

# Teaching Strategies for Enhancing Vocabulary Mastery of Indonesian EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Vocabulary mastery is essential for effective communication in language learning, yet students often struggle with understanding and retaining new words. This study aimed to explore the strategies used by an English teacher to enhance vocabulary mastery in the Bilingual Class at MTsN 1 Gondanglegi Malang. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving one English teacher and seventh-grade students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations and Focus Group Interviews (FGI), with an iterative technique applied to ensure data richness. The analysis included familiarizing and organizing, coding and reducing, and interpreting and representing the data. Credibility and confirmability were maintained through triangulation of observation, FGI, and audit trails such as video and record documentation. The findings revealed four main teaching strategies: text-based teaching, dictionary use, memorization, and blended-skills instruction. The study also identified key challenges, including students' limited understanding of vocabulary and their tendency to forget new words. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers integrate more interactive and innovative strategies to enhance vocabulary retention and engagement. The study provides practical implications for EFL teachers and contributes to the literature on effective vocabulary teaching strategies.

*Keywords: EFL learners, teaching strategies, vocabulary mastery,*

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a widely used global and universal language (Nuraeni, 2019; Alsalihi, 2020). Due to that, English has attained a dominant part in almost recent fields (Mulis, 2023; Azizah, 2023; Rao, 2019; Rahayu & Rosa, 2021). Hence, vocabulary becomes a fundamental aspect of language which should be mastered (Panjaitan, Sibarani, and Saragih, 2021). The four English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are supported by some elements such as vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, spelling, and structure. Yet, vocabulary is one of the crucial elements in learning English because, without vocabulary, the other elements cannot be constructed comprehensively (Josafat et al., 2021). Hence, for those who want to learn English, it is not possible without mastering the vocabulary. However, vocabulary leads to listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Therefore, students need to have much vocabulary mastery. Besides, vocabulary is also needed to

share ideas and thought (Workie, et al, 2020). Thus, vocabulary is an extremely important part in English learning (Costica, 2015). On the other hand, vocabulary becomes the core aspect of a language. Yet, without vocabulary, students cannot communicate with others and without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, the meaning or message being conveyed will not be well-received (Permana, 2020). Further, vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language which should be mastered by English learners (Panjaitan et al, 2021; Workie et al 2020). Therefore, Rahmadhani, (2015); Josafat et al., (2021) noted that vocabulary is important and necessary. Therefore, with sufficient vocabulary mastery, students can express their ideas (Keo, 2021).

Overall, teaching vocabulary plays an important role in developing language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In another hand, teaching vocabulary effectively is needed because vocabulary mastery becomes the core foundation in mastering English. Therefore, teaching English effectively should be a concern for teachers (Amalisa and Rozimela, 2021). Yet, it is not easy to teach vocabulary to learners because some English teachers continue to use traditional strategies to teach vocabulary to young learners (Josafat et al., 2021). In this case, a teacher should use a number of teaching strategies in order that the students are not bored and they more understand with the lesson or material learning. Hence, the teachers should have teaching methods, strategies and techniques in order to teach well that is in line with the characteristics of the students (Lelawati, Dhiya and Mailani, 2018). In this case, the teacher does not simply give students vocabulary to memorize. However, it is necessary to apply appropriate strategies during the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the teacher should apply innovative teaching strategies (Permana, 2020; (Meliana, N., Umaemah, A., & Hidayat, 2018; (Workie, Melaku Bayu; Feleke, 2020). Further, Nunan, (2005) revealed several vocabulary-teaching strategies that can be applied to teaching vocabulary directing and in-directing teaching, teaching vocabulary before new activity, using contextual clues appropriately, presenting multiple exposures to new vocabulary, giving opportunities for deep processing of vocabulary items, using a dictionary, having the students keep vocabulary notebooks.

In line with this, Josafat Gultom et al., (2021) investigated the teacher's strategies and teacher's solutions to students' problems in teaching vocabulary in secondary school. The qualitative paradigm was employed and the descriptive method was chosen to reveal the findings. The data were obtained through questionnaires and documentation. The research revealed that the teacher's strategies are (1) applying a translation strategy, (2) applying a game strategy, (3) applying a dictionary, and (4) applying a story strategy. While the problems encountered by the teacher are such as teacher calls and noisy students. Besides, the teacher applied giving grade strategy to the active students in the teaching and learning process. This research underlined that the teacher's strategies in teaching vocabulary were effective because the students became more active. Also, Meliana et al, (2018) have already conducted research related to teacher's strategies in teaching vocabulary. The subjects of this research were the teachers and students of Vocational High School Sultan Agung Sumber. This research investigated the strengths and the weaknesses of the strategy applied by the teacher in teaching vocabulary. And the descriptive qualitative was employed. At the research, data were obtained from observation and interviews with the English teacher and five students. The result of the research explored the strategies applied by the teacher such as: 1) comprehending vocabulary in detail; 2) memorizing some vocabulary every meeting; 3) utilizing a dictionary; and 4) teaching vocabulary by utilizing games. Meanwhile, for the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy, the researcher found that using games was the most effective strategy in teaching vocabulary. Further, the poor vocabulary teaching strategy was memorizing vocabulary in every meeting because memorizing vocabulary of around 15-20 words is not effective because they easily forget what they have memorized. For the next research, Permana, (2020) explored a study related to teaching strategies to develop elementary students' vocabulary. This study employed a literature review. And the findings underscored that teachers should apply interactive media such as games, songs, and pictures. Besides, interactive media can develop students' engagement and motivation during

teaching and learning vocabulary. In more detail, Panjaitan et al., (2021) explored teaching vocabularies done by EFL teachers in Junior High School. This research was qualitative research paradigm and to gain the data, depth survey by questionnaire with ten teachers as respondents were utilized. And the finding described teachers' strategies such as (1) teacher's teaching preparation, (2) vocabulary teaching sources, (3) type of teachers' questions, (4) teachers' activities, and (5) students' activities during the teaching and learning process. Besides, Keo, (2021) also conducted research related to teachers' strategies and obstacles in teaching vocabulary in Senior High School. The research used descriptive qualitative and the data were obtained through interviews with the teachers. The findings of this research were [1] Comprehending Vocabulary through Reading and Translating Text; [2] Memorizing Vocabulary; [3] Dictionary Use. While the students' obstacles were related to a lack of motivation. Hence, they felt lazy, feeling bored, and being crowded in the classroom. Rahmadhani, (2015) in her research revealed that applying flashcards in presenting, sorting tasks in practicing, and sentence completion in revising vocabulary are the three most preferably common techniques in teaching young learners' vocabulary.

Further, an instruction applying bilingual language needs language skills which should be well-known to both the speaker and listener. Further, in language skills, a language component such as vocabulary mastery must be fulfilled by the learners. Due to that, a sufficient vocabulary is necessary because without that they can not understand the meaning conveyed by the others (teacher). It is because vocabulary is the core of English language mastery. Yet, a lack of vocabulary mastery leads to students' speaking performance (Azis Pulungan, 2021; Zannah et al., 2023; Normawati et al., 2023). Further, Jaelani and Zabidi, (2020) claimed that a lack of vocabulary leads to students' speaking performance and listening sections. Besides, the lack of vocabulary mastery also leads to the other students' English skills such as writing (Alisha, Safitri and Santoso, 2019; Azis Pulungan, 2021). Overall, vocabulary mastery affects the four students' English language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In the context of MTsN 1 Gondanglegi Malang, especially in the Bilingual Class where English is mostly used during instructional activities, investigating teachers' strategies is particularly important. This class is chosen because the teacher frequently applies English during instructional activities and has extensive experience in teaching English. Therefore, this research is conducted to investigate the teacher's strategies in expanding students' vocabulary mastery and to identify the obstacles encountered during the teaching process. In line with this, the objectives of this research are formulated as follows: (1) to explore the strategies applied by the teacher in teaching vocabulary, and (2) to reveal the obstacles faced in the teaching and learning process of vocabulary. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on vocabulary teaching and practically to provide insights for EFL teachers in improving their instructional practices.

## **METHODS**

This current research takes descriptive qualitative research. The core object of this research is to explore and discover situation, feeling, perception, attitude, value, belief, and experience of a group of people (Kumar, 2011; Willis, 2007). Hence, this paradigm is suitable for understanding and investigating the teaching and learning processes in a particular class. Further, Ary *et al.*, (2010) clarify highlight several key points of qualitative research such as context and meaning, natural settings, and the researchers as the instruments. Further, qualitative research is appropriate to note a research problem Creswell (2012). So, this paradigm is suitable to address the questions of this research which includes exploring phenomena. Thus, the researcher employs descriptive qualitative research to investigate specific information about teaching and learning activities of vocabulary mastery in Bilingual class. Here, the researcher will explore the teacher's strategies for expanding students' vocabulary mastery. The subjects in this research were the students of the eighth grade and the English teacher of Bilingual Class at MTsN 1 Malang regency. This class is addressed because

the teacher at this class mostly applies the English language during the teaching and learning process and the teachers' insights and views in English teaching. Creswell (2012) stated that a few data collection can be done by some techniques such as observing, interviewing, distributing the questionnaire, and analyzing documents. In this research, observation of the teaching and learning process, interview with the English teacher, document analysis (lesson plan), and focus group interview (FGI) with some students were conveyed. Yet, observation was the core technique for obtaining data while an interview with the English teacher, document analysis, and FGI become a secondary method to verify and recheck the data gained from observation. Further, FGI was conducted to get data by interviewing four students. This is one voice with the statement of Creswell (2012) that focus group interviews can be conveyed by involving four to six participants. This was done by involving some students recommended by the English teacher. Overall, observation is conducted until the researcher obtains data saturation shown by similar themes of the participants or when the new emerging does not appear anymore (Kumar, 2011; Bryman, 2015; Carlsen and Glenton, 2014). Then, the researcher continued to the next data collection; an interview with the English teacher, analysis of the teacher's lesson plan, and conducting FGI with some students. Next, related to the data collection procedures, an iterative method was applied which includes the process of visiting and revisiting data (Srivastava, 2009). Furthermore, the observation will be finished first and then will be followed by interviews and FGI with students. The illustration of the data collection procedures can be seen as follows.

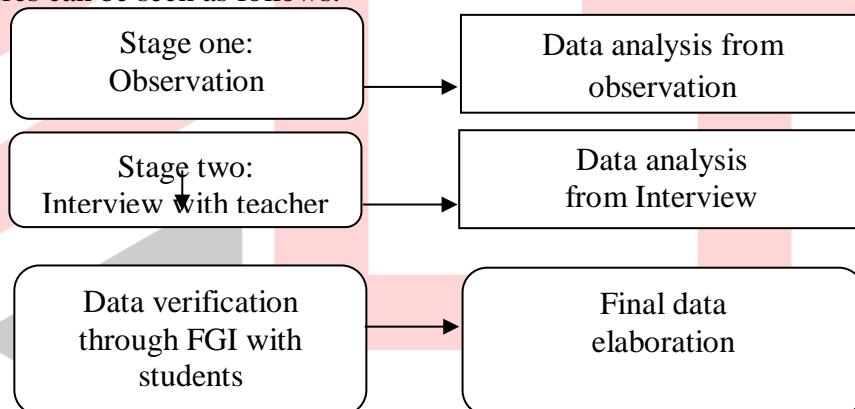


Figure 3.1 Data collection technique

Neuman, (2002) stated that data from qualitative research are text-based from documents, notes of observation, transcripts of interviews, or physical artifacts. On the other hand, Leavy, (2017) defines analysis as abridging and managing data and explaining findings or making meaning. Hence, this process in terms of data analysis addresses the researchers to answer their research questions. Further, an iterative approach to analyze the data was employed. Next, the researcher analyzed the data through several steps proposed by Ary *et al.*, (2010). such as data familiarization, data organization, data coding and reduction, interpretation and interpretation, and the last is data representation.

The detailed data analysis activities are described below.

- familiarizing
1. The researcher transcribed the result of observing the teaching and learning process in the classroom thoroughly
  2. The researcher checked and rechecked the result of the transcription of the observation by reading more and more
  3. The researcher transcribed the result of an interview with the English teacher and the result of FGI with the students.
  4. The researcher checked and rechecked the result of the transcription of the interview and FGI by reading more and more

organizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The researcher gave a coding to the transcription of observation by different colors.</li> <li>2. The researcher gave a coding to the transcription of the interview and FGI by different colors.</li> </ol>
reducing	The researcher reduced or deletes the data of observation, interview, and FGI transcription that do not relate to the topic of research
interpreting and representing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The researcher combined the data of observation, interview, document analysis, and FGI</li> <li>2. The researcher verified the data of observation by data of interview, document analysis, and FGI.</li> <li>3. The researcher elaborated on the overall data findings.</li> <li>4. Then the researcher presented the final data and makes a conclusion</li> </ol>

*Figure 3.2 The activity of data analysis*

To minimize subjectivity in this research, trustworthiness using credibility and confirmability were employed. The credibility was achieved by conducting observations, interviews, focus group interviews, and analyzing related documents (lesson plans). Ary et al., (2010) highlighted that credibility can be done by two more data collection methods. In terms of credibility, observation of teaching and learning activities, interview with the English teacher, lesson plan analysis, and focus group interview was constructed. Further, for confirmability, an audit trail was employed by the video record of observation, record of interview with the English teacher, and record of focus group interview (FGI) with students. By confirmability, all data of this research may be tracked down from their source when they are needed (Ary et al., 2010).

## RESULTS

The research revealed four main strategies used by the English teacher in teaching vocabulary at the Bilingual Class of MTsN 1 Gondanglegi Malang:

### 1. Text-Based Teaching Strategy

The teacher taught vocabulary by reading and translating texts, particularly narrative texts from the textbook. Sentences were read and translated step by step to ensure students understood the meaning. Two languages were used alternately so that students could comprehend the material more easily.

### 2. Using Dictionary

Students were encouraged to use dictionaries to find the meaning of unfamiliar words. Although considered a traditional approach, it was useful in helping students enrich their vocabulary and practice independent learning.

### 3. Memorizing Vocabulary

The teacher asked students to memorize certain vocabulary items while also emphasizing correct pronunciation and spelling. Vocabulary memorization was believed to support long-term retention when practiced repeatedly.

### 4. Blended-Skills Teaching Strategy

The teacher integrated vocabulary teaching with other skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary items from a topic were extended into related activities across skills to reinforce understanding.

In addition, two main obstacles were identified: (1) students' difficulty in understanding the meaning of vocabulary, and (2) students' tendency to forget new vocabulary due to infrequent use.

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the teacher applied a combination of traditional and integrated approaches. The text-based strategy supports Pan and Pan's (2012) view that translation helps learners build connections between two languages. By translating step by step, students gained clearer comprehension.

The use of dictionaries was consistent with previous studies (Amalisa & Rozimela, 2021; Keo, 2021; Meliana et al., 2018), which emphasize the importance of training students to use dictionaries as a tool for independent vocabulary learning.

The memorization strategy, although traditional, proved effective when combined with pronunciation practice. This aligns with Craik and Tulving's (1972) depth of processing theory, which argues that repeated and meaningful practice leads to long-term retention. Similarly, Schmitt (2000) and Sholeh & Muhaji (2015) highlight the role of memorization and pronunciation in supporting oral communication skills.

The blended-skills approach reflects Thornbury's (2002) argument that vocabulary is central to all language skills. By integrating vocabulary into listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, the teacher created opportunities for contextual learning, although classroom time limited the full integration.

Regarding obstacles, students' lack of understanding and forgetting vocabulary are challenges commonly reported in earlier studies (Martha, 2012; Sintadewi et al., 2020; Rahayu & Rosa, 2021). Forgetting is often linked to insufficient practice and lack of meaningful use, which suggests that teachers need to provide more varied reinforcement and engaging activities. Overall, the study confirms that while traditional methods like memorization and dictionary use remain relevant, they should be complemented with innovative, integrative strategies to sustain vocabulary learning and retention.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the teacher employed text-based teaching, dictionary use, memorization, and blended-skills instruction to enhance students' vocabulary mastery, though challenges such as limited understanding and forgetting new words persisted. The findings imply that vocabulary teaching should combine traditional and interactive strategies, offering engaging and contextualized activities to support long-term retention and overall language development. However, the study is limited to one teacher and one bilingual class, with a short data collection period and no pre- or post-tests, restricting generalizability. It is recommended that teachers adopt more innovative strategies, schools provide supporting facilities and training, and future research employ larger samples and longitudinal or quantitative designs to better evaluate instructional effectiveness.

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