Unlocking Vietnamese Vocabulary: The Power of Social Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Bruneian Students

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ABSTRACT

Scholars emphasize that vocabulary acquisition is the cornerstone of communication in foreign language (FL) learning. Therefore, students must employ effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) to retain and utilize new words proficiently. However, limited research has explored the use of VLS among Bruneian learners, particularly those studying Vietnamese as an FL. This study examines the VLS employed by Bruneian students, with a specific focus on Social Strategies. These learners often face difficulties in acquiring, retaining, and applying Vietnamese vocabulary. To mitigate these challenges, instructors integrate activities such as scriptwriting and video production to encourage interaction and practical language use. These approaches enable students to recall vocabulary naturally through authentic communicative contexts. This study utilized a modified version of Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ), which was administered to 120 Bruneian students learning Vietnamese as an FL. Participants evaluated their use of 65 VLS on a five-point Likert scale. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to interpret the data. The findings revealed that Bruneian learners demonstrated a moderate level of VLS usage. Among the strategy types, Discovery-Social and Consolidation-Cognitive strategies were the most frequently employed, Discovery-Determination and Consolidation-Social strategies were used at an intermediate level, while Memory and Metacognitive Consolidation strategies were the least utilized. Overall, students placed significant value on interactions with their instructors and peers, highlighting the importance of Social Strategies in Vietnamese vocabulary acquisition. This study underscores the role of VLS in Vietnamese language education, particularly the effectiveness of Social Strategies and interactive communication. Language instructors should incorporate interactive approaches to create real-world linguistic experiences. Enhancing Vietnamese language education through such methods is essential to supporting Bruneian students in their learning journey and fostering greater proficiency in Vietnamese.

Keywords: Brunei, Interactive Approach, Social Strategies, Vietnamese as a Foreign Language, Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is widely recognized as the most essential skill in foreign language (FL) learning (Davies & Pearse, 2000; McCarthy, 1990; Laufer, 1986). A strong lexical foundation enables learners to communicate effectively, comprehend written texts (Davis & Kelly, 2003), engage in spoken discourse, and produce coherent written work. Moreover, vocabulary proficiency allows individuals to be understood by native speakers (Susanti, 2002). Consequently, insufficient lexical knowledge impedes students' ability to convey ideas clearly and interact meaningfully in the target language (Gan, 2012). However, when studying a third language, learners often lack exposure to authentic linguistic interactions, which hinders vocabulary development in two key ways. First, due to limited real-world communication experiences, students must rely primarily on formal instruction, making vocabulary acquisition largely dependent on classroom-based learning (Lee, 2007). In this context, incorporating dynamic teacher-student and peer interactions into FL instruction is essential. Through engagement with instructors and classmates, learners can explore, practice, reinforce, and retrieve newly acquired vocabulary. Second, given that educators cannot introduce every possible word, and learners are unable

to memorize all newly encountered terms in FL lessons (Sokmen, 1997), explicit training in Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) is crucial. This study adopts Oxford's (1990: 8) definition of VLS as "the operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information". Research has shown that employing such strategies enhances students' lexical knowledge, metalinguistic awareness, and overall comprehension (Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016; Zarrin & Khan, 2014). While learners benefit from classroom-based interactions to practice vocabulary, they must also develop independent study skills by utilizing a diverse range of VLS. However, students do not always engage with these strategies autonomously. Therefore, FL educators should introduce and reinforce various techniques to foster self-directed learning (Cameron, 2001).

Despite the significance of VLS, there has been little research on their application among Bruneian learners, particularly those studying Vietnamese as a foreign language (VFL). This pilot study seeks to examine the VLS commonly employed by Bruneian students acquiring Vietnamese as a third language. Specifically, it explores whether an interactive teaching approach—implemented by a Vietnamese instructor—shapes learners' strategy preferences and influences their selection of specific VLS types. Additionally, this research investigates students' perceptions of the role played by Social Vocabulary Learning Strategies in their language acquisition process.

Accordingly, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1) To what extent do Bruneian students employ Social VLS when learning Vietnamese as an FL? Furthermore, are there significant correlations between Social strategies and other VLS categories?
2) How do Bruneian students perceive the impact of specific Social VLS on their vocabulary acquisition?

Vietnamese Language Teaching and Learning Context

The introduction of Vietnamese into the foreign language curriculum at the Bruneian university under study in 2022 reflects a strategic vision and deepening cooperation between Vietnam and Brunei. The Vietnamese as a Foreign Language (VFL) program, led by native-speaking instructors, employs interactive teaching methodologies that have proven highly effective in engaging learners. Students particularly value dynamic learning experiences both within and beyond the classroom. During the initial semester, exposure to new vocabulary remains relatively limited; thus, interactive activities facilitate the retention of new material. However, as coursework progresses into the second semester, vocabulary acquisition becomes more demanding due to the increasing volume of new lexical items. Additionally, the distinct characteristics of Vietnamese vocabulary and structural differences from other languages present additional challenges, necessitating both instructor support and individual learner effort. Therefore, equipping students with effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) is crucial.

Previous studies conducted across Asia utilizing Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) have provided valuable insights into learners' strategic preferences. However, these investigations do not fully capture the unique linguistic environment of Brunei, where multilingualism complicates the process of acquiring and managing diverse grammatical and phonetic structures. In addition to expanding their lexicon, students must develop the ability to navigate linguistic shifts between languages with distinct typologies.

Bruneian learners encounter particular difficulties when studying Vietnamese vocabulary due to the language's unique phonetic and structural attributes. As a tonal language with a predominantly monosyllabic lexicon, Vietnamese presents significant challenges for individuals unfamiliar with tonal distinctions. The presence of disyllabic and polysyllabic words, influenced by Chinese and French, further complicates acquisition. Pronunciation, in particular, emerges as a major obstacle, given that every Vietnamese word carries a tonal marker. This feature often confounds speakers of Malay and English, impeding comprehension and reducing linguistic confidence. Estimates suggest that Chinese-derived terms constitute up to 60% of the Vietnamese lexicon, alongside numerous borrowings from other languages, contributing to its rich linguistic diversity. Consequently, Bruneian students struggle with vocabulary retention and effective application in communication.

Another critical factor influencing language acquisition is student motivation. Vietnamese, introduced into Brunei's academic offerings only a few semesters ago, is often selected by learners in anticipation of future

employment prospects stemming from the recently established strategic partnership between the two nations. However, this long-term outlook does not necessarily translate into immediate enthusiasm for language learning. Observations indicate that current motivation levels remain inconsistent. Small-scale surveys conducted by instructors reveal that most students choose Vietnamese due to the engaging nature of the classes, which incorporate hands-on activities such as cooking, video production, and participation in cultural events with the local Vietnamese community. Research has consistently demonstrated that highly motivated foreign language learners invest greater effort and resources in their studies (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Rivers, 1987; Gardner, 1985). Motivation serves as a driving force that fosters engagement and sustained commitment to language learning.

To address these learning challenges, instructors emphasize interactive activities designed to enhance practical language use. Tasks such as scriptwriting and video production encourage meaningful interaction and reinforce Vietnamese vocabulary acquisition. The pedagogical approach prioritizes interpersonal engagement, fostering a dynamic and immersive learning environment. Classroom strategies, including group work, role-play, simulations, and interactive games, promote active participation and collaboration. Group projects further develop teamwork, task management, and communication skills, while cultural exchange initiatives deepen students' appreciation of native speakers' values and traditions, enhancing their adaptability and cross-cultural awareness.

These interactive methodologies serve specific communicative functions, stimulating student motivation and encouraging linguistic creativity to support vocabulary retention. Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasize that positive interpersonal interactions enhance learner engagement and overall well-being by cultivating a supportive educational atmosphere. Additionally, assessments are structured to reflect real-world language use, aligning with Rivers's (1987) recommendation that proficiency evaluations incorporate authentic communicative contexts. To reinforce language practice, Bruneian students are encouraged to maintain active engagement with instructors and peers through digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and email. These exchanges are systematically recorded, reviewed, and graded at the end of each semester. Moreover, students are required to master 20–40 communication-based questions per semester (20 for Level 1, 40 for Level 2) through repeated practice with teachers and classmates. These questions focus on daily life and academic topics, ensuring gradual language accumulation and continued improvement over time. Cognitive-mechanical repetition, a well-documented VLS, has been shown to facilitate vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001). Techniques such as repetitive drills and verbal recitation are particularly effective, explaining the strong preference for Consolidation-Cognitive VLS among the students (see *Findings* section).

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Scholars have extensively explored the significance of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) in fostering student autonomy. Research indicates that learners must have the flexibility to select techniques that align with their individual preferences for both classroom and independent application (Nation, 2001, 1990; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Oxford & Scarcella, 1994). Consequently, fostering independent and proactive engagement in foreign language acquisition is essential (Nation, 2001).

A broad spectrum of strategies has been classified under various VLS frameworks. Oxford (1990), through the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire, distinguished learning strategies into Direct and Indirect categories. The former encompassed Memory, Cognitive, and Compensation strategies, while the latter comprised Metacognitive, Affective, and Social approaches. Likewise, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed a classification system incorporating Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Social-Affective strategies.

Gu (2003, 2018) and Gu & Johnson (1996), through their Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire (VLQ), identified two primary categories. The Metacognitive dimension included Beliefs about vocabulary learning and Metacognitive Regulation strategies, whereas the Cognitive category encompassed Inferencing, Note-Taking, Dictionary Use, Rehearsal, Encoding, and Activation techniques.

Schmitt (1997) developed another widely utilized taxonomy in the *Vocabulary Learning Strategies* Questionnaire (VLSQ), which categorizes 58 strategies into two overarching groups with six subcategories. Notably, *Social* strategies appear in both primary classifications.

In Schmitt's (1997) framework, the first major category, *Discovery* (DIS; 14 items), involves techniques for identifying the meaning of unfamiliar words. This category is further divided into:

Determination (DIS-DET; 9 items) – Strategies employed individually, such as analyzing discourse elements, deriving meaning from context, and recognizing cognates across languages.

Discovery Social (DIS-SOC; 5 items) – Approaches that involve interaction with teachers, classmates, or peers to acquire new vocabulary.

The second major category, *Consolidation* (CON; 44 items), facilitates vocabulary retention, recall, and retrieval. It consists of the following subcategories:

Consolidation Social (CON-SOC; 3 items) – Strengthening word knowledge through peer discussion or instructor feedback.

Memory (CON-MEM; 27 items) – Techniques that enhance retention via deep cognitive and morphosemantic processing, including verbal-visual associations and semantic grouping.

Cognitive (CON-COG; 9 items) – Mechanical techniques such as rote memorization, repetitive oral and written drills, note-taking, and glossary consultation.
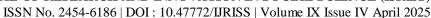
Metacognitive (CON-MET; 5 items) – Strategies for self-regulation, including decision-making, progress monitoring, and exposure to authentic media resources (e.g., songs, films) to reinforce vocabulary acquisition.

Numerous researchers have adapted Schmitt's (1997) VLSQ to examine learners' preferences and strategy implementation. The present study applies this framework to investigate the tendency of Bruneian students to favor interactive Social strategies, among other techniques, while acquiring Vietnamese vocabulary. Given the limited research on VLS use among learners in Brunei, the findings of this pilot study will be contextualized by comparing them with similar investigations on strategy application among Asian student populations.

Research on Interactive Language Teaching Approach

The interactive language teaching approach emphasizes active engagement and communication between instructors and learners, fostering a collaborative and immersive educational environment. Unlike traditional rote memorization, this method incorporates authentic language materials, encouraging students to engage meaningfully with the language both within and beyond the classroom. Among its key advantages are heightened learner involvement, enhanced proficiency across speaking, listening, reading, and writing, greater cultural awareness, the cultivation of critical thinking skills, and improved long-term language retention. Rivers (1987) posited that at the introductory stages, interactive classes prioritize purposeful communication over rigid grammatical instruction, engaging students in collaborative exercises and practical tasks that promote experiential learning. Participation in such interactive activities not only enhances the enjoyment of language acquisition but also fosters active student involvement (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). By practicing communication in diverse contexts, learners can refine their linguistic abilities more effectively (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). Additionally, integrating real-world materials and cultural components enables students to develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the target culture (Kramsch, 1993). Evaluations within this framework should closely mirror authentic language use in real-life scenarios (Rivers, 1987).

Within this pedagogical model, Bruneian students are encouraged to ask questions, collaborate with peers, and engage in meaningful classroom discussions. These interactive exchanges form an integral part of the assessment process, contributing to a comprehensive evaluation of both linguistic proficiency and communicative competence. In essence, the interactive approach represents a dynamic, student-centered method of foreign

language instruction that promotes active engagement, meaningful discourse, and cross-cultural understanding. By incorporating interactive exercises and authentic materials, this strategy equips learners with practical language skills and nurtures a lifelong appreciation for language learning.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Instrument

Schmitt's (1997) *Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire* (VLSQ) was chosen to assess Bruneian students' perceptions and utilization of Social VLS. Building on insights from prior research (e.g., Yee Chin et al., 2021; Laffey, 2020; Kai-Chee & Wee-Ling, 2019; Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016), certain strategies from the original VLSQ were refined, while less common ones were excluded. Additionally, statements were simplified, and illustrative examples were incorporated to clarify potentially unfamiliar concepts. Moreover, technologically advanced VLS were integrated into the questionnaire to reflect contemporary learning practices.

The final version comprised 65 items: 18 Discovery strategies and 47 Consolidation strategies. Among these, eight pertained to Social VLS, with five classified as Discovery Social (DIS-SOC) and three as Consolidation Social (CON-SOC) strategies. A panel of experts and native Vietnamese speakers validated the questionnaire for consistency and clarity. A pilot study was conducted in December 2023, involving 75 students learning Vietnamese as a Foreign Language (VFL) at the Bruneian university under investigation. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient = .923). Subsequently, the questionnaire was digitized into an online *Qualtrics* format for convenient distribution among VFL students.

Questionnaire Procedure

The VFL lecturer distributed the VLSQ link to students via WhatsApp during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Participants completed the questionnaire within 20 to 25 minutes. By submitting their responses, students provided informed consent to participate in the study. Anonymity was strictly maintained, and participation was entirely voluntary.

In addition to responding to the VLS-related items, students provided sociodemographic, educational, and linguistic background information. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("never used") to 5 ("always used"), to assess the frequency of strategy use.

Data Analysis

The collected data were processed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) *Version 20*. The internal consistency coefficients for both the Discovery VLS category (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) and the Consolidation VLS category (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89) were notably high, indicating strong reliability and justifying further statistical analyses.

To compare variations in strategy use, researchers chose non-parametric *Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests* (z value; with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$) since the p-value was below 0.05, as indicated by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests for the Vietnamese as a Foreign Language VLSQ. Additionally, a *Spearman correlation test* (with a significance level set at $p < 0.01$) was performed to identify potential relationships between Social strategies and other VLS categories.

A descriptive statistical approach was employed to interpret the findings. The score range classification proposed by Zaid Araf Mohd Noor et al. (2016) was adopted, where a mean score of 1.00–1.40 indicated low usage of a given strategy, while a mean of 4.50–5.00 signified high usage.

Sample

The VLSQ was administered to 120 Bruneian university students enrolled in VFL courses. The majority were aged 17 to 22 (91.7%, N = 110) and predominantly female (81.7%, N = 98). The sample included first-year

students (25.8%, N = 31), second-year students (60.8%, N = 73), and third- or fourth-year students (both 6.7%, N = 8).

All participants were English speakers and multilingual, with most speaking between three and seven languages. The largest groups spoke either four (44.2%, N = 53) or five (24.2%, N = 29) languages. Their experience with Vietnamese varied, with 85.8% (N = 103) studying the language for one semester, 10.9% (N = 13) for two semesters, and 3.3% (N = 4) for three semesters. Since the targeted Bruneian educational context requires three semesters to complete level A1 (CEFR), participants were classified as beginner-level VFL learners.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: Social VLS Frequency Use and Impact

In this section, researchers highlight the overall results of the VLSQ data. The purpose here is to observe if Social VLS were commonly used by students while discovering (DIS-SOC) and consolidating (CON-SOC) new VFL words. Furthermore, the findings of a Spearman test are highlighted to verify if students' use of Social VLS impacted the employment of other kinds of VLS. As shown below, the analyzed data has been summarized in tables.

Table 1: Inter-Category Overall Findings of the Vocabulary Learning Strategies Use (N = 120; Means in Descending Order; Standard Deviations)

Strategy (Sub)Category	M	SD	Frequency User	Rank
DIS-Social (DIS-SOC)	3.44	.86	Moderate	1
CON-Cognitive (CON-COG)	3.40	.54	Moderate	2
DIS-Determination (DIS-DET)	3.34	.47	Moderate	3
CON-Social (CON-SOC)	3.26	.84	Moderate	4
CON-Memory (CON-MEM)	3.09	.55	Moderate	5
CON-Metacognitive (CON-MET)	2.83	.65	Moderate	6
Strategies Overall Mean:				3.23

Table 1 reveals an overall mean of 3.23, indicating that students were moderate users of VLS. The standard deviations were below 1 (SD = .47 < .86), suggesting a relatively low variance in responses and a high level of agreement among students regarding the effectiveness of these strategies.

Among the discovery (DIS) strategies, Social VLS were the most frequently employed (ranked first), whereas Cognitive VLS were the most utilized within the consolidation (CON) strategies (ranked second). The marginal mean difference of 0.04 between DIS-Social and CON-Cognitive strategies indicates a nearly equal preference for these two categories. DIS-Determination (ranked third) and CON-Social (ranked fourth) occupied intermediate positions, while CON-Memory strategies followed in fifth place. The least favored category was CON-Metacognitive strategies (ranked sixth).

Table 2: Mean-Variance (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test) and Mean-Correlation (Spearman Linear Correlation Test) between the Six Vocabulary Learning Strategies Subcategories (N = 120)

VLS Subcategories		*Spearman Linear Correlation Test (ρ-value)*					
		DIS-SOC	COG	DET	CON-SOC	MEM	MET
Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests (z value)	DIS-SOC		*ρ = .49*** *Sig.= .00*	*ρ = .57*** *Sig.= .00*	*ρ = .58*** *Sig. = .00*	*ρ = .50*** *Sig. = .00*	*ρ = .41*** *Sig. = .00*
	COG	z = -1.05^c Sig. = .29 r^a = .27		*ρ = .55*** *Sig. = .00*	*ρ = .43*** *Sig. = .00*	*ρ = .55*** *Sig. = .00*	*ρ = .45*** *Sig. = .00*

	DET	$z = -1.82^b$ Sig. = .07 r^a = .45	$z = -1.14^b$ Sig. = .25 r^a = .29		$\rho = .42**$ *Sig. = .00*	$\rho = .59**$ *Sig. = .00*	$\rho = .39**$ *Sig. = .00*
	CON-SOC	$z = -1.94^c$ Sig. = .05 r^a = .50	$z = -1.65^b$ Sig. = .10 r^a = .43	$z = -1.15^c$ Sig. = .25 r^a = .30		$\rho = .52**$ *Sig. = .00*	$\rho = .23**$ *Sig. = .01*
	MEM	$z = -4.77^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.23	$z = -5.79^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.49	$z = -5.52^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.42	$z = -2.40^c$ Sig. = .02 r^a = .62		$\rho = .45**$ *Sig. = .00*
	MET	$z = -6.67^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.72	$z = -7.58^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.96	$z = -7.34^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.89	$z = -4.65^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.20	$z = -4.06^c$ Sig. = .00 r^a = 1.05	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[a.] r = Effect size value (paired samples: N = 15).

[b.] Based on negative ranks.

[c.] Based positive on ranks.

The relatively low usage of CON-Metacognitive strategies is further corroborated by the findings from the Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests (see *Table 2*). The most significant mean-variance was observed between Metacognitive strategies and the three most frequently used VLS subcategories—CON-Cognitive (z = -7.58, p = .00; r = 1.96), DIS-Determination (z = -7.34, p = .00; r = 1.89), and DIS-Social (z = -6.67, p = .00; r = 1.72). These results underscore that while students highly valued Social VLS for discovering new VFL words, they did not predominantly rely on interactive practice to consolidate their vocabulary knowledge.

Additionally, *Table 2* presents the inter-subcategory Spearman correlation findings (italicized). The six VLS subcategories were positively correlated, exhibiting a consistent increase across all categories (ρ-values ranging from .23 to .59, with a shared variance between 5.29% and 34.81%, indicating low to moderate effect sizes; p = .00<.01). The significant interrelationships among these six strategy subcategories suggest that a higher preference for social interaction-based strategies (DIS-SOC and CON-SOC) corresponded with increased usage of other VLS types (ρ = .23 < .58, p = .00 < .01).

Research Question 2: Students' Perception of the Role Played by Specific Social VLS Dimensions

The second research question aims to examine students' awareness of specific Social Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) dimensions. The aggregated findings on Discovery and Consolidation Social VLS are summarized in *Table 3*.
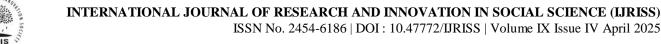
Table 3: Findings of Students' Perception of the Discovery (DIS) and Consolidation (CON) Social Vocabulary Learning Strategies Usefulness (N = 120; Means of the Strategies Use Frequency in Descending Order; Standard Deviations)

Social Strategies			Use Frequency/5		
Item Nb	Category	Statement	M	SD	Rank
17	DIS	I ask classmates or friends for the meaning of the new word.	4.00	1.03	1
14	DIS	I ask my teacher for a translation to a known language.	3.78	1.15	2
21	CON	I interact with other learners of the foreign language.	3.77	1.18	3
19	CON	I study and practice the new word's meaning in a group activity.	3.51	1.14	4
16	DIS	I ask my teacher for an example sentence including the new word.	3.39	1.20	5
18	DIS	I discover the new word's meaning through group work activity.	3.26	1.21	6
15	DIS	I ask my teacher for a paraphrase or synonym of the new word.	2.75	1.24	7
20	CON	I interact with native speakers.	2.52	1.30	8
Overall Mean for Discovery and Consolidation Social Strategies:					3.37

The findings indicate that learners were moderate to moderately high users of social VLS, both for discovering the meanings of new Vietnamese words and for consolidating their vocabulary knowledge. However, the high standard deviations (SD > 1) suggest considerable variability in students' agreement with the effectiveness of the eight Social VLS.

Three of the four most frequently used Social VLS involved interactions with peers. Students most often asked classmates or friends for word meanings (Item 17: M = 4.00, SD = 1.03) and engaged with other foreign language learners (Item 21: M = 3.77, SD = 1.18) to discover new vocabulary. They also frequently participated in group activities to reinforce their vocabulary knowledge (Item 19: M = 3.51, SD = 1.14). However, students exhibited only moderate engagement in group activities for discovering new words (Item 18: M = 3.26, SD = 1.21).

Regarding teacher-led strategies, students reported moderate to moderately high reliance on instructors for direct translations of unknown words (Item 14: M = 3.78, SD = 1.15). However, they were less likely to request example sentences using new words (Item 16: M = 3.39, SD = 1.20) or ask for synonyms and paraphrases (Item 15: M = 2.75, SD = 1.24).

These findings suggest notable differences in usage frequency across social VLS. Learners exhibited a strong preference for peer interactions, particularly during the discovery phase. Several factors support this conclusion:

Peer Interaction Preference – The four VLS related to peer interactions (Items 17, 18, 19, and 21) had a higher aggregated mean (M = 3.63, SD = 0.81) than teacher-related strategies (Items 14, 15, and 16), which had a lower aggregated mean (M = 3.31, SD = 1.00). A Wilcoxon Signed Rank test revealed a statistically significant difference (z = -3.88, p = .00; r = 3.88).

Limited Interaction with Native Speakers – Students reported the lowest frequency of engagement in social interactions with native speakers (Item 20: M = 2.52, SD = 1.30), which also exhibited the highest variability among all Social VLS.

Preference for Discovery over Consolidation Strategies – The overall data from the VLSQ suggest a stronger preference for Discovery Social VLS (M = 3.44, SD = 0.86) compared to Consolidation Social VLS (M = 3.26, SD = 0.84). The finding is supported by the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test (see the paired DIS-SOC/CON-SOC in *Table 2*).

These results suggest that learners primarily rely on peer interactions for discovering new vocabulary, while teacher assistance and interactions with native speakers play a more limited role in their social VLS preferences.

DISCUSSION

The discussion is structured into two sections, each corresponding to one of the research questions. The first section examines how Bruneian students utilize interactive (social) strategies when learning Vietnamese vocabulary, as well as the relationships between these strategies and other vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) (Research Question 1). The second section explores students' perceptions of the role played by specific Social VLS dimensions (Research Question 2).

The Effectiveness of Social-Interactive Strategies Among Existing VLS

The findings indicate that, overall, participants demonstrated a moderate level of VLS usage. This outcome aligns with prior research on VLS adoption among Asian learners studying Vietnamese (Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016) and other foreign languages, including English (e.g., Ta'amneh, 2021; Rabadi, 2016; Jafari & Kafipour, 2013; Shamis, 2003; Wharton, 2000; Park, 1997) and Arabic (e.g., Harun & Zawawi, 2014).

The 120 Bruneian students primarily relied on Social strategies during the vocabulary discovery phase. Moreover, findings revealed positive correlations between the use of various VLS, indicating that engagement in Social strategies influenced the adoption of other learning approaches. Although few studies have highlighted the significance of Social strategies for Asian learners, Gökhan Karacan and Dikilitaş (2020) found that 103

Italian-Turkish simultaneous and sequential bilingual high school students predominantly employed Social VLS. However, other research suggests that Asian students often avoid Social strategies. For example, investigations into VLS usage among Iraqi (e.g., Al-Omairi, 2020; Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013), Indonesian (e.g., Besthia, 2018), and Taiwanese (e.g., Chieh-Yue & Yu-Hua, 2004) EFL/ESL learners identified Social strategies as the least utilized. These findings suggest that Bruneian students effectively incorporated the social-interactive approach emphasized by their Vietnamese language instructor into their study practices.

Despite favoring Social strategies for discovering new vocabulary, students preferred individual and self-directed methods for consolidating, recalling, and retrieving lexical knowledge. This pattern aligns with other studies on VLS preferences among Asian learners (e.g., Yee Chin et al., 2021; Kai-Chee & Wee-Ling, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016; Hsu, 2012), which found that cognitive strategies for consolidation (CON-Cognitive VLS) were highly valued.

Students perceived consolidation-oriented Social strategies (CON-Social VLS) as only moderately useful. Additionally, CON-Cognitive VLS exhibited less variability in usage compared to both discovery and consolidation Social strategies, emphasizing the role of mechanical cognitive processes in reinforcing learned vocabulary. As Kudo (1999) argues, cognitively less demanding techniques—such as mechanical written and verbal repetition and note-taking—are commonly adopted by foreign language learners. However, more advanced approaches, including mnemonic (CON-Memory) and metacognitive strategies, require greater cognitive engagement, selective attention, and extended learning time. Mechanical cognitive techniques offer the advantage of helping learners internalize new vocabulary with minimal mental effort (Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016; Wenden, 1987). Furthermore, Kai-Chee and Wee-Ling (2019) suggested that a preference for mechanical cognitive methods is typical when students are learning a completely unfamiliar language. These insights are particularly relevant to this study, as the Bruneian students examined were beginners in Vietnamese, not yet attaining the A1 level (CEFR). Consequently, they may have initially favored simple and familiar cognitive techniques to consolidate their vocabulary knowledge.

In line with prior research (Ta'amneh, 2021; Yee Chin et al., 2021; Al-Omairi, 2020; Gökhan Karacan & Dikilitaş, 2020; Kai-Chee & Wee-Ling, 2019; Besthia, 2018; Rabadi, 2016; Harun & Zawawi, 2014; Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013; Hsu, 2012), metacognitive strategies were the least valued by students. These techniques demand continuous self-regulation, planning, and monitoring of language acquisition (Harris, 2003), requiring learners to engage in "thinking about thinking" (Anderson, 2002: 3). Given this complexity, it is likely that participants in this study were unfamiliar with how to implement metacognitive strategies effectively. This could explain their preference for discovery-oriented Social strategies (DIS-Social VLS) and mechanical cognitive approaches (CON-Cognitive VLS) when consolidating vocabulary knowledge.

Interaction Practice Inside and Outside the Classroom

The findings highlighted that Bruneian VFL students predominantly favored peer interactions within the classroom setting. Several factors may explain this preference:

Preference for Peer Interaction – Students appeared to value the opportunity to discover new vocabulary alongside classmates at a similar proficiency level (Kai-Chee et al., 2019). This collaborative learning environment likely enhanced their sense of comfort while fostering the development of cooperative learning skills (Vo & Jaturapitakkul, 2016). Moreover, the results indicate that these learners relied almost exclusively on the academic setting for their Vietnamese language acquisition.

Minimized Reliance on Instructors – Research conducted in Malaysia (e.g., Tahmina, 2023; Zaid Araf Mohd Noor et al., 2016) suggests that students often reduce their dependence on teachers. Scholars have linked this trend to various emotional, cultural, and pedagogical factors shaping student-teacher interactions in Asian contexts. Kafipoor (2010), for instance, attributed the limited engagement of Iranian ESL students with instructors to the prevailing educational structure in Iran, where teachers deliver comprehensive explanations, and students are expected to passively record information. Additionally, Asian learners frequently emphasize hierarchical distinctions between teachers and students, which may lead to reluctance in seeking guidance due to shyness or fear of making mistakes (Kai-Chee et al., 2019). Similarly, Laffey (2020) argued that the reduced

reliance of Korean EFL learners on instructors stemmed both from cultural learning traditions and the autonomy skills cultivated at the university level. In this study, the relatively low preference for teacher-directed inquiries among Bruneian VFL students may likewise reflect their cultural background and FL learning habits. Furthermore, students demonstrated strong self-directed learning abilities, particularly in reinforcing vocabulary retention through Cognitive VLS. The data revealed that Bruneian students exhibited moderate to moderately high engagement in note-taking (Item 55: M = 4.85, SD = .42), oral repetition (Item 49: M = 4.64, SD = .68), and written repetition (Item 50: M = 3.88, SD = 1.14). Additionally, they autonomously utilized glossaries to reinforce their learning, as evidenced by their use of personal vocabulary notebooks (Item 51: M = 3.83, SD = 1.32) and textbook vocabulary sections (Item 52: M = 3.63, SD = 1.13).

Limited Interaction with Native Speakers – Many language learners lack opportunities for regular engagement with native speakers, thereby restricting their ability to practice the target language beyond the classroom (Rabadi, 2016). In the case of Bruneian students studying Vietnamese, this limitation may stem from the small size of the Vietnamese expatriate community in Brunei, estimated at approximately 300 individuals (source: Hoài, 2023, VnExpress). Furthermore, since most learners were beginners in the targeted foreign language (see the *Sample* section), they may lose confidence in interacting with native Vietnamese speakers (see the next section for the outside-the-classroom teaching implications). As a result, students primarily rely on their instructors and peers as the primary sources of linguistic interaction.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights three key implications for teaching Vietnamese to Bruneian students.

Firstly, Oxford (1990) posited that moderate use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) indicates students' general awareness of such techniques; however, educators should encourage learners to expand their knowledge and application of these strategies throughout the vocabulary acquisition process. The findings suggest that Bruneian students have limited familiarity with the full range of available VLS, emphasizing the need for targeted training sessions to introduce them to effective vocabulary acquisition methods. In particular, educators should focus on Memory and Metacognitive consolidation strategies, as these approaches enhance self-directed learning and long-term retention.

Secondly, fostering stronger learner-teacher interactions is essential. While instructors may implement diverse engagement methods, Bruneian students tend to be reserved, often seeking assistance from peers rather than directly consulting their teachers. To address this tendency, creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment is crucial. This can be achieved through structured collaborative activities and initiatives aimed at building rapport with students. Establishing personal connections by demonstrating genuine interest in their perspectives, concerns, and cultural backgrounds can help cultivate trust and encourage more active participation in teacher-led discussions.

Finally, increasing opportunities for social interaction and exposure to the Vietnamese language is imperative. Given that Bruneian students have minimal engagement with Vietnamese speakers outside the classroom, educators should facilitate additional avenues for immersion. Organizing cultural events, incorporating interactive language-based activities, and leveraging online platforms can provide students with meaningful linguistic and cultural experiences and increase learners' self-confidence in speaking Vietnamese. By addressing these implications, instructors can enhance students' Vietnamese vocabulary acquisition while fostering a deeper appreciation of the language and its cultural context.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) employed by Bruneian students studying Vietnamese as a foreign language (VFL). Overall, participants demonstrated a moderate reliance on various VLS, with Social strategies playing a dominant role in the vocabulary discovery phase. Notably, positive correlations emerged between different strategy types, indicating that the adoption of Social strategies facilitated the use of additional approaches. While prior research has suggested that Asian learners

tend to avoid socially driven techniques, the present findings indicate that Bruneian students effectively incorporated the interactive methodologies promoted by their instructors into their learning practices. Cognitive strategies, particularly mechanical techniques, were highly favored. In contrast, Metacognitive strategies were employed less frequently. This underscores the necessity of integrating explicit VLS instruction into teaching methodologies to enhance learners' understanding and application of diverse techniques—especially Memory and Metacognitive strategies—to foster greater autonomy and efficiency in vocabulary acquisition.

Moreover, findings highlighted students' inclination toward peer interaction within the classroom, likely influenced by their educational environment and cultural norms. Limited opportunities to engage with native Vietnamese speakers outside the academic setting, coupled with the small expatriate community in Brunei, may further explain their dependence on instructors and classmates for language practice. To address this constraint, efforts should be made to expand opportunities for authentic language exposure beyond the classroom, thereby improving students' fluency and confidence in using Vietnamese in real-world contexts.

Future research on VLS remains essential. Studies involving a larger sample size would enhance the reliability and comparability of findings. Additionally, future studies should investigate the effect of learners' socio-demographic, educational, and linguistic profiles on their VLS preferences. Finally, qualitative investigations through researcher-student interviews could provide deeper insights into learners' perceptions of various strategies, identifying those deemed most beneficial or ineffective and exploring the motivations that shape their language learning preferences and behaviors.

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Ethical Approval

The authors obtained the ethical approval for this research involving human subjects. The participant anonymity was strictly maintained, and participation was entirely voluntary.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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