

STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES IN MASTERING ENGLISH VOCABULARY: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY AT CLASS B, ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITAS ISLAM RIAU

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ABSTRACT

English vocabulary mastery is a fundamental requirement for developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, yet many students continue to face difficulties in memorizing, pronouncing, and using English words appropriately. This study aims to explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by students in mastering English vocabulary, based on Oxford's (1990) classification of memory, cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies. A descriptive quantitative design was employed, with data collected through a 28-item questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale distributed to 19 fourth-semester students of the English Education Department, Universitas Islam Riau, Academic Year 2026/2027. The data were analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage to identify the strategies most frequently used by the respondents. The findings reveal that students applied all four categories of vocabulary learning strategies, with particularly strong reliance on cognitive strategies such as watching English movies and listening to English songs (100% positive response), as well as memory strategies such as keeping vocabulary lists and reviewing previously learned words. Social strategies, including asking teachers and discussing vocabulary with peers, and metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting and self-monitoring, were also widely reported, although with a slightly lower level of consistency. These results suggest that students tend to combine multiple strategies, particularly engaging and self-directed ones, to support their vocabulary acquisition. The study is expected to provide useful insights for English teachers in designing vocabulary instruction that accommodates students' preferred learning strategies.

Keywords: *vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies, vocabulary mastery, English Education students*

Article History

Received: Juni 2026
Reviewed: Juni 2026
Published: Juni 2026

Plagiarism Checker No 2635

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Publish by : Sindoro



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INTRODUCTION

English is one of the international languages that plays an important role in education, communication, and technology. In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary school to university level, and students are expected to master listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. To support these skills, students need sufficient vocabulary knowledge, since vocabulary is an essential component of language learning that helps students understand meaning, express ideas, and communicate effectively.

However, many students still face difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. Some students find it difficult to memorize new words, understand meanings, pronounce words correctly, and use vocabulary appropriately in sentences. In addition, students often forget vocabulary

because they rarely use English in their daily lives. To overcome these difficulties, students apply various vocabulary learning strategies, such as repeating vocabulary, using dictionaries, watching movies, listening to songs, reading texts, or discussing with peers and teachers. Understanding which strategies students use is important because it can help teachers recognize how students learn vocabulary and identify strategies that are effective for vocabulary development.

Based on this background, the research problem of this study is formulated as follows: How do students use vocabulary learning strategies in mastering English vocabulary? Accordingly, the objective of this research is to explore how students use vocabulary learning strategies in mastering English vocabulary among fourth-semester students of the English Education Department, Universitas Islam Riau.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the most important components in language learning because it enables learners to understand and express meaning in communication. According to Schmitt (2000), vocabulary is a key component of language proficiency and provides the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. Similarly, Thornbury (2002) states that vocabulary is central to language learning because without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Nation (2001) further explains that knowing a word involves understanding its meaning, pronunciation, spelling, grammatical function, and appropriate use in different contexts. Therefore, vocabulary learning is not merely memorizing words but also developing the ability to use words accurately and effectively.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies refer to the techniques, methods, and actions used by learners to acquire, store, retrieve, and use vocabulary effectively. Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more effective. Nation (2001) adds that vocabulary learning strategies are activities that assist learners in discovering the meaning of new words, retaining vocabulary knowledge, and using vocabulary appropriately in communication. This study adopts Oxford's (1990) classification, which categorizes vocabulary learning strategies into four main types, as described below.

Memory strategies help learners store and retrieve information effectively, such as memorizing vocabulary repeatedly, making vocabulary lists, using flashcards, and reviewing vocabulary regularly. Cognitive strategies involve direct manipulation of and active engagement with learning materials, such as using dictionaries, taking notes, reading English texts, watching English movies, and listening to English songs. Social strategies involve interaction with other people during the learning process, such as asking teachers about unfamiliar words, discussing vocabulary with classmates, and practicing English with friends. Metacognitive strategies refer to learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, such as planning vocabulary learning activities, monitoring learning progress, evaluating vocabulary achievement, and setting vocabulary learning goals.

Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery refers to learners' ability to understand, remember, and use vocabulary accurately in communication. Cameron (2001) explains that vocabulary mastery involves understanding word meanings and being able to use words appropriately in different situations, while Hatch and Brown (1995) state that vocabulary mastery includes knowledge of pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and word usage. Students with good vocabulary mastery are generally able to communicate more effectively, comprehend texts more easily, and express ideas more confidently in English. Therefore, vocabulary mastery is an important indicator of students' success in learning English.

Based on the theories discussed above, vocabulary is an essential element in language learning, while vocabulary learning strategies play an important role in helping students acquire and retain vocabulary knowledge. The blueprint of the variable, strategies, and indicators used in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Blueprint

No	Variable	Strategy	Indicator
1	Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Memory Strategy	Memorizing, reviewing vocabulary
2	Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Cognitive Strategy	Dictionary use, note-taking, reading
3	Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Social Strategy	Asking teachers, discussing with friends
4	Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Metacognitive Strategy	Planning, monitoring, evaluating

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research involves the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical procedures to answer research questions. Ary et al. (2010) add that descriptive quantitative research aims to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon through numerical data. This design is appropriate for identifying and describing the vocabulary learning strategies employed by students in mastering English vocabulary.

Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Riau. The participants were fourth-semester students of the English Education Department in the Academic Year 2026/2027, who had completed several English courses and were expected to have sufficient experience in learning vocabulary and

applying various vocabulary learning strategies. Out of the students invited, 19 students completed and returned the questionnaire.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire developed based on Oxford's (1990) classification of vocabulary learning strategies. The questionnaire consisted of 28 items categorized into four sub-variables: Memory Strategy, Cognitive Strategy, Social Strategy, and Metacognitive Strategy. Each indicator was represented by two statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by distributing the questionnaire to the participants, who were asked to read each statement carefully and choose the response that best reflected their learning experience. The collected responses were then classified according to the four categories of vocabulary learning strategies and analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage to identify the strategies most frequently used by the students in mastering English vocabulary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from a questionnaire administered to 19 students, organized according to four strategy categories: memory, cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies.

Memory Strategies

Regarding repetition as a strategy to memorize new vocabulary, 57.9% of respondents agreed, 36.8% strongly agreed, and 5.3% strongly disagreed, indicating that repetition is a commonly used strategy for retaining vocabulary. Likewise, 63.2% agreed and 31.6% strongly agreed that repetition helps them remember vocabulary more effectively, while only 5.3% strongly disagreed, showing that repetition plays a significant role in supporting vocabulary acquisition.

Concerning the use of vocabulary lists, 47.4% agreed and 42.1% strongly agreed that making vocabulary lists helps them learn new words (89.5% positive), and a similarly high proportion (89.4%) agreed that writing vocabulary lists helps them remember words better. These results suggest that vocabulary lists help learners organize and review new words systematically. In addition, 68.4% agreed and 26.3% strongly agreed that they regularly review previously learned vocabulary (94.7% positive), indicating that regular review is an important strategy for strengthening vocabulary retention. Overall, 78.9% agreed and 15.8% strongly agreed that repetition is effective for memorizing new vocabulary, while 78.9% agreed and 21.1% strongly agreed that practicing vocabulary with others helps improve vocabulary mastery, and all respondents (100%) gave positive responses to keeping a vocabulary list.

Cognitive Strategies

For dictionary use, 52.6% agreed and 36.8% strongly agreed that they use a dictionary when encountering unfamiliar words (89.4% positive), confirming that dictionaries remain an important resource for vocabulary development. Regarding note-taking, 52.6% agreed and 31.6% strongly agreed that they take notes of new vocabulary during learning activities (84.2% positive), suggesting that note-taking helps learners organize and remember vocabulary.

For reading, 47.4% agreed and 47.4% strongly agreed that reading English texts helps improve vocabulary knowledge (94.8% positive), indicating that reading exposes learners to vocabulary in natural contexts. Notably, watching English movies or videos and listening to English songs both received 100% positive responses (68.4% strongly agree and 31.6% agree for movies; 52.6% strongly agree and 47.4% agree for songs), making these the most consistently preferred cognitive strategies among the respondents. These findings suggest that audiovisual and entertainment-based media are highly effective and enjoyable means for vocabulary acquisition.

Social Strategies

Concerning interaction with teachers, 57.9% agreed and 26.3% strongly agreed that they ask teachers about unfamiliar vocabulary (84.2% positive), while 57.9% agreed and 36.8% strongly agreed that teacher explanations help them learn unfamiliar vocabulary (94.7% positive). These results indicate that teachers play an important role in clarifying word meanings and usage. The findings further indicate that practicing vocabulary with others is viewed positively by all participants (78.9% agree, 21.1% strongly agree), showing that collaborative practice with peers supports vocabulary mastery.

Metacognitive Strategies

Regarding planning, 63.2% agreed and 26.3% strongly agreed that they plan specific activities to improve their vocabulary, while 10.5% disagreed, suggesting that although most students organize their learning, a smaller group does not regularly plan their vocabulary activities. For goal-setting, 57.9% agreed and 31.6% strongly agreed that they set goals for their vocabulary learning (89.5% positive), and for self-monitoring, 78.9% agreed and 15.8% strongly agreed that they monitor their progress in learning new words (94.7% positive). These findings indicate that the majority of students possess a high level of reflective awareness and actively manage their own vocabulary learning process.

Discussion

The overall findings indicate that students apply a combination of memory, cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies in mastering English vocabulary, which supports Oxford's (1990) classification of vocabulary learning strategies. Among the four categories, cognitive strategies involving entertainment-based media, such as watching movies and listening to songs, received the most consistently positive responses, suggesting that students favor enjoyable and naturally contextualized exposure to vocabulary. This is consistent with Nation's (2001) view that vocabulary learning is most effective when learners encounter words in meaningful contexts.

Memory strategies, particularly keeping vocabulary lists and reviewing previously learned words, were also widely used, reflecting students' awareness of the need for repeated exposure to retain vocabulary, as emphasized by Oxford (1990). Social strategies show that teachers and peers remain important sources of support, especially when students encounter unfamiliar words, while metacognitive strategies reveal that most students take an active role in planning and monitoring their own vocabulary learning, although a smaller proportion still lacks consistency in planning specific learning activities.

These findings imply that English teachers should consider designing vocabulary instruction that incorporates a variety of strategies, particularly engaging and self-directed activities such as

multimedia exposure, vocabulary journaling, and structured review sessions, while also continuing to provide direct support such as explanations and clarification of word meanings.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the vocabulary learning strategies used by fourth-semester students of the English Education Department, Universitas Islam Riau, in mastering English vocabulary, based on Oxford's (1990) classification of memory, cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies. The findings reveal that students employed all four categories of strategies, with cognitive strategies involving movies and songs, as well as memory strategies such as vocabulary lists and regular review, being the most consistently and positively perceived. Social strategies involving teachers and peers, and metacognitive strategies such as goal-setting and self-monitoring, were also widely used, although with slightly more variation in consistency. These results suggest that students tend to combine multiple, often enjoyable and self-directed, strategies to support their vocabulary acquisition. It is recommended that English teachers design vocabulary instruction that accommodates these preferred strategies, and that future research expand the sample size and explore the relationship between strategy use and actual vocabulary achievement.

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