An Investigation of Proficient and Less Proficient EFL Arab Learners' Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Linguistic Self-Image and Perceptions of Learning Environment

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Abstract

EFL Arab learners are usually expected to learn vocabulary on their own without much guidance from teachers who mostly teach vocabulary items through decontextualized activities spending a considerable amount of instructional time on presenting, explaining and defining them. In such EFL learning environment, Arab learners take it upon themselves and their linguistic competence to employ several vocabulary learning strategies which may vary from one learner to another accordingly. Thereupon, this study aims at examining EFL Arab learners' vocabulary learning strategies, linguistic self-image and perceptions of their learning environment and how they relate to each other. It also intends to find out how their proficiency level impacts these strategies. The subjects of the study were 112 enrolled in grade 11 from two secondary schools in Riyadh. They responded to three tools designed by the researchers: A Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire, a Linguistic Self-Image Scale and a Perceptions of Learning Environment Questionnaire. A Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was also administered to the participants to identify learners' English language proficiency. Findings of the study indicated an overall above average strategy use, a relatively positive linguistic self-image and moderately positive perceptions of their learning environment. Findings also indicated a positive correlation between the frequency of strategy use and linguistic self-image on the one hand and perceptions of their learning environment on the other. Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs and ANOVAs) were used for data treatment with two clusters of participants according to their English

language proficiency (proficient vs. less proficient)) as independent variables and their vocabulary learning strategies, linguistic self-image and perceptions of their learning environment as dependent variables. Results indicated that there were significant multivariate and univariate effects of English language proficiency on EFL Arab learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies, linguistic self-image and perceptions of their learning environment. The study presents some recommendations in the light of the results and suggests some topics for further research.