VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research was done on vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among English Department (ED) students. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the VLS that were mostly used by ED students. The two sub-questions were: (1) What are the most frequent VLS used? and (2) What are the most useful VLS for ED students? To find the answer, this study used a questionnaire adapted from Schmitt' s (2004) VLS taxonomy. After analyzing the questionnaires from 100 participants, it was discovered that some of the most preferred and useful VLS were opening the dictionary and repeating the word in mind frequently.

Keywords: learning media, text types in English, junior high school students, text types board

Introduction

Vocabulary is one important aspect in learning English language. It is quite central of learning a language. Without knowing vocabulary, it is difficult for learners to learn the language. However, according to Fan (2003), vocabulary is generally given little emphasis in the university curriculum in Asian country. Generally, the emphasis on English teaching in university in Asian countries is on the four skills, that are speaking skill, writing skill, listening skill, and reading skill (Fan, 2003).

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) are actually very important. This is because they can help the students to learn and master vocabulary well. Therefore, one of the ways to help learners to enhance their knowledge of second language vocabulary is through equipping learners with a variety of VLS. According to Rubin (1975), VLS can also be considered as a subset of general learning strategies in second language acquisition. Also, according to Nation (2001), VLS are one part of language learning strategies which in turn are part of general learning strategies.

However, Schmitt (2000) said that learning vocabulary in the second language using VLS has not been receiving much attention in the field of second language learning. Other than that, his research has shown that many learners use more strategies to learn vocabulary especially when compared to integrated tasks such as listening and speaking. Nevertheless, they are tend to use basic VLS (Schmitt, 1997). From the explanation above, it means that the learners would use

more learning strategies to learn vocabulary rather than learning listening and speaking tasks.

The main benefit gained from all learning strategies, including strategies for vocabulary learning, is the fact that they enable learners to take more control on their own learning so that they can take more responsibility for their learning (Nation, 2001; Scharle & Szabo, 2000). Sanaoui (1995) also carried out a study that showed the positive relationship between VLS used and the success in the acquiring and retaining vocabulary items. Nation (2001) also believes that a large amount of vocabulary could be acquired with the help of VLS and the strategies prove useful for students of different language levels.

Many VLS have been listed by many experts. However, each learner may have different strategies to learn vocabulary. English Department (ED) students may have also used different strategies when they learn vocabulary, especially throughout their English learning experience in ED. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore VLS used by ED students, especially the students that had learned English for three to four years. This study was guided by the following main research questions: " What vocabulary learning strategies are mostly used by the students that had learned English 3-4 years in ED? with the below sub questions:

a. What are the most frequent vocabulary learning strategies used by ED students?
b. What are the most useful of vocabulary learning strategies used by ED students?

We hope that this study will provide some information about how most ED students learned new vocabulary using VLS. Below are some theories and research related to VLS that will become the foundation of the study. We will start with the definition of language learning strategies, followed by the taxonomy of VLS, and a relevant study on VLS.

Williams and Burden (1997) define language learning strategies as techniques used by learners to help increasing the effectiveness and independence of their language learning. Furthermore, according to Rubin (1987) and O' Malley and Chamot (1990), language learning strategies are any set of actions, plans, tactics, thoughts or behaviors that the learners employ to facilitate the comprehension, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Stern (1992, p.261) also explains, " The concept of language learning strategy is based on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals that they exercise choice procedure, and that they undertake." From the experts' explanations, it can be concluded that language learning strategies are the way learner used to learn a language.

O' Malley (1985) and O' Malley and Chamot (1990), confirm that most language learning strategies are used for vocabulary learning tasks. So, one way to help learners to enhance their knowledge of second language vocabulary is through equipping learners with various VLS. According to Rubin (1975), VLS can also be considered as a subset of general learning strategies in second language acquisition. Also, according to Nation (2001), VLS are one part of language learning strategies which in turn are part of general learning strategies.

From all above, it can be concluded that the VLS is the strategies to find out and memorize meaning of unfamiliar vocabularies so that they can be retrieved when needs arise.

Next is the taxonomy of VLS. Many researchers had been VLS. Gu and Johnson (1996), Schmitt (1997), and Nation (2001) for example, propose the VLS taxonomy based on the second or foreign learner' s various strategies to acquire the target language words or vocabularies. More explanation of their taxonomy will be presented below.

Gu and Johnson (1996) list second language VLS as metacognitive, memory and activation strategies. According to Gu and Johnson (1996):

Metacognitive strategies consist of selective and self-initiation; cognitive strategies entail guessing, strategies, skillful use of dictionary and note-taking strategies; memory strategies are classified into rehearsal (word lists and repetition) and encoding categories (association, imagery, visual, auditory, semantic and contextual encoding as well as word structure); activation strategies include those strategies include those strategies through which the learners actually use new words in different context. Classification of Gu and Johnson' s (1996) VLS is summarized in the following Chart.

Table 1. Gu and Johnson' s (1996) VLS classification

Strategies			
Metacognitive	**Cognitive**	**Memory**	**Activation**
Selective attentive: Identifying essential words for comprehension **Self-initiation**: using a variety of means to make the meaning of words clear	**Guessing**: Activation background knowledge, using linguistic items Use of dictionary Note-taking	**Rehearsal**: Word list repetition, etc **Encoding**: association (imagery visual, auditory, etc)	Using new words in different contexts

Another comprehensive inventory of VLS is developed by Schmitt (2000). He groups VLS into the five categories below. More details about Schmitt' s (2000) VLS can be seen in Table 2.

a. Determination strategies are individual learning strategies, which help learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers, such as guessing the words from the context (Schmitt, 2000).

b. Social strategies engage learners in interaction with their peers, and this helps them to learn from each other, such as observing their classmates and asking their teacher for the meaning of a word (Schmitt, 2000).

c. Memory strategies are strategies which engage learners in learning the new word through mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new word (Schmitt, 2000).
d. Cognitive strategies do not engage learners in mental processing but is more mechanical. An example is repeating the pronunciation of new words (Schmitt, 2000).
e. Metacognitive strategies are strategies relating to processes involving monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of one's progress. Metacognitive strategies help the learner in determining appropriate VLS for learning new words (Schmitt, 2000).

Table 2. Schmitt's VLS (Schmitt, 1997, pp. 207-208)

1. Strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning	
Strategy group	**Strategy**
Determination	• Analyzing part of speech
	• Analyzing affixes and roots
	• Analyzing and available pictures or gestures
	• Guess meaning from textual context
	• Use a dictionary (bilingual or monolingual)
Social	• Ask teacher for a synonym, paraphrase, or L1 translation of new word
	• Ask class mates for meaning

2. Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered	
	Strategy
Social	• Study and practice meaning in a group
	• Interact with native speakers
Memory	• Connect word to a previous personal experience
	• Associate the word with its coordinate
	• Use semantic maps
	• Image word forms
	• Group words together to study them
	• Study the spelling of a word
	• Say new aloud when studying
	• Use physical action when learning a word
Cognitive	• Verbal repetition
	• Written repetition
	• Word lists
	• Put English labels on physical objects
	• Keep a vocabulary notebook

Metacognitive	• Use English language media (songs, movies, news, casts, etc)
	• Use spaced word practice (expanding rehearsal)
	• Test oneself with word tests
	• Skip or pass new word
	• Continue to study word over time

Mnemonic and non-mnemonic are also VLS. Mnemonic and non-mnemonic elaboration techniques involving deep semantic processing of target words have been shown to be more effective than memorization strategies involving only shallow processing, such as oral rote-repetition (Atkinson and Raugh, 1975; Pressley and Levin, 1987; Pressley, Levin and Mc Cormick, 1980; Cohen and Aphek, 1981; O' Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzares, Kupper, and Russo, 1985). Mnemonic techniques involve the use of both visual and verbal mental imagery relates a word to be memorized with some previously learned knowledge such as Keyword Method (Cohen, 1987; Meara, 1980; Nation, 1982). According to Sökmen (1997):

Non-mnemonic elaboration techniques, such as semantic mapping (brainstorming associations that a word has and diagrammatically) and ordering (a techniques that asks learners to organize scrambled lists of words, forcing them to distinguish differences in meaning during the arrangement process) encourage learners to process target words in terms of their semantic properties.

In my opinion, mnemonic techniques are of vocabulary learning strategies that using real things or AVA to memorized the lesson. While, non-mnemonic techniques using brainstorming combining with learners' background knowledge. Whereas Nation (1980) differentiates VLS into two categories, which are learning words in list and guessing words from the context. Learning words in list have advantage for the learner that large numbers of words can be learnt in a very short time. Guessing word from context is just a means of acquiring the unconscious skill that an efficient reader already has. These two strategies are complementing each other.

Nest is about previous studies on VLS. Research on VLS are usually related to many kinds of strategies that used by the students to learn vocabulary. Over many years, scholars have conducted research to know many kinds of VLS from students' perception. One of the studies was carried out by Lip in 2009, in Hong Kong. The research aimed to investigate the most frequently used and most useful vocabulary language learning strategies' among Chinese EFL postsecondary students in Hong Kong (Lip, 2009). Subsequently, Lip (2009) identified that the most frequently used and most useful VLS were as spelling the word in the mind repeatedly, analyzing the word by breaking down the sound segments, remembering words by doing a project, and asking classmates for the meaning of the word.

Method

This study used a mixed methodology which combined two existing methods, quantitative and qualitative. This method was initiated by Campbell and Fisk who were interested in making triangulation of data from quantitative and qualitative

data sources (Jick, 1979, a cited study by Creswell, 2009). The benefit of using mixed method in this study will be explained further in the Instrument of Data Collection.

The research study was conducted in the English Department (ED) of Faculty of Language and Literature of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. English was not the daily spoken language in this place, so the learners usually only had opportunity to speak English in the classroom. However, English vocabulary was an important aspect because the students are learning English here. The reason for selecting this university was because the students are learning English as a second or foreign language. So, the students in ED may use some VLS for learning English vocabularies during their study in ED.

The participants of this study were 100 ED students. The participants were chosen based on purposive sampling or " criterion-based" selection (Blackledge, 2001, p.57). The criteria were ED students, especially those who had been studying in ED around three or four years. The reason why the researchers chose those participants was because the senior ED students possibly have more experiences in using VLS compared to younger students.

This research used questionnaire in collecting the data. The questionnaire used for this study was based on Schmitt' s (2004) taxonomy of VLS and adapted from Cheung (2004). It included the following: five statements on cognitive strategies, ten statements on memory strategies, nine statements on determination strategies and three social strategies in vocabulary learning. The frequency of use and their usefulness were measured by 5-point Likert scales (Never to Always); (Not Useful to Extremely Useful). The questionnaire was adapted from Cheung' s (2004) questionnaire, as Cheung used Schmitt' s list of VLS, and was reorganized according to Schmitt' s taxonomy. This type of questionnaire was used because it helped the researchers in categorizing the VLS for the analysis.

The questionnaire was divided in three (3) sections. The first section was used to know the most frequently VLS that were used by the participants. The second section was used to know the mostly used VLS. Each of the section consists of 27 of VLS based on the Schmitt' s taxonomy of VLS. The third section was an open-ended question used to inquire the participants' perspective of the most useful and the most used VLS. This question was hopes to strengthen the answer from the close-ended questionnaire.

Four ED teachers were asked to help distributing the questionnaire in the class they taught. The classes chosen were the classes in which most of the students had learned English 3-4 years in ED. The percentage of data returned was relatively high (90.90% was returned). Of 110 questionnaires which were distributed, 100 were returned.

The data collected from closed-ended questionnaire were analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel. First, the VLS in section 1 and 2 were grouped into four big themes. The first section was about the frequency used VLS and the second section was about the mostly used VLS. The groups were made based Schmitt' s VLS taxonomy. They were cognitive VLS, determination VLS, memory VLS, and social VLS. For analyzing the third part of the questionnaire, the participants' responses were categorized based on the similar themes. The categorization was done manually by first typing all the responses in its same

categories in Microsoft Office Word. Similar responses were given the same color to identify that they were similar, thus it would ease the categorization process.

Findings and Discussion

Below are the classifications of the most frequently used and most useful VLS based on the grouping by Schmitt (2000). The strategies were analyzed by grouping them in four big themes; those are cognitive learning strategies, determination learning strategies, memory learning strategies, and social learning strategies. Diagrams with the explanation and some answers from the open ended questionnaire will also be provided to strengthen the explanation about VLS in this study.

Cognitive learning strategies (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 18)

According to Schmitt (2000), cognitive learning strategies are strategies that do not relate with learners' mental but more on the practices to make the learners be able to remember the word in a longer time. The VLS that are under these categories are saying the word in mind frequently, saying the word aloud, analyzing the part of speech of the new word, spelling the word in learners' mind, and write the word. Below are the result of the most frequently used VLS and most useful VLS under this category.
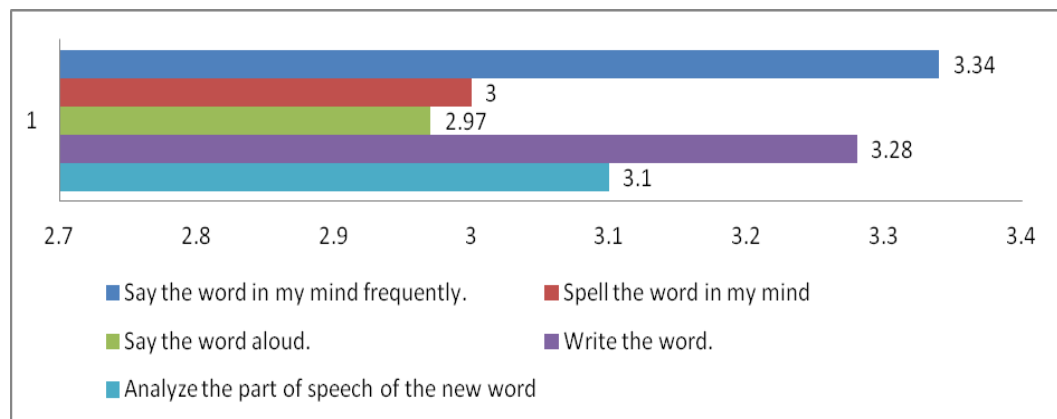

Figure 1. Frequency of Cognitive VLS Used

From the above figure, it was stand-out that participants chose ' repeatedly say the word in mind' as the most frequently used cognitive VLS (Ave: 3.34). In here, the number 3.34 means that repeatedly say the word in mind was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). The second position was ' repeatedly write the word' (Ave: 3.28), then ' analyzing the part of the speech of the new word' (Ave: 3.1), ' repeatedly spell the word in mind' (Ave: 3), and ' repeatedly say the word aloud' (Ave: 2.97).
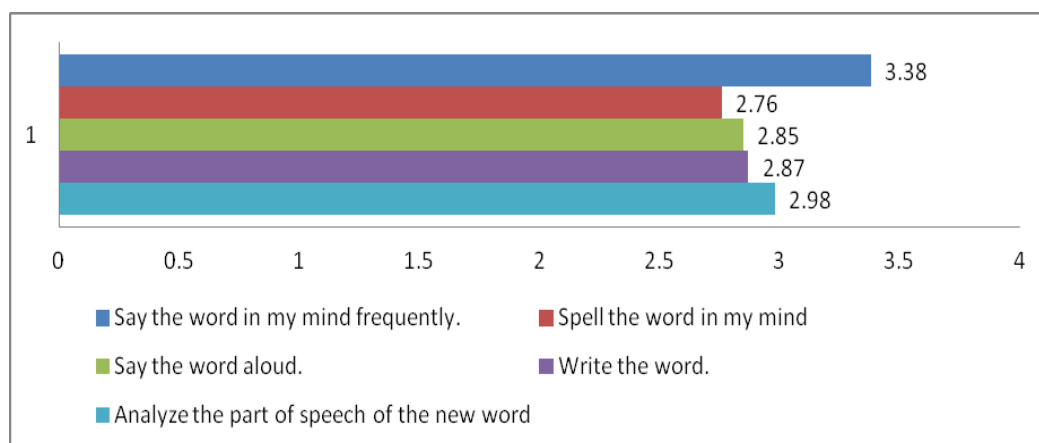
Figure 2. The usefulness of Cognitive VLS

In the second part about the usefulness of cognitive VSL. The above chart shows that participants also chose ' repeatedly say the word in mind' as the most useful cognitive VLS (Ave: 3.38). 3.38 means that this strategy was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). The second position was ' analyze the part of speech of the new word' (Ave: 2.98), followed by ' repeatedly write the word' (Ave: 2.87), ' repeatedly say the word aloud' (Ave: 2.85), and ' repeatedly spell the word in mind' (Ave: 2.76).

The participants' answers on the open-ended questionaire also gave support why they chose ' repeatedly say the word in mind' as the most frequently used and most useful VLS. One of the participants said that' repeatedly say the word in mind' helped them to remember the word in long period. Student 28 said, " I repeatedly say the word in my mind frequently. It will help me to remember in long period, so I won' t forget it." Student 48 also said, " Frequently repeat say the word and trying to use it frequently." Other student said that it could help them to learn more about English. Student 55 said, " I think repeating say the new vocab will help in learning English. It because we can learn more." It means that using the ' repeatedly say the word in mind' VLS will help learners to be able to remember words in their long-term memory and help the learner to learn more about English. Schmitt (2000) also said that ' repeatedly say the word in mind' are proven to help learners to remember the spelling and pronunciation of words in a long time.

Determination learning strategies (questions 5, 6, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24)

The next VLS is categorized under the determination learning strategies. According to Schmitt (2000), determination learning strategies are strategies that are possessed by the learners to help them to know the meaning of the word by using their own knowledge without the help of other people. Nine VLS are under this learning strategy, namely ' analyzing the word by breaking it into sound segments' , ' try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind' , ' check for the L1 meaning of new English words' , ' guess the meaning of the new word from the story' , ' ask the teacher for the new word' s synonym' , ' analyze the word by breaking it into meaningful parts' , ' analyze the affixes and roots of the new word' , ' analyze any available pictures or gestures to guess the words' , and ' use a dictionary to check the words' . Below

are the result of the most frequently used VLS and most useful VLS under this category.
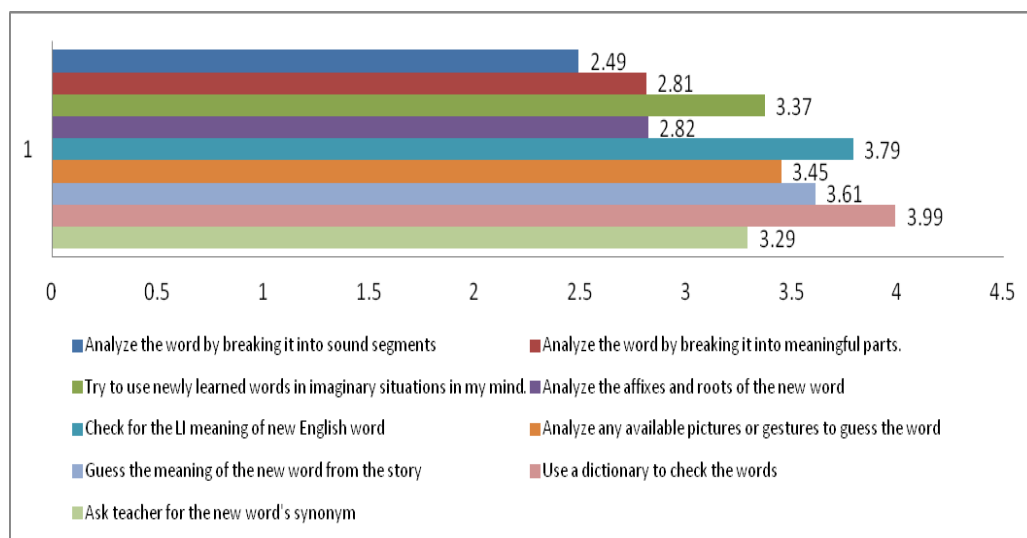

Figure 3. Frequency of Determination

Figure 3 shows that participants chose ' using dictionary to check the words' as the most frequently used determination VLS (Ave: 3.99). In here, 3.99 means this strategy was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). The second position was ' checking for the L1 meaning of new English word' (Ave: 3.79), the next most dominant VLS under this category were ' guessing the meaning of the new word from the story' (Ave: 3.61), ' analyzing any available pictures or gestures to guess the word' (Ave: 3.45), ' trying to use newly learned words in imagery situations in mind' (Ave: 3.37), and ' asking teacher for the new word' s synonym' (Ave: 3.29).
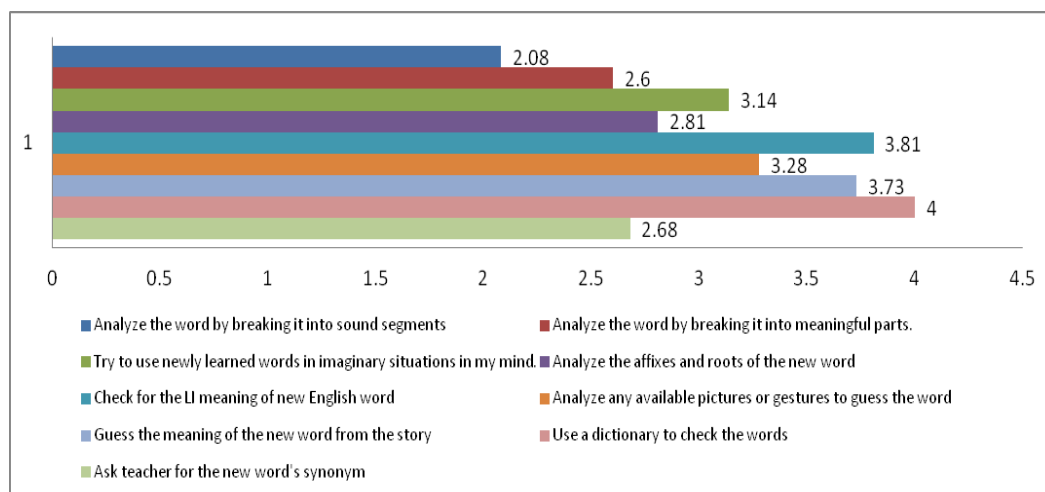

Figure 4. The usefulness of Determination VLS

Figure 4 shows that, participants also chose ' using a dictionary to check new words' as the most useful determination VLS (Ave: 4). In here, 4 means that the participants frequently (4) used dictionary to help them learn vocabulary. Then

some dominant VLS that appeared after this VLS were ' checking the L1 meaning of new English word' (Ave: 3.81), ' guessing the meaning of the new word from the story'   (Ave: 3.73), ' analyzing any available pictures or gestures to guess the word' (Ave: 3.28), and ' trying to use newly learned words in imagery situations in mind' (Ave: 3.14).

The result form the open-ended questionnaire also represented the participants' statements related to the reason why ' using a dictionary to check new words' was the most frequently and most useful VLS for them. The first reason may be because a dictionary could be opened dictionary anytime they wanted. For example, Student 44 stated, " I use a dictionary, because I can do it whenever I really need to know some difficult words" . Another reason was because opening a dictionary was comfortable enough to learn new vocabulary. Student 72 stated that " I tend to use dictionary to find the meaning of words because I think it' s more comfortable" . Other than that, Student 97 stated, " by learning vocabulary through dictionary we will know the right meaning of the words so it will help us a lot in learning the language" . Because open dictionary could be done any time, comfortable enough and can help participants know the right meaning of the words directly, for the participants opening dictionary was the best VLS that helped them to learn English. Schmitt (1997, p. 205) also said that determination strategies are used when the learners are faced with discovering a new word' s meaning without recourse to another person' s experience. So it will help the learner to find the meaning of the new vocabulary without help from other people, like when participants used their dictionaries.

Memory learning strategies (questions 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12,13,15,16, and 17)

According to Schmitt (2000), memory learning strategies are strategies that connect with the learners by doing mental processing and relating the word with some background knowledge by using some form of imagery or grouping. There are ten VLS that falls under this category: ' link the word to a visual image in mind' , ' link the word to an Indonesian word with similar sound' , ' remember the sentence in which the word is used' , ' make up own sentences using the new word' , ' remember words by doing group work activities in class' , ' link the word to another English word with similar sound' , ' use sound and meaning associations' , ' remember the new word together with the context' , remember words by doing dictation, and ' remember words by doing a project' .
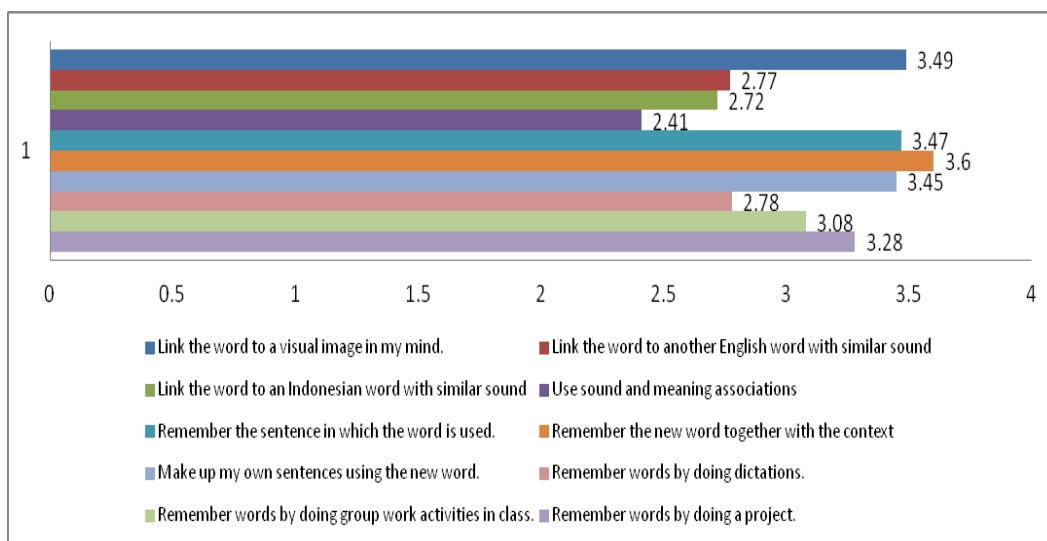
Figure 5. Frequency of Memory VLS Used

Figure 5 shows the frequency of memory VLS used by participants. It was evident that participants chose ' remembering the new word together with the context where the new word occurs' as the most frequently used memory VLS (Ave: 3.6). In here, 3.6 means that ' remembering the new word together with the context where the new word occurs' was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). Some of the VLS that had the highest frequency after this VLS are ' linking the word to a visual image in mind' (Ave: 3.49), ' remembering the sentence in which the word is used' (Ave: 3.47), ' making up own sentences using the new word' (Ave: 3.45), ' remembering words by doing a project' (Ave: 3.28), and ' remembering words by doing group work activities in class' (Ave: 3.0).

The result of the open-ended questionnaire may help us to see the reason why ' remembering the new word together with the context where the new word occurs' strategy was most frequently used. The first reason was possibly because connecting the word with context was more helpful than learned it single word. For example, Student 7 stated, " Learning English through context is more helpful than learning English (vocabulary) only by the single word." The next reason was maybe because it made them got the sense of the word. Student 35 stated, " By connecting the word with the context, it helps a lot as a vocabulary may have many different meaning, when we use it we get the " sense" of the word in the context and it helps a lot to remember it." Another reason was possibly because using the context would help them remember the word in a long time. This was what Student 47 said related to this point, " Analyze the word by making a relation between the word and the context. It will last long in my mind."
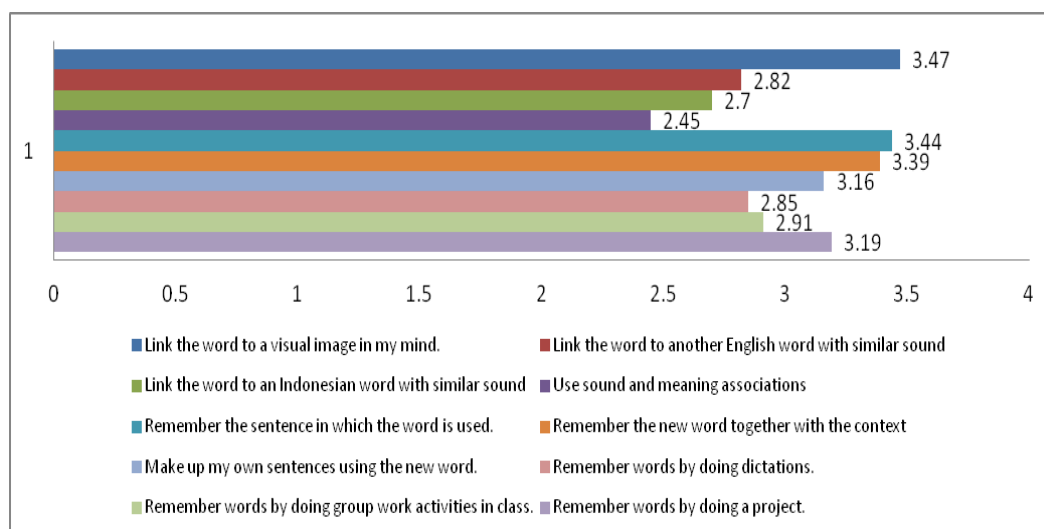
Figure 6. The usefulness of Memory VLS

Figure 6 depicts the usefulness of memory VSL for the participants. Different from the most frequently used memory VLS, here participants chose 'link the word to a visual image in my mind' as the most useful memory VLS (Ave: 3.47). Other VLS that were reported as most useful by participants were 'remembering the sentence in which the word is used' (Ave: 3.44), 'remembering the new word together with the context where the new word occurs' (Ave: 3.39), 'remembering words by doing a project' (Ave: 3.19) and 'making up own sentences using the new word' (Ave: 3.16).

These were what participants felt by using 'link the word to a visual image in my mind' strategy. Student 23 said "*I connect the new word to something and visualize it in my mind, and sometimes using "jembatan keledai" [to help me remember new words]*". Student 100 also said, "*I think learning by doing, or by giving picture. By those two strategies, learning vocabulary might be easier.*" So, by connecting the new word to something and visualize it in mind helped participants to learn the new word. This is similar to what Thompson (1987) and Stockmen (1997) explain that memory strategies involve relating the word with some previously learned knowledge by using some form of imagery or grouping.

Social learning strategies (questions 25, 26, and 27)

According to Schmitt (2000), social learning strategies are strategies that involve the interaction with their friends and learn from each other. Three VLS falls under this category, which are 'ask teacher for the new word's paraphrase', 'ask classmates for meaning of the words, and 'ask teacher for the new word's translation'.
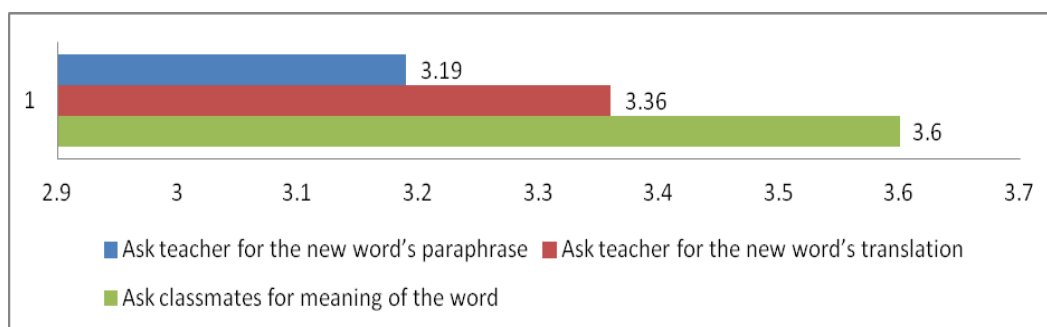
Figure 7. Frequency Social VLS Used

From Figure 7, it was evident that the most frequently used Social VLS that participants used was ' ask classmate for the meaning of the word' (Ave: 3.6). In here, 3.6 means that ask classmate for the meaning of the word was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). The second VLS was ' asking teacher for the new word' s translation' (Ave: 3.36), and the third was ' asking teacher for the new word' s paraphrase' (Ave: 3.19).
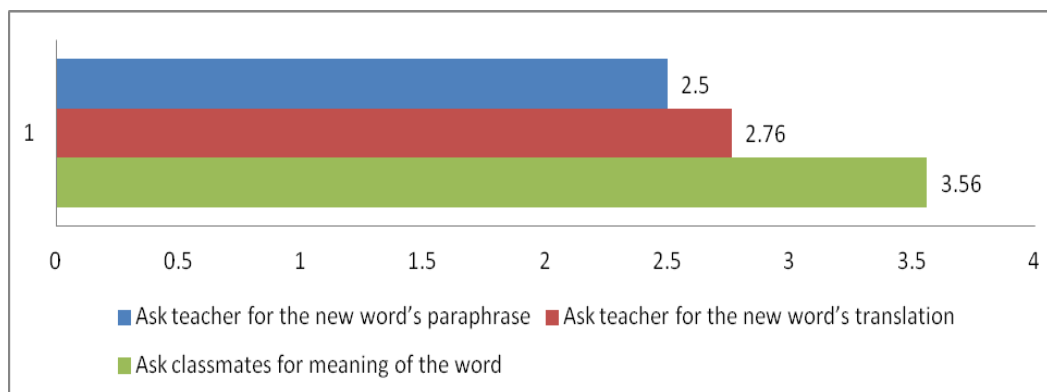

Figure 8. The usefulness of Social VLS

Figure 8 shows that participants also chose ' asking classmate for the meaning of the word' as the most useful social VLS (Ave: 3.56). In here, 3.56 means that ' ask classmate for the meaning of the word' was placed between sometimes (3) and frequently (4). The second most useful social VLS was ' asking teacher for the new word' s translation' (Ave: 2.76), and the third was ' asking teacher for the new word' s paraphrase' (Ave: 2.5).

From the open-ended questionnaire, participant 22 stated, " I always ask my friends if I find a new vocabulary" . Although no exact reason was evident from participants' answer, maybe this strategy is frequently used and useful because According to Schmitt (1997), the second way to discover a new meaning is through employing the social strategies: asking someone for help with the unknown words. Schmitt (2000) also said that by using social strategies, the learner will create an interaction with their friends and they can learn from each other.

Other vocabulary learning strategies

Besides the VLS reported above, there were actually some other VLS that occurred and admitted as helpful for participants. The newly-appeared VLS were participants learnt new words by ' reading a lot' , ' watching movie' , ' listening to music' and ' using flash cards' .

Conclusion

This research study was aimed to explore the most frequently used and the mostly used of VLS used by ED students especially the students that had learned English 3-4 years in ED.

This study finally discovered the most frequently VLS that were used by ED students that had learned English 3-4 years were (1) opening dictionary, (2) repeating the word in mind frequently, (3) remember the new word together with the context, and (4) asking their classmates. Furthermore, the most useful of VLS were (1) opening dictionary, (2) repeating say the word in mind, (3) linking the word to a visual image in mind, and (4) asking their classmates.

Other than the above, there were some VLS that did not appear in the questionnaire distributed to participants. They were ' reading a lot' , ' listening to music' , ' watching a movie' and also ' using flash cards' .

The finding of the most frequently used and mostly used VLS, and the new VLS that had been found in this research, a further research regarding the strategies and new strategies may be necessary to be carried out. Hence, the additional VLS could be added in the new research study. It could make the research got a richer data from the participant. It also digs deeper about the students' perspective of VLS.

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