

## INVESTIGATING ENGLISH VOCABULARY DIFFICULTIES AND ITS LEARNING STRATEGIES OF LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: June 2023 Revised: July 2023 Published: July 2023	<i>Vocabulary plays a crucial role in language proficiency as it serves as the foundation for effective language acquisition. The ability to acquire vocabulary is considered a prerequisite for learning a language. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the difficulties encountered by students in their vocabulary learning process as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles in the context of English vocabulary acquisition. The participants in this study consisted of nine students at various proficiency levels in a lower secondary school, along with one English teacher. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data for this research. The interview questions focused on investigating the difficulties students faced in learning English vocabulary and the strategies they utilized to address these challenges. To facilitate data analysis, each interview was meticulously recorded and transcribed. The data analysis technique employed in this research entailed descriptive analysis. The findings of this study revealed that a significant number of students encountered difficulties in acquiring vocabulary. Specifically, these challenges manifested in areas such as the correct pronunciation of new words, accurate spelling, proper usage of word meanings, and effective retention or memorization of vocabulary. In order to mitigate these difficulties, students employed various strategies, including utilizing media resources such as smartphones, the internet, and games as well as employing note-taking techniques and consulting dictionaries to aid their vocabulary learning process.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

The ability to effectively speak, listen, read, and write in a particular language is greatly influenced by the foundational knowledge of that language, namely vocabulary (Wangdi, 2022). The mastery of foreign languages has become imperative in response to the demands of the contemporary era, particularly in light of globalization (Sotlikova, 2023). Among the various foreign languages that students are compelled to learn, English holds a significant position as a globally recognized language. Nevertheless, the process of acquiring proficiency in a foreign language necessitates careful consideration, with vocabulary mastery being one essential aspect to be prioritized.

In the process of acquiring a second language, the acquisition of vocabulary emerges as a fundamental and indispensable skill. This notion is supported by Yawiloeng (2020). Nobody can learn a language without acquiring vocabulary first and highlighting the importance of vocabulary in language learning. It is universally acknowledged that one cannot effectively learn a language without initially acquiring a substantial vocabulary foundation. Moreover, (Afzal, 2019) emphasizes that vocabulary acquisition and mastery are important as English

proficiency depends on the vocabulary knowledge acquired by second and foreign students as well as native speakers. Lutfiyah et al (2022) said that as a tool for determining which terms are good for communicating successfully and quickly understanding contexts students are required to learn vocabulary well. Surmanov & Azimova (2020) explain that in order to successfully use a second language (L2), vocabulary is required and students are unable to utilize the structures and abilities they have learned for effective communication. Receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary are the two types of vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is necessary for developing receptive L2 abilities such as reading and listening, and productive vocabulary is needed for developing productive L2 skills such as writing and speaking (Uchihara et al., 2022). In addition, Mateo-Valdehita & De Diego (2021) pointed out that receptive knowledge involves understanding a word's structure, meaning, and potential contexts; productive knowledge entails using a word in the right lexical, pragmatic, and syntactic contexts as well as with the proper spelling and pronunciation.

Learning vocabulary in language learning is a challenge for foreign English speakers. In the early steps of learning English, it is mandatory to master L2 vocabulary first. Learning vocabulary is not a simple task. The L2 vocabulary learning process is the most demanding and complicated. According to other experts in this study, Salam & Nurnisa (2021) discovered that there are four factors that contribute to vocabulary acquisition challenges: pronunciation, spelling, word length, and meaning.

In the context of English and Indonesian vocabulary, they are different. They differ in pronunciation, writing, usage, and meaning. The distinctions between these two languages engender specific challenges, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition in English. The acquisition of vocabulary in English necessitates grappling with different pronunciations, which often presents difficulties for learners (Baiq Sumarni et al., 2022; Nugraha et al., 2022). For instance, within the educational context, English vocabulary assumes a pivotal role as it constitutes an essential component in the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Insufficient vocabulary proficiency among students can impede their ability to effectively express themselves verbally, compose written pieces, or even comprehend written texts (Karya et al., 2022; Nurdiana et al., 2023). One factor that makes it difficult for students to communicate in English is their laziness in acquiring and enriching their vocabulary. The biggest difficulty in acquiring a language was a lack of vocabulary knowledge. It indicates that it will be a big issue if someone does not have a large vocabulary.

With the above problems, it found some students' problems in mastering English. The lack of vocabulary in students is the first problem found. Having a limited vocabulary leads to a limited number of conversations. A large number of vocabulary mastered by students makes it easier for students to speak. Secondly, students find it difficult to choose the right words to express their ideas or thoughts in English. Most students think English is a complex subject to learn, and that makes them passive in class. The meaning of the words that they hear, read, and write is unknown to them. Moreover, they have a fear of big mistakes when learning English. Salam et al., (2020) argue that language learners must investigate learning methodologies. Students can better their learning process if they apply learning strategies. Bai (2018) attempted to determine the general character of the individuals' vocabulary learning processes at the met-cognitive, cognitive, and social affective levels. The cognitive approach was the most commonly employed of the three types of vocabulary learning techniques, followed by the met-cognitive strategy. The social/emotional strategy utilized the smallest.

In line with the current study, the study of Reskiawan et al. (2020) showed that the students had a variety of issues or challenges with vocabulary mastery. The students' struggles were essentially always with vocabulary mastery, including issues with word pronunciation, word spelling, and word meaning determination. In addition, the other relevant study by Andriani & Sriwahyuningsih (2020) pointed out that both internal and external influences affected students'

vocabulary mastery. The environment is an example of an external factor. For instance, the environment did not encourage practice or study among students. The students did not have friends or family they could talk to. Then, the other internal factor is embarrassment. Students sometimes felt embarrassed to speak as they lacked vocabulary.

The focus of this study is specifically dedicated to exploring the challenges encountered by lower secondary school students in their journey of vocabulary learning and how they could reduce these difficulties. The primary objectives of this research were an investigation into the difficulties faced by lower secondary school students in acquiring English vocabulary as well as their strategies employed to get over these difficulties. Notably, the novelty of this study resides in its concentration on the lower secondary school context, underscoring the significance of investigating vocabulary learning within this particular educational setting. The following of the current research questions was formulated as follows: (1) What are the difficulties faced by lower secondary school students in learning English vocabulary? (2) What strategies can be used to reduce students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To conduct this study, a descriptive qualitative method was employed, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the research subject. The data collection process involved conducting interviews with a diverse sample of participants, consisting of nine students from varying levels of English proficiency as well as one English teacher. The interview protocol comprised ten carefully crafted questions, designed to elicit detailed insights into the specific difficulties encountered by students during the process of learning English vocabulary and the strategies they employed to alleviate these challenges. The utilization of interviews as a data collection tool ensured an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives, providing rich and nuanced information that contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

### **Research Design**

The current research employed a descriptive qualitative method to explore the research objectives. Within in qualitative research, the human investigator assumes a central role as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2018). This methodological approach recognizes the active involvement of the researchers in the gathering and analysis of data, highlighting their perspectives and interpretations as crucial components of the research process. In line with this, the research design functioned as a tool or instrument through which data were gathered and analyzed, guided by the researchers' theoretical perspectives and objectives. The utilization of a descriptive qualitative method allowed for a comprehensive exploration and understanding of the research phenomenon, enabling the researchers to capture the richness of the participants' experiences and perspectives in relation to the topic under investigation.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from one of the State Lower Secondary Schools in Bekasi, West Java. The selection process involved purposefully choosing nine students from different proficiency levels as determined by the teacher. Additionally, one English subject teacher from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level was included as a participant. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the selection of participants could provide valuable insights and perspectives relevant to the research objectives. Each participant had a 10-15 minute interview. It is important to note that throughout the study, the identity of the participants was protected and kept confidential to ensure their safeguard their privacy. By adhering to ethical guidelines and ensuring participant confidentiality, the study upheld the principles of research integrity and respect for the individuals involved.

## **Instruments**

In order to collect data for this study, the researchers opted to employ semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. To guide the interview process, the researchers developed interview guidelines, which served as a framework for the interviews. These interviews were conducted face-to-face with the selected participants, providing an opportunity for direct interaction and in-depth exploration of the research topic. The interview questions were specifically designed to delve into the difficulties faced by students in learning English vocabulary and to uncover the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. To ensure a comprehensive and informative data collection process, the researchers began by formulating a set of open-ended questions that covered the key topics and themes of interest in this study, focusing on the students' vocabulary learning difficulties and their corresponding problem-solving strategies. These open-ended questions allowed participants the flexibility to provide detailed and nuanced responses, facilitating a deeper understanding of their experiences.

To facilitate data processing and subsequent analysis, each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. This transcription process ensured accurate representation of the participants' responses and facilitated the organization and analysis of the data. By recording and transcribing the interviews, the researchers were able to capture the rich information shared by the participants, enabling them to conduct a comprehensive analysis and gain valuable insights into the research topic.

## **Data Analysis**

To ensure the integrity of the data analysis process, the researchers employed their cell phones to record the interviews. This approach was adopted to enhance the validity of the data by relying on the participants' own voices rather than solely relying on the researchers' interpretations or impressions. By listening to the recorded interviews, the researchers aimed to present an accurate representation of the participants' perspectives and experiences. Recording the interviews enables the researchers to capture the natural flow of thoughts, emotions, and experiences shared by the participants. This audio-based approach provides a more authentic representation of the participants' responses, as it allows the researchers to revisit and analyze the interviews in their entirety. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the analysis, it is crucial for the researchers to be diligent and attentive when listening to the recorded interviews. This involves careful transcription of the participants' words and sentiments.

In the realm of qualitative research, transcription holds significant value as a crucial technique for handling spoken data. Transcription involves the systematic process of converting spoken language into written form, enabling researchers to analyze and interpret the data effectively. In this study, the data were qualitatively examined following a systematic process comprising several key steps: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Firstly, data reduction was conducted, involving the organization of the extensive data and identify prominent themes. This step allowed the researchers to focus on the essential elements of the data and discard irrelevant content. Next, data display was employed to visually present the analyzed data, often using tables, charts, or matrices. This step facilitated the exploration of patterns, relationships, and connections within the data, enabling researchers to gain a comprehensive overview and delve deeper into the underlying themes. Next is Data verification was another crucial step in the analysis process. This involved cross-referencing the data with the original recordings, field notes, and other relevant sources to confirm the interpretations. Finally, the conclusion drawing phase was reached, where the researchers drew meaningful insights from the analyzed data. This step

involved making connections to existing literature, identifying implications, and providing a comprehensive and cohesive interpretation of the research findings.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

As the researchers had the chance to investigate the difficulties lower secondary school students in acquiring English language, to respond to the two study topics, qualitative research was performed. Based on the results of observations, researchers got nine students and one teacher as the subjects in this study. Researchers asked students about their difficulties in learning English vocabulary and what strategies they used to reduce difficulties in learning English vocabulary. The researcher asked the teacher to confirm the difficulties of students who were in line with the teacher's feelings, like how the students' vocabulary skills was in the English class and whether there were any difficulties the students faced in learning English vocabulary.

### The Difficulties of Learning English Vocabulary

#### *Students' problems in pronouncing new vocabulary*

Pronunciation was considered one of the most essential sub-skills to master. In addition, many of the students had difficulties pronouncing the new words as they learned them due to various factors. For Indonesian students, in particular, some words with silent letters presented difficulties. The difference in sound between English and the student's original tongue frequently led to improper pronunciation. When researchers interviewed students, they were able to prove this. They stated:

*"I have a little difficulty in pronouncing new vocabulary that I rarely say and when I found words with silent letters such as o, u, g, h in words 'tough' and 'bough'." (Student 9)*

The other students said:

*"Yes, I find it difficult because writing by saying the vocabulary in English is different. Sometimes I find it difficult to read when there is new vocabulary." (Student 3)*

*"I might find it difficult if I haven't really mastered it. It's difficult to pronounce due to the fact that I rarely listen to native English conversations. Additionally, Indonesian pronunciation differs from English pronunciation, making it challenging to pronounce." (Student 4)*

Teacher also reinforced the findings related to this and said:

*"There are many difficulties, and one of them is probably the way of pronunciation because the students always think that 'I'm not an English person' even though I have used several strategies. However, the students are still having difficulty pronouncing words, especially the words containing letter 'r' and longer words such as 'difficult', 'comfortable', or 'advertisement'."*

#### *Students' problems in spelling the word correctly*

As some students were still unable to distinguish between the Indonesian and English alphabets, the spelling problem frequently occurred. In addition, a student claimed that the English alphabet was complex and that it was impossible to predict the sound a particular letter would make. Some letters may make more than one sound. They found it difficult to recognize the spelling of the words, especially those with more than two syllables and terms they had never heard before. They said:

*"Yes, there is. In English and Indonesian, the difference seems obvious, especially like 'A, E, I' it's really hard to pronounce, and sometimes I forget to tell the difference too." (Student 2)*

*"Yes, there are difficulties in spelling words because sometimes I am still confused with Indonesian and English alphabets." (Student 3)*

The other students said:

*"Yes, I'm having a few problems because I haven't memorized some of the alphabet in English." (Student 5)*

*"The difficulty is in the letters which like in Indonesia 'I' but it reads as 'ai'." (Student 1)*

When words were introduced to the English language, their original spellings were occasionally preserved, while other times, they received new English spellings. As a result, English spelling could be pronounced in various ways and had inconsistencies. Therefore, some students claimed that learning English spelling had become difficult because of the variations or inconsistencies between the students' present pronunciations and spellings of words.

### ***Students' problems in using the meaning of the word correctly***

It is realized that many terms in the English language have many meanings. These terms' opposite and identical meanings are possible (antonyms and synonyms). The same word is used in English as well. However, it has many connotations depending on its context. One of their difficulties in learning the English language is this. This information was obtained through interview questions. He said:

*"Maybe it's difficult for me if I haven't learned and mastered the vocabulary. Reading the meaning is a bit difficult for me because usually one word in English can have two meanings in Indonesian, and that's difficult to understand." (Student 4)*

The other students said:

*"Yes, there is. For example, the word that I want to interpret is sometimes very different from the original word, so it's a bit confusing for me to interpret it." (Student 6)*

*"There is a sense of a little difficulty when translating Indonesian words into English, especially when I see words that are a little complicated." (Student 7)*

The students only depended on the meaning of the words although the precise meaning was not always just defined. The students claimed that they could not understand a text only by looking up each word explanation; instead, they needed to understand each term in the context of the text. Thus, the students were unable to understand the word meanings in the context due to the problem they faced. As it is pointed by one student.

*"Of course, I have a little difficulty. When I interpret a word, the word has an ambiguous meaning." (Student 5)*

Some students also mentioned how words frequently had conflicting meanings in texts. In some texts, there was a tendency to introduce new meanings for words. Sometimes, the student was unaware that words might mean different things depending on their context.

### ***Student's problems in remembering or memorizing vocabulary***

Students had to learn new words and memorize them if they want to master their vocabulary. When learning English, students struggled with remembering a large amount of vocabulary for an extended period of time. They forgot vocabulary they learned before while

trying to remember new vocabulary. Not repeating was a factor. The students explained this experience, and one of them said:

*"Yes, I have difficulties because I rarely repeat words or sentences that I have learned before. I have difficulty remembering or memorizing English vocabulary." (Student 3)*

The other student said:

*"For remembering and memorizing seems to be my weakness because, in English, there are numerous instances of words that are the same but different meanings, so sometimes when I talk to my friends who are from abroad sometimes, I get confused because I use the word convoluted." (Student 8)*

Another factor that contributes to difficulties for students in memorizing or remembering vocabulary is the lack of confidence due to not having friends to communicate with. As a result, they don't have the ability to recall the vocabulary they have learned. The following is how student 9 described this:

*"Lots of vocabulary and also lack of confidence because there are no friends to communicate in English." (Student 9)*

Most participants thought they recalled a list of words and assumed that the words they had stored in their memory would be quickly used. As a result, they continued to having trouble remembering words when they needed to use. It is possible because many students remembered words without applying them to actual situations. The application of remembered lexical items in daily life had to come first.

### **The strategies used to reduce students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary *listening and watching***

Utilizing media effectively is crucial for learning English vocabulary. They found it simple to study English because of the enjoyable condition. In order to understand thoroughly the significance of what they heard and saw, they paid great attention to it. So, this is one of the learning techniques. They stated the following in the interview:

*"My strategy could be listening to the English teacher's voice or audio. For example, I find out from YouTube or from people such as teachers who speak English." (Student 4)*

*"I master the words that I don't know from movies, music, games." (Student 7)*

*"Usually, I learn from games. For example, I play a button with the words 'shoot'. At first, I didn't know what it meant, but when I clicked the 'shoot' button, it started shooting, and as a result, I knew what it meant. The other words in the game are the same way as I know their meaning." (Student 3)*

The other students said:

*"I always use a little English when talking, and try to watch more English movies." (Student 1)*

*"To master vocabulary, I usually read the English dictionary, listen and pay attention to teacher's explanation, and I also watch YouTube videos to add more insight into English vocabulary." (Student 5)*

*"As for strategy, what I apply is learning from anywhere. I can learn English from games, English newspapers, YouTube, or billboards. From the beginning, I didn't understand English at all, then I learned from a game called 'Minecraft' which taught me about the basics of English." (Student 8)*

The integration of media into the process of vocabulary learning has proven to be a valuable approach, offering students an advantageous opportunity to expand their lexical repertoire

within an environment that fosters their educational growth. The incorporation of diverse media resources, as observed in the learning activities undertaken by students, demonstrates their adaptability and flexibility in engaging with a wide array of tools and platforms. This multifaceted utilization of media resources in the context of vocabulary acquisition highlights the significance of personalized and dynamic approaches to address the distinct needs and preferences of students. By incorporating media, educators can effectively cater to the diverse learning styles and preferences of students, facilitating a more engaging and comprehensive learning experience that maximizes vocabulary development. This integration not only enhances students' linguistic competencies but also nurtures their digital literacy skills, equipping them with the essential abilities to navigate and interact with the ever-evolving landscape of media technologies.

### ***Spelling and memorizing***

The students told that memorization was one of their strategies for learning vocabulary. They said:

*"Memorize one by one vocabulary in English." (Student 2)*

*"Usually, I read and spell it many times so that I get used to it or memorize it with the vocabulary." (Student 6)*

The present study's findings shed light on the efficacy of two prominent strategies utilized by students to tackle the difficulties associated with acquiring English vocabulary: memorization and spelling. The active engagement of learners with vocabulary items through deliberate memorization aids in the assimilation and retention of lexical knowledge. Furthermore, the act of reinforcing this knowledge through spelling activities contributes significantly to the consolidation of vocabulary understanding. By employing these cognitive processes, students enhance their linguistic competencies and facilitate the acquisition of English vocabulary, ultimately fostering language proficiency and communication skills.

### ***Using a dictionary and taking a note***

According to the students interviewed, keeping vocabulary notes was one of the most comfortable ways for them to use. The student said:

*"Read and read, use dictionaries and encyclopedias, journal my dictionary, write down new words that I find, and try to have conversations with others." (Student 9)*

Even though students implemented this strategy, it turned out that teachers still had limitations in students' vocabulary. As the teacher said:

*"There are some students who can mention in spelling or, for example, completing sentences (complete), but some are not. So, their ability is still fifty-fifty."*

## **Discussion**

The current research aimed to investigate the students' English vocabulary difficulties and the learning strategies in overcoming their English vocabulary in a lower secondary school. The findings derived from the analysis of interview data indicate that lower secondary school students faced a range of difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. The interview results shed light on the specific areas in which students had obstacles and struggle to navigate the complexities of vocabulary acquisition. The data reveals that the students' difficulties were related to retention and memorization of newly introduced vocabulary, pronunciation of unfamiliar words, accurate spelling, and appropriate usage within context. The difficulties experienced by the students in retaining or memorizing new vocabulary items reflected the cognitive demands associated with vocabulary acquisition. The process of committing new words to memory required some efforts and practices as the students strived to internalize the

meanings, forms, and associations of the targeted vocabulary. Additionally, the students faced challenges in accurately pronouncing unfamiliar words, indicating difficulties in mastering the phonetic of the English language. Pronunciation played a crucial role in effective communication, and students' struggles in this aspect underscored the importance of targeted instruction and practice to develop phonological awareness and improve pronunciation skills (Assauri et al., 2022; Hidayatullah & Haerazi, 2022).

The findings regarding mispronunciation of words with silent letters align with previous research conducted by Salawazo et al (2020). Pronunciation was one of the problem they raised with vocabulary learning. Students' difficulties with vocabulary learning were made difficult by differences between written and spoken English. For instance, the students encountered words like "hour," "climb," "listen," and "know," which presented particular challenges due to the presence of silent letters. The silent letters in certain English words add an additional layer of complexity (Surmanov & Azimova, 2020), as they deviate from the expected sound patterns based on the spelling. Consequently, students may struggle to accurately articulate these words, leading to mispronunciation and potential comprehension difficulties. The challenges associated with silent letters in vocabulary learning highlight the importance of targeted instruction and explicit teaching strategies. Educators should address these specific pronunciation difficulties by providing ample practice opportunities, incorporating phonetic exercises, and raising students' awareness of the discrepancies between written and spoken English (Tong et al., 2023). Furthermore, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages students to engage in oral activities, such as conversations and presentations, can foster their confidence in pronunciation and enhance their overall language proficiency.

An essential component of the English language that facilitates effective communication is pronunciation (Fang, 2022). Exposure to pronunciation is crucial for EFL students to improve their language skills (Abdalla Ahmed Abker 2020) since it could support students in differentiating between good and bad English. Also, having good pronunciation is essential for someone to have a good vocabulary. Factors causing students' difficulties in pronouncing vocabulary are (1) they encountered the silent letters, (2) the way the words are pronounced and written are different, and (3) the pronunciation of English and Indonesian is different. In fact, in this research, the difference between written form and the pronunciation of English words makes it difficult for foreign language students to pronounce words. When studying a second language, English pronunciation is a sub-skill of the speaking modules, confirmed by Vadakalur Elumalai et al (2021).

The next problem they faced was about spelling the word. Most English language students find learning to spell to be one of their most difficult tasks (S. Alenazi, 2018). Due to the different spellings between Indonesian and English, it makes it difficult for students to remember. Based on the interview, it could be observed that one of the factors causing difficulties in mastering vocabulary was spelling. Incorrect word spelling or a lack of sound-to-spelling correlation, difficulty to learn specific English alphabets, and discrepancies in English and Indonesian spelling were the root causes of these issues. They commonly encountered difficulties due to incorrect sentence construction or mismatched spelling sounds. Students were said to have mastered a word if they could spell, recognize, and apply it in the proper context both verbally and in writing (Alshahrani, 2019).

The correct use of a word's meaning was yet another challenge that students encountered when acquiring English vocabulary. Making meanings was a process that depended heavily on words (Hanks, 2014). Another problem the students faced in learning vocabulary was understanding the meaning of English words. Since students learned English based on their native language, using English words correctly became a challenge for them. Students had to learn new words and strived to improve their understanding of them. Based on the interview,

students also struggled to determine the appropriate meanings in English. Ambiguous and confusing meanings made it challenging for students to interpret a sentence accurately. People could learn the specific meaning of a term while reading, speaking, and writing by using a dictionary. Even a single word may have numerous interpretations, with context usually determining which was correct. (Rohmatillah, 2016).

In the last problem, it was found that it is regarding the students' difficulty in remembering or memorizing vocabulary. Based on Wang (2020), the primary issue with learning English is having trouble memorizing words, which takes up most of the learning process. It was proven in the interviews that the students rarely repeated words or sentences that had been learned before. It is not uncommon for language learners to struggle to remember the words they are trying to learn. Gaybulloyevna (2022) stated that to learn is to remember. Unlike grammar learning, which is essentially a rule-based system, vocabulary learning is primarily a matter of item assembly.

Dealing with the results on the students' strategies in reducing their difficulties to learn English vocabulary, one of the key factors in a student's success in learning English is their strategies to learning vocabulary (Wanpen et al., 2013). Syafrizal & Haerudin (2018) Stated that practicing with friends, taking notes, and memorizing more were the students' methods for solving their vocabulary learning difficulties. Additionally, we could learn from interviews what methods students employed to reduce the difficulties associated with acquiring English language. Students utilized available media, such as the internet to learn vocabulary. They also tried to learn by watching YouTube videos, listening to songs, playing games (Faadhilah & Apoko, 2022), and watching movies, so they created an enjoyable learning environment for themselves. Some of them also learned by spelling out the words one by one and repeating them multiple times to memorize the vocabulary. Besides, using a dictionary, taking notes, and trying to converse with others were also the ways that students increased their vocabulary.

Thus, each student had different strategies for overcoming difficulties with expanding their English vocabulary. Good language students might develop their own methods or learning strategy. During the learning process, implementing language learning strategies helped improve students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. In order to select efficient learning strategies or approaches for themselves, learners had to be able to maintain, retrieve, and process knowledge (Wong et al., 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the results discussed above, it is then inferred that the students had several difficulties when learning English vocabulary. They often struggled with vocabulary because of several causes, such as: (1) the sound dissimilarity between English and Indonesian which often caused wrong pronunciation, differentiation between written and spoken words in English, (2) some words similar to, yet having different meanings, (3) rarely using English in interactions, and (4) rarely recalling previously acquired vocabulary. In addition, there are some strategies to solve the difficulties faced by the students. Firstly, they tried to practice communicating with others while using existing vocabulary after first memorizing words to improve their vocabulary mastery. Secondly, they practiced using the media they had, such as mobile phones, the internet, games, and programs that could help them enrich their English vocabulary. They could also use strategies such as using dictionaries and taking notes. This research recommends that students in lower secondary schools need to use some strategies to overcome the problems in mastering English vocabulary. English teachers also should provide some English exercises to encourage the students to pronounce more vocabulary and English games on vocabulary knowledge. As the research was conducted in one of lower secondary schools in West Java, it is good to have more schools to be involved in the future.

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