

Exploring Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed by PSDKU Aru Students

Maria Jomima Ngosiem¹

English Education Postgraduate Study Program, Pattimura University, Indonesia

E-mail: mariajngosiem@gmail.com

Hendrik Maruanaya²

English Education Postgraduate Study Program, Pattimura University, Indonesia

Inggrit Tanasale³

English Education Postgraduate Study Program, Pattimura University, Indonesia

Abstract

This research aims to recognize common vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and find out the factors that affect the selection and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies among sixth-semester English students at PSDKU Aru. The methodology that the researcher used is a mixed method with the questionnaire and interview as the instruments. The questionnaire, used only to identify the VLSs that students commonly use, was adapted from Schmitt's VLS taxonomy (1997). The interview questions are open-ended and focus on VLSs, the factors that influence VLSs, and the difficulties in learning VLSs. The results of this research explained that the most common VLSs that students used were using a dictionary, asking classmates for the meaning, working and practicing with peers/in groups, using English language media (songs, movies, etc.), creating a vocabulary notebook, listening to music with word lists, remembering words through projects, and writing the words on paper and sticking them on the walls of their houses. Most of these commonly used strategies are consolidation strategies, which aim to memorize and become familiar with the words. Furthermore, the results also showed that there are two important factors that influence their choice of strategies for learning vocabulary. These factors are motivation and belief. These factors not only help in the choice of strategies that are good for them but can also affect the consistency of learning. Besides that, using one VLS may encourage students to utilize other VLSs. As a result, these findings provide lecturers and students with information regarding alternate strategies for teaching and learning language in class.

Keywords: *Exploring, Students, Vocabulary, Vocabulary Learning Strategies, PSDKU*

DOI: 10.30598/matail.v5i2.23043

INTRODUCTION

A main aspect of being proficient in English is using vocabulary well because vocabulary is a combination of various words with certain meanings that can be used as sentences and paragraphs. According to Fries (2020), an essential component of each language lies in the vocabulary which has its meaning based on the type of vocabulary used. It means that vocabulary is critical for students to master. Thus, students are required to learn all things about vocabulary including its types namely nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Thus, it can assist students in recognizing the use of each type of vocabulary that students learn.

Moreover, students must be able to know the layout of the words used, how to pronounce the words, the meaning, and the use. These things should be a learner's attention in learning vocabulary. It is reinforced by (Cameron, 2001) who states that "Learning vocabulary means learning new words together with the pronunciation, spelling, part of speech, meaning and also the use of these words". It is evident that it is easier for a person to master the language if they learn vocabulary.

Hanson and Padua (2011) state that "words we use for oral and written communication are called vocabulary." It implies that vocabulary includes all the words we are familiar with and employ to communicate in English language. Words we use to express meaning encompass not only words but also phrases, idioms, and expressions. Vocabulary plays an important role in communication because it allows us to convey our thoughts, ideas and emotions to others. Having a vocabulary is essential for understanding written content and improving reading comprehension. The process of learning words begins in childhood and continues throughout our entire lives. Students do not acquire knowledge about vocabulary. They also learn how words are structured and used within sentences or specific contexts.

English language education students should possess a wide range of vocabulary as they will assume the responsibility of guiding others in the language. Because English is not their native tongue and is only used occasionally, these students may encounter difficulties. Moreover, most students have no experience in learning basic English knowledge when they are in middle school and high school. When they became students in the English study program, this became an obstacle for them because they did not have enough basic knowledge, especially vocabulary, which is very important. So, they are looking for the most effective strategy for learning a language.

Tay (2013) states that the complete effort that students must make to process, comprehend and apply the knowledge provided during the learning process or individual preparation is referred to as learning strategies. It implies that all the behaviors and methods students employ to interact with and make sense of the information offered to them in the classroom or during independent study time are referred to as learning strategies. It includes a variety of techniques, strategies, and procedures by students to advance their understanding and mastery of the material. Strategies for learning involve absorbing information, understanding it, and applying newly acquired knowledge. Learning strategies are intended to improve student's learning efficiency and to support in-depth comprehension and application of knowledge in pertinent circumstances.

In general, every student learns vocabulary the way they like. There are various strategies used by each student, including reading English books, writing and making vocabulary notes, listening to music or radio, watching English films without subtitles, searching for English platforms on the internet, etc. All of the strategies above are called vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). On this basis, it can be said that VLS (vocabulary learning strategy) is a method or tactic that students use to learn new vocabulary. Each student has a different strategy for learning a language. These strategies will impact how well they speak English. Since many facets of learning English require vocabulary to comprehend the content, students with excellent vocabulary-learning practices can quickly understand what they have studied. Takac (2008) defines the vocabulary learning strategy as a practice that is used by students to identify the linguistic components, meaning, and form of words and memorize them.

In addition, students are also learning the meaning of vocabulary itself, pronunciation, location or position, and even the usage of the word itself. VLS is therefore essential to learning English. According to Nation (2001), you can build up an extensive and varied vocabulary with the help of learning strategies. A successful strategy will play a significant part in helping the students achieve

more success and gain a deeper comprehension of vocabulary in general. The researcher intends to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by students in the English Department of the Aru Islands Study Program because of the importance of these strategies in language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)

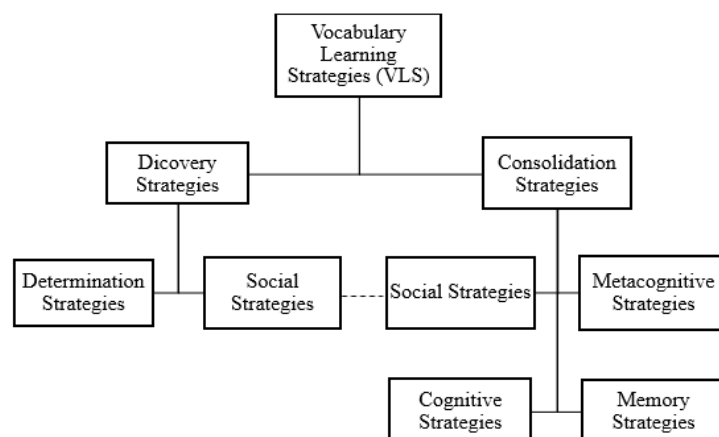
Language learning strategies consist of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as one of their components. Many significant studies have examined vocabulary learning strategies related to students' vocabulary results (Gu, 2010). Besides that, Gu (2003) asserts the significance of vocabulary learning strategies. He emphasizes their role as essential tools in elucidating the development of foreign language vocabulary. It means vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) guide students in learning vocabulary effectively. Vocabulary learning strategies are methods that students use to enhance their vocabulary skills. Cameron (2001) defines these strategies as the steps learners take to help them understand and remember vocabulary items. It suggests that students have methods and actions that can be used to expand their vocabulary.

Types of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Students employ various strategies in their vocabulary learning. According to Schmitt (1997), VLS taxonomy is an arrangement or grouping of vocabulary that can be used in a systematic way. Broadly, Schmitt classifies vocabulary learning strategies into two parts, namely; "Discovery Strategy" and "Consolidation Strategy". "Discovery Strategies" has the meaning of the efforts made by students when they find new vocabulary by using language knowledge, tools such as dictionaries and also asking other people while "Consolidation Strategies" refers to the efforts made by students in memorizing previous vocabulary that has been studied. The detailed subcategories of these primary themes are depicted in Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1

Schmitt's VLS Taxonomy (1997)



a. Consolidation Strategies

These strategies consolidate a word. It encompasses social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies.

- **Social Strategies (SOC)**

As part of these social strategies, students engage in collaborative projects, seek confirmation from the teacher regarding their word lists or word cards, and engage with native speakers to enhance their vocabulary development (Schmitt, 1997).

- **Memory Strategies (MEM)**

Memory strategies, also known as mnemonics, involve using images and grouping to link new words to existing knowledge and improve phrase recall. Additionally, physical exercise can be used to support word recall (Schmitt, 1997). According to Schmitt (2000), memory strategies often involve mental processes that contribute to long-term retention of vocabulary. Mnemonics serve as helpful “tricks” to speed up word recall (Cohen, 1990; Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Thornbury, 2002). Although mnemonics are valuable tools for learning advanced concepts, especially those that are difficult to remember, it is important not to rely on mnemonics as the sole alternative to other strategies such as contextual learning (Hulstijn, 1997). Memory strategies include techniques such as imagery, word association, grouping, keyword methods, and collocations.

- **Cognitive Strategies (COG)**

Schmitt (1997) recognizes that these strategies are similar to those in the memory group, however this category's main concern is not on controlling mental processes. He further suggests that although word lists and word cards can help with term introduction, they can also be used as tools for continuous learning. Moreover, by using this technique, students can listen to the words of their own audio recordings. "Thought processes used directly in learning that enable the learner to deal with the information presented in tasks and materials by working with it in different ways" is what cognitive strategies refer to (Hedge, 2000, p. 77). These include taking notes, repeating information, and drawing conclusions. According to Macaro (2003), a careful analysis of the target term in cognitive strategy, starting with noting its form and meaning and continuing to process the word in working memory before entering the target vocabulary into long-term memory. Word lists, flashcards, note-taking, verbal and written repetition, and textbook glossaries are common strategies for this category.

- **Metacognitive Strategies (MET)**

Metacognitive methods, according to Hedge (2000), include planning, self-evaluation, monitoring, and reflection on the learning process. For example, a student who is about to start reading a new chapter in a book can look over the comments the teacher made on a written work or go over the notes they made during the lecture. Vocabulary learning strategy Schmitt's taxonomy states that learners can monitor and evaluate their learning process using these metacognitive strategies. To measure their own progress, students must test their vocabulary. They should be aware of when to skip words, especially low-frequency words that they believe will be of little use. Because there are so many resources available for learning a language including books, newspapers, magazines, and movies, students should immerse themselves in their second language (L2) as much as they can. Schmitt (1997) asserts that building new vocabulary on a regular basis is essential to succeeding in the target language.

b. Discovery Strategies

These strategies aim to understand a new word. It comprises determination and social strategies.

- **Determination Strategies (DET)**

Schmitt (1997, 2000) defines Determination Strategies (DET) as strategies students use to determine the meaning of a word independently, without seeking help from others. These methods include word classes, analyzing word components, recognizing cognates, making educated guesses based on context, and using a dictionary.

- **Social Strategies (SOC)**

These strategies require consulting those who are familiar with the meaning of the target word's meaning, such as a teacher or friend. This consultation may include L1 translations, synonyms, definitions of paraphrasing, and examples illustrating the new word's usage in sentences (Schmitt, 1997, 2000).

The difficulties in learning vocabulary

The early stages of effective vocabulary instruction require identifying the hurdles that students encounter. Thornbury (2002) lists several factors that contribute to the difficulty of particular words:

- **Pronunciation**

According to Thornbury's study, it's harder to learn words that are hard to pronounce.

- **Spelling**

Words become even more difficult when there is a mismatch between sound and spelling, which can lead to mispronunciation or spelling. English spelling generally follows the rules, but anomalies such as foreign words, and words with silent letters such as listen, headache, climb, boredom, honor, cabinet, muscle, etc. cause special difficulties.

- **Length and complexity**

Although both short and long words pose equal challenges in the learning process, frequently used English words tend to be shorter, increasing the likelihood that students will encounter the words frequently and promoting learning skills. It is worth noting that.

- **Grammar**

Another issue is the word's grammar, especially if it is different from that of its L1 equivalent. Students need to remember whether verbs like "love," "hope," and "swim" are followed by an infinitive (e.g. "swim") or an -ing form (e.g. B. "swimming").

- **Meaning**

Learners often face challenges when two words overlap in meaning. An easy-to-understand example is the distinction between "doing" and "doing" between "making breakfast" and making an appointment, and "doing" homework and filling out a questionnaire at the same time.

METHODOLOGY

This research used mixed method research. The research design that the researcher used was an explanatory sequential design type. Creswell and Plano Clark (2006) stated that explanatory sequential design is a combination of two data that begins with collecting and analyzing quantitative data and continues with collecting and analyzing qualitative data. In this

research, the researcher collects data starting with quantitative data to find out vocabulary learning strategies that students commonly use. Then, collect qualitative data to find in-depth information about the factors influencing students' vocabulary learning strategies. The researcher conducted this research at PSDKU Pattimura University in Aru Island located on Perkampungan Pelajar Street, Wangel village. The subject of this research focused on English students' vocabulary learning strategies. The participants were 10 students from the sixth-semester of 2019.

Research Procedure

- The researcher conducted research based on the following procedures:
- Researcher distributed questionnaires to students.
- The researcher explained the questionnaire that was distributed and explained the contents of the questionnaire.
- Students filled out the questionnaire.
- Researcher collected the results of filling out the questionnaire.
- Researcher examined the questionnaires and sorted the questionnaires based on the type of vocabulary learning strategy used.
- Researcher calculate the questionnaire results based on the formula.
- Each student with a strategy grouping was taken for an interview. Five students who interviewed based on the five types of strategies, which were categorized according to vocabulary types from Schmitt (1997).
- Researcher conducted interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study, utilizing an adapted Vocabulary Strategy Questionnaire (Schmitt, 1997) and in-depth interviews with 10 sixth-semester university students, investigated common VLS usage, influential factors, and associated difficulties.

Questionnaire Results (VLS Usage Frequency)

The questionnaire results, organized by VLS taxonomy, highlighted the most and least frequently used strategies:

VLS Category	Most Used Strategy ("Always" Usage)	Least Used Strategy
Determination (DET)	Using a dictionary to check words (100%)	Analyzing affixes and roots (10%)
Social (SOC)	Asking classmates for meaning / Practicing with peers (70%)	Asking the teacher for translation (20%)
Metacognitive (MET)	Using English language media (songs, movies, etc.) (100%)	Getting myself a vocabulary test (20%)
Cognitive (COG)	Creating a vocabulary notebook / Listening to music with word lists (70%)	Repeatedly writing the word (40%)
Memory (MEM)	Remembering words by doing projects (80%)	Linking the word to imaginary situations/unfamiliar similar words (30%)

The most dominant individual strategies overall were **Using a dictionary (DET)** and **Using English language media (MET)**, both reported as "Always" used by 100% of respondents.

In-Depth Interview Results

Interviews provided qualitative context, confirming student reliance on media consumption, note-taking, peer interaction, and dictionary use.

Factors Influencing VLS Choice

Students identified two primary factors influencing their choice and consistency in VLS usage, aligning with **Learner's Individual Differences** (Ellis, 1994):

1. **Motivation:** Having a great internal drive and feeling motivated by the success of the chosen strategy.
2. **Belief:** Strong self-belief in their ability and the conviction that the chosen strategy is effective and yields positive results.

Difficulties and Solutions

Common difficulties included **not knowing word meanings**, **pronunciation issues**, **contextual understanding**, and **losing motivation**. Solutions primarily involved checking pronunciation via Google Translate, using dictionaries, and employing self-regulation techniques like forced practice to regain focus.

Common VLS Use

The high-frequency VLSs span all five categories, confirming that students employ a diverse set of methods to enrich their vocabulary. The eight most frequently used strategies include: using a dictionary (DET), social interaction (SOC), media use (MET), vocabulary notebooks (COG), word list listening (COG), projects (MEM), and post-it notes (MEM).

- **Dominant Strategy Type:** Analysis revealed that **Consolidation Strategies** (e.g., notebooks, media, projects, sticking notes on walls) were more prevalent than **Discovery Strategies** (e.g., dictionary look-up). This suggests students prioritize internalization, memorization, and becoming familiar with words over simply finding their meaning.
- **Support for Existing Literature:** The reliance on the dictionary (DET) aligns with findings by Schmitt (1997, 2000), while the overall strong usage of DET, MET, COG, and MEM supports the literature on common VLS choices in EFL contexts (Hartimi, 2018).

Factors Affecting VLS

The factors identified—**Motivation** and **Belief**—are critical individual differences that drive VLS application. This finding is consistent with studies (Fu, 2003; Marttinen, 2008) demonstrating a clear correlation between high student motivation and the application of a wider, more effective range of VLSs, emphasizing the importance of affective factors in consistent strategy use.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of the findings and discussion, this study draws the following conclusions regarding the Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) used by sixth-semester undergraduate English Education students:

- **VLS Usage and Dominance:** The students utilize a diverse and varied set of VLSs. Eight strategies are habitually used by most students, spanning all VLS categories: **using a dictionary** (DET), **asking classmates** and **working with peers** (SOC), **using English language media** (MET), **creating a vocabulary notebook** and **listening to word lists** (COG), and **remembering via projects** and **post-it notes** (MEM). Analysis indicates a greater reliance on **consolidation strategies**—methods used for memorization and internalization—over discovery strategies. Crucially, **using English language media (songs, movies, etc.)** was identified by students as the most enjoyable, successful, and relaxing strategy for vocabulary acquisition.
- **Influencing Factors:** Two primary factors, consistent with Ellis's (1994) classification of Learner's Individual Differences, significantly influence students' choice and application of VLSs: **Motivation** and **Belief**.
Motivation: High motivation is linked to a wider and more consistent application of VLSs, aligning with the findings of Fu (2003) and Marttinen (2008). This connection underscores the mutual influence between VLS use and students' motivation to improve their language ability.
Belief: Students' **self-belief** in their capabilities and their **belief** in the effectiveness of their chosen VLSs act as powerful mechanisms for sustaining learning and encouraging the active use of newly learned words (Si-Xiang & Srikhao, 2009).

REFERENCES

- Arjomand, M. &. (2011). The Most and Least Frequently Used Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Iranian EFL Freshman Students and Its Relationship to Gender. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 7(1), 90-100.
- Asgari, A. &. (2011). The Influence of Informal Language Learning Environment (Parents and Home Environment) on Vocabulary Learning Strategies. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 1(1). 7-13.
- Bahanshal, D. (2015). The effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies on English language acquisition of the Saudi learners. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 47-56.
- Bernardo, A. S. (2009). Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Filipino College Students Across Five Disciplines. *TESOL Journal*, 1, 17-27.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching language to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celik, S. &. (2010). Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use of Turkish EFL Learners. Retrieved from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com>.
- Chang Tsai, C. &. (2009). An Examination of EFL Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Students at the University of Technology of Taiwan. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, 5(2), 32-38.
- Cheung, C.Y. (2004). The Effectiveness of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Chinese Low Achievers. Unpublished Master Thesis, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Chiang, H. (2004). The Relationship between Field Senility/ Field Independence and the Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of EFL University Students in Taiwan. *Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University*.

- Cohen, A. (1990). *Language learning: Insights for learners, teachers, and researchers*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Cohen, Louise, & Goham. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Creswell, J., and Plano Clark, V. (2006). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Doczi, B. (2011). The Vocabulary Learning Strategies of High School and University Students: A Pilot Study. *WoPaLP*, 5, 138-158.
- Edwards, R. J. (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fries, P. H. (2020). *Words, context, and meaning in reading*. In *Scientific realism in studies of reading* (pp. 53-82). Routledge.
- Ghalebi, R., Sadighi, F., & Bagheri, M. S. (2020). Vocabulary learning strategies: A comparative study of EFL learners. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1).
- Gidey, G. (2008). Vocabulary -Learning Strategy Use: The Case of High and Low Achiever Students in Gondar College of Teacher Education. *Unpublished Master Thesis, Addis Ababa University*.
- Goundar, P. R. (2019). Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSS) Employed by Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). *English Language Teaching*, 12(5), 177-189.
- Gu, P. Y. (1996). *Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Language Learning Outcomes*. *Language Learning*, 46(4), 643-679.
- Gu, P. Y. (2003). *Vocabulary Learning in a Second Language: Person, Task, Context and Strategies*. *TESL-EJ*, 7(2).
- Gu, Y. (2010). *Learning strategies for vocabulary development*. *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 105-118.
- Martinen, M. (2008). Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Upper Secondary School Students Studying English as a Second Language. *Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*.
- Mongkol, N. (2008). A Study of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of the First- and Second-Year Students from the English Department at Phetchaburi Rajabhat University. *Unpublished Master Thesis, Kasetsart University, Thailand*.
- Muti'atu, AR. (2012). Strategi Siswa dalam Belajar Kosakata di MTsN Aryojeding.
- Noprianto, E., & Purnawarman, P. (2019). EFL students' vocabulary learning strategies and their affixes knowledge. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(1), 262-275.
- Nation (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Paula, L & Justo, A. (2001). Population and sample. Sampling techniques. *Management Mathematics for European School*.
- Schmitt, N. (1997). *Vocabulary learning strategies*. In N. Schmitt, & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy* (Vol. 2035, pp. 199-227). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Si-xiang, P. &. (2009). *English Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Miao Students in Senior High School in China-A Pilot Study*. *US-China Foreign Language*, 7(2), 12-17.

- Tilfarlioglu, F. F. (2012). The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Proficiency of English Language Learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 1(2), 91-101.
- Thornbury, S. (2002). *How to teach vocabulary*. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Zhi-liang, L. (2010). Study on English Vocabulary Learning Strategies for Non-English Majors in Independent College. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 8(4), 152-164.