

**VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY  
MALE AND FEMALE FRESHMEN OF LINGUISTICS POSTGRADUATE  
PROGRAM IN BRAWIJAYA UNIVERSITY  
(Strategi Pembelajaran Kosakata yang Digunakan oleh  
Mahasiswa Baru S2 Linguistik Universitas Brawijaya)**

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***Abstract***

*Vocabulary is very important in the learning process, and students have to master it. Thus awareness and understanding of vocabulary learning strategies can increase students' vocabulary. This study aims to reveal more and less common strategies used male and female students, the difference vocabulary learning strategy between students who studied English in their undergraduate level and those who did not. In conducting this research, the researcher used survey methodology. A questionnaire adapted from the taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies developed by Schmitt was spread to sixteen first-year students. The most frequent strategy was "listen to English songs and news" and "using dictionary" as the most favoured strategy used by both male and female students who studied English and them who did not. From the results, it can be stated that be the students seem to enjoy learning English. Moreover, in order to increase vocabulary, both teacher and students must know about vocabulary learning strategies.*

**Keywords:** *vocabulary learning strategies, male, female, survey*

**Abstrak**

Kosakata sangat penting dalam proses pembelajaran dan mahasiswa harus menguasainya. Kesadaran dan pemahaman akan strategi pembelajaran kosakata dapat meningkatkan kosakata mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi yang paling banyak dan paling sedikit digunakan oleh mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan, perbedaan penggunaan strategi belajar kosakata oleh mahasiswa baru pascasarjana ilmu linguistik yang belajar bahasa Inggris pada strata satu dan mahasiswa yang tidak belajar bahasa Inggris pada strata satu. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode survei. Kuesioner yang diadopsi dari taksonomi strategi pembelajaran kosakata yang dikembangkan oleh Schmitt diberikan kepada enam belas mahasiswa baru. Strategi yang paling sering dilakukan adalah "listen to English song and news", dan "using dictionary" sebagai strategi yang paling disukai digunakan, baik oleh mahasiswa laki-laki maupun perempuan yang belajar bahasa Inggris pada strata satu dan mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan yang tidak belajar bahasa Inggris pada strata satu. Dari hasil tersebut, dapat dinyatakan bahwa para mahasiswa tampaknya menikmati belajar bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, untuk meningkatkan kosakata, baik guru maupun siswa harus mengetahui strategi pembelajaran kosakata.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** strategi pembelajaran kosakata, laki-laki, perempuan, survei

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are four language skills in English that students have to master: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Additionally, four

language components must be taught and understood very well, i.e., structure, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. One of the most important components that should be mastered is vocabulary.

In line with this, Farjami and Aidinlou (2013) claimed that “Even though learners master all grammatical areas in the language, the communication stops when do not know the necessary word” (p.1). From this statement, it could be understood that vocabulary is a key to English language proficiency because no one can speak English well if he or she has a limited vocabulary.

Furthermore, Zhi-Liang (2010: 154) said that the achievement of all four major skills influenced by the quantity of vocabulary. While the language proficiency’s improvement can be helped by the vocabulary, Those ideas that shape the learning strategy for vocabulary development plays a vital role in students’ educational progress in learning English.

Since vocabulary is very important to learn, some researchers have been conducted studies on the vocabulary learning strategies. Cicko et al. (2013) claim that students’ vocabulary quantity can be increased if they know about vocabulary learning strategies. In addition, Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) assert that “Vocabulary learning strategy, as a part of language learning strategies, is being very crucial in language learning and consequently being aware of these strategies is important for both teachers and students” (pp. 636). It means that it is not only students but also teachers need to know about vocabulary learning strategies. Knowing Vocabulary Learning Strategies are necessary for teachers in order to increase students’ vocabulary.

Many researchers also support those ideas. The previous research studies (Gu, 2010; Zarrin. S & Khan. Z, 2014) have pointed out that students can develop their words, awareness, and understanding words by vocabulary learning strategies. As a result, students will be successful in improving their language proficiency.

In line with the researcher’s experience and based on the informal interview with the informants, the researcher found out that most freshman Linguistics Postgraduate students in Universitas Brawijaya were not aware and lack of vocabulary learning strategies.

Consider these facts; vocabulary learning strategies is important to increase students’ vocabulary thus vocabulary learning strategies need to be investigated.

Based on the preliminary studies, the researcher interested to conduct a study to discover more about vocabulary learning strategies used by freshman linguistics postgraduate students in Brawijaya University.

On the basis of the idea above, the focus of this study is to identify male and female students in use vocabulary learning strategies. The following research questions were addressed to achieve the study objectives.

What are the most and the least common vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female freshman of Linguistics Postgraduate Program in Brawijaya University?

What is the difference strategy between students who studied English in their undergraduate and them who did not use vocabulary learning strategies?

## **The Nature of Vocabulary**

Pan and Xu (2011) said that “There is no sentence, no essay and even no language without vocabulary” (pp.1586). It shows that vocabulary is a key to master a language. According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Vocabulary is all the words that a person knows or uses.” Hornby (2002) divided vocabulary in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary into two terms: Active and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary is a word that is used, while passive vocabulary is a word which is understood but isn't used.

There are many definitions of the vocabulary defined by some experts. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) in Teaching and Learning Vocabulary defined “Vocabulary is the knowledge of the meaning of words” (p. 3). Then, they assert that words come at least in two forms: spoken and written. Spoken vocabulary is a list of words that we know the meaning when we speak or read orally. While written vocabulary

involves those set of words that we know the meaning when we write or read silently. Moreover, The American Heritage Dictionary defines vocabulary as “The sum of words used by, understood by, or the command of a particular person or group” (Pikulski & Templeton, 2004:1). Vocabulary is a set of words that people use to communicate in oral and written form.

Furthermore, vocabulary is exceedingly essential in learning English. Nation and Waring (1997:8) informed that native speakers have around 4.000-5.000 word families in the beginning school. Then 1.000 words will be added every year until it ends up with 20.000 words when they graduate.

On the other hand, in one study with EFL students reported that after nine years of formal English language instruction, first-year EFL university students in Taiwan, 47% had mastered the 1.000-word level and 16% had mastered the 2.000-word level (Webb 2013).

It is not enough to master English because at least students need to know 3.000 words to comprehend 98, 68% words in a graded reader (Nation, 2006). Also, 8.000-9.000 words to know 98% words to read novel and newspaper (Nation, 2006). Moreover, 3.000 words to understand 95% of words in TV programs film and dialogue (Webb, 2013). The result indicates that it is better to concern on vocabulary learning and the goals of the courses in order to increase EFL students' vocabulary.

#### **The Essence of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Vocabulary learning strategies are important to increase students' vocabulary. According to Yang and Liu (2014) “Vocabulary learning strategies are the special thoughts or behaviors that learners use to assist them in learning new vocabulary items” (pp. 187). While Asgari and Mustapa stated that (2011) “Vocabulary learning strategies are steps taken by the language learners to acquire new English word” (pp. 85). The researcher

defined vocabulary learning strategies as a technique or method used by the students to succeed in their process of learning vocabulary.

Moreover, in the last decades, vocabulary learning strategies attracted the attention of language teaching researchers (Schmitt, 1997; Saunders, 2013; Eliah & Kiran, 2014). Those researchers know that vocabulary is important and are aware of or knowing the strategies will help students in their learning process. Additionally, Nemati (2013:8) said that students who learn vocabulary learning strategies to find out the answer by themselves might be empowered to manage their own learning than others who do not. Nemati also said that vocabulary learning strategies are the best way for students who desire to learn new vocabulary much more comfortable and in a more extended period.

In line with this, Heidari et al. (2012) in their study with 65 undergraduates EFL students in Iran found some benefits of vocabulary learning strategies. First, vocabulary learning strategies helped students to comprehend their reading and to know how to apply it in learning the reading task. Second, the students said that being conscious of the strategy helps them to get a good score in their study. Last but not least, it helped them to improve their confidence, lessened worry, and increase motivation, interest, and success in the English learning process. Thus students are independent.

Taken together, there had no doubt that vocabulary learning strategies are essential in learning new vocabularies and with it, the students will be more independent, more active in their learning process.

#### **Classification of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Some researchers have proposed a variety of classification of vocabulary learning strategies. However, the purpose of this study, the taxonomy developed by Schmitt

(1997) will be used. He developed his vocabulary learning strategies based on Oxford's taxonomy (1990) (Schmitt 1997). To Schmitt, Oxford's classification of vocabulary learning strategies was unsatisfactory. In Oxford's taxonomy, there is no kind of strategy used by learners when facing difficulties to discover a new meaning of a word meaning without resources from another person's expertise. Schmitt then creates a new category for these strategies, i.e., Determination Strategies (DET).

Schmitt (1997) proposes two features of vocabulary learning strategies. There are discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies are the strategies to find out or discover the definition of the words that are conveyed by the learners at the beginning. It contains determination and social strategies. Meanwhile, consolidation strategies are used to help the learners consolidating a word once it has been encountered. It contains memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies.

Determination strategies (DET), refer to the strategies that learners use to find out the meaning of words independently by themselves. According to Schmitt, in Determination strategies there are three ways to discover the meaning of a word: by analyzing a word, guessing the meaning from context and using dictionaries or references. Another way to discover a word's meaning is through Social strategies. Social strategies (SOC) engage learners to interact with others or asking someone's help when dealing with unfamiliar words. Schmitt includes Social

strategies in both categories (Discovery and Consolidation strategies) since it can be used for both purposes. In Discovery strategies, students often asked a teacher to help them. Not only the teacher, but a student can also ask their friends or classmates. Meanwhile, in Consolidation strategies, students can study the meaning of a new word in a group or ask a native speaker. After discovering a word's meaning, students, need to practice and retain their vocabulary knowledge use in a variety of Social, Memory, Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies.

Furthermore, Memory strategies (MEM) traditionally known as Mnemonics, involve learners to learn new words related to their background knowledge by using some forms of imagery or grouping. These strategies include saying a new word aloud, study the sound of a word, and use a physical action when learning a word. Cognitive strategies (COG) are similar to Memory strategies, but in these strategies, students are tending to do mental processing rather than mechanical processing. They include keeping a vocabulary notebook, verbal repetition, and written repetition. Finally, Metacognitive strategies (MET) strategies which are strategies concerning processes like monitoring and evaluating learners' progress in their study. These include using media, skip or pass new words, continue to study words over time and to test oneself with word test. All these suggested strategies can be summarized in Table 1as follows.

**Table 1 Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997)**

Discovery Strategies Item	Category
Analysing words	DET
Guessing meaning from context	DET
Using dictionary or references	DET
Ask teachers	SOC
Ask classmates	SOC
Consolidation Strategies Item	Category

Study and practice meaning in a group Interact with native speakers	SOC SOC
Say new words aloud Study the sound of a word Study spelling of a word Use a physical action when learning a word	MEM MEM MEM MEM
Keeping a vocabulary notebook Verbal repetition and written repetition	COG COG
Using media (songs, movies, news, magazines etc.) Skip or pass new words Continue to study words over time Testing oneself with words tests	MET MET MET MET

## METHOD

In conducting this research, the researcher used a survey. According to de Leeuw et al. (2008) survey can be seen as a research strategy in which quantitative information is systemically collected from a relatively large sample taken from a population (p. 2). The participants in this study were 16 freshmen of Linguistics Postgraduate Program in Brawijaya University, as can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2 The Number of Male and Female Freshman of Linguistics Postgraduate program at Brawijaya University (BU)**

SEX	Study English in Undergraduate		Total
	Yes	No	
Male	5	2	7
Female	5	4	9
Total	10	6	16

To collect the data, the instrument used was a questionnaire. The researcher used a questionnaire based on Schmitt's Taxonomy (1997). It was designed and developed specifically for this study. The vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire consists of two parts as follows. Part 1: The questionnaire contains participants' background information. Part 2: The questionnaire about students' use of vocabulary learning strategies. The following scales are used to indicate the frequency of the usage of each strategy: 1 =

never use it, 2 = seldom use it, 3 = sometimes use it, 4 = often use it, 5 = always use it. It consisted of 25 questions which were divided into six categories: 1-3 Determination, 4-6 Social (discovery), 7-10 Social (consolidation), 11-14 Memory, 15-20 Cognitive, and 21-25 Metacognitive strategies.

In order to get the result of the data from the questionnaire, the researcher used SPSS version 16. Descriptive Statistics (mean and its S.D) were utilized.

## DISCUSSION

In answering the research questions, the findings of this study were discussed in two areas; 1. The most and least common vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female freshman of Linguistics Postgraduate Program in Brawijaya University. 2. The difference strategy between students who studied English in undergraduate level and those who did not use vocabulary learning strategies.

In identifying the most and least common vocabulary learning strategies used by the male and female freshman in Linguistics Postgraduate Program, 25 statements were provided, and the students have to choose the strategies they always apply and those which are rarely used in their learning process.

The results showed that the most and least common frequently vocabulary learning strategies used by the male and female students are as follows. The most

common strategy used by male students was the “Using dictionary” (DET) with  $M = 3.57$ . While the least strategy used was “Ask a teacher to put an unknown word into a sentence to understand the word meaning” (SOC Discovery) with  $M = 1.71$ . Whereas, the most strategy used by female

students was “Listen to English song and news” (MET) with  $M = 4.33$ . Meanwhile, the least strategies used was “Write a new word on a flash card” (COG) with  $M = 1.76$ . The result could be described in the following table.

**Table 3 The most and least common vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female students.**

Sex	N		Strategy	Category	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Male	7	Most	Using dictionary	DET	2	5	3.57	.976
		Least	Ask teacher to put an unknown word into sentence to understand the word meaning	SOC (Discovery)	1	3	1.71	.951
Female	9	Most	Listen to English song and news	MET	3	5	4.33	.866
		Least	Write a new word on a flash card	COG	1	3	1.76	.833

The most common frequent strategy used by male students is “using a dictionary,” while female students used “listen to English songs and news” as their most used strategy. Therefore, teachers and students are advised to be more aware of the differences in the strategy used that exist between male and female in order to increase students’ vocabulary size and their effectiveness in studying a language.

Nevertheless, “ask a teacher to put an unknown word in a sentence” (SOC), and “write a new word on a flash card” (COG) were the least strategy used. This result nearly same with Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) who did a survey with 74 Iranian EFL university students which “ask the teacher to translate and put a word to a sentence to understand the meaning” (SOC) also were the least strategy used. They explained that because of the nature of vocabulary is considered as an individual or asocial process. Then, students resist asking others’ help for the meaning of new words.

Furthermore, Kafipour (2006) in Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) stated that the environment was the main reason why social strategies were rarely used. Since students just listen and take note while teacher provided all information through lecturing.

In order to find out the different strategies used by freshmen students who studied English in undergraduate level and those who did not, 25 statements were provided, and students have to choose the strategies that they used in their learning process.

The results showed that from 25 strategies proposed, the students who studied English in undergraduate level used “Listen to English song and news” (MET) with  $M = 4.20$  as their strategies in learning vocabulary, while students who did not study English used “Using dictionary” (DET) as their vocabulary learning strategy. The results are shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4 Difference strategy between students who studied English in undergraduate level and those who did not.**

Studied English in Undergraduate Level	N	Strategy	Category	Min	Max	Mean	SD
YES	10	Listen to English song and news	MET	2	5	4.20	1.033
NO	6	Using dictionary	DET	2	5	3.50	1.378

As has been mentioned above, from the survey almost a majority of students in Linguistics Postgraduate Program especially students who studied English in undergraduate used “listen to English songs and news.” Students who study English in undergraduate might faced several difficulties in their learning process because they were forced to study and to handle those problems they used songs in their learning process. Shen (2009) stated that students could express their feeling. Some songs convey love and emotions. As a result, students can enjoy the vocabulary learning strategy, and it increases their vocabulary size. “using dictionary” applied by students who did not study English in their undergraduate level is similar to finding reported by Zhi Liang (2010) in which Chinese students also use “Using dictionary” as the most used vocabulary learning strategy.

## CONCLUSIONS

Vocabulary learning strategies are important to use, and it is a must to be aware. This study shows that “listen to English songs and news” and “Using dictionary” are the most favored. Nonetheless, they cannot just focus on those strategies and obey or ignore others strategies, because as we know that different learning situations need different strategies. Both teachers and students must be aware of the differences in the strategy used by male and

female students. There is a need for further researchers to conduct research, especially toward detecting the correlation between students’ vocabulary learning strategies and cultural background, learning style, and their motivation.

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