



## Determining Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Used in Mother Tongue Education

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the strategies used by Turkish language teachers within the scope of vocabulary development activities within the framework of mother tongue education and to reveal whether the level of use of vocabulary teaching strategies by Turkish language teachers is affected by the factors of length of professional experience and gender. In line with the objectives of the research, the data of the study, which was conducted in the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, were obtained online through *Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Scale (VTSS)* in 2022-2023 school year. The sample of the research includes 401 teachers who work as Turkish teachers in middle schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. As a result of the statistical analysis of the data obtained within the scope of the research, it was found that Turkish teachers used vocabulary teaching strategies at a moderate level; the length of professional experience affected the frequency of using vocabulary teaching strategies; and gender had no effect on teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies. The study also found that teachers used control strategies the most and guidance strategies the least, and that the frequency of using vocabulary teaching strategies was in the order of control > reinforcement > explanation > skill acquisition > teaching > guidance strategies. Based on these results, which were interpreted in the light of the literature, various suggestions were made for teachers and mother language education planners.

### Keywords

Mother tongue education  
Vocabulary teaching  
Vocabulary teaching strategies  
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Personal vocabulary

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### Introduction

In the process of mother tongue acquisition, the words that people need to communicate first with their family and immediate environment and then with the society in which they live are added to their vocabulary through acquisition in a way that is related and proportional to the conditions of their family and social environment. Acquired personal vocabulary may be sufficient for basic communication, meeting personal needs, interacting with peers and satisfying curiosity about topics of interest. However, when individuals reach sufficient mental, spiritual and physical maturity, their acquired personal vocabulary may be insufficient for acquiring knowledge on different topics, expressing their thoughts and expanding their knowledge of the world. The aforementioned limited vocabulary may also lead to difficulties in cooperating utilizing language and using the mother tongue

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more effectively. This need, which individuals realize for the first time, especially when they are involved in a formal or informal education and training process, is a need that varies from person to person and according to conditions, but will continue for everyone throughout their lives (Memiş, 2018a). In order to meet these needs, some of the elements of personal vocabulary that people need to learn in childhood, which will prepare them for the future and new learning, are tried to be gained within the scope of mother tongue education courses. In this respect, enriching vocabulary has a key role and importance in achieving the goals of mother tongue education. The development of basic language skills, which is the main purpose of mother tongue education, and the effective use of the mother tongue while using these skills depend on the breadth, depth and richness of the vocabulary. Vocabulary, which can be characterized as the common ground of basic language skills and activities to develop these skills, acts as a bridge between listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. From this point of view, vocabulary development activities within the scope of mother tongue education should be a natural part of the process of developing basic language skills, both directly and indirectly.

Based on the fact that having advanced language skills is an essential element of learning and school success in general (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1997; Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Marzano & Pickering, 2005; Sprenger, 2013), the impact of personal vocabulary on basic language skills and its direct relationship with them (Kamil, 2004; Li, 2019; Meara, 1995; Miralpeix & Muñoz, 2018; Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012; Nagy, 2007; Snow, 2002; Williams, 2008; Yopp, Yopp & Bishop, 2009), it can be said that the breadth of vocabulary is a prerequisite for achieving the goal of ensuring more effective and accurate use of language in all skills, which is the most basic goal of all studies on mother tongue education. Having a large vocabulary helps firstly to improve reading comprehension skills and then to have long-term academic success in general education life (Graves, Schneider, & Ringstaff, 2018; Minskoff, 2005; Walters, 2004; Zhang & Zhang, 2020). There is growing evidence that lack of personal vocabulary is one of the important factors underlying students' inability to achieve their reading goals by creating learning difficulties (Biemiller, 2004; İlter, 2019). In this respect, there is a need to develop students' vocabulary systematically throughout the whole process from the first moment they start formal education.

Teaching activities aimed at developing students' vocabulary in formal education can be performed indirectly, directly or in a mixture of these two approaches. Whereas the teaching activities in direct vocabulary instruction require students to focus their minds directly on the words, the activities in indirect vocabulary instruction led students to use the language for communicative purposes and are based on the principle of learning the targeted words unknowingly. In this respect, direct vocabulary instruction can be defined as any kind of conscious action or attempt to incorporate vocabulary into memory, while indirect vocabulary instruction can be defined as a by-product of activities aimed at developing one of the basic language skills, especially reading (Hulstijn, 2003; Rieder, 2003). In direct vocabulary instruction, the vocabulary to be taught throughout the process is clearly defined and planned, whereas in indirect vocabulary instruction, the vocabulary expected to be learned is learned randomly during conversation with adults, listening to a text, or intensive reading (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). In different educational environments, in consideration of the needs of individuals with different needs, usually one of the direct or indirect vocabulary teaching methods can be utilized, and in some cases, both can be utilized, although with different intensities, due to the influence and necessity of the conditions in which they are located. At this point, it is necessary to choose which of these methods is more effective in teaching which subject and to plan the vocabulary teaching process accordingly. For example, interconnected word forms and their meanings are better learned through the direct method, while pronunciation and phonological features of new words are better learned through the indirect method (Ellis, 1994).

Direct and indirect vocabulary teaching methods have prominent aspects compared to each other and have advantages, disadvantages and limitations that they bring to the teaching process according to themselves. For example, the number of words that can be added to students' vocabulary at the end of the whole teaching process will be limited due to the time that can be allocated to vocabulary teaching with the direct method. In the indirect method, vocabulary will not develop at the targeted rate, especially when the student does not have the habit of reading and has not yet reached the level of mental and psychological maturity to regulate his/her own learning. At this point, in order to overcome the limitations and disadvantages of direct and indirect vocabulary teaching methods, it would be the most appropriate approach to integrate both methods into the teaching-learning process in a balanced way, that is, to plan the vocabulary teaching process to include a balanced combination of these two methods. Considering the limited time allocated to the development of language skills in the formal education process and the large number of words targeted to be taught in each age group, it can be claimed that the inclusion of both methods in the vocabulary teaching process at a sufficient rate will ensure the most ideal learning success. This mixture is appropriate because these two teaching approaches complement each other by covering each other's deficiencies (Schmitt, 2007). When the activities in the textbooks used in the process of teaching Turkish as a mother tongue and the way Turkish lessons are taught in middle schools are examined, it is seen that the indirect teaching method is largely adopted as the understanding of vocabulary teaching due to reasons such as the obligation to follow the curriculum, the limited time allocated to the lessons, and the prioritization of other knowledge and achievements in this process, based on the assumption that students' need to learn new words will be met spontaneously during language skills development activities and that their vocabulary will be enriched in this way (Genç, 2021; Kaya, 2021), one of the biggest deficiencies seen in Turkish lessons is that vocabulary teaching is mainly handled within the scope of reading activities, and this understanding continues in the recently published Turkish curriculum (Mert, 2015; Nurlu & Sarıca, 2015; Tağa, 2018), and accordingly, it is seen that vocabulary teaching is carried out through textbooks and dependent on them.

However, in the examinations conducted on the Turkish textbooks used in mother tongue education courses, the following points are stated: the textbooks do not contain the number and quality of activities that will meet and activate all of the objectives aimed to be achieved by students for vocabulary teaching in the Turkish language curriculum (Mert, 2013; Numanoğlu, 2021; Şimşek & Demirel, 2020), the activities repeat each other and do not show diversity (Aydın & Aydın, 2020; Ömeroğlu & Hakkoymaz, 2022), there is no balanced ratio in terms of number between vocabulary teaching activities and all activities in the books (Kaya, 2008; Numanoğlu, 2021), Turkish language textbooks contain a large number of foreign words whose meaning is not explained and there is no approach to distinguish them from Turkish words (Kaya, 2021), there are irregular increases and decreases in the number of words targeted for teaching between themes and classes (Akyüz Aru, 2013), the ratio of word commonality between textbooks and workbooks and the number of total and varied word lists are inconsistent (Kan & Karadavut, 2021; Şimşek, 2021), this situation causes problems in teaching target words to students in a common way (Baş & Demirci, 2015), some vocabulary teaching methods are frequently included in the textbooks while others are not included at all (Şimşek & Demirel, 2020), although dozens of teaching methods have been proposed in the literature for vocabulary teaching (Karadağ, 2022; Memiş & Kara, 2023), Turkish language textbooks do not offer sufficient variety in terms of methods, techniques and activities used for the goal of developing vocabulary (Karagöl & Tarakçı, 2019; Şimşek & Demirel, 2020), and textbooks are insufficient in providing students with vocabulary (Sarı, 2020). Again, studies on the vocabulary of middle school students indicate that students' vocabulary is quite limited (Göçen & Okur, 2015) and as a result of this, students cannot go beyond the words they use in daily life in their expressive language (Aydın, 2014), the vocabulary used by students in their written expressions is not wide (Tok & Ünlü, 2014) and this is the main source of problems in teaching writing (Tağa, 2018; Tağa & Ünlü, 2013). In this respect, it can be said that vocabulary development activities, which are generally dependent on textbooks, are far from the level they should be in terms of ensuring the achievement of the goals set within the scope of mother tongue

education, especially in terms of the realization of vocabulary gains, and the current vocabulary teaching practices have become questionable (Kansızoğlu, 2022). In this case, in order to ensure that the objectives specified in the curriculum can be achieved and students' personal vocabulary development can be secured, teachers need to implement other practices that will help improve this process in addition to the vocabulary teaching activities in the textbooks. Studies testing the positive effects of various vocabulary teaching methods other than the classical vocabulary teaching approach on vocabulary (Elleman, Oslund, Griffin, & Myers, 2019; Gellert, Arnbak, & Elbro, 2020; Göçer & Koçak, 2020; Kiriş, 2022; Maden, 2020; Sevim, 2019; Tavşanlı, Kaldırım, & Gedikli, 2021; Yaşar Sağlık, 2022; Yeğen, 2020) and the results of meta-analyses comparing the widespread effects of these methods (Anguiano, 2020; Kansızoğlu, 2017) confirm this necessity.

The limited time allocated to mother tongue education courses within the scope of formal education, the time that can be allocated to vocabulary teaching from this time, the number of words that can be taught in this limited time, the word capacity that the mind can learn in a certain period of time, the inadequate vocabulary development activities in terms of quality and quantity in the textbooks, and the fact that students quickly get bored with monotonous and traditional teaching activities and practices due to their age group and expect to deal with different types and diversity of teaching practices (Memiş, 2019b) make it necessary for teachers to employ various teaching strategies throughout their vocabulary development activities. There are various classifications in the literature (Karadağ, 2022; Memiş, 2019b; Ülper, 2023) about vocabulary teaching strategies that can be used by teachers for vocabulary teaching within the framework of *mother tongue education*, which is a consistent pattern of all methods, techniques and tactics used to achieve a determined goal (Sönmez, 2008) and the totality of the means and practices adopted in this direction.

In the field of vocabulary teaching, Ülper (2023) categorized the strategies for vocabulary teaching/learning under 10 headings as "strategies for vocabulary retention" without making a distinction between teaching and learning, on the grounds that there is no definitive and distinctive information and definite lines to distinguish a teaching strategy from a learning strategy and there is no consensus in the literature on what constitutes these strategies (Ülper, 2023). These headings are; listening, reading, writing, speaking, morphemic analysis-oriented, using word lists, inferring, keeping a vocabulary notebook, creating semantic networks, and defining vocabulary retention strategies. Karadağ (2022) opened a separate heading as vocabulary learning strategies within the methods used for teaching vocabulary in mother tongue and classified the strategies related to an understanding that focuses on students and learning under 3 subheadings as strategies to be used to solve the meaning of the unknown word, strategies to be used to clarify the meaning of the word and to deepen the vocabulary, and strategies to be used to learn/teach new words and concepts. On the other hand, Memiş (2019a) defined vocabulary teaching strategies as a collection of various methods and techniques that teachers can employ in their language teaching practices within formal educational settings. These strategies encompass not only the techniques themselves but also the attitudes that teachers may adopt in this context. Memiş categorized these strategies into six distinct groups, which are 'teaching strategies,' 'explanation strategies,' 'reinforcement strategies,' 'skill acquisition strategies,' 'guidance strategies,' and 'control strategies,' based on their functions and intended objectives. This study utilizes a measurement tool developed in accordance with Memiş's (2019a) classification, and the associated scale serves as the data collection instrument. The following section provides a detailed overview of these vocabulary teaching strategies:

### ***Teaching Strategies***

Teaching strategies that can be used by teachers during the planning and implementation of direct and indirect vocabulary teaching activities include: preparing vocabulary cards and lists; using pictures, banners, and posters to facilitate vocabulary teaching; using synonyms, near synonyms, and antonyms to teach and explain the meaning of words; using words that students already know or have learned in lessons in a functional way when teaching new words, and reminding previously taught words in situations where there is a subject connection; paying attention to the thematic nature of the

words to be taught and teaching them by taking into account the classes of words; limiting the number of words to be taught during a lesson or vocabulary teaching activity; making use of technological teaching tools when designing and implementing vocabulary teaching activities; exemplifying new words in context with more than one sentence; teaching collocated, topic-related, and meaning-related words along with new words in the teaching process; having students vocalize in choral form to achieve accuracy in the pronunciation of the taught words; writing the words on the board and vocalizing them at a slow speed to ensure accuracy in pronunciation and spelling; linking words to a sound, shape, or image to facilitate recall of the words taught; creating a context when teaching vocabulary and explaining the meaning of unknown words; teaching derivational suffixes by drawing attention to the meaning connections and relationships between words and training students to use this knowledge to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words; and teaching the second and third meanings of words as well as their figurative meanings.

#### ***Explanation Strategies***

Explanation strategies consist of 7 strategies that teachers can use to explain the meaning of words they aim to teach, especially during and after reading activities, as well as during independent vocabulary teaching activities, and for unknown words that students encounter during reading. These strategies are: “drawing, using gestures and mimics and drama to explain the meanings of words by taking into account concrete and abstract meanings and feasibility; bringing objects that correspond to the words to the class as much as possible; saying the shortest word that explains the meaning of the word or their own definition in a way appropriate to the level of the students instead of the comprehensive definition in the dictionary while explaining the meaning of the words; directing students to take notes of unknown words during reading and listening activities and explaining these words in an appropriate way after reading and listening”.

#### ***Reinforcement Strategies***

Reinforcement strategies include 6 strategies that teachers can use to ensure that the meaning of words, whose meaning is explained, is retained during the activities that are taught or carried out to develop comprehension skills. These strategies are: “playing word games; using songs as a reinforcement tool; organizing individual and group guessing activities and competitions with prizes; keeping a vocabulary board in the classroom to ensure that the words taught are constantly visible to the students in the educational environment and updating this board periodically with word lists, proverbs, idioms, and phrases and pictures reflecting them; having students explain the target words previously taught in their own sentences”.

#### ***Skill Acquisition Strategies***

Skill-acquisition strategies include 6 strategies that teachers can use to help students acquire vocabulary-related skills that they can use independently in the process of vocabulary development and throughout their lives. These strategies are: “practicing speaking and writing activities to ensure that newly taught words can be used effectively in speaking and writing; practicing listening, watching, and reading to pay attention to contextual clues when encountering an unknown word and to predict its meaning; drawing attention to the affixes that make up words and practicing in this direction to ensure that students can use the affix-root-word relationship to predict the meaning of words; having exercises to gain the ability to change the meaning, word class, and structure of already known words by using derivational suffixes; preparing activities to gain the ability to guess the meanings of words from foreign languages based on sound and spelling similarities; having exercises to ensure that other words and word groups can be used to give the necessary meaning to the sentence in case a necessary word is not known or cannot be remembered while speaking or writing”.

### ***Guidance Strategies***

Guidance strategies include 4 strategies that teachers can use during and after vocabulary development activities and throughout life to help students develop the habit of learning vocabulary and to keep learning new words. These strategies are: "informing students about vocabulary learning strategies and guiding them to use these strategies; asking students to keep a vocabulary notebook regularly and to memorize new vocabulary words by writing them in this notebook; guiding students to use an annotated dictionary when looking up the meaning of a word in dictionaries on their own".

### ***Control Strategies***

The control strategies consist of 3 strategies that enable instructors and learners to check whether the targeted learning has taken place during and after vocabulary learning and teaching activities, and to verify the level of accuracy of what has been learned, especially in self-directed learning. These strategies are: "checking the success of the vocabulary teaching process with the help of quizzes at certain intervals and at the end of the unit; checking whether the words used in the texts written by students within the scope of writing skill development activities are used correctly, and giving feedback to them; getting students into the habit of checking the accuracy of the words they have learned by searching their meanings from the dictionary or other sources on their own, by asking their teachers, parents, or friends".

As mentioned above, reasons such as limited class hours and inadequate quality and quantity of vocabulary teaching activities in textbooks make it a necessity for Turkish language teachers to utilize the mentioned vocabulary teaching strategies to support students' personal vocabulary development. In this respect, it is important to determine the use of vocabulary teaching strategies by Turkish language teachers and to take measures to eliminate the deficiencies, if any. The literature review revealed that there is no research in the national and international literature on which vocabulary teaching strategies are used by teachers in vocabulary teaching practices within the scope of mother tongue education.

The theoretical knowledge about the strategies used for vocabulary development in the literature and the research conducted within this framework (Baumann, Font, Edwards, & Boland, 2005; Chirobocea-Tudor, 2021; Hilbert & Kamil, 2005; Kame'enui & Baumann, 2012; Nation & Coxhead, 2021; Webb, 2020; Wilfong, 2021) can be categorized in terms of teacher and student aspect and in terms of mother tongue education and second language, foreign language and additional language teaching. In other words, the strategies used in vocabulary development can be organized in the form of strategies that can be used by teachers or students by focusing on teaching or learning and on the distinction between language education and language teaching. Considering the learning aspect within this classification, vocabulary learning strategies for second and foreign language students have been defined and various classifications have been made (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Nation, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 1997), measurement tools for these classifications have been developed (Gu, 2018; Fan, 2003; Kocaman & Kızılkaya Cumaoğlu, 2014; Labontee, 2019), and learners' levels of use of these strategies have been investigated in detail (Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022; Barcroft, 2009; Linda & Shah, 2020; Memiş, 2018b; Şener, 2015; Waldvogel, 2013), theoretical information on vocabulary learning strategies that students can use for mother tongue education has been created, but an assessment tool to determine the students' use of these strategies has not been developed and no research has been conducted in this direction yet. Considering the teaching aspect of the above classification, although there is sufficient theoretical knowledge (Dixon-Krauss, 2001; Flanagan & Greenwood, 2007; Graves, 2016; Karadağ, 2022; Memiş, 2019a; Schneider, 2019; Ülper, 2023) about the strategies that teachers can use in vocabulary development practices in the mother tongue education process, there is a gap in developing measurement tools based on this knowledge and examining teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies. There is also a lack of theoretical knowledge in the literature on vocabulary teaching strategies that second and foreign language teachers can use and, accordingly, a gap in data-based research. Therefore, a significant lack of research on the teaching aspect can be said to exist in both mother tongue education and second/foreign language teaching literature. Considering that teachers

and students represent the teaching and learning aspects, the two main components of the vocabulary development process in language education and teaching, they need to employ various strategies to fulfill their responsibilities. As a result, there is a need for research in the teaching aspect, similar to the learning aspect. It is believed that this study will contribute to addressing the aforementioned research gap in the literature.

### *Purpose of the Study*

This study aimed to determine the strategies used by Turkish teachers in the framework of mother tongue education for vocabulary development activities in Turkish lessons. It also aimed to investigate whether the level of use of vocabulary teaching strategies is influenced by the factors of professional experience and gender. Therefore, the research questions of the study were formulated as follows:

1. What is the level of usage of vocabulary teaching strategies among Turkish teachers?
2. Does the length of professional experience have an impact on the use of vocabulary teaching strategies?
3. Does gender have an impact on the use of vocabulary teaching strategies?

## **Method**

### *The Model of the Research*

The study employed the survey model, which is a quantitative research method, in alignment with the research objectives. The survey model is a research approach that is used to determine the descriptive characteristics of participants such as opinions, perceptions, skills, attitudes, interests, beliefs, etc. regarding an event or topic, and is conducted on larger samples compared to other researches (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014; Can, 2014; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012), and aims to reveal and describe a situation that has existed in the past or currently exists, as it exists, in all its reality without any intervention in the research environment (Creswell, 2012; Karasar, 2013). In this model, in order to reach a general conclusion about a population with a large number of variables, a group or sample that has the ability to represent this population is taken as a sample and survey research is conducted on this sample.

### *Population and Sample of the Study*

The population of this study consists of teachers working as Turkish teachers in middle schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. According to the data from the Ministry of National Education (2020), the number of Turkish teachers working within the ministry is 47,825. In cases where the total number of entities constituting the population is known, it is stated that the sample can be formed with at least 378 people when the sampling error is taken into account as  $\alpha=0.05$  for universes with a size between 25,000 and 50,000 (Baş, 2005; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Erkuş, 2005; Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2017). Accordingly, the convenience sampling method was preferred in the sample selection of the study and 401 teachers who responded to the researcher's request for data collection were selected as the sample of this study, taking into account the number of Turkish teachers (47,285) constituting the population based on the reference given above. The demographic information of the Turkish language teachers in the sample of the research, which is examined as a variable within the scope of the research, is as follows:

**Table 1.** Demographic information of Turkish teachers in the sample

Variable	F/M	N	Variable	Year	N
Gender	Female	256	Length of Professional Experience	1-5	115
				6-10	132
	Male	145		11-15	103
				16 and above	51

Analyzing the data above reveals that 256 of the participants are female (63,84%) and 145 of them are male (36,16%); in terms of the length of professional experience in the sample, there are 115 (28,68%) teachers between 1-5 years, 132 (32,91%) between 6-10 years, 103 (25,69%) between 11-15 years, and 51 (12,72%) between 16 and more years.

#### **Data Collection Tools**

The *Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Scale*, developed by Memiş (2019a), was employed as a data collection tool to assess the extent to which Turkish middle school teachers utilized vocabulary teaching strategies in their Turkish language lessons. This scale was used the identification of specific strategies employed by the teachers and their corresponding levels of usage. The VTSS is a 5-point Likert scale with 6 sub-dimensions and consists of 47 items. The sub-dimensions of the scale are "teaching strategies" (21 items), "explanation strategies" (7 items), "reinforcement strategies" (6 items), "skill acquisition strategies" (6 items), "guidance strategies" (4 items) and "control strategies" (3 items). In order to ease the application and evaluation, the items in the scale were rearranged according to the sub-dimensions/factors mentioned above and the first 21 items in the scale indicate *teaching strategies*, items 22-28 indicate *explanation strategies*, items 29-34 indicate *reinforcement strategies*, items 35-40 indicate *skill acquisition strategies*, items 41-44 indicate *guidance strategies*, and items 45-47 indicate *control strategies*. According to the scoring system of the VTSS, the highest possible score is 235 and the lowest score is 47. In the evaluation of these scores, the total score (x) obtained from the scale is first divided by the total number of items (47) and the result obtained ( $x/47$ ) is taken into consideration. According to this evaluation system, the level of use of vocabulary teaching strategies by the instructors was defined as 1.0-2.2 points as *low level of use*, 2.3-3.7 points as *medium level of use* and 3.8-5.0 points as *high level of use*. The levels of strategy use in the sub-dimensions of the scale are calculated by the formula based on dividing the score obtained from the sub-factor by the number of items in the same factor and evaluated by considering the ranges mentioned above.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the VTSS, which consisted of 47 items, a new analysis was conducted using data obtained from the research sample within the scope of this study. In this framework, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) were performed to determine whether the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and .915 and .00 values were found for KMO and BTS, respectively. These values reveal that the data are suitable for EFA.

Based on this result, varimax rotation method was used in the exploratory factor analysis performed to determine the factor structure of the scale, and the slope accumulation graph, factor loadings and variance ratios were examined. In these examinations, the 6-factor structure previously reported in the scale emerged again, it was seen that there were at least 3 items in each factor, the factor loadings of the items were determined to be between .50 and .81, and it was determined that the scale explained 58.49% of the total variance. Based on the EFA results and the references in the literature (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2009), it can be stated that the scale, the factors in the scale and the variance explained have acceptable validity.

As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted to test the accuracy of the EFA results,  $\chi^2/df = 2.01$ , RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04, GFI = .91, AGFI = .90, CFI = .95 and NNFI = .95 values were found. Considering the reference values in the literature (Anderson & Gerbing, 1984; Goodwin, 1999; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008), the values revealed by CFA show that the 6-factor structure of the scale consisting of 47 items was confirmed and the resulting model was highly compatible.

Finally, as a result of the analysis conducted to determine the reliability level of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which shows the internal consistency of the items of the VTSS, was calculated as  $\alpha = .91$ . This value indicates that the scale is "highly reliable" (George & Mallery, 2003; Domino & Domino, 2006).



### Collection and Analysis of Data

The data of the study were obtained online on a voluntary basis from Turkish language teachers working in public schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in 2022-2023 school year with the help of VTSS. Since the normality tests of the data distribution indicated that the data showed a normal distribution, parametric tests were used in the statistical analyses conducted within the scope of the research. Accordingly, descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of Turkish teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies; one-way analysis of variance was used to determine whether the length of professional experience had an effect on the level of strategy use; and t-test was used to determine whether the gender of the teachers had an effect on their strategy use.

One-way analysis of variance, which is used to determine whether the difference between the means of two or more than two unrelated samples is significantly different from zero, compares the variance within each variable group with the variance between different groups. In other words, this analysis is based on the comparison between the variance thought to be due to chance and the variance believed to be due to the independent variable (Büyüköztürk, 2017; Pallant, 2016). T-test is a type of analysis used to determine whether the average value of a group related to any variable is different from a previously determined value; whether there is any difference between two independent groups in any respect and whether the reactions of any group under different conditions differ (Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2017).

### Ethics Committee Approval

The Bartın University Social and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee granted approval for the data collection tools and methods used in this research, ensuring that they would not result in any ethical concerns. The approval was given under the protocol code 2022-SBB-0477. The research was conducted in compliance with all ethical regulations. No personal data were collected from the participants.

## Findings

In this study, which was conducted to determine the vocabulary teaching strategies used by Turkish teachers and the frequency of their use of these strategies and to determine whether the variables of length of professional experience and gender affect the level of teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies, the following findings were obtained:

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of Turkish teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies are given in Table 2:

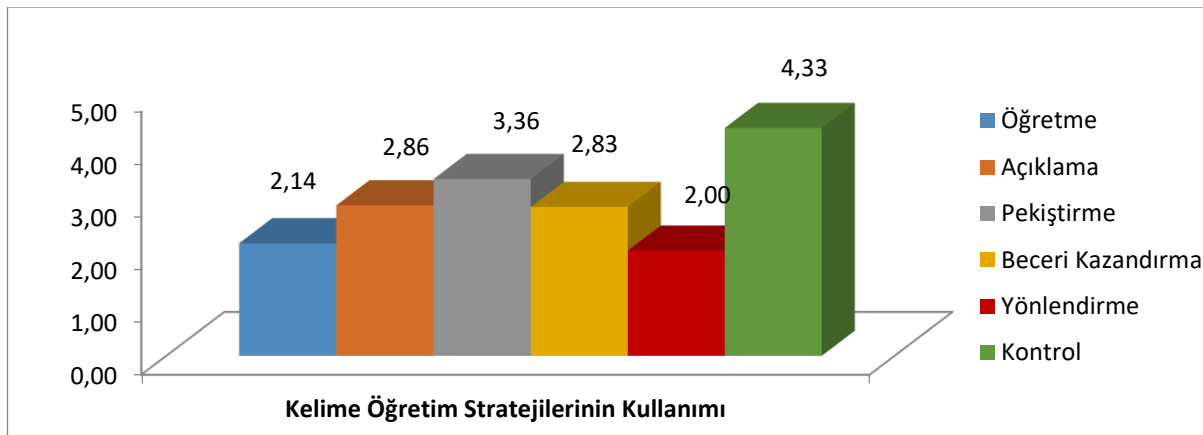
**Table 2.** The results of the descriptive statistics analysis on the vocabulary teaching strategies used by Turkish teachers

N	Teaching Strategies $\bar{X}$	Explanation Strategies $\bar{X}$	Reinforcement Strategies $\bar{X}$	Skill Acquisition Strategies $\bar{X}$	Guidance Strategies $\bar{X}$	Control Strategies $\bar{X}$	General Use $\bar{X}$
401	2,14	2,86	3,36	2,83	2,00	4,33	2,62

1,0 – 2,2 = Low-level; 2,3 – 3,7 = Moderate level; 3,8 – 5,0 = High level

According to the data in the table, it is seen that the level of Turkish teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies is at a *moderate level*. The data obtained from the scale show that Turkish teachers use *control strategies* most frequently and *guidance strategies* least frequently. According to the analysis, *control strategies* are employed at "high" level, *explanation, reinforcement and skill acquisition strategies* at "medium" level, and *teaching and guidance strategies* at "low" level.

Below is a graph on the level of strategy use in the relevant dimensions:



**Figure 1.** Teachers' Levels of Using Strategies in the Sub-Dimensions of VTSS

According to the data presented in the graph above, it is seen that the distribution of the frequency of use of the strategies used by Turkish teachers during vocabulary teaching to the sub-dimensions of the VTSS is in the form of *control* > *reinforcement* > *explanation* > *skill acquisition* > *teaching* > *guidance* strategies.

The detailed analysis of the items and sub-dimensions of the scale revealed that, among the *control strategies*, the instructors most frequently used the strategy of getting students into the habit of checking the accuracy of the words they learned by looking up their meanings from the dictionary or other sources on their own by asking their teachers, parents or friends, and least frequently used strategy was checking the success of the vocabulary teaching process with the help of quizzes at certain intervals and at the end of the unit.

Among the *reinforcement strategies*, Turkish teachers most frequently used the strategy of having students explain the previously taught target words with their own sentences and the least used strategy was using songs as a reinforcement tool.

Among the *explanation strategies*, it was found that teachers mostly preferred the strategy of directing students to take notes of unknown words during reading and listening activities and explaining these words in an appropriate way after reading and listening, and the least preferred strategy was bringing objects that highly correspond to the words to the classroom.

Among the *skill-building strategies*, it was found that the instructors mostly preferred to use the strategy of practicing to pay attention to contextual clues and to guess the meaning when encountering an unknown word during listening, watching and reading; and the least preferred strategy was practicing to use other words and word groups to give the necessary meaning to the sentence when a necessary word is not known or cannot be remembered while speaking or writing.

In the analysis of the data, it was determined that the most preferred *teaching strategies* were the strategies of exemplifying new words in context with more than one sentence and using synonyms, near synonyms and antonyms in teaching and explaining the meaning of words, while the least preferred strategies were preparing word cards and word lists.

Among the *guidance strategies*, Turkish teachers most frequently used the strategy of guiding students to use an annotated dictionary when they were searching the meaning of a word from dictionaries on their own, and least frequently used strategy was informing students about vocabulary learning strategies and guiding them to use these strategies.

The results of the one-way analysis of variance conducted to reveal whether the length of professional experience of Turkish teachers affects the level of vocabulary teaching strategies used during the activities in Turkish lessons are presented in the table below:

**Table 3.** The results of one-way analysis of variance on the effect of length of professional experience on the level of use of vocabulary teaching strategies

Length of Professional Experience	N	$\bar{X}$	Ss	Source of The Variance	KT	Sd	KO	p
1-5 years	115	122,73	3,15	Between Groups	77810,36	3	25936,79	.000
6-10 years	132	140,32	3,35					
11-15 years	103	113,75	2,98	Within Groups	429309,07	397	1081,38	
16 and above	51	99,00	2,08					
Total	401	123,19	1,78	Total	507119,44	400		

Looking at the data in the table presented above, it is seen that among the group of teachers in the sample, those with 6-10 years of professional experience are the Turkish teachers who use vocabulary teaching strategies most frequently, while those with 16 years of experience and above are the Turkish teachers who use these strategies the least. The analysis conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the level of strategy use between Turkish teachers with different lengths of professional experience indicates that the length of professional experience makes a significant difference in the frequency of teachers' use of vocabulary teaching strategies.

**Table 4.** Tukey test results

Length of Professional Experience	Length of Professional Experience	Difference in Means	p*
1-5 years	6-10 years	-17,59	,000*
	11-15 years	8,98	,185
	16 years and above	23,73	,000*
6-10 years	11-15 years	26,57	,000*
	16 years and above	41,32	,000*
11-15 years	16 years and above	14,74	,045*

The results of the Tukey test, conducted to determine the length of professional experience among the teachers, revealed that there was no difference in terms of strategy use only between the teachers with 1-5 years and 11-15 years of professional experience, and that the frequency of use of vocabulary teaching strategies changed significantly among the teachers in all other experience groups.

Finally, the study examined whether the gender of Turkish teachers had any influence on their level of use of vocabulary teaching strategies. The results of the t-test conducted on the data are presented below:

**Table 5.** The results of t-test analysis on the effect of gender on using vocabulary teaching strategies

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	Ss	Sd	t	p
Female	256	123,98	38,447	399	,585	,559
Male	145	121,81	30,017			

When the results of the analysis given in the table are examined, it is determined that the level of Turkish teachers' employing vocabulary teaching strategies in the sample of the study does not indicate a significant difference according to their gender. This result shows that gender does not have any effect on the use of related strategies in lessons.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The results of this study, which aims to determine the vocabulary teaching strategies used by Turkish teachers working in middle schools during vocabulary development activities and the level of use of these strategies, and to reveal whether the factors of length of professional experience and gender affect the frequency of teachers' use of these strategies, are as follows:

Turkish language teachers use vocabulary teaching strategies at a *moderate level* during the activities and studies to develop students' personal vocabulary within the scope of Turkish language lessons in middle schools. Upon examining the details of vocabulary teaching strategies used by teachers, it becomes evident that they most frequently prefer control strategies over guidance strategies in terms of frequency, while the latter are applied at the lowest level. In addition, it is understood that Turkish teachers use *control* strategies at *high level*, *explanation*, *reinforcement and skill acquisition* strategies at *medium level*, and *teaching and guidance* strategies at *low level*. The frequency of use of vocabulary teaching strategies utilized in Turkish lessons is respectively as follows: *control > reinforcement > explanation > skill acquisition > teaching > guidance* strategies.

Among the *control strategies*, which were found to be the most frequently preferred strategy group among the vocabulary teaching strategies by Turkish teachers, the strategy of getting students into the habit of checking the accuracy of the words they have learned by researching their meanings from the dictionary or other sources on their own by asking their teachers, parents or friends is used the most; the strategy of checking the success of the vocabulary teaching process with the help of quizzes at certain intervals and at the end of the unit is used the least.

In this context, guiding students to check whether the words that they try to learn or learned on their own are correctly interpreted in their minds is an important and functional practice in order to prevent possible mislearning and subsequent misuse of the words that children at the middle school level will learn on their own. Turkish dictionaries, which are generally available to children in middle schools, which they can easily access and prefer to use as their first choice, do not have the features that provide the students a content which they can learn on their own. In the explanations and definitions in these dictionaries, the first meaning of the words that comes to mind is mostly presented and this meaning usually points to the concrete and surface meaning; there is no sample sentence that would create an explanatory context appropriate to the level of middle school children about the words whose meanings are tried to be learned by the students. As a matter of fact, studies conducted to determine the qualities of secondary school dictionaries and the dictionary needs of secondary school students report the following: dictionaries do not contain many words in children's books and do not have the characteristics of a reference source for children (Okur, 2011), words with low frequency and words that are unlikely to be known by the target user are used in defining the items in the dictionary without prioritizing the purpose of preparing the dictionary and the user level (Çetinkaya, 2014), dictionaries do not include visuals and distinctive colored article titles that middle school students need (Melanlıoğlu, 2013), some dictionaries do not always provide accurate information (Dağtaş, 2014), there is a need for dictionaries that can meet the needs and expectations of students by taking into account the grade levels (Can & Deniz, 2016), dictionaries do not include the connotative, figurative and terminological meanings of words with multiple meanings and are far from meeting the needs of students (Baskın, 2017). As a result, students see dictionaries only as a tool used in the lesson and cannot gain the habit of using dictionaries (Tağa, 2022). This situation faced by middle school children leads to the fact that independent vocabulary learning is often limited to the first meaning of the word and the depth of meaning of the related words is not understood, some words are not learned completely, or the meanings of some words are learned incompletely or incorrectly. For this reason, it is a useful and functional approach to control students' attempts to search and learn the meaning of words on their own through teachers, parents, siblings and friends in order to prevent and reduce learning errors that may arise from the possibility that learners are not yet able to understand abstract concepts sufficiently depending on the mental development process, inadequate dictionary usage skills, lack of world knowledge and experience, and especially the quality of middle school level dictionaries available to

students. However, since it is not known how much students adopt this practice and how often they use it, it would be appropriate for the teacher to focus on this issue and to check whether the relevant strategy is used by the students.

The most important function of the end-of-unit vocabulary quizzes, which is the least used strategy among the control strategies, is to reinforce the vocabulary learned by the students during the unit and to check whether the students have learned the words planned to be taught directly or indirectly in Turkish language lessons. The fact that achievement tests, which are used by Turkish language teachers to reinforce the words that they aim to teach at the end of the units they complete in the textbooks they use or that are planned to be taught in the textbook and to check whether they have been learned or not, are not used sufficiently by Turkish language teachers leads to the loss of the opportunity to determine the vocabulary of children at the middle school level. The fact that it is impossible to determine all of the students' personal vocabulary in a single test (Nation, 2011; Read, 2004) makes the above-mentioned types of opportunities more valuable for this goal. In addition, periodic testing of vocabulary and determining the personal vocabulary of the target audience helps to recognize problems related to reading and reading comprehension (Brooks, Clenton, & Fraser, 2021; Heaton, 1990; Patro, 2016; Read, 2000), which is the most important predictor of academic success in all subjects. The inadequate use of end-of-unit vocabulary quizzes also shows that Turkish language teachers need to prepare additional teaching materials as well as assessment and evaluation tools to be used during and after the lesson and that there is a weakness or deficiency in this regard. Teachers' tendency to follow the curriculum and to continue their lessons in a textbook-dependent manner (Şen, Kayabaşı, & Topçuoğlu Ünal, 2021; Uçar, 2012) seems to be effective in the emergence of the aforementioned situation. Teaching based on textbooks, which is functional at the point of achieving a standard throughout the country, also causes the emergence of weaknesses as mentioned above. At this point, especially in-service trainings to be organized by the Ministry of National Education, providing teachers with training on practices that can be carried out independently of the textbook, guiding teachers in this direction, and increasing the number of hours allocated to Turkish lessons and allowing sufficient time for activities that can be done outside the textbook may help to eliminate the problems mentioned above.

Among the *reinforcement strategies*, Turkish teachers most frequently used the strategy of having students explain the previously taught target words with their own sentences and the least used strategy was using songs as a reinforcement tool.

It is very helpful for Turkish teachers to ask students the meanings of unknown words and keywords as a standard practice, especially during and after reading activities related to reading texts, and to ask students to explain the meaning of these words and to use them in sentences, to make students active and to allow them to apply what they have learned. While it is beneficial for teachers to frequently use the strategy of allowing students to explain target words in their own words, they should refrain from constantly giving the floor to students who have a high desire to participate in the lesson. This is because, in most cases, it is observed that students who have an interest and talent in this subject are the ones who take the lead in these activities, and the activities where target words are explained in students' own words are carried out with these students. To ensure that all students learn the target words, teachers should involve not only the talkative students but also the quiet students in monitoring the learning of the target words and enable them to develop their skills within the framework of the relevant strategy.

Among the reinforcement strategies, the least used one is the strategy of using songs in the process of reinforcing the taught words. Although the fact that this strategy is not used sufficiently leads to a limitation in terms of the variety of reinforcement activities, it does not constitute a significant problem if other reinforcement practices are carried out at an adequate level. Especially in Turkish language lessons, the fact that no time is allocated to the activities of developing learners' vocabulary (Kaya, 2021) explains why teachers do not use this strategy. Nevertheless, when possible, the strategy can be used preferably several times during the semester to make vocabulary teaching and reinforcement activities more entertaining and different.

Among the *explanation strategies*, the study found that teachers mostly preferred the strategy of directing students to take notes of unknown words during reading activities and explaining these words in an appropriate way after reading, and the least preferred strategy was bringing objects that highly correspond to the words to the classroom.

Within the scope of explanation strategies, the strategy most preferred by teachers, the explanation of unknown word meanings, shows that vocabulary development activities are largely carried out through reading passages as a reflection of the indirect vocabulary teaching approach and are dependent on the activities during and after reading. This reveals that the explanations and teaching process in the vocabulary teaching process are limited to the textbooks used in Turkish language lessons, the texts in these books and the vocabulary in these texts. At first glance, this situation can be seen as functional and useful in terms of providing a general framework for the vocabulary that children in the same age group across the country will learn with the help of Turkish language lessons and textbooks at their grade level. However, the same situation also brings along an important limitation in terms of enriching and developing students' vocabulary. Regarding the preparation process of the textbooks used in Turkish language lessons in middle schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, it is noteworthy that there are no specific criteria for selecting the texts to be included in the textbooks. These criteria include the number of words that should be included in the texts, the age group the children are in, and the vocabulary that they should know and learn at grade level. Especially Turkish textbooks prepared by different author groups and different publishing houses cannot be the same and equivalent in terms of vocabulary (Kan & Karadavut, 2021; Şimşek, 2021). This situation makes it difficult to create a common denominator in terms of personal vocabulary gained at school as a result of students following the curriculum in a way that is dependent on textbooks. This situation causes the education process to be insufficient in developing students' vocabulary. In order to solve this problem, it is important to determine and express the mentioned criteria in the Turkish language curriculum and in the regulation of the Board of Education on the preparation of textbooks and to make the textbooks more consistent and balanced in terms of vocabulary. This situation also makes it impossible to ensure equivalence in terms of the level of development of language skills and the level of depth (knowing different meanings of words) and breadth (knowing a large number of words in different subjects) of vocabulary among students graduating from middle school throughout the country and to establish a certain standard. As a matter of fact, in the examinations and researches conducted on the books used in Turkish lessons, it is stated that "Turkish textbooks prepared by different authors and published by different publishing houses do not have sufficient qualities in terms of providing students at the same grade level with a common vocabulary" (Karadağ, 2019, p. 1130), "there is no systematic planning regarding vocabulary teaching that should be done based on texts in the books, the number of words increases or decreases irregularly between themes within the same book and between textbooks belonging to successive grade levels, "there is no specific order in the distribution of words to themes" (Akyüz Aru & Ertem, 2014, p. 675), "textbooks are inadequate in terms of vocabulary teaching methods and techniques and do not offer diversity" (Karagöl & Tarakçı, 2019, p. 149), "no strategy was followed in determining the vocabulary that books will consist of" (Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2006, p. 342), "Turkish textbooks are inadequate in achieving all of the vocabulary objectives in the Turkish curriculum" (Şimşek & Demirel, 2020, p. 327) and "these books do not contain enough exercises for students to grasp the depth of meaning and flexibility of meaning of words" (Karatay, 2007, p. 148). In this regard, we can infer that vocabulary teaching activities solely based on Turkish textbooks,

their texts, and associated vocabulary teaching activities may not be sufficient for vocabulary teaching in mother tongue education.

An analysis of Turkish teachers' skill acquisition strategies reveals that they mostly prefer the strategy of practicing in order to ensure that contextual clues are paid attention to and the meaning can be guessed, especially when an unknown word is encountered during reading. This strategy helps students to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words by analyzing the context in the text. On the other hand, when they did not know or could not remember a necessary word while speaking or writing, it was found that they preferred the strategy involving the activities of practicing to ensure that other words and word groups can be used to give the necessary meaning to the sentence less frequently.

Trying to help students acquire the most frequently used strategy among the skill acquisition strategies through guidance during reading activities is of great importance for the period when they will become independent readers in the following years. In order for students to overcome their possible deficiencies in vocabulary development in situations where direct vocabulary instruction is not done for various reasons, not to try to find the meaning of the unknown word from the dictionary at all times and in all situations, to continue the fluent reading and reading comprehension process without interrupting it, to learn new words with the help of context and to become an independent reader, they need to employ a particular set of strategies. For instance, learning to pay attention to contextual clues when they encounter an unfamiliar word and developing their ability to make correct predictions. The literature states that the ability to use contextual clues is one of the primary conditions for becoming an independent reader, and studies conducted within this framework (Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher, & Taffe, 2013; İltir, 2018; Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2015; Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelley, 2010) report that students who can use contextual clues are more successful in terms of reading comprehension. In this respect, it is positive for Turkish language teachers to employ the relevant strategy.

The "*explaining with different words strategy*", which is the strategy that Turkish teachers use the least among the skill acquisition strategies, is actually very functional in maintaining communication without interrupting it in cases of not knowing or not remembering the word needed during speaking or writing activities. This need arises in the absence of the lexical elements needed to explain, narrate, illustrate or express a situation, event, idea or object in written or oral communication. When such a need arises during communication; situations, events or objects that correspond to unknown, forgotten or unremembered words are tried to be described, depicted, shown and/or explained with examples, taking into account their characteristics (Memiş & Ustabulut, 2021). Systematic skills and awareness training is needed so that the actions mentioned here can be performed automatically by students when appropriate. In this respect, it is essential for Turkish language teachers to include practices and activities that are dependent on the textbook and curriculum through comprehension activities, as well as practices and trainings that are not included in the textbooks, such as the strategy of explaining with different words, which will enable students to become independent readers.

The analysis of the data revealed that the most preferred strategies among the teaching strategies were the strategies of exemplifying new words in context with more than one sentence and using synonyms, antonyms and connotations in teaching and explaining the meaning of the word; the least preferred strategies were the strategies of preparing word cards and word lists. Previous works in the literature about the vocabulary teaching methods used by Turkish teachers have demonstrated that teachers mostly use methods such as guessing the meaning of words (Genç, 2021; Göçer & Kılıç, 2021), making use of dictionaries and keeping a vocabulary notebook (Karadüz & Yıldırım, 2011), using the word in sentences and matching the word with meanings (Yağcı, Katrancı, Erdoğan, & Uygun, 2012) and teaching with games (Şen et al., 2021) and less commonly making use of puzzles (Genç, 2021), and preparing word cards (Kaya, 2021).

The most commonly used teaching strategy is related to teachers' efforts to concretize the target words in students' minds. When the use of a word with an unknown meaning is shown in different sentences, that is, in different contexts, the parts that are missing or abstract in the minds of the students in terms of meaning are clarified, and the process of adding the unknown word to the known words becomes easier. In this respect, Turkish teachers' attempts to explain the target words with many example sentences is a good practice that should be continued. Another frequently used strategy among teaching strategies, the use of synonyms, near-synonyms and antonyms as a teaching or explanation tool in vocabulary development activities, is not suitable for all the words targeted to be taught due to the nature of word meaning relations, but it is very effective when used in cases where it is possible. It is much easier to teach a word that students already know or have learned in lessons than to teach a word that has a similar, close or opposite meaning relationship with this word. The aforementioned convenience occurs because in this style of teaching, a meaning relationship is established between a known word and the word targeted to be taught, thus creating an extra connection in the mind and making the meaning more concrete. Thus, a word that is already in the vocabulary creates a meaningful basis for the new word to be taught. That way, the time spent on teaching is shortened, the words become harder to forget and easier to remember, and the retention of the words in the mental vocabulary increases.

The least frequently used teaching strategy is the strategy of drawing attention to the word class during vocabulary teaching and following a sequence according to word classes in the vocabulary teaching process. The reason for this result is that there is no guidance and practice for the types of words in the vocabulary teaching activities in the textbooks, since teachers carry out their vocabulary development activities largely through the reinforcement activities in the textbook and the key and unknown words in the texts in the textbook. At this point, students' knowledge of the types of words they learn while adding new words to their vocabulary will help them both remember these words more easily and make them permanent, as an extra information connection will be established in their minds, and help them create sentences that are more grammatically correct and richer in terms of word classes, especially when writing. In this respect, providing information about the word classes of newly taught words would be useful for teachers to help students learn vocabulary.

The strategy of using vocabulary cards as a teaching tool, which is the second least frequently employed strategy among the teaching strategies, indicates that teachers are not willing enough to make use of additional materials in vocabulary teaching practices. The most important reason for this situation is the pressure on teachers to follow the curriculum and the fact that lessons are conducted only through textbooks that limit teaching. However, it would not be wrong to say that in addition to the activities in the textbooks, additional teaching materials that appeal to different types of senses and intelligence will increase the success of vocabulary development activities as in other areas of knowledge and skills targeted for teaching. In this respect, to facilitate vocabulary learning, teachers should prepare and use additional materials, such as vocabulary cards, especially for teaching abstract and low-frequency words.

Among the *guidance strategies*, Turkish teachers most frequently used the strategy of guiding students to use an annotated dictionary when they were searching the meaning of a word from dictionaries on their own, and the least frequently used strategy was informing students about vocabulary learning strategies and guiding them to use these strategies.

It is very useful for teachers to direct students to use a dictionary instead of directly giving or explaining the meaning of the unknown word, both in terms of making students active and organizing their learning and in terms of trying to practically gain a skill that they have to put into practice, especially in the period when they will become independent readers. However, in the dictionaries prepared for middle school students, the age groups of the students are not sufficiently taken into account, the dictionaries do not sufficiently meet the vocabulary to meet the reasons for students' application, and the relevant dictionaries cannot fully meet the needs of the target audience because they are prepared by abridging the general dictionaries (Baskın, 2017; Karadağ, 2011; Okur, 2011), The



forementioned deficiencies related to annotated Turkish dictionaries prepared in accordance with the level of middle school students constitute a significant problem and obstacle in front of the students in terms of dictionary use and making sufficient use of the dictionary. Moreover, these shortcomings put the onus on teachers to check whether students understand the word correctly after consulting a dictionary to learn the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

The fact that Turkish teachers do not make sufficient and necessary efforts to inform, raise awareness, encourage and guide students about vocabulary learning strategies that will enable students to learn vocabulary on their own, which is the strategy that Turkish teachers use the least among the guidance strategies, is an important problem that needs to be solved in the process of developing students' vocabulary. Many restrictive factors such as the limited time allocated for vocabulary development activities, practices and the Turkish lesson, the activities for basic language skills and other skills that need to be acquired during this time, the scarcity of activities aimed at direct vocabulary instruction, the limited number of words that can be taught in this short period and the limited number of words that students can learn in a certain period of time make it compulsory for students to organize their learning process to enrich their vocabulary in lessons, outside of lessons and throughout their lives. Knowing and using vocabulary learning strategies can help achieve this goal. Many studies (Catalán, 2003; Fan, 2003; Gu, 2003; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Kojic-Sabo & Lightbown, 1999; Lawson & Hogben, 1998; Nassaji, 2006; Young & Oxford, 1997; Zhang & Lu, 2015) have shown that the use of vocabulary learning strategies in the language teaching and learning process positively affects the development of language skills and vocabulary and contributes significantly to this process. Therefore, teachers should systematically train and guide students aged 12 and above (Selçuk, Kayılı, & Okut, 2003), the years when children's abstract thinking skills begin to develop, on vocabulary learning strategies and how to use them on their own from the fifth grade onwards. The fact that Turkish teachers do not sufficiently fulfill their duty to educate and guide in this respect suggests that they do not have sufficient knowledge and awareness about vocabulary learning strategies. In this regard, it would be appropriate both to provide in-service training on vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning strategies to Turkish language teachers currently working under the Ministry of National Education and to teach vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning strategies to prospective teachers studying in a department related to language education within the scope of courses at universities.

The study observed that the teachers with 6-10 years of professional experience used vocabulary instructional strategies the most, 16 years or more of teaching experience used them the least; the level of strategy use, which was relatively high in the first years of teaching, reached its peak in the first 10 years of professional life and decreased in the following years in an inversely proportional manner to experience. We can explain the reasons for this situation in two ways. The first explanation is that novice teachers (those with less than 10 years of experience) are trained to be more open-minded to include innovations in their teaching practices due to the education they have received, that they are informed about new developments in the education process other than following the curriculum within the framework of language education, and that they strive to transform the theoretical education they have received during their professional life into practice. In contrast to this situation, teachers who have entered the maturation period in their teaching life (those with more than 10 years of experience) may not be willing and/or knowledgeable enough to go beyond the curriculum, to know non-traditional methods and to put them into practice because they have a more traditional understanding of education. Secondly, teachers with more professional experience, especially in public schools, become psychologically worn out over time due to a variety of reasons such as learned helplessness, indifference, lack of appreciation, and the lack of any motivational incentive between teachers who make a difference and those who do not, and lose their willingness and inclination to introduce practices that are not included in the curriculum but would provide significant benefits to students, whereas teachers who are new to the profession are less worn out, vigorous, and idealistic. Regardless of the reasons for this situation, authorities need to take measures to ensure that Turkish teachers of all experience groups implement innovative practices for the benefit of students in a systematic way and all schools across the country. To achieve this goal, schools should conduct in-service training and

seminars at the beginning and end of the semester with a more serious approach. Turkish language teachers should hold class meetings to exchange ideas about innovative practices in the field. Teachers should carry out in-school lesson follow-up and supervision seriously. Additionally, relevant departments could put into practice the requirement of a master's degree without thesis for all teachers or encourage them to pursue this degree.

### Recommendations

The results obtained from the study and the suggestions made for teachers, textbook and dictionary authors, academicians teaching language education in faculties of education, and the Ministry of National Education by discussing them in the light of the literature above are briefly as follows:

- In order to increase the level of vocabulary teaching strategy use, which is found to be intermediate, teachers should update their knowledge on this subject and start using other methods and strategies, which have been found to be more effective than the current practices in many studies, instead of or in addition to the classical vocabulary teaching methods.
- Institutions should provide in-service training to the teachers currently working under the ministry for practices that can be carried out independently from the textbooks that offer a limited number of vocabulary teaching activities, and the number of class hours, which is deemed insufficient by Turkish language teachers, should be increased in order for them to put this knowledge into practice.
- Vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning strategies should be taught to prospective teachers studying in a department related to language education as part of their university courses.
- Teachers should make students aware of vocabulary learning strategies as early as the fifth grade and train and guide them on how to use these strategies on their own to become independent readers.
- Since middle school dictionaries are far from meeting the needs of students for various reasons, the strategy of checking whether students understand the words they learn through dictionaries correctly should be used consistently by teachers. In this context, it can be stated that middle school dictionaries should be updated in terms of being sensitive to the grade and student level, containing sample sentences, providing synonyms, and being simple and plain in definitions and explanations in the dictionary.
- Teachers should carefully employ control strategies to ensure that students' independent vocabulary learning is healthy, and should especially use speaking and writing activities as an opportunity for this purpose.
- Due to the problems identified in Turkish language textbooks regarding vocabulary teaching, vocabulary development activities should not be carried out solely on the basis of textbooks; additional materials other than textbooks should be prepared by teachers or ready-made materials whose positive effects have been proven in academic research should be used.
- For the teaching of words with abstract meaning and low frequency of use, teachers should adopt the preparation and use of additional materials such as word cards and lists as a constant teaching strategy and should not neglect to provide information about the class of each newly taught word.
- The use of songs in vocabulary teaching, which stands out as the least used reinforcement strategy but is expressed in the literature that it supports teaching, can preferably be used several times a year to make Turkish language lessons more fun.

In addition to these, based on the results of the study, the following suggestions can be made for those working in this field for future research:

- This paper, which is the first study in the national and international literature on vocabulary teaching strategies employed by instructors within the framework of mother tongue education, can be repeated by making new classifications of vocabulary teaching strategies or by taking into account the classification specified in this study and contribute to the literature on this matter.
- The relationship between the vocabulary teaching strategies used by teachers and the vocabulary learning strategies used by students can be investigated and the harmony between the two parties of this process can be compared.
- Teachers' methodological knowledge and their competencies in vocabulary teaching can be examined in terms of rural, urban and regional locations.
- This study, which was carried out with quantitatively collected data, can be conducted in a qualitative design and the results obtained can be examined in depth.

### **Limitations**

This study is important in terms of being the first study in the literature on the determination of vocabulary teaching strategies in mother tongue and revealing the current situation on this issue as a basis for further research. However, there are some limitations in the study. Due to the nature of the quantitative measurement tool used in the study, the possible reasons for the results arising from the data collected from the participants could not be asked to them, and the study tried to explain and interpret the results only in line with the research and theoretical knowledge in the literature and the academic knowledge of the author. Furthermore, the lack of studies in both national and international literature on the identification of vocabulary teaching strategies employed in mother tongue has led to the fact that the results obtained in the study cannot be compared in terms of similarities and differences. Those who are expected to benefit from the results of this study are Turkish language teachers, Turkish language textbook and middle school dictionary writers and the Directorate of Teacher Training and Development of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey, and mother tongue teachers and researchers working on vocabulary teaching all over the world.

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