

## **EFL Young Learners' Vocabulary Learning Strategies : An Overview**

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### **Abstrak**

Anak-anak pada usia sangat muda (*young learners*), umumnya memiliki kemampuan untuk mempelajari sesuatu yang baru dan memngingatnya dengan sangat cepat. Dengan kemampuan tersebut, tentunya itu membuka peluang yang sangat bagus bagi mereka untuk belajar bahasa asing, terutama kosakata dalam bahasa Inggris untuk berkomunikasi. Akan tetapi, bagi sebagian guru dirasa sangat sulit untuk membuat siswanya (terutama yang masih dikategorikan sebagai anak – anak) untuk memberikan perhatian penuh mereka saat proses belajar mengajar berlangsung. Maka dari itu, akan sangat penting bagi guru untuk memahami lingkungan belajar dan strategi – strategi dalam belajar kosakata dengan tujuan membuat kegiatan belajar mengajar lebih kondusif. Artikel ini merupakan kombinasi rangkuman dari beberapa penelitian-penelitian terdahulu terkait dengan strategi pembelajaran dalam bahasa Inggris, terutama dalam pembelajaran kosakata. Artikel ini diharapkan dapa tmemberikan informasi bagi guru dalam mengkondisikan kelas serta mengarahkan anak-anak untuk belajar kosakata.

### **Abstract**

Young learners have the ability to learn something quickly and memorize it in the long-term. It is a good chance for the children to learn about foreign languages, especially vocabulary as the key to communicate in English. However, it may be challenging for the teacher to make children quiet and give their full attention while learning in the classroom. So, the teacher needs to understand the children's learning habits and the vocabulary strategies to make the teaching and learning activity more conducive. This article is an overview of some previous studies related to the EFL young learners' learning strategies, especially in learning vocabulary. It is hoped that this article will help in providing knowledge for teachers for EFL young learners in conducting their English class and stimulating students' vocabulary knowledge.

**Keywords:** vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategy, young learners.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Generally, learning English aims to make the learners mastering both the oral and written form of the English language. This aim expects that the students have good communication in English. To achieve that goal, one of the important challenges in the English language learning process is learning vocabulary. Vocabulary is identified as essential in language use in which the learners will find difficulties in English as a foreign language learning if they are lack of vocabulary knowledge.

In teaching and learning English, vocabulary tends to be the fundamental factor since the students will communicate or express their ideas well while they have board knowledge of vocabulary. Moreover, Nation (1994) stated that by learning vocabulary and

enrich vocabulary knowledge, a person will not have any difficulties in learning language and it will improve the listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. So, students need to enrich and enhance vocabulary mastery. To achieve the goal in the learning process, both teachers and students have to apply suitable teaching and learning strategies. Teachers may have some alternatives in teaching the English language by considering the students' condition in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers should provide the students with some alternatives or strategies in learning vocabulary outside the classroom.

Anderson (2005) stated that some foreign language learners may be more successful than others since they try to apply more effective strategies, and approach the role of language learning differences. In the other

words, a successful foreign language learner is aware of how to use an effective strategy to learn and memorize the basics of a large number of foreign words with its meaning, then know how to use it appropriately. According to Ahmed (1989), by applying many learning strategies regularly, a foreign language learner will have more chance to be a success than the one who uses fewer strategies and use them irregularly. Consistency is important for the students in approaching the learning strategies since they will be more adapted to use more than one strategy in solving their difficulties in the learning process.

Based on the passages above, we found the important role of vocabulary in the language learning process and its' strategies. As well as in encouraging foreign language learners in learning vocabulary, they usually apply a particular strategy. Moreover, the strategies that they used in learning vocabulary are called as vocabulary learning strategies. Catalan (2003) stated that vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) is knowledge including the processes on learning vocabulary and also vocabulary function by the learners. Furthermore, in line with Anderson (2005), Schmitt (1997) proposed that the use of various vocabulary learning strategies will lead the foreign language learners to be more competent and successful in learning the new language rather than the less competent students who apply less varied strategies.

Young learners have a well-established set of instincts, characteristics, skills that they bring to the classroom in which will help them being fully-prepared in learning a foreign language (Halliwel, 1993). It means that it is the best time for the learners to learn vocabulary while they are young to provide them sufficient knowledge of the English language. On the other hand, based on the researcher's observation in one of the elementary schools in a rural area, it was found that the students have difficulties in learning English since they are lack vocabulary. It contradicts with the Haliwel's statement that said that young learners do not come to the language classroom empty-handed, or in the other words, students

should not have many difficulties in learning vocabulary in and outside the classroom. Moreover, Awalin (2017) in her background to conduct research, stated that some junior high school students are not aware of the strategies that they used in the learning process. Although they always use certain strategies unconsciously, some of the students do not know about it. For the students who do not know whether the strategies are suitable for them or not, most have poor vocabulary size. By knowing the variety of strategies for learning vocabulary, it is hoped the students will have more sufficient knowledge and apply appropriate vocabulary learning strategies.

By concerning to the issues above, this paper will focus on various vocabulary learning strategies used by English as foreign language young learners. First, it starts with a brief explanation of language learning strategies by English as foreign language young learners. It continues with an overview of the importance of learning vocabulary at an early age. The next part is about the kind of vocabulary learning strategy used by English as foreign language young learners. Finally, it proposes some suggestions for the teacher related to teaching English for English as a foreign language for young learners.

#### **ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE YOUNG LEARNERS' CHARACTERISTIC**

As Halliwel (1993) stated that children have some characteristics related to the way they are learning a language, the first one is about their ability to grasp the meaning while communicating even before they understand the individual's word. Second, children are creative to use limited language sources. Third, they have a high capacity to do indirect learning. Fourth, children's capacity for finding and making fun is large. Furthermore, children are interested in imagination and fantasy. And the last, they have a high instinct to interact and communicate with others. So, before we are going to discuss vocabulary learning strategies by EFL young learners, here the brief explanation about young learners language learning characteristics that have been distinguished by McGlothin (1997) :

### **Young Learners Learning Language Environment**

Below are ten features of the young learners' environment. They are kind of crucial component in the language environment of young learners. Furthermore, these elements are rare to be found in the adult learners' language environment. Principally they deal with the language that young learners accept, not the language that they produce.

1. There is no direct pressure to learn (no test, no grades, etc.).
2. There is no time limit for learning (no end of the semester).
3. There is no way of escaping into a different language (no vacations).
4. The language is not sequenced by grammar or vocabulary (no textbook).
5. There is lots of repetition.
6. Language and the world are new and interesting.
7. All the language is spoken in the context of the surrounding world.
8. The language is all around the children.
9. Young learners have many opportunities for using the language to communicate with the people around them.
10. Young learners simplify much of the language to their level of understanding.

### **Young Learners Learning Language Strategies**

1. Language is not interesting for young learners. Language is not too important for young learners, and peripheral or incidental learning is the style of all of their language learning. For a child, the language will be more valuable for them if it can facilitate them better in enjoying their primary interests. They feel as if they have been completely successful when they get what he wants, even though if they break all the imaginable rules of grammar and pronunciation.
2. New language that young learners do not understand will not disturb them. One of the young learners' characteristics is they do not pay more attention to something that they cannot understand. So, when they cannot understand a language, they just ignore

it since language is not the center of their attention.

Young learners are happy to do repetitive events of their life and use this happiness to help them in learning.

By doing repetitive events, children's sense of security and order will be improved. As well as they are improved, their understanding of the order in the language that is associated with those events.

These repetitive events give the children a sense of. Generally, repetitive events often leave much of a mark on children's language ability.

Children's primary interest helps them in the learning process.

Something that takes children's attention will cover up the other things. They focus on the one thing, excluding the others for that moment in time.

These last three points are closely related. They deal with how a child focuses his attention. He does not simply let the language pour over him and slowly ooze into his mind. Rather, he is very selective about the language he pays attention to. An adult learner tends to become first confused then discouraged when he receives too much new information at one time. He tries to take in all that is presented to him, often with the result that he does not learn any of it well. Because of this, special care must be taken not to present too much at one time to an adult learner of a foreign language. The excess causes the adult learner real problems. But a child never tries to take in all that is around him. He is the one who is in control, and he selects what he likes best, ignoring the rest. A child is very picky about the language he listens to, just as he is often very picky about the food he eats. But precisely because he is so effective in shutting out what does not interest him, his mind is not cluttered or divided, and he can bring to bear the full resources of his mental facilities to learn what he has selected. This ability to focus on the material at hand while effectively excluding the rest is a very important ingredient in learning.

The things that take children's attention easily will be easier to be understood for the children directly.

They do not think about the world economy and foreign cultures. They think about the people around them and the things around them. And these things can easily be given a name.

6. Calling an object by its name is one of the young learners' natural desires.

By pointing out something and calling it by its name, children feel real joy and pleasure.

7. Young learners participate in their environment by using their natural desire, and it helps them learn a new language.

They want to do what they see others doing, and when that includes language, they want to speak it too. Here a child often says things he does not understand at all. He is simply imitating others. He has learned that in a given situation, a word or phrase is always used, so he tries to use it too.

8. By knowing how to pronounce a new word, children are easier to add the word to their speaking vocabulary.

It is more simple for young learners if they can attach a new meaning to a sound sequence that they already know than they learn both a new meaning and a new sound sequence.

9. A new language will be used by the children immediately, and they will be more confident to communicate it.

Young learners apply the new knowledge that they get as soon as they can. They do not wait the day after today to apply the knowledge in context. Moreover, if they are successful in using a piece of language, they will remember it and be more confident to use the new language. Not only that, but it also gives them reinforcement to bring them more success. This confidence is one of the obstacles for the adult in the language learning process, they tend to feel some difficulties to keep going and establish the confidence cycle. On the other hand, children can face a lot of obstacles and still keep going on it simply. So, confidence is one of the most important aspects of the learning method. When young learners found difficulties in the learning process, they are brave enough to take a risk to overcome the problems. Besides, if the learners have less confidence, they may give up on some troubles easily.

In doing the learning task, young learners bring their wonderful ingenuity along with them.

Many of the activities that children do are wrong for us as an adult. However, they will tend to do it again and again since they do not know if that is wrong and do not care. It is because children have their own way to see and order the world that they know. Children are not inhibited by something that others might think. They face a problem by plunging in their mind first, then solving the problems by using all the resources that they have.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING VOCABULARY IN EARLY AGE

To communicate effectively, we have to master the word in which called vocabulary. Neuman and Dwyer (2009) stated there are two kinds of words in communicating, that are words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary). Moreover, vocabulary can be defined as the total number of words with the meanings in a language (Hornby, 1995). Another definition is explained by Ur (1998), vocabulary is the words that we learn in a foreign language context, a crucial thing to typical language learning (Coady & Huckling, 1998), and also the words that are used by a person, class or profession (Burns, 1972).

To conclude the definitions above, vocabulary can be defined as the total number of words that are used in communicating ideas and expressing the speakers' aim. As we know that English is a part of the International Language, so that is one of the reasons why it is important to learn vocabulary, especially English nowadays. In Indonesia, English is learned as a foreign language, and most students learn English from elementary school even though the curriculum stated that English has to be taught in junior high school. However, most of the elementary schools in Indonesia use English as an additional lesson, and it contains the base knowledge of English like vocabulary and grammatical things. Furthermore, it is good for young learners to learn about a foreign language since their ability to memorize something is relatively higher than adults.

The use of vocabulary in and out of the classroom shows how important vocabulary is. The students achieve the most enough vocabulary for themselves in the classroom. Moreover, as Nation (2011) stated that learning vocabulary has an important role in enhancing all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) both in English as a second language (ESL) context and English as a foreign language (EFL) context. It is proved by Rivers and Nunan (1991) said that a sufficient vocabulary in the acquisition is crucial in succeeding second language learning because if the learners have low-proficient of vocabulary, they will found difficulties to use the structures and functions that to be used in communicating comprehensively.

There are some arguments stated that vocabulary does not have a crucial role in learning a foreign language, and the curricula of the language learning have to consider those statements. Furthermore, Maximo (2000) stated that other scholars such as Krashen(1989) and Richards (1980) deliver some reasons to commit the role of vocabulary in language learning. The first one, the vocabulary size has a big impact on a learner in the mastery of a language. Second, the lack of vocabulary is a major problem in learning a language. It is supported by the statement “ second language acquirers are preferred to carry dictionaries along with them, not grammar book”. It shows how important to learn vocabulary as the base of the English language before all of the elements.

#### **Do the learners need a large number of vocabulary to use another language?**

Some of the reliable studies conducted by Goulden, Nation, and Read in 1990 and Zechmeister, Chronis, Cull, D'Anna, and Healy in 1995 mentioned that an educated English native speaker generally knows around 20,000-word families. However, the word family includes some derived family numbers and proper nouns that are not counted. So, in other words, these word family estimation is still low. Particularly, in a year, a native speaker adds around 1,000-word families to their

vocabulary. The studies of native speakers' vocabulary bring a suggestion for second and foreign language learners that is important for them to know a very large number of words. It will help the learners to achieve a long-term goal in learning a language. On the other hand, it is not too essential in short-term goals since the usage of some words maybe not too be needed.

Moreover, the number of vocabulary items will be easier to learn for EFL young learners rather than adult learners. As McGlothlin (1997) stated in his journal that young learners have some advantages in learning a new language. They can learn something new easily. When most adult learners are struggling to face many difficulties in foreign language learning, young learners seem to just do it simply. For a child, learning is something joyful like playing. Besides, the language play by the children has a significant result rather than adults' language struggle.

## **VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Vocabulary learning is believed as one of the most fundamental areas in teaching and it is certainly one of the constitutional elements of EFL. It is supported by Read (2000) in his statement that the basic building of language are words. Moreover, large structures such as sentences, paragraphs, and whole-text are formed by words as the units of meaning. As we have been mentioned above that word is similar to vocabulary. When we think of vocabulary, we do not only talk about merely knowing the word's meaning, and its definition; rather what is essential is knowing how to speak and use a word correctly, mastering the ability to use the word in written and spoken occasions and also recognizing it and understanding it when encountered in various contexts (Miller & Gildea, 1987).

Linse (2005) suggested that it is better to provide the young learners a board knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies at an early age. These strategies can prove very necessary in situations both inside the learning

context, the classroom, but also outside in the real world, and can help them acquire vocabulary they see or hear. For this reason, vocabulary development should also include Direct instruction - the actual teaching of words and their meanings - and Indirect instruction - the teaching of strategies through which the learners will be able to deduce the meaning themselves. Another helpful strategy for our young students is repetition. For new lexical items to be successfully assimilated by the students, they need to reappear several times after their first occurrence, in different activities, with different skills and for multiple times for recycling to take place. Deep processing is another component that can help students integrate new vocabulary items. Through this strategy, learners can create stronger links between the new words and their previous knowledge; by involving the students personally and connected with the new lexical items, deep processing is enhanced. Some tools that can prove very useful are dictionaries and vocabulary notebooks.

When talking about young learners, Cameron (2001) argues that they have different lexical needs than older learners. More specifically, they need to learn concrete vocabulary, recycling of new lexical items in new contexts is essential and basic level words should be learned before an attempt is made to teach them subordinate or superordinate vocabulary; additionally, they learn words as collections. Furthermore, the variety of vocabulary learning strategies should be introduced to the young learners so that they become applicable for the learners to use according to their learning styles, maybe at a later age (Schmitt, 1997). Besides, it is claimed that the strategies that older learners use can be traced back to habits formed at an earlier age, so the sooner they are accustomed to strategies the better for our learners.

Strategies to learn vocabulary proposed by Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) are: guessing from the context, using recalling memory techniques and word parts to remember words, and using vocabulary flashcard to help to remember the word pairs of

foreign language and first language. Also, Murcia (2001) proposed some strategies in learning vocabulary. The first one is guessing meaning from the context. She explained that learners can get sufficient clues from the context to guess the meaning of words. The second strategy is the mnemonic devices. It means learners are reminded of the keyword when they hear or see it. The last strategy proposed by Murcia (2001) is the use of vocabulary notebooks. Setting up vocabulary notebooks can be a memory aid in independent learning by the students. There are many vocabulary learning strategies presented by experts, then they suggest the learners apply lots more techniques to help learners in learning a new language easier. Furthermore, for the teachers, it will be better to teach vocabulary to the students in rich contexts.

Furthermore, Schmitt classifies vocabulary learning strategies taxonomy with two main strategies; discover strategy and consolidation strategy, and each of the strategies divided sub-strategy. In the discovery strategy, there are social strategy and determination strategy. Besides, the consolidation strategy includes cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, social strategy, and memory strategy. The Schmitt's taxonomy will be drawn at the table. 1 and explained briefly below :

Discovery Strategy	Determination Strategy (DET)	Analyzing part of speech
		Using bilingual dictionary
		Using Monolingual dictionary
	Social Strategy (SOC)	Asking the teacher for L1 translation
		Asking friends for the meaning
		Discovering new meaning by doing group work
Consolidating Strategy	Social Strategy (SOC)	Studying and practicing the meaning in a

		group	words' structural in the language context, guessing from L1 cognate and the words' content, and using reference material, such as a dictionary.
		Communicating with a native speaker	
	Memory Strategy (MEM)	Imagining word's meaning	Discovery-social Strategy This strategy shows that learners determine new words by asking other people. For example, they ask the teacher or classmate for an L1 translation and discovering meaning through a group work activity.
		Connecting the word to its synonyms and antonyms	
		Saying the new word aloud when studying	
		Using physical action when learning a word	
	Cognitive Strategy (COG)	Applying repetition in verbal form	<b>Consolidation Strategy</b>  The second vocabulary learning strategy in Schmitt's taxonomy is the consolidation strategy. This strategy is used to combine two or more new words (Schmitt, 1997). Moreover, this strategy includes four strategies that will be explained as follow :
		Applying repetition in a written form	Consolidation-social Strategy. It is a strategy to define new words by doing group work activities cooperatively in which the learners can practice and study the meaning of new words in that activity. For example, the learners do a group activity to practice and study new words, or they interact with a native speaker.
		Making wordlist	
		Using flashcards	
		Taking notes in class while learning	
	Metacognitive Strategy (MET)	Doing self-testing with the word test	Consolidation-memory Strategy. The previous study relates to the new words that will help the students to present the knowledge system, and it is called a consolidation-memory strategy. Furthermore, the example of this strategy is imaging the word form, and connecting the words to the personal experience.
		Using English-language media (song, movie, newspaper, etc.)	Consolidation-cognitive Strategy. The definition of this strategy is similar to the consolidation-memory strategy. However, this strategy includes repetitive activities and the use of mechanical skills. This strategy is focused on manipulating rational processing. For example, taking notes, and making wordlist.

**Table 1 Classification of vocabulary learning strategies by Schmitt's Taxonomy (1997)**

### **Discovery Strategy**

One of the vocabulary learning strategies is the discovery strategy. According to Schmitt's (1997), the discovery strategy is applied when the learners try to guess the meaning of the unknown words. Moreover, this strategy has two sub-strategies that will be explained as follow :

- a. **Discovery-determination Strategy**  
This strategy is used by the learners to define a new word by inferring its meaning from the

themselves with the word tests and use language media to achieve their target.

# **VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY TEACHERS AND YOUNG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

K. Kavvadia (2016) conducted a study related to vocabulary learning strategies by EFL young learners in the Greek primary school. The result shows that understanding or guessing meaning from context is a very popular strategy that the teachers use as well as the students. Similarly, students engage in guessing meaning from pictures, and teachers promote this teaching technique. It is since most young learners will be more interested in the picture rather than just words. Translation in L1 is still often used by teachers, and likewise, learners seem to favor this strategy.

In consolidating meaning, vocabulary notebooks are highly celebrated by both teachers and students. Another noted strategy for the same purpose is that of matching words with pictures; the same results came up with matching words with objects. Using words in sentences to keep meaning in mind is often employed in the classroom and can also be used as homework.

Both parties showed a strong preference for songs and stories and of course games are an all-time favorite for students and are also selected by teachers since teaching in this way can be more amusing for both and students are more involved in the lesson. Word families were almost equally treated by both groups of participants, with the teachers showing a greater preference for them. As for participation in projects, the learners seem more eager for them but also the teachers quite often engage them in such activities, which are also present in the textbooks. Writing down and sounding out words to practice them is quite a traditional strategy that can assist memorization and it is among the most popular ones. Moving on to the metacognitive strategies, teachers always prompt their students to listen to English songs, watch films and cartoons in English, read different texts in English and speak with people

who know the language well; the majority of students was also very favorable towards these strategies, with a slight exception to reading, which was not chosen by as many, probably because reading is often considered as the most tedious. Error correction was also regarded by the learners more traditionally, since they showed a clear preference for immediate correction, probably because they are used to this way of correction in their L1. Teachers discuss learners' mistakes with them, though not regularly, more often than not resort to remedial work, to help learners recognize and overcome their weaknesses.

The use of bilingual dictionaries is not as much favored by either teachers and learners; asking the classmates for meaning is also not selected as a vocabulary learning strategy. A surprising issue is that although teachers often give students sentences including the new words, students do not opt for the specific practice to discern the meaning of a word; synonyms and paraphrases are similarly treated. Also, drawing pictures of words is not popular among students, probably because they feel they have outgrown this strategy, while teachers practice it. The same goes for rhyming and poems; teachers emphasize rhyming but students do not prefer to learn poems to memorize words, probably because rhyming is a technique that appeals mostly to younger children (aged 5-8). Furthermore, although students like a crossword puzzle a lot, they are only sometimes engaged in such activity; this could be explained by the lack of such activities in the textbooks or by the fact that such activities quite consume a long time to be applied in the classroom or to be even given as homework. Moreover, making stories can prove very challenging for children, and depending on the role stories and fairytales play in their lives- whether they are accustomed to reading or hearing them- could explain the above results. A similarly treated strategy is that of the students creating exercises themselves to give their classmates; the majority of answers from both groups were that they never practice vocabulary in that way before. Quite surprisingly, although students are encouraged to share their feelings while learning a foreign



language, probably because they are not used to or are reluctant of being the epicenter of the teachers' attention or because children of this age can be quite egocentric and it is difficult for them to share their feelings with others.

Moreover, the research of R. Lan (2005) showed that note-taking is not a popular strategy that is used by young learners. As a result, note-taking only used by one young learner while learning vocabulary. Besides, another research that has been done by Cortazzi & Jin (1993); Kojic-Sibo & Lightbown (1999); Sanaoui (1995) found that adult learners apply note-taking frequently in learning vocabulary.

#### **HOW TEACHERS SHOULD TEACH VOCABULARY FOR YOUNG LEARNERS? (Kung, 2003)**

1. Appropriate instruction is a crucial aspect to teach young learners vocabulary. Not only providing the right instruction, but the teacher also has to facilitate young learners, especially for enhancing learners' low proficient of phonemic awareness.
2. Since young learners tend to do simple activities, keeping and encouraging the students to apply certain strategies that have been used by them before will help them in learning vocabulary. TEFL teachers can use cognitive shallower strategies like verbal and written repetition.
3. Teachers and parents should be the reasonable demand of students' habit formation of memorizing vocabulary.
4. Various materials in a different context will help EFL teachers for introducing some vocabulary learning strategies to the young learners.
5. The role of vocabulary in the students' learning process cannot be overemphasized since the learning strategies has a positive correlation with students' English proficiency.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on this article, we found that learning vocabulary is quite beneficial for young learners by looking at their characteristics, like have high capability in memorizing, grasping the meaning while communicating with others, and the ability to

learn indirectly. However, children cannot learn a foreign language by themselves. They may learn it indirectly and unconsciously in their daily activity and do not use their knowledge maximally.

Besides, young learners are also talkative and have a high desire for playing something fun and imaginative. It seems to be more challenging for the teachers to make the children quiet and give their attention while learning in the classroom. Therefore, there are some suggestions for the teachers to make the teaching and learning atmosphere, especially in the vocabulary context, more comfortable both for the teachers and learners. One of the suggestions that the teachers have to keep in mind is that they have to make the activities in the classroom as fun as possible since the children are interested to do something fun.

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