

# Vocabulary Learning Strategies: An investigation of the EFL University Students

Lulud Oktaviani<sup>1</sup>

Achmad Yudi Wahyudin<sup>2</sup>

Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia<sup>1,2</sup>

Email: achmad.yudi@teknokrat.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** The mastery of lexical information is a constant struggle when studying English. It is not considered that having a large lexical knowledge or vocabulary is one of the conditions for being able to communicate smoothly in the language. Each student may have a different method for increasing their vocabulary. As a result, the purpose of this study is to learn about the tactics utilized by EFL students at one of Bandar Lampung's private universities. The study will also illustrate the frequency with which each method is employed by EFL students. The data for this study was collected via a distributed questionnaire and presented using a quantitative technique. This study enlisted the participation of 30 students from a private university in Bandar Lampung. The metacognitive method was shown to be the most frequently used strategy in acquiring English vocabulary, whereas the memory strategy was found to be the least frequently employed. Students typically prefer to watch English TV episodes or movies and observe their blunders as a technique to learn a new English language in specific actions. As shown in the findings of this study, certain tactics are less popular among students and should be offered since they will help students find the best way to acquire new vocabulary and eventually help them become independent learners.

**Keywords:** vocabulary learning strategy; EFL students; university students; quantitative

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of technology is widely spread around the world in any aspect of life, especially during and after the pandemic era of the Coronavirus (Okmawati, 2020; Vargo et al., 2021). People mostly communicate and do their activities through technology. The technology used is varied from adopting or adapting (Dey et al., 2020; Whitelaw et al., 2020). This phenomenon leads them to interact with more people around the world using an international language, such as English. Since English is a global language and one of the communication means (Clyne & Sharifian, 2010), it encourages people to learn it effectively to support their communication. One of the most significant parts of effectively learning a second or foreign language is learning vocabulary.

Vocabularies, which include listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills, are stated to be the foundation of all skills in learning a language, including English as a foreign language (EFL) for Indonesians (Nemathollahi, Behjat, & Kargar, 2017). Limited vocabulary knowledge can make it difficult to successfully speak, read, write, or even understand a language (Mutalib, 2014). Each language student may have various ways of enhancing their vocabulary than another learner, which motivates them to take certain actions, such as watching a movie (Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020), using a web-based application (Oktaviani & Mandasari, 2019), and utilizing an autonomous application (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019). Those learning strategies are considered helpful ways to achieve learning goals (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018). Brown (1983) describes strategies as the unique attacks we make on a given problem that differ significantly from person to person. Furthermore, according to Naveh et al. (2011) in Dansereau (1988), a vocabulary strategy is a special instruction tool and technique of going about directly or explicitly as well as autonomous word-learning skills.

Based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), learners' lexical knowledge expansion techniques are divided into six groups (Oxford, 1989). Memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, emotional, and social methods are all available. Several studies have been undertaken based on this category to determine which tactics EFL learners most commonly employed. Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) and Nematollahi, Behjat, and Kargar (2017) performed different research that indicated the following order of strategies utilized by students in order of frequency: determination (DET), cognitive (COG), memory (MEM), metacognitive (MET), and social strategies (SOC). The two studies stated above discovered that guessing from context and using a dictionary are the most common ways. Additionally, asking the teacher or classmates for meaning is an uncommon occurrence (Amirian and Heshmatifar, 2013). Seffar (2014) performed explanatory research on Moroccan university students' language acquisition practices. Students' gender and competency had a substantial association with their usage of learning methodologies, according to the study, which included 124 Moroccan university students. Female students use memory strategies, cognitive strategies,

compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies more frequently than male students, according to this study, and fourth-year university students use compensation and memory strategies more frequently, whereas first-year university students use metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies more frequently.

There have been several categories for vocabulary learning systems since the 1960s. Oxford (1989) categorized the tactics into six groups based on these criteria.

- 1) *Memory strategy* is a mental mechanism for learning new English words by linking what is previously learned to the words. Studying words with a pictorial explanation of their meaning, sketching words' purposes, tying words to a personal experience, connecting words by their coordinates, and associating the word with its antonyms and synonyms are all examples of remembering strategies (Schmitt, 1997).
- 2) The *cognitive technique* involves directly manipulating linguistic content, such as through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, and rearranging knowledge to construct stronger schemas (Oxford, 2002).
- 3) The *compensation method* entails a lot of guesswork about what a new word's meaning is likely to be. Analyzing visuals or gestures, judging from textual context, or estimating what a speaker will say next in English are all examples of compensatory tactics (Schmitt, 1997).
- 4) The *metacognitive technique* involves accessing English language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc. ), taking word tests, spacing out word practice, skipping or passing new words, and studying words over time (Schmitt, 1997).
- 5) The *affective technique* is heavily reliant on self-motivation or self-encouragement to acquire new English words. As the name implies, affective learning entails a learning method that focuses on the learner's attitude. Attempting to relax anytime scared or afraid to speak English, talking to someone about how it feels to learn English, and even rewarding oneself when the learning language process goes well and contributes to the learner's growth are examples of affective acts.
- 6) The *social strategy* is concerned with a learner's engagement with other individuals to improve their lexical knowledge. Asking the teacher for a translation, paraphrasing or providing a synonym for the new word, asking classmates for the meaning, discovering new meaning through group activity, studying and practicing meaning in the group, or seeking assistance from native speakers are all examples of social strategies (Ahmed, 1989).

According to the explanation, the researchers want to know which of the six kinds of vocabulary acquisition procedures is most commonly employed by the EFL students in this study. As a result, the purpose of this study is to find out what ways EFL students at one of Bandar Lampung's private institutions use to learn vocabulary. In addition, the survey will disclose the frequency with which the participants employ various tactics. After the study is completed, the researchers anticipate that instructors will use the findings to emphasize the kind of inside and outside-of-classroom activities that can help pupils enhance their English lexical knowledge.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is categorized as a quantitative study as the foundation for conducting research. According to Kothari (2004), a quantitative study is used to measure quantity or amount. The participants' ways of acquiring vocabulary are discovered through a survey in which a questionnaire is distributed. This study involves 30 students from two study programs of the Faculty of Arts and Education at Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, who have the characteristics shown in the table below.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Characteristics		Number
Gender	Female	22
	Male	8
Major	English Education	13
	English Literature	17

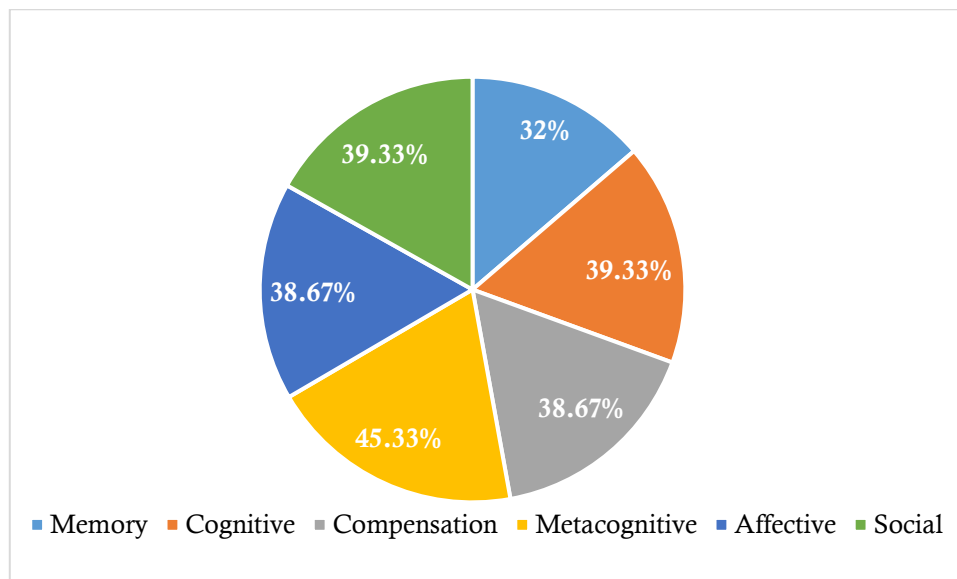
The students from these two study programs are chosen because they both are learning English as Foreign Language. They also have to take and pass the “vocabulary” subject during their bachelor's degree. Additionally, they have to memorize 5,000 words and submit the final project in a form of a self-dictionary.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) established by Oxford (1989) was employed in this study. Moreover, the questionnaire was adapted from Hashemi and Hadavi (2015). Originally, they utilized the questionnaire to conduct their research into the vocabulary learning practices of Iranian Medical Sciences students. Memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensatory strategy, metacognitive strategy, attachment strategy, and social strategy are among the 36 statements in the questionnaire, which are divided into six categories. However, in this study, the researchers used a questionnaire with only 30 statements that could indicate those six learning categories. The questionnaire was given in the form of a *Google Form*. After collecting the data, statistical analysis was used to examine the data in this study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overall, participants commonly employ a metacognitive approach to enhance their lexical knowledge among the six categories. With 45.33% of respondents, this is the highest proportion. The participants in the cognitive and social strategies often use the second strategy. The percentages in both categories are the same, at 39.33%. Compensation and emotive techniques received the same percentage of replies from the participants, with both categories receiving 38.67%. Finally, the memory method is the least employed approach by participants while learning a language. The

percentage gain is 32%, which is the lowest of the five strategy categories. It is all summarized in Figure 1 below.



Picture 1. The percentage of categories of vocabularies learning strategies used by the participants

However, to get through more detail for each category, the following tables and descriptions will go through the specifics of the acts that fall under each category.

Table 2. Metacognitive strategy with detailed actions

Actions	Percentage
I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	73.33%
I pay attention when someone is speaking English	66.67%
I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	13.33%
I look for people I can talk to in English	36.67%
I think about my progress in learning English	36.67%

73.33% of the 30 participants in this study were aware of their faults when using English and used the knowledge to help them improve. In the meanwhile, 66.67% of participants pay attention when someone speaks English as a technique of learning new terms. Participants choose to seek individuals who can speak with them in English or think about their success in learning English as a method to maintain developing their English lexical knowledge by the same amount, 36.67%.

Table 3. Cognitive strategy with detailed actions

Actions	Percentage
I say or write new English words several times	43.33%
I watch English-language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	73.33%
I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English	33.33%
I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully	16.67%
I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	30%

From cognitive strategy, watching English-language TV episodes or movies appears to be more popular and used by participants to acquire new English words. Meanwhile, 43.33% of respondents indicate that they repeat new English terms numerous times to expand their vocabulary. Writing notes, messages, letters, or reports in English is the third most common approach to expanding one's English vocabulary, in that order. Writing summaries of material written or spoken in English, on the other hand, received 30% of the votes. Finally, 16.67% of respondents admit to skimming an English paragraph before returning to read it thoroughly to acquire new vocabulary.

Table 4. Social strategy with detailed actions

Actions	Percentage
If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	66.67%
I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	40%
I practice English with other students.	40%
I ask questions in English.	23.33%
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	26.67%

When participants are learning new English terms through social techniques, they prefer to ask another person to slow down or repeat what they are saying if they do not comprehend anything. The action has the largest percentage of other actions in the area of social strategy, at 66.67%. Meanwhile, 40% of replies indicate that participants seek out someone to reprimand them when they speak English or identify people with whom they may practice their English. The culture of English speakers enriches the vocabulary of the remaining 26.67% of participants. Finally, 23.33% of respondents prefer to learn new English vocabulary by asking questions in English.

Table 5. Affective strategy with detailed actions

Actions	Percentage
I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake	43.33%
I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English	63.33%
I reward myself or treat myself when I do well in English	20%
I write down my feelings in a language-learning diary	20%
I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English	46.67%

Participants' behaviors to acquire new English words are highly tied to their sentiments or emotion in an affective approach. When they are apprehensive about using English, 63.33% of participants select to relax from a list of five options. Meanwhile, 46.67% of participants will share their feelings about learning English with someone else. When 43.33% of participants are worried about making a mistake, encouraging oneself to speak English is a better option. On the other hand, 20% of participants offer themselves a reward or a treat when they perform well in English, while the remaining 20% will record their sentiments in a language learning journal.

Table 6. Compensation strategy with detailed actions

Actions	Percentage
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses	50%
I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English	20%
If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	43.33%
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	43.33%
I try to guess what the other person will say next in English	36.67%

As much as half of the participants will guess terms they don't know. Meanwhile, 43.33% of respondents indicate that they will use a term or phrase that has the same meaning as a word or phrase that they are unfamiliar with. The action of utilizing gestures for unknown words yields the same proportion. 36.67% of respondents, on the other hand, prefer to estimate what another person would say next in English. Participants want to create new terms if they don't have the correct phrase to describe their objective, as seen by the lowest proportion in the compensation strategy.

Table 7. Memory strategy with detail of actions

Actions	Percentage
I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	63.33%
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word	36.67%
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used	26.67%
I use flashcards to remember new English words	6.67%
I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign	26.67%

Participants are more comfortable using new English terms in a phrase to remember them. In comparison to the other acts, the percentage attained is 63.33%, which is the greatest. The participants' less common method of expanding their vocabularies is to link the sound of a new English word with an image or picture of the word to help them remember it. The percentage gain is 36.67%, which puts it in second place. Memorizing a new English word by creating a mental image of how it may be used and remembering a new English word by its placement on the paper, on the board, or on a street sign are two more common methods used by participants to add to their collection of English terms. Both of the aforementioned activities have a percentage of 26.67%. Meanwhile, utilizing a flashcard to memorize new English words is the least common method of doing so. 6.67% is the current figure.

The participants in this study employed all six kinds of English vocabulary learning strategies. This finding is consistent with Seffar's study (2014), which looked into how Moroccan university students learn English vocabulary. However, the frequency of each method in both research, from the most utilized to the least used, indicates a different outcome. According to Seffar (2014), Moroccan university students utilize the compensatory method the most, while the emotive technique is employed the least. This outcome is in stark contrast to the findings of the current study, which show that students prefer to employ metacognitive strategies over memory strategies.

Another issue worth mentioning is the activities associated with each group. Participants in the study, according to Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013), as well as Nematollahi, Behjat, and Kargar (2017), tend to guess from context and utilize a dictionary to learn English vocabulary. Meanwhile, the current study found that the majority of participants acquire new English terms through watching English-language TV episodes or movies and using the mistakes they make as feedback to improve.

## CONCLUSION

Most college students are expected to attend English lessons to ensure that one of the talents that can help them compete worldwide is the ability to communicate in English. Lecturers will always present learning activities that contribute to students' English progress to motivate them to attain their abilities. Vocabularies are essential for the proper acquisition of each skill, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. EFL learners in a private institution in Bandar Lampung employed all six kinds of vocabulary acquisition tools to enhance their vocabularies, according to this study. The participants' most commonly utilized ways to extend their list of languages are metacognitive strategy and cognitive strategy, out of six categories. Participants prefer to develop their lexical knowledge by watching English TV episodes or movies and identifying their blunders to improve their performance.

The findings of this study, in addition to revealing the most commonly utilized techniques by students, also reveal that there are various activities for acquiring vocabulary that fit into a certain group and are less popular among students. It suggests that instructors or lecturers should aim to introduce EFL students to a variety of vocabulary-learning methodologies. It will allow children to discover the ways that work best for them, and they will eventually be able and encouraged to study a language on their own. Furthermore, the findings of this study are likely to serve as a foundation for future research in the field of vocabulary acquisition strategies. Future studies should be undertaken on a greater number of EFL learners from diverse departments outside of those that teach English as a foreign language, according to the researchers.

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