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GENDER AND VOCABULARY LEARNING IN EFL: A CASE STUDY FROM MACEDONIA

Abstract

This paper reports the results of a study of the influence of gender on the use of vocabulary learning strategies of EFL learners in the Republic of Macedonia. A questionnaire was administered to 709 EFL learners from ten elementary schools, ten secondary schools, as well as five Faculties of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The findings reveal similarities in the ten most and least frequently used VLS by male and female learners. Apart from females' greater use of all five categories of strategies, 8 of the 13 VLS tested by chi-square tests show more frequent use by females, one strategy is used more often by males, whereas the remaining 4 do not show any significant variation by gender.

Key words: vocabulary learning strategies, gender, chi-square tests, significant variation

1. Introduction

Until recently the study of gender and its influence on language learning outcomes was dominated by the *difference approach* to understanding gender and language learning, which viewed gender as a static, context-

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free category, focusing on males and females as rather generalized images (Schmenk 2004: 514).

Gender differences have been found in many aspects of human social and cognitive development. Synthesizing research on gender differences in human social behaviour, Oxford (1993: 66) points out that females are more interested in social activities than males; females are less aggressive than males; females are less competitive than males. Research on gender differences in language use has revealed that in mixed-gender interactions females ask more questions, use more polite speech forms and interrupt less frequently than males (Catalan 2003: 55).

Gender differences have been noticed in the area of human cognitive development, as well. Pre-school and elementary school girls develop intellectually faster than boys (Vučić 1987: 106), whereas later boys catch up. Verbal skills in the first language tend to develop earlier in females than in males. Girls usually perform better on reading, spelling and grammar tests (Oxford 1993: 67). Males generally outperform females in mathematical and visual-spatial ability (Lefrancois 1994: 55). Moreover, the achievement of males varies more than the achievement of females on most tests. However, in the past several decades gender differences among adolescents have declined (*ibid.*)

Gender differences in cognitive achievement have partly been attributed to anatomical differences in male and female brains. Springer and Deutsch (1989) /cited in Oxford 1993: 69/ have found that the left hemisphere in men is more specialized for verbal activity and the right hemisphere is more specialized for abstract or spatial processing; women have a more integrated brain function than men due to a richer connection between the two sides of the brain.

Nevertheless, gender differences should not be interpreted as merely caused by biological factors. As Nyikos (2009: 75) points out: "Much of the perceived female superiority in language capability may be due to the added effort which adults tend to lavish on baby girls compared to baby boys." Research has shown that parents have more complex conversations with daughters and encourage them to talk more than sons (*ibid.*). Parental expectations as well as gender-related cultural beliefs are considered to play a powerful role in determining the motivation and learning achievement of male and female students (Kaylani 1996: 80).

As far as motivation for learning is concerned, it is assumed that females, more than males, demonstrate integrative motivation, "a socially

based orientation reflecting a desire to learn the language in order to identify with the target language group” (Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman 1988:326). In contrast, instrumental motivation, “in which knowledge of the language is chiefly desired for job advancement or some other instrumental reason”, is more typical of males (ibid.).

Classroom interaction has also been viewed as gendered. Teachers treat male and female students differently (Eggen and Kauchak 1994: 177). They ask boys more questions, and these questions are more complex and abstract. Boys receive more approval, they are listened to more and are rewarded more for creativity (ibid.). In pair and group work, male students have been found to speak more and take longer turns than female students who “provide a good supportive environment for the males” (Sunderland 1996: 97).

The difference approach to understanding gender and language learning has been criticized for being “inherently stereotyped” (Schmenk 2004: 517). Stereotypical beliefs that females are better language learners than males, which primarily stem from females’ “presumed greater social orientation” (Ehrman and Oxford 1990, cited in Schmenk 2004: 519), overlook the individuality of actual male and female learners.

The attempts of the difference approach to assess the superiority of one gender over the other in learning achievement have recently been replaced by attempts to devise critical and feminist pedagogies in ESL/EFL. These recent approaches view gender not as a static dichotomous category, but as a “complex system of social relations and discursive practices differently constructed in social contexts.” (Norton and Pavlenko 2004: 3). The proponents of these approaches see gender as an important facet of social identity, which interacts with factors such as race, ethnicity, class, age, etc.

The emerging interest in learners as individuals who construct their complex identities in specific contexts parallels another line of research – the research of language learning strategies in correlation with gender differences.

As the aim of this paper is to elucidate the patterns of vocabulary learning strategy use among male and female EFL learners in the Republic of Macedonia, we will start by reviewing literature on language learning strategy use, and more specifically, vocabulary strategy use focusing on gender as a variable. The complex nature of gender as a social system of interrelated factors being beyond the scope of this paper, we will

limit discussion to those findings that elucidate how gender influences EFL learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies in the Republic of Macedonia.

2. Research into gender differences in language learning strategies

Language learning strategies are the specific behaviours learners use to improve their learning (Oxford 1990: 8). A plethora of empirical studies have explored how language learning strategies interact with individual variables such as age, motivation, gender, proficiency, anxiety, self-esteem, aptitude, personality type, cultural background, language teaching methods and other factors.

A review follows of the major studies on gender differences in language learning strategy use.

Politzer (1983) /cited in in Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman 1988:322/ examined the language learning behaviours of undergraduate students enrolled in French, Spanish and German courses. He concluded that female learners use social strategies more frequently than male learners.

Ehrman and Oxford (1989: 8) studied the effects of gender differences, career choice, and psychological type on adult language learning strategies. They found that women report more use of strategies than men that could be related to psychological type.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) /cited in Oxford 1993: 82/ reported that female college students used the following three categories of strategies more often than male students: formal rule-based strategies, general study strategies, and conversational input-elicitation strategies.

Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, and Sumrall (1993) /cited in Oxford 1993: 83/ examined gender- difference trends among high school students studying Japanese by satellite. Female students used cognitive, social, and affective strategies more often than males. Metacognitive, compensation and memory strategies did not show any significant variation by gender. In addition, females' motivation for learning was higher than males'.

In their study of language learning strategy use by students at three different course levels at the University of Puerto Rico, Green and Oxford (1995: 261) found greater strategy use among more successful learners and higher levels of strategy use by women than by men. Female learners

used the following types of strategies more often than male learners: memory, affective, metacognitive and social.

Exploring the impact of gender and other variables on the use of vocabulary learning strategies of students studying a foreign language at the University of Alabama, Stoffer (1995) discovered that female students used vocabulary learning strategies more often than their male colleagues. However, most of these differences failed to be significant. Significant differences in strategy use by gender were established only for the following categories of strategies: Memory, Mental Linkages and Organizing words (Stoffer 1995: 155).

Catalan (2003: 65) investigated the vocabulary learning strategies of Spanish-speaking students learning Basque and English. The study showed that the ten most and least frequently used vocabulary strategies were shared by male and female students. Females reported greater use of nine out of fourteen strategies for discovering meaning as well as greater use of thirty-one out of forty-six consolidation strategies. There was a higher usage among females of social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Kaylani (1996: 75-88) studied the effects of gender and motivation on EFL learning strategy use among high school students in Jordan. Female students used significantly more memory, cognitive, compensation, and affective strategies than male students. The use of social and metacognitive strategies did not vary significantly by gender. It is interesting that the strategy profiles of successful females resembled the strategy profiles of successful males more than they did those of unsuccessful females (*ibid.*: 85).

The study of Oxford et al. (1996: 19-34) found that women were more willing than men to try out a new strategy. Women reported using more memory, cognitive, social, and affective strategies than men. Men seemed to be more oriented toward self-evaluation with a focus on the outcome (*ibid.*: 26).

The investigation of the influence of gender and proficiency on the use of EFL learning strategies of a group of Technological Institute English majors in China carried out by Liu (2004) showed significant gender differences among overall strategy use, with females favouring Memory strategies and Affective strategies.

A small number of studies revealed no significant gender differences in language learning strategy use. The research of Shmais (2003) of University English majors' learning strategies in Palestine indicated no significant differences for the two variables examined – gender and proficiency.

It can be concluded from the literature review that female students seem to use a wider range of language learning strategies than their male colleagues, and they use them more often. However, in order to get a clearer picture, gender needs to be related to other individual variables as well as to the specific socio-cultural context of the students being studied.

3. The present study

The present study is part of a large-scale study (Nikolovska 2006) aimed at investigating the relationship between the use of vocabulary learning strategies of Macedonian EFL learners in relation to age, gender and proficiency, as well as the influence of vocabulary teaching strategies on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. It is the relationship between the use of VLS and gender that will be the subject of this paper.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Subjects

A total of 709 EFL learners participated in the study. 292 of the total sample studied English at the elementary level, 311 at the secondary level and 106 were University students. 213 participants were male, 464 were female, and 32 participants did not report their gender. The study was conducted in ten elementary and ten secondary schools in different towns in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as five Faculties of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. There was a relatively wide divergence in age – from 13 (primary level) to 20 (tertiary level).

The table below shows the distribution of subjects by gender and education level.

Table 1. Sample distribution by gender across the three levels of education

Education level	Females	Males	Unreported	Total
Elementary	163	113	16	292
Secondary	231	66	14	311
University	70	34	2	106

It can be seen from Table 1 that female students outnumber their male colleagues at all three education levels.

3.1.2. Instrument and data collection procedure

The instrument used is a questionnaire for the learners designed for the purpose of the study based on a vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) taxonomy created in line with the taxonomies proposed by Oxford (1990), Schmitt (1997), and Pavičić (2003). The taxonomy included 45 strategies belonging to one of the following categories: Social (imply learning through interaction with another person), Memory (transform information for the purpose of memorizing it), Cognitive (used to analyze and process the material in order to master it), Metacognitive (used to monitor, plan and direct the learning process) and Compensation strategies (compensate for the lack of knowledge). Below is the taxonomy used in the questionnaire:

A. Social strategies

1. Ask teacher for explanation.
2. Ask another person for explanation
3. Talk to foreigners
4. Ask the speaker to repeat
5. Learn in a group

B. Memory strategies

1. Relate words to personal experience
2. Make a mental image of the word

3. Relate the word to synonyms or antonyms
 4. Use graphic organizers
 5. Group words according to meaning
 6. Remember the configuration of the word
 7. Write the translation on cards
 8. Use rhyme to remember new words
 9. Relate the new words to feelings and movements
 10. Check the meaning by covering the translation
- C. Cognitive strategies
1. Keep a vocabulary notebook
 2. Write new words several times
 3. Say new words several times when studying
 4. Record oneself when reading out loud
 5. Read for pleasure in English
 6. Try not to translate word-for-word
 7. Make sentences with the new words
 8. Learn English from TV
 9. Find meaning dividing words into parts
 10. Highlight the new words
 11. Learn English from the Internet
 12. Learn English through computer games
 13. Look for cognates
 14. Write the words down in class
 15. Use a bilingual dictionary
 16. Use a monolingual dictionary
 17. Learn new words through songs
- D. Metacognitive strategies
1. Plan learning
 2. Learn English through other extracurricular activities
 3. Learn from the mistakes on a test
 4. Test oneself with word tests
 5. Self-initiated study of words from texts
 6. Ask for advice how to study more effectively
- E. Compensation strategies
1. Use gestures when stuck for words
 2. Make up new words when stuck
 3. Guess the meaning from context
 4. Paraphrase

5. Ask the interlocutor for help
6. Avoid difficult topics

The participants responded to the 45 strategy descriptions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = usually and 5 = always). The following three levels of strategy use were established based on the participants' self-reported frequency of VLS use:

- a) low (mean between 1.00 and 2.49)
- b) medium (mean between 2.50 and 3.49)
- c) high (mean between 3.50 and 5.00)

The questionnaire also contained a short cloze test used to determine the proficiency level of the participants and 30 vocabulary teaching strategies (VTS) to which the subjects responded by ranking their perceived frequency of use on a 5-point scale (never, rarely, sometimes, usually and always). The purpose of this part was to investigate the effects of VTS on the choice of VLS. The results of this part of the study will not be discussed here.

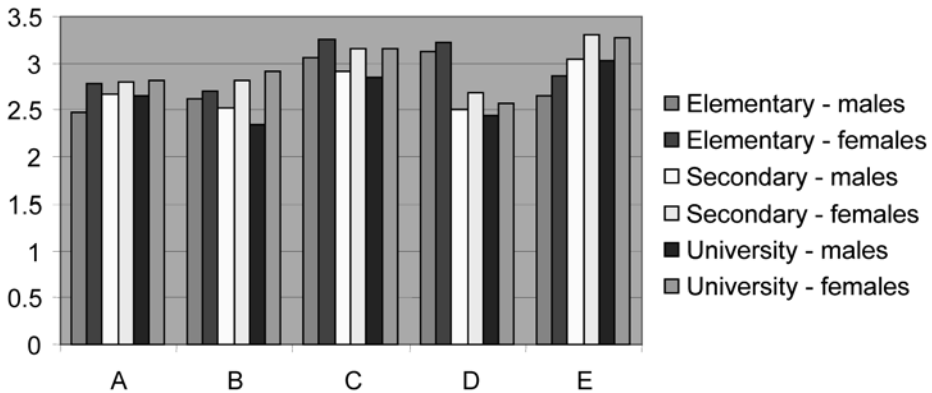
The questionnaire was administered during regular English classes. The administration took between 20 and 45 minutes. It was anonymous and it was written in Macedonian. The participants were told that the results would have no impact on their marks.

The data were analyzed by means of the statistical programmes SPSS for Windows and STATISTICA. Chi-square tests were used to check whether the use of specific VLS varied significantly in relation to learners' gender.

3.2. Data analysis and discussion

The chart below (Chart 1) shows that all means for the five strategy categories fall within the medium range of 2.5 to 3.49 with a few exceptions. Social strategies (elementary level), Memory strategies (University) and Metacognitive strategies (University) are used at a low frequency level by male students (mean value between 1.00 and 2.49). It is obvious that the means for all the categories are higher for females.

Chart 1: Variation in use of the six categories of strategies by gender



Note:

A = Social; B = Memory; C = Cognitive; D = Metacognitive; E = Compensation

The greater frequency means of all the strategy categories favouring females is in line with the findings of previous research, as we have seen (eg., Green and Oxford 1995, Oxford 1993, Oxford et al. 1996).

Eight out of the thirteen strategies tested by chi-square tests showed statistically significant correlation with gender. These strategies are:

- B2 Make a mental image of the word
(Pearson Chi-square = 17.647; df = 5; p = .00343)
- B6 Remember the configuration of the word
(Pearson Chi-square = 39.777; df = 5; p = .00000)
- B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation
(Pearson Chi-square = 23.615; df = 5; p = .00026)
- C1 Keep a vocabulary notebook
(Pearson Chi-square = 14.453; df = 5; p = .01299)
- C10 Highlight the new words
(Pearson Chi-square = 55.772; df = 5; p = .00000)
- C12 Learn English through computer games
(Pearson Chi-square = 48.962; df = 5; p = .00000)
- C15 Use a bilingual dictionary
(Pearson Chi-square = 25.640 df = 5; p = .00011)

E4 Paraphrase

(Pearson Chi-square = 32.122; df = 5; p = .00001)

The chi-square tests revealed that there is a significant correlation between gender and the use of eight out of the thirteen strategies tested ($p < .05$). Female learners are more likely to make a mental image of the word (B2), to remember the configuration of the word (B6) and to check the meaning by covering the translation (B10) than male learners. In addition, female learners were found to keep a vocabulary notebook (C1), highlight new words (C10) and use a bilingual dictionary (C15) more often than male learners. The only strategy used more frequently by males than by females was C12 (Learn English through computer games). The only Compensation strategy tested (E4) also correlated significantly with gender and was favoured by females. Females are more inclined to paraphrase than males.

Females' more frequent use of the following strategies: B2 *Make a mental image of the word*, B6 *Remember the configuration of the word* and C10 *Highlight the new words*, which rely on learners' visual-spatial skills, is not consistent with research findings according to which males outperform females in visual-spatial ability (Reid 1987: 94, Oxford 1994: 143). If we compare these results to findings of related research on vocabulary learning (Stoffer 1995), we will notice that the strategy *Visualize new words* in Stoffer's study (ibid.: 127), equivalent to *Make a mental image of the word* in our study, belongs to a category (Factor 7) which does not show any significant differences by gender. Furthermore, if we regard B6 and C10 as visual strategies comparable to Stoffer's Factor 6 strategy group (ibid.: 126), which in Stoffer's study do not vary by gender, the findings are again incompatible.

Females' greater use of B10 *Check the meaning by covering the translation*, C15 *Use a bilingual dictionary* and E4 *Paraphrase* may be explained by females' superiority in linguistic ability and facility in using language rules which may lead to greater success in processing language (Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman 1988: 324, Oxford 1993: 67).

The finding that females keep a vocabulary notebook more frequently than males could be accounted for from the perspective of females' greater desire for signs of social approval, such as good grades and a willingness to fit in with conventional norms and to follow a teacher's advice (Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman 1988: 324, Kaylani 1996: 86).

The only strategy tested for significant variation by gender which favours males is C12 *Learn English through computer games*. This finding is in concert with males' preferred sensory learning styles – visual and tactile (Reid 1987: 94). In Stoffer's study the strategies which involve making use of computers do not vary by gender (Stoffer 1995: 122)

The following strategies did not show any significant variation by gender:

- A1 Ask teacher for help
(Pearson Chi-square = 10.624; df = 5; p = .5940)
- A3 Talk to foreigners
(Pearson Chi-square = 5.689; df = 5; p = .33772)
- B5 Group words according to meaning
(Pearson Chi-square = 6.892; df = 5; p = .22879)
- D4 Test oneself with word tests
(Pearson Chi-square = 5.286; df = 5; p = .38198)
- D5 Self-initiated study of words from texts
(Pearson Chi-square = 8.746; df = 5; p = .11968)

As we have seen from the literature review, in most studies females use social and metacognitive strategies more often than males (Oxford 1993: 82, Green and Oxford 1995: 261, Catalan 2003: 65). Although the overall use of social strategies in our study showed higher means for females, which can be explained by females' greater social orientation (Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman 1988: 324), the use of the two social strategies (A1 and A3) tested by chi-square tests did not vary significantly by gender. Similarly, in spite of females' generally greater use of metacognitive strategies, which implies self-monitoring, self-evaluation, identifying goals, etc. the frequency of use of the two metacognitive strategies tested (D4 and D5) was not significantly greater for females.

Unlike the results of Stoffer's study in which the strategies used to organize words showed significant differences favouring females (1995:156), in our study strategy B5, Group words according to meaning, did not show significant variation by gender.

We will now examine the ten most and least frequently used vocabulary strategies by male and female EFL learners in order to compare them.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 show the rank order of the ten most frequently used strategies by males and females (elementary, secondary and university level respectively).

Table 2. The ten most frequently used strategies – elementary level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
C14 Write the words down in class	1	1	4.01	4.37
D3 Learn from the mistakes in the test	2	4	3.74	3.98
C10 Highlight the new words	3	2	3.73	4.2
B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation	4	5	3.66	3.95
C6 Try not to translate word for word	5	8	3.62	3.81
C2 Write the new words several times	6	/	3.58	/
C3 Say the new words several times when studying	7	10	3.47	3.61
C15 Use a bilingual dictionary	8	6	3.43	3.9
D4 Test oneself with word tests	9	/	3.38	/
A1 Ask the teacher for explanation	10	3	3.37	4
C8 Learn English from TV	/	7	/	3.84
C7 Make sentences with the new words	/	9	/	3.72

As far as the ten most frequently used strategies are concerned, certain similarities can be noticed. Eight strategies are shared by males and females at the elementary level: C14 Write the words down in class, D3 Learn from the mistakes on the test, C10 Highlight the new words, C6 Try not to translate word-for-word, B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation, C3 Say new words several times when studying, C15 Use a bilingual dictionary, A1 Ask teacher for explanation.

Table 3. The ten most frequently used strategies – secondary level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
C8 Learn English from TV	1	1	4.48	4.39
C17 Learn new words through songs	2	3	3.85	4.13
E4 Paraphrase	3	6	3.67	3.79
C6 Try not to translate word-for-word	4	8	3.65	3.66
C12 Learn English through computer games	5	/	3.48	/
C14 Write the new words down in class	6	7	3.42	3.73
E3 Guess the meaning from context	7	/	3.38	/
B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation	8	4	3.36	3.99
C10 Highlight the new words	9	2	3.32	4.14
A1 Ask the teacher for explanation	10	/	3.24	/
C15 Use a bilingual dictionary	/	5	/	3.81
C3 Say the new words several times when studying	/	9	/	3.6
E5 Ask the interlocutor for help	/	10	/	3.58

The following seven out of the ten most frequently used strategies are shared by male and female secondary students: C8 Learn English from TV, C17 Learn new words through songs, E4 Paraphrase, C6 Try not to translate word-for-word, C17 Learn new words through songs, C14 Write the new words down in class and B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation.

Table 4. The ten most frequently used strategies – university level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
C8 Learn English from TV	1	1	4.36	4.53
E4 Paraphrase	2	3	3.69	4.04
C15 Use a bilingual dictionary	3	4	3.45	4
C17 Learn new words through songs	4	5	3.42	4
E3 Guess the meaning from context	5	/	3.42	/
C12 Learn English through computer games	6	/	3.3	/
C6 Try not to translate word-for-word	7	6	3.27	3.99
E5 Ask the interlocutor for help	8	/	3.15	/
B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation	9	7	3.1	3.81
C14 Write the new words down in class	10	8	3.06	3.81
C10 Highlight the new words	/	2	/	4.2
B6 Remember the configuration of the word	/	9	/	3.71

At university level, the number of most frequently used strategies shared by males and females is also seven. These are: C8 Learn English from TV, E4 Paraphrase, C15 Use a bilingual dictionary, C17 Learn new words through songs, C6 Try not to translate word-for-word, C14 Write the new words down in class and B10 Check the meaning by covering the translation. The seven strategies most frequently used by males and females at secondary and university level are identical.

In spite of the similarity in the ranking of the most popular strategies for male and female students, a closer analysis reveals that the means for females are higher than for males.

It is interesting that C12 Learn English through computer games, which is one of the ten most popular strategies for male university students ($M = 3.3$) is among the least popular strategies for their female colleagues ($M = 2.31$).

Tables 5, 6 and 7 present an overview of the ten strategies least favoured by males and females (elementary, secondary and university level respectively). Most of these strategies are hardly ever used by males and females. However, the frequency means for most strategies are slightly higher for females than for males.

Table 5. The ten least frequently used strategies – elementary level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
C11 Learn English from the Internet	1	/	2.38	/
C16 Use a monolingual dictionary	2	4	2.36	2.28
E1 Use gestures when stuck for words	3	1	2.34	2.46
B7 Write the translation on cards	4	/	2.22	/
B9 Relate the new words to feelings and movements	5	6	2.21	2.25
B8 Use rhyme to remember new words	6	9	2.19	2.03
A4 Ask the speaker to repeat	7	5	2.13	2.28
E2 Make up new words when stuck	8	8	2.1	2.17
A3 Talk to foreigners	9	3	2.94	2.32
C4 Record oneself when reading out loud	10	10	1.29	1.2
D1 Plan learning	/	2	/	2.41
B4 Use graphic organizers	/	7	/	2.22

The following eight strategies are among the ten least frequently used strategies for both males and females at the elementary level: C16 Use a monolingual dictionary, C4 Record oneself when reading out loud, A3 Talk to foreigners, B9 Relate the new words to feelings and movements, B8 Use rhyme to remember new words, A4 Ask the speaker to repeat, E2 Make up new words when stuck and E1 Use gestures when stuck for words.

Table 6. The ten least frequently used strategies – secondary level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
C9 Find meaning dividing words into parts	1	/	2.32	/
B5 Group words according to meaning	2	/	2.23	/
C1 Keep a vocabulary notebook	3	/	2.14	/
C16 Use a monolingual dictionary	4	3	2.11	2.4
A5 Learn in a group	5	5	2.02	2.37
B8 Use rhyme to remember new words	6	7	2.02	2.16
B4 Use graphic organizers	7	8	1.92	2.09
B7 Write the translation on cards	8	6	1.79	2.17
D1 Plan learning	9	9	1.53	1.88
C4 Record oneself when reading out loud	10	10	1.08	1.13
C12 Learn English through computer games	/	2	/	2.48
A3 Talk to foreigners	/	1	/	2.53
C11 Learn English from the Internet	/	4	/	2.39

Male and female secondary students share the following seven strategies as the least frequently used: C16 Use a monolingual dictionary, A5 Learn in a group, B8 Use rhyme to remember new words, B7 Write the translation on cards, B4 Use graphic organizers, D1 Plan learning and C4 Record oneself when reading out loud.

Table 7. The ten least frequently used strategies – university level

Strategy	Rank		Frequency mean	
	male	female	male	female
B9 Relate the new words to feelings and movements	1	/	2.35	/
B5 Group words according to meaning	2	/	2.3	/
D4 Test oneself with word tests	3	/	2.24	/
C13 Look for cognates	4	/	2.09	/
A5 Learn in a group	5	3	2.06	2.48
B4 Use graphic organizers	6	4	1.94	2.33
B8 Use rhyme to remember new words	7	6	1.91	2.29
D1 Plan learning	8	9	1.79	1.62
B7 Write the translation on cards	9	8	1.68	2.11
C4 Record oneself when reading out loud	10	10	1.15	1.07
C16 Use a monolingual dictionary	/	7	/	2.12
C12 Learn English through computer games	/	5	/	2.31
A3 Talk to foreigners	/	1	/	2.53
C11 Learn English from the Internet	/	2	/	2.53

At university level, six of the ten least frequently used strategies are shared by males and females. These are: A5 Learn in a group, B4 Use graphic organizers, B8 Use rhyme to remember new words, B7 Write the translation on cards, D1 Plan learning and C4 Record oneself when reading out loud.

Analyzing the ten least and most frequently used vocabulary strategies of males and females in light of previous research is almost impossible as only one of the studies mentioned in the literature review investigated which strategies were most and least favoured by males and females – the research carried out by Catalan. In this study (2003: 62), nine of the ten most frequently used strategies and eight of the ten least frequently used

strategies, as well as similar rankings, were shared by males and females. Commenting on the common vocabulary learning patterns between males and females, Catalan speculates: “As human beings, males and females are more alike than different; although there may be sex differences in language learning due to innate and social causes, research carried out so far is not conclusive enough to determine absolutely different ways of learning for the two sexes...” (ibid.: 64).

4. Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to explore the influence of gender on the use of vocabulary learning strategies in learning English as a foreign language in the Republic of Macedonia.

The results reveal similarity in the ten most and least frequently used strategies by males and females. Elementary school male and female learners share eight out of the ten most popular strategies, whereas the number of the most common popular strategies for secondary school and university male and female students is seven. Similarly, among the least popular strategies eight are shared by males and females at elementary level; seven at secondary level and six at university level.

In view of the overall use of VLS categories, it can be inferred that although the means for all five categories are higher for female students, they all fall within the medium frequency range (2.5 to 3.49) except for Social strategies (elementary level), Memory strategies (university level) and Metacognitive strategies (university level). These three categories have a low frequency range for male learners (mean value between 1.00 and 2.49). The finding that females normally employ learning strategies more frequently than males is in line with the findings of previous research, as we have seen, and may at least partly explain why females usually outperform males in language learning.

In spite of these similarities, there are differences in the patterns of use of individual strategies. Eight of the thirteen strategies tested by Chi-square tests show significant variation in favour of females except for one, C12 Learn from computer games, with higher usage for males. The use of the remaining five strategies does not vary significantly by gender.

The existence of both similar and different patterns of strategy use by male and female learners reveals that the study of gender differences in

language learning very often brings about controversial results. This is one of the reasons why they should be interpreted with caution.

In discussing these findings, it should be emphasized that the role of gender in determining learning outcomes is far from easy to define, the main reason being its complex nature, which is a product of a number of interrelated factors.

The evidence of gender differences in EFL vocabulary learning brings to the fore the necessity of raising learners' awareness of their preferred learning strategies. At the same time, it is necessary to raise teachers' awareness of the diversity of learning strategies in the classroom and their variation by gender, as well as by other individual variables. Teachers can use a number of strategy assessment techniques, such as surveys, think-aloud procedures, diaries, interviews, and observations (Oxford 1993:84) to diagnose learners' preferred ways of learning. The task of the teacher in this respect is to find out how male and female learners learn most effectively and support them in maximizing their learning potential. The data about which strategies are least frequently used by males and females can be incorporated in a strategy training programme to train students how to develop new strategies and improve the existing ones. Teachers should integrate strategy instruction in the English language classroom on a regular basis "...in a natural but explicit way." (ibid.).

Although these findings cast some light on the relationship between gender and vocabulary learning strategy use, they are far from conclusive. Many issues which remain unresolved, such as the reasons for the existence of gender differences in strategy use, may be the subject of future research. In order to investigate this complex relationship in more depth, further investigation is needed which will examine the complex interplay of learning strategy use, gender and factors such as personality, motivation, proficiency, culture, learner beliefs and attitudes about learning.

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РОД И УЧЕЊЕ ВОКАБУЛАРА У ЕНГЛЕСКОМ КАО СТРАНОМ ЈЕЗИКУ:
СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА ИЗ МАКЕДОНИЈЕ

Сажетак

У чланку је приказано истраживање утицаја рода на избор и употребу стратегија за учење вокабулара код ученика и ученица енглеског као страног језика у Републици Македонији. Укупно 709 ученика и студената из десет основних и десет средњих школа, као и са пет различитих факултета Универзитета Кирило и Методије у Скопљу радило је упитник чији су резултати указали на сличности у употреби десет највише и најмање учесталих стратегија за учење вокабулара код ученика и ученица енглеског као страног језика. Осим што се показало да припаднице женског рода више употребљавају свих пет категорија стратегија, испоставило се да ученице чешће користе осам од тринаест стратегија за учење вокабулара тестираних помоћу хи-квадрат теста, једној стратегији чешће прибегавају ученици, док се код преостале четири стратегије не примећује значајна варијација у употреби између родова.

Кључне речи: стратегије за учење вокабулара, род, хи-квадрат тест, значајна варијација