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## Investigating vocabulary learning strategies of EFL young learners in the Greek primary school

### Διερεύνηση των στρατηγικών εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου των νεαρών μαθητών αγγλικής ως ξένης γλώσσας στο ελληνικό δημοτικό σχολείο

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*This article focuses on vocabulary learning strategies as a means of promoting learner autonomy. More specifically, an effort has been made to identify the most favoured strategies used by both EFL teachers and learners in Greek primary schools. The study begins with a review of the current literature on learning strategies, where definitions and systems for the classification of strategies are provided; additionally, the acquisition of vocabulary is stressed and justified and more specific trends on vocabulary learning strategies by various researchers are presented. The next part focuses on the research methodology; the instruments of data collection are two questionnaires administered to primary school teachers and primary school students respectively. The findings of these two questionnaires are then analysed and presented, in order to define the most commonly used strategies but also to discern if those practised by teachers coincide with the ones preferred by learners. Moreover, there is a presentation of various vocabulary learning strategies existent in the primary school textbooks, namely 'Magic Book', 'Αγγλικά Δ' Δημοτικού', 'Αγγλικά Ε' Δημοτικού', and 'Αγγλικά ΣΤ' Δημοτικού'. Finally, the implications of the study are discussed and some suggestions are made as to the use and application of vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom.*

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Το άρθρο εστιάζει στις στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου ως μέσο προαγωγής της αυτονομίας των μαθητών. Ειδικότερα, έχει γίνει μια προσπάθεια να προσδιοριστούν οι προτιμώμενες στρατηγικές που χρησιμοποιούνται και από τους καθηγητές και από τους μαθητές των Αγγλικών ως ξένη γλώσσα στο ελληνικό δημοτικό σχολείο. Η μελέτη αρχίζει με την επανεξέταση της σύγχρονης λογοτεχνίας σε σχέση με τις στρατηγικές μάθησης, όπου παρέχονται ορισμοί και συστήματα για την ταξινόμηση των στρατηγικών· επιπλέον, τονίζεται και αιτιολογείται η απόκτηση/εκμάθηση λεξιλογίου και παρουσιάζονται πιο συγκεκριμένες τάσεις στις στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου από διάφορους ερευνητές. Το επόμενο

μέρος εστιάζει στην ερευνητική μεθοδολογία. Τα εργαλεία συλλογής δεδομένων είναι δύο ερωτηματολόγια που δόθηκαν σε καθηγητές και μαθητές Δημοτικού αντίστοιχα. Στην πορεία, αναλύονται και παρουσιάζονται τα ευρήματα των δύο ερωτηματολογίων, με σκοπό να προσδιοριστούν οι πιο συχνά χρησιμοποιούμενες στρατηγικές αλλά και να οριστεί το κατά πόσο οι στρατηγικές που χρησιμοποιούνται από τους καθηγητές συμπίπτουν με αυτές που προτιμούνται από τους μαθητές. Επιπλέον, παρουσιάζονται διάφορες στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου που υπάρχουν στα βιβλία του Δημοτικού, δηλαδή στο 'Magic Book', στα 'Αγγλικά Δ' Δημοτικού', στα 'Αγγλικά Ε' Δημοτικού' και στα 'Αγγλικά ΣΤ' Δημοτικού'. Τέλος, συζητώνται οι επιπτώσεις της μελέτης και γίνονται κάποιες προτάσεις ως προς τη χρήση και την εφαρμογή των στρατηγικών εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου μέσα στην τάξη.

**Key words:** learning strategies, vocabulary learning strategies

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## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the most important elements if we are to talk of successful second language acquisition and is considered central to skilled reading comprehension and the general development of language proficiency. According to Rubin and Thomson (1994), learning the lexis of a language is the very heart of mastering it since learners need to acquire a good amount of vocabulary of the L2 in order to be able to understand what they see or hear and also express themselves appropriately and fluently.

In order to facilitate learners in their effort to acquire the necessary amount of vocabulary we can introduce them to certain vocabulary learning strategies depending on their preferable way of learning, their styles, their aptitude even their interests and needs. On a general note, strategies are, as can be seen below, learner-driven behaviours that facilitate the learning process. Because students actually learn most of the vocabulary independently, we should encourage them to create their own personal plans to become able to expand their vocabulary over time, as also proposed by Graves (1987). Actually, a lot of emphasis is now placed on the importance of the development of autonomous learning strategies on the part of foreign language students (Wan, 2006; Chamot, 2005); in the same vein, a large number of books aimed at teachers include practical advice on the teaching of vocabulary and encourage the application of student language learning strategies (McCarthy, 1990; Nation, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

The present article will attempt to specify which vocabulary learning strategies are promoted by primary school teachers, which are existent in the teaching materials as well as the strategies that are actually used by the learners. For this purpose, an action research was conducted by the writer, including the use of two questionnaires-one for teachers and one for students- and a textbook evaluation checklist.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Learning strategies

The term strategy, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, is "a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim". The following definitions provided by various researchers all imply the use of learning strategies in order to achieve specific goals in the

course of learning. Wenden and Rubin (1987, p. 19) describe strategies as “any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information”. In Richards, Platt and Platt (1992, p. 209) we find the following definition: “learning strategies are intentional behaviors and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to help them better understand, learn or remember new information”. Similarly, another definition provided by O’Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 1) sees learning strategies as “special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information”. These three definitions focus mainly on the goals of learning strategies. Oxford (1990, p. 8), more comprehensively, claims that language learning strategies are: “operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information...; specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations”. In her definition Oxford does not only provide a list of goals, expanding that of O’Malley and Chamot, but she goes one step further to explain what changes happen to learning when it is enhanced by learning strategies- ‘easier, faster,....., more transferable to new situations’.

## **2.2 Vocabulary learning strategies and young learners**

Vocabulary learning is considered one of the most important areas of teaching and it is certainly one of the constitutional elements of EFL, since “words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed” (Read, 2000, p.1). When we think of vocabulary, we do not only talk about merely knowing the meaning of a word, its definition; rather what is essential is knowing how to use a word correctly, having the ability to use the word in spoken and written occasions and also recognizing it and understanding it when encountered in various contexts (Miller & Gildea, 1987).

When it comes to teaching vocabulary, and especially teaching vocabulary to young learners, the situation can prove to be more complex than it might originally seem. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration and many theories and techniques that need to be integrated in our teaching. Firstly, as Linse (2005) points out, it is important to help expand the learners’ vocabulary knowledge by using both formal and informal instruction (by formal instruction Linse refers to the planned instruction through which the teacher teaches the meaning of the words and ways for the students to discover the meaning themselves; by informal instruction she refers to ‘by the way instruction’ where there is no rule teaching or systematic approach). Furthermore, and most importantly, it is essential that young learners be taught vocabulary learning strategies, so that they can discover the meaning of new words (Linse, 2005). These strategies can prove very necessary in situations both inside the learning context, the classroom, but also outside in the real world, and can help them acquire vocabulary they see or hear. For this reason, vocabulary development should also include Direct instruction – the actual teaching of words and their meanings- and Indirect instruction – the teaching of strategies through which the learners will be able to deduce the meaning themselves. Another helpful strategy for our young students, as the same author suggests, is repetition. For new lexical items to be successfully assimilated by the students, they need to reappear several times after their first occurrence, in different activities, with different skills and for multiple times for recycling to take place. Deep processing is another component that can help students integrate new vocabulary items. Through this strategy, learners can create stronger connections between the new words and the knowledge they already possess; by making the students personally involved

in and connected with the new lexical items, deep processing is enhanced. Some tools that can prove very useful are dictionaries and vocabulary notebooks.

When talking about young learners, Cameron (2001) argues that they have different lexical needs than older learners. More specifically, they need to learn concrete vocabulary, recycling of new lexical items in new contexts is essential and basic level words should be learnt before an attempt is made to teach them subordinate or superordinate vocabulary; additionally, they learn words as collections. When describing strategies that can be used to teach the meaning of new words she makes use of the strategies listed by Nation (1990), such as the use of demonstration and pictures and also through verbal explanation (its analytical definition, the provision of a defining context for the word or its direct translation to L1). She also stresses the importance of strategies (2001) referring primarily to Schmitt's (1997) and Ahmed's (1988) studies, pointing out that although both studies were conducted with older learners, the use of strategies has its roots in what happens earlier, at an earlier age. Some of the strategies appropriate for young learners, as she proposes (2001), are guessing meaning from the information in pictures or texts, noticing grammatical information about words, noticing links to similar words in the first language, remembering where a word has been encountered before. Teachers can also model the use of strategies, teach the sub-skills needed to make use of strategies, use classroom tasks with opportunities for strategy use, rehearse independent strategy use and help young learners reflect on the learning process through evaluating their achievements.

Lastly, as proposed by Schmitt (1997), we should introduce our learners to a variety of strategies so that they become available for the learners to use according to their personal learning styles, maybe at a later age. Besides, it is claimed that the strategies that older learners use can be traced back to habits formed at an earlier age, as has already been mentioned, so the sooner they are accustomed to strategies the better for our learners.

### 3. Aims and research questions

The aim of the present study is to determine which vocabulary learning strategies are applied in language teaching and learning in the Greek primary school. For the purposes of this research the following questions were attempted to be answered:

1. Which vocabulary learning strategies are practised by EFL teachers in primary schools?
2. Which vocabulary learning strategies are favoured by EFL students?
3. Which vocabulary learning strategies are employed in the textbooks provided by the Greek Ministry of Education?

### 4. Method and design

#### 4.1. Participants

*Teachers' profile.* The questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers was answered by 54 participants, 50 of whom are female and only 3 male-1 participant skipped the question. The majority is aged 31-40 and are permanent teachers; about 60% of them serve in urban areas, which means that there is a satisfactory sample from both urban and rural areas. To the best part, they have an average working experience of 6 to 10 years and there is a variety in the grades they currently teach, covering all classes of primary school, since every participant teaches multiple grades during each school year. A percentage of 20.75% are

already holders of a master's degree whereas 64.15% are currently studying towards the acquisition of their master's degree-this of course happening since most of the participants were contacted through the Yahoo Groups created by the tutors of the Hellenic Open University to facilitate communication with the HOU students.

*Students' profile.* The questionnaire was administered to 81 students of a primary school in Gerakas, Athens. 23 of the students were in the third grade, 20 in the fourth, 20 in the fifth and 18 in the sixth grade. Out of the total of students, 36 pupils were boys and 45 were girls. The majority of students were of Greek origin, with the exception of 2 bilinguals of Greek and Albanian and 1 Roma in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 1 Roma in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 2 bilinguals of Greek and Albanian in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Lastly, in each class there were students with learning disabilities; more specifically, 1 was in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2 in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1 in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 1 in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, presenting difficulties mostly in writing.

## **4.2. Materials**

For the collection of data for the specific study the use of the questionnaire was considered as most appropriate.

### *4.2.1. Questionnaires: from theory to practice*

*Teachers' questionnaire* (Appendix I). The questionnaire, which was administered to EFL teachers of primary schools, was originally based on Schmitt's taxonomy. It includes questions that refer both to the strategies used for the presentation of new lexical items and the discovery of the meaning of new words and also to the strategies used for consolidation of already encountered words. Different types of strategies are presented through the questions: 'determination strategies', through which the learners discover the meaning of new words for themselves; 'social strategies', where the help of someone who already possesses the knowledge is offered; 'memory strategies', known also as mnemonics, that involve the relation of the word with some previously learnt knowledge, using imagery or grouping; 'cognitive strategies', that involve repetition and mechanical means to study and retain vocabulary in memory (in a way they are similar to memory strategies but do not focus as much on manipulative mental processing); 'metacognitive strategies', which can be used by the learners themselves to monitor and evaluate their progress. Of course not all strategies suggested by Schmitt were included in the specific questionnaire not only because of the size it would amount to but also because many of them refer to older learners, since Schmitt conducted his research mainly with older students. Schmitt's taxonomy was not the only source used in the design of the specific questionnaire. Willis' work was equally influential; as she suggests (2008, p. 82): "... learning vocabulary building strategies modifies brain functions in systematic, predictable ways as enriched vocabulary becomes evident in reading comprehension, verbal language, and writing". In her study, and through evidence supported also by scientific data and medical examinations, she proposes a series of strategies that in turn affect the three components of vocabulary, namely resonance, reinforcement and rehearsal. For the aforementioned reasons, a careful selection was once again made as to the proposed strategies by Willis herself, in order to select the most appropriate for the age group under discussion.

Additionally, Oxford's (1990) taxonomy contributed greatly, not only to the actual design of the questionnaire but also to the general addressing of the vocabulary learning strategies. It is worth mentioning once more that Schmitt's taxonomy was mainly based on the work done by Oxford. Her 'affective strategies', which were not explicitly included in Schmitt's

taxonomy, are considered very important and helpful to young learners, since they have to do with their emotions, motivation and attitude towards and while learning the language; they are also included in her ESL/EFL version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which, according to her study (1995), has proven a highly reliable and valid tool to assess frequency of language learning strategy use. Generally speaking, in order to design the questionnaire not a single taxonomy could be used, since every researcher that dealt with learning strategies had something significant to contribute to work previously done. For this reason, although the basis was Schmitt's taxonomy, as he focuses primarily on vocabulary learning strategies, it was complemented with various other strategies proposed by researchers also mentioned in the previous chapter.

*Students' questionnaire* (Appendix II). The questionnaire which was administered to the EFL learners was designed keeping the same principles in mind as for the design of the teachers' questionnaire.

One of its main characteristics is that it is by far shorter, since it is addressed to children aged 8 to 12 years of age. Only the main vocabulary learning strategies were used with a view to keeping it as simple as possible, also due to their short concentration span. Furthermore, the Greek language was used, so that it could be understood by all the learners, no matter what their cognitive level is. It is also preceded by a cover letter, through which they are informed about the anonymity of the questionnaire and what is also emphasized is that their contribution is of great importance to the study. In general, the theories taken into consideration in order to design the questionnaire that was administered to the EFL teachers were the ones also used to design the EFL learners' questionnaire.

*Questionnaire description.* The first questionnaire (Appendix I) is in English since the participants are teachers of the English language. It was administered in electronic form, which was opted for against the printed form, since in this way the participants would be more easily accessible but also the questionnaire would take less time to complete. It consists of two main parts labeled under the appropriate headings and also separated in two distinct pages.

The first part consists of personal or demographic questions including the gender, the age, the employment status, the working experience, the location of the school, the grades they teach and the studies of the participants. The demographic questions are used in any questionnaire to see how closely the sample replicates the known population: the more closely the demographic distribution of survey respondents matches the population, the more confidence we can have in the data. Since, though, in this specific survey, the greatest sample comes from urban areas (Athens, to be more specific), it is not so much the location of the school that is of importance as the grades each participant teaches, so as to determine the age groups where the particular strategies are practised.

The second part/page of the questionnaire consists of 80 questions, which refer to the different vocabulary learning strategies that teachers use and practise during their lessons. The last question (number 80) is an open-ended one, inviting teachers to suggest any other strategies they might be using.

The second questionnaire (Appendix II), as also mentioned before, is addressed to students and for that reason it is in Greek. It is administered in its printed form, since it would be difficult to reach pupils of this age through the Internet; for this reason it was given for completion at the beginning of the lesson. An additional reason for this is that the students

would have the opportunity to ask any questions that might arise, since their teacher would be present during the whole procedure. It is also colourful, so that its form is more appealing.

Initially, the students are only asked to complete their gender and class, since we already know that they live in an urban area (Gerakas, Athens). The actual questionnaire is intended to investigate three areas: a) strategies used for the discovery of meaning, b) strategies used for the consolidation of a word and c) attitudes/preferences, and consists of three parts. In the first part, learners are asked to respond as to what they do when they encounter new words. It includes determination and social strategies. The second part includes strategies that concern their preferences when they memorise new vocabulary; for this reason, most of them are memory strategies but also some cognitive ones are included. Lastly, the third part refers to their general preferences as to the learning of the English language; it comprises metacognitive, and affective strategies. It should be noted here that not all the strategies from the teachers' questionnaire were included in that put together for students. The main reason is that some of the strategies are used by the teachers in order to assist students in learning and cannot easily be used by learners themselves; also, because of their age, the children are not ready for all the types of strategies since some of them take longer to develop and be used spontaneously. Additionally, it was not deemed necessary to collect such detailed information from students, so a selection was made.

*Evaluation checklist.* The last instrument used for the triangulation of data is a checklist (Appendix III), which served for the evaluation of the textbooks used in the Greek primary school. An attempt was made to define the vocabulary learning strategies existing in the textbooks, either implicitly, through the activities and practice they provide to learners, or explicitly, since one of the key features of these textbooks, especially those for the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, is the suggestion of learning strategies for the learners to use.

In order to analyse the data collected through the questionnaires, descriptive statistics was used, to provide summaries about the sample and about the observations that have been made. The analysis of the data is presented in the following chapter.

## 5. Research findings

### 5.1. Questionnaires results

An interesting aspect of the data that have emerged through both questionnaires administered arises when we compare the vocabulary learning strategies preferred by learners to those employed by the teachers.

More analytically, understanding or guessing meaning from context is a very popular strategy between both groups; teachers use this strategy and students embrace it as well. Similarly, students engage in guessing meaning from pictures, and teachers promote this teaching technique. Translation in L1 is still often used by teachers, and likewise learners seem to favour this strategy.

In consolidating meaning, vocabulary notebooks are highly celebrated by both groups, probably because the school textbooks are not equipped with extensive glossaries. Another noted strategy for the same purpose is that of matching words with pictures; the exact same results came up with matching words with objects. Using words in sentences to keep meaning in mind is often employed in the classroom and can also be used as homework.

Both parties showed a strong preference for songs and stories and of course games are an all time favourite for students and are also selected by teachers, since teaching in this way can be more amusing for both and students are more involved in the lesson. Word families were almost equally treated by both groups of participants, with the teachers showing a greater preference for them. As for participation in projects, the learners seem more eager for them but also the teachers quite often engage them in such activities, which are also present in the textbooks. Writing down and sounding out words in order to practice them is quite a traditional strategy that can assist memorization and it is among the most popular ones. Moving on to the metacognitive strategies, teachers always prompt their students to listen to English songs, watch films and cartoons in English, read different texts in English and speak with people who know the language well; the majority of students was also very favourable towards these strategies, with a slight exception to reading, which was not chosen by as many, probably because reading is often considered as the most tedious. Error correction was also regarded by the learners in a more traditional way, since they showed clear preference to immediate correction, probably because they are used to this way of correction in their L1. Teachers discuss learners' mistakes with them, though not on a regular basis, but more often than not resort to remedial work, in order to help learners recognize and overcome their weaknesses. Rewards for students' efforts are always practiced and they are also expected by the learners.

The use of bilingual dictionaries is not as much favoured by either group; asking the classmates for meaning is also not selected as a vocabulary learning strategy. A surprising issue is that although teachers oftentimes give students sentences including the new words, students do not opt for the specific practice to discern the meaning of a word; synonyms and paraphrases are similarly treated. Also, drawing pictures of words is not popular among students, probably because they feel they have outgrown this strategy, while teachers practise it. The same goes for rhyming and poems; teachers emphasise rhyming but students do not prefer to learn poems to memorise words, probably because rhyming is a technique that appeals mostly to younger children (aged 5-8). Furthermore, although students like crossword puzzles a lot, they are only sometimes engaged in such an activity; this could be explained by the lack of such activities in the textbooks or by the fact that such activities are quite time-consuming to be done in classroom or to be even given as homework. A question with controversial results was that concerning making stories with words learnt; 33.75% of the students answered that they *never* prefer this activity whereas 23.75% answered that they *always* do; teachers on the other hand were somewhere in between, with 44.44% answering that they *sometimes* use the specific strategy. Making stories can prove very challenging for children and depending on the role stories and fairytales play in their lives- whether they are accustomed to reading or hearing them- could give an explanation for the above results. A similarly treated strategy is that of the students creating exercises themselves to give their classmates; the majority of answers from both groups was that they never practise vocabulary in such a way. Quite surprisingly, although students are encouraged to share their feelings while learning a foreign language, less than half actually do (Graph 7), probably because they are not used to or are reluctant of being the epicentre of the teachers' attention or because children of this age can be quite egocentric and it is difficult for them to share their feelings with others.

## 5.2. Evaluation of textbooks

Generally speaking, most of the vocabulary learning strategies in the proposed checklist exist in the primary school textbooks. What is quite interesting with the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks is that the book itself suggests learning strategies so that the learners can become

aware of ways in which they can learn and train themselves towards autonomy. Furthermore, in the introduction of these textbooks, addressed to the students, they are informed that the purpose of these books is to guide them through the path of knowledge according to their personal needs and interests and that the use of learning strategies can make their journey easier and more effective.

However, it is evident that not all the strategies from the checklist exist in the books although they are used by both the teachers and the students, as shown by the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires. For example, the presentation of words with objects/realia or with movements/gestures is not mentioned in the teacher's notes but it is up to the teacher to use these strategies to facilitate the learners. Also, songs and rhymes are mostly used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which is understandable because they appeal to younger children mostly. Translation in L1 is not as much encouraged in any other grade apart from the 4<sup>th</sup>; the 4<sup>th</sup> grade textbook is also the only one that provides students with a glossary in which they need to complete the Greek translation of the words. It is mentioned in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbook that pupils may use the translation of a word, but it is not as much emphasised as for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, although the provision of synonyms/antonyms or sentences including new lexis is not direct in all textbooks, it can anyway be used by the teacher to make memorization easier. The use of dictionaries is recommended but not for all grades, probably because it is more difficult for younger learners or because it is not feasible for so many dictionaries to exist in every classroom of the state school. Lastly, writing down and sounding out of new words are again mostly left to the teacher and they are strategies used more often than not, as shown in the previous chapter.

## **6. Interpretation of results, limitations and implications**

### **6.1. Interpretation of the Results**

In general, the vocabulary learning strategies selected and included in the teachers' questionnaire were met with the approval of the teachers, since most of the strategies are used by the majority to a bigger or lesser extent during their lessons. Moreover, the students stated their preference towards certain strategies through the questionnaire addressed to them, which leads us to the conclusion that they also find the specific strategies helpful and appropriate since they use them. Of course if a closer look at the students' questionnaire results is taken, it will be realized that the results as to the preferred vocabulary learning strategies change according to the grade; younger students prefer songs and games whereas older pupils opt for projects and crossword puzzles, for example. Lastly, many of the strategies under discussion are proposed implicitly or explicitly in the primary school textbooks, which means that also the authors of the specific textbooks consider them appropriate, since in designing the material the age of the learners was primarily taken into consideration.

Furthermore, the findings of the specific study are validated by the findings of a study conducted by Chamot and El-Dinary (1999); although their study concerned foreign language immersion programmes-which is not the case here-its results showed that children use a variety of strategies to deal with language learning. The quantitative data of the current study proved that learners apply all different kinds of strategies to their learning, namely memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social.

The answers to the research questions that follow will provide the reader with a clearer view as to the aforementioned points.

*Q. 1: Which vocabulary learning strategies are practiced by EFL teachers in primary schools?*

The answer to this question is directly provided through the answers of the teachers to the questionnaire administered to them and can be traced back in the previous part. Furthermore, the evaluation of the textbooks provides an insight as to which vocabulary learning strategies are proposed by the writers and subsequently should be promoted by the teachers themselves, simultaneously giving them the freedom to use any other strategies they consider appropriate according to the students' needs and personal styles of learning.

More specifically, the teachers seem to be using most of the vocabulary learning strategies proposed in the questionnaire for the discovery of meaning. The use of pictures, gestures and sounds, of dictionaries and flashcards, the provision of the translation, paraphrase or sentence including the new word and the practice of prompting students to guess meaning through context are very common strategies in the Greek classroom, as also suggested by Schmitt (1997). For the consolidation of vocabulary, again there is a variety of strategies used, such as connecting the words with personal experiences, creating an image of the word's meaning, engaging in group-work activities and using a vocabulary notebook, proposed by Schmitt; also, drawing, matching words with pictures/objects, recycling words in new contexts and using stories and other English-language media. Furthermore, the teachers employ the affective strategies recommended by Oxford (1990) to promote learning in a relaxed atmosphere.

It is crucial that vocabulary teaching strategies be incorporated systematically in every lesson so that the students are equipped in order to cope with the demands of vocabulary learning. According to Sternberg (1987), the main function of vocabulary teaching is to teach learners how to teach themselves and this is where the strategies serve. The fact that they are used by Greek teachers contributes to the facilitation of the learners as to the acquisition of the necessary amount of vocabulary.

*Q. 2: Which vocabulary learning strategies are favoured by EFL students?*

The data collected through the administration of the questionnaire to the learners reveal that their preference to certain strategies varies according to the grade they attend. Looking at the results, it becomes evident that the students show a greater preference towards strategies that have the feel of free-time activities, such as playing games, doing crossword puzzles, engaging in group-work activities, reading stories, listening to songs, guessing meaning from context/pictures, either for the discovery of meaning or for the consolidation of vocabulary.

On the whole though, many of the vocabulary learning strategies they use are the ones existent in their textbooks and practised by their teachers; this means that training the students in the use of strategies, even from a very young age, does have results. Research has shown that learning strategies can be taught to students through training and in this way they are helped to improve their performance on language learning tasks (O'Malley et al., 1985).

*Q. 3: Which vocabulary learning strategies are employed in the textbooks provided by the Greek Ministry of Education?*

The evaluation of the textbooks in Chapter 4 proved that many of the vocabulary learning strategies do appear in the textbooks of the state primary schools. They are either provided as suggestions for the learners to use or are put into practice through the various activities. At the same time, the teacher has the potential to use other strategies that can facilitate the learners, since not everyone learns in the same way and at the same pace; for this reason the books are equipped with *differentiated activities* that might be more suitable for their individual learning style.

## **6.2. Limitations of the study**

It should be noted at the specific point that the study under discussion has certain limitations, firstly those concerning the number and profile of the respondents of the questionnaires. Further research involving more participants on both sides (teachers/students) and from different parts of Greece would be necessary in order to produce more general results. Differences in results would also emerge due to other factors, such as studies, training, own learning experiences and teaching experiences-on the part of the teachers. For that purpose, a larger-scale research and teacher/student interviews or classroom observations (qualitative tools of data collection) could be used. In addition, the evaluation checklist was based on the relevant literature but the final selection of the strategies to be included was made by the evaluator; judged by stakeholders it might be found to have omissions or solecism.

## **6.3. Implications of the Study**

It is evident, mainly through the literature review, that vocabulary learning strategies can prove a powerful tool in the hands of the teachers, the students and the authors of textbooks and can help in the design of both the syllabus and the lesson itself.

In that light, the teachers can train their students in the use of not only vocabulary learning strategies but also learning strategies in general, more intensively and systematically in order to help them achieve autonomy. Learners should be made aware of the different strategies they can use in order to find the ones that suit their personal style and individual needs. To that end a needs analysis questionnaire could be administered at the beginning and throughout the school year to identify which strategies should be emphasized more and generally to determine the results of such a practice. At the same time, through systematic and continuous teacher training and professional development, the teachers will be able to make informed decisions as to which strategies are most effective for their learners. Lastly, more or different strategies could be included in the textbooks so that they are enriched by the writers since strategic learning is considered more effective.

For the instruction of strategies, the five-step procedure proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) could be implemented. Briefly, the five steps are the following:

1. Preparation: development of the students' awareness as to the existence of different strategies through retrospection, think-alouds and discussions.
2. Presentation: development of the students' knowledge as to the strategies by providing them with the rationale, describing/naming the strategy and modeling its use.

3. Practice: development of the students' skills in the use of strategies through cooperative learning tasks, think-alouds, peer tutoring and group discussions.
4. Evaluation: development of student ability to evaluate their own strategy use through writing down of the strategies used, discussions and keeping dialogue journals (with the teacher).
5. Expansion: development of the ability to transfer strategies to new tasks by discussions on metacognitive and motivational aspects of strategy use, additional practice and assignments.

Apart from the aforementioned suggestions and since the object of this research is young learners, a final proposal should be made: games and game-like activities need to be used more in the classroom. Although the use of games has gained ground in teaching during the last few years and most textbooks include some, they are often avoided by teachers since they are very time-consuming, difficult to organize and are blamed for chaos in the classroom. However, judging from the students' responses, game-like activities are at the top of their preferences. Of course, they need to be carefully selected, according to the learners' age and cognitive demands, and they need to be challenging and intriguing. According to Shen (2003), the activities that make use of wordlists, dictionaries, flashcards, games, mnemonics and analysis of words are useful since the students' attention is drawn to the vocabulary that needs to be consolidated. Additionally, games need not only be limited to word-level; they can be expanded to also teach chunks of language.

## 7. Conclusion

The main intention of the present study was to investigate to what extent various vocabulary learning strategies, if any, are applied in the Greek primary school. In order to examine the specific topic, the relevant literature on vocabulary learning strategies was first and foremost reviewed; additionally the research questions were posed. The instruments used to answer these questions were two subsequent questionnaires, one addressed to teachers and another addressed to students, designed according to the vocabulary learning strategies proposed by various theorists. The data collected through both questionnaires was quite encouraging as to the use of strategies not only by teachers but also by the learners themselves. The evaluation of the textbooks was used not only for the triangulation of data but also in order to prove or disprove whether there has been provision of adequate vocabulary learning strategies. The results were quite encouraging since both learners and teachers seem to be using several of the selected strategies in order to manipulate vocabulary; the textbooks themselves also contain many of the strategies, which makes the work of the teachers easier and that of the students more focused.

Conclusively, it is advisable that teachers dedicate as much as time and circumstances allow them to the teaching of learning strategies and to the training of the learners in order to help them achieve autonomy. At the same time, knowing the way their students learn is essential in order to be able to adapt the lesson accordingly and put emphasis on the individual differences and preferences.

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## APPENDIX I

*Presentation of the questions included in the teachers' questionnaire and the strategies they refer to.*

DET= determination strategies, MEM= memory strategies, SOC= social strategies, COG= cognitive strategies, MET= metacognitive strategies, AFF= affective strategies

1. I present words with pictures/flashcards DET
2. I present words with sounds DET
3. I present words with objects/realia DET
4. I present words with gestures, pantomime or physical movements DET
5. I categorise words in word families (e.g. animals) DET
6. I categorise words in parts of speech (e.g. nouns, verbs) DET
7. I analyse the affixes and roots of words (e.g. walk-walked, happy-unhappy) DET
8. I emphasise rhyming in words (e.g. night-light) MEM
9. I emphasise homophones (e.g. their-there) MEM
10. I translate words in Greek MEM
11. I use synonyms and paraphrases to explain the meaning of words MEM
12. I give students a sentence including the meaning of words MEM
13. I give students crossword puzzles to help them revise vocabulary MEM
14. I engage students in group work activities to practise the meaning of words SOC/MEM
15. I recycle words in new contexts MEM
16. I use semantic maps (mind maps/spider diagrams) to help students study vocabulary MEM
17. I group words together within a storyline to help students study them MEM
18. I give students gap-filling activities to practise the meaning of words MEM
19. I ask students to combine words to make compounds (e.g. jelly+fish) MEM
20. I ask students to look for loan words in L1 or L2 (e.g. supermarket) DET
21. I ask students to guess the meaning of words from context DET
22. I ask students what words remind them of to help retain them in their memory MEM
23. I ask students to make an image of the words in their minds MEM
24. I ask students to find the meaning of words in a bilingual dictionary DET
25. I ask students to make word lists COG
26. I ask students to repeat words after me COG
27. I ask students to break down words in their individual sounds (e.g. cat in c-a-t) MEM
28. I ask students to blend individual sounds into words (e.g. g-d-o in dog) MEM
29. I ask students to think about situations in their life that relate to the new word (e.g. "What makes you 'happy'?") MEM
30. I ask students to make examples giving the definition of words MEM
31. I ask students to use words in sentences MEM
32. I ask students to write stories including new words MEM
33. I ask students to match words with pictures MEM
34. I ask students to match words with objects MEM
35. I ask students to match words with their synonyms/antonyms MEM
36. I ask students to draw pictures of words MEM
37. I ask students to study the spelling of words MEM
38. I ask students to sound out words when they study MEM
39. I ask students to write down words when they study MEM
40. I ask students to study words through their wordlists and/or flashcards COG
41. I ask students to study words from the vocabulary section in their textbook COG
42. I ask students to keep a vocabulary notebook to study words COG

43. I ask students to replace previously learnt words with new ones (e.g. excited-enthusiastic) MEM
44. I ask students to make predictions about the content or the follow-up of a text COG
45. I ask students to read the same text repeatedly COG
46. I ask students to read the text with me in chorus COG
47. I ask students to reread the text in small parts after I have read them aloud COG
48. I ask each student to reread (part of) the text aloud COG
49. I ask students to read the text to family members as homework COG
50. I ask students to sound out familiar words quickly MEM
51. I ask students to create their own revision exercises (e.g. words on one list and definitions on another to match) to give their classmates MET/SOC
52. I ask students to participate in projects on a given topic to use the vocabulary learnt SOC/MEM
53. I advise students to ask their teacher for the meaning of words SOC
54. I advise students to ask their classmates for the meaning of words SOC
55. I advise students to interact with native speakers/people who know the language well SOC/MET
56. I help students learn and use formulaic language (e.g. "What does this word mean?") SOC
57. I help students learn chunks of language through storytelling MEM
58. I help students learn chunks of language through games MEM
59. I help students learn chunks of language through songs/chants MEM
60. I help students learn chunks of language through drama MEM
61. I help students learn high frequency 'sight' words (e.g. eight, friend, because) MEM
62. I help students connect words with their senses (e.g. see a drum, hear a drum, tap their hands on the desk as if playing a drum) MEM
63. I prompt students to listen to English songs to acquire vocabulary MET
64. I prompt students to watch English films/cartoons to acquire vocabulary MET
65. I prompt students to read English books/comics/magazines to acquire vocabulary MET
66. I ask students to note down words learnt when they see/hear them outside the classroom (e.g. on signs, products or media) MET
67. I try to create a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom AFF
68. I encourage students to use words even when they are not sure about their correct meaning AFF
69. I encourage students to talk about their feelings about L2 learning AFF
70. I encourage students to write down their feelings in a language learning notebook AFF
71. I reward students when they do well or when they make an effort AFF
72. I correct students' mistakes on the spot MET
73. I prompt students to spot their own or their classmates' mistakes, write them down and discuss them with the teacher MET
74. I note down students' mistakes and do remedial work MET
75. I give students vocabulary tests MET
76. I ask students to monitor their progress in L2 MET
77. I ask students to keep a language portfolio MET
78. I ask students to reflect on their favourite vocabulary learning strategies MET
79. I give students wordlists and ask them to tick the ones they know MET
80. Please suggest any other vocabulary learning strategies you might be using with your students

## APPENDIX II

*Presentation of the questions included in the students' questionnaire and the strategies they refer to.*

DET= determination strategies, MEM= memory strategies, SOC= social strategies, COG= cognitive strategies, MET= metacognitive strategies, AFF= affective strategies

Όταν βρίσκω μια καινούργια λέξη:

- ❖ Προσπαθώ να καταλάβω τί σημαίνει από την πρόταση DET
- ❖ Προσπαθώ να καταλάβω τί σημαίνει από τις εικόνες DET
- ❖ Ψάχνω τη σημασία της στο λεξικό DET
- ❖ Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει τί σημαίνει στα Ελληνικά SOC
- ❖ Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει μια πρόταση με την καινούργια λέξη SOC
- ❖ Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει ένα συνώνυμο SOC
- ❖ Ρωτάω τους συμμαθητές μου SOC

Όταν μαθαίνω καινούργιες λέξεις προτιμώ:

- ❖ Να γράφω τη λέξη και τη σημασία της στο τετράδιο μου MEM
- ❖ Να βλέπω την εικόνα της MEM
- ❖ Να βλέπω ένα αντικείμενο MEM
- ❖ Να ζωγραφίζω μια εικόνα με τη λέξη MEM
- ❖ Να γράφω προτάσεις με την καινούργια λέξη MEM
- ❖ Να ακούω τραγούδια με τις λέξεις στα Αγγλικά MEM
- ❖ Να διαβάζω ιστορίες MEM
- ❖ Να μαθαίνω ποιήματα MEM
- ❖ Να παίζω παιχνίδια MEM
- ❖ Να κάνω ασκήσεις MEM
- ❖ Να λύνω σταυρόλεξα MEM
- ❖ Να φτιάχνω οικογένειες λέξεων MEM
- ❖ Να φτιάχνω μια ιστορία με τη λέξη αυτή MEM
- ❖ Να κάνω εργασίες μαζί με τους συμμαθητές μου SOC/MEM
- ❖ Να φτιάχνω ασκήσεις και να τις δίνω στους συμμαθητές μου MET
- ❖ Να γράφω τις λέξεις πολλές φορές COG
- ❖ Να λέω τις λέξεις δυνατά COG

Μου αρέσει:

- ❖ Να ακούω τραγούδια στα Αγγλικά MET
- ❖ Να βλέπω ταινίες ή κινούμενα σχέδια στα Αγγλικά MET
- ❖ Να διαβάζω βιβλία, περιοδικά ή κόμικς στα Αγγλικά MET
- ❖ Να μιλάω με ανθρώπους που ξέρουν Αγγλικά καλά SOC/MET
- ❖ Να επιβραβεύομαι για τις προσπάθειες μου όταν μαθαίνω Αγγλικά AFF
- ❖ Να εκφράζω τα συναισθήματα μου όταν μαθαίνω Αγγλικά AFF
- ❖ Να συζητάω με τη δασκάλα μου για τα λάθη που κάνω εγώ ή οι συμμαθητές μου MET
- ❖ Να με διορθώνει η δασκάλα μου αμέσως μόλις κάνω ένα λάθος MET

### APPENDIX III

#### EVALUATION CHECKLIST

1. Presentation of words with pictures/flashcards
2. Presentation of words with objects/realia
3. Presentation of words physically
4. Presentation of words with songs/rhymes
5. Categorization of words in word families
6. Translation in L1
7. Provision of synonyms/paraphrases
8. Provision of sentences including meaning
9. Discovery of meaning through pictures
10. Discovery of meaning through context
11. Use of bilingual dictionary
12. Recycling of words in new contexts
13. Relation of words to students' personal experiences
14. Prediction activities to activate previously learnt vocabulary
15. Listening activities to practise vocabulary
16. Crossword puzzles, semantic maps, gap-filling/multiple choice exercises
17. Creation of wordlists with meaning
18. Matching of words with pictures
19. Matching of words with synonyms/antonyms
20. Drawing
21. Writing down of words
22. Sounding out of words
23. Doing projects
24. Teaching of formulaic language
25. Teaching of chunks of language through games, stories, drama or songs
26. Playing games
27. Reading stories
28. Self-assessment

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