



INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research

Volume 3 Nomor 4 Tahun 2023 Page 46-54

E-ISSN 2807-4238 and P-ISSN 2807-4246

Website: <https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative>

## Exploring Students' Vocabulary Learning Strategies Applied By Vocational High School Students In Bekasi: A Case Study

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### Abstrak

Kosakata merupakan hal yang sangat penting dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris. Namun, ada masalah bahwa para siswa tidak cukup percaya diri untuk membentuk strategi pembelajaran kosakata, mengingat siswa harus mempelajari banyak kosakata untuk memberikan mereka pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menemukan perspektif siswa tentang strategi pembelajaran kosakata yang biasa digunakan oleh siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan. Sebagai desain penelitian, metodologi penelitian ini mencakup metode kualitatif dan studi kasus. Berdasarkan hasil persentase yang telah diperoleh, strategi penentuan adalah yang paling sering digunakan oleh siswa, yang lebih memilih untuk belajar kosakata berdasarkan konteks dan dengan panduan kamus bahasa Inggris. Diikuti oleh strategi memori, strategi metakognitif, strategi sosial, dan strategi kognitif yang merupakan strategi yang paling jarang digunakan. Para siswa sadar akan perlunya mempelajari kosakata, terutama untuk tujuan akademis dan non-akademis, tetapi karena masalah yang mereka alami, mereka juga memiliki berbagai strategi yang harus sesuai dengan kemampuan mereka, dan sebagian besar dari mereka lebih memilih untuk menggunakan strategi yang praktis, sederhana, namun efisien untuk mempelajari kosakata.

Kata kunci: *Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing; Persepsi; Siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK); Strategi Pembelajaran Kosakata (Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)).*

## Abstract

Vocabulary is very important in learning the English language. However, there is a problem that students are not confident enough to form vocabulary learning strategies, considering that students must learn multiple vocabularies to give them a better understanding of English. This study aimed to explore and discover students' perspectives on vocabulary learning strategies commonly used by vocational high school students. As a research design, this research methodology includes qualitative and case study methods. Based on the percentage results that have been obtained, the determination strategy is most commonly used by students, who prefer to learn vocabulary based on context and with the guidance of an English dictionary. It was followed by memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and cognitive strategies, which were the least frequently used strategies. The students are aware of the need to learn vocabulary, especially for academic and non-academic purposes, but due to the problems they experience, they also have a variety of strategies that should match their abilities, and most of them prefer to use practical, simple, yet efficient strategies to learn vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *English Foreign Language; Perceptions; Vocational High School Students (VHS); Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS).*

## INTRODUCTION

A vocabulary is an essential part of the foreign language aspect used for teaching and learning English because the meanings of new words are often emphasized in language skills, both in books and in the classroom. Vocabulary can generally be defined as the knowledge of the meaning of words (Alqahtani, 2016). Recent research reports that there are still problems in vocabulary learning, as many students are uncertain of the actual instructional practices in vocabulary learning and occasionally do not know where to turn to establish their instructional strategies in word learning (Surmanov & Azimova, 2020). Since vocabulary is one of the very important components of English to learn before students master the four Language skills, they should know some vocabulary to support them in learning English (Syafrizal, 2018).

In the Minister of National Education's decree number 008/H/KR/2022 regarding the learning outcomes in vocational high school grade X (Phase E) of the Independent Curriculum, it is required that students are able to utilize English to convey ideas and discuss topics close to their daily lives or issues related to their age in order to produce, study, and rewrite a variety of literature using common vocabulary and words (Kemendikbud, BSKAP, 2022). Therefore, the main strategy for acquiring vocabulary requires students to use vocabulary recognition, such as when reading a text, where they determine the meaning of unfamiliar words encountered in the text (Bramki D., 1984).

In the current time, vocabulary learning strategies have received greater attention due to an increased understanding of how students process their acquisition of a foreign or second language. As a result, it is crucial for students to improve their understanding of how students process their skills in acquiring a foreign language by learning new words, as well as determine the most appropriate vocabulary learning strategies for them. According to Schmitt (2000), there are five sub-categories of vocabulary Learning Strategies that can be used by students at all educational levels, namely determination strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

In a prior study conducted in a vocational context in Thailand, Puangsang n.d. (2017) reported that the vocabulary learning strategies used by Vocational School students, emphasizing three majors: engineering, accounting, and tourism, found that most students used social strategies most often. Nonetheless, this study emphasizes the need for teachers to stimulate students to take more individual responsibility for their own learning. Furthermore, findings from several studies at the vocational high school level in Indonesia regarding VLS preference and implementation Astika (2016) reported that students there rely more on determination strategies that follow an EFL environment where exposure to everyday English is usually very limited and vocabulary knowledge does not come naturally. In addition, Bambang Purwanto and Hidayad (2022) also reported in their study that students often used memory, social, and cognitive strategies. Nevertheless, some students mastered both the writing and pronunciation of English vocabulary, while others were more proficient in pronouncing than writing.

From this phenomenon, as beginner-level English learners, Vocational High School (SMK) students need an understanding of English vocabulary because English education at the intermediate level is designed to demonstrate a broader vocabulary mastery so that if students want to continue their education to a more advanced level, they will not have much difficulty (Bambang Purwanto & Hidayad, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore students' learning strategies for learning common vocabulary and discover their perspectives on the vocabulary strategies they used. This research can be useful for students who have difficulties with vocabulary, especially in finding efficient ways to learn vocabulary.

## RESEARCH METHOD

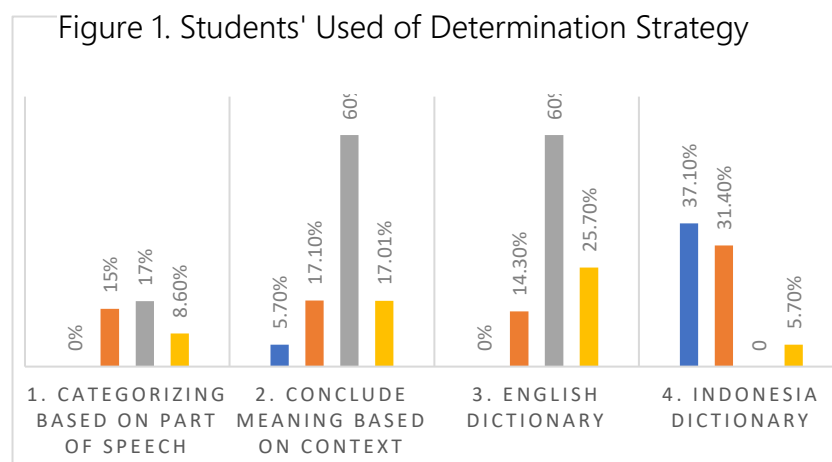
As a research design, this research methodology includes qualitative methods and case studies. According to Cresswell, John W., and Poth (2016), qualitative research is concerned with gaining a thorough understanding of fundamental phenomena and exploring issues. Furthermore, case studies are based on logic based on data and evidence

interpretation of social reality events (Quintão et al., 2020). Therefore, case studies can be used to explain, describe, and examine phenomena or events that occur in certain contexts (Cresswell, John W.; Poth, 2016). This study involved 35 students of accounting at state vocational schools in Bekasi by constructing a questionnaire containing 20 statements regarding vocabulary learning strategies that have been adopted based on Schmitt's taxonomy. For the interview questions by considering and validating the vocabulary learning strategies and techniques used by accounting students in vocational high schools. The researcher conducted the interviews by asking one or more open-ended questions and documenting the participants' responses. The data for this study was analyzed using Braun's thematic data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting data patterns (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

## RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

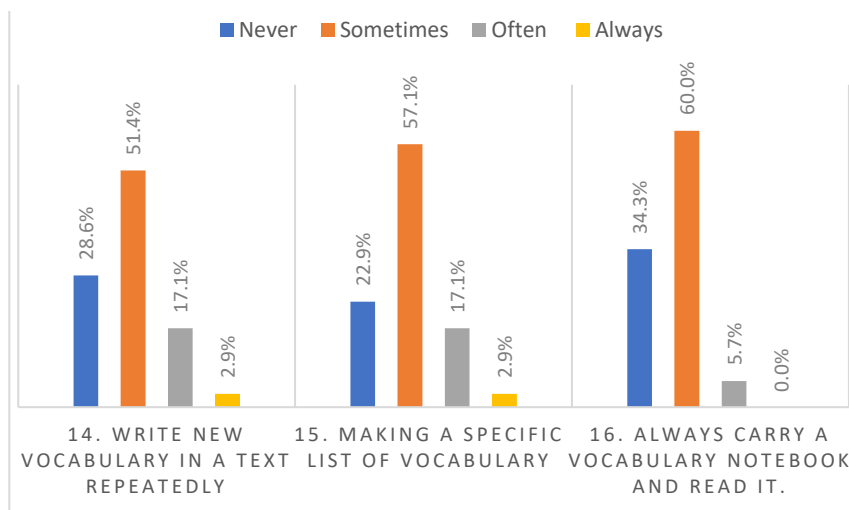
This section discusses two parts of the research results that relate to the research questions. The first part explains the various vocabulary learning strategies commonly used by accounting students. Based on the data obtained through the distribution of questionnaires and interpreted in the form of percentages for each item based on five categories of English vocabulary acquisition strategies, as follows: Determination strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Figure 1 presents the results from the use of the determination strategy by students.



According to the percentage results obtained, the determination strategy is the most commonly used strategy by students, where they prefer to learn vocabulary based on context with a percentage of 17.01% 'always' and with the guidance of an English dictionary, 25.70% 'always'. These were followed by memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, and

social strategies, and cognitive strategy. The strategy that has the lowest percentage is the cognitive strategy, where only 2.9% of students always apply the strategy of learning vocabulary by making a list of certain vocabulary and writing it down repeatedly. This is considered ineffective for students, so cognitive strategies are less popular among them.

Figure 2 Students' Used of Cognitive Strategy



At a later stage, the researcher found results regarding students' perceptions of the common vocabulary learning strategies they use: Based on the results, the students are very concerned about their vocabulary knowledge, which is considered important for them as a basis for language learning and supports them in developing their language skills for job preparation. However, most of them sometimes have their own challenges in learning vocabulary such as difficulty memorizing, pronunciation and understanding grammatical meanings. One of the students who experienced the challenge said:

*"Based on my experience, in terms of grammar. Sometimes I often find words that have different terms and meanings. because there are some vocabs that are the same but have different meanings, for example like V1 and V2 in tenses, the meanings are different. Then in the speaking section, sometimes if we mispronounce a word, the meaning will be wrong, so we don't understand."* (Student 2).

Notwithstanding the challenges that they face, they have tried various strategies to ease their learning of vocabulary, namely by often inferring the meaning of words based on context. One of the students said that she could do this by *"connecting with words that I previously got, for example, from movies, song lyrics, etc."* (Student 1). However, there are students who still need a dictionary, either in digital or non-digital form. The students think that the use of a dictionary in this determination strategy can make it easier for them, as cited:

*"In my opinion, because our vocabulary knowledge, especially my own, is still limited, so I*

*really need a guide or dictionary to help me find the meaning of words that I didn't know.*" (Student 3).

In addition, there are students who argue that having someone involved in helping them learn vocabulary is very important; *"I think involving other people is important, especially for practicing pronunciation in conversation because while we are learning English, at least they can provide corrections."* (Student 4). There are some students who find it difficult to learn vocabulary using the memorization method as one student said: *"For me, it is not effective, especially when I often forget, so it's better to just understand the context rather than have to memorize it over and over again."* (Student 3).

Despite memorization being ineffective for them, students can find other strategies by applying things they are interested in and realizing the importance of learning vocabulary by increasing their motivation and enthusiasm for learning, as one informant affirmed: *"In my opinion, I focus more on building motivation for myself, so I apply English more as basic knowledge everywhere. So if we can't speak English, we won't be able to do anything, and we will be left far behind from other people."* (Student 1).

In addition to building motivation, they were also able to overcome the lack of vocabulary comprehension by involving English media during learning, which was one of the strategies most favored by most students. One student mentioned, *"in my opinion, the use of media is very helpful to overcome the lack of vocabulary knowledge, especially now that everyone is using the internet and technology is sophisticated, so we can learn new knowledge faster"*. (Student 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that students are aware of their learning and how they can overcome the obstacles they face when learning vocabulary by utilizing English media, concentrating, building motivation, and evaluating their ability to learn vocabulary.

## DISCUSSION

From this study, the determination strategy is a strategy commonly used by students to learn vocabulary by guessing word meanings based on context and using English-English dictionaries. In contrast to Astika (2016), who reported that students seem to rely more on determination strategies, a more convenient way for students to learn new words is through the use of translation directly from English to Indonesian dictionaries, as they use bilingual dictionaries that offer an easier way to memorize word meanings through translation. Followed by the use of strategies, most students choose to learn vocabulary through group activities by discussing and searching for word definitions together. This shows that students learned some words when cooperating in group work activities (Suharmin et al., 2016). In

contrast, a different study used Turkish EFL students. Where social strategies were the least used strategies partly because, according to Okyar (2021), she reported that few students were willing to work in groups to learn vocabulary because they were not given enough encouragement to interact with their peers.

Creating a vocabulary notebook, taking notes to practice the words acquired, and writing the words to be memorized are the strategies preferred by most students. Suharmin et al. (2016) In this study, different results were obtained when students never took vocabulary notes because this strategy was considered less effective for memorization than using notes. In addition, in the cognitive strategy, they repeat words both orally and in writing. Similar results were shown in a study. It is argued by Letchumanan et al. (2016) that students' cognitive strategies have an effect on writing tasks in ESL or EFL because they involve the process of repeating terms both orally and in writing. Reflecting on the results of this study based on metacognitive strategies, most students stated they attempted to be responsible for their own acquisition of vocabulary by increasing their motivation and concentrating on learning vocabulary. Most students also try to find the best way to learn vocabulary through English media, through platforms that present a wide variety of English content. Another medium that students usually use is building knowledge of vocabulary through TV channels in English, such as films, music, and the occasional documentary in the metacognitive category (Muhammad Nur & Jusoh, 2022)

## CONCLUSION

This study examines students' strategies for learning common vocabulary at Bekasi Vocational High School. Results show that students are aware of the importance of vocabulary and use various strategies. These strategies include determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive. Determination strategy is the most commonly used strategy, followed by memory, metacognitive, social, and cognitive. Students prefer practical, simple, and efficient strategies for vocabulary learning.

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