

SCRUTINIZING PAPUAN EFL STUDENTS' STRATEGIES FOR ENRICHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY MASTERY

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Abstract

The current study aimed to scrutinize the approaches employed by Papuan EFL students to improve their vocabulary skills. The study utilized a mixed methods approach, incorporating both a questionnaire and interviews to gather data from 30 Papuan EFL students enrolled in a private university in Timika, Papua. The results revealed that the majority of participants employed four key strategies for vocabulary acquisition: social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive. Notably, the memory strategy was most commonly utilized, with participants frequently associating new words with personal experiences to aid in retention. This study provided beneficial recommendations and suggestions for educators. In this sense, the findings of this study can be utilized as useful strategies to teach EFL students based on their interests. Thus, those strategies can facilitate them to achieve vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: Papuan EFL student, strategy in learning vocabulary, vocabulary mastery

Introduction

In the EFL and ESL context, vocabulary is considered a necessary component to be acquired by English language learners. According to Atmazaki and Indriyani (2019), vocabulary can be categorized as one of the crucial language elements in learning a certain foreign language, specifically English. To put it differently, vocabulary constitutes the fundamental aspect of language acquisition that should be learned, absorbed, and memorized by EFL students to help them produce powerful communication (Barcroft, 2015; Romrome & Mbato, 2023). The EFL Students who have sufficient vocabulary do not have to put much effort into communicating with other people since they already have a variety of vocabulary to be used easily and properly. This suggests that vocabulary significantly influences the improvement of EFL students' academic achievements, either in the context of oral or written communication.

Since vocabulary is deemed necessary to be acquired by EFL students, they should find valuable learning strategies that assist them in effectively permeating many new vocabularies. Tseng and Schmitt (2008) emphasized that EFL students who want to learn and master vocabulary, need to possess powerful learning



strategies. By having those strategies, they will be enabled to be more aware, motivated, and enthusiastic during the process of learning (Ghalebi et al., 2021). Consequently, they will be interested in learning and memorizing new vocabulary.

In accordance with the learning strategies of vocabulary, Oxford (1990) divided them into two different strategies which are direct and indirect. Direct strategies include memory and cognitive techniques, whereas indirect approaches involve metacognitive and social approaches. Memory strategy, particularly potent, aids students in recalling and contemplating vocabulary in the target language (Mahardika, 2023). Meanwhile, direct approaches are employed to link students' language proficiency which comprises memory and cognitive approaches (Zahedi & Abdi, 2012).

Memory strategies aid students in recalling and reflecting on target language vocabulary, fostering connections between newly acquired words and existing knowledge (Ghalebi et al., 2021). Through tasks like word grouping and explanation, students reinforce their memory retention. Cognitive strategies come into play as students demonstrate proficiency in the language, encouraging them to integrate new vocabulary into daily communication. Effective methods, such as seeking assistance or using dictionaries, facilitate comprehension and application. Additionally, techniques like translation and highlighting keywords in texts enhance understanding and retention.

Indirect approaches are utilized to support students' involvement in vocabulary enrichment, comprising metacognitive and social strategies. Metacognitive approaches enable students to manage their performance by recollecting and structuring their existing knowledge of acquired words. They must monitor and evaluate their vocabulary acquisition process, analyzing their learning trajectory. Social strategies enhance students' self-assurance and enthusiasm to actively participate in vocabulary exercises, fostering interaction within their peer group.

Pertaining to this issue, some researchers have scrutinized the approaches employed by EFL learners in enhancing vocabulary in the Indonesian context. For example, Sari (2019) who investigated the improvement of EFL Students' vocabulary using the appropriate strategy, found that project-based learning could be used to enrich students' vocabulary mastery. In line with this, Patahuddin and Bin-Tahir (2017) found that Indonesian EFL students broadened their vocabulary through various methods, including using dictionaries, reading English literature, listening to English songs and watching movies, participating in games, surfing the internet, and reading English advertisements. Moreover, Lestari and Hardiyanti (2020) also found that Indonesian EFL students tend to use English songs to enlarge vocabulary mastery.

Despite several pieces of research that have been carried out in the Indonesian context, however, no study has been conducted in Papuan settings. Thus, this study aimed to offer insight into the techniques utilized by Papuan EFL students for vocabulary acquisition. Consequently, a research question was formulated: Which strategies are predominantly utilized by Papuan EFL Students in vocabulary learning?

Method

This study, employing a mixed-method approach, sought to investigate the learning tactics utilized by Papuan EFL students in obtaining English vocabulary. The study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to deepen understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire comprised 21 statements and two additional questions that were adopted from (Mahardika, 2023).

In collecting the qualitative and quantitative data, there were 30 Papuan EFL Students in one of the private Universities in Timika, Papua who participated in this study by filling out the questionnaire and interviewing 5 students who were chosen based on their willingness to contribute to this study.

In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher employed SPSS 26.0. Besides that, the researcher used the Likert scale to measure the strategy they utilized in enhancing their vocabulary mastery. The Likert Scale consisted of 5 items such as, Never (N), Seldom (S), Sometimes (SS), Often (O), and Always (As).

Findings and Discussion

In providing the results, the researcher divided it into two main topics that related to the strategies of learning English vocabulary such as direct and indirect approaches.

Direct strategies

In the light of indirect approaches, there are two specific strategies namely memory and cognitive strategies that were employed by Papuan EFL students in enhancing vocabulary. In the following table, the result of the memory strategy used by Papuan EFL students is provided:

Table 1. Memory strategy

Statements	N	S	Ss	O	As
Create a visual representation in your mind of the significance conveyed by the words.	22%	13%	11%	18%	36%
Connect the word to a personal experience	0%	6%	11%	20%	63%
Connect the word to other words with similar or opposite meanings	2%	15%	19%	16%	48%
Cluster words for analysis.	6%	26%	21%	19%	28%
Incorporate fresh vocabulary into sentences.	3%	6%	13%	26%	52%
Compose paragraphs employing multiple unfamiliar words.	8%	15%	12%	24%	41%
Study the sound of a word	14%	17%	23%	21%	25%
Mention the new words loudly when you encounter them	7%	27%	25%	22%	19%

From the data provided, it is evident that the second strategy, which involves linking the word to a personal experience, received a notably high score compared to other statements. It indicated that when Papuan EFL students found a new word, they usually tried to memorize it by connecting that word to their personal experiences. In the interview session, one participant claimed that:

When I'm learning English vocabulary, I typically attempt to relate the new word to my own experiences. By doing so, it enables me to memorize a certain word easily. (St. 1 Interview)

It depicted that incorporating personal experiences when learning new vocabulary can significantly enhance comprehension, retention, and overall language acquisition. This finding was underpinned by Kuhn et al. (2006) who emphasized that connecting a word to a personal experience creates a context that is relevant and meaningful to the learner, making it easier to understand and remember the word's meaning. In line with this, Paivio (2017) stated that by connecting a word to a personal experience, learners engage both verbal and imaginal representations of the word, which strengthens memory and facilitates recall. This dual coding enhances vocabulary retention and comprehension. It indicated that When learners associate a word with a memorable experience, they are more likely to remember it and understand its nuances (Asher, 2003).

Furthermore, Bruner (2017) pointed out that connecting a word to a personal experience helps learners integrate the new word into their existing schema, facilitating deeper understanding and more effective retrieval of the word in various contexts. It also can foster a sense of relevance and personal investment in the learning process, which can increase motivation and engagement with the material (Dweck, 2014).

Thus, it can be inferred that connecting vocabulary to personal experiences aligns with expert recommendations for effective vocabulary instruction by providing meaningful contextualization, leveraging dual coding processes, eliciting emotional engagement, facilitating cognitive integration, and enhancing motivation and engagement in the learning process. By drawing on personal experiences, learners can deepen their understanding of vocabulary and make meaningful connections between words and their own lives.

In the context of direct strategies, cognitive strategy as a second strategy was also used by students to enhance their English vocabulary. In the following table, the use of cognitive strategies in enhancing vocabulary is shown:

Table 2. Cognitive strategies

Statements	N	S	Ss	O	As
Repeat the words aloud many times	6%	27%	33%	24%	10%
Write the words many times	3%	19%	35%	21%	22%
Make lists of new words	0%	3%	14%	38%	45%
Utilize flashcards for capturing unfamiliar vocabulary	2%	6%	31%	30%	31%
Mark unfamiliar words during class	5%	12%	17%	29%	37%
Attach English stickers to real-life items	11%	28%	24%	18%	19%
Keep a vocabulary notebook	5%	8%	29%	27%	31%

The table above indicated that the majority of the participants employed the third strategy of cognitive strategy very often. It also implied that they usually tried to make a list of new words during the learning process. To support this result, two of them clarified that:

Making a list of new vocabulary always enables me to memorize those words easily and efficiently. What I mean is, in memorizing a particular word, I tend to write them down on a note, so that I can take it whenever I need to. Thus, I can learn those words anywhere and anytime. (St. 4 Interview)

Similarly, a participant also supported his friend's statement by pointing out that:

In my opinion, making a list of new words is very beneficial for me since it can facilitate me to memorize those particular words regularly and efficiently. (St. 5 Interview)

Based on students' arguments and the result of Table 3, it can be concluded that making lists of new words is a strategy often recommended for students looking to enhance their vocabulary skills. This finding was underpinned by Mayer (2012) who emphasized that creating lists of new words requires students to actively engage with the language. Rather than passively receiving vocabulary instruction, students take an active role in identifying, selecting, and organizing words they want to learn. This active engagement promotes deeper processing and better retention of the vocabulary.

On the other hand, when students make their own word lists, they take ownership of their learning process. It indicated that they can choose words that are relevant to their interests, academic pursuits, or personal goals, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-directed learning (Dweck, 2012). Moreover, according to Krashen (2004), customized word lists cater to individual learning needs and preferences. Students can tailor their lists based on their current vocabulary level, areas of weakness, or specific learning objectives. This personalization ensures that the vocabulary being learned is relevant and meaningful to the students.

In addition, some previous researchers suggested that actively engaging with words through activities like creating lists can improve retention and transfer of vocabulary knowledge. When students invest time and effort in selecting, organizing, and revisiting words on their lists, they are more likely to retain and effectively use those words in various contexts (Asyiah, 2017; Barcroft, 2015; Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Patra et al., 2022).

Besides that, making word lists encourages metacognitive awareness as students reflect on their vocabulary learning process. In this sense, they will be able to track their advancement, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and adapt their learning approaches accordingly. This metacognitive reflection promotes self-regulated learning and long-term vocabulary development (Flavell, 1979).

Thus, it can be concluded that "making lists of new words" is a valuable strategy for students to enhance their vocabulary skills. This approach promotes active engagement, ownership, personalization, retention, transfer, and metacognitive awareness, leading to more effective vocabulary development.

Indirect strategies

Since direct strategies comprise two major strategies, namely social strategy and metacognitive strategy, the researcher, therefore, provided the results of social strategies first.

In collecting data, the researcher employed three statements to examine Papuan EFL Students' social strategies for enhancing vocabulary mastery. Those three statements can be viewed in the table below.

Table 3. Social strategy

Statements	N	S	Ss	O	As
Review the vocabulary together with your peers	0%	25%	18%	15%	42%
Ask the teacher to validate a word's definition	0%	5%	19%	27%	49%
Talk with Native Speakers	8%	17%	33%	22%	20%

From the table above, it can be viewed that in the context of social strategy, the second strategy was the favorite one used by the participants in learning vocabulary. In this case, 49% of the participants always Asked their teacher to check the definition of a new word. It indicated that Papuan EFL students perceived that the teachers played a pivotal role in helping them permeate new vocabulary and facilitate them in enriching their English vocabulary. This finding was also underpinned by two of them. They emphasized that:

Once I encounter a new vocabulary, I always ask my teachers about the meaning and the context of using that word. (St. 2 Interview)

Besides that, a participant also pinpointed that:

Whenever I face difficulty defining a certain word, I tend to look for my English teacher to discuss that word. (St. 3 Interview)

The findings inferred that in the context of learning vocabulary, seeking validation from a teacher regarding the definition of a word can significantly enhance students' understanding and retention. According to Beck et al. (2022), direct instruction from knowledgeable others, such as teachers, is crucial for vocabulary acquisition. When students ask their teacher to check their definition of a word, they benefit from the expertise and guidance of someone with a deeper understanding of language nuances.

Moreover, this finding also similar with Kuhn et al's (2006) study. They found that asking the teacher to validate a word's definition helps students address any ambiguities or misconceptions they may have, leading to a clearer and more accurate understanding of the word. In other words, seeking verification from the teacher encourages students to reflect on their own understanding of the word's meaning and identify areas where they may need further clarification or improvement. This metacognitive process fosters deeper engagement with the material and promotes long-term retention (Marzano, 2009).

Furthermore, seeking verification of a certain word can improve students' social interaction and language development. According to Cummins (2019), asking the teacher to validate a word's definition initiates a dialogue between the student and the teacher, providing an opportunity for meaningful interaction and language practice. Through this interaction, students not only clarify vocabulary but also develop their communication skills.

In addition, by requesting validation from the teacher, students engage in a strategy of self-assessment and correction, learning to apply effective techniques for understanding and remembering new words in the future (Marzano, 2009).

In summary, asking the teacher to check the definition of a certain word in the context of learning vocabulary aligns with expert recommendations for effective vocabulary instruction. It provides students with expert guidance, clarifies misunderstandings, promotes metacognitive skills, facilitates social interaction and language development, and fosters the improvement of effective vocabulary learning strategies.

In accordance with the indirect strategies, one additional strategy was also used by Papuan EFL students to enhance vocabulary. This strategy is referred to metacognitive strategy. The result of this strategy can be viewed in the table below:

Table 4. Metacognitive strategy

Statements	N	S	Ss	O	As
Utilize English-language media sources such as songs, films, and the internet	0%	6%	13%	32%	49%
Test yourself with word tests	26%	34%	16%	11%	13%
Study new words many times	3%	17%	26%	26%	18%

The result of the percentage above showed that among other strategies in metacognitive strategy, the participants usually utilized language media to improve their vocabulary skills as their favorite strategy. This strategy was always employed by them during the learning process. One of the participants claimed that:

Using media such as the internet, movies, and songs is very useful for my vocabulary development. I always gain a new vocabulary from the movies or songs. On the other hand, when I find an unfamiliar word, I usually use the internet to seek its definition. (St. 6 Interview)

Analyzing the outcomes suggests that utilizing English-language media sources such as songs, films, and the internet proves to be a highly efficient tactic for students to improve their vocabulary abilities. This finding was supported by a previous study from Cummins (2019). He found that language media provide students with exposure to authentic language use in real-life contexts. Unlike traditional vocabulary exercises or textbooks, which may present language in isolated or artificial contexts, media sources offer a rich and diverse range of vocabulary used in natural communication. In accordance with this, Beck et al. (2022) also argued that learning words in context helps students understand the nuances of word meanings and promotes deeper lexical knowledge.

Similarly, through songs, movies, and online content, students not only learn vocabulary but also gain a deeper understanding of cultural references, societal norms, and cultural nuances embedded in language use (Kuhn et al., 2006). In addition, According to Deci and Ryan (2000) using English language media can enhance students' motivation and engagement with the learning process. Songs, movies, and internet content often appeal to students' interests and preferences, making vocabulary learning more enjoyable and meaningful.

Therefore, it indicated that using English language media is a highly beneficial strategy for students to enhance their vocabulary skills. Through exposure to

authentic language use, contextual learning, exposure to colloquial language, cultural understanding, and increased motivation, students can develop a robust and nuanced vocabulary that reflects real-world usage.

Conclusion

Drawing from the aforementioned findings and discussions, it can be deduced that Papuan EFL Students utilized various methods to improve their English vocabulary. These methods encompassed both direct and indirect strategies, including social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Of these, the memory strategy was notably prevalent, with students frequently attempting to associate words with their personal experiences. It allowed them to memorize the word easily.

In addition to employing the memory strategy, Papuan EFL students utilized three other strategies: social strategy (seeking teacher assistance in verifying definitions), metacognitive strategy (utilizing English-language media sources such as songs, films, and the internet), and cognitive strategy (compiling lists of new words). These three strategies were also integrated into their learning process, particularly in relation to vocabulary acquisition.

However, this study undeniably has weaknesses. In this context, this study was conducted using the two strategies namely, direct and indirect strategies of learning vocabulary. Therefore, future researchers should choose one of these two strategies to be investigated. Thus, the findings will be narrow and valid to be discussed.

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