

STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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Vocabulary acquisition concerns on how people expand the numbers of words they understand when learning a new language. Knowing words in a second or foreign language is vitally important because the reader will be able to understand the written text well and the speaker will be able to communicate basic ideas through vocabulary even if the person does not understand how to create a grammatically-correct sentence. As Madsen argued, "mastering vocabulary is the primary thing that every student should acquire in learning English" (Harold, 1983). Therefore, acquiring a sufficiently large vocabulary is one of the important tasks faced by L2 learners in order to comprehend the written texts in reading as one of the four basic features of language learning.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, Acquisition

INTRODUCTION

At higher education, reading becomes important as a way of knowledge gaining. The reality reading takes roles in absorbing and disseminating information to readers. Tony Buzan stated in his book, "reading is understanding what the writer intended, taking in the written word, and also the assimilation of printed information" (Buzan, 1991). Reading is a process of extracting a message from a text which has been constructed by a writer using orthographic symbols, a writer encodes the message a reader decodes it (Murphy, 1997).

Madsen stated in his book *Teaching Technique in English as a Second Language*, "mastering vocabulary is the primary thing that every student should acquire in learning English" (Madsen, 1983). It is strengthened by Michael Lewis's statement as cited by Elena and Raquel that acquiring a sufficiently large vocabulary is one of the important tasks facing Second Language (L2) learners (Elena and Raquel, 2020).

In Oxford's taxonomy, stated "language learning strategies: what every teacher should know", the strategies generally divided into two major parts: direct strategies and indirect strategies. Both of them consist of three groups: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies. Every single strategy has both advantages and disadvantages.

Researches explored the acquiring vocabulary through reading. Subekti and Lawson conducted researches together in the scope of vocabulary acquisition of postgraduate students. This study was then reported in a paper entitled *Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies of Indonesian Postgraduate Students through Reading*. They used a taxonomy, which adapted from Lawson and Hogben (Lawson and Hogben, 1996). Subekti and Lawson grouped the strategies into non-elaboration strategies and elaboration strategies. Furthermore, the strategies were then grouped into more specific sub-categories: passive, active non-elaboration, simple elaboration, and complex elaboration (Subekti and Lawson, 2007).

This research focused on key issues on vocabulary acquisition strategies. They were strategies of English Department students in encountering new English vocabularies in order to understand the meanings of the words. Moreover, the study concerned about strategy do students applied the most effectively in acquiring vocabularies.

Reading Comprehension

Hadley defined reading as communication since it connects the author and the reader. It involves a mental process of the reader to create her/his comprehension of the text based on her/his purpose of the reading (Hadley, 2001). Through

reading, the reader processes knowledge and information thus it is an active or re-receptive rather than a passive skill. In addition, Tony Buzan describes that reading is understanding what the writer intended, taking in the written word, and the assimilation of printed information (Buzan, 1991).

Readers use their background of knowledge and experience to compose meaning from the text in reading process. In this process, the readers connect the ideas in the text to what they already know in order to get the comprehension of the text. In addition, most people can understand the material they read after reading word-by-word and spending a lot of time repeating the difficult term.

Grabe & Stoller, there are seven purposes of reading, those are reading to search for simple information, to skim quickly, to learn from text, to get an integrate information, to search information needed for writing, to critique texts and to achieve general comprehension (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Indeed, comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading which is defined as *"the understanding of what is being read"* (Baker, 2008).

Reading comprehension is an interactive process as a transaction between the reader and the author through the text. Moreover, comprehension is not something that happens after reading. It is the thinking done before, during, and after reading. The reader's capabilities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences affect the act of reading (Supono, 2009).

In creating the meaning to comprehend the text a reader has to understand the text well. To read a perfect comprehension, Henry states that 12 abilities to be mastered by the reader. Here, the writer has summarized it into 5.

1. Ability to associate the meaning and understand words based on the context.
2. Ability to read and understand the phrase, clause sentence, paragraph and whole selection.
3. Ability to get main idea, follow direction and draw inference.
4. Ability to get involved in reading, organization of the text, tone, mood and writer intent.

Ability to retain main idea and related it with reader experience (Smith and Emerald, 1961).

Vocabulary Acquisition

Nuttal's states that "vocabulary is a lexical item closely defined as any words or groups of words with meaning" (Bahar, 2011). Moreover, without sufficient vocabulary, even though a student learns grammar well, the communication cannot be facilitated. David Walkins summed up the importance of vocabulary learning as quoted by Thornbury that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Thornbury, 2002). This statement also strengthened by Dellar H and Hocking D's idea "If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words" (quoted in Thornbury, 2002).

Vocabulary acquisition concerns on how people expand the numbers of words they understand when learning a new language. Knowing words in a second or foreign language is vitally important because the reader will be able to understand the written text well and the speaker will be able to communicate basic ideas through vocabulary even if the person does not understand how to create a grammatically-correct sentence. As Madsen argued, "mastering vocabulary is the primary thing that every student should acquire in learning English" (Harold, 1983). Therefore, acquiring a sufficiently large vocabulary is one of the important tasks faced by L2 learners in order to comprehend the written texts in reading as one of the four basic features of language learning.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The general ideas of vocabulary learning strategies is almost similar with language learning strategies as it is a subcategory in the framework of language learning strategies but it more focuses on vocabulary learning.

Takac defined vocabulary learning strategies as some activities, behaviors, steps or techniques used by learners to help them to discover lexical items of the word, meaning and form, and then store it in their brain. Furthermore, when they need it they can retrieve and actively use it in language production (Takac, 2008).

Besides, Cameron stated a general definition of vocabulary learning strategies as "actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary" (Cameron, 2001). In addition, Cameron tried to imply that in learning vocabulary students apply some actions or steps that can help their learning.

Furthermore, Catalan proposed a more details definition of vocabulary learning strategies. She defined vocabulary learning strategies as knowledge about mechanisms (process, strategies) which is used in order to learn vocabulary as steps or actions taken by students. It emphasizes sequential actions or steps that students take in applying the strategies or learning vocabulary, from finding out the meaning to applying the information in actions.

Vocabulary-learning might be "shallow" and "deep". Learners read lots and learn fast, and ignore many unknown words used the "shallow" strategies to help them. These strategies are; guessing from the context, repeating a word several times and lead to poor retention of the words. On the other hand, the learners who learn slowly but lead to a greater retention preferred to choose the "deep" one. These strategies are; dictionary usage, associations and keyword method.

Taxonomies of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Over the years, the experts in vocabulary learning strategies had created several taxonomies based on their experiences during the research (i.e. Sanoui, 1995; Gu and Johnson, 1996; Lawson and Hogben, 1998; Schmitt, 1997; Nation, 2001 as cited in Ruutmets, 2005, thesis). Therefore, this study adopts, Schmitt's Taxonomy as the major theory adopted in the instrument.

Schmitt categorized vocabulary learning strategies into six groups of two main categories, discovery strategies and consolidation strategies, and fifty-eight individual strategies.

1. Discovery Strategies are the strategies that learners used to discover denotation of new words when they first encounter them.
 - a. Determination strategies (Discov-Det): are used to discover a new word's meaning without recourse to another's person expertise.
 - b. Social Strategies (Discov-Soc): are used to understand a new word by asking someone who knows it.
2. Consolidation Strategies are the strategies that learners used to consolidate meanings when they confront the words again.
 - a. Social Strategies (Cons-Soc): are used to understand a new word by having group work.
 - b. Memory Strategies (Cons-Mem): are the approaches, which related new materials to existing knowledge.
 - c. Cognitive Strategies (Cons-Cog): are the manipulations or transformations of target language created by the learners.
 - d. Metacognitive Strategies (Cons-Met): are defined as a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring or evaluating the best way of study (cited in Rummets, 2005).

This study only explored several Schmitt's vocabulary learning strategies in the questionnaire. They are there are Discovery-Determination (Discov-Det), four strategies from Discovery-Social (Discov-Soc), seven strategies from Consolidation-Memory (Cons-Mem) and two strategies from Consolidation- Cognitive (Cons-Cog) strategies involved to collect expected data.

Research Design

This study was a quantitative descriptive. The researchers applied questionnaire to collect data. In addition, the questionnaire was adopted Schmitt's

Taxonomy. The samples of this study were 73 third year students of English Department, Tarbiyah Faculty of Institute Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The samples were students of three classes of reading comprehension. One of important concern that participants already took 8 credits hours of reading comprehension course.

Data Collection Process

Questionnaire

The researchers distributed questionnaires as the major data collection instrument. It consisted of 21 closed-ended items and an opened-ended item. The questionnaire (items 1-21) was adapted from Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. The questionnaire was administered to the third year students of English Department of three units.

Data analysis and discussion

This part reveals the result of the study. The result would be discussed descriptively.

The Questionnaire

From the total numbers of 73 students, 14 students missed the questionnaire distribution due to several reasons. From the statistical calculation, the highest score of vocabulary acquisition strategy of English Department students through reading was "guessing the meaning with the help of the words that they have known in the sentence or paragraph" (question no 5). Conversely, the results indicate that asking the teacher to put new word in another sentence (question no. 11) was not as popular as other strategies since the informants responded to this question was relatively low ($\bar{x} = 2,31$). The strategies were divided into three levels, which are mostly used, averagely used and latest used. Mostly used strategies ranged from 4,0 points to 5,0 points, the averagely used strategies ranged between 3,0 points and

4,0 points, and the least used strategies ranged from the lowest one up to 3,0 points.

Furthermore, the researchers grouped students into two groups, namely; students of higher GPA score and students of lower GPA score. In addition, the higher GPA score ranges from 4.0 to 3.5 (33 students), and the lower GPA score ranges from 3.49 to the lowest one (26 students).

In this analysis part, the researchers discussed 8 questions of 21 closed-ended questions in questionnaire to compare students of higher GPA score and students with lower GPA score. The first four questions were grouped into mostly used and the other four were the last four least used strategies.

Four of Most Used Strategies

Firstly, question *"I guess the meaning with the help of the words that I have known in the sentence or paragraph"* obtained the highest mean scores reached 4,75 points. Therefore, if we combine between *usually* and *always*, we found a different of the result among students which the highest score (72,7%, n=24 students) and the lowest score (50%, n=13 students). It could be concluded that the higher GPA students perceive that guessing new words meaning assisted by familiar words would be helpful. At the mean time, there was 50% of students believed on it. But, most of participants agreed that this strategy came at first of more applicable.

Secondly, dictionary became a beneficial reference book and be more helpful not only for new language learners but also for everyone. The fact that the dictionary believed helps language learners. The statistical data shows that participants stated 39,4%, n=13 students stated *always* used dictionary when they found new words. On the other hand, students with the lower score mostly chose *often* level (30,8%) as the answer, therefore, this strategy become the third choice chosen by them (see chart 5.3 for detail). Carrying dictionary for some students was a burden since it is a little bit heavier than the other books. However, this question became the second highest mean score result as it reached 4,56 points.

Thirdly, English notebook was the third strategy mostly used by the third year students to help them obtaining the meaning of vocabularies in reading. Let's see the chart below for the detail. English notebook at some points is necessary. Jotting a list of new words in it facilitates readers to re-open dictionary when they forgot about the meaning. Statistically proved that 33,3% students with the higher score and 30,8% students with the lower one always write every new single words into their notebook. They believed that notebook could improve their vocabulary acquisition during reading. Additionally, this strategy became the second choice for lower GPA students and the fifth choice for higher GPA students (see chart 5.2).

Fourthly, since using monolingual dictionary came as the alternative way of carrying bilingual dictionary. Therefore, it is no doubt that the 7th question became the fourth choice for students. The chart below will describe the different in result between the higher GPA students and the lower one.

Generally, dictionary is divided into two types, bilingual dictionary and monolingual dictionary. In previous chart (chart 5.5), we found that bilingual dictionary appeared to be the second highest mean scores in vocabulary acquisition strategies chosen by most of students. Here, looking meaning of new words from a monolingual dictionary is the fourth highest choice. Furthermore, what a fantastic and various result showed in chart 5.7 that related to the question no. 7 "*I look it up in a monolingual dictionary*". Students with the higher GPA score dominated the result by reaching 30,3% in *always* level, and only 7,7% from students with the lower one who believed so. In spite of the fact that it became the fourth choice, one student with lower GPA score still never used a monolingual dictionary when they stuck with new English words. Moreover, the strategy stood at the fifth choice for lower GPA students and the third for higher GPA students.

Four of Least Used Strategies

The last four of the least used strategies will be discussed too by focusing on the different between students with higher GPA and students with lower GPA. The last four strategies were (1). I ask the teacher to put new word in another sentence,

(2). I create semantic networks of a word to remember it, (3). I write down the new word along with my own drawings or pictures, and (4). I ask the teacher to explain the meaning of the word in mother tongue.

Firstly, question no. 11 "*I ask the teacher to put new word in another sentence*" is the first lowest mean scores by reaching 2, 31 points among another 21 questions. 48,5% (16) of students with the higher GPA score accompanied by 38,5% (10) of students with the lower GPA score rarely used that kind of strategy in order to help them maintain the meaning of new words. Furthermore, several students never asked their teachers to a new word into a sentence in order to help them finding new words meaning. It is proved by the chart that 27,3% of students with higher GPA and 19,2% of students with lower GPA put their answers in *never level*

Secondly, using English notebook in acquiring vocabulary meaning was a helpful strategy for most of students. However, when students were demanded to create semantic networks, the strategy ended up as the second least used strategies for them.

From the 16th question out of 21 is about creating semantic networks of a word to remember it. 38,5% (10) of lower GPA students stood between *rarely* and *often level* where *sometime level* become their choice accompanied by 21,2% (7) of higher GPA students. Additionally, the higher GPA students had taken led in *rarely level* as the answer with 11 students or 33,3% voices compared with only 4 students or 15,4% of the lower GPA students. Furthermore, 18 students (9 or 27,3% of the higher and 9 or 34, 6% of the lower) never create a semantic network to help themselves maintaining the new words meaning. At the end, with 2,37 points of mean score, the strategy end up to the second lowest result.

Thirdly, reading a book with pictures inside it able to help the reader in understanding the meaning that lied behind it, such as reading a comic book. However, not in this case, here, the readers were demanded to draw their own drawings or pictures in order to assist them in comprehending meaning of new words. The chart reveals that 34,6% (9) of lower GPA students stood at *rarely level*

and 23,1% (6) at *sometime level* whereas the higher GPA students stopped at *never level* by reaching 33,3% (11) and 27,3% (9) at *rarely level*. Based on the above result, the writer concluded that only several students who interested in drawing a picture or a drawing, therefore, no doubt, if the strategy became the third lowest strategy used by students in acquiring vocabulary during reading by ending up at 2,47 points.

Lastly, question no 9 is a little bit similar with the question no 11 where teacher was involved in the strategy. Asking teacher to translate the meaning of new words into their mother tongue was not an appropriate strategy to be used by students since the result showed that most of students' answer found in *sometime level* and *rarely level*. Students with higher GPA score put most of their answer (45,5%) in *sometime level* whereas the lower GPA students stood in *rarely level* (34,6%) as their choice.

In addition, besides 21 closed-ended questions in questionnaire there was an opened-ended question asking students to share about the strategy that they used other than 21 strategies mentioned above during reading process. Unfortunately, there was not any new strategy found in the answers, most of them stated what had been mentioned in the questionnaire.

DISCUSSION

To figure out the answer to the research questions, the data from questionnaire measured and correlated to each other. The first research question is about strategies, which English Department students use when they encounter with new English words in order to understand the meanings of these words. In accordance with questionnaire results, the first four of the highest students' response that the writer found were 1). *Guessing the meaning with the help of the words that readers have known in the sentence or paragraph* as the first highest with 4,75 points of mean scores, 2). *Looking it up in a bilingual dictionary* as the second highest by reaching 4,56 points of mean score, 3). *Writing down new words on my*

English notebook with 4,36 points ended up as the third highest and, 4). *Looking it up in a monolingual dictionary* as the fourth highest by reaching 4,25 points.

Additionally, there were several strategies, which become the last choice for most of students, namely; 1). *Asking the teacher to put new word in another sentence* with only 2,31 points as the first latest strategy used, 2). *Creating semantic networks of a word to remember it* by gaining 2,37 points, 3). *Writing down the new word along with the readers own drawings or pictures* as the third latest one, and act.

Therefore, based on the result above, it can be concluded that the most frequent strategy of the third year students of English Department through reading was "*guessing the meaning with the help of the words that readers have known in the sentence or paragraph*". In the case of the result of the study, there was a slight different between the present study and the previous one in result. Subekti and Lawson, the previous researchers, found that *using dictionary* was the first frequent strategy used by Indonesian postgraduate students in Australia and *guessing strategy* became the second choice. It was in contradiction with the present study result, where *guessing the meaning with the help of the words that readers have known in the sentence or paragraph* stood at the top of the strategies' list, then followed by *using dictionary* and *English notebook*.

Factor that perhaps influenced their decision for choosing "*guessing strategy*" as the dominant one was their lecturers' suggestion to do not always rely on the dictionary when they got problems with vocabularies during reading. Furthermore, with the a little help from their vocabulary retention, the readers felt confident to guess the meaning of new word from the sentence even though sometime they found it incorrect.

In conclusion, every single strategy has it advantage and disadvantage. However, everything is depend on the reader him/herself, when the reader felt that kind of strategy suit him/herself well, then it is better to apply it in their daily. In addition, if it does not, leaving it will be the best decision to make.

CONCLUSION

From the total of 21 strategies adopted from Schmitt's Taxonomy, the first four strategies mostly used by English Department Students were 1). *Guessing the meaning with the help of the words that readers have known in the sentence or paragraph*, 2). *Looking it up in a bilingual dictionary*, 3). *Writing down new words on English notebook*, 4). *Looking it up in a monolingual dictionary*. The most frequent strategy used by English Department Students is *guessing the meaning with the help of the words that readers have known in the sentence or paragraph*.

In conclusion, the least frequent strategy used is *asking the teacher to put new word in another sentence*. Although dictionary was not the first most strategy used, however it is still the best reference in looking for the meaning of the words. Both students with higher GPA score and students with lower GPA score had the same idea only in choosing the first most frequent strategy and the first less one.

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