Language Learning Strategies from the Bottom-Up: Successful EFL Learners' Experience of Preparing for the University Admission English Test

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ABSTRACT

Success in the English section of the university admission test depends on candidates' breadth and depth of written skills, especially vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension and developing these areas mainly depends on the learners' awareness and appropriate use of learning strategies. This study aimed at exploring the strategies candidates use in preparing themselves for the English section of the university admission test. To this end, twenty candidates with a mastery level of 85% or higher were purposively sampled. Their strategies were then uncovered through open-ended interviews. Candidates' perspectives were then transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed to uncover their strategies. Thematic analysis of the participants' perspectives revealed several down-to-earth techniques and strategies. The findings have clear implications for all stakeholders, especially candidates who are preparing themselves for this high-stake test since their awareness of these strategies will greatly contribute to their performance in the test and their future course of study.

KEYWORDS: Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Bottom-up processing, University Admission Test (UAT).

INTRODUCTION

Almost every student in Iran must take part in a university admission test called "Konkur" in order to enter the university. The test consists of various courses such as mathematics, physics, practical sciences, Persian literature, Arabic, English, etc. For specific majors such as mathematics, humanities, and practical sciences some items of the test vary. But the item that all majors have in common is English language which is the main scope of this study.

The English language part of the university admission test includes four categories: Grammar, Vocabulary, Cloze-test, and Reading comprehension. The grammar in this test is concise and very important. It tries to measure students' knowledge of grammar through 3 to 4 questions. The vocabulary part consists of 6 to 8 questions. However, vocabulary is one of the greatest worries and fears of most students due to the fact that meaning and perception of the

words and sentences form the fabric of all 4 parts of the test specially the reading comprehension which consists of 8 to 10 questions about English texts. The cloze-test part includes 5 questions about a text with missing words or phrases which students must fill. During almost 7 years of learning English at school, students learn and use some strategies in order to succeed in the university admission test. These strategies can be conscious or unconscious.

Every person acquires language in a different manner (Ortega, 2009). According to Dornyei (2007) second language acquisition is substantially affected by the individual differences. Different learning styles and strategies result in these individual differences (Aaron, 1966). Based on Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003), some demographic factors such as age, gender, aptitude, attitude, motivation, and emotions affect the learning process. Beside these factors, we focus on language learning strategies of successful students (Bulgren, Deshler & Schumaker, 1997). It is important to mention that conducting research on language learning strategies is highly difficult due to the fact that they are not observable directly (Griffiths, 2004).

According to Oxford (2017) in order to meet their goals, students use some purposeful and mental actions. These goals might be solving a learning obstacle, finishing a task, or improving proficiency. Oxford also mentions that these strategies occur in specific contexts and can be learned from various sources such as teachers, books, and other students (Baker, 2008). She also remarks that language learning strategies effectively self-learned by many students. Oxford (1989) also states that language learning strategies are actions that are used to make learning more successful, autonomous, and enjoyable.

Robin (1975) defines language learning strategies as the techniques or devices that are used in order to acquire knowledge. If language learners do not apply some learning strategies whether they go to English classes or not, their chance of being successful is slim (Anderson, 2008). Stern (1975) remarked that learning process greatly affects learning outcomes. Therefore, the learning process is influenced by the learner's characteristics and learning conditions (Andrew, 2006; Andrew & Vialle 1998).

Littlewood (1996) states that language learning is gradually shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered since 1960s. That was when the students began to become more independent and autonomous and this is not feasible without applying language learning strategies (Arellano, 1999). According to Oxford and Crookall (1989) learning strategies are steps which make process of acquisition, storage, and retrieval easier. In other words, language learning strategies are useful for short term and long-term memory training. O'Malley and Chammot (1990) believe that learning strategies are special ways to increase comprehension. According to Oxford (2011) when the learners apply their strategies, they will feel more responsible and encouraged, so more learning will occur. Language learning strategies will also help teachers to train less capable students to be a successful, competent and independent language learner (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). After the identification of language learning strategies of a successful learner, we can teach them to weak students and help them become successful. The obvious fact is that using strategies will facilitate learning a foreign language.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims at discovering the strategies and techniques used by successful English learners who showed a 85% or higher level of mastery in the English Section of the university admission test. More specifically it aims at answering the general research question, "What strategies do you use to prepare yourself for the English section of the UAT?"

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on case study which is a method that involves an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of as subject as well as its related contextual conditions (Bangay & Latham, 2013). The reason for choosing a qualitative approach for this study is due to the fact that it attempts to elaborately explore the participants' personal experience, perception and behavior in the Iranian EFL context (Clissett, 2008). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that the qualitative research is "typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view" (p.94).

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was used in this study in order to select the most successful EFL learners who had scored highly in the UAT. Those who had an in-depth knowledge about language learning strategies and could share their successful experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). Random sampling was avoided due to the fact that only a small percentage of the EFL learners meet the required properties of the target participants in this study thus; it could lead to frustration due to their irrelevant experiences (Flick, 2009).

In order to conduct this Study, the researchers carefully found 20 successful EFL learners who had scored more than 85% in the UAT without having participated in any classes outside school. The participants all had passed the test with flying colors and had a great perception over the types of strategies they had used. They all study in Top state universities in Iran such as Tehran University, Kharazmi University, Ferdowsi University, Mazandaran University, and Rasht Medical University. Out of these 20 participants, 8 were female and 12 were male. In order to avoid breaching the participants' guarantee of confidentiality, all of the names reported under the results, are not real. (Benson & Cooker, 2013).

DATA COLLECTION

In this study, the main method of data collection was In-depth interviews. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative researchers greatly rely on in-depth interviewing as a means of data collection. In this study, we have administered an oral, elaborate, and in-depth interview with each participant in order to find out how they learned English and what kind of strategies they applied in their learning process and the university admission test. Field notes and audio recording were also employed and all the data was recorded by a voice recorder for further analysis. (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Before conducting the interviews, all participants were provided with the interview questions. Each participant was interviewed individually for approximately 2 hours. The researchers mostly used open-ended questions. This caused the participants to answer follow-up questions and speak freely about their attitudes and experiences and the strategies they applied in their journey to the university admission test and provided them an opportunity to produce answers that were not anticipated.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, in order to analyze the collected data, the researchers first transcribed the audio data, then created a data base of the data by categorizing the data based on vocabulary, grammar, and the reading comprehension. After that

the researchers started coding the data by assigning tags and labels to each category in order to identify "chunks" of the data. Then thematic analysis of the rationalized codes was conducted. After that, various reports of the collected data were generated. Finally, by thematically evaluating and analyzing these reports, the researchers could satisfy the purpose of the study and the research question.

RESULTS

The purpose of this case study research method was to get an elaborate understanding of the experiences, techniques, and strategies of successful EFL learners who were preparing for the university admission test without access to language institutes. The main aim of this part was to present these items. After thematic analysis of the collected data, we will present the strategies and experiences of the participants under four categories that are Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, Grammar, and General Experiences. The reason for not including writing and speaking is due to the fact that they are not covered in the university admission test, thus it is outside the scope of the current study.

VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

LEARNING VOCABULARY FROM MUSIC

There are ample samples of cases in which music has greatly helped students learn vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. According to "Mozart effect", listening to music (classical) helps to increase the performance ability of mental tasks such as learning. In this study, we found that 16, out of 20 cases had used music as a strategy to learn vocabulary in true context. The participants reported that it was one of the most fun and enjoyable ways for them to acquire vocabulary and loved practicing it. It was observed that musical phrases could stick in their minds without time limits. As Haniye who scored 86% says:

> *I can't imagine my current vocabulary capacity without music. Music definitely was the greatest way I could learn new words. It was always fun, creative, refreshing, and lively to listen to music to have fun and at the same time, learn new words. In order to learn new words of the songs, I first downloaded the English lyrics of the song in order to get familiar with the dictation and spelling the target words. After that I transferred those words into my own vocabulary note book with their meaning. When it came to practicing them, I*

LEARNING VOCABULARY BY WATCHING ENGLISH MOVIES AND TV SERIES

Another way of learning new words that is fun and enjoyable, is watching English language movies and TV series. One of the most important advantages of this strategy is that the words and the knowledge that the students receive are not artificial like some commercial textbooks. The English that is used in most movies is in the real context and situation. It has audio, rhythm, music, visual images, and a story to follow. In this study, we found that our participants could remember some complex words and phrases with a visual image of the scene in the movie that was related to that word or phrase. Regarding this matter, Mahdi who scored 88% states:

> *Having almost no access to the real context in which English is used as the first language, I had to turn to English movies and TV series. While watching them, I could feel that I am in the real context and I could follow that movie with interest. I watched each movie at least 3 times. The first time, I watched it with subtitles in order to understand and enjoy the movie without interruption, the second time, I watched the movie with subtitles, then paused it at every important phrase in order to write down the new words or phrases and*

then attempted to find their meanings. After practicing the new words by myself for a couple of times, I watched the movie for the third time, without subtitles, in order to guess, practice, and evaluate my learning.

Watching movies to learn vocabulary was followed by a series of steps such as note taking and actively paying attention in order to maximize the efficiency of the process. As Hadi scored 88% says:

> *I can dare to say that one of the major reasons that I became so fluent in English, without a need to enroll in English language institutes, was watching English movies and Series. Not only was it an interesting task, but also an easy one. By watching movies, I could feel that I am part of a mission that was being able to learn most of the useful vocabulary of that movie. It's important to mention that choosing the right genre of the movies, watching and listening carefully, constantly taking notes and extracting the target words then practicing them by associating those words or phrases to the related scene of the movie should really be prioritized.*

USING EFFECTIVE TEXTBOOKS FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY

It is absolutely true that there is no single "best" textbook. But there are some books that are more effective, up-to-date, well-organized, and need related than other books that are merely published for commercial purposes and making money. We found that some of the participants had utilized different textbooks such as Oxford word skills and Oxford Visual Dictionary in order to learn vocabulary. As Zahra who scored 86% Says:

> *It was really hard for me to find good books for vocabulary learning. In the beginning, so many people recommended to use 504 and 1100 books. I tried them and failed. Those books did not help me at all and wasted a remarkable amount of my time and energy and led me to frustration. After some research, I found that I had to learn the vocabulary that is truly needed for me not the ones that are absolutely unnecessary. For this matter, I used Oxford word skills book which had categorized helpful words and had provided lots of nice tasks. And as far as I'm a visual learner, I also used Oxford Visual Dictionary in order to learn new words.*

Another book which proved to be effective in the field of providing synonyms and antonyms for the learners was "Fast Vocab for Konkur". As Milad who scored 87% states:

> *For the vocabulary in the university admission test, I studied 'Fast Vocab for Konkur' by Mehrdad Zangieh Vandi which had introduced useful words for konkur test and had provided ample samples of synonyms and antonyms. That book really made a difference for me.*

It was observed that "Word Power Made Easy" book has greatly helped students learn vocabulary by providing them more than 1000 words as well as necessary tips and game activities. The words are also presented in their appropriate context.These result in better motivation and attitude toward learning vocabulary. As Hooman who scored 85% Says:

> *One book that really made it easy for me to learn vocabulary was 'Word Power Made Easy' which provided an interesting and fun way of learning over 1000 frequent words. It is important to mention that this book had a great amount of learning tips which explained how to learn vocabulary. This book had lots of games and activities which made it absolutely not boring for me. Each word was presented in an appropriate context and situation with proper explanation in order to enable learners to fully understand that word and its usage.*

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS FOR INFERRING WORD MEANING

While encountering new words in a specific context, it is very important for learners to analyze the context in order to guess the meaning of the words by using contextual clues which include synonyms, antonyms, explanations, examples and illustrations. It was proved that making some efforts to guess the meaning of the words either correct or wrong, has a much higher success rate in comparison with just checking the meaning of the words via a dictionary. Regarding this matter,

In this study we found that making effort to learn vocabulary by guessing or inferring the meaning rather than just checking them from the dictionary has proved to be somewhat hard but it guaranties the fact that those words are not going to be forgotten easily. As Atefe who scored 92% says:

> *I have evaluated and tested myself. I have seen that I could easily forget a word if I simply just check its meaning by the dictionary. On the other hand, if I guess the meaning of the words in the real context or situations, using various clues, I would never forget it easily. I think if you work hard for piling up your vocabulary knowledge, it is not going to be easy to lose them over time, but if you make less effort to do so, it is probable to lose them easily because it could not stick in your mind well.*

GRAMMAR STRATEGIES

USING EFFECTIVE TEXTBOOKS FOR LEARNING GRAMMAR

As it was mentioned before, there is no single best textbook. However, there are some books that provide a better success rate according to the learners needs. It was reported that "Comprehensive English Grammar" book explained grammatical rules and structures in a simple language which most students can easily understand. As Atefe who scored 92% says:

> *One book that helped me the most for learning grammar was 'Comprehensive English Grammar' by Kamran Motamedi and Maziyar Mousavi. This book elaborately teaches and explains grammar and provides ample samples of tasks and practices. The language of the book is quite simple and understandable to everyone.*

Another series of books that have proven to be very successful in the field of English for the university admission test are Shahab Anari's English books for konkur. These books aim at systematically teaching almost every step that is required for the university admission test. As Matin who scored 85% says:

> *Among the grammar books I have seen, Shahab Anari's Grammar book was the most successful, comprehensive, and effective book. This book just knows the deal. It aims for*

> *fast grammar learning and techniques for konkur. I believe this book is the key for being successful in the university admission test.*

Surprisingly, the above book had been used and studied by 19 out of 20 learners and they all agree with Matin and believe that Shahab Anari's books are a great source for konkur test.

In the topic of providing ample samples and exercises of the related grammatical points, English Grammar in use and Grammar in use books have proved to be efficient. As Zahra who scored 86% states:

> *For learning grammar, English Grammar in use and Grammar in use books helped me a lot for discovering new rules and grammatical points. They also provided me with lots of exercises and task and practice makes perfect.*

UNDERSTANDING THE LOGIC BEHIND EACH GRAMMATICAL RULE

Out of 20 participants, we could not find even 1 single case in which they did not know the logic behind using every single grammatical point or tense they knew. If one doesn't know the logic behind grammatical structures, then it would be impossible to use them in the appropriate context. Regarding this matter, Nahid who scored 87% states:

> *If you learn grammar, without knowing when, where, and why to use that grammar, then you have not learned it at all. You just know a notion of that grammar. I have always tried to learn the logic behind grammar by comparing it to my own language. For example, I have always asked myself if I want to say this sentence in English and convey this message, what is the most proper grammatical structure? Even I didn't have any questions; I made them while learning new grammatical points.*

Knowing the logic behind grammatical rules enables students to deeply understand the rationale for using each grammatical point as well as enabling them to use them in the correct context in order to convey their message in the best way possible. As Masoud who scored 88% says:

> *If you mistake using grammatical points you either you will not convey your message or you will convey a totally different one. I tried my best to understand the rationale behind each grammar point and after that started comparing these grammatical points with each other. For example, what is the difference between saying a sentence in simple future and present progressive? After finding the answer, I had a deeper understanding of the whole English language.*

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

IMPROVING VOCABULARY

It has been proved that reading different texts is one good source of obtaining new vocabulary. However, when it comes to comprehension, our participants had the same idea in common which was improving their vocabulary knowledge prior to reading. As Sorush who scored 86% says:

> *Imagine someone gives you a Japanese text and asks you to read it with the supposition that you already know a little Japanese. But if your Japanese vocabulary knowledge is very low, you are most likely to fail understanding that text. The same applies to English. I tried to work on my vocabulary enrichment before I started comprehending texts and after a while I could use texts as a source of obtaining new words as well as understanding those texts.*

It was reported that there should be a logical order for learning each skill for the university admission test and in that order, Vocabulary learning precedes reading comprehension. As Mahdi who scored 88% states:

> *I had an arbitrary order on my own mind regarding the priority of learning each skill such as vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. I believe that vocabulary is the first priority and when it reaches an acceptable level, we can start reading comprehensions. If students start reading before they had developed acceptable vocabulary knowledge, either it would be really disappointing, or frustrating and time consuming for them to comprehend different texts.* I compared this situation with someone who wants to start fishing. He has bait, a fishing rod and a good place to fish. But before trying to do so, he must learn some fishing techniques if he wants to be successful. Those fishing techniques can be vocabulary knowledge. The more you know, the merrier you'll be with the rate of your reading comprehension.

READING FOR FUN

It is believed that if you have fun doing something, you will be more willing to repeat that that work and the chances of recurrence are high. Most of our cases reported that no one had forced them to read texts and they themselves wanted to do so in order to have fun or relax. As Hadi who scored 88% says:

> *Nothing is harder than studying by force. I always studied in a fun way in order to make that experience joyful and learn something at the same time. The type texts I chose to study were mostly comic and sitcom. This helped me remember what I had read for very long periods of time.*

It was also reported that learning for fun removes negative factors such as stress and boredom. As Narges who scored 92% states:

> *It is an undeniable fact that making learning fun is the best way of learning. When something is fun, there are no negative factors around and everything is just positive. I just read for fun and pleasure, and after some time I became a professional reader with lots of vocabulary and reading knowledge which I could use in my speaking and writing.*

ESTABLISHING GOALS BEFORE READING

It is important to know the purpose for reading a text before reading. For instance, do you need to get a general idea about the text or are you looking for any specific information? Knowing these goals before reading helps you utilize the most proper reading skills. As Ali who scored 87% states:

> *One of the key factors that helped me a lot either during the university admission test or before it, was knowing the purpose of what I was going to read. This helped me save a lot of time and energy and also avoid concentrating on the irrelevant data. One of the ways to find out the purpose was to look at the questions regarding that reading text in order to know exactly what to look for. Another advantage of knowing my purpose was being able to determine the studying place, for example if I were going to read for fun, I would do it everywhere such as parks or in front of the TV, but if I was going to read for more academic purposes, I had to be more ready and provide a more academic learning place such as a quiet room for more concentration.*

ASKING QUESTIONS WHILE READING

If readers start asking questions while reading, it means that their brains are engaged and they are following the text. Asking questions also motivates students to look for the answers they need with more motivation. All of these lead to more understanding and deeper comprehension of the texts. As Negin who scored 93% says:

> *In order to increase my understanding of the texts, I paused between sentences and asked myself some questions in order to know what just happened or what might happen in the coming sentences. This strategy helped me to get engaged more with the text and provided me better results at understanding the meaning of the text.*

Asking questions while reading also enables students to have a chance to stop and refresh during long and boring texts. It can also increase their concentration and perception of the text. As Atefe who scored 92% says:

> *When I want to read a text, I imagine myself as a reading supervisor who wants to evaluate that piece of text. In order to do so, I stop and pose some questions, try to answer them, or find the answers and then continue to read. This enables me to have a chance to stop and refresh during long or boring texts, and stops me from any panic attacks due to the hardness of the text. Another advantage of this strategy is helping me focus more on what I'm reading and adding it to my general knowledge.*

READING USEFUL TEXTS

Selecting what you read should be done with care and consideration. The participants in this study reported that it is essential to select valuable texts to read that offer something to learn rather than spending time on what you don't need or what is not useful. As Fatemeh who scored 92% states:

> *In my opinion, reading is like shopping. It is not rational to buy what you don't need or what is not valuable. I have seen so many of my friends who waste their time and energy reading useless texts such as American Fashion or Singers Trends in the United States. In my opinion these topics have nothing of value to teach. I personally tried to choose something that could add to my general knowledge of the world that I'm living in.*

It was proved that reading scientific and academic texts are a lot more useful for the university admission test. As Nahid who scored 87% says:

> *Reading about Sponge Bob or Ben Ten doesn't teach you much for academic purposes. They are good but for pre-teens. I merely selected scientific texts which enriched me both in vocabulary as well as scientific knowledge. Konkur is not about reading fun texts or irrelevant stuff that they teach in the institutes. It is about science and academic matters.*

Reading unnecessary text will not help students in the university admission test. It is observed that so many students spend much time on unnecessary texts which are not fruitful for them at all. Academic and scientific texts have once again proved to be most effective for university admission test preparation. As Reza who scored 85% says:

> *I don't say read funny texts, I say read the texts that have something to say and offer something to learn. If had read a text about American hotels, I would definitely not use anything in that text for my Konkur test. So learners must be on high alert about what they choose to read. In my experience, I studied lots of funny texts but out off most of them, I learned a lesson. After a while I shifted to academic and scientific texts in order to maximize my chances in the academic society.*

PREDICTING, SCANNING, AND SKIMMING

Good readers often use different contextual clues in order to predict what they are reading and this way they engage more and also increase their understanding of the text. Scanning refers to finding certain information in the text by moving your eyes quickly in order to find that specific information. In scanning we don't read the whole text. This helps save time while looking for information in texts.

Skimming is a way of getting a general idea about the text by reading the main ideas of the text very quickly. In skimming we don't need to read word by word. We just read the important parts which gives us the most amount of information. It is a good way of knowing what something is about. As Narges who scored 92% says:

> *Timing was everything for me in the university admission test. So many students are afraid of the reading comprehension part in the test because there are huge texts with difficult vocabulary and difficult questions. But the solution here is simple; by carefully scanning and skimming in a text you can easily find your answers and save a very remarkable amount of time.*

Predicting what is going to happen next while reading engages the brain more and makes the learners more excited. Scanning and skimming once again proved to save more time for the learners. As Negin who scored 93% says:

> *While reading a text, predicting about what is going to happen can engage your brain more and can make reading more exciting. About saving time while reading the texts specially in the university admission test, scanning and skimming were really a life saver for me due to the fact that I could minimize the time of answering those questions and commit my extra time to the questions that I had problems in other parts.*

Scanning and skimming also proved to decrease learners' frustration and increase their motivation. As Ali who scored 87% says:

It was very frustrating for me to read the whole text if I just needed to find a specific piece of information such as a date, city and etc. But when I administered scanning and skimming strategies, I was more motivated in reading texts and my time and energy was greatly saved.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The results of this study are in agreement with Naiman (1976), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Mitits and Gavriilidou (2016), Alfian (2016) and Porte (1988) who found that successful students follow a series of learning strategies in the appropriate way, due to the fact that all of our participants followed a set of language learning strategies in order to succeed. Rubin (1987) suggested that successful language learners are willing to learn and they are good guessers and have a strong willing to communicate. They are also not limited and not afraid to make mistakes. They would look on forms and patterns in order to analyze the rest of the text. They would take advantage of every single learning opportunity and practice and monitor their speech as well as paying attention to meaning. In a study conducted by Rubin (1987) she found that successful language learners tend to use some learning strategies such as: making reasonable guesses when not certain, making an effort to communicate and learn from it, finding strategies for solving the limitations and problems in the target language interaction, practicing the language whenever possible, monitoring their own and others speech, paying attention to form and grammar as well as paying attention to meaning. According to the results of her study, these strategies are applied in order to facilitate, improve and enhance the learning process. These results are mostly in agreements with the results of the current study. These are in agreement with our participants who used guessing strategies for vocabulary and reading and grammar.

Regarding Gender, the researchers found that there was no significance difference between the type of strategies that our male and female participants applied. This is in agreement with Alfian (2016) who conducted a study on 8 high school students in Indonesia in order to find different strategies used by these learners. He found that there was no difference in the kind of strategies used by female and male learners. In the translation part, we found that the participants weren't willing to translate directly. On the other hand, they tended to guess and use context clues to clarify the meaning. This fact is in agreement with Abraham and Van (1987) who conducted a study and found that successful learners applied more strategies than less successful learners and tended to guess the meaning, paraphrase and use clarification strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted in order to identify the experience and strategies of Iranian successful EFL learners who have a very high score in the university admission test without having participated to any commercial or extra-curricular class outside school or in the institutes. After concise and precise interviews with the participants and thematically analyzing the collected data, we found that first of all, Motivation, Determination, and Perseverance were among the main factors which paved the way for our participants to succeed in the university admission test with flying colors. Secondly, we identified various strategies that the participants had used and deleted the ones that they had in common. These strategies were reported in four parts including, Vocabulary, Grammar, Reading Comprehension. We observed that affiliating words to images, learning vocabulary from music and by watching movies, using effective textbooks, contextual analysis for inferring word meaning, and using vocabulary applications on Smart Phone, were some of the most important strategies that the participants had used regarding their vocabulary knowledge.

In the grammar part, we found that using effective textbooks, and understanding the logic behind each grammatical rule, were other types of strategies which had facilitated the learning for our participants. The most important strategies that were used by our learners for reading comprehension was improving vocabulary prior to reading, reading for fun, establishing goals before reading, asking questions while reading, Choosing Precious Texts, predicting, scanning, and skimming.

Finally, it is to be concluded that in order to succeed in the university admission test in Iran, students don't necessarily need to participate in expensive institutional test classes which most of them have commercial purposes and more importantly success is not guaranteed. If learners and parents want to decrease their costs and expenses or if they simply cannot afford those expensive classes which don't prove to be very fruitful, they can learn effective learning strategies and use them in the appropriate context. The results of this study showed that what our participants had learned, stuck in their brains for ages and this is contradictory to the fact that what most students learn in the institute is forgotten within a short period of time with the feature of being used in the future.

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