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STRATEGY-BASED INSTRUCTION FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING IN CHINA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

INSTRUÇÃO BASEADA EM ESTRATÉGIAS PARA O APRENDIZADO DE VOCABULÁRIO NA CHINA: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA

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Abstract
This systematic review focuses on empirical research studies about Vocabulary Learning Strategies-Based Instruction (VLSsBI) conducted in China in the period between 2013 and 2022. Instructional practices show an overwhelming use of metacognitive strategies, but empirical rigor claims only three studies. Most of the studies focus on tertiary level learners and lack methodological divergence as well as cognitive and social-affective approach inclusion. The review analyses a variety of subjects which are restricted in terms of research design, population diversity, and scope of teaching methods. The gaps indicate a lack of holistic explanatory models that could drive the theory, as well as the learners' developmental stages, strategies, and needs. Aimed at guiding researchers, instructors, and policymakers, the conclusions focus on how to enhance the vocabulary teaching framework within the Chinese EFL context. This review describes the instructional paradigms of VLSsBI and offers insight into the direction needed for more comprehensive study.

Keywords: VLSsBI. Strategy Instruction. Systematic Review. English Language. Empirical Studies.

Resumo
Esta revisão sistemática centra-se em estudos empíricos sobre o Ensino Baseado em Estratégias de Aprendizagem de Vocabulário (VLSsBI) realizados na China entre 2013 e 2022. As práticas de ensino mostram um uso predominante de estratégias metacognitivas, mas apenas três estudos apresentam rigor empírico. A maioria dos estudos centra-se em alunos do ensino superior e carece de divergência metodológica, bem como da inclusão de abordagens cognitivas e socioafetivas. A revisão analisa uma variedade de assuntos que são restritos em termos de desenho de pesquisa, diversidade populacional e escopo dos métodos de ensino. As lacunas indicam uma falta de modelos explicativos holísticos que possam impulsionar a teoria, bem como os estágios de desenvolvimento, estratégias e necessidades dos alunos. Com o objetivo de orientar pesquisadores, instrutores e formuladores de políticas, as conclusões se concentram em como aprimorar a estrutura de ensino de vocabulário no contexto do EFL chinês. Esta revisão descreve os paradigmas instrucionais do VLSsBI e oferece insights sobre a direção necessária para um estudo mais abrangente.

Palavras-chave: *VLSsBI. Instrução de Estratégias. Revisão Sistemática. Língua Inglesa. Estudos Empíricos.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Vocabulary in second language acquisition: a historical overview

Though lacking sufficient attention relates to the theoretical and practical approaches to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), vocabulary has remained at the forefront of SLA for some time. For example, earlier language teaching approaches like grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods were based on behaviorist assumptions. They paid little attention to lexical items and treated vocabulary as a passive entity to be learned through repetition and exposure. Thus, these methods gave preference to grammatical structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). By the late 20th century, researchers such as Nation (2011) and Schmitt (2008) have begun underlining vocabulary's role in determining communicative competence, facilitating academic achievement, and shaping cognitive processes in L2 learning. This change in perspective subsequently led to the formulation of pedagogy focused exclusively on vocabulary and the development of strategy-based approaches aimed at empowering learners in controlling their vocabulary enhancement.

A range of theoretical approaches has developed with regard to vocabulary learning. Cognitive theories focus on the vocabulary, the mental activities associated with storing and recalling words (Anderson, 2014), whereas socio-cultural theories emphasize the context and social interaction surrounding the acquisition of vocabulary (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Schwebel, 1979). These differing perspectives have come together under the term of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) as explained by Stoynoff (1993) and Nation (2001) as purposeful, conscious actions that learners take to facilitate the acquisition, retention, and use of vocabulary.

1.2 Vocabulary learning in China: contextual specificity

Within the Chinese EFL framework, vocabulary learning, particularly for examinations, seeks learners' English proficiency because of the competitive nature of the world market (Wenfeng & Gao, 2008). The *National English Syllabuses* explicitly state that vocabulary should be given attention as one of the fundamental language skills

at all educational stages (Cheng, 2011). Despite this directive, traditional teaching methods-such as rote memorization and translation-persist in many classrooms, reflecting longstanding pedagogical practices (Rao & Lei, 2014). It is evident from the literature that many Chinese learners possess good receptive vocabulary skills, however, their productive contextual vocabulary use is often very limited.

Systemic factors like high student-to-teacher ratios, a focus on examination preparation, lack of training in instructional methodology, and narrow exposure to authentic real-world language resources significantly contribute to these challenges (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). This has led to a concern to combine English language teaching with VLSs in efforts to promote autonomy and improve outcomes in vocabulary learning (Hoang et al., 2024; Xu & Hu, 2020)

1.3 Research gap: limited focus on VLSs-based instruction

There exists a myriad of descriptive studies focused on VLSs in the context of Chinese learners (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Zhang & Lu, 2015). Research concerning the operational aspect of Vocabulary Learning Strategies-Based Instruction (VLSsBI) is limited and lacks cohesiveness. Most studies tend to concentrate on patterns of strategy use, learner preferences, or correlational studies focused on the effectiveness of strategies employed. There are few studies addressing the theoretical instructional design, implementation, and evaluation of VLS in classroom settings (Cohen et al., 2005; Teng, 2022). Fewer studies apply instruments such as randomized controlled trials, longitudinal observation, or mixed-methods designs.

Additionally, the subjects of these studies are usually limited. Most of them are adult learners from higher education institutions, rarely focus on primary and secondary education (Du Plooy et al., 2024; Spiel et al., 2018). There is also a wide range of definitions of strategy based instruction, some of which include conceptions as temporary workshops or as more permanent parts of the curriculum, which makes it difficult to compare and integrate findings across studies.

1.4 Study objectives and research questions

To Address these gaps, this systematic review aims to compile and assess the body of empirical research conducted on VLSsBI in the Chinese context between 2013 and 2022. This study is concerned with the following research questions:

1. In what ways has VLSsBI been practiced in China between 2013 and 2022"?
2. What approaches have been utilized in the VLSsBI research, and what are the results?"
3. What are the perceived gaps and future possibilities in the literature analysis?"

This review not only deepens the understanding of the coherence and constructs of VLSsBI in China's educational contexts, but also offers practical suggestions for targeted research and instruction by answering the research questions.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the systematic review approach, which is useful for integrating disparate findings with fragmented synthesized comprehensive analysis of existing research and discern trends in existent research in terms of concepts and methods employed (Kitchenham et al., 2008; Gough et al., 2017). The systematic review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). It conducted a comprehensive literature review of empirical studies on VLSsBI in China published between 2013 and 2022.

2.1 Literature selection criteria

The selection of literature was driven by the review's objective, which was to examine empirical studies on the VLSsBI for a group of Chinese EFL learners between 2013 and 2022. The review specifically focused on studies where participants practiced and evaluated VLSsBI in classrooms, prioritizing those with experimental, quasi-experimental, or action research designs. The criteria selection was based on the PRISMA framework which provided a systematic approach to defining inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature.

2.2 Databases and sources

To ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature both nationally and internationally, two key academic databases were employed. First, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the primary source for academic publications in China, provided research written in Chinese. Second, Google Scholar, a multidisciplinary database, was used to access peer-reviewed journals, publications, theses, and conference papers from around the world in English.These two sources were selected to ensure inclusion of both Chinese and international scholarship on VLSsBI in the EFL context of China.

2.3 Keywords searching

To align with research questions, keywords were generated for use in abstracts, titles, and keyword fields of both databases. In English, the following terms were used: "vocabulary learning strategy instruction" AND "China," "strategy-based vocabulary teaching" AND "Chinese EFL learners," and "vocabulary strategy training" AND "English language learning in China." In Chinese, the following terms were employed: "词汇学习策略教学" (vocabulary learning strategy instruction), "中国学生英语词汇教学" (English vocabulary teaching for Chinese students), and "词汇策略训练" (vocabulary strategy training).

To enhance the search scope while maintaining focus, Boolean operators such as AND and OR alongside term variations were implemented. As mentioned, the keywords were informed by previous systematic reviews in the area (Bramer et al., 2018; Munn et al., 2018)

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to maintain the relevance, rigor, and comparability of studies included in this review, systematic restrictions criteria were designed. Specifically, publications had to be released between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2022, and in English or

Chinese to represent both international and national research dissemination. Only empirical studies were included which in this case referred to studies that implemented and evaluated VLSsBI for Chinese EFL learners. The selected studies were required to contain adequate methodology section including detailed descriptions of the instructional process, the demographic parameters of the population, assessment instruments and outcomes (e.g., vocabulary proficiency gains). Studies were considered most authoritative when they included pre and post-test analyses. These analyses were typically conducted within experimental or quasi-experimental designs

In contrast, studies that did not meet one or more of the specified criteria were excluded from the review. Specifically, conceptual or theoretical papers, opinion pieces, editorials, and purely narrative studies that examined VLSs use without instruction were excluded. Additionally, studies that did not focus on mainland China or included learners outside the EFL context were also excluded. Articles exhibiting considerable methodological ambiguity, such as those that omitted sample size, exhibited disorganization in research design, or failed to report outcomes, were also removed from consideration. Furthermore, non-retrievable articles, including those with broken hyperlinks, paywalled content inaccessible via institutional login, or partial texts, were excluded from the final synthesis to ensure consistency and maintain analytical transparency.

2.5 Screening process

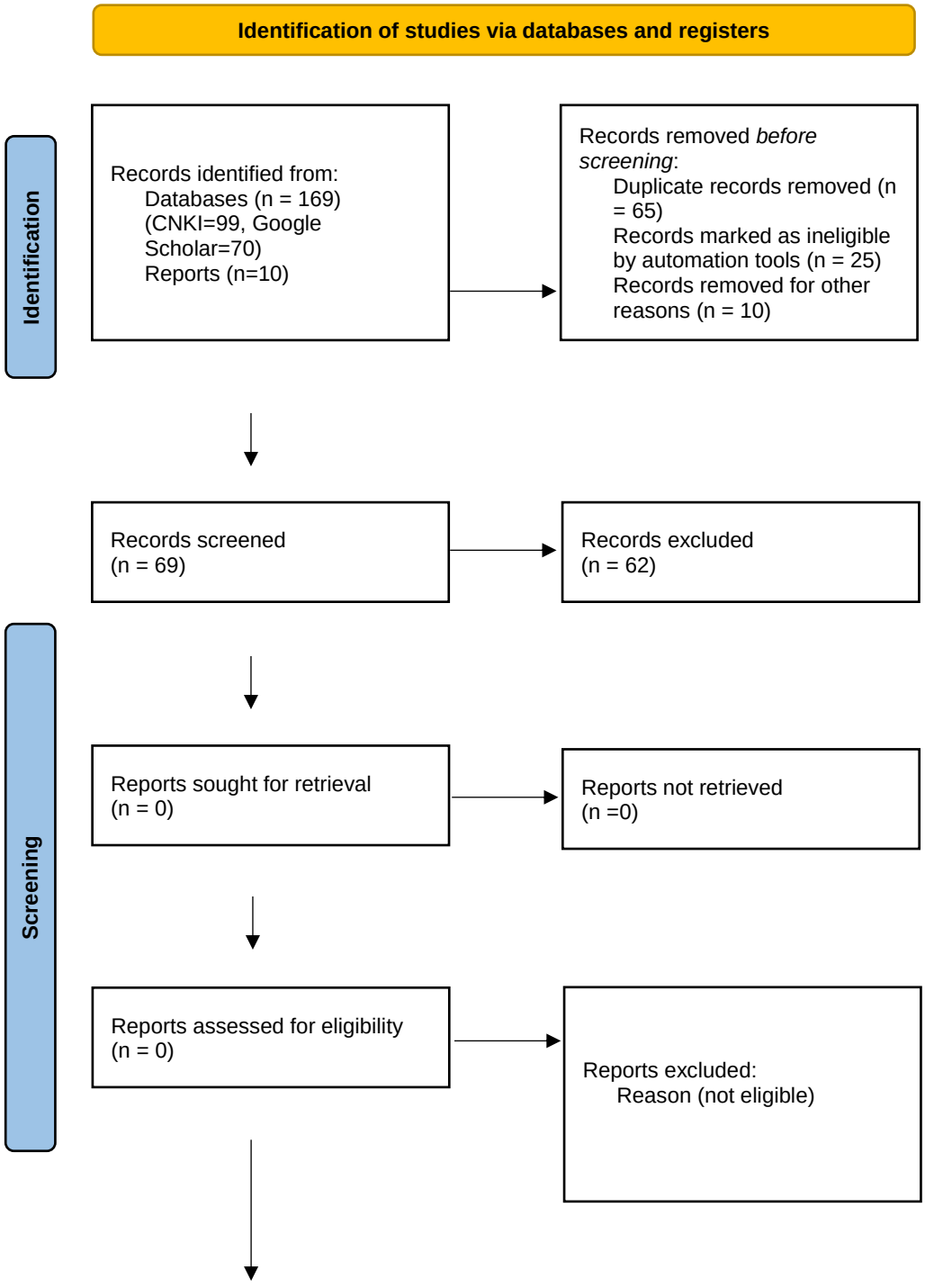
A multi-stage screening process was employed in conjunction with an initial search that retrieved 169 articles from CNKI. Thirty articles were excluded from Google Scholar, resulting in a total of 70 articles, which does not account for duplicates removed from other databases. In the thematic alignment screening, rather than focusing on the Google Scholar title "strategy instruction vs vocabulary instruction with Chinese learners," fifteen articles were identified as highly relevant and flagged for more in-depth examination. Each submission went through an initial review, which involved cross-referencing previously accepted and screened submissions across multiple databases. Finally, every study included in the screening process was thoroughly examined to ensure

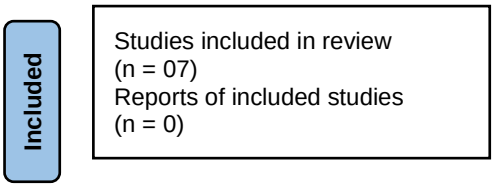
the completeness of the documents, scrutinizing the adequacy of the methodology and its relevance to the research focus.

PRISMA flowchart depicting the screening process has been added in this section

Table 1

PRISMA Flowchart





2.6 Data synthesis

Data was synthesized from the selected studies using a structured coding scheme. The framework was built around the following variables:

1. Name of Author(s) and Year of Publication
2. Educational Level of Participants (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary)
3. Type of Study Design (e.g., Experimental, Quasi-Experimental)
4. Duration and Format of Strategy Instruction (e.g., short term workshops, semester-long training)
5. Types of Strategies Taught (Metacognitive, Cognitive, Social-affective)
6. Assessment Tools Employed (e.g. vocabulary tests, questionnaires, interviews)
7. Statistical Outcomes/Aggregate Outcomes (P-values, effect sizes, and gains)

Studies were categorized as demonstrating "effective VLSsBI" if they implemented explicit VLSs instructional interventions, incorporated a control or comparison group, measured vocabulary learning outcomes using pre/post assessments, and reported improvements in learning outcomes ($p \leq 0.05$).

The overarching trends across the studies were analyzed within a single framework, focusing on predominant types of strategies, algorithms used for instruction such as CALLA, and other recurring methodological tendencies.

3 RESULTS

This section presents the synthesized findings from the studies selected for the systematic review on VLSsBI in China. The results are organized under three core themes aligned with the research questions; 1) Publication trends and Characteristics, 2) Effectiveness of VLSsBI and 3) Types of Strategies Taught

3.1 Publication trends and characteristics

For this systematic review, the studies that met the inclusion criteria were part of seven empirical investigations conducted between 2013 and 2022. Of these, six studies were published in Chinese academic journals accessible through CNKI, while one study was published in an international English-language journal on Google Scholar. The distribution of language and sources highlights the predominant domestic focus of Chinese research on VLSsBI, with limited international scholarly engagement.

In terms of scholarly achievement and participant characteristics, all included studies were conducted in higher education institutions, namely, comprising undergraduate and graduate students. Interestingly, no studies looked at VLSsBI for students in the primary or secondary education stages, which illustrates a gap in the literature related to the Chinese context concerning the young learners' English language learning curriculum. All studying conducting collected data with a total of 539 participants, which 140 were English majors, meaning a considerable number of participating students came from non-English academic disciplines. The sample sizes bound over the studies varied from 30 to in excess of 100 students. Most studies utilized stratified random sampling or convenience sampling to form their experimental and control groups.

From a research design and instructional implementation perspective, six out of the seven studies employed quasi-experimental designs that included pre- and post-test evaluations to measure the impact of the instructional intervention. Generally, these designs had an experimental group that received the strategy instruction and a control group that adhered to standard practice. The other study used a correlational design, investigating the relationship between students' self-reported strategy usage and vocabulary knowledge without any instructive intervention. The instructional interventions also differed substantially in length, spanning from 8 weeks to one academic year, although one study did not specify the duration of its intervention period.

Table 2

Summary of Study Characteristics

Study (Author/Year)	Design Type	Duration	Sample Size	Target Group	Language of Publication
Wu et al. (2014)	Quasi-experimental	1 semester	90	Non-English majors	Chinese
Luo (2015)	Quasi-experimental	12 weeks	86	Adult EFL learners	Chinese
Zhang (2018)	Quasi-experimental	1 semester	72	Mobile learning users	Chinese
	Quasi-experimental	10 weeks	80	University students	Chinese
Chen & Xiao (2015)	Quasi-experimental	Not specified	60	University students	Chinese
Yan (2014)	Quasi-experimental	2 months	75	Non-English majors	Chinese
Yang & Liu (2014)	Correlational	Not applicable	76	Chinese EFL learners	English

3.2 Effectiveness of VLSsBI

To determine the effectiveness of VLSsBI, selected studies were evaluated based on three criteria: (1) a well-defined control group should be present, (2) appropriate statistical testing procedures including paired-sample t-tests and p-value reporting should be utilized, and (3) presentation of statistically significant vocabulary learning gains from pre and post-assessment intervention evaluation. The criteria are in relation to the accepted criteria for intervention validation and empirical rigor within educational research (Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016).

Of the seven studies analysed, only Wu et al., (2014), Luo (2015), and Zhang (2018) met all three criteria and were thus classified as methodologically sound and empirically effective interventions. These studies demonstrated statistically significant vocabulary performance gains with VLSsBI in all treatment groups relative to their control groups, with reported p-values lower than the conventional 0.05 cutoff.

Particularly, Wu et al. (2014) noted that learners who were taught using a metacognitive strategy showed significant improvement in self-regulated learning skills and vocabulary retention with results achieving significance at $p < 0.01$. Similarly, Luo (2015) employed a combination of cognitive and metacognitive teaching strategies targeted at adult EFL learners, reporting a p-value of 0.015, which supports the

effectiveness of the approach in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. In a related study, Zhang (2018) implemented a mobile-assisted strategy instruction model, paced metacognitively, and achieved significant outcomes with a p-value of 0.031. Zhang's findings further underscore the critical role of technology in VLSsBI within the context of higher education in China.

In contrast, the other four studies possessed significant methodological flaws that their instructional intervention would not be deemed effective. For example, Tian et al. (2015) reported that the experimental group and the control group had significant differences not only in post-test but also in pre-test scores, which suggests internal validity issues due to lack of baseline equivalence resulting in skewed value. Chen & Xiao (2015) and Yan (2014) did provide some pre-test data, but it was not adequate to prove that the experimental and control groups were equal before instruction, thereby questioning the validity of the findings. Lastly Yang & Liu (2014) while finding that there was strategy use and vocabulary performance, did not use instructional intervention, but rather a correlational research design, thus were unable to determine causal effects.

On the whole, the findings reveal a conspicuous gap within the literature on VLSsBI in China: only three out of seven empirical studies performed in the last decade were accountable to the standards of a rigorous, evidence-based evaluation after the systematic analysis of the strategy was devised. This observation indicates a major gap where there is no effective, methodologically sound, focused intervention research aimed at reinforcing the value of VLSsBI in multiple Chinese educational contexts.

Table 3

Effective Evaluation

Study	Pre-test p-value	Post-test p-value	Control Group	Effectiveness Status
Wu et al. (2014)	0.615	<0.01	Yes	Effective
Luo (2015)	0.514	0.015	Yes	Effective
Zhang (2018)	0.345	0.031	Yes	Effective
Tian et al. (2015)	0.000	0.000	Yes	Questionable
Chen & Xiao (2015)	Not reported	0.440	Yes	Not effective
Yan (2014)	Not reported	0.000	Yes	Unclear
Yang & Liu (2014)	Not applicable	Not applicable	No	Not eligible

3.3 Types of strategies taught

The analysis conducted on the literature revealed discernible gaps regarding the types of VLSs incorporated during the instructional interventions. Nonetheless, there was an overarching focus on metacognitive strategies, which emerged as the predominant category taught in the literature under review. Metacognitive strategies, which include planning, self-monitoring, and goal-setting, were taught explicitly in five out of the seven studies, representing 71.4% of the total. These strategies are well known for promoting learners' autonomy and the ability of students to self-regulate their learning. This fact most likely explains the frequent availability of such strategies in the Chinese EFL context.

In contrast, cognitive strategies that require more interaction with vocabulary items, such as word analysis, repetition, and imagery, were employed in three studies (42.8%) as those strategies from the sample corpus. While cognitive strategies tend to be easier to implement in a classroom setting, their lower frequency may indicate a lack of appreciation for the value of these strategies in teaching in the analyzed literature. Even less frequently noted were social-affective strategies which appeared in only one study (14.3%). Approaches that emphasize peer interaction, cooperative learning and learner regulation of their own emotions are frequently marginalized within formal schooling, particularly within societies that are mostly concerned with individual learning performance, assessment and achievement (Brush et al., 2021).

Most studies decided to instruct learners on a single category of strategies, which narrowed the focus of instruction. Wu et al. (2014) was the only exception; their study used a comprehensive approach by teaching metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies in one instructional framework. The use of metacognitive strategies may indicate a combination of theoretical preferences in the literature and practical considerations in implementation.

Table 4

Distribution of Strategy Types

Strategy Type	Number of Studies	Percentage
Metacognitive	5	71.4%
Cognitive	3	42.8%
Social-affective	1	14.3%

4 DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the landscape of VLSsBI in China from 2013 to 2022. Framed by three research questions, it addressed; 1) In what ways has VLSsBI been practiced in China between 2013 and 2022, 2) What approaches have been utilized in the VLSsBI research, and what are the results, and 3) What are the perceived gaps and future possibilities in the literature analysis. Based on a review of selected empirical studies, the article offers readers a composite picture of the practical elements, methodological norms, and theoretical inclinations that are in play in the offering of VLSsBI in the Chinese EFL surroundings.

To answer the first research question, the review identified that it is received mainly at university level where teaching practices have predominantly been practiced in English language classrooms with participants studying at tertiary education level. The instruction was delivered through organized, teacher-coordinated interventions to enhance overall English proficiency, and was generally applicable to non-English majors. Metacognitive strategies were the most common types of strategies presented in the instructions, which were represented in five out of the seven studies. These were goal-setting, planning, self-monitoring, and reflective evaluation. The reasons for the rise of the strategies might be their consistency with the principle of learner independence and easy incorporation with the existing curriculum. Cognitive strategies including word rehearsal, context clues and semantic mapping were found to be used in only 3 studies, and social-affective strategies including cooperative learning and emotional self-regulation were more or less ignored (only reported in one study).

The second research question revealed that most studies used quasi-experimental research designs with pre and post- test comparison between experimental and control groups. Of the seven studies included, Wu et al. (2014) and Zhang (2018), who fulfilled

the full empirical criteria of efficacy that applied valid statistical testing, clearly specified control groups, and evidence of vocabulary enhancement. Wu et al. (2014) concluded that learners significantly benefited from the use of metacognitive strategies on vocabulary retention and self-regulated learning. Luo (2015) combined cognitive and metacognitive in a higher education setting and showed statistically significant post-test gains. Zhang (2018) provided a novel mobile-based instructional model combined with metacognitive scaffolding, and reached significant efficacy of learning ($p = 0.031$). These results not only support the pedagogic value of VLSsBI, but also demonstrate the success of appropriately designed interventions in enhancing learners' strategic development.

However, the other four studies showed substantial deficiencies in methodological quality that limited the validity of their conclusion. Chen and Xiao (2015) and Yan (2014) did not provide pre-test information or confirm the equivalence of their groups, but raised concerns in terms of internal validity of their inferences as a result. Tian et al. (2015) found the pre and post-tests were significantly different, negating the assumption of comparability at baseline, thereby confounders may have affected the outcomes. Although Yang and Liu (2014) are commonly cited with respect to strategy use, as the study was correlational, it did not involve an intervention and did not allow for causal inferences to be made regarding the effects of VLSsBI. This variability suggests a deficiency of standardized study protocols and supports the importance for methodological quality in further investigations.

The third research question inspired a range of re-occurring topics in the corpus. Notably, there is a significant lack of scientific VLSsBI studies focusing on Chinese primary and middle school children. This emphasis towards university students neglects the beginning stages of vocabulary learning where early VLSsBI might have long-term benefits. A further weakness in VLSsBI may lie on low utilization of technology. One exception is Zhang (2018), who used digital technology to implement VLSsBI; however, the potential of educational technology is generally under-explored. The absence of cognitive and social-affective strategies also represents a lost potential to build instructional models that fully take into account the multi-dimensional aspects of vocabulary acquisition.

Further, all the studies had either weak or absent theoretical grounding. Some researchers presented limited conceptual frameworks for their interventions, while fewer

still related their design to well-defined models like the CALLA framework (Dicker et al., 1994) or SBI. The absence of theoretical consistency limits the generalization of research findings and makes it difficult to develop a cumulative body of knowledge. The role of teacher training and institutional support in the implementation of VLSsBI was not apparent in studies reviewed, however, international evidence shows that these components are important for sustainable pedagogical change.

The results of the review are consistent with and diverge from the global trends. Internationally, strong VLSsBI is commonly represented as the use of multiple strategies, scaffolding through a series, and embedded in a wider curriculum. As shown by Li et al. (2023), multi-strategy intervention that is sustained over time results in improved vocabulary gains. Though some researches acknowledge the positive role of direct VLSsBI, there is a lack of longitudinal studies, the integrated model of instruction and the system of support. Similarly, Ezeamuzie et al. (2021) have highlighted the importance of teacher training and institutional support, which were absent in all seven reviewed studies. They suggest that while the research is moving in the right direction, it is doing so incrementally and lacks the system-wide capacity that needed to achieve scalable progress.

The implications of the findings are multifaceted. First, future research needs to broaden the scope of demography of participants to younger learners with different educational backgrounds. A second recommendation is to diversify VLSsBI to include both cognitive and social-affective along with metacognitive strategies. Third, more focus is needed on the design of research method and recording of data, for pre-test validity of the research design, group comparability and direct reporting of statistical results. Researchers are encouraged to ground their work in theoretical models and to consider the usage of longitudinal designs to evaluate the sustainability of learning effects. From a pedagogical perspective, in-service training should be provided to teachers for the implementation of diverse strategies. Additionally, curriculum divelopers and policymakers are advised to integrate the VLSsBI into national teaching standards and teacher training programs.

5 CONCLUSION

The systematic review analyzed the empirical research pertaining to VLSsBI in China in the last decade. This highlights an emerging field that acknowledges the significance of strategy instruction, yet it has not become a consistent, evidence-based component of English language teaching.

This review goes beyond synthesizing the current information. Additionally, it focuses on gaps in knowledge that have been overlooked or inadequately addressed. Developing a framework to evaluate a series of VLSsBI is a significant contribution of this paper. The framework uses strict inclusion criteria relating to study design, statistical analysis, and instruction delivery, offering a comprehensive model for evaluating research in this area. This approach clarifies the criteria used, allowing researchers to replicate the evaluative process in subsequent studies. In doing so, it systematically distinguishes between insightful pedagogical studies whose limitations hinder their practical application.

In the context of Chinese EFL, SBI is defined by specific pedagogical trends. The over-reliance on metacognitive strategies, despite the positive cultivation of autonomous learning, reflects a lack of diversity in instructional patterns. Autonomy in vocabulary learning and instruction is a complex process which intersects memory, cognition, emotion, and social interaction. To address this complexity, approaches should go beyond a single design framework and adopt comprehensive approaches that consider learners' diverse linguistic abilities and motivation levels. As a result, the review serves as a diagnostic tool, highlighting both the measures implemented and the gaps in the direction of the field. This review has aimed to document international conversations regarding the pedagogical research localization scan. Unlike international studies focusing on blended SBI and technology integration, as well as longitudinal outcomes, this review demonstrates contextual adoption or modification of practices in China. These findings show the need for instruction methods that are responsive and inclusive of different cultures. Instructional models should be adapted based on the local education system's structure and its main priorities. Meanwhile, the review suggests that Chinese researchers and policymakers could learn from international practices in areas like integrating digital learning, teacher training, and VLSsBI.

This review suggests that implementing VLSsBI could significantly transform English vocabulary instruction in China. While the concept of these strategies may seem straightforward, achieving it under the current conditions is far from simple. There is a need for empirical evidence and a unified approach that combines various teaching strategies, alongside a clear policy and curriculum framework that integrates language teaching and curriculum design. This review aims to support informed progress toward more inclusive and sustainable vocabulary instruction methods in China by addressing current challenges and outlining future directions.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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