

## Learning Vocabulary: What Strategies are Utilized by Primary School Students?

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### **Abstract**

*The objectives of the study are to figure out the strategies and problems in learning vocabulary of the fifth-grade students of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2019/2020. This present study is a descriptive study which employed questionnaire and interview guideline in collecting the data. The participants were 20 students, 11 boys and 9 girls of fifth graders of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus. The results revealed that the learning strategies utilized by the students in learning vocabulary are metacognitive strategy (21.45), memory strategy (18.95), compensation strategy (15.47), social strategy (14.96), cognitive strategy (14.71) and affective strategy (14.46). While the most problems faced by the students are spelling, pronunciation, memorizing, and meaning.*

**Key words:** *students' strategies, learning vocabulary, primary school students.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are key factors in EFL learning. Ikhsan (2016) said that vocabulary is often viewed as a critical tool for foreign language learners. Limited vocabulary may cause a communication barrier. Acquiring words and understanding the meanings are necessary for students to be able to express ideas and to communicate in the target language.

The students' problem in learning vocabulary is that the vocabularies seem not stored in the long-term memory. It prevents students to master the words well because they could not recall the words easily. What they usually do is open dictionary and ask a friend to find out the meaning of words.

Every student has their own strategies in learning vocabulary. Ikhsan (2017) described the result of his research that there are five types of strategies used the students in learning vocabulary. Those are determination strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies, memory strategies and metacognitive strategies. Another study was conducted by Bakti (2018). It reveals that the students chose practical, simple, and fast strategies in learning vocabulary, such as checking if the word is an Indonesian word, guessing the word meaning from the context, asking the teacher to give the definition, studying the word with their classmates, remembering the word by studying and paying attention to the word's spelling, underlining the word, and using English media. While Aryni (2017) claimed that the students tend to utilize more than one strategies in learning vocabulary: using dictionary, listening to music, watching movie or English TV program, practicing with other, memorizing, taking notes, reading English books, translating a word, asking someone, and attending the course.

Oxford (1990) explains that learning strategies are the main factors that help students to determine how well learners learn. It can make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, effective and transferable to new situations. Besides, O'Molloy (1990:188) states that good learners are aware of the learning process of themselves as learners, and seek to control their own learning through the use of an appropriate learning strategy.

Every student has their own strategy to be able to understand the lesson, and to catch the material well. One single strategy cannot be used by all students even though the learning strategies are considered effective or efficient. Considering the fact above, the study was conducted to investigate the students' strategies and their problems in learning vocabulary in the classroom.

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write (Hindmarsh:1980). Zimmerman in Coady and Huckin (1998:5) vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning. Learning vocabulary is important as stated by Pavur (2009:1) about some points in learning vocabulary, they are: 1) providing some kinds of hook will help students to retrieve words or meanings that they want to remember; 2) practicing and recalling words by trying to say them anytime and anywhere; 3) hearing, seeing and understanding the word repeatedly in various forms.

This study focuses on learning vocabulary of young learners, conducted in SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus (a Primary School). Students of primary school are young learners ranged at 6 to 12 years that are very active and like to play (Kusmaryati: 2016).

The students of primary schools often find problems in learning English vocabulary. It might make students lose enthusiasm and even are not eager to learn since vocabulary is challenging. According to Anjani (2017) some problems in learning vocabulary among others are related to pronunciation, spelling, and meaning and memorizing. There are some problems aspects in pronunciation. Similar sound in two words have different variations, for examples in the words: *through*, *taught*, and *thought*. Then, a sequence of sound in a word, and the last is classification of sound. The second is spelling problem. There are some aspects of spelling problem. First is misunderstanding between the speaker and hearer. Sounds-spelling mismatches are likely too because of errors. Second, the students do not know how to spell the words correctly. The third problem is the aspect of meaning. Some learners find it difficult to understand the meaning of English words, because often one word may have more than meaning. And the last is memorizing. The students are reluctant and not willing to memorize words.

O'Molloy and Chamot (1990) state that learning strategies are special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Learning strategies are defined as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance the own learning (Scarcella & Oxford:1992).

Chamot (1987) states that, "learning strategies as "techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate their learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information. By employing the right strategies, the process of learning the language will improve significantly. In other definition learning strategies are special tools of processing information that used by learners to improve their comprehension, learning or retain new information.

Oxford (1990) divides language learning strategies into two main classes: direct and indirect strategies.

#### 1. Direct Strategies

Direct Strategies are utilized to attract the learners' attention into direct communication with form and meaning of vocabulary. The types of direct strategies are:

- a. Memory Strategy: A strategy that used to recall and receive new information in long-term memory. The new information here is usually vocabularies, the strategies such as:
    - 1) Drawing certain pictures, it can help them to remember new words.
    - 2) Practicing the new words that they have learned with the real things around them.
    - 3) Using sounds, images or combine both of them, body movement or Total Physical Response.
  - b. Cognitive Strategy: a strategy to understand and produce language. It means, this strategy will enable the students to process and use the language. The strategies such as:
    - 1) Watching English movies or television programs.
    - 2) Listening to the English song.
    - 3) Trying to produce language and concerting their mistakes by their selves.
  - c. Compensation strategy: A strategy that used by the learners who have limited vocabularies and not understood well about English. Usually if the learners have not known about English exactly, they have limited vocabularies, automatically they will get difficulties in learning. The strategies such as:
    - 1) Using gesture or body language in speaking.
    - 2) Rephrasing the word in speaking or writing.
2. Indirect Strategies
- Indirect strategies help learners learn a language without directly getting involved in the target language. The types of indirect strategies are:
- a. Metacognitive strategy: Students' tactics or ways to manage their learning process by planning, organizing and evaluating the learning. The strategies such as:
    - 1) Organizing the time for learning
    - 2) Focusing with their learning exactly in English for instance: rehearsing the materials that they get and connect them with the other materials that they have mastered, no speaking with the others while the process of learning, etc.
    - 3) Planning the learning such as: looking for the materials that are being discussed from internet or books, trying to do practice, etc.
  - b. Affective strategy: A strategy that used by the learners to learn English by using their emotions, motivations and attitudes. The strategies such as:
    - 1) Listening to the music, trying to relax and joking with their friends after the process of learning finished in order to reduce their emotions.
    - 2) Supporting their selves in learning and positive thinking that "I can do it".
    - 3) Open their heart to their friends about learning English
    - 4) Writing a diary about learning English
  - c. Social strategy: A strategy about how the learners interact with others in learning English. In this strategy the learners are not only get knowledge about English but also they will have the ability to communicate with others. The strategies such as:
    - 1) Talking with native speakers, their English teacher or friends in EnglishAsking someone to speak slowly in order to get the clear information.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This is a descriptive study to describe the students' strategies and their problems in learning vocabulary took place at SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus. The participants were 20 students, 11 boys and 9 girls of fifth grade students of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2020/2021. The data were collected through closed-ended questions consisting of two choices, yes and no. This closed-ended questionnaire was adopted from Oxford's SILL. SILL is a widely- accepted instrument to access the frequency of language learning strategies used by the learners. The interview was also used to collect the data of the students' problems in learning vocabulary.

The data are analyzed through quantitative and qualitative data analysis on the basic of the research questions. As discussed in data collection, there are two sources of data in this research, namely questionnaire and interview guideline. The descriptive statistics were employed to find the percentage of responses in the questionnaires of six learning strategies. While to analyze the students' problems in learning vocabulary, Miles and Hubberman (1994:10) analysis was used. It consists three current flows, namely: data reduction, data displays, and data conclusion drawing/verification.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of the students' strategies in learning vocabulary were collected by using questionnaire filled by 20 students of the fifth grade of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2020/2021. The following figure is the description of the data.

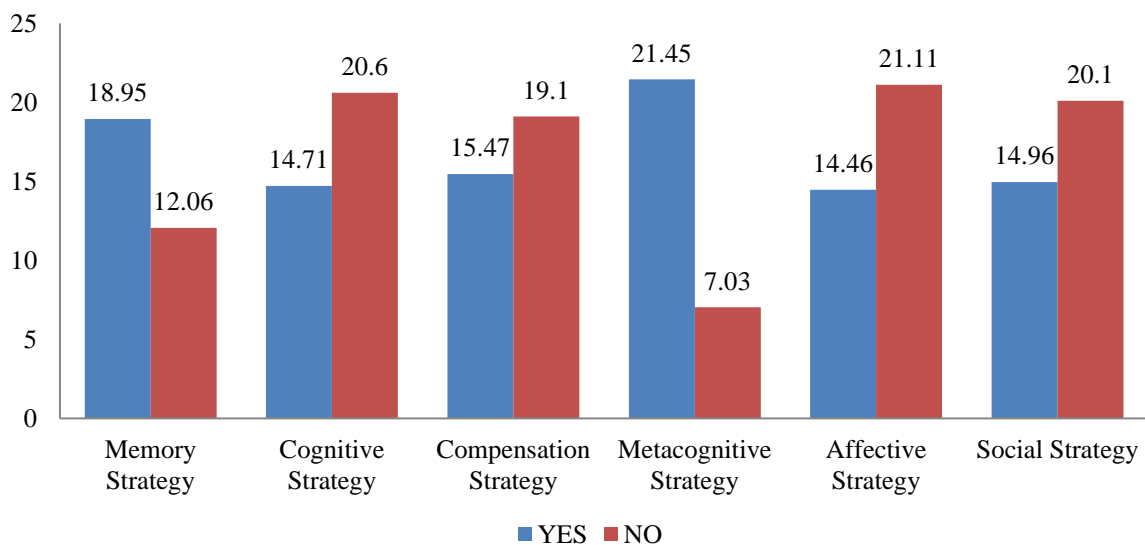


Figure 1. The Students' Strategies in Learning Vocabulary

The figure above shows that the highest average score is metacognitive strategy (21.45) and followed by memory strategy (18.95), compensation strategy (15.47), social strategy (14.96), and cognitive strategy (14.71), and the lowest average score is affective strategy (14.46).

The result reveals the most widely used by the students in learning vocabulary is metacognitive strategy. Metacognitive strategy is the students' ways to manage their learning process by planning, organizing and evaluating the learning. So, they tend to focus on their

learning, such as scheduling time for learning, not talking with other friends during the learning process, etc. Next is memory strategy. Memory strategy is a strategy used to recall and receives new words in long-term memory. They usually use sounds, images or combine both of them to remember the word. Sometimes they learn words using nearby objects.

Then, compensation strategy is a strategy used by the learners who have limited vocabularies and cannot understand English well. So, they tend to use gestures or body language and rephrase the words in speaking. After that is social strategy. Social strategy is a strategy about how the learners interact with others in learning English. This strategy trains the learners' communication with others, so they tend to talk to native speakers, their English teacher or friends and ask someone to speak slowly in order to get information.

Then, cognitive strategy, cognitive strategy is a strategy to understand and produce language. They usually watch English movies and listen the English songs. And the last is affective strategy. Affective strategy is a strategy used by the learners to learn English by using their emotion, motivation and attitudes. They tend to try to relax, joke with their friends after the learning process, and supporting themselves in learning.

Beside the questionnaire, the interview was used to strengthen the data. The researchers chose 5 students of the 20 students of fifth grade of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2020/2021 to be interviewed.

The result shows that there were some problems students face in learning vocabulary. Most students did some mistakes in the aspect of spelling. The first student (SR) misspelled the letter h (eɪtʃ), i (aɪ), t (ti:), a (eɪ), g (dʒi), and r (ɑ:). The second student (DAN) could spell the words correctly. The third student (ND) misspelled the letter h (eɪtʃ), a (eɪ), g (dʒi) and e (i:). While the fourth student (MRP) misspelled the letter h (eɪtʃ), t (ti:), a (eɪ), and g (dʒi). Then, the fifth students (MANS) misspelled the letter h (eɪtʃ), o (əʊ), p (pi:), i (aɪ), t (ti:), a (eɪ), e(i:), c (si:), r (ɑ:), and g (dʒi). Their mistakes in spelling the alphabet were mostly in the letters h (eɪtʃ), g (dʒi) and a (eɪ).

In the aspect of pronunciation. SR made mistakes when pronouncing *table*, *finger*, and *mother*. DAN had no errors in pronouncing all the words. While ND made mistakes when pronouncing *teacher*, and *mother*. MRP made mistakes when pronouncing *hospital*, *table*, and *mother*. And the last is MANS, he made mistakes when pronouncing *hospital*, *table*, *finger* and *mother*. Most of their mistakes is in pronouncing *mother*. After that is memorizing. Four students could memorize all the words they have learned. But there was one student who could not memorize all the words he had learned before. And then, meaning. All students can interpret the words correctly.

The results show the most common mistakes the students face is spelling. Because they still consider the English and Indonesian alphabets the same. They cannot tell the difference yet. Their mistakes in spelling the alphabets were mostly in the letters h (eɪtʃ), g (dʒi) and a (eɪ). Some of them also said that they forgot and did not know the English alphabet.

In the aspect of pronunciation, there were fewer mistakes. Most of them mispronounce the word *mother*. They consider reading English words like reading words in Indonesian. Unlike memorizing, they can memorize the vocabulary they had learned. But there was a student who forgot, he was irritated with the questions that made his mind blank. Even though he could not remember the words he learned, he could interpret all the words correctly.

So, the most problems faced the fifth-grade students of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2020/2021 is spelling, the next are pronunciation, memorizing and the last is meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The students tend to utilize all the learning strategies, and the mostly used to the least strategies are metacognitive strategy, memory strategy, compensation strategy, social strategy, cognitive strategy, and the least is affective strategy.

The most problems faced by the fifth-grade students of SD 7 Cendono Dawe Kudus in academic year 2020/2021 are spelling, pronunciation, memorization, and meaning.

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