

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES
AND THE SCORE OF VOCABULARY LEVELS TEST AMONG
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION

This project report is dedicated to my father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

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ABSTRACT

The present research study was an attempt to determine the vocabulary learning strategy preferences among UTM undergraduate students. It also determined the relationship between their vocabulary learning strategy use and the score of vocabulary levels test. To this end, 100 UTM undergraduate students were selected as the participants of the study based on convenience sampling at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The instrument used in the current research study was Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire which consisting of five different categories of vocabulary learning strategies. The other instrument was Nation's vocabulary levels test which assessed the learners' lexical knowledge in term of score base. In order to address the research questions, Pearson Correlation was conducted. The results revealed that the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategy subgroup was Determination Strategy and the least frequent one was Social Strategy. Besides, no significant correlation was found between the score of vocabulary levels test and vocabulary learning strategies. The important implication of the study is that students are necessary to have the awareness of vocabulary learning strategies used in order for them to develop their score of vocabulary levels test more easily and effectively.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
GMI	-	German-Malaysian Institute
LLS	-	Language learning Strategy
ME	-	Marine Engineering
TESL	-	Teaching English as a Second Language
UITM	-	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
VLS	-	Vocabulary Learning Strategy
VLT	-	Vocabulary Learning Test

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Word is a prerequisite for learners to master written language, word is also the biggest element for learning, and a tool for intellectual development. There is no doubt that knowing the word itself is an important link for learners to read, accumulate knowledge, and develop their intelligence. Accumulation of words knowledge is also conducive to the simultaneous development of the two hemispheres of the brain to stimulate the internal language development. This is also a key part for the development of learner's potential and overall improvement of learners' learning ability. Nowadays, curriculum increases its difficulty level, learners must have ample of vocabulary knowledge to enrich their knowledge. Thus, knowing some of the vocabulary learning strategies and adopting them in picking up new words in order to retain an interest in learning is crucial.

This research study had determined the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) employed by undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM) and checked their score of vocabulary levels test (VLT). The vocabulary learning strategies used in this study were classified as determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, according to Schmitt's classification. (Schmitt, 1997). Generally, different vocabulary learning strategies has its own merits and demerits. These strategies assisted students in comprehending written receptive vocabulary knowledge, which is primarily the words needed for reading as well as accumulate their scores of vocabulary levels test so that learners be able to learn in a more engaging way.

1.1 Background of the Study

A research on vocabulary learning strategy in acquiring a substantial amount of new vocabulary items of a language have been done by many scholars. According to Schmitt (2000, p. 142), the famous linguist Alexander Arguelles had estimated that English as a second language (ESL) learners need 250 words to form the most basic core of a language. ESL learners cannot combine sentences if without these volumes of words. 750 words constitute the vocabulary that everyone uses in every day. 2500 words should allow ESL learners to say anything they want to express, although sometimes the words do not fully express the meaning.

Dewi Nur Asyiah (2017) has conducted her research study in a private school at Bandung, Indonesia to find out the vocabulary learning strategies towards the influences on students' vocabulary mastery. 30 students were involved in her study and all were from 8th graders. In her findings, students strongly agreed that vocabulary learning strategies will maximize their English vocabularies understanding as well as positively help them to understand the English texts easily and ease the students to use English words in dialogue. Thus, the researcher highlighted that employing effective strategies in vocabulary learning will lead to a positive contribution to students' vocabulary development.

A study was conducted by Manuel (2017) in Africa. Students from Agostinho Neto University showed high recommendation to use memory strategies in learning English new words. Students mentioned that they can produce the words and understand a text when they repeat English words in mind and study the sound. Thus, most of the participants in his study agreed that memory strategies contribute to English learning. The researcher comprised a total of 58 vocabularies learning strategies and he divided them into 5 main groups. The finding revealed that most of the selected strategies were under the category of memory. Another similar research was done by Hamza, Yasin and Aladdin (2015), discovery strategy which included memorization technique was the most preferred range of strategies used by EFL Sudanese learners. Both researchers agreed with Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies that VLS is comprehensive, precise, and all the strategies demonstrated a complete guide for learners to improve overall English learning.

Schmitt (1997) divided vocabulary learning strategies into discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. The research study surveyed 600 Japanese learners and explored the relationship between the actual use of learners' strategies and vocabulary recognition. Schmitt found that recitation strategies are used the most and have the highest recognition.

In relation to vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary breadth knowledge refers the quantity of words towards reading ability in which also reflects the ability to understand the most commonly used meaning of a word (Nation, 1990). Nation (2001, p. 136) claimed that vocabulary breadth knowledge helped in interpreting the written receptive vocabulary knowledge when learners come across books or reading materials. The definition of vocabulary depth is the degree to which learners master the full meaning and usage of a vocabulary (Read, 2004, p. 224). Vocabulary depth represents the quality of knowledge and the use of a vocabulary.

The universities students are required to read a lot of academic texts in different subjects and most of them were in English, required for basic daily conversation, they need to be tested at least on the 2,000 whereas required for reading authentic texts, 3,000 to 5,000 word level was needed (Schmitt, 2000). The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) developed by Nation in the year 1983 and 1990 separately and then revised by Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham in the year 2001 was an ideal of assessing learners' score of vocabulary levels test because it was useful for diagnostic and placement objectives (Nation, 2001).

Furqanul Aziez, Feisal Aziez, Burhan Eko Purwanto (2020) had conducted a research study in Indonesia to find the relationship between vocabulary size and reading competence. 106 students from the English education department were involved in this study. Students who were at the knowledge of 2000 words have difficulties to interpret English text, they only managed to cover 60% of English text. The researchers found that at the knowledge of 3000 words level students understood 87% of the text. In Indonesia, students need to know about 5000 words for being capable to cover 90% of English text to avoid misinterpretation and complete independent reading without looking at dictionary.

Since this research study was focusing on the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the score of vocabulary level test, therefore, this research study emphasis on vocabulary size as the vocabulary levels test was being used for pedagogical purposes to measure ones' vocabulary size (Nation, 2001). Vocabulary is an important part of the language system, so it is also an important content in language learning. Wilkins (1972, p. 111) stated that, "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Thus, the vocabulary learning strategies are crucial in helping learners acquire a great amount of vocabularies in order for them to convey, comprehend and understand the text. ESL learners would have difficulties in acquiring new language if they have limited vocabulary size. Again, vocabulary size plays the most prominent role to the ESL students in comprehending or expressing themselves accurately in English language. (Fan, 2003, p. 222-241)

Vocabulary instruction is a critical component of English instruction and the difference between success and failure in college English classes. The mastery and application of vocabulary is the foundation for improving language knowledge and developing language skills, and the impact of vocabulary instruction is linked to the achievement of foreign language

teaching goals. Haynes and Baker claimed that it is an important task for English teachers to help students understand the importance of learning vocabulary, guide them in more effectively learning and memorising English vocabulary, and cultivate students' good vocabulary learning. (Haynes & Baker, 1993)

The foundation of foreign language learning and communication is vocabulary knowledge (Ellis, 1994). The study of English is inextricably linked to the study of vocabulary. Like the bricks used to build a house, vocabulary is the most basic and indispensable material in acquiring a language. It has a significant impact on linguistic and cultural communication. According to Lee (2003), vocabulary teaching has gotten more attention as a result of frequent exchanges of local and Western cultures and the in-depth development of foreign language teaching research. A certain amount of English words must be mastered in order to learn English effectively. The size of the number of vocabulary and the proficiency of using vocabulary directly affect the language communication ability. Most students devote a significant amount of time to learning English vocabulary, but they rely on memorization, which has a poor learning effect (Azadeh Asgari, 2016).

The basic unit of language is vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary is essential for English expression and communication. It is impossible to express and communicate without a vocabulary. As a result, vocabulary is an essential component of developing students' language communication skills.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

University is a higher institution where most of the students were using English to communicate with one another. According to Ministry of Education (The Star, Jun 2019), college students should reach C2 (proficient user). Compared with other countries in the world, the vocabulary learning of Malaysia ESL students is less emphasis. Take Japan as an example. Japanese college students require 5,900 English vocabulary when they enrol to college.

Rohmatillah (2014) once surveyed 118 college freshmen from 20 provinces and 4 municipalities across the country for the undergraduate level. These students had already studied English for 6-8 years in elementary, middle and high school before going to university. Some students even had studied English for 10 years. This study asked them the question of "Which one has the greatest gain in middle school English learning?" 115 out of 118 people

think that vocabulary learning has not gained much. In the answer to “The most difficult item to learn when you first started to learn English in college”, 80 people thought that vocabulary was the most difficult to learn. They believed that the difficulty of learning vocabulary far exceeded the difficulty of learning listening, reading, grammar and writing, and this proportion accounted for to 67.8% of the total number of people surveyed. It can be seen that the weakness of vocabulary acquisition forms a strong contrast with the importance of vocabulary teaching in the whole teaching.

However, a challenge appeared on second language university students that English vocabulary was enormously wide, for both general components and academic components. Many researchers have tried suggested vocabulary list for universities students (Coxhead, 2000; Gardner & Davies, 2014, 2016) to encourage the students to study new vocabulary items. However, Schmitt (1997) claimed that learners have to go back to square one due to ineffective use of vocabulary learning strategies to learn new vocabulary. Moir & Nation (2002) claimed that increasing direct learning strategy helps learners, especially low-level learners, to produce vocabulary. From the perspective of cognition, it explores the degree of influence of formal and semantic processing of second language vocabulary. Their research found that different VLS used has a positive effect on the overall learning effect, and the comprehension of the subjects and the maintenance of productive vocabulary level and vocabulary are higher than the formal processing group of words (read the note, copy words).

Zhihong Bai (2018) claimed that the first premise for young adults in university level must have a certain number of vocabularies in order for them to communicate with others fluently. The researcher proposed that it is necessary to introduce the vocabulary leaning strategies to China university young adults. Thus, the reasons influenced vocabulary knowledge learning and the perspectives of young adults towards vocabulary learning strategies were analysed in her study. In the interview section, university young adults pointed out that they only rely on teachers’ instruction and books as the main source in their English learning. Students believed that newspaper and magazine help them to enhance vocabulary knowledge when cognitive vocabulary learning strategies were introduced to them.

Observing university students confronted with unknown vocabulary, researchers have noted the important role of vocabulary knowledge as a predictor of overall language skills (e.g., Laufer & Aviad-Levitzky, 2017; Noreillie et al., 2018; Qian, 2002; Schoonen et al., 2011;

Staeher, 2008, Staeher, 2009; Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017). Laufer and Avid-Levitzky (2017) claimed that it is necessary for university students to know their vocabulary size and to discover strategies for studying vocabulary, not only just to pass the examination when come across the English language related subjects but also to know the important role of vocabulary as one of the core components of language. University students often encounter great difficulties when learning vocabulary and encounter vocabulary bottlenecks. Over the long term, poor vocabulary mastery or lack of vocabulary has become the biggest obstacle to English learning, which brings great resistance to students' language learning.

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt effective remedial strategies to extend university students' vocabularies. A Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was therefore the standardize platform to check one's vocabulary size. Reflection would be made once students get their score of vocabulary levels test and thereafter created an awareness and raised a thought on their mind: Is their vocabulary extensive enough? They have been an English user for years but why cannot understand the text? Do they satisfy with their score and how to improve? There are lots of possible short answers, but it depended on one's learning desire.

Different vocabularies learning strategies used might influence university students' vocabulary size. Şener (2009) confirmed that: "*vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner*". Zimmerman (1998) claimed that university students would be beneficial from studying the vocabulary levels because it gives young adults higher text coverage and apply them in real life situation. Zhihong Bai (2018), has conducted her study at China, China university students showed great interest to learn various vocabulary strategies to improve and retain English words. Thus, university students should learn and adopt the engaging way of learning English words in order for them to obtain high score in the test and being capable to understand new vocabularies. University students should re-consider the vocabulary learning strategies as the starting point of reaching ample size of vocabulary. Heng, Kimkong (2011) claimed that both Thai and Cambodian EFL young adults were encouraged to use the learning strategies that meet their learning style in order to maximize their language learning especially in vocabulary learning.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H0: There is no relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) and the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among UTM undergraduate students.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) and the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among UTM undergraduate students.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research study were:

1. To determine the preferred Vocabularies Learning Strategies (VLS) employed by undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM) in daily English language learning.
2. To determine the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM).
3. To determine the relationship between Vocabularies Learning Strategies (VLS) and the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM).

1.5 Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the preferred Vocabularies Learning Strategies (VLS) employed by undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM) in daily English language learning?
2. What is the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM)?

3. Is there a significant relationship between Vocabularies Learning Strategies (VLS) and the score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) among undergraduate students in University Technology Malaysia (UTM)?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study explained the extent to which this research study focused on the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and the score of vocabulary level test (VLT). This research study looked at the relationship between VLS and the score of VLT. The research area focused on the main five categories of strategies for vocabulary learning purposes, there are also many sub-strategies in each of the categories including the use of bilingual dictionary, repetition, spelling, guessing from context, and seeking clarification from friends, Schmitt (1997). Furthermore, the research area focused on the vocabulary sizes, in other word, vocabulary size refers to the quantity of vocabulary that the students have acquired rather than the quality of the vocabulary knowledge, which means the deeper aspects of vocabulary knowledge is excluded in this research study. Thus, the context of vocabulary knowledge is not covered in this research study and thus, it became one of the limitations.

The population or sample involved in this research study was undergraduate students from Faculty of Education in UTM. The theories underpinned in this research study were Cognitive Learning Theory and Item Response Theory. The methodology of this research study was quantitative.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study is significant in the way that its findings provided relevant information about learners' preferred strategies for learning vocabulary. Hence, learners could decide which appropriate vocabulary learning strategies may suit them to use in order to meet their needs. Furthermore, findings from the study gave significance for learners to pay more attention on their vocabulary learning strategies that enable them to meet the criteria of the score of vocabulary levels test which in turns contribute to become a competent English learner. In addition to this, the findings gave implications for learners to encourage them to practice these strategies and use them in and outside the classroom.

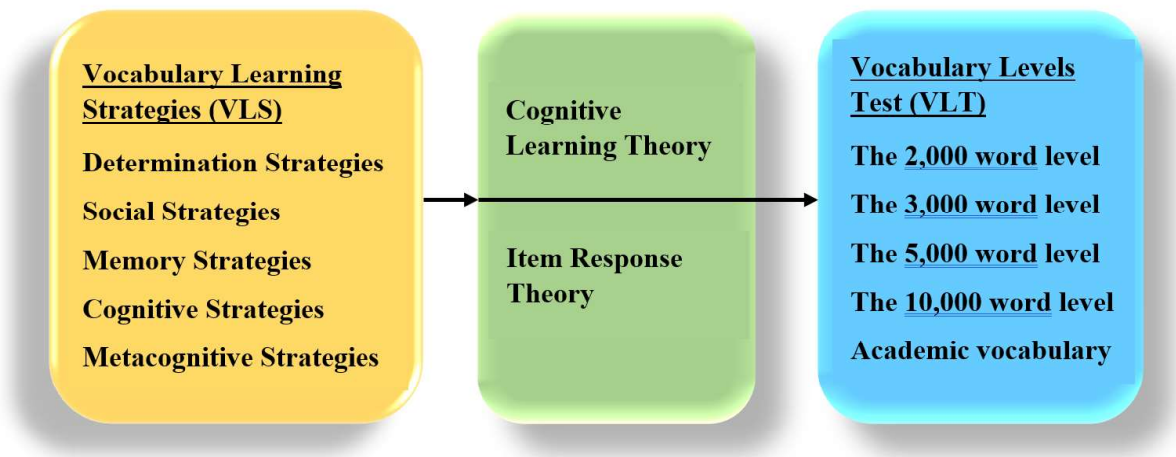
As for the educators, the finding might be able to make the teachers realized the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and added in their syllabus to enhance students'

vocabulary learning. Likewise, this finding may also help the educators especially the head of institution (e.g. headmaster, director etc.) to understand the average scores of vocabulary levels test within students in order to seek for solutions to improve on this vocabulary area. Organizing some beneficial programs or seminars which are fruitful for educators to attend in order to improve educators' teaching and facilitating skills.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The present research study examined the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the score of vocabulary levels test among UTM undergraduate students. The framework presented to see whether strategies determine scores, the vocabulary learning strategies used will have contributed to higher vocabulary levels test scores. A conceptual framework has been established by the researcher to illustrate the variables of this study in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of students' Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) in students' score of Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT).



Firstly, this research study adopted Anderson (1983), Cognitive Learning Theory which is dealt with in detail emphasizing the stages of skill acquisition, language comprehension and language production. The theoretical efforts attempt to describe language proficiency and the influence of cognition on second language acquisition. According to Anderson (1983, 1985),

he has described cognitive skill acquisition as a "three-stage process". This framework was useful in the current context because it has aided in identifying and testing the existence and applicability of specific learning strategies that are appropriate at various stages of the skill acquisition process.

Secondly, this study used Craik & Lockhart (1972), Item Response Theory. The item response theory has developed rapidly in the aspects of test paper composition, project function difference (DIF), calibration, equivalence, standard setting, test scoring, and adaptive testing are inseparable from IRT. The item response theory was based on two basic concepts: (1) the performance of a candidate on a test question can be predicted or explained by a set of factors, which are called potential traits or abilities; (2) the performance of the candidate towards the relationship between the situations. This set of potential traits can be diagnosed and explained through a continuous increasing function, which is called the Item Characteristic Curve (ICC). The meaning of any item characteristic curve is: the probability of answering a question correctly is determined by the ability of the examinee and the characteristics of the question. The stronger (or higher) the candidate's potential traits or abilities are, the greater the probability of their correct response on a test question.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

This research study did not include undergraduate students from all faculties. The age of respondents was therefore another limitation. This research study looked at university age students who were between 19 and 28. Due to time limitations and students' busy schedules, it was not possible to collect more data. The researcher did not determine the frequency of using different categories of strategies used by the participants. Moreover, convenience sampling was adopted, and the results indicated not standardized. The variables part was another limit, only few strategies involved in this study, the students might engage in with another strategy which the study were not taken into consideration. A possible direction for future research would be to repeat the research with a larger sample and possibly a number of universities in Malaysia.

1.10 Definitions of Terms

1.10.1 Vocabulary-Learning Strategy

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined Vocabulary- Learning Strategy as a part of general learning strategies in second language acquisition. In this research study, vocabulary-learning strategy is a detailed plan for achieving success in the process of getting an understanding of new words by studying it or by experience it.

1.10.2 Vocabulary Knowledge

Tovar Viera (2017) defined vocabulary knowledge as learners to learn the words meanings and how to use them in different contexts and situations. In this research study, vocabulary knowledge as all the words that someone knows, learns or uses. It is vocabulary that allows learners to express themselves and to convey their messages clearly and appropriately in a wide variety of situations.

1.10.2.1 Vocabulary Size

Read, J. (1993) defined vocabulary size is the range or areas of vocabulary knowledge that a person has. In this research study, vocabulary size refer to the breadth of vocabulary knowledge that undergraduate students have.

1.10.2.2 Score of Vocabulary Levels Test

Vocabulary levels test is an online tool to measure someone's written receptive vocabulary knowledge, that is mainly the word knowledge for reading competence. The VLT assesses vocabulary knowledge through five levels of English word families namely 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 and academic vocabulary, hence the name "Levels Test." Score is the number of points students have. Schmitt, N. (2001).

1.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, vocabulary learning is a major challenge to English learner however learners can overcome this obstacle through a variety of strategies. Learners can apply strategies such as examining part of speech, guessing meaning from the context, using a dictionary to check through word, ask teacher for clarification of new words, verbal repetition, and many other strategies that are very useful for English learners to explore new vocabulary. Moreover, English learners need to make themselves aware of different strategies used that can help them to realize their goal about the range or areas of vocabulary knowledge that they

wanted to reach. Besides that, English learners should also look for techniques that may encourage them and motivate or even create their desire to learn better. Vocabulary learning has been at the centre of the entire English language learning. The success or failure of vocabulary learning is directly related to the strength of the ESL learner's in overall English language acquisition.

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