



Teachers' Strategies to Overcome Students' Difficulties in Learning English Vocabulary at Islamic Boarding School

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-23</p> <p>Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Teaching Strategies; Vocabulary Learning Difficulties</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10530</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Ainun Jariah Usman ainunjariah.usman@gmail.com Universitas Negeri Makassar</p>	<p><i>This study aims to explore how teachers overcome students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary at Pesantren Yapid At-Taubah by identifying students' challenges, influencing factors, and the strategies used by the teacher. This research employed a qualitative method involving one English teacher and several students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews and analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students experience difficulties in pronunciation, word complexity, grammatical patterns, understanding meaning, and listening comprehension. These difficulties are influenced by internal factors such as low motivation and limited vocabulary mastery, as well as external factors such as teaching methods and limited exposure to English. To address these challenges, the teacher applied various strategies, including determination, social, memory strategies, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, as well as vocabulary notebooks and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). These strategies were found to be effective in helping students understand, retain, and use vocabulary more appropriately, thereby improving their vocabulary mastery and confidence.</i></p>

1. Introduction

English vocabulary plays a crucial role in language learning as it supports the development of the four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, many students still experience difficulties in understanding and using

English vocabulary, particularly in terms of pronunciation, word forms, meanings, and appropriate usage in different contexts. Students face similar challenges, such as mispronouncing words, misunderstanding meanings, and using inappropriate vocabulary in sentences. Therefore, teachers play an important role in addressing these challenges through the use of appropriate teaching methods.

Previous studies have reported similar findings, indicating that EFL learners often struggle with pronunciation, complex vocabulary, and comprehension. Limited exposure to English and the use of traditional teacher-centered methods are also identified as factors that hinder vocabulary development. In contrast, effective teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, memory techniques, and contextual learning have been shown to improve students' vocabulary mastery. However, most previous studies tend to focus either on students' difficulties or on teaching methods separately, with limited research examining both aspects simultaneously, particularly within the same context.

Therefore, in addition to teaching methods, it is important to consider the strategies used by learners in acquiring vocabulary, as these strategies play a significant role in overcoming learning difficulties. Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) are defined as the techniques or actions used by learners to acquire, retain, and recall vocabulary effectively, especially in contexts with limited exposure to the target language (Nation, 2001). By applying appropriate strategies, learners can enhance their understanding of word meanings and their ability to use vocabulary accurately in context. Schmitt (1997) classifies VLS into five categories: determination, social, memory strategies, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, which support learners in discovering, practicing, organizing, and evaluating their vocabulary learning process.

Recent studies emphasize that vocabulary development is essential for successful language learning and significantly influences students' overall language proficiency. Nevertheless, students continue to face challenges related to pronunciation, vocabulary complexity, grammar, and comprehension. Factors such as limited exposure and less interactive teaching methods further contribute to these difficulties. On the other hand, student-centered approaches, including communicative activities, memory strategies, and contextual learning, have been proven to facilitate better vocabulary acquisition and retention.

Although vocabulary learning has been widely discussed, many studies still examine challenges and teaching methods separately. Only a limited number of studies integrate students' difficulties, influencing factors, and teaching strategies within a single context, particularly in Islamic boarding schools. Moreover, there is still insufficient understanding of how teachers directly address students' vocabulary difficulties in actual classroom practices, as well as how internal and external factors interact in shaping these challenges.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating how teachers help students overcome vocabulary learning challenges at Pesantren Yapid At-Taubah.

This study focuses on the following research question: What methods do teachers use to help students deal with challenges in learning English vocabulary? The significance of this study lies in its attempt to integrate students' difficulties and teaching methods within the context of an Islamic boarding school, providing a more comprehensive understanding of vocabulary learning and its practical solutions in classroom settings.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary and to explore the teacher's strategies in overcoming those difficulties. The research was conducted at Pesantren Yapid At-Taubah, Polewali Mandar, West Sulawesi. The participants consisted of one English teacher and three students selected through purposive sampling. The students were chosen based on their difficulties in learning English vocabulary, while the teacher was selected due to direct involvement in teaching. The small number of participants allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth data, which is the main focus of qualitative research.

Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Field notes and observation checklists were used to record classroom activities. Interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' difficulties and the teacher's strategies. The data were analyzed using the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results were presented descriptively.

3. Result

Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Students' Vocabulary Learning Difficulties

The results of the data analysis show that the English teacher applied several strategies to overcome students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary. Based on classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the strategies identified refer to Norbert Schmitt's classification, including Determination, Social, Memory strategies, Cognitive, Metacognitive, Vocabulary Notebook Strategies, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The findings indicate that Determination Strategies were used to train students to understand unfamiliar vocabulary independently. Students were encouraged to guess meanings from context, analyze sentences, and use dictionaries when necessary. This strategy helped students become more autonomous and reduced their dependence on direct teacher explanation.

Determination Strategies in Learning Vocabulary

Determination Strategies were applied to help students understand unfamiliar vocabulary independently. The teacher guided students to guess meanings from context, analyze sentences, and use dictionaries when necessary. This finding is supported by the interview:

"The most effective strategy so far is using vocabulary in context. Students not only memorize the meaning of words but also understand how to use them in conversation, for example through everyday activities in the classroom or dormitory. This way, students can directly transfer the material they've learned, making it easier to remember." (Q11)

This response (R11) shows that the teacher applied contextual vocabulary learning as an effective strategy to support students' vocabulary development. The teacher encouraged students to learn vocabulary through meaningful contexts related to their daily activities, both in the classroom and in the dormitory.

Social Strategies in Learning Vocabulary

Social strategies in learning English vocabulary encourage students to interact while learning vocabulary. For example, students are asked to discuss with peers and practice vocabulary in simple conversations. This is supported by the following quote:

"Usually, I encourage students to use new vocabulary in simple sentences or conversations..." (Q8)

This response (Q8), the teacher emphasized the importance of actively using vocabulary in communication. Engaging students in simple conversations can help them understand how words function in real contexts. This indicates that the teacher views interaction as an effective way to strengthen students' vocabulary mastery. Through this strategy, students learn vocabulary collaboratively and improve their communicative competence.

Memory Strategies

Memory strategies are implemented through repetition and organization of vocabulary. Teachers provide vocabulary lists and encourage regular review.

"...I usually also provide a vocabulary list for each lesson that they can add to each week." (Q8)

Based on the response (Q8), providing vocabulary lists is intended to help students organize and gradually expand their vocabulary. Teachers consider regular exposure and repetition to be important factors in helping students remember new words. This indicates that teachers recognize the need for structured learning to support memory. As a result, students are able to recall vocabulary more effectively through continuous review.

Repetition-Based Pronunciation Practice

Repetition-Based Pronunciation Practice is implemented to improve students' pronunciation and comprehension. The teacher provides examples of correct pronunciation and asks students to repeat the words.

"I provide examples of correct pronunciation... students are encouraged to imitate them repeatedly..." (Q-7)

This response (Q7) indicates that the teacher focuses on pronunciation accuracy as part of vocabulary learning. By providing clear examples and repeated practice, the teacher aims to help students become familiar with the sounds and forms of words. The teacher believes that repetition will make students more confident and accurate in using vocabulary. Therefore, this strategy supports improved pronunciation and vocabulary retention.

Metacognitive Strategies in Learning Vocabulary

Metacognitive strategies are used to develop students' awareness of their learning process. Students are encouraged to plan, monitor, and evaluate their vocabulary learning.

"...That way, they can immediately practice the words they're learning and remember them more easily. They not only memorize the meanings of the words, but also understand how to use them in conversation. So the results are more tangible and easier for students to remember." (10)

This response (Q10), the teacher emphasized the importance of understanding how vocabulary is used, not just its meaning. The teacher encouraged students to be aware of their learning process by practicing vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This reflects the teacher's belief that learning should be purposeful and connected to real-world use. As a result, students became more independent and more aware of how they effectively learned vocabulary.

Vocabulary Notebook Strategies

Vocabulary Notebook Strategies were applied by asking students to write new vocabulary in a notebook and use it in sentences.

"In addition, I ask students to write down vocabulary in a special book regularly, then try to use new words in sentences." (Q-10)

This response (10), it can be seen that the teacher aimed to build students' habit of recording and reviewing vocabulary regularly. The use of a vocabulary notebook helped students organize new words and revisit them when needed. The teacher believed that writing and using vocabulary in sentences could strengthen understanding and memory. This strategy contributed to improving students' vocabulary retention.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is implemented through role-playing and discussions to encourage authentic communication.

"Sometimes I also invite them to practice through role-playing or discussions so they can directly practice the vocabulary they have learned." (Q10)

This response (Q10), the teacher emphasized the importance of practicing vocabulary through real-life communication activities. Role-playing and discussions are used to create meaningful learning situations where students can

actively use new words. The teacher believes that hands-on practice makes vocabulary learning more effective and engaging. As a result, students become more confident and experience fewer difficulties in using English vocabulary.

4. Discussion

Students' Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The findings of this study indicate that students employ a variety of vocabulary learning strategies to overcome their difficulties in learning English vocabulary. The dominance of memory and cognitive strategies can be explained by the learning environment, which emphasizes repetition, note-taking, and structured classroom activities. In contexts where exposure to English is limited, such as in pesantren, students tend to rely on strategies that provide direct practice and reinforcement, particularly memorization and repeated use of words. This is consistent with Schmitt (1997), who argues that memory and cognitive strategies are commonly used by learners in foreign language contexts to strengthen retention.

Furthermore, the frequent use of social strategies reflects the importance of interaction in supporting vocabulary learning. Students benefit from asking questions, discussing meanings, and receiving immediate feedback from peers and teachers. This occurs because interaction reduces misunderstanding and helps learners clarify word usage in context. In line with this, Oxford (1990) emphasizes that social interaction plays a significant role in facilitating language acquisition, especially for learners who lack sufficient exposure outside the classroom.

In contrast, the limited use of metacognitive strategies indicates that students have not yet fully developed awareness of their own learning processes. Many students still depend on teacher guidance rather than independently planning, monitoring, and evaluating their vocabulary learning. This situation is influenced by students' learning habits and the teacher-centered approach commonly found in traditional classrooms. As a result, students' autonomy in learning remains limited, which affects their ability to manage their vocabulary development effectively.

Additionally, the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies in this study is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include students' motivation, learning habits, and prior knowledge, while external factors involve teaching methods, classroom environment, and the availability of learning resources. The interaction between these factors determines how successfully students can apply different strategies in learning vocabulary.

Overall, the combination of various vocabulary learning strategies contributes significantly to improving students' vocabulary mastery. The use of multiple strategies allows students to approach vocabulary learning from different angles, including understanding meanings, practicing usage, and reinforcing memory. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to select and

apply appropriate strategies. By introducing a variety of strategies and encouraging students to become more aware of their learning processes, teachers can promote more effective and autonomous vocabulary learning.

5. Conclusion

This research investigates the strategies used by teachers in teaching English vocabulary at Pesantren Yapid At-Taubah. The findings highlight two main aspects: (1) the teaching strategies implemented by teachers, and (2) how these strategies support students in improving their vocabulary mastery. The findings reveal that teachers apply various strategies to support students' vocabulary learning. These include the use of memory and cognitive strategies such as repetition, note-taking, and vocabulary exercises to strengthen students' retention.

Teachers also use social strategies by encouraging interaction through discussion, questioning, and group activities. In addition, contextual teaching methods, such as using vocabulary in sentences and real-life situations, help students understand meaning more effectively. The use of structured activities reflects the learning environment, which emphasizes practice and reinforcement.

However, students face several challenges in learning vocabulary. Many students have difficulties with pronunciation, understanding word meanings, and using vocabulary appropriately in context. Limited exposure to English also makes it harder for students to practice and retain new words. In addition, students often rely on memorization without fully understanding usage, which affects their ability to apply vocabulary in communication.

Low learning motivation and limited learning autonomy also contribute to these difficulties. To overcome these challenges, teachers implement several solutions. They provide repeated practice, encourage active participation through discussion and group work, and guide students in using vocabulary in context. Teachers also support students by giving clear explanations, using simple examples, and providing regular review activities. In some cases, teachers begin to introduce strategies that promote learner autonomy, such as encouraging students to review vocabulary independently.

In conclusion, the use of varied teaching strategies, including repetition, interaction, and contextual learning, plays an important role in helping students overcome vocabulary learning difficulties. Teachers need to combine different strategies and adapt them to students' needs in order to improve vocabulary mastery. However, this study is limited to one research setting and may not represent all learning contexts. Therefore, future studies are recommended to explore similar topics in different settings and examine the effectiveness of specific strategies in greater depth.

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