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**VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY EFL LOW AND HIGH ACHIEVERS
(A Case Study of Two Senior High Schools)**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) applied by EFL low and high achievers and how they applied it. The writer employed a case study conducted in two senior high schools in Ciamis. There were 60 participants involved in this study consisted of 30 low and 30 of high achievers. To answer the research questions, the writer conducted semi-structured interview and administered closed-ended questionnaire based on Schmitt (1997)'s classifications of vocabulary learning strategies. From the results of completed questionnaire, the writer found that metacognitive, determination, and memory strategies were the mostly applied by EFL low and high achievers. Those strategies included using English media, consulting on bilingual dictionary, and studying a sound of word. Furthermore, the data of interview specifically showed that watching subtitled films, listening English songs, consulting on google translate, and asking friends are also involved. Finally, EFL low and high achievers have to be aware of their own preferred strategies in learning vocabulary to improve their foreign language learning. It is suggested for English teachers to facilitate students in applying their preferred strategies in learning vocabulary.

Keywords: *good language learner, low and high EFL achievers, vocabulary learning strategies*

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, students usually involve their preferred learning strategies. Oxford (2003, p. 2) defined learning strategies as specific actions, behaviours, steps, and processes that students use for gaining their goals in learning foreign language. Griffith (2004, p. 8) also stated that learning strategies are specifically defined as technical ways that are used by students for comprehending foreign language. English as a foreign language is a language that is not primarily used in daily interaction (Oxford, 2003, p. 1) and it is increasingly difficult to be mastered by students. So, improving learning strategies to comprehend foreign language is important for EFL students.

Learning strategies are the main factors that show how well students' efforts in learning foreign language (Oxford, 2003, p. 1). It employs students' thoughts and intentional actions when they learn to improve their understanding on certain knowledge that they have encountered in language learning (Nayan & Krishnasamy, 2015, p. 11).

Meanwhile, the scholars have tried to link the concept of language learning strategies to vocabulary learning strategies that include obtaining, storing, retrieving and using information. Students need to recognize strategies that help them to acquire vocabulary when they learn grammar, literature, and others (Nayan and Krishnasamy, 2015, p. 10). The vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), as the variable of present study, is a branch of language learning strategies (Yazdi & Kafipour, 2014, p. 2). Vocabulary learning strategies were designed by Schmitt (1997) which is adapted from Oxford's (1990) classifications of language learning strategies into vocabulary learning strategies. The strategies are divided into two general categories. They are discovery and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies consist of the strategies used by learners to find the meaning of new words when they see the word for the first time. While, consolidation strategies are applied strategies when students see the word again. Determination and social strategies are in the category of discovery strategies. On the other hand, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies are classified under consolidation strategies. These strategies help students learning vocabulary. Schmitt's taxonomy as the different study from the others is the basis of this study.

In learning language context, there are two types of students based on their achievement. They are high achievers and low achievers. High achievers are also known

as good language students. They know what they have to do in completing English task. High achievers can opt appropriately strategies they prefer to complete the tasks. These students believe that they are able to succeed compared to students who dont know how to use strategies effectively. Students who attempt to be successfull in learning foreign language are generally successful and each well completed task will improve their motivation (Chamot, 1998, p. 5). On the other hand, poor language students do not understand a task and do not know what they have to do. They cannot choose appropriate strategies that aid them to understand and to complete the task. So, they will take implicit approach that they use habitually in learning or their preferred strategies without understanding the task (Chamot, 1998, p. 6).

Although improving vocabulary learning strategies are important, students are still unaware and pay lack of attention to improve their strategies in learning vocabulary. The previous study presented qualitative study entitled Vocabulary Strategies: Building New Vocabulary that was conducted by Eliah and Kiran (2014). In addition, Nayan and Krishnasamy (2015) has addressed their study on Knowing the Usefullness of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Students of Accountancy Faculty. The last previous study was conducted by Namaghi and Malekpur (2015). The study was entitled Vocabulary Learning Strategies from the Bottom-Up : A Grounded Theory. The study focuses on vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) which are important to be mastered by EFL learners can be their basic knowledge to comprehend and improve foreign language strategically. Insufficient knowledge of VLSs will lead students into indirect foreign language learning. However, EFL low and high achievers in senior high schools are rarely involved in previous studies. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating vocabulary learning strategies applied by EFL low and high achievers.

METHOD

In this study, the writer conducted qualitative research because this approach assisted the writer to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2008, p. 32). Meanwhile, case study is employed in order that a bounded system (for example, activity, events, process, or individual) to be explored deeply resulting from data collection which is extensive (Creswell, 2012, p. 465).

To get information from participants, the writer conducted criterion sampling from two classes of each school as suggested by Patton (1990, p. 5). It meant that in categorizing low and high achievers, the writer chose students from fifteen highest scores and fifteen lowest scores from each school. Both of schools had same maximal and minimal criteria of English score in determining low and high achievers. The minimal scores of 75-80 were categorized as low achievers. Besides, the maximal scores of 85-100 were categorized as high achievers. The writer involved 60 EFL second grade students of two senior high schools (SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMA Informatika) as the participants consisting of 30 students from first school and 30 students from second school. There were 60 students that completed the questionnaire and 12 students conducted the interview. They were chosen from 2 classes.

In collecting the data, the writer conducted survey to answer questions that have been raised, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context. In conducting survey, the writer used some instruments (Isaac and Michael, 1997); those are questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was closed-ended likert question that was adapted from Schmitt (1997) about students' vocabulary learning strategies items. The students were required to choose strategies they used to improve their vocabulary from "very often" to "never". The questionnaire contained of students' ways in learning vocabulary. The writer chose 34 item of VLSs by Schmitt (1997). Meanwhile, Semi-structured interview consisted of three questions was recorded on the audio recorder. They are deciphered as follows: 1) "what are strategies do you usually use in learning vocabulary?"; 2) "how do you apply the strategies?"; and 3) " why do you apply the strategies?".

Data analysis in qualitative research was conducted concurrently with other parts of the qualitative study development, i.e., the data collection hand in hand by writing findings, as suggested by Creswell (2008, p. 245). In this step, the writer analyzed the data from the questionnaire and interview that have been completed by participants. After that, the writer categorized it into percentage. The questionnaire which was adapted from Schmitt (1997) were translated into Indonesian language for better understanding. The data from questionnaire was used to find out how often the strategies they used in learning vocabulary. It was to be shown into percentage category by using the formula from Hatch and Lazaraton (1991, p.136) as follow:

$$Percentage = \frac{\text{number of x}}{\text{total number}} \times 100\%$$

For investigating percentage each response, the writer interpreted the result by using categorization as follows:

- 0% = None of the students choose the alternative.
- 1-25% = Small part of the students choose the alternative.
- 26-49% = Half of the students choose the alternative.
- 50-75% = Most of the students choose the alternative.
- 100% = All of he students choose the alternative.

The results of the interview were analyzed through transcription process. Subsequently, the writer reduced it into needed data and categorized it into vocabulary learning strategies adapted from Schmitt using percentage category. Subsequently, coding process was also used to segment and label text to make a description and wide theme of the data (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). In this process, the writer read whole trascribed data. Then, the writer segmented the transcribed data into some classifications based on the different information. After that, the writer gave these segmentations some codes. Then, the writer adjusted these segmentations into Schmitt (1997)'s classification.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writer found that there were three most used strategies in learning vocabulary used by low and high achievers . Table 1 show the results of the most used strategies by EFL low and high achievers.

Table 1The strategies used by EFL low and high achievers.

Items	The mostly applied strategies	EFL High achievers	EFL Low achievers
30	Using English media	96.66%	100%
6	Consulting to bilingual dictionary	100%	100%
19	Studying the sound of words	93.33%	100%

Based on the previous findings of questionnaire and interview, the writer concluded that there were three mostly used strategies in learning vocabulary employed by low and

high achiever. Those were using English media, using bilingual dictionary, and studying the sound of word.

The first strategy was using English media. This strategy was under metacognitive strategy that requires students to control and evaluate their learning. This strategy was supported by both of schools' rules that allow students to bring cell phone. So, students could keep accessing the internet. Students often use English media for learning vocabulary through listening song, watching subtitled films, and consulting on google translate. The writer found that 96.67% which were 29 of high achievers used this strategy. On the other hand, 100% which were 30 low achievers used this strategy. It means that these activities were helpful for students in learning vocabulary. Asgari (2011, p. 88) stated that the high and developed technology has become a dominant part of vocabulary learning and the process of second language learning. This meant that using English media could be applied by students' in variety of ways to learn vocabulary.

The previous study conducted by Nayan and Krishnasamy (2015) also found similar findings on their study to 52 participants of students from faculty of accountancy. They found that Using English media was the most helpful for students in learning vocabulary. Nayan and Krishnasamy (2015, p. 4) stated that gadget savvy characterized generation Y learners so they found it easy to download their favorite English songs from the internet and they like to listen to the songs while going to classes. Generation Y (Gen Y) means that they are familiar with "instantaneous hypertext, downloaded music, communication via cell phone and text messaging, and information from laptops" (Black, 2010, p. 95).

Comparing to the previous studies, the current study found that listening songs was the most helpful. They did not find that watching subtitled-English films and consulting words on google translate as English media were also helpful for students in learning vocabulary. They also did not find students' ways and reasons in learning vocabulary through listening songs because they only conducted the questionnaire and did not conduct the interview. So, they did not specifically find how and why students apply the strategy.

Another previous study that found similar finding is conducted by Eliah and Kiran (2014). They utilized the English-language media (songs, movies, internet,

computer games, TV programs, etc.) which were preferred by students and it became the high frequency strategies used by the students. It means that the researchers found many strategies that students used in English media, apart from watching films and listening songs. Unfortunately, the researchers did not explain specifically how and why those strategies were applied by their participants.

As explained before in the findings, the writer found the difference between low and high achievers in using English media. The low achievers tended to use google translate for learning vocabulary. The reason was that 1) consulting to google translate was faster than other strategies for low achievers; 2) low achievers could manipulate ways in understanding the words in ambiguous meaning that they found in google translate; and 3) it is good for them to produce words. Meanwhile, high achievers tended to watch subtitled films and listening English songs. The writer categorized this strategy not only into metacognitive strategy, but also cognitive strategy.

The second mostly used strategy was using bilingual dictionary. There were 100% (30 students) of high achievers and 96.67% (29 students) of low achievers applied this strategy. Using bilingual dictionary is under determination strategies. Students opened their bilingual dictionary from their cell phone or book when they saw the word for the first time, but it was possible for students to open their dictionary again when they forgot what the meaning of words that they have encountered. So, the writer also categorized this strategy under consolidation strategies.

Using dictionaries strategy was also found by Eliah and Kiran (2014) on their research to 105 participants of ESL students who were studying Bachelor Technology in Enginereeng colleges. The dictionaries were common used and gave more detailed guidance on pronunciation, grammar, and usage with explanations written in a controlled, simplified vocabulary (Eliah & Kiran, 2014, p. 192). Besides, Namaghi and Malekpur (2015) also found similar findings on their participants of Iran learners. Using dictionaries was also the most useful for their participants. Namaghi and Malekpur (2015, p. 247) stated that learners found the dictionaries the most important and reliable reference in learning English vocabulary. The difference from current study is that the researchers found only monolingual dictionary as common strategy used by their participants. The reason is that their participants were ESL students that commonly used monoligual dictionary instead of bilingual dictionary. Different from those previous

studies, the current study found that bilingual dictionary was EFL students' choice to learn vocabulary.

The third mostly used strategy was studying the sound of word. It had 93.33% which were 28 students of high achievers and 100% which were 30 students of low achievers applied this strategy. This strategy was under memory strategies that required students to remember the words. In applying this strategy, low and high achievers tried to study words from watching films and listening songs. So, they could hear and study the new word.

Studying the sound of word is also supported by Namaghi and Malekpur (2015). The previous study conducted by Namaghi and Malekpur (2015) involved 4 females and 6 males. Namaghi and Malekpur (2015, p.7) stated the learners' improvements in mastering English vocabulary was due to listen different aural texts such as news reports on the radio, taped dialogues or short passages, music, etc. It implied that this strategy helped students in learning vocabulary by listening different pronunciation of words. Namaghi gave specific information by conducting the interview. So, the participants could freely answer the questions. This issue was the same as the current study.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been discussed the answer of two research questions of the present study. The first research question asked what vocabulary learning strategies applied by EFL low and high achievers. This question was answered by the results of completed questionnaire. After analyzing the results of completed questionnaire by categorizing it into percentage category, the writer concluded that the most of EFL low and high achievers always apply three strategies in learning vocabulary. They used English media, bilingual dictionary, and studied the sound of word. Based on Schmitt classification, those strategies were categorized into metacognitive, determination, and memory strategies.

The second research question focused on how EFL low and high achievers applied their strategies in learning vocabulary. This question was answered by conducting the semi-structured interview. After analyzing the data gathered from the interview, the writer concluded that there were some specific ways applied by EFL low and high achievers in learning vocabulary. They were watching films, listening songs,

consulting on google translate and asking friends. Consulting on google translate was the different strategy that was not found in close-ended items and other studies. This strategy was mostly used by low achievers.

In conducting this study, the writer found some strenghts and weaknesses. The strenghts are that there were many specific strategies that could be found based on students preferred strategies. Finding specific strategies helped English teacher improving students preferred strategies specificaly. The weakness of this study is that not all of the specific strategies in the closed-ended questionnaire could be supported by data of the interview.

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