*International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7 (4) (2018) 3703-3709

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**International Journal of Engineering & Technology**

*Website: www.sciencepubco.com/index.php/IJET*
*doi: 10.14419/ijet.v7i4.16885*
***Research paper***



# Factors affecting students' learning strategies at school

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## Abstract

English language is spoken, written, read, and understood widely in most parts of the world. The significance of English language today underlines the significance of its vocabulary learning strategies. The aim of this study is, therefore, to examine factors affecting vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among Saudi students studying Saudi School in Malaysia (SSM). To achieve the objective of the paper, two dif-ferent tools of data collection have been adopted by the researcher. The study employs both semi-structured interview, where a total of seven students participated, as well as class observation which complement the findings of the interview. The study generated three themes from the interviews as the factors affecting vocabulary learning of students: language learning environment, attitude and beliefs, and Motivation. The findings of the study show that vocabulary-learning strategies (VLS) in SSM is affected by three major factors: language learning envi-ronment, attitude and beliefs of students, and motivation.

***Keywords***: *English Language; Vocabulary-Learning Strategies; Saudi Students; Saudi School in Malaysia*

## 1. Introduction

English language is spoken, written, read, and understood widely in most parts of the world. It is considered as the most common language as highlighted by Kachru and Nelson that "English has actually developed from the native language of a relatively small island nation to the most commonly taught, shown, read and spoken language that the world has ever known" (2001, p. 9 as cited in Kuo, 2006, p.213). In other words, the significance of English language is global in nature used for the development of economy, updated and sophisticated technological process, and internationalization (Spolsky, 1998). It is also important for the usage and development of the Internet and The World Wide Web (Pakir, 2000). One of the most significant aspects of the language, particularly as a second language (ESL) and a foreign language (EFL) is lexical knowledge.

Vocabulary plays a vital part in learning a foreign language (FL) as the famous linguist, Wilkins claims that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Thornbury, 2002, p.13). Lewis (2000, p.8) also concludes that "the single most important task facing language learners is acquiring a sufficiently large vocabulary". Vocabulary and acquiring an FL are related to each other. Knowing vocabulary helps to make learners to use the language and using the language enhances vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 1993). Therefore, vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) should be essential part of vocabulary learning and teaching. Schmitt (1997) has proposed that many learners use more strategies to learn vocabulary especially when compared to some integrated tasks as listening and speaking, but they are mostly inclined to use basic VLSs. This in turns makes VLSs a key part of enhancing vocabulary in an FL. Several scholars such as, Williams and Burden (1997, p.145); O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.1); Oxford (1990, p.1) and Rubin (1987, p.22) assert that strategies are crucial tools for developing communicative competence.

Consequently, this study is interested in investigating VLSs among Saudi students living in Malaysia. Studies, such as Al-Fuhaid (2004) and Al-Otaibi (2004), have looked into VLS of English language in relation to Saudi students living and studying in Saudi Arabia. However, the contexts of their studies differ from that of this study which focuses on students at Saudi School in Malaysia (SSM). Thus, this article discusses factors affecting VLS among Saudi School students in Malaysia.

## 2. Defining VLSS

VLSs mean certain strategies used for language learning which aims at enabling learners acquire a new vocabulary of the target language. Despite a dearth of literature addressing VLS, the definition of VLS still remains unclear. Fan (2003, p.223) outlines five main stages as described by Brown and Payne (1984) in the lexical learning process which are involved in VLSs as obtaining resources for new words, understanding meanings, understanding new word forms visual and/or auditory, having concise knowledge in relating forms and word meaning, and word application. Additionally, Schmitt (1997) refers the general explanation of LLS as pointed out by Wenden and Rubin (1987, p.19) that it refers to a collection of steps, operations, routines, and plans that a learner used to enhance the cognitive process in language learning, meaning that VLSs could imply anything that influences this cognition instead of the general process defined. (Wenden and Rubin, 1987, p.23).

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## 2.1. Taxonomies of VLSS

The classification of VLSs is as debatable as the definition is. Numerous studies propose various VLS categorization depending on the criteria set by the researcher. Following this, Fan (2003, p.223) concludes that there is no ideal categorization and any distinct strategy may occur in any group based on the subject matter. Hitherto, classifications of VLS that have been pointed out by Nation (2001), Gu and Johnson (1996), and Schmitt (1997) have been identified as the most exceptional. To come up with their classification, Gu and Johnson (1996) administered a questionnaire combining the VLSs that learners use and drawing out the beliefs of the students about learning vocabulary. They then divided them into three classifications: cognitive strategies, beliefs, and metacognitive strategies, which were sub grouped into six. Secondly, Nation's (2001) VLSs classification splits three diverse aspects concerning the acquisition of vocabulary as the first addresses strategies instead of metacognitive in the scope of preparing the experience of learning, the second addresses the process of gathering information regarding lexical items and the last part addresses the ways of acquiring vocabulary, which are, perception, recollection and generation.

Schmitt's (1997) categorization has many advantages such as its appropriateness in being used as a standardized assessment and to collect learner's answers efficiently. In addition, it is founded on memory theories and learning strategy theories. It is also technically simple, which means classification, coding, classification and handling data in computing software packages is simple. Moreover, students with various educational background, ages, and target language can use the classification. Generally, it is comprehensive and it considers various strategies of learning strategies as well as facilitating comparison with different research, in which Schmitt's study is incorporated. Consequently, the instruments used in the present study will be based on Schmitt's VLS classification (Schmitt's taxonomy of VLS).

## 2.2. Taxonomy of the current study

Schmitt (1997) considered, memory, social, metacognitive and cognitive strategies out of the six classifications set by Oxford, and added determination strategy. This strategy encompasses finding the meaning of unknown terms without consulting other people. This last classification was derived from Oxford's guessing strategies incorporated in the category of tactics of compensation. Therefore, all VLSs are sub grouped into two: strategies for finding (discovering) new word meanings and strategies for unifying them (strategies used to consolidate it).

**Table 1:** Schmitt's Taxonomy of VLSS (Schmitt, 1997, P. 207-208)

| Dimension | Discovery | Consolidation |
|---|---|---|
| | Analyse part-of-speech | |
| | Analyse affixes and roots | |
| | Check for L1 cognate | |
| | Analyse any available pictures or gestures | |
| Determination | Guess from textual context | - |
| | Bilingual dictionary | |
| | Monolingual dictionary | |
| | Word lists | |
| | Flash cards | |
| | Ask teacher for an L1 translation | Study and practise meaning in a group |
| | Ask teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new word | Teacher checks students' flash cards or word lists for accuracy |
| | Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word | |
| | Ask classmates for meaning | |
| Social | Discover new meaning through group work activity | Interact with native-speakers |
| | | Study word with a pictorial representation of its meaning |
| | | Image word's meaning |
| | | Connect word to a personal experience |
| | | Associate the word with its coordinates |
| | | Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms |
| | | Use semantic maps |
| | | Use 'scales' for gradable adjectives |
| | | Peg method |
| | | Loci method |
| | | Group words together to study them |
| | | Group words together spatially on a page |
| | | Use new word in sentences |
| | | Group words together within a storyline |
| Memory | - | Study the spelling of a word |
| | | Study sound of word |
| | | Say word aloud |
| | | Image of word form |
| | | Underline initial letter |
| | | Configuration |
| | | Use keyword method |
| | | Affixes and roots/parts of speech, |
| | | Paraphrase word meaning, |
| | | Use cognates in study |
| | | Learn words of an idiom together |
| | | Use physical action |
| | | Use semantic feature grids |
| | | Verbal repetition |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Written repetition |
| | | Word lists |
| | | Flash cards |
| Cognitive | - | Take notes in class |
| | | Use the vocabulary section in your textbook |
| | | Listen to tape of word lists |
| | | Put English labels on physical objects |
| | | Keep a vocabulary notebook |
| | | Use English-language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc.) |
| | | Testing oneself with word tests |
| | | Use spaced word practice |
| Metacognitive | | Skip or pass new word |
| | | Continue to study word over time |

## 3. Determination strategies

According to Schmitt (1997, p.205), determination strategies are applied when identifying the meaning of an unknown word without consulting another person's skill. This implies that students could attempt to deduce the meaning of new words or refer to relevant materials.

Guessing strategies are critically fundamental in finding the meaning of new terms. Definitely, they have been incorporated in all three classifications mentioned above (Nation categorized it as noticing and Gu and Johnson as cognitive). These techniques involve guessing from basic language knowledge, from an L1 equivalent and from context. The evaluation of word morphology or distinct parts of speech may provide clues to deduce the meaning of a word. Therefore, instructors give their students lists of usual suffixes and prefixes with their meanings so that they can presume meaning from a specific affix in a new word as well as learners may identify a related term in their L1 that looks like L2 term thereby deduce its meaning.

Furthermore, Laufer (1997) cautions of the risk of L1 cognate comparison or word part analysis. She opposes the fact that a term is the total of its segments. In the same way, idioms cannot be interpreted by splitting them such as in, 'kick the bucket' referring to 'dying'. Concerning guessing from the context of a text, to deduce the meaning of a term from its context is common to students as they look for the meanings of unknown terms. Numerous hints can facilitate the learners' inference of new terms like in the topic, which provides a summary of the text, the title and other hints associated with speech, such as anaphora, redundancy, punctuation or intonation, which enables learners to improve their ability to find out the meaning based on the context. In addition to that, Nation (1990) points out that indirect learning is the suitable approach to handle the acquisition of many vocabularies, for example, contextual learning of unknown terms through wide-ranging listening and reading, or group work activities of problem solving. However, although contextual learning may be appropriate in improving work knowledge, novices cannot begin learning from context up to the time they familiarize themselves with basic vocabulary in order to be equipped to understand the reading content. Schmitt (1997, p.209) also stresses the fact that predicting meaning from context could consider a key foundation of lexical learning. However, for guessing to be resourceful, a student must have background knowledge of the text and to have acquired sufficient vocabulary level as well as if there are no adequate hints in the context, the student might encounter challenges.

Unlike guessing strategies that can serve as techniques of accidental learning, reference materials involve a deliberate approach to learning vocabulary. This research puts emphasis on the importance of proficiency in using dictionaries, instructing learners on their appropriateness and capitalizing on the various descriptions associated with the word, not the meaning of the word alone. Besides, Nation (2001) offers a comprehensive description of various dictionary types: bilingual, monolingual, and bilingualized (meaning they have an explanation contained in a monolingual dictionary and an extra translation of the main term. Monolingual dictionaries usually have extensive information about words, but learners that are less proficient in L2 language might encounter challenges in making inferences of the meaning. On the contrary, bilingual dictionaries are most appropriate in enabling students comprehend the meaning of a word and can be applied mutually in languages, that is L1-L2 and L2-L1.

However, critiques oppose them since they support translation and cause learners to have a false impression that all word meanings have a corresponding cognate in another language, apart from having insufficient description of the usage of the word. This idea causes Nation (2001, p.290) to propose that both dictionary types be used collectively. In other words, checking every unknown term from the dictionary may become a safe haven for students.

Finally, Schmitt (1997) treated flashcards and word lists as materials for reference, but they are considered under the classification of memory strategies thereby kept for later explanation. Schmitt recognizes "the correspondence of categories and strategies while he states that majority of the consolidation and discovery strategies could be possibly be treated as consolidation strategies, but the key ones are those highlighted under both classification parts" (1997, p.206).

### 3.1. Social strategies

Since 'social' strategies fail to demonstrate similar acceptance in all classifications of VLSs so, even though Schmitt came up with an independent classification, other researchers such as Nation (2001) or Gu and Johnson (1996) do not refer to them. This shows that they are regarded to have an insignificant role in acquiring vocabulary as argued by some scholars. In general, Schmitt (1997, p.210) refers to social strategies as the strategies applied in the understanding of the meaning of a word meaning by taking into account those conversant with it. Nonetheless, some social strategies do not involve the determination of meaning. Some strategies can be applied when consolidating knowledge. Therefore, this category can be regarded as being two-dimensional.

While attempting to find out a word's meaning, an instructor often acts as the most important source of material by offering the cognate word in the L1, definitions, example of usage or an equivalent word. Furthermore, peer learning from friends, classmates or group activities can also enhance student's learning by minimizing knowledge gaps among them. Basically, in the consolidation strategies category, those processes that cause students to practice the use of new terms in pairs or groups through interviews or role-plays can be fundamentally productive in acquisition of vocabulary (Schmitt, 1997, p.211).

### 3.2. Consolidation strategies

The second stage of acquiring vocabulary involves attempting to integrate already learnt words in order to understand them and stick them in memory. In addition to the part of social strategies previously illustrated, metacognitive, cognitive, and memory can as well be applied.

### 3.3. Memory strategies

Memory strategies are methods that connect existing knowledge with new content (Schmitt, 1997, p.205). Strategies like these are among the oldest and they are rather considered as traditional. In the process of classifying VLS, Gu and Johnson (1996) differentiated two types of memory strategies: encoding strategies (imagery, audio and visual memories), and rehearsal (repetition visual and oral), which resonate with the way Schmitt (1997) differentiated deep strategies and rote learning.

All those strategies help students to retain new words in their memory and then recall them when necessary especially during communication. They also increase the speed and ease with which students learn and recall since they enhance the assimilation of new content into current cognitive elements. Therefore, memory strategies can be divided into the following subgroups (Oxford: 1990):

1) Creating mental connections:

a) Peg method: this approach entails the categorization of language content into significant units so as to be able to remember them easily by minimizing the amount of dissimilar elements. Dissimilar elements are connected by with a hook or peg. As Schmitt (1997, p.213) explained, the first stage is to memorize a rhyme such as "one is a bun, two is a shoe, three is a tree, etc." Then a visual of the word for recalling is generated together with the peg word. In a case where the first word for recalling is chair, then a visual of a bun (peg word) on a chair is made. Reciting the rhyme helps retrieve these images, consequently acting as reminders of the target words.

b) Associating/Elaborating: this entails associating new terms to ideas presently in memory with significance to the student, even if it is absurd to other people. Word relations such as antonym, coordination (various primates), synonymy, among others, are deemed very significant (Schmitt, 1997, p.212).

c) Grouping: learners can come up with significant word groups based on various criteria, for instance, words with similar spelling, meaning (objects, animals), and word classifications (nouns, adjectives) so that they can remember them efficiently.

d) Context embedding: this strategy involves positioning a phrase of word in a logical sentence, story or discussion to recall it. Without a doubt, this association links new terms with specific contexts. This process is referred to as the strategy of narrative chain where words are related with the plot (Ruutmets, 2005, p.35).

2) Applying images and sounds

a) Imagery: It entails relating an image to a term or generating a metal picture of ideas learned or heard in target language so that the learner can recall it. The picture can take the form of an object, for example, the word 'foreman' may be imagined as a person who takes the lead in a specific context despite the fact that students may sketch the new term (Oxford, 1990, p.61).

b) Loci method: Oxford (1990, p.35) describes it as an ancient approach in which orators used to recall an extensive discourse by relating various parts of speech with distinct house or temple rooms, and then walking through the rooms. The same method can be used for unrelated terms. Spatial memorization of particular elements can also be engaged (recalling specific positioning of image or terms on a page).

c) Semantic mapping implies coming up with connections that a term has and consequently plotting the outcomes (Sokmen, 1997, p.250). This strategy entails the arrangement of terms and relationships (antonym, coordination or synonymy) into an image to generate a semantic map, that is, a figure comprising of a key idea at the top or center and associated concepts and words connected through arrows or lines. It involves various memory strategies, such as grouping, association/elaboration, or use of imagery, to visually demonstrate relations between (Oxford, 1990). In the same way, McCarthy (1990: 93) defines grids as the process of listing properties or characteristics on a horizontal axis and relating words by based on similar meaning elements on the vertical axis. McCarthy recommends the use of this strategy to demonstrate variations in meaning of words that are related semantically.

d) Keyword method: of all VLSs, most of the research concentrates on this strategy. It necessitates the creation of a visual and auditory connection between the target word and a term in L1 that sounds similar. Two steps are involved in this strategy: first, learners pinpoint a term they are conversant with in their language and that which appears like the new term ('auditory link'). Afterwards, they generate a visual picture of the interaction of new term and the accustomed one ('visual connection'). The two links are relevant for student vocabulary learning. (Oxford, 1990, p.62).

e) Representing: sounds in memory: This strategy enables learners to recall through auditory depictions of sounds after listening. The student relates new terms with those he or she is already familiar with. Using rhymes to recall a particular term is among the most regularly applied methods; for instance, James makes a pointless rhyme: "I with my carrot I knockout a parrot. The parrot thought I was angry. Nevertheless, rhymes are among the various methods of expressing sounds in memory. (Oxford, 1990, p.63).

f) Employing action: This relates to strategies that necessitate physical reaction or impression. Therefore, the approach of 'Total Physical Response' permits students to initially keep quiet and instead engage in gestures and movements. The strategy employs rhymes, stories and orderly songs to enable learners to do according to the expressions or words (Schmitt, 1997).

g) Spaced revisions: Organized review, or as Irene Thompson (1987) terms it spaced practice, is particularly significant in remembering the learned content in the target language. It concerns corrections in intervals, at first adjacent and then spread out more widely. This subcategory also comprises of self-tests and they serve the same function.

### 3.4. Cognitive strategies

While borrowing from Oxford's (1990, p.43) definition, Schmitt defined cognitive strategies as a learner's technique of transforming or manipulating target language. The application of mechanical methods (oral and written repetition), which other researchers regard as memory strategies (Gu and Johnson, 1996), Schmitt categorizes them as cognitive because their link with mental manipulation is not obvious (Schmitt, 1997, p.206) as the previously explained strategies. Schmitt claims that this type of strategies lacks depth and may be more appropriate for starters since they have less content, which confuse them, while middle or advanced students can find value from the context contained in profounder activities (1997, p.201).

3) Rehearsal: written and verbal reiteration of acquainted words may be significant for novices to familiarize themselves with new terms.

4) Mechanical means:

a) Flash cards or word cards: in learning, these materials act as discovery strategies and a way of combining the knowledge of words. Some teachers may regard learning vocabulary out of context as going to old-fashioned learning methods. However, Nation (2001, p.302-304) outlines the resourcefulness of such technique in terms of learning speed and volume. Direct vocabulary learning from word cards provides learners with the ability to determine and assess their advancement and success. Word cards also portable and students can use them to learn new terms as well as revise familiar terms outside the classroom context. Generally, students should not take up the impression that learning from flashcards implies that the terms are learned repeatedly. Conversely, this type of learning is just a preliminary phase of learning a specific term and additional experience with

the terms through listening, speaking and reading is very necessary.

b) Note-taking/word lists: note taking in the classroom environment is a learning strategy that permits learners to carry out their own arrangement on gathered information or content and to conduct extra revisions. Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) investigated "the significance of possessing a notebook for vocabulary learning that facilitates lexical learning the importance of keeping a vocabulary notebook that enhances lexical acquisition and they suggested a continuing growth of information"; to begin with, learners are instructed to put down two words ( a pair of (L2-L1). At that time, they ought to increase the information afterwards (from examples of use to simple translation, derivative terms, among others).

### 3.5. Metacognitive strategies

Schmitt (1997, p.205) refers to metacognitive strategies as an intentionally conceived impression of the process of learning and decision making concerning the planning, evaluating or monitoring the most appropriate techniques of studying. In contrast to the strategies discussed previously, metacognitive strategies involve indirect management of lexical acquisition. However, they tend to be exceedingly fundamental due to the fact that they appear in all the established classifications although with dissimilar tags. Gu and Johnson (1996) describe them as 'metacognitive regulation', that consists of attentive focus (the knowledge of the key subject or content of learning) and self-initiation (looking for learning opportunities); while Nation (2001) takes them in classification that he calls 'planning'.

Consequently, Schmitt contends that learners have to experience the target language through means possible, through either movies, books, or the Internet. Students also have to take part in activities that deal with communication with native language speakers. Learners should also find out regularly whether the process of learning vocabulary is successful and whether the applied strategies of learning strategies satisfy their demands. Lastly, they should control the process of studying L2 vocabulary as well as the amount of time required (Schmitt, 1997, p.216).

Briefly, it is essential that students be responsible of their own process of learning. As Nation (1998, p.9) points out, regardless of the effort of the teacher or the content presented by the course book, at the end of the day, the student is the one that learns. The more students gain knowledge of the most appropriate method of learning, the more improved learning becomes.

## 4. Method of data collection

This paper employs a qualitative method in achieving its objectives. To gather the data of the paper, two instruments of interview and class observation have been employed.

### 4.1. Interview

Several scholars (e.g. Brown, 2001; Nunan, 1992; Punch, 2005; Robson, 2002) show that the interview could be totally structured, concentrated or semi-structured, or unstructured. However, Nunan (1992, p.149) asserts that "the semi-structured one seems to be widely used in qualitative designs since they are flexible and provide the interviewee a degree of both power and control over the course of the interview". This view also has been echoed by Merriam (2002, p.90) stating that since the semi-structured interview is flexible enough, so it allows the researcher "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world-view of the participants, and to new, or unforeseen ideas on the topic". Therefore, for these same reasons this paper use semi-structured interview for data collection. The interviews are conducted to probe in greater detail; the construction of VLSs used by those students in each stage of vocabulary learning. In other words, the interviews would be very useful to clarify some remarks made by students on specific and effective VLSs related to the five stages of vocabulary learning. The paper follows the seven stages described by Kvale (1996) in designing and implementing a qualitative interview which include thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. In addition, the outlines of semi-structured interview are concerned with the 5-stages of vocabulary learning as such researchers including Brown and Payne (1994, cited in Hatch & Brown 1995, p. 373), and Hatch and Brown (1995) (also Luo, 2009; Mokhtar, Rawian, Yahaya, Abdullah & Mohamed, 2009) have suggested the idea of identifiable stages to learn the vocabulary as 'encountering new words, getting the word form, getting the word meaning, consolidating word form and meaning in memory and lastly using the word'. In other words, in acquiring an FL vocabulary, learners must go through these five stages (Brown and Payne, 1994). Hence, VLSs should be associated with these five steps (Fan, 2003). Hatch and Brown (1995, p.383) also assert that vocabulary learning goes through these five stages in which learners are required to make use of VLSs for conducting a specific task.

### 4.2. Class observation

The rationale for classroom observations is based on Patton's (2002) perspective that observation is the best method to understand a complex phenomenon in the natural setting. As a result, the researcher would use a number of multiple observation tools as a guideline including audio and video taping and field notes which are considered as rich sources of data, as affirmed by Allwright (1983). This allows the researcher to observe behavior of the participants of the study as it is happening as is the core purpose of observation (Merriam, 1998; Dornyei, 2007). For the observation sessions, the researcher visited the school (SSM) several times in order to build a good relationship, trust and rapport between the researcher and participants, as suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000).

Merriam's (1998) has recommended a list of elements that researchers should consider during classroom observations which deal with the physical setting in the classroom, the participants, activities and interactions, subtle factors (such as informal and unplanned activities, non-verbal communication, what does not happen, etc.) and also observer's field notes. However, the classroom observation is more of a reflective assistance, not an evaluative tool (Lengeling, 2013), so the researcher would also ask some participants to comment on some classroom teaching and learning incidents observed in terms of learning vocabulary. As an example, to observe how they do acquire new vocabulary through different language skills and the strategies or methods they have used to apply in learning new vocabulary.

## 5. Method of data analysis, findings and discussion

At first, for observing the classroom, the researcher determines to take 5 weeks in order to get overall events and situations for the construction of strategies employed by students in all 5-stges of vocabulary learning and how they do learn new vocabulary in all language skills generally. Therefore, the researcher would use such multiple observation tools as the observation guideline that includes audio and video taping and field notes which are considered a rich source of data (Swann, 1994; Patton, 1990) to assist the researcher in analysing and transcribing the data later on.

As for the students' interviews, the concern is to focus on VLSs that belong to all 5-stages of vocabulary learning. Specifically, the interview (the transcribed) data would be analysed with themes. Interviews in qualitative research are theme oriented which attempt to interpret and understand the meanings of the main themes in the life of the interviewees (Kvale, 1996). He also described seven stages in designing and implementing a qualitative interview which were followed in this study. These stages include

thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. Thematizing indicates that the researcher should be very clear about the purpose of the study and the topic to be investigated before starting the interview. Designing the interview involves all the seven stages and should be planned before the interview begins.

### 5.1. Factors influencing vocabulary learning

Several explanations were given by the Saudi School students in Malaysia who took part in this study concerning their understanding of the factors that affect the learning of English vocabulary at the secondary schools stage. Under this heading there are three themes generated based on the explanation of the informants as follows:

1) Language learning environment
2) Attitude and beliefs
3) Motivation

#### 5.1.1. Language learning environment

According to Gu (2003) Language learning environment is the socio-cultural-political environment in which learning takes place. Secondary School students who took part in this study described the language-learning environment as the surrounding environment where they have a better opportunity of immersion in the language compared to the situation in their countries like Saudi Arabia where English is rarely used. On this informant 1 explains that " Yeah…at Saudi school Malaysia, English is very important because many people speak English….so language is the only way to communicate with people here and particularly outside the school". Other words for the same meaning explained by informant 2 "English is really important here at Malaysia…..for example, if I like to go with taxi somewhere, how I can explain for him….and if I go outside home…I need to speak English because it's difficult to find someone talks Arabic".

In essence, the interviewee students are saying the same thing in different words. That is, the society in Malaysia is more conducive for building their vocabulary and acquiring their English language in general. This is because there are many situations where they need to speak in English. From the foregoing discussion it can be said that the surrounding environment plays an important role in second language learners' building their vocabulary. When Arab students study at the Saudi school in Malaysia, the environment helps them to build their vocabulary. As an example, participant 7 mentioned that, "Yeah…there is a big difference between studying at Saudi Arabia and studying at Saudi school Malaysia…..English here is very important because of the society…mmm…they speak and understand English.". Finally, what can be deduced from this factor, environment is important for building students vocabulary and the Malaysian environment can be considered as conducive for secondary school students in the Saudi school in Malaysia.

#### 5.1.2. Attitudes and beliefs

Another factor mentioned by the informants of this study is students' attitudes and beliefs. According to Borg (2001) belief is "a proposition when may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviours". Informant 8 explains that "According to myself… I see learning vocabulary is the basic thing in the language…aa…I have used to expand my vocabs from time to time…so I feel my level in language becomes advanced..". There is in fact an intertwine between these factors, for example when second language learners realise the importance of the language and the vocabulary in particular, that increase their belief that building their vocabulary is a significant issue. This idea best exemplify by informant 5 "of course!.. Knowing vocabulary is important because you will use vocabs in your daily life situations…aaa…you have to focus on learning and expanding your vocabs frequently".

Meanwhile, participant 7 mentioned "Yeah…there is a big difference between studying at Saudi Arabia and studying at Saudi school Malaysia…..English here is very important because of the society…mmm…they speak and understand English". The findings from the study shows that language learner attitude is a significant factor towards building the vocabulary for the target language and Secondary students in the Saudi school in Malaysia have a good attitude which is apparently motivated by the environment.

#### 5.1.3. Motivation

Motivation and the second language vocabulary building are relatively correlated as previous studies have revealed (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Sanaoui, 1995). Secondary School students who took part in this study described the motivation as one of the important factors that affect their vocabulary learning. this informant 2 explains that" Actually, it depends on the person himself…aaa...I mean if he is interested in learning and has the desire for that…so language will be easy…for example, sometimes when I see someone talks about something important and there are some key words that I don't know…aaa… when I come back home…I try to learn these words which I don't understand…".

Meanwhile, participant 8 mentioned that "Yeah…I think any one wants to learn English…he should put in his mind first to like learning English...okay…but if you don't like to learn language…aaa…you will not make use of any aspects which help you to learn…" . As mentioned that motivation is a significant factor for building students vocabulary. Oxford and Nyikos (1989), Schmidt and Yuichi (2001) found motivation to be one of the most obvious influences on vocabulary learning strategy choice. This correlation between motivation and vocabulary learning is confirmed by this current study where all the students interviewed believed that motivation is one of the most important factors that affect their vocabulary learning. The researcher also observed during data collection of this study that majority of the students is very motivated. All in all, motivation is confirmed by the literature, the interviews as well as the observation carried out by the researcher at Saudi School in Malaysia as a factor affecting vocabulary learning.

## 6. Conclusion

VLS is one of the most attractive aspects of language learning researches. With the increasing relevance and significance of English language globally more studies are needed particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia or in relation to Saudi students where Arabic language is the lingua franca and most students of Saudi origin are naturally inclined to use their mother tongue wherever they find themselves. The findings of this study indicate that learning environment, students' motivation as well as attitude and beliefs of students can all have either a negative or positive impacts on students' English vocabulary learning. Therefore, there is need for further researches in finding solutions to these factors affecting students' vocabulary learning particularly in a Saudi Arabian context. The implication of the study's findings means that an environment where English language is needed for one to go about their daily affairs has a positive impact on English vocabulary learning, their attitudes and beliefs as well as their motivation. Contrarily, an environment, such as Saudi Arabia where Arabic is the language of expression, will have a negative impact on students' vocabulary learning.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank School of Education and Modern Languages, University Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah Darula-

man, Malaysia by giving the authors an opportunity to conduct this research.

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