

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES OF EFL STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract: This article aims at investigating the vocabulary learning strategies of EFL learners at tertiary level. Since the students are required to pass English as a required subject in Indonesian tertiary education, exploring vocabulary strategies attracts more attention from teachers and practitioners. A survey approach was carried out in conducting this research. The present study involved 120 non-English major participants to fill out a questionnaire consisting of four vocabulary learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, and determination strategies. The data of this research were descriptively analysed to reveal the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners at tertiary level. This study reveals that the cognitive strategy is the most frequently strategy used. The respondents use new words in a sentence to remember them from time to time. While the least frequently strategy used is making a mental image to remember the words. The findings of the study might give an insight for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and practitioners to consider changes and adjustments to their pedagogical practice.

Keywords: *vocabulary, learning strategies, EFL, tertiary level*

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INTRODUCTION

As English, now, serves as the most frequently used language in the world, the demand of learning English has been raising for more over a decade. People from all over the world are now aware that they need English to be a part of global citizens. English helps people to gain, comprehend, communicate, and share any kind of information. One of the ways that people do to master English is by acquiring English vocabulary. Comprehending English vocabulary will be beneficial for EFL/ESL learners. Mastering English vocabulary will enable them to understand and respond the communication in English.

Vocabulary mastery has been essential for individual to learn English. There is a consensus that vocabulary becomes a catalyst to master a second or foreign language. It means that if English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) learner lacks the knowledge of vocabulary, it is very difficult for them to communicate in the target

language. Learners need to find the key words of the text. By doing this strategy, students can cover their vocabulary weaknesses since vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential aspects that affects reading comprehension (Roehrig & Guo, 2011). Nagy (2012) perceives academic vocabulary as a component of academic language and considers that the capacity to read and understand texts from various content areas or disciplines is closely related to students' vocabulary knowledge.

Therefore, Pustaka (2019) argues that teachers should provide English language learners with the necessary vocabulary, and discourse structures needed to further their learning in the specific domain. It has been noted that EFL teachers focus their classroom practice on the integration of activities that support vocabulary mastery. At the tertiary level, during classroom interaction, a vocabulary list written by learners on their notes helps them convey meaning and describe the point that they want to elaborate. Vocabulary mastery is supposed to add more confidence and self-esteem for learners. Learners may speak more fluently when they have sufficient vocabulary. Thus, learning vocabulary is very important for the success of their study since most textbooks and journal articles are written in English. Consequently, strategies of learning vocabulary in language learning become key issues nowadays for EFL teachers to help them achieve their learning objectives.

Investigating language learning strategies (Oxford, 1996; Kato, 2005, 2009; Li, 2005; Tam, 2013, Hassan, 2017) and styles (Joy and Kolb, 2009; Naserieh & Sarab, 2013; Wahyudin & Rido, 2019) of students whose native language is not English have been long initiated for decades. While the term strategies and styles might be used interchangeably, this article is concerned more with language learning strategies. Language learning strategies refer to all plans and actions that learners utilize to help them develop the language skills to aim the mastery of target language (Oxford, 1990).

Language learning strategies are perceived to be integral parts of learning a second and foreign language, as they contribute to understanding the structure and use of language necessary to produce the target language. Many researchers have reported that the awareness of language learning strategies for learners makes them more efficient in learning English (Kato 2005). Researchers believe that those strategies of successful language learners can provide a basis for aiding language learners.

Learning English means learning English vocabulary, knowledge of vocabulary enables learners to use the language fluently because by knowing a lot of English words, students will try to use it and to express the idea and communicate using it.

A study conducted by Furqon (2013) found that since many students lack of vocabulary knowledge, it is recommended to use English in English classes. By accommodating English in the classroom, it helps students acquire materials efficiently. English as a medium of instruction will facilitate them increase their vocabulary knowledge. However, He (2013) finds that using Indonesia language is also needed in English classroom to overcome the misunderstanding that may occur in mostly second language settings.

In learning vocabulary learners could use learning strategies, there are five sub-categories in learning vocabulary strategies. The first strategy is cognitive strategy. The cognitive strategy does not engage learners in mental processing but is more mechanical means. The second strategy is metacognitive strategies. This strategy is related to processes involved in monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of

learner's progress. The third strategy is memory strategies. This strategy is taken place when learners link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words. The last strategy is the determination strategy. This strategy deals with individual learning strategies, when learners try to know about the words by themselves (Schmitt, 1997).

A study carried out by Sihotang, Afriazi, and Imranuddin (2017) results that determination strategy was the most frequently applied by the students, followed by metacognitive strategy, cognitive strategy, memory strategy, social (discovery) strategy, and social (consolidation) as the least frequently applied by the students. It can be concluded that the subjects of this study prefer to learn new vocabularies by leaning it individually.

Another study done by Ghalebi, Sadighi, and Bagheri (2020) tries to reveal the significant differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students' usage of vocabulary learning strategies. However, from their research, it can be drawn that there was no significant difference between master and doctorate students in accommodating vocabulary learning strategies. From their research, the result also shows that investigating the vocabulary learning strategies can also expose individual differences in vocabulary learning among students, and motivate EFL educators and curriculum designers to design materials and activities which would facilitate learners in improving their vocabulary skill.

The result of study conducted by Asgari and Mustapha (2011) concludes that learning a word through reading, using monolingual dictionary, using various English language media, and applying new English word in learners' daily conversation, which are associated with memory, determination, metacognitive strategies respectively, are popular strategies used by learners. Therefore, learners are acute in using those strategies.

Many studies have been carried out to find out the vocabulary learning strategies used by learners. Most of studies elaborate vocabulary learning strategies done by learners who actually learn English for academic purposes. While, this article's objective is to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by the EFL learners at tertiary level. The subjects of this study are non-English major learners who are taking English for specific purposes subject. As the objective of this research is to investigate vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners at tertiary level, this research is expected to reveal the most and least frequently strategies used by the EFL learners at tertiary level.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, which is a technique of determining the sample by selecting samples among the population according to goals or problems in the study. The samples of this study were chosen from tertiary students who are not from English department students. 120 non-English department students were chosen in this research to accommodate the objective of this study, which is investigating vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners at tertiary level.

Design and Procedures

A survey study was carried out in conducting this research. Survey research is carried out since the objective of this research is to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners at tertiary level. The variables in this paper use of substance of 4 strategies in learning vocabulary such as: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, and determiner strategy.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The instrument used to collect the data in this research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire of this research was an open-ended question consisting of 3 choices; agree, neutral, disagree. The questionnaire in this study included 27 statements. The questionnaire statements were taken from the theories of the 4 vocabularies strategies developed by the researchers of this study. These 27 statements then adhered to the research subjects and they were asked to give responses to the statements. The researchers collected data formally to the subjects. The data of this research were analysed descriptively. Descriptive analysis was done to figure out the most and the least frequent strategy used by the EFL learners at tertiary level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study tries to reveal the students' vocabulary learning strategies at a tertiary level. The finding is taken from the questionnaire analysis consisting of 27 items. The result can be seen in the following data and table. This study includes the characteristic of respondents based on their gender (See Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristic of respondents based on gender

Gender	N	%
Male	32	26.7
Female	88	73.3
Total	120	100

Tabel 2. Reports of cognitive strategy used by students

No	Statements	N	Mean		Mean Total
			Male	Female	
Q1	I use new words in a sentence in order to remember them	120	3	3.2	3.1
Q2	I make word lists and write their translations in my mother tongue.	120	1.87	2.1	1.98
Q3	I review words regularly outside the classroom	120	1.93	1.63	1.78
Q7	I write down words while I read books and magazines for pleasure.	120	2.06	2.3	2.18
Q9	I remember a word if I see it written down	120	2.5	2.6	2.55
Q16	I make a mental image a word's written form in order to remember it.	120	1.53	1.33	1.43

No	Statements	N	Mean	Mean	Mean
Q17	If I cannot remember a word in a conversation, I describe it in my own words in the foreign language	120	2.1	2.2	2.15
Q18	I imagine a context in which a word could be used in order to remember it.	120	2.37	2.16	2.265
Q20	I group words together in order to remember them	120	2.17	2.89	2.53
Q21	I repeat the word mentally in order to remember it.	120	2.23	2.17	2.2
Q23	I pick up words while reading books and magazines in the foreign language.	120	2.1	2.67	2.385
Q24	I use spaced word practice in order to remember words	120	1.6	1.43	1.5
Q26	I test myself with word lists to check if I remember the words.	120	2.2	2.13	2.165
Mean Total			2.13	2.22	2.175

*Yellow colored box shows the highest score

*Red colored box shows the lowest score

The table above shows reports of the cognitive strategy used by students. From those data we can see that the highest score for the male respondents is in Q1 with result 3.

From the data we can see that the most often strategy that uses by male students is to use new words in a sentence to remember them, this strategy also became the most used by the female students with score 3,2. This shows that both female and male students agree that using new words in a sentence will help them remember new vocabulary, while the lowest is for Q16 which makes a mental image a word's written form to remember it. This strategy became the lowest in both male and female students. This shows that both females and males rarely use this strategy in learning new vocabulary. The data also shows there are several strategies often used by male then female students, for example, review word regularly outside the classroom, this strategy is indeed used more often by male then female learners.

For the mean of female reports of cognitive strategy is 2,22 score is quite close to male students' which is 2,13. Although only a few numbers differ from female and male students, it proves that they indeed have different strategies in learning vocabulary. Female students often group words together to make them easier to memorize the word while male students prefer to imagine a context in which a word could be used so they could memorize it easily, despite having different preference both male and female students use a lot of cognitive strategy to learn new vocabulary.

If the first table shows reports of cognitive strategy used by students, then table 3 below reports of the metacognitive strategy used by students. For this metacognitive strategy, the researchers gave 5 statements for students.

From the data, it can be inferred that the highest score comes from female students with score 2,87 in Q22, this statement also became the highest in male students with score 2,53, which means both female and male students are likely to

learn vocabulary through listening to songs in the foreign language and try to understand the words that they hear. While for the lowest score for male students is 2,03, as well as female students is 2,01 coming from the Q13. This finding indicates that both male and female learners rarely write down words when they watch films and TV programs to help them gain new vocabularies.

Tabel 3. Reports of metacognitive strategy used by Students

No	Statements	N	Mean		Mean Total
			Male	Female	
Q5	I pick up words from films and TV programs I watch	120	2.4	2.56	2.48
Q8	I plan for vocabulary learning in advance	120	2.3	2.44	2.37
Q13	I write down words when I watch films and TV programs.	120	2.03	2.01	2.02
Q22	I listen to songs in the foreign language and try to understand the words	120	2.53	2.87	2.7
Q27	I pick up words from the Internet	120	2.1	2.76	2.43
Mean Total			2.27	2.53	2.4

*yellow colored box shows the highest score

*red colored box shows the lowest score

Table 3 also shows that for Q5 the result of 120 respondents' answers for metacognitive strategy is 2,4 for male respondents and 2,56 for female respondents. It means both of the respondents sometimes pick up words from films and TV programs they watch while learning vocabulary.

For Q8 the result of female respondents' answer for metacognitive strategy is 2,44. This score is a bit higher than male answer which is 2,3, which means the respondents sometimes plan for vocabulary learning in advance while learning vocabulary. For Q13 the result of 120 respondents answer for metacognitive strategy is 2,03 for male and 2,01 for female meaning that the respondents sometimes write down words when they watch films and TV programs while learning vocabulary.

For Q22 the result of 120 respondents' answers for metacognitive strategy is 2,53 for male and 2,87 for female, it shows both of the respondents always do that thing while learning vocabulary. For Q27 the result of female respondents answer for metacognitive strategy is 2,76 and 2,1 from male respondents, it means the respondent sometimes pick up words from the Internet while learning vocabulary.

Table 4 below shows that for Q4, the result from 120 respondents for memory strategy is 2,23 for male and 2,20 for female meaning that the respondents sometimes test themselves to check if they remember the words while learning vocabulary.

For Q6, the result of male respondents for memory strategy is 2,57 and female respondents' answer is 2,66 implying that the respondents always use another one with a similar meaning if they cannot remember a word in a conversation.

For Q10, the result of male respondents' answer for memory strategy is 1,73 indicating that the male respondents sometimes say a word out loud repeatedly to remember word while they learn vocabulary, while female respondents' answer for

memory strategy is a bit higher which is 2,17, indicating that female respondents say a word out loud repeatedly more often than male respondents.

For Q11, the result taken from 120 respondents for memory strategy is 1,9 for male and 2,36 for female representing the male respondents sometimes listen to songs in the foreign language and try to remember the lyrics to learn vocabulary, and female respondents also do it.

For Q12, the result derived from 120 respondents for memory strategy is 2,2 for male and 2,67 for female determining that both respondents sometimes pick up words from the internet to learn vocabulary.

For Q14, the result of male respondents for memory strategy is 2,27 and female respondents is 2,32, meaning that both respondents sometimes write the words down repeatedly to remember them.

Tabel 4. Reports of memory strategy used by students

No	Statements	N	Mean		Mean Total
			Male	Female	
Q4	I test myself to check if I remember the words.	120	2.23	2.20	2.215
Q6	If I cannot remember a word in a conversation, I use another one with a similar meaning.	120	2.57	2.66	2.615
Q10	I say a word out loud repeatedly in order to remember it	120	1.73	2.17	1.95
Q11	I listen to songs in the foreign language and try to remember the lyrics	120	1.9	2.36	2.13
Q12	I pick up words from the Internet	120	2.2	2.67	2.43
Q14	I write down words repeatedly to remember them.	120	2.27	2.32	2.295
Q25	I connect words to physical objects to remember them	120	2.07	1.87	1.97
Mean Total			2.14	2.32	2.23

*yellow colored box shows the highest score

*red colored box shows the lowest score

For Q25, the result from 120 respondents for memory strategy is 2,07 for male respondents and 1,87 for female, even though female respondents' answer for memory strategy is a bit lower than male's, it still shows that both respondents sometimes connect words to physical objects to remember them in learning vocabulary.

Table 5 shows that for Q15, the result from 120 respondents for determination strategy is 1,7 for male and a bit higher from female respondents which is 2,23, indicating that male respondents rarely read and leaf through a dictionary to learn some new words while female respondents do it more often than male respondents. For Q19, the result from 120 respondents for determination strategy is 2,63 for male and 2,78 for female. It means that the respondents always translate the words into their mother tongue to understand the words.

Tabel 5. Reports of determination strategy used by students

No	Statements	N	Mean		Mean
			Male	Female	Total
Q15	I read and leaf through a dictionary to learn some new words.	120	1.7	2.23	1.965
Q19	I translate the words into my mother tongue to understand them.	120	2.63	2.78	2.705
Mean Total			2.165	2.505	2.335

*yellow colored box shows the highest score

*red colored box shows the lowest score

Discussions

Vocabulary learning strategies are steps taken by language learners to acquire new English words. There are four strategies in learning vocabulary, they are cognitive, metacognitive, memory, and determiner strategy. This paper tries to find out the type of strategy that students use to study English Vocabulary through the questionnaire given in this research.

The first is the cognitive strategy, cognitive strategy is a kind of behavior that helps learners master vocabulary through their daily life. Examples of this strategy are repetition, organizing new language, summarizing meaning, guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorization, etc.

Most of those activities are common activities in learners' daily activities. The data gained in this research elaborates on male and female learners' learning strategies. For male learners, the most frequently used strategy is to use new words in a sentence to remember them.

Other activities that they sometimes use to learn vocabulary are using word lists to check if they remember the word correctly, imagining a context in which a word could be used to remember the word, and remembering a word if they see it written down, so they will write down the word that they want to learn. Meanwhile, for female learners, they use new words in a sentence to become one of the most common strategies to learn vocabulary.

Other than this strategy, female learners also like to write down words while they read books or magazines or they may group words to remember them. Some of them will remember a word if they see it written down. From the data portrayed, we can see that transforming a mental image of a word to remember a word is the rarest strategy for both female and male learners, they rarely use this strategy to learn.

Another strategy that they seldom use is using spaced word practice to remember words and review words regularly outside the classroom. Those three strategies are rarely used by both female and male learners.

The next strategy is the metacognitive strategy, this strategy is related to processes involved in monitoring, decision-making, and evaluating the learners' progress in their language learning process. In other words, it means the processes designed for students to 'think' about their 'thinking' or to think about how they will learn.

An example of this strategy is planning how to learn vocabulary, self-assessing, and self-correcting in response to the self-assessment, evaluating the progress of learning language process, etc. In the questionnaire that respondents filled out, the

researchers put several metacognitive strategies to know what metacognitive strategies that learners usually use. The result shows both female and male students like to listen to songs in a foreign language and try to understand the words. This strategy helps them gain more vocabulary. From 5 statements the researchers put in the questionnaire, almost all of them got answers showing that learners sometimes use metacognitive strategy to help them in learning vocabulary.

Another strategy used to learn vocabulary is the memory strategy. In this strategy, learners link their learning of new words to their existing or background knowledge with the new words. Memory strategies involve correlating the word with previously learned information using some image or grouping format. An example of this strategy is learners make associations with words that sound or look similar to words in their native language, with this strategy they will easily memorize the word.

In the questionnaire given, there were 7 kinds of memory strategies that learners can use to learn. From those 7 strategies, using another word with a similar meaning, if they forget about a word when they are involved in a conversation, becomes the most frequent memory strategy used by both female and male learners. Memory strategy that male learners rarely use to learn vocabulary is saying a word out loud repeatedly to remember it, while for female learners, they nearly never connect words to physical objects. However, from the data, it was found that both female and male learners sometimes use this memory strategy to help them in learning vocabulary.

The last strategy is the determination strategy. This strategy is an individual learning strategy. In this strategy, learners will learn the word without using the experience of another person. Learners will discover the meaning of the new word through their efforts, with the help of context, structural knowledge, or the dictionary.

The researchers gave 2 determination strategies in the questionnaire and both of them show that learners sometimes use them. Translating the words into learners' mother tongue becomes the most frequent strategy the learners use. Meanwhile, female learners read and leaf through a dictionary to learn some new words more often than male learners. However, the determination strategy got the highest mean from all strategies, meaning that the learners use this strategy more often than other strategies. Yet, the most used strategy comes from cognitive strategy.

From the findings and discussion portrayed above, we can see that female learner use more strategies to learn vocabulary than male learners. From all strategies, using new words in a sentence to remember them is the most frequently used strategy. This strategy belongs to the cognitive strategy that learners highly use in their daily life.

Female and male students have different preferences in using strategies to learn vocabulary. Male learners prefer to imagine a context in which a word could be used to remember it, while female learners prefer to pick up words while reading books and magazines in the foreign language. Female learners are also likely to use more cognitive strategies to understand and produce the language such as repetition, note-taking, and translation than male learners.

Taking a dictionary, for example, is the most convenient resort available (if the internet is unavailable) for both male and female students to learn a new word and gain more specific examples of sentences, but the data showed that female students would find dictionary more useful than that for male students because the former intends to understand the full meaning and use after consulting the dictionary while

the latter always consider knowing the meaning is quite enough. Note-taking and repetition are also popular among female students since they help memorize words and sentence structures.

After analyzing the result of the research, it can be concluded that cognitive strategy is the most frequent strategy used by EFL learners. The cognitive strategy used that is frequently encountered by the respondents of this research is using new words in a sentence to remember them. While the least frequent strategy used by the respondents of this study also belongs to the cognitive strategy, which is making a mental image to remember the words.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As this study aims at investigating vocabulary strategies encountered by EFL learners at the tertiary level, some vocabulary strategies have been revealed. The first strategy is cognitive strategies. From this strategy, it can be concluded that using new words in a sentence to remember them is the most used strategy by male and female students. While the least cognitive strategy encountered by the respondents is making a mental image to remember it.

From the metacognitive strategies, the most frequent strategy used by female and male students is learning vocabulary through listening to songs in the foreign language and trying to understand the words that they hear. The metacognitive strategy that is rarely used by the respondents is writing down words when they watch films and TV programs.

From the memory strategies, the result implies that the respondents always use another word with a similar meaning if they cannot remember a word in a conversation. While the least frequent memory strategy used is saying a word out loud repeatedly to remember for male respondents and connecting words to physical objects for female respondents.

The last strategy is determination strategies. The most frequent strategy is that respondents always translate the words into their mother tongue. The least frequent strategy is that respondents rarely read and leaf through a dictionary.

The cognitive strategy is the most frequent strategy used by the respondents of this research. The respondents use new words in a sentence to remember them from time to time. While the least frequent strategy used by the respondents of this study is making a mental image to remember the words.

From this research, it can be seen that EFL learners learn vocabulary through several activities like listening to target language songs, watching English videos, and English TV programs. From this result, it is recommended for the EFL teachers and learners to do such fun activities to make students encounter vocabulary strategies.

This research has some weaknesses that can invite future researchers or English practitioners to work on this topic. This research only involves a small number of respondents. It is recommended for future researchers to gather more respondents and go deeper in discussing the vocabulary strategies used by language learners.

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