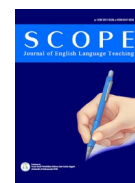




SCOPE

Journal of English Language Teaching

| p-ISSN 2541-0326 | e-ISSN 2541-0334 |
<https://journal.lppmunindra.ac.id/index.php/SCOPE/>



Research Article

Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Indonesian EFL Undergraduate Students

Nancy Putri Utami¹, Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay^{2*}

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Jalan William Iskandar Pasar. V, Medan Estate, Deli Serdang 20371, Indonesia

KEYWORDS

EFL learners;
 language acquisition
 vocabulary learning strategies

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is essential in learning a foreign language. This study aims to determine how frequently and how the students feel about the usage of vocabulary acquisition tactics by 22 undergraduate EFL learners. The purposes of this study are achieved by utilizing a descriptive qualitative research methodology. Data for this inquiry were gathered using both questionnaires and observation. Analysis of the interactive simulation developed by Miles and Huberman, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drafting, was the method of data analysis employed in this study. The study's findings show that students use 17 different vocabulary-building strategies. The vocabulary acquisition strategies that the students in this study selected and used were significantly influenced by their teaching and learning environment, culture, learning preferences, and sources of motivation. Every student has a different learning style that they find most effective in increasing their vocabulary as well as vocabulary.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR(S):

E-mail: sholihatulhamidah@uinsu.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Most individuals who study second or foreign languages understand the significance of vocabulary. Non-native speakers frequently struggle to find the appropriate words to express themselves in writing and conversation, which is why the term "vocabulary problem" applies to them properly. Additionally, they note how having a limited vocabulary makes reading and listening less engaging. Gardner (2013) and Nation (2013) stated that both academics and linguists recognize the importance of vocabulary and how strongly it correlates with reading ability. Both linguists and language students are aware of the numerous challenges that different students have when learning terminology. The element is the quantity to be learnt are words, word families, and word units, as well as employed that is most frequently noticed. However, the conditions

for learning language vary depending on the context. Given that possibilities for target-language intake, output, and interaction are scarce when learning a foreign language, using effective and engaging learning strategies appears to be crucial for vocabulary acquisition (Tseng & Schmitt, 2008). It was found that vocabulary deficiencies may have a significant impact on resistance among students to reading and writing instruction hearing in situations when learning there is use of a second language or a foreign language. The difficulty of vocabulary acquisition (and teaching) typically depends on factors like word saliency, word frequency, learning load, and learners' specific vocabulary demands and goals are all taken into account (Grabe & Stoller, 2018).

Despite the fact that English is still a foreign language in this country, Indonesians are increasingly acquiring it because it is required in many fields. A language is regarded as foreign if it receives little input and is not

acknowledged as an official language. Achieving communicative competence in the intended tongue, or being an expert in the language's knowledge and usage, is made possible by learning an additional language to one's mother tongue. Students use a variety of strategies, or learning techniques, to accomplish their goals when acquiring a second language. Since the mid-1970s, language acquisition models and methodologies have become a key focus of numerous studies.

Research on language learning strategies has attracted interest from academics all over the world due to its significance in the acquisition of second languages (Green & Oxford, 1995). Some academics emphasize the word "conscious" a lot when defining learning processes. To hasten their learning, the students actively choose and apply their preferred strategy (Cohen, 1998). It indicates that students choose specific routines or habits to purposefully use as language learning strategies. Similar to this, language learning strategies (LLS), according to Chamot (2004), are the deliberate actions and notions that students use to achieve a learning objective. Definitions show that students consciously select particular strategies and subsequently strive toward their learning goals. The precise efforts made by the students to create a more welcoming, accommodating, and less demanding learning environment are also referred to as language learning approaches, in accordance with Oxford (1990). She distinguished between direct and indirect the two primary types of learning strategies (*ibid.*). Direct strategies are focused endeavors made by learners that include using the language, whereas indirect strategies support language acquisition without explicitly utilizing the language (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989).

Students have never found it straightforward to learn new vocabulary, despite the fact that some educators might think it is simple. For EFL pupils with a restricted vocabulary, the educational repercussions are significant. Students struggle throughout their academic careers due to a lack of word-learning strategies or sufficient vocabularies; it feeds a vicious cycle of disappointment and failure (Khany & Khosravian, 2014). Also commonly employed is a person's vocabulary to judge their level of education and is thought of as a key to opening or closing doors to information (McKeown & Beck, 2007).

Learning one of the first problems is to learn how to memorize a large quantity of foreign words a person learning a foreign language face. The dynamic process requires the student to be extremely motivated of building autonomous vocabulary skills, which calls for practice with a variety of skills. Teachers can encourage children to create their own language by explicitly demonstrating, recalling, and exercising these skills in the classroom, even though the specific strategies used by each student usually

vary. By employing this strategy in the classroom, students can take control of their own education. In recent years, interest in learning practices that are intended to enhance the growth and acquisition of students' vocabulary has risen (Van de Wege, 2018). Before putting students when students are required to remember, utilize, and retrieve the key vocabulary words in many circumstances and scenarios, new words and their definitions will first be introduced to them and their meanings (Cook, 2013).

However, it is crucial to remember that learning new terms entails more than just learning their meanings; learning a word's sound, spelling, grammatical traits, connotations, morphological options, and semantic linkages are all important components of the process. With support and scaffolding, English language learners can successfully expand their vocabulary (Kayi-Aydar, 2018). To put it another way, teachers should give their students direction and advice as they grow their vocabulary so that they may manage their study time wisely and get the most out of their both in-classroom and extracurricular learning (Rogers, 2018). Vocabulary, according to Zimmerman (1997) and Lin et al. (2013), "is essential for EFL learners and vital to language". Vocabulary is a flexible collection with thousands of things, in contrast to grammar, a collection of finite numbers, therefore it plays a key part in language learning. As a result, It is regarded as one of the most crucial abilities in learning a language. However, beliefs are influenced by students' interactions with their environment and their innate knowledge of the second language they are studying (Barcelos, 2003).

English is a foreign language that is taught and studied in Indonesia. Only one foreign language is taught as a precondition in educational institutions (Orfan 2020). However, both in educational institutions and English language centres, figurative language—especially vocabulary receives comparatively little emphasis in English classrooms. Teaching English vocabulary in English classrooms is not done because the majority of EFL teachers lack appropriate vocabulary knowledge in English and do not understand the importance of vocabulary to EFL learners.

Since the 1970s, researchers have been interested in categorizing different language learning strategies (LLS; see, for instance, Rubin, 1975), because they are adopted by L2 (second language) learners. The classification of language learning strategy (LLS) research underwent a significant change throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1990, O'Malley and Chamot distinguished between social/affective, metacognitive, and cognitive methods. This study aims to determine the degree to which students from various EFL backgrounds share vocabulary acquisition strategies and the degree to which they consider these methods when learning vocabulary in English.

Although substantial research has been conducted on vocabulary acquisition strategies and their significance in second language learning, several gaps remain in the understanding and application of these strategies in specific contexts, particularly in Indonesia. Despite the critical role vocabulary plays in language proficiency, and the extensive studies highlighting the importance of effective vocabulary acquisition strategies (Gardner, 2013; Nation, 2013; Tseng & Schmitt, 2008), there is limited research focusing on how these strategies are specifically utilized and perceived by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesian educational settings. In Indonesia, where English is considered a foreign language with minimal exposure, the implementation and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies in classrooms and language centers are not well-documented. This is compounded by the fact that many EFL teachers lack adequate vocabulary knowledge and fail to recognize the importance of vocabulary instruction (Orfan, 2020). Furthermore, while previous studies have categorized various language learning strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective methods (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), there is a need for more focused research on how these strategies are applied by Indonesian EFL learners, and how their effectiveness can be improved. This research aims to address these gaps by examining the specific vocabulary acquisition strategies employed by EFL learners in Indonesia, and evaluating how these strategies impact their language learning outcomes.

METHOD

The study is both descriptive and qualitative. The informants are Indonesian EFL students. There were 22 students who took part in the sampling. Questionnaires and the methods utilized the data for this study were gathered through observation. Passive participation observation was the method of observation used in this investigation. Observation in the classroom was done while taking notes. The survey was distributed by having the questions translated into the informants' native tongue. The survey was carried out using a Google form. In this study, Miles and Huberman's (1984) interactive model study was employed to analyse the data. Included were data reduction, data visualization, and a conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study goal is to identify the techniques used by students to learn new language. The interview and questionnaire revealed that the students used seventeen distinct strategies to aid in their language acquisition. In two tables, the study's results are condensed. Table 1 seeks to illustrate the types of ways students employ to broaden their vocabulary, while Table 2 aims to show the sequence in which they do so.

Table 1. Results of Questionnaires and Observation

The Kinds of Strategies Used	Number of User
Analysis of a speech act	22
Using textual context to infer meaning	22
The use of a dictionary	22
Requesting an L1 translation, substitute for a new word learned from the teacher	10
Asking friends for the definitions	17
study and practice of meaning in a group collectively	15
relating a phrase to a previous instance of your own experience	20
Relating the term to its opposites and synonyms	18
Studying a word's spelling	22
Speaking out loud new words while studying spoken repetition	22
Repetition in writing	22
Maintaining a vocabulary journal	22
Using media in English (songs, movies, etc.)	20
Self-Discovery	16
Passing or skipping a new word	8
Keeping up your word study over time	14

Using media in the English-language media (such as music and films), part-of-speech analysis, interpreting a text's meaning by looking at its context and consulting a dictionary, checking the spelling of a word, speaking new words out loud while studying, verbal repetition, repetition in writing and the use of English-language media are among the most well-liked vocabulary-learning techniques, which are listed in Table 2. The results of questionnaires and observation lead to the discovery of seventeen strategies. Observable strategies and unobservable strategies are the two categories into which these tactics fall. To determine the types of methods that are absent from the classroom, a survey is required. Unobservable strategies make up the remaining applications of the strategies. Verbal repetition, studying antonyms and synonyms, as well as spelling, questioning teachers and classmates, examining parts of speech, utilizing a dictionary, studying and practicing in groups, and keeping a vocabulary notebook are some of the tactics that can be observed. Oxford (1990, p194) stated that there are numerous language acquisition processes that "cannot be observed". The following are all included in this study as examples of unobservable strategies because they relate to mental processes and are therefore invisible: guessing

meaning, relating words to past experiences, repetition in writing, use of English-language media, comparison testing with other exams, skipping or passing new words, and steadfast study.

The results confirmed previous research findings that learners employ a range of vocabulary acquisition strategies. The most popular strategy for EFL students, according to research, is metacognitive. Taking control of one's education is a key component of independent learning. The outcomes of Sahbazian's (2004) study were different from this one. She found metacognitive strategies among the less-used methods and deduced that students were incapable or unwilling to take control of their education. Metacognitive techniques were found to be the least often used strategies, which may be related to the popularity of rote learning among Turkish students and teachers. Cognitive strategy was the second-most popular approach among Indonesian EFL students. Given that cognitive methods were shown by Gu and Johnson (1996) to be a positive predictor of general proficiency, it is reasonable to believe that Indonesian EFL students' sufficient general English proficiency in the current study led to the widespread usage of these techniques.

Cognitive strategies can be categorised into six different categories: guessing, diction, note-taking, practising, encoding, and activation procedures. Kids commonly look for methods for removing affixes from stems or roots in addition to using the dictionary for comprehension and clarification. We can therefore infer that they are eager to use the dictionary technique effectively, preferably to confirm the definition of new words and make sure that their educated guesses line up with the definitions of words they have come across in context. The students rank guessing as the second most effective tactic. individuals said that individuals regularly made educated guesses using prior knowledge and linguistic cues. This suggests that they employ a range of strategies to clarify the meaning of both well-known and cryptic phrases. As a result, it's conceivable that they've picked up a lot of language and improved their capacity for top-down comprehension, which enables them to comprehend words and phrases in context. This is in line with the research of Nation (1990), who found that "passage learners can guess unknown words from the context at least around eighty percent of the time." Despite the paucity of evidence, there is still a link between dictionary use and guessing methods. When reading, readers frequently deduce the meanings of new words from the context. To ensure that their assumptions are correct, however, people routinely use dictionaries (Nation, 1990).

Although assuming the meaning of words from context is a solid strategy, it is recommended to use a dictionary to confirm the definitions of the words. As a result, students'

vocabulary knowledge is strengthened and the accuracy of their estimates is increased (Nation, 1990). The third most popular strategy is note-taking methods. They utilize notes to make decisions that are both "usage-oriented". Gu (2013) suggested that selecting which words to include in notes and focusing on their meanings can aid in remembering and using vocabulary. They recommended keeping notes to help with this process.

Since there are many different components to learning a language, it is sense that language teachers would give their students different strategies since the bulk of them are unaware of them. Numerous studies have shown how teaching techniques influence learners' use of techniques and aid in vocabulary development. These findings support Oxford's (1999) claim that it is important to determine a method's frequency of use and percentage of contribution to ensure that teachers get the most out of their training, at the start of a lesson. Students' ability to manage the use of tactics will improve if they are informed about their use and effectiveness, which will improve learning.

CONCLUSION

Given the complexity of learning a foreign language, it is beneficial for students to actively seek ways to improve their language acquisition. This includes obtaining guidance from teachers on how to maximize their study time both inside and outside the classroom (Rogers, 2018). Teachers have significant flexibility in how they design their course materials to support vocabulary growth. They need to teach students effective learning techniques to help them expand their vocabulary more efficiently. The choice and implementation of these techniques can impact how well new words are learned (Sokmen, 1997).

While the use of English-language media was noted as a strategy, it was not observed in the classroom and is thus considered an unobservable strategy in this study. The vocabulary acquisition strategies used by students were influenced by their learning and teaching environment, culture, learning preferences, and motivation. Effective strategies observed included part-of-speech analysis, dictionary use, asking teachers and classmates, group study, verbal repetition, spelling practice, repeating words aloud, connecting words to synonyms and antonyms, and keeping a vocabulary notebook. Each student has a unique learning style that affects how they increase their vocabulary.

Despite its benefits, this study has limitations. The sample reflects the specific cultural context of Indonesia, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other cultural settings. Additionally, the majority of participants were female undergraduates, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research should include a more diverse range of participants in terms of

age, gender, and educational background to provide broader insights.

REFERENCE

- Barcelos, A.M.F. (2003). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In Kalaja, P., & Barcelos, A.M.F (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA* (pp 7–33). Springer
- Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (2007). Increasing low-income children's oral vocabulary repertoires through rich and focused instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 107 (3), 251–271. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1086/511706>
- Chamot, A. U., Barnhardt, S., El-Dinary, P. B., & Robbins, J. (2004). *The Learning Strategies handbook*. White Plains, New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. London: Longman
- Cohen, A. D., Weaver, S., & Li, T. –. Y. (1998). The impact of strategies-based instruction on speaking a foreign language. In A. D. Cohen (Ed.), *Strategies in learning and using a second language* (pp. 107–156). Longman.
- Cohen, A. D., & Aphek, E. (1981). Easifying second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 3(2), 221–236. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100004198>
- Cook, V. (2013). *Second language learning and language teaching* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Gardner, D. (2013). *Exploring vocabulary: Language in action*. Routledge.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. (2018). Teaching vocabulary for reading success. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching, First Edition*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0773>
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2018). Scaffolding vocabulary development. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2020.1824306>
- Khany, R., & Khosravian, F. (2014). Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development through Wikipedia. *English Language Teaching*, 7(7), 2014. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n7p57>
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Source book of New Methods*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publication.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Orfan, S. N. (2020). Afghan undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 7(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1723831>
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Newbury House.
- Oxford, R. L. (1999). Learning strategies. In B. Spolsky (Ed.), *Concise encyclopedia of educational linguistics* (pp. 518–522). Elsevier.
- Rogers, J. (2018). Teaching/Developing vocabulary through metacognition. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0737>
- Rubin, J. (1975). What the “good language learner” can teach us. *TESOL Quarterly*, 9(1), 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586011>
- Schmitt, & Schmitt. (1993). Identifying and assessing vocabulary learning strategies. *Thai TESOL Bulletin*, 5(4), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.0000/eric.edu.gov/ED380994>
- Schmitt, N. (2008). Instructed second language vocabulary learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(3), 329–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168808089921>
- Sokmen, A. J. (1997). Current Trends in Teaching Second-language Vocabulary. In N.Schmitt & M.McCarthy (Eds), *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition, and Pedagogy*(pp. 237–257). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tseng, W. T., & Schmitt, N. (2008). Toward a model of motivated vocabulary learning: A structural equation modeling approach. *Language Learning*, 58(2), 357–400. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/j.1467-9922.2008.00444.x>
- Van de Wege, M. (2018). Teaching strategies for independent vocabulary development teaching vocabulary. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0754>
- Zimmerman, C. B. (1997). Historical trends in second language vocabulary instruction. In Coady, T., & Huckin, T., (Eds), *Second language vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 5–19). Cambridge.