Strategies in Learning Vocabulary Used by First Year Students

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Approval Sheet

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Abstract

Vocabulary plays an important role in the English language learning process. In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, students will deal with vocabulary. Thus, students need to master vocabulary so that they can engage in the learning process. The strategies in learning vocabulary are needed as a tool to make the vocabulary learning process easier. The aim of this research was to find out the strategies used by first-year students in learning vocabulary and find out the most effective strategies. This research employed qualitative methodology with standardized open-ended interview to obtain the data from six first-year students in an English language education department as the participants of this research.

The researcher chooses the first year students as the participants of this research since the researcher have been observing them. Some of the first year students were lack of vocabulary. Based on the researcher observation, some of the students did not even able to introduce themselves in front of the class because they did not know the proper vocabulary to introduce themselves. It becomes the problem because they are going to learn English language which demands them to understand every context in the learning process. Thus, first-year students need to learn and master the vocabulary. The results of this research found that the first year students employed reading strategies such as reading novels and an online story, writing the words such as writing a vocabulary list, using a dictionary, highlighting words, using the words and asking friends to help them and clarifying their understanding. They did those activities as strategies in learning vocabulary. In addition, they believed that the most effective and used strategies were writing the words, and using the words, also reading novels and an online story.

Keywords: Learning strategy, effective strategy in learning English, vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies

The Background of the Study Background

Students should consider putting vocabulary as one of the top aspects in their language learning process because lack of vocabulary can lead them to difficulties in the language learning process. Asgari and Mustapha (2011) said that vocabulary has been recognized as crucial to language use in which lack of vocabulary knowledge will lead the learners to difficulties. The point shows that vocabulary is important in language learning.

To learn vocabulary, students need strategies in their learning process. These strategies are usually made by themselves. It can make the language learning process easier, fun, enjoyable and effective. As stated by Weinstein (2000) learning strategies were thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, and emotions that help the acquisition and the transfer process of new knowledge or skills. That is why the students should have their strategy in acquiring the vocabulary. Oxford (1990) stated that strategies are important for language learning because they are tools for students to be active in every language activity. A strategy can be a tool for students to help them in learning vocabulary. By having a proper strategy, the students can acquire more vocabulary rather than those who have no strategy.

Students with less experience in English will find difficulties to follow the learning process; it is because of the lack of vocabulary. Research by Abdullah (2006) found that most of the Indonesian high school students only acquire less than 1000 vocabulary when they were graduated. Moreover, first-year students' awareness in the strategies for learning vocabulary also gives a significant effect on the process of acquiring vocabulary because they only remembered a few vocabularies since high school. Some of the first year students do not know about the strategies in learning

vocabulary. According to Priyono (2004), the main problem of Indonesian EFL students is their limited vocabulary. It becomes a problem because the lack of vocabulary will make students cannot engage in the learning process.

Meanwhile, there are some first-year students who have an outstanding performance in using vocabulary during the language learning process. Those students who can use the strategies effectively can acquire more vocabulary than the other first-year students who have no strategy to learn vocabulary. The difference condition between the first-year students who have not outstanding performance and first-year students who have outstanding performance is in line with the aims of the research which is to find out strategies used by first-year students in learning vocabulary.

This research is important because the results of this research will determine the common and effective strategies in learning vocabulary. Based on the researcher experience, some of the first-year students in one of the private universities who have less experience in learning English are confused in mastering the vocabulary. Hence, the researcher hopes that the results of this research can help first-year students to choose the proper strategies in learning vocabulary.

The study was conducted in an English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. The first-year of university students are the participants of this study. First-year students are the new students that have just finished High School. Based on the researcher's observation and experience, most of the first-year students cannot engage with the learning activity because of lack vocabulary. Some of them only learn the basic of English before they enroll in college.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used descriptive qualitative research design. Merriam (2002) argued that descriptive qualitative research design can show how the participants

make the meaning of a situation or phenomenon which can be delivered through an instrument of the research and the outcome is descriptive. By using descriptive design, the researcher found a detail and depth data based on the results of the interview which contains the information. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher found rich and details information as presented in the results of this research.

This research took place at the English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. The research was conducted in the academic year of 2017/2018. It was in line with the aims of the research which was to find out strategies in learning vocabulary used by first-year students.

The research was conducted at an English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. The accreditation that the department received in the recent year makes the department demand a higher passing grade for the new students. Therefore, the first-year students who already passed the test will have relatively good English proficiency based on the standard criteria that the department made. It made the researcher want to investigate the way the students mastering vocabulary by knowing the strategies that they use. Moreover, the researcher wants to provide a list of effective strategies for all of the students at the English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. Also, to find out the most effective strategies that may be useful for students to improve their vocabulary. Besides, the researcher was also a student of an English Language Education Department. By then, it makes all of the research process easier because the researcher and the participants are in the same location.

The participants of this research were first-year students of the English Language Education Department at one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. The aims of this research were to find out the strategies in learning vocabulary used by first-

year students. Regarding the aim of this research, the first-year students were the most suitable participants for this research. It is because the first-year students in the English Department start to use English as the medium of the instruction in the learning process. Therefore, the researcher scrutinized what were the strategies in learning vocabulary that the students used to increase their level in learning English.

The sampling technique applied in this research was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling technique was suitable for this research because this technique was based on someone's judgment. Ball (as cited in Cohen et al, 2011) argued that purposive sampling used to access knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues (p. 159).

This research used the interview as a data instrument for collecting data. The type of interview used in this research was a standardized open-ended interview. Patton (1980) stated that participants will answer the same questions, therefore, it can increasing the comparability of responses (as cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p. 413). This type was more organized, which the researcher can get deep information in one question and move to another question if the answer from participants was enough. It also helped the researcher in interviewing the participants because the question was already listed. Therefore, the researcher can follow the sequences. Patton (1980) said that standardized open-ended interviews are reduced interviewer effects and bias result. Also, facilitate organization and ease the researcher to analyze the data (as cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p. 413).

The interview in this research was standardized open-ended items. Kerlinger (1970) stated that standardized open-ended interviews were "those that supply a frame of reference for respondents' answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression". Open-ended items were more flexible and suitable for this research, in

which the researcher wanted to get rich and deep information from participants. By using this interview, participants can go depth in giving information and it can minimize misunderstandings.

The questions format used in this research were indirect and specific questions. It was suitable for the aims of this research that required depth and detail information from participants. Tuckman (1972) stated that by using indirect questions format, the results will be a more frank and open response. Tuckman (1972) also stated that specific questions will make respondents be more cautious, guarded and give less-than-honest answers (as cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p. 417).

The response mode of this research was an unstructured response. By using unstructured response, participants can answer all questions with open and no limit. The more they give information, the more depth and detail the results are. Tuckman (1972) said unstructured response allows participants to give their answer in whatever the way they choose it (as cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p. 419). The responses from participants were recorded using mobile phone and participants used Bahasa Indonesia in giving the responses.

The results of this research were transcribed. Then, the researcher focused on all of the ideas, themes, all words, and every piece of data. The researcher used a pseudonym to name the participants. They were Patrice as participant 1, Janet as participant 2, Evelin as participant 3, Jammy as participant 4, Harison as participant 5 and Helena as participant 6. The pseudonym was a process in giving a false name instead of giving a real name. To ensure the validity, the researcher conducted a member checking.

In this research, member checking was chosen as the techniques to check the validity of the result. Member checking conducted after the researcher transcribed the

data from the recorder and it is before the researcher conducted a coding. In member checking, the researcher shows the interview transcript to the participants. From the member checking, all of the participants confirmed that the interview transcript was valid based on what they said in the interview process.

To analyze the data, the researcher conducted the coding process. It started from open coding. In the open coding, the researcher created a category in the sentences of the interview transcript given a label and categorize the transcript text that contains information in the interview result. After giving a label or a code to a piece of the word that contains an idea and information. The researcher conducted an axial coding. In this process, the researcher put all the label or data into a smaller unit and made a group for categorizing the data. Cohen et. al (2011) mentioned that axial coding is the process of integrating a whole text that contains information into small units. The last process was selective coding. In this process, the researcher found the core point of the short sentences that have been summarized in analytical coding. Cohen et. al (2011) stated that selective coding is the process of identifying the core point. The main point of the short sentences became the finding of this category.

Finding and Discussion

There are six first-year students with an outstanding performance during their first year of English Language Education Department in one of the private university in Yogyakarta were chosen as the participants. It was chosen based on lecturers' judgment and recommendation. This study used pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy. The participants will be referred to as Patrice for participant 1, Janet for participant 2, Evelin for participant 3, Jammy for participant 4, Harison for participant 5, and Helena for participant 6. In this chapter, researchers provided

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

There are three participants were learning vocabulary from novels. Patrice says "I usually get a new vocabulary when I read a novel". Janet also says "I usually read an English novel" and Harison added, "and also novel".

Another media used by participants for learning vocabulary is an online story. Helena mentioned "I usually learn or get new vocabulary from an online story" and Patrice said that online story is a media to learn vocabulary besides a novel. Through reading novels and online reading stuff, the participants were learning new vocabulary. According to Schmitt (2006) regarding reading novels, newspapers, and something from the internet, students can enhance their lexical knowledge, words spelling, words meaning, and grammar.

Participants also learn and get new vocabulary from songs. Patrice says "and also listen to the song. I also find out the lyrics and find the meaning. Thus, it can add my vocabulary size". Evelin said, "and also songs with the lyrics". Harison also shared the same thing by saying "I also learn from songs" and Helena said that she also learn from songs. Moreover, movies also became the media for some of the participants to learn and get new vocabulary. Evelin mentioned, "I usually learn and get a new vocabulary from movies". Jammy also said "I usually learn from movies" and Harison stated that he also learn from movies too. Some of the participants also learn from games. Harison says "I learn from many things but mostly from games". Jammy also says "and also games but mostly from movies" and Helena stated that she learn from games. This is in line with the finding of Asgari and Mustapha (2011) who found that most of the Malaysian students frequently using English language media such as movies, song, and television programs and those were reported to be used by the students for learning vocabulary.

Asgari and Mustapha (2011) stated that students should be able to access and maximize their opportunities in learning English through media.

Reading. The first strategy used by three participants is reading any kind of novels and an online story. Reading became the strategies for the three participants in learning vocabulary. Patrice mentioned, "I read for many times until I can memorize it". Moreover, Janet stated that she read the vocabulary more than once until she can remember the vocabulary. Helena added that she read a lot to learn vocabulary.

Reading is a part of metacognitive strategies in learning vocabulary. Halilah, Rashidah, and Rashidah (2014) stated that students usually used metacognitive strategy to master the vocabulary. The examples of metacognitive strategies are reading novels, articles, and something from the internet. In addition, Dóczi (2011) said that reading is an important source of language input because reading is the most traditional way of expanding vocabulary.

Writing the words. The second strategy raised by four participants is reading. Those are writing a vocabulary list and note. Patrice says "then, I also write it down in a list". In another opinion, Janet mentioned, "I am bad at remembering so I usually write down the words with its meaning". Evelin added by saying "I write it down and memorizing so I can easily remember it". Also, Helena stated that she writes to memorize and practice the vocabulary.

Writing is a part of cognitive strategies. According to Saengpakdejit (2014) cognitive strategies used by students to save the new words in their memory so they can use the vocabulary whenever they need it. The examples of cognitive are the same as the statement from participants which is writing a list of vocabulary and write the words with meanings on papers.

Using dictionary. There is one participant used a dictionary as the strategy to learn new vocabulary. As stated by Patrice "and using a dictionary". Dictionary is part of support strategies. This strategy aims to help students discover some words and meanings either using a dictionary or electronic dictionary. Students have a different way to overcome the problem when they are learning vocabulary, in terms of unknown words. Using a dictionary, an online dictionary, and electronic resources is a common strategy employed by the students in learning vocabulary. This finding is in line with the study of Asgari and Mustapha (2011) who found that among the Malaysian students are using a dictionary, both in electronic and non-electronic. In addition, Asgari and Mustapha (2011) stated that dictionaries give detail explanation and guidance on pronunciation and grammar.

Highlighting Words. Highlighting words belong to discovery strategies. This strategy used by one participant which is Evelin. Evelin mentioned, "but I usually highlighting some words if I read a novel". Hasanabadi, Biria, and Kassaian (2016) stated that by doing highlighting words, students can emphasize the words to be more prominent. Highlighting is not only for marking the words but it also allows students to highlight difficult parts of spelling word.

Using the words. Two participants raised this strategy. They stated that using the words is the strategy that they used when they learn English. According to Jammy " when I got new vocabulary I eventually use it, I make a sentence. I prefer to use it rather than writing it because I like to practice" and Harison added "I usually use it in the conversation or in writing. Thus, I can memorize it" (Harison.10). This strategy is a part of Memory Strategy. Schmitt (2006) stated that this strategy occurred by linking the new vocabulary and students' background knowledge. The example of these strategies are

students try to use new words by imagining the situation where the words can be used and students make sentences using new words.

Asking friends. One participant raised that asking friends became the strategy in learning vocabulary. Patrice stated that sometimes she asked friends when Patrice found a new vocabulary. This strategy belongs to social strategies. Asking friends occurred when students practicing their new vocabulary in conversation or just asking their friends or teachers. In this strategy, the communication occurred, Saengpakdeejit (2014) stated that vocabulary can be learned receptively through conversation, communication, and listening. It supported by Shahov (2012) who says that students will be able to use new vocabulary correctly if they can understand the new vocabulary on its spoken form and productive knowledge such as writing.

The Most Effective Strategies

According to Chamot (2005), the criteria of an effective strategy is when students can remember the technique. Hence, if students are often using some strategies, it could be effective strategies for them because they already remember it and the strategies work for themselves.

In consequence, the researcher concluded that the findings of this study are in line with the study from Chamot (2005). All of the participants stated that some of the strategies that they used are effective. It is because the participants can feel the impact of using the strategies and the strategies work for them.

These three strategies below are effective for students. According to the result of the interview, some of the participants choosing effective strategies based on their interest in learning English. Hashemi and Hashdevi (2015) stated that it accepted for students to train their vocabulary mastery using the strategies and there are a variety of vocabulary learning strategies among the students. It based on their interest in the area of

language learning. The following findings discuss effective strategies in learning vocabulary;

Writing the words. There are three participants stated that writing the new words in any form such as make the list of vocabulary and note is effective. Moreover, this strategy is part of cognitive strategies. The participants stated the reason why the strategy is effective, as mentioned by Patrice "I feel that write a list is effective because we can read it many times and also memorize it". While Evelin says "because it works for me. Thus, I can get more vocabulary. Because I like to use those strategies so I have no pressure when I learn". Helena added that writing the new vocabulary is effective because she can read it anytime while she practices her writing skill. Janet said that before using the strategy she finds a difficulty to remember the vocabulary, but after using the strategy she can remember the vocabulary.

Using the words. Two participants said that using the new vocabulary in any activities such as writing, making sentences, and doing communication are effective. Two participants; Jammy and Harison stated the reasons. According to Jammy "it is because practicing made me easy to memorize the new vocabulary". Harison added, "because I get used to it and become more confident in using my new vocabulary".

Reading. One participant stated that reading is effective for them. Reading is part of metacognitive strategies. Reading is one of the common strategies used by participants. Helena mentioned, "While by reading I can get new vocabulary".

Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the strategies used by first-year students in learning vocabulary and also knowing the most effective strategies that first-year students believe. Six first-year students with good performances in the learning process and achieve a good score at the end of the semester became the participants in this

research. The data were collected with an interview which asked some questions that controlled under interview guideline and mobile phone recorder as a tool in recording the interview process. Moreover, the data were analyzed by coding.

The results of this study showed that students used vocabulary learning strategies. The students using the strategies for learning vocabulary based on what they like in the English Learning process. The strategies are cognitive strategies that include writing the words, metacognitive strategies including reading, and support strategies including using dictionaries.

The results found that the students used the strategies because it is related to students' interests in English learning. The strategies also related to the media that usually students used to learn vocabulary. According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that students used strategies in learning vocabulary based on their personal interests in English learning and the media that they like.

Other findings are students shared the most effective strategy in learning vocabulary that they believed. There are three most effective strategies based on the finding of the study such as writing the words, using words, and reading. Then, reading became the most effective strategies. It is because students can feel and see the impact. Also, students stated that the strategy works for them and it relates to their interest in English learning.

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