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## The investigation of vocabulary learning problems and its strategies in learning English

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**ABSTRACT** Words are significant part of human life, without words language is impossible to be conveyed. In learning and teaching a language, vocabulary plays crucial role and especially in learning second or foreign language it is considered as big obstacle which the learners must overcome. Lexical competence is considered as the heart of language learning and the goal of language teaching is to improve the language competence of learners.

The present study investigates what types of vocabulary learning strategies are used to solve the learning problems faced in learning vocabulary in English language learning and comprehensive literature is given on varieties of vocabulary learning strategies given by different researchers. Quantitative approach is used in study to collect and analyze data through close ended questionnaire from students at institute of English Language and

Literature, University of Sindh Pakistan. Results show that most frequently used strategies are “Memory Strategies” and “Cognitive Strategies” which students of IELL university of Sindh used mostly from other strategies, and we also came to know that students use vocabulary learning strategies to enhance their word knowledge in learning a language.

In these strategies students remember the new words, repeatedly practice new words, enhance vocabulary by listening words from movies and songs and news. The least strategy used were social strategies.

**Key words:** English language, vocabulary, Lexical competence, learning strategies.

### **Introduction and background of study**

Vocabulary is the major problem that usually students experience in learning English.

Vocabulary is not just concerned with meaning of words but also with their pronunciation and spellings of words. The second problem that most students confuse is how to use the new words in an appropriate way. Sometimes learners overlap the meanings of related words. Mostly students knew the meanings in their head, but fails to resemble and how to articulate in English, obviously there are hundreds and thousands of words having different contextual meaning and the best way is to practice and using variety of strategies to tackle these problems.

Strategies play a key role in a learning process of every student and it is a road map through which we can easily accomplish our learning destination. Mostly “Good learners” use effective strategies for them, every learner have his/her own learning strategies. But now lots, of research done on learning strategies. In the field of language learning both ESL/EFL strategies is of core importance, for acquiring a language in an easy and productive way. In learning a language, learners need to be educated with many types of techniques and strategies which can helps them in acquiring language and vocabulary in a profound way. This study focuses on the research on vocabulary learning and varieties of strategies used by learners in order to acquire good grip over vocabulary and making mental lexicon.

In early language learning, grammar was viewed as the main task in second language teaching, and importance was only given to mastery of grammatical structure.

### **Research Question**

**Question no 1:** How we learn vocabulary?

**Question no 2:** Which techniques or strategies are used for learning a vocabulary?

### **Aim and objectives of study**

It is important to be aware of the vocabulary leaning strategies and how students adopt vocabulary learning strategies profoundly.

The aim and purpose of my study is to investigate the types of vocabulary learning strategies used by learners to solve the problems faced in building and learning vocabulary in English language.

### **Statement of problem**

In the academic career of my life, I have noticed that students of ESL with reduced vocabulary face various problems. They have difficulties of learning language when they are encountered with many unfamiliar words which are not in their prior knowledge. Because of one major problem, poor vocabulary they confront with each learning problem. When reading they find difficulties in reading, not comprehending the meaning of text correctly. Likewise, when, writing because of poor vocabulary students fail to achieve good marks in composition, in speaking they are not fluent enough and they hesitate same case with listening, it means vocabulary is playing crucial part in learning of language and it affects the other areas of language too. So, these problems are like a stone on our way to language learning simply because of these problems a student can't not write effectively, not speak fluently and neither good in listening activities. In order to solve this mystery, language learning strategies should be taught to students. By using various techniques and strategies, leaners can come up with these hurdles.

### **Significance of study**

- The study reveals the most of problems faced by students in order to improve their language.
- By this study we come across multiple strategies for improving learner's outcome.
- This study helps the students to learn variety of strategies and by this they can enhance and polish their learning styles.

## **Review of related literature and research works on vocabulary learning strategies Introduction of vocabulary and word**

I will start with the great word of Wilkins (1992) wrote that "... One can deliver very little without Grammar but, one cannot convey anything without vocabulary. (p. 111 – 112).

As Schmitt (2010) noted, "learners carry around dictionaries and not the grammar books" (p.4). From above statements we know that words play a very important role in learning any language. vocabulary serves as the backbone of language.

Huang and Lin (2012, p.273) mentioned the role of vocabulary by stating that "we can express our own ideas effectively only when we have sufficient vocabulary with which to do so ". We can better understand form Scrivener example described below.

English vocabulary is the combination of three things i.e. form, meaning, use and different meanings related with one word. (Nation & Meara, 2010).

As the vocabulary taught to students within the class and outside environment so these students possess sufficient vocabulary. Most of the class activities are carried out verbally so students knowing different words and being able to use those words in language leads to successful activities. At the end of schooling, an adequate vocabulary is highly important for showing talents in society. (Graves, 2006, p. 1).

From this we can get the idea that maximum knowledge of vocabulary/words also play a good role in academic success because obviously good vocabulary helps to speak proficiently and in good writing.

Many scholars have worked on the importance of teaching and learning vocabulary.

Lee Luan and sappathy (2011, p.6) indicate that learning only the structure and function of a language cannot be helpful in the process of comprehension and communicating in language.

### **Why is vocabulary important?**

□ It gives you a confidence. (Margaret Hyder & Catherine Hilton, p. 48).

### **Defining a word:**

Language consists of large amount of words. Words are the constituent units of language. In vocabulary building it's important to learn what words are.

Written vocabulary, Graves (2006:11) defines words as 'groups of letters separated by white space.' Words with different meaning can create a problem for second language learners.

When the limited language proficiency it's difficult to acquire language learning goals.

There are hurdles like, when searching a word in the dictionary on might find 10 different meanings of a single word so how to know which one to choose?

**Table 1: What Is Involved in Knowing a Word.**

From I. S. P. Nation (2001:27).

<b>Form</b>	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	R	What parts are recognisable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
<b>Meaning</b>	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concept and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
<b>Use</b>	Grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what pattern must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency...)	R	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

Note: In column 3, R= receptive knowledge, P=productive knowledge.

## **Methodology**

In conducting this research, the researcher used quantitative approach to collect and analyze data through close ended questionnaire from students. Researcher conducted questionnaire tool from students of institute of English language and literature, university of Sindh Pakistan, in order to know what strategies, do student use for developing vocabulary.

### **Participants:**

The participants in this research study were 112 of department of English language and literature, university of Sindh. Students were from 1<sup>st</sup> year 2<sup>nd</sup> year and from 4<sup>th</sup> year, both female and male respondents of different ages that range between 19- 24years old.

### **Instruments:**

The method used to collect data for this study was a survey. In this study the researcher used an adapted version of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire proposed by Schmitt (1997).

The questionnaire was distributed to the students in class. The researcher remained in the classroom to respond to any queries that the students may have from the questionnaire. Upon completion, the researcher collected all the answered questionnaires. The instrument used in this survey is a 22-item questionnaire.

### **Questionnaire construction**

The questionnaire used in this survey was from Schmitt's questionnaire (1997) presented in his classification of vocabulary learning strategies. Items that were problematic were omitted.

### **Data collection:**

This will be a quantitative study and the tool in data collection will be questionnaire, which will be conducted from the students of IELL university of Sindh. The data will be collected from both male and female students. The 22-item questionnaires were introduced by the researcher. The respondents were also told that they had to answer in terms of how well the explanations of each item describe them.

### **Data analysis**

The present study aimed to explore which strategies were employed by the students to deal with their vocabulary learning problems. For investigating the vocabulary learning strategies used by learners, VLS classification purposed by Schmitt (1977) was used as the guide in the process of data analysis.

SPSS program was used for analyzing the data obtained from the Questionnaires.

The questionnaires of the six strategy categories: the Determination, the Social (Discovery), the Social (Consolidation), the Memory, the Cognitive and the Metacognitive.

120 questionnaires had been distributed among the participants and 112 questionnaires were returned. All of the questionnaires were analyzed.

VLSs STRATEGIES	Most Frequently Used	value	Least Frequently Used	value
		4		0
DETERMINATION STRATEGIES	I use a bilingual dictionary to help me translate into mother language.	(46.9)%	I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings.	(60.2) %
			I learn meaning of words by identifying parts of speech	(68.1) %
SOCIAL STRATEGIES	I know some new words when working in group works.	(60.2) %	I ask the teacher to translate the words into mother language.”	(38.9) %
	I practice English in group work activities.	(54.0) %		
MEMORY STRATEGIES	I make use of my knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of words”.	(71.7) %	“I speak word out aloud when studying.”	(63.7) %
	I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.”	(35.4) %		
COGNITIVE STRATEGIES	“I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs”	(43.4) %	Nill	
	“When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.”	(39.8)%		
METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES	I listen to English songs and news.”	(42.5) %,	I use only exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.	(75.2)
	I memorize words from English magazines”	(33.6) %		

## Results

From the findings of the results, most frequently used strategy were “**Memory Strategies**” and “**Cognitive Strategies**” which learners used mostly from other strategies, In these strategies students remember the new words, repeatedly practice new words, enhance vocabulary by listening words from movies and songs.

The **Metacognitive strategies** helps to ease learning with many English sources and it can interest and motivate learners. Learners use strategies like, listening to English songs and news, and memorizing words from English magazines or word puzzles. In Memory strategies learners usually guess the meaning of words and repeatedly use the new words in sentences to remember them.

Using a dictionary and guessing from the context were common strategies.

**The least strategy used were social strategies** because in our context classes are not based on task or group activities.

Tables are used to show mean scores **Gender** of each vocabulary learning strategy.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	60	53.1	53.1	53.1
	female		46.9	46.9	100.0
	Total	53			
		113	100.0	100.0	

Male respondents are more than female respondents.

### Description of results:

The questionnaires were used to collect data. They consisted of 22 items classified by types of strategies, which were adapted from the vocabulary learning strategy classification based on Schmitt's classification (1997):

Determination, Social, Memory, and Cognitive and metacognitive.

According to Determination Strategies, the results show that respondents most frequently used the strategy item

1; "I use a bilingual dictionary to help me translate into mother language." to find the meaning of new words (46.9)% selected the value "often use it" . While, the least used strategy was item 2 and 3, 2 "I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings" (60.2) % selected the value "sometime use it". 3 I learn meaning of words by identifying parts of speech (68.1) % also selected the value sometime use it.

- In Social Strategies, the results show that to interact with other, in vocabulary learning, the strategy, which the student use most frequently was item 7; "I know some new words when working in group works." (60.2) % selected the value "often use it" and other frequently used strategy is item 8;"I practice English in group work activities" (54.0) %. While the least used strategy was item 4; "I ask the teacher to translate the words into mother language." (38.9) % students used the value "never use it".
- In Memory strategies, the respondents most frequently used for storing and recovering new information was item 11; "I make use of my knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of words". (71.7) %

students often use it, and another frequently used strategy is, “I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.” (35.4) % students always use it. While the least used strategy by the respondents was item12; “I speak word out aloud when studying.” (63.7) % students sometime use it.0.

**Class**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent		
BS part 1	27	23.9	23.9	Cumulative Percent	
BS part 2	48	42.5	42.5		23.9
BS part 4	38	33.6	33.6		66.4
Total	113	100.0	100.0		100.0

1. I use bilingual dictionary to help translate English into mother language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	22	19.5	19.5	19.5
often use it			27.4	46.9
sometime use it	31	27.4		69.0
seldom use it			22.1	82.3
Never use it	25	22.1		100.0
Total			13.3	
	15	13.3	17.7	



	20	17.7	100.0	
	113	100.0		

**2. I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	18	15.9	15.9	
always use it	20	17.7	17.7	15.9
often use it				33.6
sometime use it	30	26.5	26.5	60.2
seldom use it				80.5
never use it	23	20.4	20.4	100.0
Total	22	19.5	19.5	
	113	100.0	100.0	

**2. I ask my classmate for meaning.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	14	12.4	12.4	12.4
				35.4
always use it	26	23.0	23.0	61.1
often use it				78.8
sometime use it	29	25.7	25.7	100.0
seldom use it				
never use it				
Total	20	17.7	17.7	

	24	21.2	21.2	
	113	100.0	100.0	

3. I learn meaning of words by identifying parts of speech

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it				20.4
often use it	23	20.4	20.4	41.6
sometime use it	24	21.2	21.2	68.1
	30	26.5	26.5	
	19	16.8	16.8	
4seldom use it				85.0
never use it	17		15.0	100.0
Total		15.0		
	113	100.0	100.0	

4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into mother language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
				3.5
	4	3.5	3.5	

always use it				15.9
often use it	14	12.4	12.4	43.4
sometime use it				61.1
seldom use it	31	27.4	27.4	100.0
never use it				
Total	20	17.7	17.7	
	44	38.9	38.9	
	113	100.0	100.0	

**5.I know some new words when working in group works.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	32		28.3	28.3
often use it	36		31.9	60.2
sometime use it	28	28.3	24.8	85.0
seldom use it	11	31.9	9.7	94.7
never use it	6	24.8	5.3	100.0
		9.7		
		5.3		
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

**6. I know some new words when working in group works.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	32	28.3	28.3	28.3
often use it	36	31.9	31.9	60.2

		24.8		
sometime use it	28	9.7	24.8	85.0
seldom use it	11	5.3	9.7	94.7
	6			100.0
never use it			5.3	

**7. I study spelling of new words.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
always use it		33.6	33.6	33.6
often use it	38	20.4	20.4	54.0
sometime use it	23	19.5	19.5	73.5
seldom use it	22	15.9	15.9	89.4
never use it	18	10.6	10.6	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

**8. I make use of my knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of words**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	40	35.4	35.4	35.4
often use it	22	36.3	36.3	71.7

sometime use it	5	19.5	19.5	91.2
seldom use it	113	4.4	4.4	95.6
never use it		4.4	4.4	100.0
Total		100.0	100.0	

9. I speak word out aloud when studying.

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	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid always use it	25			
often use it		22.1	22.1	22.1
someime use		17.7	17.7	39.8
it seldom use it	20	23.9	23.9	63.7
never use it	27	15.9	15.9	79.6
Total	18	20.4	20.4	100.0
	23	100.0	100.0	
	113			

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			Valid	Cumulative
	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
Valid	always use it	25		
	often use it		22.1	22.1
	someime use		17.7	-
	it seldom use it	20		39.8
	never use it	27	23.9	63.7
	Total		15.9	
		18		79.6
		23	100.0	100.0
		113		
			100.0	

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**10. I repeatedly practice new words.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	34	30.1	30.1	30.1
always use it	28	24.8	24.8	54.9
often use it	23	20.4	20.4	75.2
sometime use it	15	13.3	13.3	88.5
seldom use it	13	11.5	11.5	100.0
Never use it	13	11.5	11.5	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

**11. When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	45	39.8	39.8	39.8
always use it	33	29.2	29.2	69.0
often use it	20	17.7	17.7	86.7
sometime use it	11	9.7	9.7	96.5
seldom use it	4	3.5	3.5	100.0
never use it	4	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

**12. I record vocabulary from English sound track movies in my notebook**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Relative Percent
always use it	34	30.1	30.1	30.1
often use it		18.6	18.6	48.7
sometime use it	21			ISSN:2059-
seldom use it	23	20.46596(	20.4	69.0
never use it				80.5
Total	113	100.0	100.0	100.0

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13. I listen to English songs and news

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	48	42.5	42.5	42.5
	26	23.0	23.0	65.5
always use it	22	19.5	19.5	85.0
often use it	11	9.7	9.7	94.7
sometime use it				100.0
seldom use it	6	5.3	5.3	
never use it				
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

14. I memorize words from English magazines.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	24	21.2	21.2	



	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	38	33.6	33.6	33.6
often use it	29	25.7	25.7	59.3
sometime use it	25	22.1	22.1	81.4
	12	10.6	10.6	92.0
seldom use it	9	8.0	8.0	100.0
never use it				
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

always use it				21.2
often use it	26	23.0	23.0	44.2
sometime use it				65.5
seldom use it	24	21.2	21.2	82.3
never use it				100.0
Total	19	16.8	16.8	
	20	17.7	17.7	
	113	100.0	100.0	

**15. I review my own English vocabulary notes for reviewing before the  
 next lesson starts**

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	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

	34	30.1	30.1	30.1
	21	18.6	18.6	48.7
always use it	23	20.4	20.4	69.0
often use it	13	11.5	11.5	80.5
sometime use it	22	19.5	19.5	100.0
seldom use it				
never use it				
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

16. I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	49	43.4	43.4	43.4
	27	23.9	23.9	67.3
always use it	14	12.4	12.4	79.6
often use it	11	9.7	9.7	89.4
sometime use it				100.0
seldom use it				
naever use it				
Total	12	10.6	10.6	

	113	100.0	100.0	
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**17. I am not worried very much about the difficult words found when  
 reading or listening, I pass them**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	28	24.8	24.8	24.8
	31	27.4	27.4	52.2
	23	20.4	20.4	72.6
always use it	20	17.7	17.7	90.3
Often use it				100.0
sometime use it	11	9.7	9.7	
seldom use it				
never use it				
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

**18. I use only exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
always use it	25	22.1	22.1	22.1
	25	22.1	22.1	44.2
often use it	35	22.1	22.1	75.2
	14	31.0	31.0	
sometime use it	14	31.0	31.0	

		6596(Online)		
	113			87.6
seldom use it		12.4	12.4	
never use it		12.4	12.4	100.0
Total		100.0	100.0	

In Cognitive strategies the students used most frequently, mostly responses are in "always use it". But from all cognitive strategies, item 14; "I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs" (43.4) % students always use it and another most frequently used strategy is "When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly." (39.8)%, students always use it.

19. In Metacognitive strategies the results shows that most of the frequently used strategy of Metacognitive was the item 17; "I listen to English songs and news." by the respondents (42.5) %, students always use it .and second was item 18;" I memorize words from English magazines" (33.6) %always use it. While the item; "I use only exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge." was least used (75.2).

From the above description and findings of the results, we came to know that most frequently used strategies are "Memory Strategies" and "Cognitive Strategies" which students of IELL university of Sindh used mostly from other strategies, and we also came to know that students use vocabulary learning strategies to enhance their word knowledge in learning a language. In these strategies students remember the new words, repeatedly practice new words, enhance vocabulary by listening words from movies and songs. The least strategy used were social strategies. In the associated study. It was mentioned in the study by Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) in their study the strategy most frequently used by junior high school, high school, and university students is use of a bilingual dictionary which is one of the elements of the Determination strategies. Even though the result of the study of English gifted students at Triam Udomsuksa School did not determine that the use of bilingual dictionary was the most frequently used strategy, in the group of Determination strategy the use of bilingual dictionary was the highest in the group. From the result, it can be inferred that the item no.21 (I listen to English songs and news.) and the item no. 24 (Do not worry very much about the difficult words found when reading or listening, I pass them.) in the Metacognitive strategies are the most popular methods to find words' meanings when the respondents first encounter a word problem.

This study also relates with that of Asgari and Mustapha (2011) they found that among the Malaysian students, both 'using a monolingual dictionary' and 'guessing from the context' has been mentioned as common strategies which have been employed in vocabulary learning situation. The popularity of these two strategies may be because the use of a dictionary and guessing from

context clues are common practice in language class for second language learners. Furthermore, “a dictionary gives detailed guidance on pronunciation, grammar and usage with explanations written in controlled, simplified vocabulary” (Asgari and Mustapha. 2011)

## Conclusion

Vocabulary is one of the major problems that usually students experience in learning English. Another problem that most students are confuse in, is how to use the new words in an appropriate way. Sometimes learners overlap the meanings of related words. Mostly students know the meanings in their mind, but fails to resemble and how to articulate in English, obviously there are thousands of words having different contextual meaning and the best way is to practice and using variety of strategies to overcome these problems.

The aim and purpose of my study was to investigate what types of vocabulary learning strategies are used by learners to enhance their vocabulary.

The quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze data through close ended questionnaire from students. An adapted version of the vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) questionnaire by Schmitt (1997) was used in the collection of data .

This study investigated most used strategies and least used vocabulary learning strategies. The data was conducted from the students of IELL university of Sindh Pakistan. SPSS program is used to analyze the data, 120 questionnaires had been distributed and 112 questionnaires were returned. All of the questionnaires were analyzed.

## Discussion and conclusion:

From the core study we came to know that learners depend on varieties of strategies to solve their vocabulary learning problems. Moreover, from the findings of the results, most frequently used strategy were “Memory Strategies “and “Cognitive Strategies” which learners used mostly from other strategies, In these strategies students remember the new words, repeatedly practice new words, enhance vocabulary by listening words from movies and songs. The Metacognitive strategies helps to ease learning with many English sources and it can interest and motivate learners. Learners use strategies like, listening to English songs and news, and memorizing words from English magazines or word puzzles. In Memory strategies learners usually guess the meaning of words and repeatedly use the new words in sentences to remember them. Using a dictionary and guessing from the context were common strategies.

The least strategy used were social strategies because in our context classes are not based on task or group activities.

Teaching plays crucial role in learning a language. Teachers must guide students so that they become aware of their learning strategies and specially help them become more responsible to meet their learning goals. In a nut shell, teachers help students to become good language learners by teaching them in using the accurate strategies or appropriate strategies that suit their level. Then students will become more autonomous to master the language. As the language learning strategies are viewed as good tools for language learners, this study supports the English teachers’ and as well as learners, and how the pupils process information and select the most suitable vocabulary learning strategies to enrich their second language learning. To conclude, greater attention should be given to vocabulary learning strategies by both language teachers and language learners because it will develop learners’ language competence. Strategies

should be used for vocabulary learning, so that the language learners will be successful in their language learning goal.

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