

Teacher's Strategies in Teaching Vocabulary at Vocational High School

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A B S T R A C T

Vocabulary is an important component when learning English because without studying vocabulary, it will be difficult to understand the language. Therefore, effective teaching is necessary for students to comprehend the vocabulary being taught. Teaching strategies can help teachers in teaching vocabulary. This research aimed to identify the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching vocabulary to students at a Vocational High School. A qualitative approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from one English teacher at Vocational High School. The results showed that teacher used texts to present the word. Students used printed or online dictionaries to translate the vocabulary found in the texts. The teacher reported no difficulties in applying this strategy. The assessment was conducted by asking questions related to the vocabulary in the texts, and feedback was given after the assessment. The teacher also developed and evaluated the strategies to adapt to the students' classroom conditions. However, the respondent noted that several students were distracted by the media used during the learning activities. It is suggested that future researchers explore additional vocabulary teaching strategies and offer recommendations for optimizing media use to enhance learning outcomes.

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Introduction

Vocabulary had an essential role in developing the four skills in English. Students must learn four English skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Vocabulary is a component that can help students improve their English language skills because vocabulary can help students understand English (Syabli et al., 2017). The lack of understanding of vocabulary could impact students' experience in learning English. Thornbury (2002) stated that students will have difficulty conveying ideas and messages to others because they lacked vocabulary.

Mastering the English language requires a strong foundation in the components of the language, and one of the most important aspects is vocabulary. A rich and varied vocabulary enhances understanding, communication, and overall fluency, making vocabulary a key element that students bring to achieve success in learning English. However, despite its significance, vocabulary is also one of the difficult aspects for students to learn, especially English foreign language (EFL) learners. Some students have difficulty understanding the text given and had difficulty answering questions given by the teacher due to a lack of understanding of vocabulary (Panjaitan et al., 2021). This problem was also found in the researcher's preliminary observations at the research location. When the teacher gave the text to the students and ordered the students to observe the text. Students seemed to have difficulty understanding the text because they were confused about the meaning of the text.

In response, these problems could be overcome by teachers who guide students and explain vocabulary well. The teacher needs a teaching strategy in the classroom to be able to teach vocabulary properly in the classroom. Teaching strategies could help

teachers teach vocabulary in a fun way but still stay in the learning material (Septiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022). The teacher must have a good and appropriate teaching strategy to convey vocabulary appropriately to students. Good vocabulary teaching strategies would positively impact students (Asyiah, 2017). Moreover, the vocabulary used should be carefully adapted to the context of vocational high school students. This ensures that learners not only understand the meaning of the words but also how they apply within relevant, real-world situations related to their fields of study. In line with Risanti et al. (2025), English instruction in vocational high schools should be tailored to meet students' specific needs, aligning with their majors and supporting their career aspirations through relevant and practical language use.

Several studies have been conducted on teacher strategies in teaching vocabulary. There are various kinds of teaching strategies described in previous studies. According to Meliana et. al. (2018), some strategies are used to teach vocabulary in vocational high school: understanding vocabulary in detail, memorizing vocabulary, looking for vocabulary using a dictionary, and teaching vocabulary using games. This strategy succeeded in making teachers teach vocabulary in a cheerful and not boring way to increase student vocabulary. Meanwhile, Nasser and Mahmoud (2022) stated, communicative language learning is one strategy that can attract the attention of EFL learners. This strategy is quite effective for active students during learning because students could discuss together and make the class situation less awkward.

Putri et. al. (2023) research which was in Islamic senior high schools, the extensive listening strategy could be one of the teachers' choices in teaching vocabulary. Through audio listening and the language, teacher used during teaching, students learned new words. Extensive listening is an effective strategy to attract students' enthusiasm, not only listening to the teacher's explanation, but students could listen to audio listening which has interesting topics for learning vocabulary. It is also found in Arini and Suwarso (2024). This research used Baamboozle to teach vocabulary in class. The games presented make students interested and enthusiastic in learning. Not only was fun but this strategy helped students to remember the vocabulary that had been given easily because of the fun classroom situation.

The teacher's strategies above were strategies that could increase students' vocabulary knowledge in a fun way. Meanwhile, several previous studies (Meliana et al., 2018; Nasser & Mahmoud, 2022; Putri et al., 2023) also mentioned that teachers need more teaching time when using certain strategies, and students also had problems memorizing vocabulary because too much vocabulary was given. This problem made vocabulary teaching not optimal. This would make it difficult for students to develop vocabulary mastery. Learning had to be in the right situations and conditions so that students can understand and manage words (Thornbury, 2002). Therefore, this research wanted to find out strategies that can be used from the teacher's point of view, which have been adapted to the situation and conditions of students and classes. The strategy could be used as additional insight in helping teachers and students in different settings.

Research Method

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach using case study design. Qualitative research could highlight respondents' experiences in detail, and then the researchers could explain them according to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study as a design was used to explore more deeply the real situation in the class. Researchers could focus on a case and maintain a perspective of the real world with case studies (Yin, 2014). This approach and design were compatible with research that

examined vocabulary teaching strategies from the teacher's point of view based on the teacher's experience in teaching. The data was collected by semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview is an interviewer technique carried out to explore the topic in question, and the interview is more open to obtaining in-depth information (Ridwan & Tugka, 2024). The questions in the interview were based on Thornbury's (2002) theory, which stated that learning vocabulary requires strategies and tasks to assist students in receiving vocabulary. There are two main topics from the interview questions: the vocabulary teaching strategy and the assessment used by the teacher. The researchers used observation for preliminary observation when teacher was teaching at school.

The respondent in this current research is one of teacher from vocational high school in Batu City (T1). Class observation was also carried out in both teacher classes. Based on the preliminary observations at school, the students could answer vocabulary questions correctly. Teacher and students also interact actively when learning vocabulary. Therefore, based on the first observation, researchers want to examine teachers' strategies for teaching vocabulary. Interviews were conducted twice. On October 22, 2022 and December 23, 2023. After conducting interview, the data analyzed by the theory of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The data go through several processes: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction included selecting, focusing, discarding unnecessary data, and structuring the data to obtain conclusions. After the data had been reduced, the next step was presenting the data. Qualitative research presents data through explanations in text form. Through displaying, the data will be organized and easier to understand. After the data has been collected, the data could be concluded.

Result and Discussion

In this research, researchers highlight three aspects: 1) teacher strategy, 2) learning media, and 3) the impact of strategy in the classroom. The data were obtained from semi-structured interviews of one of the English teacher at the Vocational High School in Batu City.

Teacher Strategy

Teacher strategy was a plan, method, or set of activities created to achieve a specific educational goal. In this research, the teacher said students were quite active during learning. Active students would quickly get bored when learning was too monotonous. Therefore, teacher chose strategies that suited the student's conditions so that the students were interested in learning and that the learning process ran according to learning objectives.

“For strategies, there are several that are commonly used to teach vocabulary, we adapt to the condition of the students, for example... if the student is rather active, we must adjust to the student's condition...” (T1)

Teaching strategies for vocabulary are needed so students are interested in learning vocabulary. In research by Meliana et al. (2018), it is stated that students are motivated to learn vocabulary with the right strategy. In teaching vocabulary, two essential things, according to Thornbury (2002), need to be considered: how to convey the meaning of the vocabulary and how to present the word. To present meaning, teachers can use several methods as follows: 1) translation, 2) real things, 3) pictures, 4) action/gestures, 5) definitions, 6) situations. Meanwhile, the teacher can use spoken and written forms to present the word. In this study, the researchers observed when the teacher taught narrative text. Therefore, the teacher chose the written form for presenting the

word, and the teacher chose translation and definition. Meanwhile, the teacher presented words in written form. This is demonstrated by what the teacher said below:

“The strategy...Hmm...for example, I take material on narrative text...Eee... first, I ask them to skim the text, then I ask them to look for difficult vocabulary by underlining the words they don't understand. From what they have underlined, they have to write it down in a book and then...Eee...translate it, they can use...Eee... their smartphone to access Google Translate or use a dictionary.” (T1)

In the statement above, in the learning activity, students are given text and students did skimming. Then, students could underline difficult words and translate them into Indonesian. The teacher adapted strategies to the situation of students who brought smartphones to school so that students can easily search for words with an online dictionary. After finishing translating difficult vocabulary, the teacher and students discussed the vocabulary that the students found. The teacher gave deeper definitions to vocabulary that made students confused. The strategies used by the teacher pay attention to how to convey the meaning and form of vocabulary. This relates to what Thornbury (2002) says: Teacher use definitions to present meaning so that students understand and comprehend the vocabulary context. Then, teacher used short text as a presentation of words.

This semester's learning topics are descriptive, narrative, and procedure texts. The teacher used the skimming text strategy because of the condition of the students who are lacking in reading so that the students can be interested in reading and understand the reading as the teacher said:

“I think this strategy is the most suitable for teaching vocabulary because these students are currently lacking in...Hmm... reading. So we must find a way to encourage them to open a dictionary and increase their motivation to read. This semester, the material taught is still related to text... in my opinion, this strategy is suitable for the material as well as for the current state of students.” (T1)

The use of text in learning is good so that student literacy can be improved. A lack of literacy can lead to wrong perceptions. When people are lazy in reading, there would be many misunderstandings in this world because they are not careful reading (Wahjusaputri & Nastiti, 2022). This strategy is also not monotonous. Not only reading but students are also active in looking for the meaning of the words they underlined. This strategy is suitable for vocational high school students who are used to practical lessons and are active in class. It was shown in class that students were active in interpreting the meaning of vocabulary by translating it. Then, students would ask friends and the teacher to ensure the meaning was correct. This situation is also found in Arini and Suwarso (2024) research, students are enthusiastic about the strategies used by teachers because they are not boring. The games presented by the teacher in class make students excited and curious to learn vocabulary. This proves that if the strategies used in class are very entertaining and attracting students' attention, students will learn vocabulary without hesitation.

In addition to using strategies that attract students' attention. Teacher must also create a supportive environment. The teacher supervised students during vocabulary learning, so it was easy for students to ask the teacher about vocabulary they did not understand. The situation could also be controlled during this activity because the teacher

supervised student activities. In Hao and Que (2023) research, the use of short texts in teaching vocabulary also receives a positive response from students. Students are motivated to learn words because a short text was presented interestingly so that students want to know more about the story's meaning (Hao & Que, 2023).

The teacher also paid attention to the strategies used. The strategies used by the teacher will be developed according to the conditions of the students in the class. The teacher evaluated strategies for interpreting words in the text as the teacher said:

“We have tried the method of.. Ee.. Interpreting each sentence. We translated one sentence at that time, and it turned out to be ineffective.. Ee.. What's it called?... It turned out to be more effective when they just looked for difficult vocabulary compared to translating entire sentences. by only translating difficult vocabulary, they are learn other vocabulary they have previously studied.” (T1)

In the teacher's statement above, we can see that the teacher developed the strategies she previously used into strategies that could help students learn vocabulary. Teacher was already using strategies to interpret one sentence, but it was ineffective because students would just translate without understanding more deeply. However, the strategy of interpreting difficult words was more effective because students could learn new vocabulary and remember the vocabulary they had learned.

“When asked to translate one sentence directly, students became... more passive. But if they only translate difficult vocabulary, they will try to remember another vocabulary that they may have learned before.. ee.. in the text.” (T1)

The teacher stated when interpreting one sentence, students would be passive in interpreting the sentence. Students would translate a sentence and write translations according to those on Google Translate. Meanwhile, it's different when students sorted vocabulary according to words they do not know, so they will recognize the text in detail and try to remember the vocabulary they already know. The strategy of analyzing texts in detail can increase students' vocabulary. This is in line with Putri et al. (2023) research, which states that the more texts students read, the more vocabulary they acquire.

Strategy development was also carried out by the teacher, such as using online dictionaries as another alternative for students to translate vocabulary. The teacher adapted to the situation of today's students who prefer more practical and easier methods, as the teacher said:

“.... Sometimes, when told to use a dictionary, they are a bit too lazy to open it, so it takes longer to complete, but when they use Google Translate, it's true.. Ee.. It's more time efficient.” (T1)

The teacher found situations where students had a short focus to focus on learning. Therefore, the teacher chose a strategy by using an online dictionary to make it easier for students to translate words, and students are still interested in learning because the way to understand learning does not use monotone methods.

“...To counter student's feelings of laziness when they have to open a dictionary, the alternative is to use Google Translate and use their handphone.” (T1)

In the statement above, the teacher appears to be analyzing the behavior of students in class. Then the teacher determines appropriate strategies when teaching. The use of electronic dictionaries helps teacher in conveying material because it is efficient and does not take a long time. Students are also interested in learning because they can interpret words easily and practically.

Learning Media

Media is a way to share ideas and information. Learning media refers to any form of media that conveys instructional lessons or knowledge for educational purposes. The purpose of learning media is to make it easier for students to understand the material taught by the teacher (Muhfiyanti et al., 2021). Therefore, it is hoped that learning media can help during the learning process. The media used in this lesson is an online dictionary. The online dictionary used was Google Translate. As stated by the teacher below:

“For the media, I usually use a dictionary or Google Translate. Most students use Google Translate because they can directly access it... on their smartphones. Dictionaries are used when students do not carry...their smartphone and can borrow them from the library.” (T1)

The teacher revealed that students used Google Translate than other online dictionaries because it was easy to access, and the teacher had a backup plan for students who did not bring smartphones. They could borrow a dictionary from the library. All students brought smartphones, so students used Google Translate to translate vocabulary. When the teacher supervised student activities, the teacher found that some students were still confused about using Google Translate, and the teacher helped students use online dictionary especially Google Translate. Some students were helped by their friends when translating vocabulary. Online dictionaries make it easier for users to interpret vocabulary, which also occurs in Gultom et al. (2022) research, where when looking for the meaning of words, teachers and students need a dictionary with online dictionaries helping translate vocabulary more easily and quickly. This is also found in the research from Tanasale and Suwarso (2024), where Google Translate helped students in improving vocabulary mastery because it made it easier for students to find vocabulary that they did not understand. This result proves that online dictionaries can be a medium that helps students understand lessons according to the intended purpose of the media.

Google Translate has various features, such as displaying translations of words with various definitions, so students can choose which meaning is suitable for the words in the short text. There are features on how to pronounce words so that students can know the pronunciation of the word. Meanwhile, in the class students would listen to the pronunciation of Google Translate. This did not disturb the class atmosphere because the audio volume was not too loud. This result coincides with research by Zamkova et al. (2023). Students primarily use online dictionaries for reading and translating activities. Students use an online dictionary to listen to the vocabulary pronunciation and examples provided by the online dictionary (Zamkova et al., 2023).

The Impact of Strategy in The Classroom

This section explains the benefits of using the strategies, the challenges of using the strategies, and the effectiveness of strategies in learning activities. The strategy used to teach vocabulary influences the learning process. Skimming text, underlining words, and translating the word was a strategy chosen by the teacher as one suitable for the

conditions of the students in the class and suitable for the topic of the texts because this strategy can attract students' attention to read and understand the text. Looking for difficult vocabulary and translating it could help students understand the entire text in detail.

"I think it's very helpful because each student has a different understanding. One student and another will find new and different vocabulary, depending on the difficulties... they face. Students can understand vocabulary that they did not know before...Eee... because they must find the vocabulary and understand it" (T1)

The teacher gave an assessment to determine the students' understanding of the vocabulary that had been given. The assignments were in the form of questions about vocabulary, questions about the essence of the story, and written assignments. The teacher gave an assessment to evaluate how well the students processed and recognized the word that had been previously learned, as said by the teacher:

"...Usually, the teacher asks questions about vocabulary... or we can also ask about the essence of the story based on some of the vocabulary they understand, or maybe we can also provide an assessment in the form of questions to know students understand." (T1)

Feedback was given after the assessment. When the teacher asked about some of the vocabulary in the story, some students still misinterpreted the vocabulary. Before the teacher gave the correct answer, other students who wanted to answer the vocabulary were given the question. After the answers mentioned by the students were correct, the teacher explained the vocabulary again. If no one could answer the vocabulary, the teacher told the meaning of the vocabulary. The teacher also checked the vocabulary that had been underlined and interpreted. If there was an error in writing, the teacher provided the correct writing beside it so that students understood the correct form. Assessments were given to students as an evaluation for teachers and as a measure of the strategies' success. Thornbury (2002) considers that the test is used to determine whether the strategies used are effective during learning.

In preliminary observation, no one complained or was bored. Students focused on skimming text and looking for vocabulary that was difficult for them to understand. This strategy also did not require much time because the teacher used short text, so this strategy did not make the teacher stressed and run out of time when teaching. The teacher felt that the strategy made it easier for the teacher to teach vocabulary, as the teacher said:

"I think the strategy is not too...Hmm... difficult because all the students already have... smartphones to access Google Translate, but if they don't have... smartphones they can go to the library to borrow a dictionary..." (T1)

This strategy was helpful and easy to implement in class. Students can easily understand the text by interpreting some vocabulary they do not know. The teacher said this strategy was easy because students already had smartphones and access to online dictionary to interpret the vocabulary. Adding new vocabulary can increase students' vocabulary. The vocabulary provided can be used by students when using it directly in everyday life (Nasser & Mahmoud, 2022).

Translating from Google Translate is also very easy and fast so that when students have finished translating, teacher and students still have time to discuss and provide feedback to students. This can be a solution for teachers who often find themselves short of time when using teaching strategies, such as in Meliana et. al. (2018) research, where teachers lack teaching time because the strategies used take too much time to implement. Therefore, teachers need to choose the right strategy so that the learning process is appropriate and there are no obstacles.

Besides these advantages, this strategy has disadvantages in the students' focus. When opening the smartphones became problematic, they opened other apps. Then, when the teacher approached to see students' progress, they changed the tab to an online dictionary. In this case, the teacher continued to remind students that if they opened other apps during lessons, their smartphones will be confiscated. This step is good and firm for students to focus more on learning. Not only reminding but also monitoring students when they carried out activities related to opening their smartphones.

When supervising, the teacher also saw the condition of the students at that time. When the teacher saw students having difficulty finding the correct answer, the teacher paused for a moment to give the students their views on the correct answer. Teachers communicated well with students and did not forget to supervise other students by moving around the class. This contrasts with Asmin (2019) research, where teachers did not monitor students enough and only looked at the teacher's desk. Lack of communication between students and teachers made the class less organized. Therefore, communication was essential when teaching.

Conclusion

This research concluded that the teacher used skimming text, underlining words, and translating effectively to teach vocabulary. As for the initial stage, skimming text could help students understand reading in general and improve their understanding of the text content. Underlining word difficulties and translating could help students understand the content of the text more deeply. An online dictionary as a learning medium helps students understand the material the teacher provided.

The strategies could help teachers present words and meanings and make it easier for students to understand words they did not understand. The words they learned in the text became new words and added a collection of words to the student's vocabulary library. Skimming text and translating unknown vocabulary from the text could be used to teach vocabulary in text material, especially in learning narrative text. The difficulty in the strategy is in students' focus when accessing smartphones. Students could open applications other than Google Translate, so teachers needed to supervised the class carefully.

It is highly recommended that future researchers conduct a more in-depth exploration of the various strategies used by teachers in assessing students' learning progress. Additionally, further research should be conducted to identify and develop effective methods to optimize the use of educational media. This effort should specifically aim to enhance the overall learning experience, ensuring that teaching tools and media are utilized to their maximum potential to support student engagement and understanding. This research was small in scope, so future research can examine challenges in strategies that use online dictionaries on a larger scale.

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