

MALAYSIAN STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

This research aims to review the vocabulary learning strategies applied by Malaysian students in acquiring English as a second language. This research is library research. The researcher compiled the results of 5 articles about students' vocabulary learning strategies in Malaysia. The researcher found that the most frequent strategies Malaysian students use is metacognitive and cognitive. Hopefully, these strategies can be applied by many learners in other countries to learn English vocabulary.

Keyword: second language acquisition; English; strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the fundamental aspect of a language. Vocabulary is vital in second and foreign language acquisition because learners cannot understand others or convey their feelings without it (Viera, 2018). Because a restricted vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication, vocabulary knowledge is frequently regarded as a key tool for second language learners. Vocabulary is also important to develop when learning to read, write, speak, and listen. Learners can only say something if they have a vocabulary. Both correlate in many elements of communication, such as how to communicate fluently (Alqahtani, 2015).

Learning vocabulary in a second language is time-consuming and difficult (Gu, 2018). Developing a useful vocabulary is essential to learning a foreign language (Cameron, 2001). Developing a useful vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning that significantly contributes to effective communication, comprehension, and cultural integration. It is an ongoing process that involves exposure to diverse language contexts, consistent practice, and a willingness to expand one's linguistic knowledge. Bai, (2018) also states that vocabulary is the foundation of a language since it is used to construct sentences, express ideas and meanings, and, of course, as a means of communication. Vocabulary serves as the essential foundation of a language,

influencing every aspect of communication—from constructing sentences and expressing ideas to understanding context and engaging in meaningful conversations. As individuals expand their vocabulary, they enhance their ability to navigate the intricacies of language, fostering effective communication and a deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural nuances.

In the dynamic global communication landscape, English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency has become increasingly vital. Among the multifaceted aspects of language acquisition, vocabulary is a cornerstone for effective communication and comprehension. This article delves into the intricate vocabulary acquisition process among English as Foreign Language (EFL) students, exploring their challenges and strategies to enhance their lexical knowledge. As EFL learners navigate the linguistic nuances of English, acquiring a robust vocabulary is paramount for successful communication in academic, social, and professional spheres.

Students learn English at school with the help of the teachers. Students learning vocabulary in the classroom is a complex and dynamic process influenced by many factors. Classroom settings play a pivotal role in shaping the vocabulary acquisition journey of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. One fundamental aspect is the exposure to a rich language environment. Classroom activities, discussions, and interactions contribute significantly to students' language input, exposing them to diverse vocabulary in context.

Additionally, the instructional methods employed by educators play a crucial role. Engaging and interactive teaching approaches. Such as contextualized vocabulary lessons, word games, and real-world applications can enhance students' ability to grasp and retain new words.

English is spoken and utilized as a second language (L2) in countries that were formerly British or American colonies, including Malaysia (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012). The prevalence of English in Malaysia as a second language can be traced back to its colonial history, educational policies, economic considerations, globalization, and the cultural impact of English-language media. Today, English proficiency is an asset that opens doors to various opportunities in education, employment, and international collaboration in this Southeast Asian nation.

Based on the background, the researcher researched Malaysian students' vocabulary acquisition when learning English as a second language. The researcher proposed a research question: What are the Malaysian students' learning strategies for acquiring English vocabulary as a second language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term second language refers to the study of individuals and communities who are learning a language after having learned their first as young children, as well as the process of acquiring that language, which is relevant. The additional language is referred to as a second language (L2), regardless if it is the third, fourth, or tenth acquired (Troike, 2012). The term "second language" (L2) is commonly used in the field of linguistics and language acquisition to refer to a language that an individual or community learns after acquiring their first language (L1) as a young child.

Learning strategy is one of the factors that influence second language acquisition. Every learning process necessitates the adaptation of a strategy in

order to reach the primary goal of learning (Hardan, 2013). Adopting a strategy in the learning process is not just a means to an end but an ongoing and integral component of the learning journey. It involves recognizing the dynamic nature of learning, aligning strategies with individual preferences and goals, addressing the complexity of subjects, engaging in metacognition, and embracing a lifelong learning mindset. Through intentional and strategic adaptation, learners empower themselves to reach the primary goal of learning: acquiring knowledge and skills meaningfully and effectively.

To support the learning process, some learning strategies are needed. Learning strategies are a collection of tactics that people employ to achieve control of their learning process (González, 2017). Individuals take an active role in their education by consciously employing learning strategies, leading to more effective and efficient learning outcomes. The process involves self-awareness, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous improvement in one's learning approach. Paudel, (2019) also states that learning strategies are essential for determining the approach to accomplishing the learning goal. They are involved in various stages of the teaching and learning process. They are typically linked to students' needs and interests to improve their learning efficiency.

In learning vocabulary, learners need some effective strategies in the learning process. Gu, (2018) divided the strategies for learning vocabulary into metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategy refers to beliefs in vocabulary learning and metacognitive regulation. It also refers to higher-level cognitive process individuals use to monitor, regulate, and plan their thinking and learning. It involves the awareness and control of one's cognitive processes. This strategy allows learners to take an active and reflective role in their learning. Furthermore, cognitive strategy refers to learners' mental or cognitive approach to understanding, remembering, and recalling new words. This strategy involves conscious efforts to process and store information effectively.

METHODS

This research is library research. The researcher compiled research in the form of articles related to English vocabulary learning strategies of Indonesian students. The researcher collected five articles related to Malaysian students' vocabulary learning strategies. The researcher focused on the Malaysian students' vocabulary learning strategies. The population in the articles are varied. The specific details of the population can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Population of students in the researches

Num	Research	Population
1	Husin et al., (2022).	Secondary and tertiary Malaysian ESL students
2	Mustapha & Hatta, (2018)	Pre-diploma students at the Machang Campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA
3	Kho et al., (2021)	Primary school students
4	Zaidi et al., (2022)	Students of Universiti Teknologi MARA
5	Charles & Affendi, (2021)	Pre-University students

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Metacognitive strategies

Malaysian secondary and tertiary students chose metacognitive qualities above other dimensions. In terms of gender, the findings revealed substantial disparities between male and female students in the meta-cognitive and cognitive VLS dimensions. Furthermore, secondary students chose to utilize dictionaries to learn new English vocabulary, but tertiary students preferred to use meta-cognitive control. These findings indicate that students used various VLSs when acquiring a new language. Furthermore, it highlighted that gender had a key influence when students learned the language, as results revealed a significant variation in VLS dimension preferences between male and female students (Husin et al., 2022). Another research from Mustapha & Hatta, (2018) indicates that students' metacognition is the most frequently used by the students. This includes using an internet translation (e.g., Google Translate) to translate a new English term, improving vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs and searching for the meaning of a new English word using a mobile dictionary.

2. Cognitive strategies

Malaysian ESL students used vocabulary strategies, the most frequently cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies involve mechanical methods of learning vocabulary, such as listing, underlining, circling, memorizing, repeating, and recalling a list of words. This research implies that ELLs regard the mechanical approach to vocabulary learning as effective since it aids memory by underlining, translating, circling, memorizing, and listing terms. It is worth noting that, despite the students' exposure to various VLS, the mechanical technique was favoured, as revealed in the interview (Kho et al., 2021). Students from Universiti Teknologi MARA's diploma programs chose to employ guessing in context and dictionary tactics the most (Zaidi et al., 2022).

Guessing strategy plays a significant role in learning vocabulary, especially in contexts where learners encounter unfamiliar words. These strategies involve making educated guesses about the meaning of a word based on context, prior knowledge, and linguistic clues. Dictionaries also play a crucial role in vocabulary learning, providing learners with information about words, their meanings, pronunciations, and usage.

Another research from Charles & Affendi, (2021) indicated pre-university students often use memory strategy.

In memory strategy, the students amply these procedures:

a. Learning the spelling of a word

Learning the spelling of a word is intertwined with various memory processes, including visual, auditory, and cognitive aspects. It contributes to a robust representation of words in memory, aiding both comprehension and production in language learning.

- b. Learning the sound of a word
This is a fundamental aspect of vocabulary acquisition. Learning and practising the pronunciation of words contribute to various memory processes, enhancing receptive and productive language skills.
- c. Using new words in sentences
It is a dynamic and effective method for consolidating vocabulary learning. It engages multiple cognitive processes, enhances contextual understanding, and promotes the practical application of language skills, improving memory and retention.
- d. Considering the meaning of a word
It is crucial for memory retention in vocabulary learning. When learners engage in meaningful processing of words, connecting them to existing knowledge and understanding their significance, it enhances the encoding and storage of those words in memory.
- e. Relating a phrase to a personal experience
It creates a network of associations that deeply embeds new vocabulary in your memory. This approach enhances retention and makes the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful.
- f. Repeating words aloud
Repeating words aloud is a powerful mnemonic technique that can significantly contribute to memorizing and retaining vocabulary.
- g. Picture word form
The use of picture-word associations, where a visual representation (picture) is linked to a word, can significantly enhance memory and learning in vocabulary acquisition. This approach is efficient for visual learners and can be a valuable tool in language learning.
- h. Speech fragments
The use of speech fragments or spoken language components can have a positive impact on memory and vocabulary learning.
- i. Connecting a word to its location
It is also known as spatial memory and can be a powerful mnemonic technique that enhances memory retention in vocabulary learning. This method leverages the brain's ability to associate information with specific spatial contexts.
- j. Learning the meaning of the word
In learning the meaning of the word, students learned that the meaning of a word is integral to memory formation. The depth of understanding, connections to prior knowledge, active engagement, and emotional associations all contribute to creating robust memory traces that support effective vocabulary recall and usage over time.
- k. Studying a word with a graphic representation of its meaning can significantly enhance memory and vocabulary learning. This visual learning approach leverages the power of imagery to create solid mental associations, making it easier for learners to recall and retain new words.

CONCLUSION

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of the English language. In learning the language, the learners need help learning the vocabulary as much as possible. Perfect vocabulary learning strategies are needed to accelerate the vocabulary acquisition of second language learners. Some research has figured out that the common vocabulary learning strategies used by students as second language learners in Malaysia are metacognitive and cognitive. Many learners in other countries can apply these strategies to learn English vocabulary.

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