

**TEACHER'S STRATEGY IN IMPROVING STUDENT VOCABULARY MASTERY  
AT MTS MARDHATILLAH HIDAYATULLAH PALEMBANG**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Learning English vocabulary is essential for the improvement of students' language ability. Students should learn as much vocabulary as possible to establish good communication with other students. This study aims to investigate teacher's strategy in improving student vocabulary mastery at MTs Mardhatillah Palembang as one of learning strategies outside of class activities. This study uses descriptive qualitative research where the researcher implements interview and observation as data collection techniques. The researcher used observation to understand the school environment where students learn English. To find out the student vocabulary mastery as learning strategies which is used by the teacher, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with the teachers and students as participants. The results showed that students most often used meta-cognitive strategies to improve their English vocabulary.

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**Kata kunci**

Penguasaan kosakata,  
Strategi Belajar,  
Strategi Mengajar,

Mempelajari kosakata bahasa Inggris sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa siswa. Siswa harus mempelajari kosakata sebanyak mungkin untuk membangun komunikasi yang baik dengan siswa lain. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi guru dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata siswa di MTs Mardhatillah Palembang sebagai salah satu strategi pembelajaran di luar kegiatan belajar mengajar. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dimana peneliti menggunakan wawancara dan observasi sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Peneliti menggunakan observasi untuk memahami lingkungan sekolah tempat siswa belajar bahasa Inggris. Untuk mengetahui penguasaan kosakata siswa sebagai strategi pembelajaran yang digunakan oleh guru, peneliti menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru dan siswa sebagai partisipan.

## Introduction

Learning a new language cannot begin without knowing the words of the previous language. Since language is a means of communication, lexical knowledge or vocabulary knowledge of the language becomes the main thing in language learning. Therefore, lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and second language acquisition (Schmitt., 2000). Regarding the need for vocabulary learning, the role of learners in the development of their vocabulary learning is an important issue to study. Since vocabulary learning cannot only be done in the classroom without practice outside the classroom, learners should build their learning strategies, especially for their vocabulary development.

In addition, learning sessions outside the classroom have important support for learners in vocabulary development. Learners need to transfer what they have learned in class, and also choose the suitability of strategies for learning. As suggested by Nation and Moir. (2008) that learners need to know how to learn vocabulary and monitor their progress. For example, the use of the internet, multimedia, games, diaries/journals, and social activities involving English can improve students' vocabulary acquisition.

The importance of vocabulary learning strategies and the influence of internal and external factors cannot be separated. Students' use of learning strategies is mainly influenced by their language learning processes and activities in the context of the environment. Previously, Chamot. (2004) mentioned that learners' goals, the context of the learning situation, and learners' cultural values can be expected to have a strong influence on the choice and acceptance of language learning strategies.

In Indonesia, researchers and practitioners have previously studied the use of vocabulary learning strategies and their relationship with vocabulary skills. students' language, students' proficiency level, and students' use of vocabulary learning strategies (Asyiah., 2017; Besthia., 2018; Rahmatika et al., 2017; Rionaldi & Saputra., 2016). Most of the research was conducted with college-level learners regarding their needs for English language acquisition. However, there are also studies regarding how students use their vocabulary learning strategies according to the learning environment. In other words, the context of learning, the factors in which students learn the language, and the facilities provided in learning are crucial for learners' language development. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the strategies used by students, as well as the factors that influence students' learning strategies. In addition, this study aims to find out how the elements in language learning affect the strategies used by students.

In this study, the researcher focuses on students living in a boarding school that implements a language program through daily conversations and some other extracurricular activities to improve vocabulary acquisition. In this boarding school, students are required to communicate in English and Arabic after three months of entering the school. In addition, the school implements several language programs in extracurricular activities to help students in their language development. Driven by the rationality that

students must communicate in English in their boarding school, the researcher aims to investigate how students fulfill the requirement through self-learning practices. Thus, pedagogical implications for the research results are an important part of the discussion.

The term learning strategy in language learning is defined by Oxford and Scarcella. (1994). Learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that used by students to enhance their learning (Scarcella & Oxford., 1992; Oxford., 2003). In other words, learning strategies are concerned with how learners choose some actions to help them in the development of linguistic knowledge.

The definitions of language learning are sorted and briefly explained by Brown. (2000) as follows; (1) Learning is acquisition or getting; (2) Learning is the storage of information or skills; (3) Retention implies storage systems, memory, and cognitive organization; (4) Learning involves active and conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism; (5) Learning is relatively permanent but can be forgotten; (6) Learning involves some form of practice, possibly reinforced practice; (7) Learning is a change in behavior. In addition, Chamot. (1998) states that learning strategies are students' thoughts and actions that they can apply to improve their understanding. From the definition mentioned by Brown. (2000), we can conclude that language learning should demand active, participatory, and behavioral actions from learners towards their learning.

Successful language learning is the goal of every language learner. Richard. (2014) proposes two main components related to successful language learning, namely: what happens in the classroom and what happens outside the classroom. In language learning, strategies related to how students behave towards their learning process are very important. Learning strategies have an important role to play for students' language skills. The term learning strategy has been discussed by researchers, and there are differences regarding the definition of strategy. Some definitions of language learning strategies from experts are mentioned by Griffith. (2008) in his book 'good language learners,' namely (1) Action; (2) Awareness; (3) Optional or utilizing available information to develop competence in the second language; (4) Implies or orientation to goals and activities aimed at learners; (5) Rules to control student learning.

The classification of language learning strategies has many differences. There are two general classifications used by researchers in conducting research (Oxford., 1990; O'Malley & Chamot., 1990). Oxford. (1990) classifies strategies into two parts namely direct strategies and indirect strategies. Furthermore, the two parts were categorized into six sub-classifications of learning strategies, such as; meta-cognitive strategies (helping them plan, organize, and self-evaluate their studies), memory strategies (helping them remember new language items), cognitive strategies (thinking about and understanding the new language), compensatory strategies (helping them compensate for lack of knowledge), affective strategies (students' feelings about the new language), and social strategies (involving interaction with others).

In addition, O'Malley and Chamot. (1990) divided learning strategies into three classifications, including metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Meta-cognitive strategies refer to higher-level executive strategies such as planning, monitoring, thinking about the learning process, and self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies refer to awareness of handling learning materials, techniques, and linguistic inputs. In addition, social/affective strategies refer to interpersonal strategies related to students' personal psychology, emotional states, and experiences.

Language learning is also influenced by factors related to the learners' environment. Oxford. (1990) mentions several factors that influence students' language learning strategies: (1) Motivation (more motivated students tend to use more strategies than less motivated students); (2) Gender (students) (3) Cultural background (Asian students tend to apply memorization than other cultural backgrounds); (4) Attitudes and beliefs (negative attitudes and beliefs lead to poor strategy use); (5) Task type (the task helps to determine the strategy as it is executed); (6) Age and L2 stage (age and L2 stage differences of students affect the choice of strategies); (7) Learning style (general approach to language learning determines the choice of learning strategies); and (8) Ambiguity tolerance (more tolerant students tend to use different strategies than students with less ambiguity).

Vocabulary learning strategies are a branch of language learning strategies. Foreign language learners often find difficulties regarding their vocabulary learning strategies. In addition, Ghazal. (2007) says that although learning vocabulary is a challenge for foreign language learners, learners can use various vocabulary learning strategies to overcome these challenges. Therefore, strategies used in vocabulary learning are an important topic to discuss in the realm of applied linguistics.

As for the definition of vocabulary learning strategies, it has previously been mentioned by researchers. Behbahani. (2015) mentioned some important things about vocabulary learning strategies used by students; (1) keyword method; (2) vocabulary flash cards (flash cards); (3) guessing words from context; (4) word part learning (5) repetition. For foreign language learners, learning vocabulary is not as easy as acquiring a first language, so strategies for learning a foreign language must be diverse and interesting. Researchers have proposed two main approaches to vocabulary learning in a learned language, and they are: 'explicit learning' or vocabulary learning when the focus is on the words to be learned, and 'incidental learning' or learning vocabulary as additional knowledge from any language learning activity, such as reading or listening, (Sonbul & Schmitt., 2013). Explicit learning refers to a direct approach where vocabulary learning is the main focus, whereas implicit learning refers to indirect vocabulary learning where students recognize words from reading or listening to them.

There are various classifications or taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies, but all classifications have a common meaning. Ghazal. (2007) mentions the taxonomy in vocabulary learning strategies namely: (1) Knowing the word involves knowledge (of the general frequency of its use, syntactic and situational constraints on its use); (2) Its basic

form and derivable forms, its network of semantic features; and (3) its semantic features; (4) The various meanings associated with the item.

In addition, the taxonomy by Schmitt. (1997) in vocabulary learning strategies is a standard instrument for researchers to analyze students' vocabulary learning strategies. Schmitt. (1997) classifies vocabulary learning strategies into five taxonomies namely (1) Determination strategy: finding meaning without the help of expertise; (2) Social strategy: involves interaction with others; (3) Memory strategy: connects new words with previously known knowledge; (4) Cognitive strategies: manipulating or changing the learned words; (5) Metacognitive strategies: involving awareness of the learning process.

Some researchers point out that language researchers emphasize research related to learners' learning processes and strategies, through retrospective interviews, interviews to recall the learning process, questionnaires, written diaries and journals, and think-aloud protocols in conjunction with learning tasks (Chamot, 2004). In this discussion, there are several studies on learning strategies vocabulary. Most of the studies were geared towards university students, but the participants were not only majoring in English language teaching and learning (Asyiah., 2017; Saengpakdeejit., 2014; Yazdi & Kafipour., 2014).

In addition, Asyiah (2017) conducted her study in one private secondary school in Bandung. Then, researchers have differences regarding the objectives, methods, and procedures in the study. Thus, the three studies conducted by Yazdi and Kafipour. (2014) and Saengpakdeejit. (2014), classify the findings with the same analysis of Schmitt. (1997) vocabulary learning strategy (VLS). Therefore, this study used Schmitt's classification of vocabulary learning strategies. (2000), because the classification used has a wide range of strategies as sub- classifications.

According to the problems stated in the research background, the researcher pointed out two research questions, and that is how do students learn vocabulary in their language learning activities? And what strategies do they use most often in their language learning?

## Method

This study utilized a qualitative research design because the research is conducted in the actual setting of one phenomenon where students learn English through their daily conversational practices (Hamied., 2017). In addition, the researcher took two interviews involving the students and the teachers. The students' interviews showed the strategies they applied in independent learning whether the school provided them or not. Thus, the teacher interviews are expected to provide information about the pedagogical implications of the language improvement strategies implemented in boarding schools.

The research subjects were 3rd year of junior high school students. They lived in a boarding school that implements language learning inside and outside the classroom. The researcher took some students as research participants as selective that be based on

teacher recommendations. In this case, the students who were involved in this study are considered to have language competence and also have the responsibility to organize the language improvement program for all students in the school. Their involvement in English classes and extracurricular activities is expected to provide more information in their vocabulary learning strategies. Thus, the vocabulary teaching and learning strategies obtained are diverse.

There are two instruments used in this study, namely: observation and student interviews. Observation was conducted to get information about the boarding school where the students live including the environment and programs implemented in the school. Then, the primary data collection of this study is students' interviews related to their vocabulary learning strategies during their out-of-class learning sessions. The analysis of students' interview results is based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. The taxonomy includes; (1) Determination strategies; (2) Social strategies; (3) Memory strategies; (4) Cognitive strategies; and (5) Metacognitive strategies (Schmitt, 1997). In addition, the pedagogical implications of the strategies used by students and the strategies provided by schools are presented along with teacher interviews.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this study are divided into Schmitt's (2000) five classifications of vocabulary learning strategies, including determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies.

### A. Determination strategy

Determination strategy refers to how students discover the meaning of new words without expert help, Schmitt. (1997). In this study, there are some examples of determination strategies used by students, such as; guessing the meaning from the text even if they do not understand the meaning of every word in the text. When they enjoy their reading, they try to grasp the meaning of the words from the context of their reading rather than bothering themselves to find the meaning in a dictionary or the like. So, when they finish reading, they try to find the real meaning of the difficult words. Another student, likes to carry a dictionary to look up the difficult words he wants to say. He used to carry a dictionary wherever he went. He stated that learning English was not dominant in the dormitory, so he tried to find a solution to improve her English by carrying a dictionary wherever he went. Thus, Schmitt. (2010) also stated that learners do dictionaries, not grammar books, for their language learning.

Two strategies, namely finding meaning from reading passages and using dictionaries in learning new words are mostly found to be vocabulary learning strategies, where students prefer to learn by themselves rather than asking their teachers or friends (Al-khasawneh., 2012; Saengpakdeejit., 2014; Mustofa., 2011; Asyiah., 2017). In other words, reading passages from books and dictionaries helps students improve their vocabulary knowledge through their independent learning. In addition, Nematollahi et



al. (2017) mentioned that guessing meaning from context and using dictionaries are the most preferred strategies used by successful students.

### **B. Social strategy**

Social strategy refers to how students practice using familiar vocabulary by practicing with their friends (Schmitt., 1997). In this study, the participants indicated that learning with friends was more interesting than just learning with the teacher. Although learning with teachers can give them a lot of language input, learning with friends will boost their confidence.

in using language. Thus, interacting with friends continues to develop their vocabulary bank driven by the random topics they talk about. In addition, another student said that listening to friends talk helped him a lot in improving his vocabulary knowledge. Instead of learning vocabulary by himself by reading or memorizing, he agreed that learning with friends can avoid monotonous learning strategies.

### **C. Memory strategy**

Referring to the use of memory strategies, two students reported that they used the strategy of memorizing English words in vocabulary learning. The first information shows that the student tries to memorize words related to the lessons in class to make it easier for him to understand the learning materials. In addition, memorizing words related to the lessons taught by the teacher helps him understand the texts and passages as learning materials. However, another response shows the student's unique habit. The second response in the memory strategy is also used by the student where she tries to memorize all the words in the dictionary by tearing each page and memorizing it step by step. He tore off one page, then he memorized it. After memorizing the words on the torn page, he kept the page again to tear another page. Unfortunately, she stopped doing this when she got to about page twenty. She found it difficult to keep trying to memorize English words that way.

This strategy is in line with research by Yang and Dai. (2011) that they found Chinese students mostly memorize word lists when they learn vocabulary. They also mentioned that for most Chinese students, learning English means memorizing a certain number of words a day and reading as many books as possible. However, memory strategy is known as an old strategy for learning language. The memorization strategy may occur because students lack knowledge of other learning strategies. As an emphasis on this strategy, Wang and Kelly, (2013) conducted their study on introducing students to technical learning other than memorization. Thus, they found that memorization was less beneficial for students after they were introduced to three vocabulary learning techniques, including; mnemonic techniques, original sentence production, and vocabulary drills or exercises.

#### D. Cognitive strategy

Referring to the cognitive strategies used by the students, some responses pointed to the types of strategies used by the students. The first response said that students often try to talk to themselves or to the animals (cats) around them to practice English. Having practice speaking in English may have a significant impact on building students' confidence in using the language. Another response, according to this, is also that students respond by saying that if they usually use the vocabulary, they can master it. In other words, they are more accustomed to using familiar vocabulary when they often try to use it. These two responses are in line with students' awareness of recognizing language by applying what they are interested in. Cognitive strategy is the way students practice the vocabulary they have learned (Schmitt., 1997). Thus, the way students practice talking to themselves or talking to what is around them is the process in which they can expand their vocabulary learning.

#### E. Metacognitive strategies

The last category found from the student interview sessions is the application of meta-cognitive vocabulary learning strategies. This strategy refers to how students are aware of their learning, including how they can overcome their lack of vocabulary knowledge. There were three responses referring to the example of meta-cognitive strategies used by the students; first, one respondent said that *"I felt very helped by the lessons in class."* The student who made this comment explained that the lessons taught in class helped him improve his vocabulary mastery. Since there were various texts presented as learning materials, this student found them very helpful in improving her vocabulary.

Secondly, another respondent said that *"I usually use the Joox app, because it gives me the lyrics directly."* This action may not be unique to students living in this boarding school. However, the student who used this vocabulary learning strategy explained that he usually learns music while looking at the lyrics when he is visited. He learns English with the support of his parents, not only at school but also at home. Parental support by facilitating their children with language media can be applied by providing information, materials, and resources (Torres & Castañeda-Peña., 2016). However, the other responses were similar but different in source. An additional answer said that *"I listen to Zakir Naik's speeches; otherwise, I learn from fantasy movies"*. Rather than listening to music, this student preferred to learn through native speakers' speeches or conversations through movies. Although incidental listening can help learners in improving their vocabulary, it cannot lead them to gain great mastery of vocabulary compared to reading (Zeeland., 2013).

In contrast to this argument, Cohen. (2008) claims that listening can be used as a strategy for better vocabulary acquisition, as well as reducing students' time allocation



compared to reading. In other words, listening may not be suitable for students to acquire vocabulary. which is good. However, due to a lack of interest in reading, listening strategies can be beneficial to increase word retention for their language development.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the data generated from this study, the researcher briefly describes some pedagogical implications regarding vocabulary learning for students' language development. Self-regulation plays an important role in vocabulary learning strategies. Students are required to follow the dormitory rules to speak in English. However, if the teachers do not emphasize students' motivation to learn their language, there will be no significant effect for them to learn the language.

The importance of raising teachers' and students' awareness of the existence of materials and opportunities in language learning helps teachers and learners develop their language learning (Gil., 2008). Students in this study mentioned that they tend to read books to improve their vocabulary, but the school does not facilitate them to do so. Therefore, providing students with a small library will help them find their learning tools. On the other hand, due to the lack of technological media in schools, teachers should provide media in their language learning.

Oral tests can help learners to enrich their vocabulary acquisition. Orienting exams to learn vocabulary may reduce students' interest, but when the vocabulary used in exams is diverse and gradually increased, it will implicitly lead learners to develop their vocabulary mastery. In addition, oral exams are not only held to test students' vocabulary mastery, but can also be a medium to find out how students understand their vocabulary through interaction with the examiner.

Creating an environment for Their learning is largely influenced to promote their language knowledge through practice with friends or coworkers (Kameli *et al.*, 2012). Creating an English language environment is a practical way to help learners gain more language input. The factor of teachers as language models is an important part to consider in students' language learning. As stated by Kacani and Cyfeku. (2015), there are three factors that influence vocabulary acquisition; teacher skills, learner skills, and language features. Therefore, of the three factors, the teachers are prioritized as the students' helpers for language development.

In the context of classroom learning, one way to help learners acquire language is to equip learners with various vocabulary learning strategies (Ghazal., 2007). Since learners are the objects of classroom teaching and learning activities, to make them aware of their out-of-class session learning, it is important for teachers to equip them with learning strategies to help them learn independently.

## Conclusion

Language learning strategies are a discussion in the study of language learning but still need consideration from experts and teachers to make up-to-date information. Language learning strategies, particularly vocabulary learning strategies, are at the core of second and foreign language learning. Since this study found that students still continue to use memorization strategies and use dictionaries to improve their vocabulary development, teachers and curriculum designers should emphasize on introductory materials various learning strategies using authentic learning tools. Thus, learners can find new and interesting strategies for independent learning.

## Declarations

### Author Contribution

**Tiara Eliza:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Original draft preparation.

**Wulandari Berliani:** Investigation, Reviewing and Editing

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### Conflict of Interest

The Authors, Tiara Eliza and Wulandari Berliani are listed immediately below certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as: honoraria: educational Grants: stock ownerships or other equity interest and expert testimony or patent licensing arrangement), or nonfinancial interest (such as personal or professional relationship, affiliation, knowledge or belief) in the subject matter or material discussed in this manuscript

### Additional Information

No additional information is available for this paper

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