Identifying Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Undergraduate Students in Different Proficiency Levels

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to discover diverse vocabulary learning strategies among undergraduate students in three different competence levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced) who are enrolled in the Vocabulary course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI in semester III. In this study, determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive methods were used to learn language. Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire was used to collect data (VLSQ). Thirty undergraduate students were chosen on the basis of their competence levels. The results of descriptive statistics revealed that most undergraduate students used a medium strategy. The basic level had a mean score of 2.91, the intermediate level of 3.10, and the advanced level of 3.44. It was evidence that the more vocabulary acquisition strategies a student used, the greater his or her competency level became. When it came to the most and least frequently utilized strategies by undergraduate students, metacognitive and determination were the most commonly employed techniques across three levels. However, the least frequent strategies of each level were different. Cognitive was slightly used by basic undergraduate students. Memory was the least employed by intermediate undergraduate students, and social was the fewest strategies implemented by advanced undergraduate students. This study revealed that the development of vocabulary learning strategies could increase EFL undergraduate students' proficiency levels significantly.

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of teaching vocabulary for undergraduate students is to help them improve their vocabulary knowledge and competence. Before or after the vocabulary teaching process, a lecturer can identify students' vocabulary learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies become a part of language learning strategies that facilitate increasing language learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 2001; Nosratinia, Abbasi, & Zaker, 2015). Learners also help themselves understand and remember vocabulary items through vocabulary learning strategies (Cameron, 2001) to learn vocabulary independently. It means that they learn vocabulary based on their interests, needs, wants, and competence.

Language teachers need to make learners conscious of the development independent and structured approach to language learning that is mostly associated with vocabulary learning success (Goundar, 2015). If the lecturer knows every student's learning strategy, he will easily choose effective, innovative, and enjoyable tips, techniques, and learning media to overcome students' difficulties in vocabulary learning. Vocabulary learning is the challenging component of a language that EFL undergraduate students face (Ghazal, 2010).

Undergraduate students employ vocabulary learning strategies to acquire new English vocabulary. They learn to find new vocabulary so that they understand the meaning conveyed in the text they are reading. In learning vocabulary, learning strategies are needed to meet the needs of learners. There is a wide range of classifications of vocabulary learning strategies presented by different researchers. Therefore, this research used vocabulary learning strategies proposed by Schmitt (1997 in Asgari & Ghazali, 2011; Kafipour, 2011).
He categorized vocabulary learning strategies into five sub-categories:

1. Determination strategies are individual learning that helps learners identify the meaning of new words without one's help. These strategies make learners determine the meaning by using dictionaries, guess the meaning from the context, and identify the parts of speech and constituent elements.
2. Social strategies are ways that learners learn new words through interaction with other people either inside or outside the class or seeking another's person expertise.
3. Memory strategies make learners link their learning of new words to mental

processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words.
4. Cognitive strategies are related to mechanical aspects, not mental processing. Making repetition, taking notes or highlighting new words, making a list of the words, keeping a vocabulary notebook, and putting English label objects are the parts.
5. Metacognitive strategies are related to the process involved in monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of one's progress. Language and learning media such as songs, the internet, TV programs, movies, and dictionaries (printed and e-dictionary) are the parts.

Vocabulary learning strategies allow learners to take more control of their learning and grow learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction (Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Nation, 2001; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989 in Nirattisai & Chiramanee, 2014). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), explicit teaching is one of the best ways that teachers can use to enhance learners' vocabulary and lexical competence of vocabulary; therefore, vocabulary learning strategies are fundamentally important (Oxford & Scarcella, 1994 in Manuel, 2017). As a result, vocabulary learning strategies are practical, fruitful, and helpful to upgrade undergraduate students' vocabulary proficiency levels. The level of vocabulary proficiency is not only derived from the discovery of vocabulary but also strategies of learning. This is because learning strategies play an important role in vocabulary mastery in the future.

Dealing with the importance of vocabulary for improving and increasing language proficiency, Richards & Renandya (2002) stated that vocabulary knowledge was the core component of language proficiency. They also believed that it provided much of the basis for how well learners could listen, speak, read, and write. Undergraduate students have to reach the lexical requirements of English to a minimum of 3,000 word-families to begin reading authentic texts and daily everyday conversations, 5,000-9,000 word-families to comprehend authentic texts independently and 10,000 word-families to widen vocabulary knowledge and competence. Therefore, undergraduate students studying English can acquire vocabulary size up to 10,000 words. (Laufer, 1992; Hazenberg & Hulstijin, 1996 in Fahim & Komijani, 2010).

Related to students' vocabulary learning strategies, the researcher has observed and interviewed undergraduate students based on their vocabulary proficiency levels during taking a Vocabulary course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. Basic level was mostly passive undergraduate students and had fundamental vocabulary knowledge and proficiency. They felt afraid of making mistakes during the Vocabulary class; then, it made them have low self-confidence. As a result, they were shy to interact with smart classmates and lecturers. They also felt bored to remember or even memorized new words and did not know how to analyze prefixes, suffixes, zero affixation, parts of speech, and derivation. They watched western movies or listen to English songs or use websites more for entertainment than education. However, there was a similarity between intermediate and advanced levels in which undergraduate students' were diligent, active, critical,

and independent learners. They preferred practicing to memorizing the new vocabulary. Their vocabulary knowledge and competence were good even though they still got difficulties in understanding collocation, phrasal verbs, and idioms. Dealing with technological devices in learning, they knew how to use it properly to support their vocabulary learning.

Based on the statements above, the purpose of this research is to identify the type of vocabulary learning strategies employed by undergraduate students concerning their proficiency levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and investigate the most and least frequently used and significant vocabulary learning strategies.

The following questions are formulated in this research:
1. Are undergraduate students at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI high, medium, or low strategy users?

2. What are the most and least frequently used and significant strategies by undergraduate students at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI to their proficiency levels?

METHOD

The samples were taken based on three different proficiency levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced). The researcher took the scoring criteria of undergraduate students' proficiency levels from students' achievements during taking vocabulary class which involved mid-term test, individual and group assignments, and final test. The cumulative score 45.00–69.99 indicates basic level, 70.00–79.99 indicates intermediate level, and 80.00–100 indicates advanced level.

Therefore, the proper technique was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used based on certain considerations such as characteristics of

the population, or previously known features (Notoatmojo, 2010). Sugiyono (2010) also stated similar statements and added that its purpose was the data obtained could be more representative. Ten students of each vocabulary proficiency level were chosen purposively so that the number of samples was 30 participants. They were from semester III, the academic year 2019/2020, taking a Vocabulary course of the English Education Program from regular class at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI.

The questionnaire was used as a research instrument. It was taken from Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) adopted from Bennet (2006 in Hendrawaty, 2015). This questionnaire was a Likert-type scale with five responses from 1 to 5. (1= never, 2= seldom, 3= sometimes, 4= often, and 5= always) for every item. The questionnaire was given to the participants after they took the final test. The participants were asked to choose the number that indicated how often they used the given strategy. Seven items of each strategy category are grouped as determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies:

Collecting data was taken from a series of closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were administered to undergraduate students using a Likert type scale with 35 items. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions were used to know the depth of undergraduate students' opinions during the vocabulary class. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) are used to answer research questions. Oxford's (1997, 2001 adopted from Kafipour, 2011) scoring system is used to identify high, medium, and low strategy users. Based on the scoring system, score 1.00 - 2.49 show low strategy use, 2.50 - 3.49 show medium strategy use, and 3.50 - 5.00 show high strategy use.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question, descriptive statistics were used to compute the mean and standard deviations of the type of vocabulary learning strategies employed by undergraduate students in different proficiency levels. Overall strategies are depicted in the following table.

Table 1. Overall Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Undergraduate Students in Different Proficiency Levels

Overall Vocabulary Learning Strategies		Strategy Use	Students' Vocabulary Proficiency Levels
Mean	S.D.		
2.91	0.96	Medium	Basic
3.10	0.85	Medium	Intermediate
3.44	0.86	Medium	Advanced

As depicted in Table 1, undergraduate students from semester III of English Education Program at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI were found to be medium strategy users even though they were from different proficiency levels.

Table 2. Mean Strategy Scores of Three Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Level	D	S	M	C	MC
Basic	3.03	2.76	2.74	2.54	3.49
Intermediate	3.11	2.93	2.91	2.99	3.56
Advanced	3.51	3.07	3.41	3.23	3.98

Based on Table 2, the most and least frequently used strategies by undergraduate students at the basic level were metacognitive (MC= 3.49), followed by determination (D=3.03), social (S=2.76), memory (M=2.74), and cognitive (C=2.54). The most and least frequently used strategies by undergraduate students at the

intermediate level were metacognitive (MC=3.56), followed by determination (D=3.11), cognitive (C=2.99), social (S=2.93), and memory (M=2.91). The last most and least frequently used strategies by undergraduate students at the advanced level were metacognitive (MC=3.98), followed by determination (D=3.51), memory (M=3.41), cognitive (C=3.23), and social (3.07). The conclusion was metacognitive and determination were mostly preferred strategies by undergraduate students from all levels.

Table 3 and 4 showed the most two strategies which were highly employed by undergraduate students at three different levels.

Table 3. The Most First Frequency of Metacognitive Strategies Used by Undergraduate Students in Three Different Levels

No.	Metacognitive Strategies	Mean of Each Level		
		Basic	Inter mediate	Advanced
1.	Listen to English songs.	4.11	4.67	4.78
2.	Use English websites.	3.33	3.33	3.78
3.	Use social media.	4.11	2.78	3.22
4.	Watch English movies.	3.56	3.56	4.89
5.	Watch English TV programs	2.56	2.89	3.44
6.	Translate the words from Indonesian to English or vice versa through the printed dictionary.	3.33	3.89	4.00
7.	Translate the words from Indonesian to English or vice versa through e-dictionary.	3.44	3.78	3.78

As depicted in Table 3, there were four numbers in the high-frequency strategies: 1, 4, 7, and 6, and for the-medium frequency strategies, there were three numbers: 2, 3, and 5. It reveals that all undergraduate students in different proficiency levels use learning media and technological devices to support their vocabulary learning strategies so that they can improve their proficiency levels significantly. The involvement of new media technology can develop undergraduate students' interests in learning vocabulary and make available English teaching resources more diverse, flexible, and speedy (Guo & Zhu, 2018).

Table 4. The Most Second Frequency of Determination Strategies Used by Undergraduate Students in Three Different Levels

No.	Determination Strategies	Mean of Each Level		
		Basic	Inter mediate	Advanced
1.	Look up words in an English-Indonesia dictionary.	3.00	3.40	3.20
2.	Look up words in an Indonesia-English dictionary.	3.40	3.60	3.20
3.	Look up words in an English-English dictionary.	2.00	2.10	2.20
4.	Guess the meanings of words from textual context.	3.70	3.30	3.90
5.	Analyze parts of speech to guess the meanings of words (e.g. verb, noun, adj, adv, etc)	3.50	2.70	4.00
6.	Analyze prefixes, roots, and suffixes to guess the meanings of words.	2.90	3.60	4.30
7.	Analyze any available pictures or gestures to understand the meanings of words.	2.70	3.10	3.80

As mentioned in Table 4, there were two numbers in the high-frequency strategies: 4 and 6, for the medium-frequency strategies, there were four numbers: 1, 2, 5, and 7, but the low-frequency strategy was only number 3. As autonomous learners, they were used to guess the words from the context, analyzing affixation and parts of speech and pictures to get the word meanings, and looking up words in an Indonesia to English or vice versa. However, they still got confused to understand the meaning of the unfamiliar words by looking up them in an English-English dictionary because this strategy needed proficient vocabulary knowledge. It is in line with research conducted by Akbary & Tharirian (2009 in Goundar 2015) on vocabulary learning strategies that learners preferred using bilingual to monolingual dictionaries. In short, undergraduate students taking Vocabulary course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI were simple and practical learners; therefore, they used easy, practical, and understandable strategies.

Table 5, 6, and 7 showed the least frequent strategies, cognitive was employed by basic level, memory was used by intermediate level and social was implemented by advanced level.

Table 5. The Least Frequency of Cognitive Strategies Used by Basic Undergraduate Students

No.	Strategies	Mean
1.	Learn words through verbal/oral repetition.	3.10
2.	Learn words through written repetition.	3.20
3.	Take notes or highlight new words.	3.50
4.	Make lists of new words.	2.70
5.	Learn new words from textual context.	2.20
6.	Get another word from the same word.	1.00
7.	Read English novels, magazines, articles, and newspapers.	2.10

As depicted in Table 5, undergraduate students at a basic level were in the high-frequency strategy for taking notes or highlighting new words. They also tried to learn words through written and verbal/oral repetitions. To avoid forgetting the new words, they made some lists. However, they got difficulties if they had to learn new words from textual context and read English novels, magazines, and newspapers. Last but not least, they were extremely poor at getting another word from the same word, for their vocabulary knowledge was inadequate.

Table 6. The Least Frequency of Memory Strategies Used by Intermediate Undergraduate Students

No.	Strategies	Mean
1.	Stick a picture with its word in a place where it can be seen clearly.	2.20
2.	Remember the word from its "root", "prefix", and "suffix".	2.50
3.	Remember the word from its form [e.g. beautify (verb), beauty/beautician (noun), beautiful (adjective), or adverb (beautifully)]	2.70
4.	Practice the sound and spelling of the words.	3.60
5.	Connect the word to its synonym and/or antonym.	2.70
6.	Memorize the new words many times.	3.30
7.	Use the new words in a sentence (s).	3.40

As shown in Table 6, the least frequent strategies used by undergraduate students at an intermediate level were sticking a picture with its word in a place where it can be seen clearly and remembering the word from its "root", "prefix", and "suffix". It seemed that students were uninterested in using these two strategies because they were ineffective and boring. Undergraduate students still preferred using the new words in a sentence (s), memorizing the new words many times, and remembering the word from its form. On the other side, they were enthusiastic when practicing the sound and spelling of the words.

Table 7. The Least Frequency of Social Strategies Used by Advanced Undergraduate Students

No.	Strategies	Mean
1.	Ask my teacher/lecturer to translate the meanings of the words.	2.60
2.	Ask my classmate (s) to translate the meanings of the words.	3.50
3.	Ask other people (e.g. parents, sister, brother, cousin, foreigners, etc) to translate the meanings of the words.	2.20
4.	Discover new meanings through group work activities.	3.50
5.	Interact with English teachers or lecturers.	3.40
6.	Interact with my classmates.	4.00
7.	Interact with native English speakers or second language English speakers.	2.30

Table 7 showed that the least frequent strategies used by advanced undergraduate students were asking other people or making interaction with native or second language English speakers. They did not want to ask for someone's help because they were not sure about his/her vocabulary knowledge and competence. Besides, there was no interaction with foreigners since they did not make friends with them. This finding was related to the previous result (Table 3) that excellent learners were less interested in using social media than basic learners for vocabulary learning.

The results of the research question showed that undergraduate students from semester III of the English Education Program at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI were medium strategy users. It was the same as the previous research conducted by Jafari & Kafipour (2013) and Mustapha & Mohd Hatta (2018). Furthermore, the findings also revealed that metacognitive and determination strategies were the most frequently used strategies among three levels of vocabulary proficiency. On the other side, the least frequently used strategies were different. Firstly, cognitive strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at the basic level. Secondly, memory strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at the intermediate level. Finally, social strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at the advanced level.

Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used categories of strategies and high frequency used strategies. Metacognitive was the most popular strategy among undergraduates from different proficiency levels. The findings were similar to the previous research (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011; Jafari & Kafipour, 2013; Hendrawaty, 2015; Manuel, 2017, Wu, 2019). Metacognitive strategies showed that most of the undergraduates from semester III of the English Education Program especially from morning classes at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI were taking control of their vocabulary learning. They used strategies related to their interest and passion as the millennial generation. Mostly basic, intermediate, and advanced undergraduates highly preferred listening to English songs, using social media, watching English movies, and translating the words from Indonesian to English or vice versa through printed and electronic dictionaries. The evidence revealed that the use of learning media could increase students' vocabulary proficiency levels significantly.

The determination was the second favorable strategies used by undergraduates from all levels. It was the same as the previous research done by Asgari & Ghazali (2011). Undergraduates were keen on analyzing prefixes, roots, and suffixes, parts of speech to guess the meaning of the words, and any available pictures or gestures to understand the meaning of the words. Besides, they used other strategies such as guessing the meaning of words from textual context and looking up words in an English-Indonesian dictionary or vice versa.

Cognitive strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at the basic level of vocabulary competence. It was similar to the research done by Jafari & Kafipour (2013). Three out of seven cognitive strategies were in the low-strategy use. Getting another word from the same word, reading English novels, magazines, articles, and newspapers, and learning new words from textual context seemed boring since some poor learners were lack of reading; as a result, their vocabulary competence was at a low level. Based on table 3, basic undergraduate students preferred using English websites and social media. To the future, they can use technology-based reading media which are much more attractive, innovative, and effective to overcome their reading habit and vocabulary proficiency.

Memory strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at an intermediate level. Fortunately, only two out of seven memory strategies were in the low-strategy use. The first strategy was sticking a picture with its word in a place where undergraduate students could see it clearly, and the second one was to remember the words from their root, prefix, and suffix. It assumed that the two low strategies were uninteresting and ineffective for the learners nowadays. Most undergraduate students at Unindra never stuck any pictures to remember the new words either at home or in the classroom. Besides, to sharpen their vocabulary memories, they enjoyed practicing instead of memorizing. They realized that memorization made them easy to forget some new words learned several months or years ago.

Social strategies were the least frequently used by undergraduate students at the high or advanced level of vocabulary competence. The low strategies for the advanced undergraduate students were asking other people (e.g. parents, sister, brother, cousin, foreigners, etc) to translate the meanings of the words and making interaction with native English speakers or second language English speakers. The conclusion was that undergraduate students with a high vocabulary competence were reluctant to ask someone whom they did not know properly the depth of vocabulary knowledge and competence. However, their strategies were high if they made interaction, asked their classmate (s) about English vocabulary, and discovered new meanings through group-work activities so that presentation and discussion were appropriately applied in the Vocabulary class.

Based on the research results, the mean score of the basic level was 2.91, the intermediate level was 3.10, and the advanced level was 3.44. The evidence showed that the higher vocabulary learning strategies were, the higher student's proficiency level was. As a result, there was a strong relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and students' proficiency levels. Some recent research had proven it. Firstly, Boonkongsaen & Intaraprasert (2014) claimed that levels of vocabulary proficiency affected undergraduate students' three levels of vocabulary learning strategies use. It was in line with the research conducted by Fahim & Komijani (2010) that there was a positive relationship between participants' L2 vocabulary knowledge and their L2 vocabulary learning strategies. Rahimi (2014) also found that vocabulary learning strategy instruction had a positive impact on the depth of vocabulary knowledge of students to get a better understanding of the nature of language learning in general. The following research was done by Lachini (2008) on 120 female language learners

of three proficiency levels that there was a relationship between the student's level of proficiency and vocabulary learning strategies which included creative, effective, active, and motivated techniques. The results revealed that learners' proficiency level affected their application of vocabulary learning strategies and their performance on vocabulary size test. Finally, similar research showed that vocabulary learning strategies had a significant effect on the learners' scores obtained from the vocabulary tests (Rahimy & Shams, 2012).

As stated above, all undergraduate students from three different levels of vocabulary competence were medium strategy users. They enjoyed using metacognitive and determination instead of the other three vocabulary learning strategies. It is a novelty of the research. However, the least frequent vocabulary learning strategy used by undergraduate students from each level was different. It was a challenge for lecturers teaching the vocabulary course in the heterogeneous class. It was like what was stated by Schmitt (2000) that teachers and lecturers might help to decrease students' learning burdens by providing some organized vocabulary learning strategies for them.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the research, the conclusion is presented as follows:

Firstly, the findings showed that undergraduate students in the third semester majoring English Education Program at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI were found as medium strategy users for overall strategies use. Secondly, the most frequently used strategies were metacognitive and determination strategies, whereas the least frequently used strategies by the

basic level were cognitive, the intermediate level was the memory, and the advanced level was social.

This recent research can be valuable to lecturers and undergraduate students. For lecturers, by identifying undergraduates' vocabulary learning strategies concerning the different proficiency levels at the beginning of the Vocabulary class, the lecturers can decide how to teach vocabulary enjoyably in the heterogeneous class. They can design interesting Vocabulary module and relevant teaching media. Meanwhile, undergraduate students will feel motivated to upgrade their levels of vocabulary proficiency.

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