

JED: Journal of English Development

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The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability for Indonesian EFL Students

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Abstract

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the most difficult stages of Article History acquisition for many language learners. Especially for Indonesian Received: 13-Dec-2025 Junior High School Students who have limited access to use English Revised: 07-Jan-2025 in Daily Life. There have been many researchers conveyed on how Accepted: 23-Mar-2025 Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) helps students in increasing reading ability. Despite, there is no study that show the relation on Keywords: reading ability and VLS level of Junior High School Students in Learning Strategy, Indonesia. Thus, this study aims to investigate the students' Vocabulary Leaning vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) and its relationship with reading Strategy, Reading ability of Indonesian junior high school students who are in their Ability last year of school. It used two instruments: a test given to measure students' ability in reading and a VLS questionnaire to get the vocabulary learning strategy used by the students. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS 25.0 program. The One-way ANOVA was used for analyzing the data. Finally, the study found no relationship between different level of vocabulary learning strategy usage and students' reading ability. For further research, we expected to have external factors that contributed to the VLS, such as motivational, background knowledge, and the role of contextual learning in vocabulary retention.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, many researchers have recognized learning strategies. The comprhenesive definition describes LS as an action that enables learners to perform more easily, quickly, enjoyably, independetly, efectively, and in away that can be implemented to new learning situations. (Oxford, 1990). Learning strategies, in Second Language Acquisition perspective, was recognized as a research on structures' general area and mental processes (LS) (Kalajahi & Pourshahian, 2012). Researchers tried to link the strategies with language learning skills, in order to make the enhancement of learning vocabulary, pronunciation, and etc. Therefore, (Sadeghi & Khonbi, 2015)) claims that for completing vocabulary learning tasks, LLS is mostly used

JED: Journal of English Development

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25217/jed.v3i01..5316

Vocabulary is known as one of the most difficult tasks that any learner faces while learning English (Nyikos & Fan, 2007). This may be since vocabulary is considered as crucial element to language use. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge can lead to facing more challenges in second language learning. Besides all the challenges, learners also find it important to boost their numbers of vocabularies (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009). The importance of increasing the numbers of vocabularies because of the consideration that vocabulary is extremely important in language learning. Fazel & Ahmadi (2011) showed that by knowing vocabulary, it becomes the basic block of language and the unit of meaning from larger structure of language. To be able to understand the whole text, vocabulary needs to be mastered. This is also implying that vocabulary also has strong relationship with reading comprehension (Stahl, 2003). He stated that the expectation of vocabulary as instrumental in reading comprehension reduces the difficulty of words in a text. In other words, it leads to the more readability of the text.

Considering the situation in Indonesia, where English is rarely used in daily communication, English is only taught in school without daily basis communication. Teaching vocabulary should not only focus on specific words in learning condition. Even though various types of approaches, techniques, and exercises have been practiced in the field of vocabulary learning. Lot of students complaining on how they quickly forget after they have memorized a word. Even teachers have sacrificed so much time in teaching vocabulary and the results are often disappointing (Khabiri et al., 2012).

Thus, learners need to be exposed by vocabulary learning strategies. It is not only focusing on teaching specific words, but also provide students with strategies that is important to enlarge their vocabulary knowledges. One of the types of learning strategies that has attracted the attention of many researchers around the world is Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs).

Instead of just memorizing the words, VLSs play an important role in the process of using the vocabulary. The stage is obtaining storing, retrieving, and using the vocabulary (Rubin, 1987 p.29). Similary, (Schmitt, 1997) also defines VLSs as "Vocabulary learning strategies could be any action which affects this rather broadly defined process" (p.203).

Many researchers have tried to classify the taxonomy of VLSs. One of the taxonomies of VLS came from Schmitt (1997) which is based on the language learning strategy taxonomy. The taxonomy is divided into five groups which are determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies (Bennett, 2006)

Determination strategies try to analyze the unknown word, the constituent element, or the surrounding context to determine the meaning. Derivational and affixes are also considered as the constituent element which leads to the word class and definition. As nation said, 60% of words consisting

The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability ... with prefix un-, re-, in-, and dos-, can be understood if the root word is discovered (Nation, 2013)

Next, social strategies. It can be used to determine word definitions. The teacher play the big role here which provides the information about the target language vocabulary in various ways. It can be paraphrased, synonyms, or given examples from the new vocabulary. The information from the teacher was considered the most reliable. However, learners can also get that information from classmates or work together with them. It makes them to be more independent and improve paraphrasing skills. Social strategies are also beneficial for consolidating information. This is needed for learners to create their own opportunities for language use outside the classroom (Sanaoui, 1995).

The third category is memory strategy which is used by the learners to recall the vocabulary. In this taxonomy, there are 27 separate memory strategies. The use of image that associate with the meaning is used in this category. Another way is using the link or group together to assist retrieval. This is in line with Belleza (1983) in (Schmitt, 1997) that stated grouping L1 word spatially has also been shown to improve recollection than just in a list. Then Schmitt (1997) postulate this as the same approach for L2 vocabulary.

Fourth, cognitive strategies. It is strategy which focuses on mechanical aspects of learning vocabulary. The learning process, homework from teacher, and habits of individual learners are also included. This category uses "making a note of new vocabulary on Notebook" as part of it. Writing new vocabulary on notebook makes learners more independent. The role of teachers is assisted by this strategy from some of the learning process.

This process highlights the importance of allowing learners to choose vocabulary to foster their sense of discovery (Schmitt, 1997). In addition to use notebooks for tracking new vocabularies that have been learned, this strategy also includes vocabulary repetition. Learners must repeatedly practice words either orally or passively, in a written form, to improve their vocabulary

Lastly, Metacognitive strategies. This strategy highlights learners' self-development and ways to enhance their own learning. Various habits that have been adopted by successful learners classified as metacognitive strategies. This allow them to identify the opportunities, record their experiences, and reflect on them (Sanaoui, 1995)

The study about vocabulary learning strategies has been conducted by many researchers. (Alqarni, 2017) conducted study to explore the VLS employed by 81 male students of Department of English and Translation the College of Language and Translation at King Saud University. The result showed that the most used strategy among the respondents is metacognitive strategy based on (Schmitt, 1997) taxonomy. Where the least used strategy used among them is memory strategy.

In Indonesia context, Susanti (2018) investigated the use of VLS based on gender toward IAIN Salatiga students majoring in English. The study

The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability ... collected data through open ended questionnaire and an interview adopted from Schmitt's taxonomy. The result showed that gender differences for discovery were observed in social strategy. Although other strategies were equally used by both genders.

Moreover, the study that revealed the relation between VLS and reading comprehension has been done by several researchers. Gu & Johnson (1996) Explored the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and English learning outcomes among Chinese university students through a vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire, a vocabulary size test, and the College Englsh Test. The result shows that there is a correlation between vocabulary size with reading comprehension.

Another study highlighted the impact of VLS on reading comprehension among undergraduate students in Iran. It indicates that VLS has a weak and indirect influence on reading comprehension (Kafipour & Hosseini Naveh, 2011a).

However, there is no study that revealed the relationship between VLS and reading ability especially in EFL Indonesian junior high school students' context. This study tries to investigate the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and reading ability for Indonesian EFL junior high school students.

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research questions as follows:

- a. What frequency are the Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by students?
- b. What is the significant difference between vocabulary learning strategies and the low and high level of students' reading ability?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with comparison research using SPSS. The total of participants was selected through convenience sampling where all participants took a part based on their availability (Cohen, 2005). The participants are 58 Indonesian Junior high school students who were in the last year of school. The school is in East Java, Indonesia. The VLS questionnaire based on Schmitt's taxonomy was applied into this research and was adopted from (Bennett, 2006). Reading tests are also conducted to measure participants' reading ability.

The participants were given a reading test at the first stage to measure their score of reading ability. After that, researchers give vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaires (VSLQ). There are five aspects of Learning Strategies which are: determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. The items in the questionnaire used Likert Scale ranged from 1

The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability ... (Never) to 5 (Always) which is distributed in the classroom during the research time.

SPSS was used to analyze the result of the questionnaire. For the first research question, the researcher uses descriptive statistics and frequency to measure the mean of each aspect. Then we see what is the most and the least used of each aspect using frequency. For the second research question, the researcher divided the reading ability into three levels: low, moderate, and high, using visual binning. After that, we use ANOVA to know the significant differences of each aspect with reading ability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
TotAve	.087	73	.200*	.976	73	.186

^{*.} This is a lower bound of the true significance.

To answer the first research question, we get the normality data test which shows 0.186 on Shapiro-Wilk which indicates the data is normal. Then we can see at the description statistic, on which show the result on the frequency of VLS of the Indonesian EFL student. The result is shown below.

Table 1. Common Strategies used

	N	Mean	Std.
			Dev
Metacognitive strategy	58	3.576	0.9200
Determination Strategies	58	2.929	0.5191
Memory Strategy	58	2.762	0.6453
Social Strategies	58	2.634	0.4829
Cognitive Strategy	58	2.266	0.7515

The table above shows that metacognitive strategies ranked first as the most used strategies among students with the highest mean (mean = 3.576) contributed as the most VLS used by the learners. This is in line with several studies from Asyiah (2017 and Kafipour & Hosseini Naveh (2011). Second rank was placed by Determination strategies (mean = 2.929). The third rank was Social Strategies (mean = 2.634). Next rank was placed by Memory Strategy (mean = 2.762). And the last one Cognitive strategy (mean = 2.266)

Metacognitive strategies play the roles to make learners take control of their own learning. This can happen because there are a lot of materials and resources that can be used and easily accessed by the students. This finding inline with the research in Iranian learners which mostly prefer Metacognitive

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability ... Strategies as the most used strategies in vocabulary learning. Moreover, they also prefered simple and direct strategies while learning vocabulary. (Kafipour & Hosseini Naveh, 2011).

Determination strategy (mean= 2.929) is the second most frequently used by students. According to Schmitt (1997)), Determination strategies are dealing with how the students find out the meaning of the new words by utilizing their language, contextual clues, or reference materials. This is support Sahbazian (2004) research which found that students mostly prefer to use determination and memory strategy for getting meaning.

The third place is memory strategy (mean=2.762). Schmitt (1997) stated that student's strategies that is used to look for the meaning of particular words by asking the people surround them such as teacher, classmates, or any other groups are called social strategies. It stands in the middle of the other four categories of strategies. It is less frequently used than metacognitive and determination and more frequently used than social and cognitive strategies. This finding in contradicting with Torghabeh, (2011)'s result which found that memory strategy is the most used strategy among others for female students.

Social strategy (mean=2.634) takes fourth place. The social strategy involves students seeking the meaning of new words by asking someone knowledgeable, such as teacher, friends, or other groups. Based on (Susanti, 2018) social strategies were examined to the male and female English student of IAIN Salatiga. Both genders show that they use Social Strategy while learning vocabulary. In contrary with (Besthia, 2018) that examined EFL students at Lampung University. The study shows that Social Strategy is the least strategy that they used for learning vocabulary.

The last one is cognitive strategy (mean=2.266). Working directly with the incoming information that enhance learning is called Cognitive Strategies. It does not attract students in mental processing, but mechanical things (Wahyudin et al., 2021) such as repeating the words, using flash card to remember words, or even take notes and highlighting new words. The least use of cognitive strategies in this study in line with Baskin et al. (2017) study that examined 22 Turkish student at Gaziosmanpasa University Turkish Teaching and Application Center. The study shows that cognitive strategies consist of activities such as verbal repetition, written repetition, and note-taking, but the students did not utilize additional learning materials. This makes cognitive strategies the least popular among others. However, Wahyudin's et al. (2021) study showed the vice versa. The cognitive strategies become the most popular one among 120 non English department students because they prefer utilize new word in a sentence to help them retain those words over time, which included in Memory Strategies.

The frequency of vocabulary learning strategies used by students will be explained details in these tables below.

Table 2- Metacognitive Strategies

NO	ITEMS	MEANS	STD.
			DEV
1.	Use English-language media (song, movies, the internet)	4.24	1.014
2.	Study new words many times.	3.31	1.127
3.	Test yourself with word tests	3.17	1.313

Table 2 shows Metacognitive Strategies most and lease used item of strategies. Metacognitive Strategies talk about students' control on choosing the largely favored media to store the vocabulary they had learned. This can be affected by motivation factors and positive atmosphere that appear when the learn foreign language through the media they had chosen by pleasure. (Asyiah, 2017) stated that the effective way for students to retain the vocabulary in the long term memory is by using vocabulary learning media, songs, and movies. This is reflected from the result that learners mostly used item of strategy which is Use English-language media (song, movies, the internet) with M (4.24) Std. (1.014).

This result support (Kusnierek, 2016) study that stated students can increase their motivation, positive atmosphere, cultural, historical and linguistic knowledge by empowering the use of the song. The same result was shown from interview of 30 Indonesian English education students which mostly agree that utilize song can help them in learning and mastering their vocabulary (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021)

Table 3- Determination Strategies

NO	ITEMS		STD.
			DEV
1.	Guess from context	3.72	1.056
2.	Look for any word parts that I know (impossible, colouful)	3.40	.935
3.	Use an Indonesian-English dictionary	2.91	1.159
4.	Check if the word is also an Indonesian word	2.86	1.161
5.	Check the new word's form (verb, noun, etc)	2.66	.762
6.	Use any pictures or gestures to help me guess	2.59	.992
7.	Use an English-English dictionary	2.33	1.190

From the data above, in Determination Strategies (Table 3), consists of seven items which are checking new word's form, looking on the words that is known, whether the words are similar with Indonesian, guessing through pictures and gestures and context, using Indonesian English dictionary and vice versa. The result shows that learners mostly used strategy is guessing from the context with mean (M = 3.72) and standard deviation (Std = 1.056). While less used strategy is using Indonesian – English dictionary, M (2.33) Std. (1.190).

This result is similar with Law (2003) which investigated the of VLS toward 80 Chinese EFL Students which common strategy used among

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The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability ... participants is guessing and inferencing strategies. In line with Elzubier (2016) study toward Sudanese University students that mostly prefer guessing strategies from Determination strategies to discover new word meaning using bilingual dictionary.

Table 4-Memory Strategies

NO	ITEMS	MEANS	STD. DEV
1.	Study the spelling of a word	3.55	.882
2.	Study the sound of a word	3.43	1.045
3.	Make your own definition for the word	3.16	1.254
4.	Connect the word to other words with similar or opposite meaning	3.14	1.050
5.	Use new words in sentences	3.09	1.144
6.	Remember the words that follow or proceed the new word	3.02	1.263
7.	Connect the word to a personal experience	2.93	1.226
8.	Remember the word using its word form (verb, noun, adjective)	2.78	.918
9.	Group words together to study them	2.67	1.015
10.	Remember words in 'scales' (always – often – sometimes- never)	2.60	.954
11.	Write paragraphs using several new words	2.59	1.155
12.	Remember the word using its parts (-im, un, -able, -ful, -ment, ex-)	2.52	1.064
13.	Say the new words aloud when you first meet them	2.50	1.274
14.	Make a mental image of the world meaning	2.41	1.124
15.	Use physical action when learning a word	2.40	1.256
16.	Make a mental image of the word's form	2.17	1.126
17.	Draw a picture of the word to help remember it	1.97	1.008

In Memory Strategies (Table 4), seventeen items were provided. Most of the items deal with how learners remember words or use their memory to store new vocabulary. It can be done by writing new words into several sentences, remembering the word as a group or their word classes, and using physical action, also by saying loud the new words. The result shows that learners mostly used items are studying the spelling of a word with M (3.55) Std. (.882) and the less used items is drawing a picture of the word to help remember it, M (1.97) Std. (1.008).

"Spelling of a word" as the highest rank of item in Memory Strategies supports Yılmaz & Çöker (2021) study that examined Turkish graduate learners with high employed vocabulary. The result shows that spelling words is popular, 22 out of 30 students used it, among high level ESL learners. However, this does not support study from Alqarni (2017) that shows 81 male students at King Saud University use Memory Strategy as the least used Vocabulary Learning Strategies, as they steered away from the rote memorization approach commonly used in High School

Table 5-Social Strategies

NO	ITEMS	MEANS	STD. DEV
1.	Ask your classmates for the meaning	3.55	.841
2.	Ask the teacher to give you the definition or a sentence	2.72	.970
3.	Study the word with your classmates	2.59	.974
4.	Ask the teacher to check your definition	2.57	.920
5.	Talk with native speakers	1.74	1.036

Next, social strategies (Table 5). From the five items given, learners mostly used strategy is Ask the classmates for the meaning with M (3.55) Std. (.841). Asking a teacher for the definition and learning the new word with classmates are the second and third place with M (2.59) and M (2.57). While the less used item in social strategy is talking with native speakers with M (1.74) Std (1.036).

Social strategies cannot be left from strategies of vocabulary learning. This is due to students realizing many benefits from using it such as acquiring language in natural setting by communicative approach. They also get another benefit such as checking the accuracy of the vocabulary being used with the help from the teacher (Krashen, 1987).

This result consistent with the previous study by Asgari & Mustapha (2011). Social strategies value positively because students seek assistance when they face difficulties. This approach helps them to overcome challenges effectively and enhance learning experiences. Another study from Maghsoudi & Golshan (2017) reveals that Iranian EFL learners less favorably to use Social Strategies and most prefer Metacognitive Strategies. The similar study was investigated by (Al-Bidawi, 2018) toward Saudi EFL undergraduate students. The result shows that social strategies are often used by them.

Table 6 Cognitive Strategies.

NO	ITEMS	MEANS	STD.
			DEV
1.	Repeat the words aloud many times	2.60	1.227
2.	Take notes or highlight new words in class	2.64	1.238
3.	Write the words many times	2.47	1.231
4.	Make lists of the new words	2.29	1.185
5.	Keep a vocabulary notebook	2.21	1.210
6.	Put English Labels on physical objects	1.95	1.033
7.	Use flash cards to record new words	1.72	1.022

In Cognitive Strategies (Table 4) there were seven items given such as repeat, write, and use the new words using flashcards. Learners mostly used items are taking notes or highlighting new words in class with M (2.64) Std.

Zakiyyatul Maghfiroh Hamidah Assagung, Lies Amin Lestari, Ahmad Munir *The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Reading Ability* ... (1.238) and the less used item is using flash cards to record new words, M (1.72) Std. (1.022).

Cognitive strategies focus on repetition and mechanical techniques for vocabulary learning, as mentioned by (Ghouati, 2014) researcher highlights the impact of using the traditional way, repetition method, which students had been already familiar with. Make it popular among all items in Cognitive Strategy. Moreover, study from (Zuhairi & Mistar, 2023) which examine 180 English department students from three university in East Jawa, Indonesia shows that Cognitive Strategy is the least used among others. The fact that they use cognitive strategies least among others indicates that they may struggle with applying these techniques effectively. They faced difficulties in handling newly encountered vocabulary and required support in tasks such as categorizing words by their types, taking notes, and linking new vocabulary to previously learned words.

Table 7 - ANOVA Result

	df	Mean	F	Sig
		Square		
Determination Stretegies	6	0.787	1.172	0.336
Social Strategies	6	0.592	0.764	0.602
Memory Strategy	6	0.442	0.571	0.752
Cognitive Strategy	6	0.906	1.361	0.248
Metacognitive strategy	6	1.263	2.079	0.072

To answer the second research question, after the reading test was conducted, the result of the test was divided into three categories. After that, using visual binning in SPSS 25.0, we got the result about the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and students reading ability.

We can see from Table 7, in the first category, determination strategies, the ANOVA test result shows p value = 0.336 which is greater than 0.05. The result also has the same answer as Social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategy. This indicates that there is no significant difference in low, moderate, and high of students VLS's level. This suggests that they adopt similar approaches to vocabulary acquisition, regardless of their reading proficiency. On possible reason for this result is they, regardless of their reading proficiency, utilize common vocabulary learning strategies that they have already experienced in the classroom, or they developed through personal experiences. Moreover, external factors such as teaching methods, exposures to language learning resources, and motivation levels might influence the vocabulary learning strategies among students

CONCLUSION

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This study aims at investigating the frequency of vocabulary strategies used by learners and the significant difference between vocabulary learning strategies and the low and high level of students' reading ability. Some vocabularies have been revealed first. The most strategy used is Metacognitive Strategy, followed by Determination Strategies, then Memory strategies, social strategies, and lastly Cognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategy is the most used vocabulary learning strategies by Indonesian Junior high school students. The most used item of strategies is students are mostly use songs, movies, and any other English Language Media as a tool for learning. While the metacognitive strategies that are rarely used by the respondents is doing self-assessment on new words learned.

From Determination strategies, the result implies that the respondents mostly guess the new words that they found from the context in a sentence. While the least frequent determination strategies used is used an English-English dictionary on the learning process.

From Memory strategies the most item of strategies used by students is they memorize the words by studying the spelling of the words. The least item of strategies used is drawing the picture or visualizing it to help them remember.

From social strategies the most item of strategies used by students is asking the classmates for the meaning of new words discovered. While the least item of strategies used is talking with native speakers.

While the last strategy is cognitive strategy which the most used item of strategy is repeating the words aloud many times. The least item of strategies used is using flash cards to record new words.

From the vocabulary learning strategies used by Indonesian Junior High School EFL Learners acquire vocabulary through various activities, such as listening to songs in target language, watching English videos, and viewing English TV programs. From this result, it is recommended toward the teacher to conduct fun activities to expose students to vocabulary learning strategies

However, the other aim of this study, which is investigating the significant difference between vocabulary learning strategies and the low and high level of students' reading ability, find no significant difference. Due to vocabulary learning strategies do not have significant differences based on reading ability, educators might consider implementing different method to better support students with low reading ability and maximize the potential of students with high reading ability by inspiring using different learning strategies. Furthermore, future research could explore other potential factors influencing vocabulary learning, such as students' motivation, background knowledge, of the role of contextual learning in vocabulary retention.

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