

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LEARNING

Alin Herliyana Putri
Institut Prima Bangsa
alinerliyanaputri@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in English language learning, as it influences how effectively students communicate. However, many students still struggle to master, remember, and use new vocabulary in real-life situations. This study aims to explore students' perspectives on vocabulary acquisition strategies in English language learning. It employs a qualitative descriptive design using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Pancalang, with data analyzed through thematic analysis to identify patterns in students' experiences and the strategies they use. The findings show that students see vocabulary as a key part of English proficiency and use a range of strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, which are applied flexibly depending on students' preferences, motivation, and learning context, reflecting a constructivist approach to learning. At the same time, students still face several challenges, such as limited vocabulary retention, low motivation, and difficulty using new words in real-life contexts. Overall, the study suggests that vocabulary learning becomes more effective when teaching strategies are adjusted to students' needs and supported by interactive, student-centered activities, which can help develop learners' engagement and support their vocabulary growth.

Keywords: students' perspectives, vocabulary acquisition strategies, English learning, learner autonomy, constructivist approach.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is crucial in English language learning, as it significantly influences students' ability to communicate, comprehend texts, and express ideas both orally and in writing. However, at the secondary education level, limited vocabulary knowledge remains a major obstacle to students' English proficiency and their confidence in using the language. Many students struggle not only with memorizing new words but also with using them appropriately in real-life situations. As noted by Richards and Renandya (2002), a strong vocabulary foundation enables students to comprehend spoken and written discourse and use English more accurately and flexibly across various contexts. However, in practice, vocabulary

instruction in many EFL classrooms still relies on traditional approaches, such as memorization and translation, which often fail to engage students or support long-term retention. This situation highlights the need for a better understanding of how students themselves experience and approach vocabulary learning.

Beyond limited vocabulary knowledge, another challenge lies in students' lack of awareness and independence in choosing effective learning strategies. Many learners tend to depend on teacher explanations and rarely explore other ways to develop their vocabulary more meaningfully. As a result, they often find it difficult to retain and use new words, especially in spontaneous communication. Despite the growing number of studies on vocabulary instruction, much of the existing research has focused on teaching methods rather than on how students perceive and use learning strategies in their own learning process. This gap raises important questions about students' roles as active learners. Therefore, this study addresses two main questions: (1) What are students' views on strategies that support their English learning? and (2) Which vocabulary acquisition strategies do they use most frequently and find most effective?

Based on these questions, this study aims to explore students' perspectives on vocabulary acquisition strategies and to identify the strategies they consider most beneficial for improving their English proficiency. The focus of this study is on students' experiences in applying cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies in vocabulary learning. By analyzing how students plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes, this study seeks to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between these various strategies and successful vocabulary development. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for teachers in designing more flexible and engaging vocabulary instruction that aligns with students' needs, preferences, and learning contexts, while also fostering more independent and reflective learning.

This study also makes both theoretical and practical contributions to English language teaching. Although previous research has explored the effectiveness of specific teaching approaches, such as digital tools or activity-based learning, attention to students' own perspectives and how they integrate various strategies into their daily learning remains limited. By adopting a constructivist perspective, this study positions students as active participants who construct knowledge through experience, reflection, and interaction. These findings are expected to enrich the understanding of student-centered vocabulary learning and support the development of more interactive and strategy-based teaching practices. Overall, this study emphasizes that vocabulary learning becomes more effective when grounded in students' perspectives, needs, and self-regulated learning processes..

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology to explore students' perspectives on vocabulary learning strategies in English language learning. Although this method meets quality requirements due to its ability to explore in depth students' personal experiences, reflections, and learning experiences, the aspects studied by the researcher have not yet reached an adequate level of expertise. This research was conducted at Cabo in State Junior High School No. 2 Pancalang, Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia. The research participants were students from eight classes who actively participated in English socialization activities. Participants were selected deliberately, based on criteria such as previous exposure to various vocabulary learning techniques, dispositions that included learning experiences, and regular assistance in English

classes. These criteria ensured that participants could provide detailed and relevant data in line with the research objectives. In addition, Professor Aula Ayudó identified students with varying levels of English proficiency, which allowed the researcher to obtain diverse information about vocabulary learning strategies.

Data collection was carried out using technical principles: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations began with the data collection process, sharing direct information about student actions, participation, and interaction dynamics during vocabulary learning centers. Researchers monitored activities such as note-taking, inferring word meanings from context, formulating questions, and integrating new vocabulary into sessions. Observations covered several sessions and documented structured formulations to ensure coherence. Next, semi-structured interviews with other selected students were conducted to understand individual experiences and reflections. Participants were given questions to help them understand the methods required to learn new vocabulary, the strategies they preferred, and the difficulties they encountered. Each session lasted between 20 and 30 minutes in a quiet room with enough space to create a relaxed atmosphere. With the participants' consent, all sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

The transcript data will be presented in a thematic analysis, which facilitates the identification of motivations and recurring themes related to students' strategies and perceptions. This process began with repeated revisions of observation notes and transcript entries to gain a holistic understanding of the material. Then, coding is carried out, which consists of additional key phrases and classifications into initial categories such as “cognitive strategies,” “metacognitive strategies,” “affective strategies,” and “social strategies.” These topics cover students' experiences, motivations, and difficulties in learning vocabulary. To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied, which involved comparing classroom observation data with results obtained from participants. This validation ensured consistency between student-related words and observed practices. This analysis procedure culminated in an interpretation of how these strategies reflect automatic adjustment behaviors and the ability to adapt to the surrounding environment. Behind all this is Marco's meticulous work, which provides a clear and applicable description of how high school students understand and utilize vocabulary acquisition strategies in English language learning, contributing to a core understanding of vocabulary acquisition studies in the context of English as a foreign language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that learners perceive vocabulary learning as an important element in English language acquisition and use various strategies to improve their knowledge. Classroom observations and semi-structured meetings revealed several key themes: (1) cognitive implications, (2) metacognitive awareness, (3) affective implications, and (4) social interaction. These themes illustrate how learners proactively develop their skills, adopting constructivist principles, such as evolving knowledge, reflection, and cooperative action.

Cognitive implications reveal the dominant strategies used by students. In general, repetition, note-taking and repeated contextual application improved vocabulary retention. For example, new terms are identified in the context of their organization or relationship to the situation, which facilitates memory consolidation. These observations support Oxford's (1990) description of cognitive strategies as mental mechanisms that facilitate comprehension and retention of linguistic information. The application of generalized repetition and contextualized learning is in line with Khatami and Ambarwati's (2023) experience. We have consistently observed that English language learning, like other foreign languages, uses recognizable tactics and concrete examples for similar new vocabulary, however while previous research presented memorization as a slow process, this study presents a more engaging approach for students using repetition in innovative forms, integrating them into coherent speech, or combining visualizations, suggesting a more dynamic and reflective approach to participation.

Metacognitive awareness is manifested in students' ability to elaborate strategies, monitor, and evaluate their learning progress. Many participants expressed a need for individual meta-regulation, such as mastering a set number of words within an hour or incorporating new terms into their dialogue. *Asimismo*, a reflection on the most effective methods, demonstrates the characteristics of self-regulated learning. This paragraph, from a constructivist perspective, suggests that students function as autonomous learners and have the ability to evaluate their understanding (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Compared to previous studies, such as Safitri (2024), which limited metacognitive strategies to self-evaluation, this study identified reflection and self-monitoring as processes that enhance emotional and motivational dimensions. The results suggest that students who understand their learning context will demonstrate self-efficacy and persistence in vocabulary learning.

When effective compromise occurred, participants described emotional factors—such as frustration, trust, and peer support—as having a significant impact on vocabulary learning efficacy. Many sought to learn vocabulary during conversations, games, or videos, confirming that these activities made practice more comfortable and less painful. This coincides with Aljasir (2025), who emphasized the importance of effective strategies for students' emotional modularity and initiating self-efficacy. Specifically, this study found that self-efficacy is not the sole contributing factor to the problem, but rather a fundamental component that holds compromise in place in most settings. The ability to associate positive feelings with vocabulary practice and learn from autonomous forms can alleviate the impact of effectively transforming vocabulary skills and mechanical skills into experiences that signify a personal level.

The final theme, social interaction, revealed that students often wanted to learn new vocabulary among their peers. Collaborative dialogue, re-adjustment between time and practice of animal conversation, and new uses in authentic contexts were easily facilitated when engaging in instruction and use. This idea aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Desirrollo Proximo (ZDP), which implicates interpersonal impulse interactions in cognitive development. This data was sent to more studios from Toha et al. (2023), who also sought to explore participatory tools, such as video blogs and collaborative platforms, that leverage vocabulary retention. In this study, students described these interactions as a dual-purpose field—educational as well as motivational—that allows for validation of understanding and builds confidence in it. This suggests that social strategies are not only employed by the community.

CONCLUSION

This study examines students' views on vocabulary acquisition strategies in English language learning and identifies which strategies they consider most effective. The findings indicate that students tend to use a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies when learning new vocabulary. These strategies do not operate in isolation but work together flexibly. Cognitive strategies, such as repetition and use in context, aid in retention; metacognitive strategies support self-planning and self-monitoring; affective strategies, such as learning through songs or games, help maintain motivation and reduce anxiety; and social strategies provide students with opportunities to practice and build self-confidence through interaction. Overall, these findings suggest that vocabulary learning is not a static process, but rather a dynamic and largely self-directed one, shaped by reflection, motivation, and collaboration. This also supports the constructivist view that learning develops through active engagement, not through passive memorization.

From a theoretical point of view, this study adds to the understanding of learner-centered vocabulary learning by highlighting the role of strategic awareness and flexibility. In practice, the results suggest that teachers need to move beyond rigid teaching methods and create learning environments that are more adaptive, interactive, and supportive of students' independence. At the same time, this study has some limitations, as it was conducted with a relatively small group of students in a single junior high school, which may limit how far the findings can be generalized. Future research could involve a wider and more varied group of participants or use a mixed-methods approach to explore how vocabulary strategies develop over time, especially in digital learning contexts. Overall, this study highlights the importance of paying attention to students' perspectives as a basis for designing more meaningful vocabulary instruction and supporting long-term language development in EFL settings..

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