

# JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary mastery is an important element to understand a new language. Knowing that vocabulary is an important thing in a language, the efforts to help learners to master vocabulary has become crucial. One of the ways to help learners to master vocabulary is that by the help of learning strategies. Some students, especially junior high school students, sometimes find the difficulty to express their ideas in written or spoken. They also have difficulties in understanding the text books written in English. To overcome these problems, most of junior high school students have tried many strategies such as by asking teacher for L1 translation, making vocabulary lists, and using bilingual dictionaries. This ways are able to help them to acquire new words that they find in English text books. Based on the previous reasons, the researcher conducted a research to describe the types of learning strategies that is employed by the Junior high school students.

This research attempts to answer some research questions, those are: (1) what types of strategies do high achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?, (2) What types of strategies do intermediate achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?, (3) What types of strategies do low achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?.

The researcher used descriptive qualitative approach. The researcher did the research to the first grade students of junior high school students at SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo who divided into 3 groups (higher, intermediate, AND lower achievers). The data of this research were students' verbal and non-verbal behaviors while using vocabulary learning strategies in their learning process. To collect the data, the researcher used observation and interview. The observations were done four times and the interview was done once after the class was over.

After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed and analyzed them. The result showed that high achievers employed four strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies are determination strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Intermediate achievers employed three strategies: determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies. And low achievers employed three strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those are determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

*Key words: Vocabulary learning strategies, Determination strategies, Social strategies, Cognitive strategies, Metacognitive strategies.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching English to junior high school students has become important in recent years in Indonesia. Nowadays, both parents and students think that English is an important tool of communication. For the reason, many parents send their children to English courses and even teach them English at home. They expect their son or daughter will be able to speak in English and also they want to make sure that their son or daughter can read, spell and pronounce words correctly, so that they will have skills in English to compete favorably in job market.

In learning a new language, the first thing language learners usually do is to understand the meaning of new words. Vocabulary mastery is an important element to understand a new language. Grammatical rule is also important because with no vocabulary mastery, comprehension of grammar becomes no use. It is supported by Harmer's (2002: 18) statement that the four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) become meaningless if learners do not possess a number of words required.

In the condition when learners encounter difficult words whose meaning they do not know in reading, listening, writing, and speaking, they try to solve the problems by looking up in a dictionary, asking someone else to explain the words, or inferring the words from the context. These different efforts are the examples of strategies used by learners.

Knowing that vocabulary is an important thing in a language, the efforts to help learners to master vocabulary has become crucial. One of the ways to help learners to master vocabulary is that by the help of learning strategies. According to Nation (2001: 222) that a large amount of vocabulary can be acquired by the help of learning strategies and those of strategies proved to be very useful for vocabulary learners coming from different level. Furthermore, the idea of having certain strategies is thought to be beneficial to the language learning, it is because learning strategies can make students become more independent in their learning.

Language learning strategies have been one of the major issues in the second and foreign language teaching field for the last three decades. A great deal of studies have supported for the construct of language learning strategies in EFL learning contexts.

To learn a foreign language, especially English, there are many different ways to try and to do. In most of the research on language learning strategies, the primary concern has been on identifying what good language learners do to learn a second language. Some writers use different terminology for language learning strategies. In spite of these different terms, all of them refer to the same concept that is strategies which are used by the learners in their language leaning process.

Several experts have proposed the definition of language learning strategies. According to Brown, learning strategy is associated with input – to processing, storage, and retrieval, that is, to taking in messages from others (Brown, 2000: 132). Ellis (2004: 544) uses the term “learner actions” for “learning strategy” which refer to behaviors, tactics, techniques, and strategies which learners use to solve some learning problems consciously. Rubin (1987: 19) states that English language learning strategies include the techniques that learners use to remember what they have learnt, their storage and retrieval of new information. O’Malley and Chamot (1990: 1) define learning strategies as the special thoughts or behavior that individual use to help his or her comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement (Oxford, 1990: 1). Under the umbrella of language learning strategies, the certain strategies used in learning vocabulary is called “Vocabulary Learning Strategies”. The strategies are considered to be useful for students in learning a new language. A major function of those strategies is to help the learners continue to learn new words and increase their vocabulary size. In addition, Cameron (2001: 92) proposes Vocabulary Learning Strategies as “actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary”. Learning vocabulary in the second language requires the use of vocabulary learning strategies which have been receiving much attention in the field of second language learning (Schmitt, 2000: 827). The use of vocabulary learning strategies has accompanied the shift from the teacher-oriented to the learner-centered curriculum. It means that by using vocabulary learning strategies, the students are able to mastery vocabulary by their selves without the teacher help or explanation.

Rifai (2009: 15) mentions that strategies are needed in second language learning and the reasons are the learning strategies are tools for active, self directed

involvement which is essential for developing communicative competence. The result then, the improvement of proficiency and greater self-confidence, finally they become better learners. Next, strategies are useful to develop good diagnostic test, as well as conduct interesting research for the teacher particularly. The last, by using strategies, learners become more motivated as they begin to understand the relationship between their use of strategies and success in learning language.

Some students sometimes find the difficulty to express their ideas in written or spoken, even in the form of a single sentence. When they are asked to perform written or spoken tasks, they tend to write the Indonesian version first before the English one. It is particularly serious when students come in situations like spoken interaction, because in this situation vocabulary is sometimes poor and difficult to recall, even after it has been learnt.

There are some problems which are experienced by the second language learners of Indonesia while studying English. They have very little English vocabularies and they are influenced by their mother tongue (Indonesia, Javanese, Maduranese, etc.). If they write or say something in English, most of them always write or say in Indonesian first then translate it into English word by word.

It is in line with the problems faced by first grade students of SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo who do not have enough courage to use English in their daily communication both inside and outside of the classroom. They also have difficulties in understanding the text books written in English. They feel that they do not have sufficient vocabulary to do all those activities.

To overcome these problems, first grade students of SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo have tried many strategies such as by asking teacher for L1 translation, making vocabulary lists, and using bilingual dictionaries. This ways are able to help them to acquire new words that they find in English text books. If students use the right strategies, they will make the learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more effective. On the contrary, many students fail to study English properly because they do not know how to employ the proper learning strategies.

Based on the previous description, the study is focused on investigating the junior high school students' strategies in master vocabulary. The research question is posited into the following research questions: (1) what types of strategies do high

achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?, (2) what types of strategies do intermediate achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?, (3) what types of strategies do low achievers of junior high school students' employ in their attempt to master vocabulary?. Concerning the objectives of the study, the limitation of the study was focused on junior high school students' vocabulary learning strategies which are categorized into four learning strategies based on Schmitt's taxonomy. They are: Determination Strategies (DET), Social Strategies (SOC), Cognitive Strategies (COG), and Metacognitive Strategies (MET) which are focused on strategies that discover a new word's meaning. The scope of the study was the first grade students at SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo.

The subjects were the first grade students of SMP Jati Agung Sidoarjo. They were represented by six students covering two high achievers (HA1 and HA2), two intermediate achievers (AA1 and AA2), and two low achievers (LA1 and LA2) of the first grade of SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo. This grouping method was done based on their last English score in students' book report. Students with high scores belong to high achievers. Students with intermediate scores (neither high nor low) belong to intermediate achievers. Students with low scores belong to lower achievers.

Descriptive is used to answer the research questions as stated above, through qualitative approach. The descriptive method in the present study also used in investigating and describing vocabulary learning strategies which are used by junior high school students.

## **FINDINGS**

In conducting the research, research design plays an important role in obtaining the data. It is the way information gained from the subjects. In the case of this study, describing and investigating vocabulary learning strategies which were used by junior high school students, the investigation as they are in natural situation became the main concern.

The qualitative research has a natural setting. In this study, the researcher came to the class in order to describe the learning process of an English class in SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo. She sat on the back and observed the class activities to see the real condition of the classroom and described the teacher's and students'

activities. The next step was the researcher interviewed the students for more information and described about the vocabulary learning strategies used by them. The results of the interview were used to support the data from the observation.

In learning vocabulary, especially while the students acquiring new words, the students must be using one or several strategies. The strategies that are used by junior high school students can be the use of dictionaries, ask teacher for clarification, or make vocabulary list. The strategies that were used by the junior high school students were categorized based on Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. They are: Determination Strategies (DET), Social Strategies (SOC), Cognitive Strategies (COG), and Metacognitive Strategies (MET).

The source of the data was the activities or behaviors of the students during the English learning process. The data itself contained clear information to support the result. The data obtained was eventually presented in descriptive manner.

As a qualitative research, the study places the researcher as the key instrument to obtain any data from its source. For this reason, the researcher of the present study collected and analyzed the data. To collect the data, the researcher used observation technique as the main technique. The researcher also used interview to avoid the subjectivity while collecting the data. In this study, the researcher conducted non-participant observation. It means that she did not participate directly and influence the teaching and learning process. She became an observer and data collector. Below are some data collecting techniques which were applied in this research.

In this research, the researcher used observation. An observation technique is a data collecting technique performed during an observation. The data collection was done through non-participant observation. The researcher observed the teaching-learning process from beginning to the end of the activity. Field notes were used during the observation. They were used to write down the occurrence and sudden activities happened during the observation. These field notes were used to help the writer in retrieving the data from the writer's memory. These were also used to record what the writer heard, saw, and thought. The results of observations were detailed explain the descriptions of what were observed and analyzed to address the research questions. The supporting instrument that was used by the researcher during the observation was observation sheet.

To get the in depth data, the researcher also conducted unstructured interview to the subjects of the study after the English class was over. She also used interview to avoid the subjectivity while collecting the data. The interview was an individual interview to obtain more detail information about student's vocabulary learning strategies. Some questions consist of the strategies used by the students. The interviews were also recorded by using audio recorder and then transcribed using words.

The data of the study was analyzed inductively. The data of observation and interview was used to describe what were happening in the classroom during the learning process. The data were used to find out the strategies used by students in mastering the vocabulary.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012, it was Friday, the researcher had come into the class at SMP Jati Agung, Sidoarjo and observed the learning process of the students for 80 minutes. She used non-participant observation. During the observation, she wrote the important events that happened at that time in her field note sheets. The same things also happened on may 22<sup>nd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012. After the observation, the interview session was conducted on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 after the class was over and it was time to go home. The researcher interviewed the students one by one related to the results of the observations. The transcriptions of the interview were written after the researcher got home.

After the data obtained had been transcribed into transcription sheets, the researcher analyzed them using vocabulary learning strategies taxonomy proposed by Schmitt. The purpose of using Schmitt's taxonomy was to find the types of vocabulary learning strategies employed by junior high school students. After that, the writer determined which data were relevant to the research questions. Then, the researcher displayed the findings and gave the conclusion after all data had been analyzed on the next chapter. The descriptions were represented in the qualitative narrative passage. The narrative passage was to convey the findings and conclusion of the study by describing the types of communication strategies used by junior high school students.

There were 6 students who were divided by three achievers based on the score of the last book's report. HA1 and HA2 belong to the high achievers. AA1 and AA2 belong to the intermediate achievers. LA1 and LA2 belong to the low achievers.

Both HA1 and HA2 employed some strategies, such as: look up the bilingual dictionary, ask teacher and classmates for L1 translation and the synonym of some new words, and also guess the words meaning of new words that they did not understand before. HA1 and HA2 also skip or pass some new words, highlight and underline some words, and use English language media (songs and movies) as their strategies in master the vocabulary. It shows that high achievers employed four strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies were determination strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. It is in line with Chamot & Kupper (1989: 38) explanation that successful learners will not use a single strategy to accomplish a certain task, they will employ more strategies. This result is also supported by Wardhono (2008: 188). He said that the high achievers were primarily considered as good language learners seemed to reflect that they might employ and combine useful learning strategies more often than did others and had appropriate capability to help themselves in making use of the learning strategies to master vocabulary.

AA1 and AA2 who belong to the intermediate achievers employed some strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary, such as: look up the bilingual dictionary, ask teacher and classmates for L1 translation, and skip or pass some new words that they found on the text. It shows that intermediate achievers employed three strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies were determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies. It indicates that intermediate achievers also employed and combined some categories of learning strategies. This indication is also supported by Wardhono (2008: 194). He stated that the intermediate achievers employ and combine some categories of learning strategies in accordance with their capability in determining their choices of learning strategies. They made use of learning strategies they knew and then their moderate capability determines their choices. In short, it seems that an intermediate achiever has an intermediate capability to choose some useful strategies.

Meanwhile, LA1 and LA2 who belong to low achievers employed some strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. LA1 and LA2 only employed a few strategies, such as: look up the bilingual dictionary, ask classmates only for L1 translation, and skip or pass some new words that they found on the text. LA1 and LA2

did not employ many strategies. It shows that low achievers only employed three strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies were determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

## **DISCUSSION**

Higher achievers, intermediate achievers, and low achievers employed different strategies. It is in line with Jen-Hsien (2001-4) who stated that the strategies used by learners may differ from one to another. Otherwise, most of the students also used more than one strategy in a meeting. It is also supported by O'Malley & Chamot (1990) in Wardhono (2008: 189). They stated that metacognitive, cognitive, or memory strategies are often used together, supporting each other.

There are six students tend to employ determination strategies. This trend is probably influenced by their individual personality (Ellis, 1994) which leads them to be independent learners. The students also employed the same strategy; the use of bilingual dictionary. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) also supported that if the learners use good learning strategies which are not appropriate for them, it will be useless. Using monolingual English dictionary, for instance, is a good strategy to search the meaning of words. But if such strategy is applied to learners who used to use bilingual dictionary, it will not be appropriate for them since it may cause confusion for them. So that, the use of bilingual dictionary by junior high school students at SMP Jati Agung is the appropriate strategy for them because they will get difficulties if they use monolingual dictionary. Even though all the junior high school students looked up the bilingual dictionary as one of their strategies, it does not mean that all of them become successful. It is in line with Lessard-clouston (1997) in Schmeck (1988) argues that there is always a possibility that good language learning strategies can also be used by poor language learners. He also affirms that it should be strongly stressed that using the same language learning strategies does not guarantee that bad learners will also become successful in language learning since other factors may also play a role in success.

Otherwise, five students employed social strategies. Most students usually ask other's help whenever they encounter a problem. Students take the advantage of their close relationship to help each other in their learning. Moreover, they also sometimes feel so close to their teacher and find it easier to ask their teacher than

overcome their problem by themselves. The tolerance of helping each other is considered something common in the school environment (Aisyah, 2009).

There are two students employed cognitive strategies, and five students employed metacognitive strategies. Because of AA1, AA2, LA1, and LA2 did not employ all the strategies in master the vocabulary, it can be concluded that high achievers of junior high school students employed the most strategies than intermediate achievers and low achievers. These findings are in line with the previous research reveals that the greater use of strategy is often related to the higher levels of language proficiency. Huda (1999 as cited in Aisyah: 2009) has mentioned that successful learners tend to use a greater number of strategies while less successful learners tend to use fewer learning strategies. It is also supported by Oxford (1994) who claims that motivation helps determine the frequency of language strategies used by learners. Furthermore, she (1990: 19) affirms that more highly motivated students use a significantly great range of appropriate strategies than do less motivated students

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that high achievers employed four strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies are determination strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Intermediate achievers employed three strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies are determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies. And low achievers employed three strategies in their attempt to master English vocabulary. Those strategies are determination strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

Higher achievers, intermediate achievers, and also lower achievers looked up bilingual dictionary as one of their important strategy in master the vocabulary. Students of junior high school students seem to addict to look up the bilingual dictionary as their strategies in master the vocabulary. It can be concluded that junior high school students employed the same strategy, that is: look up bilingual dictionary.

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