

INVESTIGATING OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) used by undergraduate students (S1) of 6th semester and how they learned or acquired VLSs. In addition, the study compares the use of VLSs between low and high achievers of undergraduate students that consisted of 30 students. An explanatory sequential mixed research method was implemented in this study. The corroboration was used employing a questionnaire adapted from Schmitt's taxonomy (Classification of VLSs) as the instruments. As for the qualitative approach, the writer conducted interviews to explore how the students acquired VLSs. The research report showed that the mean score indicated the uses of Determination strategies are most frequently used by both of achiever. Likewise, the least frequently used vocabulary learning strategy was Social strategies (Consolidation). There were no great differences found in using vocabulary learning strategies between the low and high achievers and they learn the most frequently used strategy in several situations such as, course, organization, English club, media, and etcetera. Effective vocabulary learning and teaching strategies need to be incorporated into students' vocabulary learning process.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs), Schmitt's Taxonomy

Introduction

In the study by (Penha, 2006) points out that no reading, writing, speaking, listening, or literature-based activity discussion can be conducted with learners without providing them with the conventional vocabulary to perform the activity.

It consequently goes without saying that vocabulary building is one of the most important aspects of learning a foreign language or second language, and words may therefore be considered as the foundation stones and building blocks of any language. For this reason, building learners' vocabulary knowledge is critical to the overall language development, because all language skills are dependent upon vocabulary learning strategies becomes a must.

Nirattisai and Chiramanee (2014) entice language teachers to give concern in vocabulary learning strategies and the importance of the strategies in order to encourage students to use these strategies because the use of vocabulary learning strategies can lead students to large vocabulary size. It is important to explicitly teach students vocabulary learning strategies, if we expect students to enhance their vocabulary. Likewise, (Ghazal, 2007) mentioned that one way to lessen the burden of foreign language learners' challenges is to assist them by teaching them how to apply vocabulary learning strategies.

The growing importance of vocabulary has been evident not only in second/foreign language teaching and learning in a wider context of the world, but also in Indonesian context of English Foreign Language (EFL). Cahyono and Widiati (2008) stated that a great number of Indonesian writers, in fact, considered vocabulary as essential as grammar and recommended that vocabulary be given a greater emphasis in Indonesian curriculum. For undergraduate students learning English vocabulary, the awareness of vocabulary learning strategies can assist them in successfully learning and retaining new English vocabulary.

Regarding English learning and teaching at STAIN Parepare, English as a foreign language is provided to student English Program as compulsory. Apart from the main English program of their majors, English program students have to study English as fundamental course. In fact, in the field of English language learning there are many factors that have an effect to undergraduate student's low English learning proficiency such as, students' learning styles, students' background, teachers' styles, and so on. One

of the most difficult problems of unsuccessful English instruction is that students lack particular vocabulary knowledge which can influence students' reading comprehension, not able to express and communicate well.

Learning vocabulary is not easy, the writer have been conducting observation and interview several undergraduate students in order to find out their vocabulary learning strategies. From this observation and interview the writer find out that one of the students' problems in studying vocabulary is that they are easy to memorize, but they do not remember it in long time. It means that vocabularies which they have learned are easy to forget. Referring to this case, students have different strategies in learning vocabulary, because they have different characteristics, interest, and motivation.

Every undergraduate students have certain ways in learning, since they are different with each other and they learn differently too. They will choose the strategy that is suitable to their own personal learning style. By choosing the suitable strategies, it will become effective and joyful learning which can improve their vocabularies. They will become easy to memorize and they have strong retention in their memorization, more motivated by using their own learning strategies, increasing their language skills, and self-confidence to become independent learners. The study of Masrurin (2012), the use of appropriate learning strategies often results in increased language proficiency and greater self-confidence. So, we can conclude that learning strategies is very important in learning language, especially in learning vocabulary as one foundation in order to become successful English learners.

There have been a number of research studies on classification of vocabulary learning strategies over the last several decades. Among these classification, one of the well-known and well-accepted is that by Schmitt who divides vocabulary learning strategies into 5 sub-categories: (1) Determination (DET), used by individual to discover a word's meaning without consulting other people. (2) Social (SOC), a way to learn a new word by interacting with other people. (3) Memory (MEM), connecting a new word with formely learned knowledge. (4) Cognitive (COG), similar to memory strategies but focusing on manipulative mechanical process. (5) Metacognitive (MET), process of learning and making decisions about planning, monitoring, and evaluating the best way to study. The writer is not only interest in investigating about how these

five categories of VLSs are used by undergraduate students, but also interest to find out whether there are any differences in the use of VLSs by undergraduate students with high and low academic achievement levels.

Based on the description above, this brings about the focus of this study, which aims to investigate undergraduate students' vocabulary learning strategies. The knowledge of specific VLSs use to English language learning by the undergraduate students of STAIN Parepare will undoubtedly provide teachers with ideas to employ different strategies in vocabulary teaching and encourage their use both in and out of the classroom for future English language learners.

Based on the statement above, the researcher would like to formulate some research: 1) What are the most and the least frequently vocabularies learning strategies used by undergraduate students at STAIN Parepare? 2) How did the undergraduate students learn or acquire English vocabulary learning strategies? 3) Are there any differences in using vocabulary learning strategies by high and low achievers?

Method

An explanatory sequential mixed research method is implemented in this study (quantitative-qualitative method). An explanatory sequential mixed research method is one in which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyzes the results and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative research. It is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results are explained further with qualitative research. It is considered sequential because the initial quantitative phase is followed by qualitative phase. The research was used interview, documentation and questionnaire as the instrument of this research.

Results

This part presents the result of data analysis of Vocabulary Learning Strategies used by undergraduate students of STAIN Parepare. The data were taken from 30 undergraduate students of sixth semester (S1) which was divided into two groups, high and low achievers. In order to take the data, the questionnaire and interview were used to find out the undergraduate students Vocabulary Learning Strategies. This part one

was general information of low achievers and high achievers. The details of Table 1 and Table 2 are shown below:

Table 1. The Respondents' of Low Achievers General Information.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	13	86,67
Male	2	13,33
Total	15	100
Age		
20 years old	8	53,33
21 years old	6	40,00
more than 21 years old	1	6,67
Total	15	100
Year of English Learning		
3-5 years	2	13,33
5-10 years	11	73,33
more than 10 years	2	13,33
Total	15	100

From Table 1, approximately 86,67 percent of the respondents were female. More than half of the undergraduate students were 20 years of age (53,33%). The majority of undergraduate students (73,33%) have studied English around 5-10 years. All 15 undergraduate students are the low achievers who got the average grade of English under than 3,70.

Table 2. The Respondents' of High Achievers General Information

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	14	93,33
Male	1	6,67
Total	15	100
Age		
20 years old	8	53,33
21 years old	4	26,67
more than 21 years old	3	20,00
Total	15	100
Year of English Learning		
3-5 years	0	0,00
5-10 years	7	46,67
more than 10 years	8	53,33
Total	15	100

From Table 2, the information data showed that most of the undergraduate students who got high achievement were female (93, 33%). While, there was no different percentage between low and high achievers in age (53,33%). But the high achievers have more experience in learning English, since more than half of them have been studied English more than 10 years (53, 33%). All 15 undergraduate students are the high achievers who got the average grade of English more than 3, 70.

The Findings from Part two of The Questionnaire (Low Achievers).

The finding shows that in six categories, the respondents of low achievers most frequently used Determination at the highest mean score (2,61). Meanwhile, the least used strategies were Social (Consolidation) strategies with the lowest mean score (1,66). Table 9 shows the overall of strategy use.

Table 3. Overall of Strategy Use.

Strategy Category	Mean (X)
Determination	2,42
Social (Discovery)	2,20
Social (Consolidation)	1,66
Memory	2,21
Cognitive	2,22
Metacognitive	2,23

The Findings from Part Two of the Questionnaire (High Achievers).

The finding shows that in six categories, the respondents of high achievers most frequently used Determination at the highest mean score (2,61). Meanwhile, the least used strategies were Social (Consolidation) strategies with the lowest mean score (1,66).

Table 16 shows the overall of strategy use.

Table 4. Overall of Strategy Use.

Strategy Category	Mean (X)
Determination	2,53
Social (Discovery)	1,89
Social (Consolidation)	1,63
Memory	2,20
Cognitive	2,33
Metacognitive	2,42

The Findings from Part Three of the Interviews (Low Achievers).

Question 1: How long have you studied English?

Based on the result of interview for question 1 revealed that 2 respondents have studied English around 5 years, 1 respondent in 7 years, 4 respondents in 8 years, 4 respondents in 9 years, 1 respondent in 11 years as well as 3 respondents studied English more and less 12 years.

Question 2: How do you think about learning English and why do you choose English Program?

There were 4 different opinion or answer from question 2. 3 of 15 respondents of low achievers had same opinion about learning English and their reasons for choosing English Program as their major. For example respondent 1 stated:

Respondent 1: “In my opinion learning English is not quite difficult. Even though, English program is not my own choice. Substantively, I perforce to take English Program because of my parents and my aunt encouraged me as well to take English Program, since my aunt is an English teacher.”

Whereas, 7 of 15 students stated learning English is quite difficult but they enjoyed in learning English. For instance respondent 5 and 14 stated:

Respondent 14: “English is difficult but interesting, I think. Actually, I like very much to hear people talking in English, so decided to learn English so, I can be able to be like them too.”

In the other hand, 3 of 15 respondents said English is important. The respondent’s response as follow:

Respondent 7: “English is important, since it is international language and I think after graduate, I can easy to find job.”

Then, 2 of 15 respondents said English is a language that interesting to learn. For instance:

Respondent 11: “In my opinion English is interesting language. Since I was child my ambition to become English teacher. I choose English program because I want to be a teacher as I said before.”

Question 3: Except campus, what other sources do you use to learn English vocabulary learning strategies?

It has been found that there were three different sources. The respondent’s response as follow:

Respondent 1: “Except campus, making discussion with them is my source to learn English. I always interact with my friends.”

Other respondents stated that they use English media, there were 6 of 15 respondents have the same sources, for example:

Respondent 3: “I like to watch western movies and listening to western songs.”

Course also is quite famous as a source of respondents to learn English, 6 from 15 students stated that course became their source to learn English except campus.

While, 1 of them stated course and organization became their source to learn English except campus. The respondent's responses as follows:

Respondent 6 : "Actually I ever joined course and language organization."

Question 4: What vocabulary learning strategies do you use to help you learn vocabulary?

The following are sample of quotes from participants, regarding their use of strategies in learning vocabulary:

Respondent 9: "I think.....dictionary, I used both monolingual and bilingual dictionary."

Respondent 11: "Usually I take notes when I found new or unfamiliar words. Next, I tried to find the meaning the words in dictionary. After that I classified the words into part of speech. Then I memorize the words."

Question 5: Are the strategies you use to learn vocabulary encouraged by your English teachers/lectures or have you learned them on your own?

The respondents' comment on this question of interview corroborated the unbalance between teacher/lecturer encouraged an undergraduate students-used vocabulary. Based on the results of interview more than half students said that strategies they used are encouraged by themselves (10 of 15 respondents). The following is a sample of quotes from participants:

Respondent 1: "Actually, no encouraging from lecturer, so I learned them on my own."

Whereas only 5 respondents stated the strategies that they used are encouraged by teacher or lecturer and learned by their ownself.

Respondent 4: "Actually it is encouraged by my lecturer but I learned it by my ownself too."

The Findings from Part Three of the Interviews (High Achievers).

Question 1: How long have you studied English?

Based on the result of interview for question 1 revealed that 1 respondent have been learned English 8 years, 4 respondents in 9 years, 2 respondents in 10 years, 4 respondents in 11 years, 1 respondent in 12 years, 1 respondent in 14 years, and 2 respondents in 16 years.

Question 2: How do you think about learning English and why do you choose English Program?

3 of 15 respondents of high achievers had same opinion about learning English and their reasons for choosing English Program as their major. For example respondent 1 stated:

Respondent 1: "I think learning English is interesting. The reason I choose English as my major because I interest in it. I interest to study in English."

Besides, 4 of 15 respondents gave opposite response. The following is the quotes of response from several respondents:

Respondent 7: "During my time in learning English, I found many difficult things....but I like the way we pronounce the words, it's very interesting for me. I chose English program because I love English so much."

Whereas, 6 of 15 respondents stated learning English were interesting, challenging, unique and they enjoyed in learning English. In the other hand, 2 of 15 respondents said English is important. The respondent's response as follow:

Respondent 3: "English is important, since it is international language and I the reason I chose English because I like to learn it."

Question 3: Except campus, what other sources do you use to learn English vocabulary learning strategies?

According to the result of high achievers responses, more than half of respondents took English course and joined organization as the sources to learn English, (11 of 15 respondents) from those sources they learned English vocabulary learning strategies. The following are quotes from several respondents:

Respondent 7: "Yes I do. I have another source to learn English, I ever joined course and now I have been joining organization in campus namely, LIBAM."

The rest of the respondents, 4 of 15 respondents were using English media as source to learn English.

Question 4: What vocabulary learning strategies do you use to help you learn vocabulary?

There were variants answers or responses from this question of interview. 4 of 15 respondents revealed they used memorizing strategy to help them to learn vocabulary. The following are quotes from several respondents that used memorizing strategies:

Respondent 1: “Vocabulary learning strategy that I used to learn vocabulary is memorizing.”

Respondent 4: “I always memorize. Sometimes I record my voice and then I try to memorize it.”

Besides memorizing, 7 of 15 respondents used listening western songs and watching western movies. The quotes from several respondents as follows:

Respondent 5: “One of my strategies to improve or learn new vocabulary is watching western movie and listening to the music.”

Another strategy that respondents used in learning vocabulary is reading. 3 of 15 respondents are using that strategy. The quotes from respondents as follows:

Respondent 11: “My strategy to learn vocabulary is reading. When I read the text I tried to find the new words then memorize it.”

Question 5: Are the strategies you use to learn vocabulary encouraged by your English teachers/lectures or have you learned them on your own?

Based on the results of interview more than half students said the strategies that they used are learned by themselves (8 of 15 respondents). The following is a sample of quotes from participants:

Respondent 2: “of course the strategy that I used in learning especially vocabulary is from my ownself not encouraging from the others.”

Whereas 4 of 15 respondents stated the strategies that they use to learn vocabulary are encouraged by tutor, teacher/lecture, and 3 of 15 respondents learned by both lecture and their ownself. The following is a sample of quotes from participants:

Respondent 7: “The strategies that I use encouraged by my tutor in my course.”

Discussion

Table 5. Comparison of the Most and the Least Vocabulary Learning Strategy used between low and high achievers.

Strategy	Achievement	Most		Least	
		Item	Mean (X)	Item	Mean (X)
Discovery	Low	1	3,27	3	1,80
	High	1	3,40	3	1,73
	Low	8 & 9	2,73	7	1,73
	High	9	2,80	6	0,87
Consolidation	Low	10	2,53	11	0,60
	High	10	2,67	11	0,6
	Low	13	2,67	12	1,33
	High	15	2,80	12	1,47
	Low	18	2,60	20	1,73
	High	18	2,80	20	1,80
	Low	25	2,93	24	1,87
	High	25	2,80	26	2,07

With reference to research question 1, “What are the most and the least frequently vocabularies learning strategies used by undergraduate students at STAIN Parepare?” Table 17 shows that item 1; “I use a bilingual dictionary to help me translate English words into Bahasa.” under the category of Determination strategies was rated the most frequently used as it received the highest mean score from both of achievers. The similar findings of (Schmitt, 2007) dictionary was the most used strategy of all. This is perhaps because the dictionary strategies can help the undergraduate students discover the form of vocabulary without asking for assistance from others.

When undergraduate students fail to remember the meaning and sound of the word they have learned before, the strategies of using dictionary may make the undergraduate students feel more secure than asking help from others, which might cause embarrassment. While the least frequently used is item 11; “I interact with native speakers.” as it received the lowest mean score 0, 60 both of low and high achievers.

From table 17, it is obvious that the respondents were rarely or never interact with the native speaker to learn vocabulary. It is not surprising about the situations of Social strategies (Consolidation), which require unfamiliar people like native speakers or communication in English would cause anxiety to the undergraduate students. Thus, both the low and the high achievers in this study employed Social strategies (Consolidation) less than other categories.

The reason can be, all of them might have never been taught how Social strategies could help them learn vocabulary or they hardly ever have opportunities to speak English with others people especially unfamiliar ones or native speakers, even the high achievers. The similar findings of (Alfredo,2006) reported that asking or interact native speakers was the less commonly used. Kafipour and Naveh (2011) stated also summarized that Social strategies were found as the least commonly used.

While for the qualitative result, the interview was conducted in order to investigate about how the respondents learn or acquire the vocabulary learning strategy. All interviews were recorded by researcher. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and then data were translated from Indonesian to English for those students who used Indonesian during interview and for the purpose of data analysis. Based on the results of interviews, the informants of low achievers specifically stated several situations of learning that they acquired are from course, English media, and discussion/interaction with friends. The following is a sample of quotes from the informants of low achievers regarding the way they acquired the strategy:

Respondent 10: "I ever joined course. I join course namely Abrus, exactly 1 year ago and I studied there around 1 year."

Respondent 3: "I like to watch western movies and listening to western songs."

Respondent 1: "Except campus, making discussion with them is my source to learn English vocabulary learning strategies. I always interact with my friends."

Besides, most of the informants of high achievers specifically stated several situations of learning that they acquired are from course, organization, and English media. The following is a sample of quotes from the informants of high achievers regarding the way they acquired the strategy:

Respondent 7: "Yes I do. I have another source to learn English, I ever joined

course and now I have been joining organization in campus namely, LIBAM.”

Respondent 12: “sources? Erm.. internet....play games. That’s all.”

Further, most of both informants from low and high achievers stated the strategies that they used to leaning vocabulary learned by their own self or undergraduate student-used VLSs, 10 of 15 respondents of low achievers and 8 of 15 respondents of high achievers, respectively. Only the small numbers of both achievers that the strategies they used are encouraged by teachers or lectures (5 of 15 respondents of low achievers and 7 of 15 respondents of high achievers).The following is a sample of quotes from the informants of low and high achievers illustrate the situation:

Respondent 1 low achiever:

“Actually, no encouragement from teacher or lecturer. The strategies that I used to learning Vocabulary encouraged by myself.”

Respondent 14-low achiever:

“The strategy that I use to help me in learning vocabulary is learned by my own self”.

Respondent 12-high achiever:

“I learned them by my own because, most lectures only ask us to read academic books or read English text, but didn’t encourage us in learning strategy of vocabulary”.

Respondent 9-high achiever

“I think I learned them by my own self”

So, to address research question 2, “How did the undergraduate students learn or acquire English vocabulary learning strategies?” It was revealed from the informants specifically several situations of learning that they acquired English vocabulary learning strategies are from course, organization, English club, media, and etcetera. It also was found that the strategies they use in learning vocabulary are learned by themselves or their own self and encouraged by teacher or lecturer, and tutor. But, most of the informants make out to be that strategy strongly encouraged and learned by their own self.

According to research question 3, “Are there any differences in using vocabulary learning strategies by high and low achievers?” it was revealed that there is no great

difference in the use of VLSs between low and high achievers. Table 5 shows that in Discovery strategy, both of achievers select item 1 in the determination strategy and also item 9 in the Social strategy (Discovery). Likewise, in the Consolidation strategy, which are Social (Consolidation), Cognitive, and Metacognitive strategies the respondents chose the same item except in the memory strategy. In memory strategy both select different items, 13 and 15 items respectively. This fact reinforcing by the data shows on Table 3 and table 4 that both achievers use most frequently Determination strategies and used least frequently Social strategy (Consolidation). Nevertheless, it can be concluded there is no great difference in the use of vocabulary learning strategies, both of low and high achievers.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is obvious that the undergraduate students more familiar with Determination strategies, whereas Social strategies (consolidation) are the least frequently used by both low and high achievers. Undergraduate students from both achievers revealed several situations of learning that they acquired English vocabulary learning strategies are from course, organization, English club, media, and etcetera. It also was found that the strategies they use in learning vocabulary are learned by themselves and encouraged by teacher or lecturer, and tutor. But, most of the informants make out to be that strategy strongly encouraged and learned by their ownself. Among all six categories of VLSs, the results to the current study showed no great differences found in using VLSs, neither low and high achievers have same strategies in learning English vocabulary.

This study investigates the vocabulary learning strategies used by undergraduate students at STAIN Parepare. Even, the major of the both achievers are English but they still lack in knowing the knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies (VSLs), the application, and the categories of VLSs as well. Moreover, some of them not realizing what they have been done to improve their English vocabulary were kind of VLSs. Therefore, all parties such as language teachers, lecturers, or tutors should recommend to introducing more optional VLSs, to promote and build up VLSs.

Besides, most of informants revealed, the strategies that they used is not encouraged by their teachers or lectures. Teachers or lecturers have played an important

role in reinforcing student' awareness in learning English vocabulary to improving their English skills. So teachers' guidance could be the best way in giving exposure to learners develops their VLSs, and then the learners can find appropriate and effective for their learning styles and needs.

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