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A STUDY OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AT SMP NEGERI 2 TAKARI

Duplim Beatris Luma¹, Niken Ardila Rehiraky²

(1) English Education, Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur

(2) Master of Linguistics, Warmadewa University, Denpasar, Bali

Email : duplimbeatrisluma@gmail.com¹; nikenrehiraky454@gmail.com²

Abstract

This research is entitled "A Study of Vocabulary Learning Strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Takari." The purpose of this study is to identify the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by 8th-grade students in learning English. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method. In the context of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, vocabulary is often underemphasized, despite its importance in language comprehension. Therefore, understanding how students develop their vocabulary is essential. Data were collected using a questionnaire based on Schmitt's taxonomy, consisting of 20 items, and supported by interviews with 30 students at SMP Negeri 2 Takari. The results show that students frequently apply cognitive strategies such as practicing, underlining, and guessing meanings from context. They also use social strategies, including asking the teacher and studying with peers. These findings highlight the students' preference for simple and accessible vocabulary learning techniques.

Keyword: *vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), English as a foreign language, junior high school, language learning*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning has become the topic of interest for many EFL practitioners throughout the world. The more vocabulary an EFL learner acquires, the better communication he/she will have. In the onerous process of learning a foreign language, learning the vocabulary part of the target language has always been problematic, difficult, and bewildering to the EFL or ESL learners. Teachers and learners have always been seeking easy ways to master the vocabulary of the English language. Vocabulary plays a very important role when it comes to learning a foreign language. From the late 1980s, vocabulary was an area that has drawn the researchers' interest within the domain of second language acquisition (Nation, 1997).

Cameron (2001) stated that building up a convenient vocabulary is central to the learning a foreign language. It means to build a suitable vocabulary it is not only a matter of allowing the students to know and then memorize the words but also providing the students with knowledge to comprehend and apply the words in an actual context. The students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use the words correctly. Harmer (2007) states that teachers need to spend time understanding how their students think and operate. Every student has different way or strategies in learning as Macaro (2003) states that learners probably have their own strategies in learning vocabulary outside the classroom. So, it is a task for teachers to think productively in teaching vocabulary to find activities which provide a fun and enjoyable situation.

Vocabulary learning strategies are important for students; students need to apply the appropriate strategy, as Oxford (1990) states learning strategies taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more selfdirected, more effective and transferable. Schmitt (2000) also states that vocabulary learning strategies can empower learners and attract learners' attention in learning language in a way that will improve the learners' vocabulary development. Vocabulary need to be learnt by applying active strategies as it enables learners to understand the concepts of unfamiliar 3 words, gain a better number of words, and use words successfully for communicative purposes.

In curriculum 2013, the target of learning English in Junior High School is the students can reach a functional level that is students can communicate with each other by oral and written in daily communication. Students are required to have sufficient vocabulary and to be able to use them in their conversation to achieve the target. Vocabulary is considered to be one of the most important elements in comprehending lesson materials, especially when learning a foreign language. Heidari et al. (2012) states that vocabulary is the core of language and the cornerstone of language learning. Through comprehending foreign words,

students will understand the meaning of the words. Wessels (2011: 46) believes that knowledge of vocabulary is essential to student's academic success. "If students do not understand the meaning of the words in the text, they will have difficulty understanding the content".

This study aims at investigating the VLS used by junior high school students when they learn English. This study seeks to answer the research question: What are the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by junior high school students? This study could be useful for language students, especially junior high school students who encounter problems in comprehension of vocabulary in their language learning. Furthermore, teachers could use this study as a reference to help learners who find difficulty understanding the meaning of vocabulary in their English learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design refers to the plan for collecting and analyzing data systematically. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), case study is a qualitative study approach that studies a single individual, group, or important example to formulate interpretations to the specific case or to provide useful generalization. This research was conducted on class VIII students of SMPN 2 Takari. This type of research is a qualitative method because the author wants to analyze a study of vocabulary learning strategies in junior high school students. To explore students' vocabulary learning strategies, primary data is used, namely, data obtained directly from interviews, questionnaire and documentation involving one class in class VIII at SMP N 2 Takari. The data sources in this research are the results of interviews carried out in the One classes that were the object of the research. Research procedure are needed as a procedure to conduct research. The researcher intended to arrange some procedures as follows: The researcher prepared a questionnaire The researcher conducted questionnaire, The researcher collect the data and Researcher reported the result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Researchers provide questionnaire results to answer research questions. Data were analyzed using qualitative methods. This research was conducted through a questionnaire.

Data Questionnaire

4.1.1 Determination Strategy

Table 1 : Students' Use of Determination Strategies

NO	Strategy/Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	%
1	Check the word's form; whether it belongs to verb, noun, adjective.	0	11	19	0	63%
2	Check if the word is also an Indonesian word. E.g.: pencil, Bahasa Indonesia: pensil	0	6	20	4	66%
3	Guess word's meaning from the context	1	8	10	11	36%
4	Look up the word in English - Indonesian dictionary.	0	2	8	20	66%

From table number 1, the first strategy (check the word's form: whether it belongs to verb, noun, adjective) contains never 0, sometimes 11, often 19, always 0. Strategy number 2 (check if the word is also an Indonesian word. E.g: pencil, bahasa Indonesia : pensil contains never 0, sometimes 6, often 20, always 4. Strategy number 3 (guess word's meaning from the context) contains never 1, sometimes 8, often 10, always 11. Strategy number 4 (look up the word in English-Indonesian dictionary) contains never 0, sometimes 2, often 8, always 20. The statement that received the highest ranking in Determination Strategy was statement number four: looking for the meaning of a word in the English-Indonesian dictionary. The statement with the highest ranking in Determination strategy is statement number two: check whether the word is also an Indonesian word. The similarity of several terms in English and Indonesian could be a factor in the high ranking of this statement. The participants explained that the similarity of several words in Indonesian and English helped them guess and understand the meaning of the words. One of the sources stated, "... the meaning is the same but the writing is different. So we can interpret the word almost the same as in

Indonesian" (English translation: the meaning is similar but the spelling is different. In this way, we can understand English terms that are similar to Indonesian).

Nation (2001) states that when there is little similarity between items and patterns in the L1 (first language) and the foreign language, vocabulary learning presents a greater burden to the learner (p. 220). In other words, if there are many words that are similar with the first language, the word learning burden presents less of a challenge. Therefore, learners can understand a new word easily when the word is similar with its equivalent in their first language. Statement number four (Check if the is also an Indonesian word.E.G: pencil,Bahasa Indonesia : pensil, also ranked highly in this category. 66,6% of the participants chose guessing word's meaning from the context as the strategy that they used most. There are several reasons why this strategy was selected. For instance, the students were already familiar with the word doctor which in English means someone who maintains or restores human health through the practice of medicine (Woodford, 2005). When the students heard the word doctor, they could guess with confidence that doctor means dokter. Due to the similarity between certain English and Indonesian terms, students often associated a new English word with its cognate in Indonesian.

4.1.2 Social Strategy

Table 2 : Students' Use of Determination Strategies

NO	Strategy/Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	%
5	Ask the teacher to translate the meaning of a word that I do not understand.	1	10	10	9	33,3%
6	Ask the teacher for synonyms or similar meanings of new word.	0	14	9	7	46,6%
7	Ask the teacher for definition.	2	11	13	4	43,3%

From table number 2, the 5 strategy (ask the teacher to translate the meaning of a word that I do not understand) contains never 1, sometimes 10, often 10, always 9. Strategy number 6 (ask the teacher for synonyms or similar meanings of new word) contains never 0, sometimes 14, often 9, always 7. Strategy number 7 (ask the teacher for definition) contains never 2, sometimes 11, often 13, always 4. One possible reason why statement nine ranked highest is the common belief that the teacher is fluent in English. The assumed English background of the teacher is a likely reason for students to trust the teacher. It indicates that teachers are generally considered to be credible sources. The interviews explained that their teachers could provide a clear and correct definition of a new word. Participants number one and two added that "the teacher's explanation is more specific and suitable than the one in the dictionary because sometimes the words have different meanings or cannot be found in a regular dictionary".

Nation (2008: 12) explains that "some words are commonly found in a certain area but rarely found in other areas". Only someone who has a background in English can provide a suitable definition of a specific word. In addition, the use of English as a medium of instruction in the classroom provided opportunities for the participants to ask their teacher about the meaning of a new word. As Table 2 shows, On the other hand, statement number six (ask teacher for synonyms or similar new word meaning) has the lowest value rank. 32% of participants chose this strategy. Only 28% of participants choose sometimes, 18% often, and 14% choose always. Possible reasons for this low rating The strategy is that students are needed as English language learners is simply the meaning of a say. Participant number one stated that the definition given by the teacher is sufficient. Another person interviewed stated that "knowing the definition of the word is more important rather than knowing the synonyms." This can also explain why this method is not performed identified as a general learning strategy.

4.1.3 Memory Strategies

Table 3 : Students' Use of Determination Strategies

NO	Strategy/Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	%
8	Connect the word with my previous experience.	1	19	10	1	63,3%
9	Group the word by its form (verb, noun, adjective)	0	7	17	6	56,6%

10	Remember the word by studying and paying attention to its spelling.	1	7	11	11	36,6%
11	Try to make a sentence using the word.	0	5	22	3	73,3%

From table number 3, strategy number 8 (connect the word with my previous experience) contains never 1, sometimes 18, often 10, always 1. Strategy number 9 (group the word by its form : verb, noun, adjective) contains never 0, sometimes 7, often 17, always 6. Strategy number 10 (remember the word by studying and paying attention to it spelling) contains never 1, sometimes 7, often 11, always 11. Strategy number 11 (try to make a sentence using the word) contains never 0, sometimes 5, often 22, always 3. Statement number 11 (Try making a sentence using this word) was ranked highest. 73,3% of participants chose this strategy. In contrast, only 63,3% of participants chose statement number 8. 56,6% of participants chose statement number 9. 36,6% of participants chose statement number 10. Learning and paying attention to a word's spelling made the participants feel more confident in recalling the word. Participant number one commented that paying attention to a word's spelling helped her remember the word. Participant number two added, "So, if next time I find the word again, I will easily remember the meaning." According to Akbari (2011), proper knowledge of spelling is a significant resource in memorizing words. This indicates that by learning word's spelling, the participants can easily remember the meaning of the word in the future. In addition, studying and paying attention to the words can also help students in writing the word correctly, as stated by participant number two. This strategy did not only help the participants to remember the word, but also helped them to know how to write the word correctly. Gu (2003) states that to know a word is to know its form. In other words, understanding a word does not only mean knowing its meaning, but also knowing its form. On the other hand, connecting the word with my previous experience, only 22% of participants chose the learning method by connecting the word with my previous experience, maybe they had studied or looked for the meaning before.

4.1.4 Cognitive Strategies

Table 4 : Students' Use of Determination Strategies

NO	Strategy/Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	%
12	Say the word repeatedly	0	5	16	9	53,3%
13	Use flashcard.	7	13	7	3	43,3%
14	Underline the word.	1	5	17	7	56,6%
15	Write the word repeatedly	5	8	13	4	43,3%
16	Keep a vocabulary notebook wherever you go.	17	12	0	1	56,6%

From table number 4, strategy number 12 (say the word repeatedly) contains never 0, sometimes 5, often 16, always 9. Strategy number 13 (use flashcard) contains never 7, sometimes 13, often 7, always 3. Strategy number 14 (underline the word) contains never 1, sometimes 5, often 17, always 7. Strategy number 15 (write the word repeatedly) contains never 5, sometimes 8, often 13, always 4. Strategy number 16 (keep a vocabulary notebook wherever you go) contains never 17, sometimes 12, often 0, always 1. Statement number 14 (Underline the word) is the statement most frequently chosen by participants (56,6%). In contrast, statement number 16 (Keep a vocabulary notebook wherever you go) ranked lowest among the cognitive strategies. Most participants chose statement number 14 because underlining a word helped the participants to recall the new word. Participant number one commented, "Underlining the words helped me to understand the points of the words effortlessly while reviewing. I could easily remember the meanings of the words". Hassanvand et al. (2012) states that underlining the word can help the students in guessing and recognizing new words. Participant number two added, "Underlining a word helps me to remember it easily, and if the word is important I can repeat it again and again, so recalling vocabulary by underlining the word is helpful." Underlining a new word can also be a reminder that the word is important and will have to be used in the future. Moreover, by underlining the word, students are able to find the word easily when they want to recall it later.

4.1.5 Metacognitive Strategies

Table 5 : Students' Use of Determination Strategies

NO	Strategy/Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	%
17	test myself with word test.	0	22	8	0	73,3%
18	Use English media (news, news broadcasting, internet, magazine, video, etc)	0	3	18	9	60%
19	Skip or pass new word which likely does not need to study	30	0	0	0	100%
20	Continue to study the word overtime	0	8	13	9	43,3%

From table number 5, strategy number 17 (test myself with word test) contains never 0, sometimes 22, often 8, always 0. Strategy number 18 (use English media : news, news broadcasting, internet, magazine, video,etc) contains never 7, sometimes 13, often 7, always 3. Strategy number 19 (skip or pass new word which likely does not need to study) contains never 30, sometimes 0, often 0, always 0. Strategy number 20 (continue to study the word overtime) contains never 0, sometimes 8, often 13, always 9. Statement number 18 (use English media) was the highest-ranked Metacognitive strategy. 60% of the participants chose this statement. In contrast, statement number 19 (skip or pass new word which likely does not need to study) ranked the lowest. 0% of the participants chose this strategy. English-language media supported the students to learn and retain new vocabulary. The interview results show that by using English media such as English-language Internet pages, newspapers, videos, and magazines, students remembered English vocabulary more easily. English media frequently provides clear context, so students can learn certain words easily. As participant number four stated, "There are some English words which are unique. Therefore, I use other media such as the Internet and magazines, because on the Internet there are some websites that help me to understand English better... So, I often read English articles or short stories in those media." Engaging with English-language media can be utilized as an alternative method for learning vocabulary. Participant number three stated that he used English-language media such as the Internet and videos when he was dissatisfied with the explanation given by the teacher and textbooks. Out of the English language media mentioned in the questionnaire, the Internet was the medium chosen most frequently, likely due to easy access and economic factors. The students can browse necessary materials any time and anywhere. The Internet helps students to become more independent in their vocabulary learning, as stated by Brahja (2013).

In contrast, no participants chose statement number 19 (missing or skipping new words that are unlikely to be worth learning). The participants believed that all English words were important to learn. Interviews showed that most participants agreed that all English words are important to learn and remember. Participant number one stated, "If I don't know a word in an English sentence, this can affect my understanding of the sentence. I do not understand what it means." For these students, mastery of English vocabulary is very important. In addition, their English learning is carried out entirely in English. Therefore, they assume that knowledge of English words is necessary.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to determine what vocabulary learning strategies are most frequently adopted by junior high school students when learning English. To answer this research question, a questionnaire was administered and interviews were conducted. This study found that the junior high school students preferred checking if the word is also an Indonesian word (for example, the English doctor and the Indonesian dokter), guessing a word's meaning from the context (DET), asking their classmate with learning the word, asking the teacher for a definition (SOC), remembering the word by studying and paying attention to its spelling (MEM), underlining the word (COG), and using English media such as news, the Internet, magazines, and videos (MET). The participants chose vocabulary learning strategies which were practical, fast, and simple but helpful in discovering and remembering new words, such as guessing the meaning from the context, asking the teacher for definition, studying the meaning with friends, underlining words, and using other English-language media. These findings indicate that what is most important for language learners is to discover the meaning of new vocabulary. Therefore, the participants of this study infrequently chose strategies such as using flashcards, grouping the words according to topic, and classifying the words into

their form. The findings of the study demonstrate that it could be useful for language students to enrich their vocabularies, which provides a better understanding of the language.

The five strategies chosen by the participants indicate that these language learners tend to use practical, simple, and efficient strategies to understand their lessons. In addition, the participants also perceived that the strategies chosen were most efficient for them to comprehend the meaning of new words. Therefore, by using these strategies, the participants could better understand the materials being taught. The strategies used by these participants could likely be useful for other junior high school students in their language learning process. This study could be used as a reference for language teachers to help their students who encounter difficulties in comprehending the meaning of vocabulary. Teachers could suggest that students utilize the strategies identified in this study. Moreover, teachers could also encourage students to become independent learners by teaching the students to apply these vocabulary learning strategies to the study of technical words. After conducting research, the researcher wants to explain it briefly conclusions regarding the learning strategies of class VIII students at SMP Negeri 2 Takari. Applying learning strategies really helps improve how to study for class VIII students at SMP Negeri 2 Takari. Benefits of Using student learning strategies is to improve students' learning methods, students' memory regarding.

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