

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) play a significant role in helping English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners develop vocabulary knowledge. However, differences in the ways male and female students employ these strategies and perceive their usefulness remain insufficiently explored. This study aimed to identify the vocabulary learning strategies most frequently used by male and female senior high school students and to examine their perceptions of those strategies. A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 185 students, followed by semi-structured interviews and reflective journals involving 12 selected participants consisting of six male and six female students. The questionnaire provided an overview of students' strategy preferences, while the interview and journal data were analyzed thematically to gain deeper insights into learners' experiences and perceptions. The findings revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used, followed by social, cognitive, determination, and memory strategies. Although both male and female students applied various vocabulary learning strategies, they demonstrated different preferences in their learning practices. Furthermore, students perceived vocabulary learning strategies as beneficial for improving vocabulary understanding, strengthening vocabulary retention, increasing confidence in using English, enhancing learning interest, and creating a more comfortable learning environment. These findings highlight the importance of integrating diverse vocabulary learning strategies into English instruction to accommodate students' different learning preferences and support more effective vocabulary acquisition

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, gender differences, students' perceptions, qualitative study, EFL learners

ABSTRAK

Strategi pembelajaran kosakata memiliki peran penting dalam membantu peserta didik mengembangkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (English as a Foreign Language/EFL). Meskipun demikian, perbedaan strategi yang digunakan serta persepsi peserta didik laki-laki dan perempuan terhadap strategi tersebut masih memerlukan kajian yang lebih mendalam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi strategi pembelajaran kosakata yang paling sering digunakan oleh peserta didik laki-laki dan perempuan serta mendeskripsikan persepsi mereka terhadap penggunaan strategi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner kepada 185 peserta didik, kemudian dilanjutkan dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur dan jurnal reflektif terhadap 12 partisipan yang terdiri atas enam

peserta didik laki-laki dan enam peserta didik perempuan. Data kuesioner digunakan untuk memberikan gambaran umum mengenai kecenderungan penggunaan strategi, sedangkan data wawancara dan jurnal dianalisis secara tematik untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai pengalaman belajar peserta didik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi metakognitif merupakan strategi yang paling sering digunakan, diikuti oleh strategi sosial, kognitif, determinasi, dan memori. Selain memiliki kecenderungan penggunaan strategi yang berbeda, peserta didik juga memandang bahwa strategi pembelajaran kosakata membantu meningkatkan pemahaman kosakata, memperkuat daya ingat terhadap kosakata baru, meningkatkan rasa percaya diri dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris, menumbuhkan minat belajar, serta menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih nyaman. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya penerapan berbagai strategi pembelajaran kosakata dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris agar dapat mengakomodasi kebutuhan belajar peserta didik yang beragam.

Kata Kunci: strategi pembelajaran kosakata, perbedaan gender, persepsi peserta didik, penelitian kualitatif, pembelajaran EFL

A. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the fundamental components of language proficiency because it enables learners to understand and express ideas effectively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, limited exposure to authentic language makes vocabulary mastery an essential factor in supporting students' communicative competence. Consequently, learners are required not only to acquire new words but also to employ appropriate learning strategies that facilitate vocabulary development.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) have been recognized as an

important aspect of second language learning because they help learners understand, store, retrieve, and use vocabulary more effectively. Rubin (1975) explained that successful language learners actively apply learning strategies to regulate their learning process. Later, Schmitt (2000) classified vocabulary learning strategies into five categories, namely determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. These categories have become one of the most widely used frameworks for investigating vocabulary learning in EFL contexts.

Previous studies have demonstrated that learners employ different vocabulary learning

strategies according to their individual characteristics. One factor that has received considerable attention is gender. Several studies reported that female students tend to apply social and memory strategies more frequently because they prefer collaborative learning and interpersonal interaction. In contrast, male students often rely on cognitive and metacognitive strategies that emphasize independent learning, problem solving, and self-regulation. Nevertheless, findings across previous studies remain inconsistent. Some researchers found significant differences between male and female learners, whereas others reported relatively similar patterns of strategy use. These inconsistencies indicate that gender-related differences in vocabulary learning strategies remain open for further investigation.

Another limitation identified in previous research concerns the emphasis on the frequency of strategy use rather than students' own perspectives. Most studies primarily measured which strategies were used most frequently through questionnaires, while relatively few explored how learners experienced, evaluated, and interpreted the

usefulness of those strategies during the vocabulary learning process. As a result, students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies have not been sufficiently documented, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context.

Understanding students' perceptions is important because learning strategies are closely associated with learners' motivation, confidence, and self-regulation. Students who perceive particular strategies as useful are more likely to apply them consistently, leading to better vocabulary retention and more meaningful learning experiences. Exploring learners' perceptions therefore provides insights not only into what strategies are used but also into the reasons those strategies are maintained and considered beneficial in everyday learning.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female senior high school students and examines their perceptions of those strategies. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the vocabulary learning strategies most frequently employed by students and to describe how male and female learners

perceive the contribution of those strategies to their vocabulary learning. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on vocabulary learning strategies and provide practical implications for English teachers in designing learning activities that accommodate diverse learning preferences and promote more effective vocabulary acquisition.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female senior high school students and to explore their perceptions of those strategies. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to obtain a detailed understanding of participants' experiences, opinions, and learning practices within their natural learning environment.

The study was conducted at a senior high school in Bekasi Regency, Indonesia. The participants were Grade 11 students enrolled in six regular English classes. Data collection was conducted in two stages. First, a structured questionnaire was distributed to

students across the six English classes to obtain an overview of their vocabulary learning strategy preferences. Based on the questionnaire results, twelve students were purposively selected for the qualitative phase, consisting of six male and six female students. The participants were chosen to represent different vocabulary learning strategy preferences and learning experiences, allowing the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information related to the research objectives.

Three instruments were employed to collect the data: a structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals. The questionnaire was used to identify students' preferences for the five categories of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) proposed by Schmitt (2000), namely determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary source of qualitative data by allowing participants to explain their learning experiences, strategy choices, and perceptions in greater depth. In addition, students' reflective journals were used to support the interview

findings by providing continuous reflections on their vocabulary learning experiences.

The data were analyzed using different procedures according to the type of instrument. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the mean score of each vocabulary learning strategy category to identify students' overall strategy preferences. Meanwhile, the interview transcripts and reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data reduction, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data obtained from the questionnaire, interviews, and students' journals were triangulated to ensure consistency and provide a comprehensive understanding of students' vocabulary learning strategies and their perceptions.

C. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study were obtained from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals to examine the vocabulary learning strategies employed by male and female senior high school students and their

perceptions of these strategies. The analysis showed that students employed all five categories of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) proposed by Schmitt (2000), namely determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Rather than relying on a single strategy, students combined several strategies according to their learning needs, classroom experiences, and personal preferences. Although both male and female students demonstrated positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning strategies, differences were identified in the way each group approached vocabulary learning.

Students commonly began the vocabulary learning process by applying determination strategies, particularly when encountering unfamiliar words. Questionnaire responses indicated that learners generally attempted to identify word meanings independently through dictionaries, online translation tools, contextual clues, grammatical analysis, and visual representations before asking others for assistance. This tendency was consistently reflected in the interview data. One male participant explained that he

usually searched unfamiliar vocabulary through several digital platforms before asking anyone else: *"Usually, if I don't know a word, I search for it on Google Translate or ChatGPT. Sometimes I also check YouTube because I want to know both the meaning and the pronunciation."* (Usually, if I don't know a word, I look it up on Google Translate or ChatGPT. Sometimes I also check YouTube because I want to know both the meaning and the pronunciation.) (MS2).

This statement illustrates that digital resources were not merely used to obtain direct translations but also to understand pronunciation and contextual usage. Similar experiences appeared in the students' reflective journals, where participants described looking for authentic examples before using unfamiliar vocabulary in their own sentences. Female participants also demonstrated independent vocabulary discovery; however, they were more likely to continue the learning process through discussion with classmates whenever additional clarification was required. These findings indicate that determination strategies encouraged students to become autonomous learners by

utilizing multiple linguistic resources before depending on external assistance, supporting Schmitt's (2000) description of independent vocabulary discovery.

Besides independent learning, social strategies also played an essential role in students' vocabulary development. Participants described learning vocabulary through classroom discussions, asking teachers or classmates about unfamiliar words, practicing English conversations, and completing collaborative learning activities. Although both groups acknowledged the benefits of interaction, female students generally regarded collaborative learning as a more effective approach because immediate feedback helped them understand unfamiliar vocabulary more easily. As one female participant stated: *"We usually quiz each other about vocabulary and practice using the new words in conversations. It makes learning easier because we can ask questions directly."* (We usually quiz each other on vocabulary and practice using the new words in conversations. It makes learning easier because we can ask questions directly.) (FS2).

The reflective journals further showed that interaction with classmates created opportunities to clarify misunderstandings and practice vocabulary in meaningful communication. Meanwhile, male students tended to combine collaborative learning with independent exploration through digital resources, suggesting that social interaction functioned as complementary support rather than their primary learning preference. These findings demonstrate that social strategies enhanced vocabulary acquisition by promoting communication, collaboration, and immediate feedback, consistent with Schmitt's (2000) taxonomy.

Students also reported that memory and cognitive strategies contributed significantly to vocabulary retention and language production. Rather than memorizing isolated words, participants repeatedly reviewed vocabulary, recorded unfamiliar words in personal notes, constructed example sentences, and incorporated newly learned vocabulary into daily conversations. One participant described this learning habit in the reflective journal: *"I usually try to make sentences using the new*

vocabulary so that I can remember how the word is used." (I usually try to form sentences using the new vocabulary so that I can remember how the word is used.) (FS4-J).

This reflection indicates that students strengthened vocabulary retention through meaningful language production rather than mechanical memorization. Interview findings similarly revealed that repeated pronunciation practice, note-taking, reading English texts, and listening to English media enabled students to understand vocabulary more deeply and apply it in different contexts. These learning behaviors suggest that memory and cognitive strategies supported vocabulary acquisition through continuous practice, contextual application, and repeated exposure, which are fundamental characteristics of effective vocabulary learning according to Schmitt (2000).

Another prominent finding concerns students' use of metacognitive strategies. Participants demonstrated awareness of their own learning process by planning vocabulary study, selecting appropriate learning resources, reviewing previously learned

vocabulary, monitoring learning progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of different learning methods. Male students generally preferred managing their learning independently through digital resources because these platforms allowed them to regulate their own pace, whereas female students frequently combined independent review with collaborative discussions. The consistency across questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals indicates that students consciously selected strategies that matched their individual learning preferences, reflecting the characteristics of self-regulated learners described by Rubin (1975).

Beyond identifying the strategies employed during vocabulary learning, this study found that students perceived vocabulary learning strategies as valuable tools for improving their English learning. Participants consistently reported that these strategies helped them understand unfamiliar vocabulary more efficiently, retain newly learned words, increase confidence in speaking and writing, enhance motivation, and create a more enjoyable learning environment.

Although male and female students differed in their preferred learning approaches, both groups agreed that combining various strategies made vocabulary learning more meaningful and effective. Female students generally valued discussion and collaborative learning because immediate interaction reduced learning difficulties, whereas male students preferred the flexibility provided by independent learning through digital resources. These findings suggest that students' perceptions were shaped primarily by their learning experiences rather than gender alone.

The integration of questionnaire responses, interview findings, and students' reflective journals demonstrates that vocabulary learning strategies functioned as complementary learning practices rather than isolated techniques. Students continuously combined determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies according to different learning situations and objectives. These findings support Rubin's (1975) proposition that successful language learners actively regulate their learning by selecting strategies that

correspond to their needs. Likewise, the findings reinforce Schmitt's (2000) taxonomy by demonstrating that effective vocabulary acquisition results from the integration of multiple strategy categories. More importantly, this study extends previous research by showing that students' positive perceptions toward vocabulary learning strategies emerged from their direct learning experiences, indicating that strategy use contributes not only to vocabulary development but also to learners' confidence, motivation, and autonomy in English learning.

D. Conclusion

This study investigated the vocabulary learning strategies employed by male and female senior high school students and explored their perceptions of using those strategies in learning English vocabulary. The findings revealed that students employed all five categories of Vocabulary Learning Strategies proposed by Schmitt (2000), namely determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Rather than relying on a single strategy, students combined different strategies according to their learning preferences, learning

experiences, and classroom situations. Although both male and female students demonstrated positive engagement with vocabulary learning strategies, differences were identified in the ways they approached vocabulary learning. Male students tended to rely more on independent learning supported by digital resources, whereas female students generally preferred collaborative learning through interaction with teachers and peers.

The study also found that students perceived vocabulary learning strategies as beneficial for improving vocabulary comprehension, strengthening vocabulary retention, increasing confidence in using English, enhancing learning motivation, and creating a more supportive learning environment. These positive perceptions indicate that effective vocabulary learning is influenced not only by the strategies themselves but also by students' ability to select and adapt strategies that correspond to their individual learning needs. The consistency of findings across questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals further strengthens the conclusion that vocabulary

learning strategies contribute to both vocabulary acquisition and students' engagement in English learning.

The findings of this study provide practical implications for English teachers by highlighting the importance of integrating various vocabulary learning strategies into classroom instruction to accommodate diverse learning preferences among students. Learning activities that combine independent exploration with collaborative interaction may provide greater opportunities for students to develop vocabulary more effectively. Future studies are encouraged to involve participants from different educational levels or learning contexts and employ broader qualitative or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of vocabulary learning strategies and learners' experiences.

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