



Implementing Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy in Teaching Vocabulary Mastery to Secondary Junior High School

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary plays a vital role in mastering a foreign language, as it directly influences students' ability to communicate effectively. However, many students still face challenges in understanding, remembering, and using new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This study aimed to investigate the implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) in improving students' vocabulary mastery and to explore their experiences and perceptions during the learning process. The research employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The participants were nine eighth-grade students from a junior high school in Karawang, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and exploration tasks, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which included data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that students initially struggled to understand and retain new vocabulary due to unclear instruction, monotonous activities, and limited learning strategies. After implementing VSS, students showed increased motivation, autonomy, and critical thinking. They became more active in identifying new words, analyzing their meanings in context, and collaborating with peers during classroom discussions. The strategy also helped students develop analytical skills and promoted deeper vocabulary learning by connecting words to meaningful contexts. Overall, the implementation of VSS proved effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery, fostering learner independence, and creating a more interactive and engaging classroom environment. These findings suggest that VSS can serve as an alternative approach to traditional vocabulary instruction, offering both cognitive and affective benefits for English language learners.

Keywords: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS), Vocabulary Mastery, Qualitative Research, EFL Learning, Learner Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary occupies a crucial role in the process of language learning. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, individuals are unable to effectively speak or comprehend a language. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), *"Vocabulary is seen as a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well a learner speaks, listens, reads, and writes."* This statement implies that vocabulary is not merely a collection of words that learners memorize and understand, but rather a continuous process of acquiring, organizing, and applying those words appropriately in communication. Without mastering an adequate range of vocabulary, students not only encounter difficulties in communication but may also be unable to communicate at all. Learners are expected to use vocabulary both productively in speaking and writing and receptively in listening and reading since receptive skills require a broad lexical range to comprehend written texts and spoken discourse.

In essence, vocabulary plays a vital role for students in understanding texts, achieving academic success, and using the language effectively for communicative purposes. Furthermore, McCarthy (1990) stated that , *“No matter how well a student learns grammar or how proficient they may appear, communication in a second language cannot occur meaningfully without words that convey broad meanings.”* , This emphasizes that a rich vocabulary significantly facilitates learners’ communicative competence.

In relation to the significance of vocabulary, students who learn a foreign language are required to master it effectively. However, in practice, learning vocabulary remains a challenging aspect for many students to acquire and comprehend. According to Zahedi and Abdi (2012), *“Vocabulary is related to the ability to understand the meaning of words and use words appropriately.”*. Furthermore, Thornbury (as cited in Zahedi & Abdi, 2012) emphasizes that learners of a foreign language should master at least 2,000 words to communicate with people in their immediate surroundings and to comprehend written texts. This implies that an EFL learner possessing a vocabulary of approximately 2,000 words is expected to understand most daily conversations and infer meaning from context more effectively. Nevertheless, students often continue to face difficulties in various aspects, such as pronunciation, spelling, reading, and writing of the vocabulary they are learning. This issue aligns with the researcher’s teaching experience at SMP Tunas Dharma Karawang, where eighth-grade students were observed struggling to learn English vocabulary. Their limited vocabulary mastery hindered them from expressing their thoughts in English. Oljira (as cited in Saniyah, 2020) also found that students experience difficulties in formulating ideas in both speaking and writing, identifying limited vocabulary as the primary cause of their linguistic challenges. Similarly, Saniyah (2020) revealed that students encounter difficulties in understanding most of the vocabulary found in reading texts.

The researcher observed that the English teacher at the school had implemented the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) in classroom instruction. During the application of VSS, students appeared to participate actively in the learning process. The Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy represents an innovative pedagogical approach designed to engage learners in identifying, collecting, and exploring new words based on their daily experiences, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and relevance in vocabulary learning. This strategy motivates students to independently seek new words and understand their meanings. According to Ruddell (2008), the primary objective of this instructional strategy is to support long-term vocabulary acquisition and enhance academic language development across disciplines. Furthermore, Ruddell (2005) emphasizes that in VSS, students are responsible for selecting words from texts or other learning materials according to their interests, which increases their engagement and comprehension. However, in its practical implementation, VSS presents specific challenges for teachers. This issue represents a research gap, as limited studies have addressed the challenges teachers encounter when applying this strategy in classroom settings or examined its effectiveness in improving students’ vocabulary mastery. Therefore, based on the aforementioned rationale, the researcher intends to conduct a study on the implementation of VSS as a strategy to enhance students’ vocabulary mastery at the eighth-grade level of junior high school. Previous studies have identified several benefits of applying VSS in vocabulary learning, yet they have not explicitly demonstrated how this strategy assists students in acquiring English vocabulary. Consequently, this study seeks to explore how VSS can effectively facilitate students’ vocabulary learning.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative research design utilizing a case study approach. This approach enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative data collected throughout the investigation. This study was carried out in 2025 at a junior high school located in Karawang City. The participants of this research were eighth-grade students, from which a sample of nine students representing three classes was selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed to enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, researcher collected data by conducting observations, interviews with students, and providing student worksheets. Researcher will use field notes to record everything that happens in the classroom during the study. Furthermore, researchers also use a voice recorder to record the results of interviews with students regarding the impact of using the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) during learning. Researcher will also distribute student worksheets to students during learning. The researcher applied the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four interactive stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion .

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Challenges Faced by Students in Learning Vocabulary Mastery.

Based on the analysis of the collected data, several challenges encountered by students in learning vocabulary were identified. Observation results indicated that most students experienced difficulty understanding the meanings of newly introduced words. On several occasions, students approached the researcher to ask about the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary items they encountered in the narrative texts used during the learning process. Many students were also observed using dictionaries as a primary tool to help them identify and comprehend words that were unfamiliar or difficult to interpret. In addition, data obtained from interviews supported these findings. During the interviews, the researcher asked students how they usually attempted to understand the meaning of newly learned or unfamiliar words. All nine students interviewed reported that they commonly relied on dictionaries or Google Translate to assist them in finding and comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary. Moreover, they frequently sought assistance from their English teacher or classmates to clarify the meanings of new words encountered during lessons.

The researcher also inquired about other challenges students encountered when trying to comprehend the meanings of words during vocabulary learning. Based on the responses obtained from the students, it was revealed that they often faced difficulties because many English words have similar pronunciations but convey entirely different meanings when translated. This similarity in sound caused confusion and made it harder for students to both understand and retain the new vocabulary they were learning. Consequently, students perceived English vocabulary learning as a demanding and complex process. Furthermore, the researcher asked students about their experiences learning vocabulary in English classes, including whether the instructions provided by their teachers were clear and easy to follow, as well as whether the teaching strategies used helped them remember new words effectively. Out of the nine students interviewed, five reported feeling confused by the instructions given during class. They explained that the teacher's explanations were often delivered too quickly, leaving them uncertain about the learning directions provided. Additionally, the teaching strategies implemented during the lessons were considered difficult to follow and lacked



clarity, making it challenging for students to remember newly introduced vocabulary. As a result, many students felt less motivated to continue learning new words.

Furthermore, The researchers are also asked students about the types of learning activities conducted in their English classes and whether these activities supported their vocabulary development or the acquisition of new words. Based on the students' responses, it was found that one of the main challenges they experienced in learning English vocabulary was that the classroom activities provided by their teachers tended to be monotonous and unengaging. The tasks assigned were often repetitive and lacked variety, making the learning process feel dull and less stimulating. Teachers frequently asked students to complete similar exercises, such as composing sentences using specific verbs or creating short dialogue conversations with their seatmates related to the lesson material. As a result, many students reported feeling bored with these repetitive learning activities, perceiving them as ineffective in helping them acquire and remember new vocabulary. Consequently, their vocabulary knowledge remained limited, primarily consisting of basic verbs commonly used in daily communication.

The Advantages of Implementing Vocabulary Self - Collection Strategy.

Based on students' experiences after the implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) in English classes, they expressed that the strategy significantly supported their process of learning new vocabulary. Students reported feeling more actively involved in the learning activities and appreciated the introduction of a new instructional approach that made vocabulary learning more engaging and effective. During classroom sessions, students showed noticeable enthusiasm as they searched for unfamiliar words or those whose meanings they did not yet understand. Through this process, they became more independent in identifying and exploring new vocabulary encountered in reading materials, particularly in recount texts. The application of VSS also aided students in retaining and recalling the meanings of newly learned words. Furthermore, students demonstrated the ability to explain and discuss the new vocabulary they discovered more confidently and effectively during English lessons, indicating a deeper understanding and improved mastery of the words they had learned.

The researchers asked students about their perceptions and feelings toward the implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS), specifically whether the use of VSS helped them better understand the meanings of new words and whether it made the learning process more enjoyable. Based on the interview results, students expressed positive feelings after the application of VSS in English learning. They appreciated discovering a new and engaging approach to learning vocabulary, as the strategy required them to search for and select words they considered important or unfamiliar, then explore their meanings based on the context of a reading passage. In this case, students worked with a recount text titled *Celebrating Independence Day at School*, which provided them with a fresh and interactive learning experience. Through this process, students became more involved and motivated in learning activities. Moreover, after implementing VSS, they reported that the strategy helped them identify new words more easily while also improving their ability to understand and remember the meanings of the vocabulary they had recently learned.

Besides that, The researchers interviewed students whether they felt more actively engaged in the learning process following the implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS). Based on the students' responses, it became evident that they felt more motivated to take an active role throughout the learning activities. They reported contributing more actively during group discussions with their peers and demonstrating



greater initiative in gathering new vocabulary to be shared and discussed collectively. Additionally, students expressed a sense of responsibility in exploring the meanings of the words they discovered, which fostered a more collaborative and participatory classroom atmosphere. This increased level of engagement suggested that the application of VSS successfully encouraged students to become more involved and invested in their vocabulary learning process.

In addition to being motivated to participate more actively during class, the students were also encouraged to think more critically when identifying and understanding the meanings of new words. The implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) played a significant role in fostering students' analytical abilities, as it required them to select new words, define the meanings of their chosen vocabulary, and discuss these words collaboratively within their study groups. Based on classroom observations, students demonstrated critical thinking skills when selecting words that were contextually relevant to the reading materials provided. They analyzed and discussed the meanings of the vocabulary items they had chosen together with their group members, showing deeper engagement in the learning process. Several words particularly captured their attention, which they recorded in their group's VSS chart. Among the selected vocabulary were *appreciating*, which they interpreted as *memberikan pujian* according to the reading context; *ceremony*, which they translated as *upacara*; *independence*, which they defined as *kemerdekaan*; and *hilarious*, which they understood as *hal lucu* or *menyenangkan*. These examples reflected how students not only learned to find new words but also developed their ability to interpret and contextualize vocabulary meaningfully through discussion and collaboration.

Discussion

The Challenges Faced by Students in Learning Vocabulary Mastery

Based on the findings presented in the previous section, the primary challenge encountered by students in learning vocabulary lies in their struggle to comprehend the meanings of newly encountered and unfamiliar words. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Wulandari, Alaydrus, and Ni'mah (2020), which revealed that students frequently face challenges in understanding the meanings of English vocabulary due to their lack of familiarity with the words. This issue is further compounded by the fact that many English words possess similar pronunciations yet convey entirely different meanings, making it even more difficult for students to distinguish and remember them accurately during the learning process.

Furthermore, a single word can carry multiple meanings depending on the context in which it appears. However, many students are unaware of this linguistic complexity and often assume that a word retains the same meaning in all situations (Harmer, 2010). Such misconceptions lead to confusion and prevent students from developing a deeper and more accurate understanding of the new vocabulary they encounter. Thornbury (2004) explains that mastering vocabulary involves at least six major challenges: pronunciation, spelling, length and complexity, grammatical features, meaning, and range, including connotations and idiomatic usage. This suggests that vocabulary learning difficulties are multifaceted and extend beyond merely understanding the literal meanings of words.

Another challenge closely associated with vocabulary learning is students' difficulty in retaining the meanings of newly acquired words. Retention becomes particularly challenging when words are not understood within their contextual framework. Craik and Lockhart's (1972) Levels of Processing Theory posits that the depth of cognitive processing directly influences how effectively information is remembered. In classroom practice, many students try to overcome this obstacle by using online translation tools such as Google Translate to



identify meanings, while others seek assistance from teachers or classmates. Although such strategies may offer temporary support, they tend to promote only surface-level comprehension and fail to ensure long-term vocabulary retention. This condition indicates that students' vocabulary learning approaches remain largely superficial and dependent, rather than promoting autonomy and deeper learning engagement.

Apart from linguistic obstacles, students also encounter challenges arising from teachers' instructional delivery and classroom strategy design. According to Huyen and Ngain, as cited in Komalasari (2022), difficulties in vocabulary learning frequently occur when students lose interest because teachers focus primarily on explaining word definitions, pronunciation, spelling, and grammatical rules. Furthermore, when instructional delivery is rushed or lacks clarity, students often experience confusion and reduced engagement in the learning process. These issues underscore the critical role of teacher clarity, effective pacing, and engaging pedagogical approaches in facilitating successful vocabulary acquisition.

Students also expressed that the learning strategies employed by teachers tend to be monotonous and ineffective. For example, classroom tasks such as constructing sentences using specific verbs or practicing simple dialogues are perceived as repetitive and lack creativity. Consequently, students experience a decline in interest and motivation, which hinders their ability to develop vocabulary efficiently. Zhou (2011) highlights the importance of teachers acknowledging and adapting to diverse student learning styles to enhance engagement in the learning process. The absence of varied and interactive instructional approaches not only diminishes student motivation but also limits opportunities for deeper cognitive processing and retention of new vocabulary.

The Vocabulary Self Collection Strategy (VSS) contributes to helped students in learning English and facilitated students' learning vocabulary.

The implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) enables students to explore new approaches to vocabulary learning and to develop more effective learning strategies. Overall, students respond positively to this method, as it offers them a novel and engaging experience in acquiring vocabulary. Through VSS, learners are encouraged to collect new words that they perceive as important, unfamiliar, or meaningful within the context of their reading materials. This process fosters learner autonomy by encouraging students to take ownership of their learning, which in turn motivates them to participate more actively in identifying learning strategies that are both suitable and enjoyable for expanding their vocabulary knowledge. As noted by Wanpen et al. (2013), one of the crucial determinants of students' success in learning English lies in their ability to develop and utilize effective vocabulary learning strategies. Thus, the implementation of VSS not only broadens students' vocabulary but also enhances their strategic competence in language learning.

In addition to introducing students to new learning approaches, the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) also encourages greater student participation in classroom activities. This strategy can be classified as a student-centered learning approach, in which learners serve as the primary agents of vocabulary acquisition, while the teacher functions as a facilitator who provides guidance and clarification when necessary (Gelişli, 2009). The transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model marks an important pedagogical shift, as traditional vocabulary instruction often depends heavily on teacher explanations, thereby restricting student autonomy and engagement. In contrast, VSS promotes learner agency by enabling students to identify and discuss words they find difficult, fostering a more interactive, collaborative, and engaging learning environment.

The implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) also promotes the development of students' critical thinking skills. When learners identify new words from a

text, they are required to justify the significance of those words, analyze their contextual meanings, and collaboratively negotiate appropriate definitions with their peers. This process involves analytical and reflective thinking, which contributes to deeper and more meaningful vocabulary acquisition. As noted by Wong et al. (2021), the capacity to retain, process, and apply knowledge is fundamental for students to develop and employ effective learning strategies. VSS inherently nurtures these competencies by combining word selection, contextual interpretation, and collaborative discussion within the learning process. Moreover, the cooperative nature of VSS facilitates peer learning, allowing students to gain insights not only from their teacher but also from the diverse perspectives of their classmates, thereby enriching their understanding of vocabulary use across different contexts.

From a critical standpoint, the strength of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) lies in its dual emphasis on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Cognitively, it facilitates vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure, contextualized usage, and meaningful discussion factors that Graves (2006) identifies as essential components of effective vocabulary instruction. Affectively, VSS fosters motivation and engagement by encouraging students to take personal ownership of their learning. Nevertheless, the success of VSS is also contingent upon adequate teacher scaffolding. As noted by Harmon, Wood, and Hedrick (2006), without appropriate guidance, students may choose words that are overly simple, irrelevant, or disconnected from the intended learning objectives. Therefore, teachers must ensure that the selected words are appropriately challenging to stimulate linguistic development while remaining suitable for the learners' proficiency levels.

Another significant aspect of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) is its alignment with the concept of lexical depth of knowledge, which pertains to the extent of learners' understanding of a word's multiple dimensions, including its meaning, usage, and collocational relationships (Qian, 2002). By guiding students to analyze words within context and engage in collaborative discussions, VSS enhances not only the breadth of vocabulary knowledge referring to the number of words known but also its depth, emphasizing the quality of understanding. This comprehensive approach to word learning fosters more durable and transferable vocabulary knowledge, enabling students to apply new words effectively in authentic communicative situations.

In summary, the implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) plays a pivotal role in enhancing vocabulary learning by fostering learner autonomy, encouraging critical and analytical thinking, and increasing motivation through student-centered engagement. Although challenges persist in guiding students to select appropriate words and ensuring consistent instructional support, VSS stands as a compelling alternative to conventional teacher-centered vocabulary instruction. Its focus on active learner participation and contextualized exploration of language aligns with contemporary pedagogical perspectives, which emphasize the importance of strategic learning, autonomy, and critical thinking as essential components in achieving proficiency in a foreign language.

CONCLUSION

Students frequently encounter several challenges when learning new vocabulary, one of which is the difficulty in understanding word meanings. This issue often arises because many English words share similar pronunciations, yet differ in spelling and meaning, making it difficult for learners to recall newly acquired words. In addition, the instructional delivery and teaching strategies used by teachers in the classroom are sometimes unclear and less effective in supporting vocabulary learning. The rapid and rushed delivery of instructions



often leads to confusion, preventing students from fully grasping the learning material. Moreover, students perceive classroom activities as unengaging and overly basic, which contributes to their lack of interest and reinforces the perception that learning new English vocabulary is challenging.

The implementation of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) helps students discover new methods and strategies for learning vocabulary. Through the application of VSS, students express positive feelings as they gain new learning experiences and identify approaches that align with their individual learning preferences. VSS also motivates students to participate more actively during classroom activities. As a student-centered learning method, it encourages learners to take initiative in identifying new words and engaging in discussions to explore their meanings. Moreover, the implementation of VSS fosters the development of students' critical and analytical thinking skills. By selecting new words and interpreting their meanings according to contextual usage, students enhance their ability to think critically and reflectively throughout the learning process.

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