

Vocabulary Strategies for English Learners

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is an essential part of a language. In Indonesia, especially in Ternate, many students struggle to enrich their vocabulary on mastering English. Students find difficulties in learning English and strategies in learning vocabulary. Therefore, this study aims to investigate vocabulary strategies for English learners. The research purposes were: 1) to determine the students' strategies in learning vocabulary and 2) to determine the dominant strategies used by university students. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative design, and the subjects of the study were students of Khairun University, consisting of 59 students. The data of the study were collected through a questionnaire. The result found that students used all types of vocabulary learning strategies. However, they used the memory and cognitive learning strategy more often than other strategies. Additionally, using a dictionary, repeatedly spelling the word in mind, and consciously contacting the target language through various media were the dominant strategies used by the students.

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the language aspects that must be learned by the foreign language learners. Vocabulary is often viewed as a critical tool for foreign language learners because a limited vocabulary in learning a foreign language make it barrier in communication. It is known as the building blocks of language and No. language acquisition of vocabulary and vocabulary is prime concern in second language settings because it plays a dominant role in classroom success. It is generally acknowledged nowadays vocabulary, grammar and phonetics are the three major components that constitute language knowledge. Schmitt (2000) claims that "the learning of these basic words cannot be left to chance, but should be taught as quickly as possible, because they open the door of further learning".

Academic vocabulary is notably more difficult to learn than conversational language because it is more specific and sometimes abstract, making it difficult to grasp. Knowledge of this kind of technical vocabulary in any specific content are , for example; social science, science, mathematics, or language arts is directly linked to content knowledge.

When English language learners struggle with English Knowledge, it can be often be attributed to their difficulty with understanding the vocabulary. According Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002), there are profound differences in vocabulary knowledge among learners from different ability or socioeconomics. Thus, students with smaller vocabularies are at a greater disadvantage in learning, and this lack of Knowledge too often is the main barrier to their comprehension of texts and lectures (Newton, Padak & Rasinski, 2008).

However, the importance of vocabulary learning has never been overemphasized in learning a foreign language. since then, many teachers, researchers and scholars have devoted themselves to this field, making remarkable achievements. This research aims to investigate the vocabulary learning strategy used by the students of English Department of Khairun University. These descriptive techniques attempted to find out vocabulary strategies used by students.

2. Method

This research involved 59 4th-semester students. The reason for choosing the participant was that the participants had already passed some English skill subjects such as structure, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students also had passed a few literature subjects, guaranteeing they had more reading experience than the first-year students.

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLS and adapted from Cheung (2004). There are two sections of the questionnaire. The first section aimed to know student vocabulary learning strategies through a 5-point Likert scale. The scale was (1) Never to (5) Always. The questionnaire consisted of 33 statements, including four cognitive strategy statements, eleven memory strategy statements, six metacognitive strategy statements, three social strategy statements, and nine consolidation strategy statements.

The second section of the questionnaire was an open-ended question. This section aimed to know student perspectives on the most used vocabulary learning strategies and their difficulties in increasing their vocabulary number.

This study aimed to know student vocabulary learning strategies. The researcher classified every statement in the strategies group. The next step was calculating the number of the 5-point Likert scale categorization per strategy using a formula proposed by Sudjana (2005) below:

$$\text{Range} = \frac{\text{highest score} - \text{lowest score}}{\text{number of category}}$$

The result of the formula was a **class category**. The next step is calculating the mean of the class. The distribution of every type of strategy will be shown in a table.

3. Result

This section discussed the findings of the most used vocabulary strategies by the 4th-semester students of the English Department, Khairun University. The result will be explained based on the category of vocabulary learning strategies proposed by Scmitt (2000). There are five categories: cognitive, memory, metacognitive, social, and consolidation. The explanation will include a diagram and answers to the open-ended questions.

3.1. Memory Strategies

Memory learning strategies is a strategy that involves cognitive processing by connecting the newly learned word with some prior knowledge the students have (Scmitt, 2000). The questionnaire for this category included eleven statements related to memory strategies. The statements are (7) I link the word to a visual image in my mind; (8) I link the word to another English word with a similar sound; (9) I link the word to an Indonesian word with a similar sound; (10) I use sound and meaning associations (like the sound in the poetry); (11) I remember the sentence in which the word is used; (12) I remember the new word together with the context where the new word occurs; (13) I make up my own sentences using the new word; (14) I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind; (15) I remember words by doing dictations; (16) I remember words by doing group work activities in class; and (17) I remember words by doing a project.

The result from the Likert scale analysis for memory vocabulary learning strategy is shown in the table below:

Table 1. Scale Categorization of Memory Strategy

Scale	Description
11.0-19.8	Never
19.9-28.6	Rare
28.7-37.4	Sometimes
37.5-46.2	Often
46.3-55	Always

Table 1 contains the exact number of scale categorizations of memory vocabulary learning strategies. Participants who got a total score between 11.0 to 19.8 are categorized as never, or the participants never used memory strategies to acquire a new vocabulary. Participants who got a total score of 19.9 to 28.6 is classified as rare, or the participants rarely used this technique to earn a new word. Moreover, once the participants got a total score between 28.7 to 37.4, it means they sometimes used this strategy to learn a unique expression. Some participants may bring a total score between 37.5 and 46.2, meaning they often use this strategy. The last categorization is always. It is when the participants got a total score between 46.3 to 55.

The result of the mean calculation showed that the average score of all participants for this category was 38.39. The score means that, in general, the group used this strategy often. The distribution of participants who used this technique is shown in the following chart:

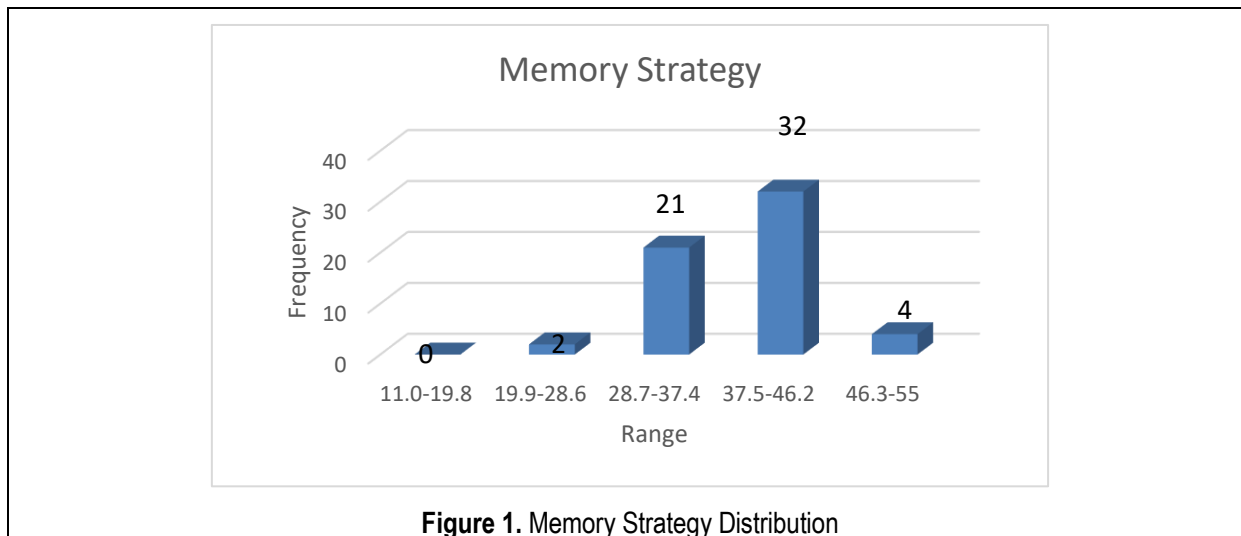


Figure1. displays the frequency distribution of memory vocabulary learning strategy. The chart shows that all the participants used this technique to learn a new expression with different frequencies. Two students *rarely* applied this strategy. Twenty-one participants *sometimes* enjoyed this technique while attaining a new term. Thirty-two students chose to use this strategy to master a new vocabulary *often*. Lastly, only four students used the memory strategy always.

Another fact shown in this research was the specific strategies the students used the most. To find the result, the researcher summed up the total score of every technique included in this category. The most used memory vocabulary learning strategies are shown below:

Table 2. Most Frequently Used Memory Strategy

No.	Memory Strategy	Score
7.	I link the word to a visual image in my mind	214
8.	I link the word to another English word with a similar sound	205
9.	I link the word to an Indonesian word with a similar sound	177
10.	I use sound and meaning associations (like the sound in the poetry)	182
11.	I remember the sentence in which the word is used	229
12.	I remember the new word together with the context where the new word occurs	212
13.	I make up my own sentences using the new word	206
14.	I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind	204
15.	I remember words by doing dictations	204
16.	I remember words by doing group work activities in class;	215
17.	I remember words by doing a project	217

Table 2 presents the total score for every memory strategy. The sequence of the most frequently used techniques was statement 11, statement 17, statement 16, statement 7, statement 12, statement 13, statement 8, statement 14 and 15, statement 10, and statement 9. The answer to the open-ended questionnaire strengthened this result.

Memory strategy suggests that students must have prior information before trying to learn a new expression. Even though the impact of the mean calculation indicated that the participants used these strategies *often*, only a few students mentioned the particular method they used. Student 4 combined a few techniques and used the vocab to make up a sentence with the wording. Student 45 preferred to do a group activity with her friend in the class. She said that the exercise helped her to memorize the vocabulary quickly. Student 53 also got a few strategies for gaining a new expression. One of the methods he used was to use the newly learned words with an imaginary situation. It helped him personally to add a new list to his vocabulary. Another student who mentioned the memory strategy specifically is student 57. Putting the latest words in context helped him to improve his English. The number of students mentioned in

this section revealed that they lack English exposure. There was only slight mental processing included in their learning routine. They could not relate to the new words because they had never met something they could associate with the terms.

3.2. Cognitive Strategies

According to Scmitt (2000), a cognitive strategy is a more mechanical strategy that involves students using the new vocabulary often so that students will memorize the words for a long time. The questionnaire included five statements related to the cognitive approach. The statements were (1) I repeatedly say the word in my mind frequently; (2) I repeatedly spell the word in my mind; (3) I repeatedly say the word aloud; (4) I repeatedly write the word; and (18) I analyze the part of speech of the new word.

The result from the Likert scale analysis for cognitive strategy categorization is shown in the following table:

Table 3. Scale Categorization for Cognitive Strategy

Scale	Description
5.0-9.0	Never
9.1-13.0	Rare
13.1-17.0	Sometimes
17.1-21.0	Often
21.1-25.0	Always

Table 3 pointed out the total score categorization the participants could get. The total score between 5.0 to 9.0 was categorized as *never*, 9.1 to 13.0 was classified as *rare*, 13.1 to 17.0 was organized as *sometimes*, 17.1 to 21.0 was ordered as *often*, and 21.1 to 25.0 was categorized as *always*. This categorization is used to analyze the distribution of cognitive vocabulary learning strategies trends from the participants.

Based on the calculation of the means, the average class scale for cognitive strategy was 17.831. The outcome means that the strategy trend was classified as *often* found in table 4.3, or students used this strategy often while learning a new vocabulary. The distribution of scale categorization for this design is shown below:

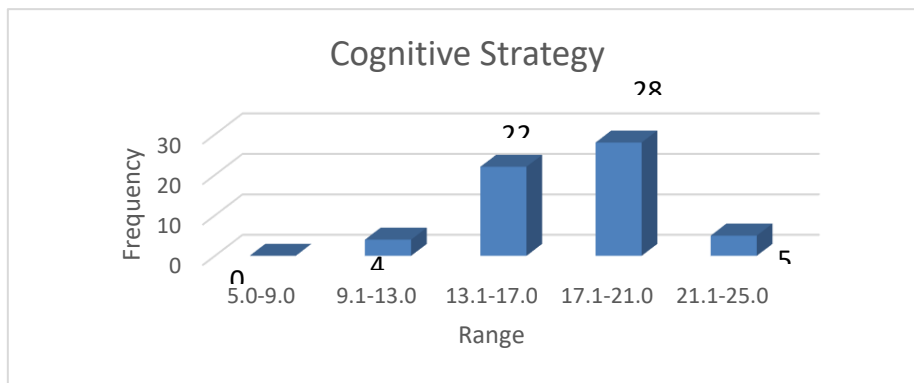


Figure 2. Cognitive Strategy Distribution

Chart 3.2. illustrates cognitive strategy distribution from all students. The chart displays that all students used the strategy in learning vocabulary, but the frequencies range. Four (4) students rarely used the cognitive method, twenty-two (22) students used the approach sometimes, twenty-eight (28) students often enjoyed the strategy, and five (5) students always utilized this technique.

In addition, the researcher also looked up specific strategies the students used for this category. To find the result, the researcher summed up the score of all participants for a design. The most frequently used cognitive vocabulary learning strategies are shown below:

Table 4. Most Frequently Used Cognitive Learning Strategy

No.	Cognitive Strategy	Score
1.	I repeatedly say the word in my mind	240
2.	I repeatedly spell the word in my mind	218
3.	I repeatedly say the word aloud	191
4.	I repeatedly write the word	198
18.	I analyze the part of speech of the new word	205

Table 4. shows that most participants tended to apply *I repeatedly say the word in my mind* as the most frequently used strategy to acquire a vocabulary. The second most commonly used vocabulary strategy is *I repeatedly spell the word in my mind*. *I analyze the part of speech of the new word* ranked third, followed by *I repeatedly write the word*. The least frequently used strategy was *I repeatedly say the word aloud*.

Compared to the questionnaires, some students mentioned using the cognitive vocabulary learning strategy to pick up vocabulary in the open-ended question. Student 4 said that he memorized and mentioned the word every day until he could use the words to make a sentence. Student 31 also preferred one of the cognitive vocabulary strategies to learn a new term. He said that besides memorizing the words, he kept saying or using the term over and over. Another student who used this technique was Student 46. Student 46 would find an essential part of the conversation, keep listening to it until he could catch the meaning based on the context, analyze which part of speech the word belonged to, and finally find the word in the dictionary.

A cognitive strategy requires students to practice using the new vocabulary often. The design does not engage students in the mental process. However, the students faced some challenges. Student 4 struggled to attain a new term when he could not read the new word. He could not continue to the phase *memorized and mentioned the word every day* since he could not read the word in the first place. Student 31 could not move on to the *saying or using the term repeatedly* because he tended to forget the item easily once he met a new one. He only preferred the technique but did not practice it. Student 46 even said he was lazy in practicing a new vocabulary, resulting in his lack of fluency.

3.3. Metacognitive Strategies

A metacognitive strategy helps learners determine their best approach to earning new words by monitoring, decision-making and evaluating their progress (Schmitt, 2000). There were six statements about this strategy included in the questionnaire. The statements are (28) I consciously contact the target language (e.g., reading extensively in English, watching films, listening to the radio, communicating with native speakers, getting a pen pal); (29) I get myself a vocabulary test; (30) I work and practice with peers/in groups; (31) I set a specific time for vocabulary learning; (32) I set priorities about which words are essential, not so important, not important at all, and to what extent (passive, active); and (33) Setting goals for learning vocabulary.

The result from the Likert scale analysis for metacognitive vocabulary learning strategy is shown in the table below:

Table 5. Scale Categorization for Metacognitive Strategy

Scale	Description
6-10.8	Never
10.9-15.6	Rare
15.7-20.4	Sometimes
20.5-25.2	Often
25.3-30.0	Always

Table 5 exposes the scale categorization for metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies. Students who received a score of 6 to 10.8 were classified as having *never* used this method. The ones who summed up a total score of 10.9 to 15.6 were grouped as the ones who *rarely* applied this technique. When the students got a total score between 15.7 to 20.4, it meant they practiced the strategy *sometimes*. Students with scores between 20.5 to 25.2 were considered the ones who used the technique *often*. The last categorization for metacognitive strategies was *always*. It was when the students got a total score between 25.3 to 30.0.

Based on table 3.5. the general students only used the metacognitive strategy *sometimes* since the calculation of the means proves that it only reached 20.407. It means the students used the technique often enough but did not constantly use it. The following chart is presented to see how many participants surpass the average class:

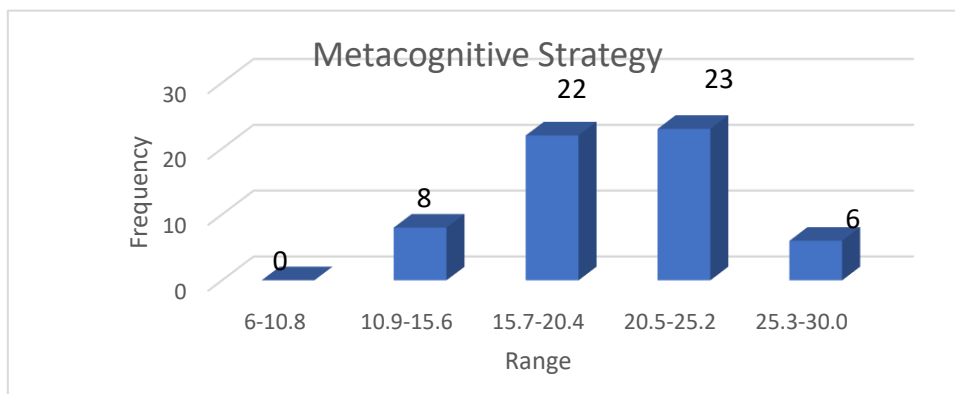


Figure 3. Metacognitive Strategy Distribution

Figure 3. show a tight distribution between those who surpassed the average score and those who did not. Eight students *rarely* used the method, twenty-two students used the technique *sometimes*, twenty-three students *often* practiced the approach to attain e new vocabulary, and six students *always* applied the strategy to enhance a unique expression. The chart shows that all the participants used the metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies with different frequency ranges.

Students' answers in the open-ended questionnaire showed a different fact than in close questionnaires. Thirty-two students, or more than half students, confessed that they learned a new vocabulary by watching a movie, listening to music, using English subtitles for non-Indonesian or English movies, reading books, magazines, or newspapers, and even playing video games. Student 7 said that she usually watches a film with English subtitles. She also listens to music, writes lyrics, and exchanges messages with her friend using English. Student 12 seemed to apply the same technique as student 7. Student 12 said that he usually finds a new vocab through watching a video, a movie, or even playing video games. Student 26 was exposed to new English vocabulary by reading books, magazines, and newspapers. She even said in the questionnaire that the more she reads, the more language she will learn. The resulting form of the open-ended questionnaire seemed to align with the calculation of the most frequently used metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies.

To find the most frequently used metacognitive strategy, the researcher summed up the score of all participants for a design. The most commonly used metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies are shown below:

Table 6. Most Frequently Used Metacognitive Learning Strategy

No.	Metacognitive Strategy	Score
28.	I consciously contact the target language (e.g., reading extensively in English, watching films, listening to the radio, communicating with native speakers, getting a pen pal)	232
29.	I get myself a vocabulary test	212
30.	I work and practice with peers/in groups	197
31.	I set a specific time for vocabulary learning	189
32.	I set priorities about which words are essential, not so important, not important at all, and to what extent (passive, active)	172
33.	Setting goals for learning vocabulary	202

Table 6. reveals the most frequently used metacognitive learning strategy. *I consciously contact the target language* turned out to be the most commonly used metacognitive strategy. It was followed by *I get myself a vocabulary test*. The third place went to *setting goals for learning vocabulary*. The least used metacognitive approaches consecutively were *I work and practice with peers/in a group*, *I set a specific time for vocabulary learning*, and *I set priorities*.

The metacognitive strategies are projected to be an adequate vocabulary learning strategy. It allows the learners

to control and evaluate their learning process. The open-ended questionnaire had proven that thirty-two students consciously preferred the method to acquire a new expression. However, they also mentioned some difficulties in learning new vocabulary. Most of them said they were too lazy to practice the technique, resulting in less language. Some also said memorizing the new item they got from music, book, movie, or magazine was difficult. Student 26 even said she did not know how to use the new vocabulary she had just learned. For student 30, whatever the learning strategies were, learning a new language was too much activity. The most common reason foreign language learners lack fluency is that they did not practice using the vocabulary in context or try to pronounce it correctly. Since the students can control their learning process, they also get the chance not seriously to learn the language.

3.4. Determination Strategy

A determination strategy is a learning strategy that allows learners to acquire the meaning of a vocabulary without assistance from other learners (Schmitt, 2000). Learners are expected to get the meaning of the word by corresponding the word with the context. The questionnaire contains nine statements about this strategy. The statements are (5) I analyze the word by breaking it into sound segments; (6) I analyze the word by breaking it into meaningful parts; (14) I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind; (19) I analyze the affixes and roots of the new word; (20) I check for the L1 meaning of new English words; (21) I analyze any available pictures or gestures to guess the words; (22) I guess the meaning of the new word from the story; (23) I use a dictionary to check the words; and (24) I ask the teacher for the new word "s synonym.

The result from the Likert scale analysis for the determination vocabulary learning strategy is shown in the table below:

Table 7. Scale Categorization for Determination Strategy

Scale	Description
9.0-16.2	Never
16.3-23.4	Rare
23.5-30.6	Sometimes
30.7-37.8	Often
37.9-45	Always

Table 7. shows the scale categorization for the determination of vocabulary learning strategies. Students who received a 9.0 to 16.2 were classified as having *never* used this method. Members with a score of 16.3 to 23.4 were grouped as *rare*. The ones who summed up a total score of 23.5 to 30.6 were grouped as the ones who *sometimes* applied this technique. Students with scores between 30.7 to 37.8 were considered the ones who used the method *often*. When the students got a score of 25.3 to 30.0, it was classified as *always*. The categorization was used to define the distribution of determination strategy users.

Based on the calculation of the means, the average class score from this category was 30.627. The numbers mean that on a typical day, the students used the strategy *sometimes*. The following chart provides information about the distribution of this technique.

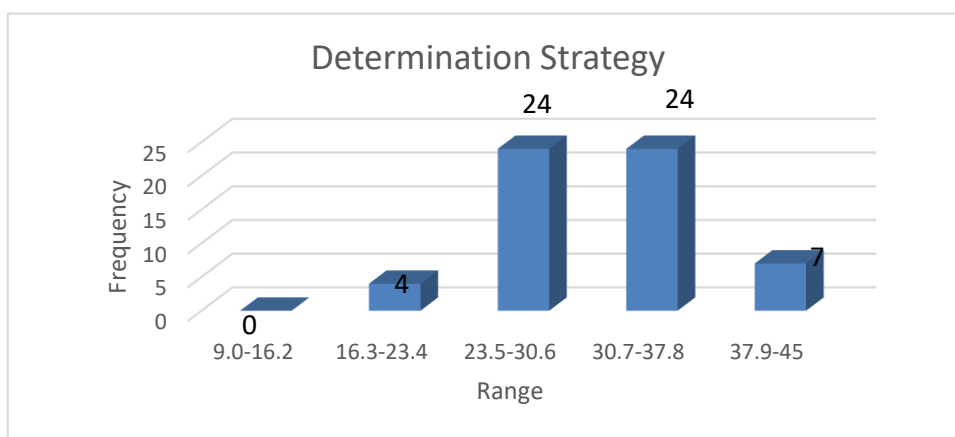


Figure 4. Determination Strategy Distribution

Chart 3.4. presents the frequency distribution of determination vocabulary learning strategy. The exact number of students preferred to use this strategy *often* and *sometimes*. Seven students *always* used this method often to obtain a new expression. Four students said that they *rarely* applied this technique in learning vocabulary. The distribution chart proved that all students used the determination strategy despite having different regularity.

The researcher summed up the score of every technique to find out the most frequently used determination strategy. The result of the calculation is shown in the following table:

Table 8. Most Frequently Used Determination Learning Strategy

No.	Determination Strategy	Score
5.	I analyze the word by breaking it into sound segments.	181
6.	I analyze the word by breaking it into meaningful parts	202
14.	I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind.	204
19.	I analyze the affixes and roots of the new word.	197
20.	I check for the L1 meaning of new English words	186
21.	I analyze any available pictures or gestures to guess the words.	195
22.	I guess the meaning of the new word from the story.	222
23.	I use a dictionary to check the words.	256
24.	I ask the teacher for the new word "s synonym.	164

Table 8. displays the most frequently used determination vocabulary learning strategies. *I used a dictionary to check the words* that seemed to be the most commonly used determination strategy. Most students also favored *guessing the new word's meaning from the story* that it placed second. Students frequently *tried to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in their minds*, and it came third. The rest order of the method was statement 6, statement 19, statement 21, statement 20, statement 5, and statement 24.

The result from table 3.8. appeared to be aligned with the answer from the open-ended questionnaire. Students who considered themselves using this technique mostly mention the usage of a dictionary. For example, student 9 said that he opened and read the dictionary once he met a new vocabulary. Student 15 would try to guess the meaning of a new word she had just heard. Late on, she would check the word in google translate or the dictionary. Students 25 and 43 combined metacognitive strategy and determination strategy. When a new word came across while reading, student 25 would learn the meaning of the sentence and look it up in the dictionary. Student 43 would read many stories to find a new vocabulary and search for the word using a dictionary. The determination vocabulary learning strategies expect students to find the meaning of a new word on their own. Students who enjoyed this strategy chose to use the dictionary to get a unique expression.

3.5. Social Strategy

Social strategy is a strategy that engages learners to interact with other people (Schmitt, 2000). Learners can learn vocabulary from their peers or ask their teacher. There are three statements about social strategy in the questionnaire. The statements are (25) I ask the teacher for the new words to paraphrase; (26) I ask the teacher for the translation of the new words; and (27) I ask classmates for the meaning of the word.

The result from the Likert scale analysis for social strategy categorization is shown in the following table:

Table 9. Scale Categorization for Determination Strategy

Scale	Description
3.0-5.4	Never
5.5-7.8	Rare
7.9-10.2	Sometimes
10.3-12.6	Often
12.0-15.0	Always

Table 9. discloses the scale categorization for the social vocabulary learning strategy. Students who received a total score between 3.0 to 5.4 were classified as *never*. When students got a total score between 5.5 to 7.8, they were assumed to use the technique *rarely*. Students with a total score between 7.9 to 10.2 were categorized as the ones who

used the strategy *sometimes*. A score between 10.3 to 12.6 was classified as *often*. The last classification was *always*. It was when the students received a total score between 12 to 15. The categorization was used to determine the distribution of social strategy in the class.



In general, the subjects seemed to use this strategy *sometimes*. It was seen from the mean calculation result, which resulted in 9.491 on average. The score of 9.491 was in the range of *sometimes* categorization. The distribution of all students for the social strategy can be seen in the following chart.

Figure 5. shows the distribution of social vocabulary learning strategy. Two students confessed to never using the method. Thirteen students said that they *rarely* used the technique. Twenty-four students used this strategy to gain a new vocabulary *sometimes*. The rest of the subjects were divided into two groups as the exact number of students who preferred to use the method *often* and *consistently*. Even though some students had never used the technique, most students still tried to use this strategy to improve their vocabulary list.

The researcher summed up the total score for every strategy to find out the most frequently used social method. The result of the calculation is shown in the following table:

Table 10. Most Frequently Used Social Learning Strategy

No.	Social Strategy	Score
25.	I ask the teacher for the new words to paraphrase.	159
26.	I ask the teacher the translation of the new words	178
27.	I ask classmates for the meaning of the word.	223

Table 10. reveals that students look more comfortable learning with their friends than their teachers. *I ask classmates for the meaning of the word* was chosen as the most frequently used method among other social strategies. Moreover, students also preferred to *ask the teacher to translate a new word* rather than *to ask the teacher to give them a new word so they could paraphrase*.

The social strategy appeared to be less popular among students. In the open-ended questionnaire, only one student mention specific social techniques to gain a new vocabulary. Student 47 combined the metacognitive strategy with the social approach. She said the most helpful method for her was watching a western movie with a friend. If she happened to meet a new expression, she could directly ask her friend about the expression's meaning, spelling, and pronunciation. However, student 47 also admitted that she had difficulty memorizing the vocabulary. Interaction with peers will create a more friendly environment for students to learn new languages.

4. Discussion

This research aimed to determine the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among fourth-semester English Department Students of Khairun University. A questionnaire with closed and open question was given to fifty-nine students. The questionnaire was based on Schmitt Vocabulary Learning Strategy Taxonomy (1997) and adapted from Cheung (2004).

English position in Indonesia remained a foreign language. A foreign language means that it is not an official

language nor being spoken daily by the community. For the fourth-semester students, English vocabulary was still a big challenge. The findings showed that the students did not use any dominant strategy. They tried all the methods to improve their vocabulary list. From all five techniques, students constantly decided to enjoy the cognitive and memory approach. However, none of the memory sub-strategies was chosen as the most frequently used strategy. Students also used the other three techniques, and the number showed that they did not regularly use them (sometimes).

In addition, the research also looked up the most dominant strategy among students. In the tabulation, students' answers revealed that they *used dictionaries or Google Translate to check the new vocabulary* seemed to be the most frequently applied technique. *I repeatedly say the word in my mind* was quite popular among students. Some students even mentioned it specifically in the open-ended questionnaire. The third most commonly used strategy was *conscious to contact the target language*. The students enjoyed English exposure through books, magazines, movies, music, and even video games. The tabulation calculation was aligned with students' answers in the open-ended questionnaire, as thirty-two students confessed to contacting the target language through various media.

5. Conclusion

Vocabulary learning strategies are methods that the learner uses to acquire a new language. According to Scmitt Taxonomy (1997), there are two commonly known vocabulary learning strategies: determination and consolidation. Determination strategy consists of determination and social strategy, while consolidation strategy consists of cognitive, memory, metacognitive, and social strategy. Based on the findings, students enjoyed all types of vocabulary learning strategies. However, they used the memory and cognitive learning strategy more often than other strategies. Additionally, using a dictionary, repeatedly spelling the word in mind, and consciously contacting the target language through various media are the most dominant method used by the fourth-semester student of the English Department of Khairun University.

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