


# Exploring Students' Difficulties in Memorizing English Vocabularies in a Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is a very important aspect for learners when they are learning a language. More than one million English vocabulary, it is a challenge for them to memorize and know their meaning. In the learning process, many students have difficulty remembering vocabulary. It is this difficulty that makes students experience limited vocabulary when speaking or writing in English. The difficulties experienced by students are of course caused by several factors. This study aims to explore the students' difficulties in memorizing English vocabularies and the causes. The method used in this study was descriptive qualitative. To collect data and get sample answers, researchers used questionnaire media. In the questionnaire, the researchers presented eight questions with a multiple-choice model. The answers from the respondents were then analysed by researchers and concluded. Based on the findings of the questionnaire, the biggest difficulty experienced by students was being able to understand but not being able to express it with a percentage of 42.9%. The biggest factor that causes students to have difficulty memorizing vocabulary was that they take too long to translate what they want to say with a percentage of 57.1%, followed by their laziness to apply the vocabulary in everyday life with a percentage of 38.1%. The most common solution used by students to overcome difficulties in memorizing vocabulary was that they always want to know the meaning of the vocabulary they read and write it down in notes with a percentage of 71.4%. In this study, the researchers concluded that the most difficulty experienced by students when memorizing vocabulary was that students were able to understand the meaning of their vocabulary but were unable to express it. The most factors that cause difficulties are the time it takes too long to translate what the students want to say and also their laziness. To overcome these difficulties, the most chosen solution is to find out the meaning of new vocabulary and write it on a note.

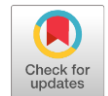
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## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a very important aspect of language (Indriani et al., 2023). When students learn a new language, vocabulary cannot be separated. It is essential for students who want to strengthen their command of the English language in all its forms (Arochman, Jabbar, et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2019). Vocabulary plays a role in all aspects of language use, from listening and speaking to reading and writing (Manoppo et al., 2020). From this statement, it can be said that vocabulary is a significant factor in language because it is needed for speaking, reading, and writing. This means that someone's poor speaking ability is closely related to their vocabulary. To learn a new language, it is helpful to have a list of terms and their definitions, or a vocabulary, and a dictionary, vocabulary book, is a collection of such lists (Wang, 2022). The most important component of a language is its vocabulary (Arochman, Malasari, et al., 2023; Bai, 2018). It is

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where the language revolves. A vocabulary-based communication system is called a language (Salawazo et al., 2020). People rely on words in order to process information, communicate with others, and expand their knowledge of the world around them. Therefore, as a consequence of this, building one's vocabulary is a vital component of language study. There is a connection between it and the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Vocabulary is a library of target language words in a certain language or a collection of words that a person may employ (Wero et al., 2021). A vocabulary is a set of words and their definitions, typically found in a book for learning a foreign language, that an individual or group uses to communicate (Ghalebi et al., 2021). Additionally, learning vocabulary helps students become better language creators. The greater a learner's vocabulary, the more precisely he or she can convey the exact message desired (Liu & Chen, 2021). Based on this point of view, in order to communicate successfully, students must be familiar with a wide range of word meanings. Moreover, the use of vocabulary is used to assess a student's speech ability (Putra, 2023). The implication is that a vocabulary is crucial to determining how well students can express themselves. The inability of students to speak the language must be overcome in order to communicate effectively.

A vocabulary is a set of words that comprise a language. The aspect of vocabulary refers not only to meaning, but also to how one writes, pronounces, influences, and how it changes when it becomes a verb, noun, or adjective, and so on (Baharuddin et al., 2022). Vocabulary is the body of words that arrange the language (Huei et al., 2021). Vocabulary includes meaning, pronunciation, effect, and change depending on the verb, noun, or adjective. It is one of linguistic components in learning a language. Before students start to improve their English skill, they should learn about vocabulary as the first step.

Mastering English vocabulary requires good memory and knowledge (Al-Qaysi & Shabdin, 2016; Wu et al., 2020). In learning, memory is very important because good thinkers are those who have learned to remember their experiences (Guo & Li, 2022; Quy & Thi, 2022). It is more than a million English words. This is one of the morning challenges for students to remember and recognize vocabulary. Many students find it difficult to remember vocabulary (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023). Based on observations, researchers found several problems related to the difficulties students experienced when memorizing vocabulary, especially in class. First, students cannot express their ideas or thoughts while in class, they also have difficulty using appropriate words to express their ideas in English. It shows their limited knowledge of the language. They don't understand what they read, write, or hear. During class, only a few students actively use English. Most of them prefer to use Indonesian because they have trouble understanding the lecturer explaining in English. Students often prefer to remain silent. As a result, they experience limited vocabulary when speaking or writing in English. This difficulty hinders the learning process of students to become good English speakers (Delimasari et al., 2023). In addition, of course, there are many factors that make it difficult for students to remember vocabulary.

In connection with the explanation above, the researchers were interested in examining what difficulties students experience in memorizing vocabulary and what solutions can be used to overcome these problems. Therefore, the research questions in this study were 1) What are students' difficulties in memorizing English vocabularies at English Education Department, Universitas Tidar? 2) What are the factors that make it difficult for English Education Department students to memorise English vocabulary? 3) What are the solutions to overcome the students' difficulties in memorizing vocabularies?

## METHOD

### Research Design

The research design used by the researchers in this study was descriptive qualitative. This was done to explore students' difficulties in memorizing English vocabulary. To collect data, researchers used a questionnaire. The type of questionnaire used was multiple choice. In a multiple-choice question, which was a type of closed question, the respondents had to choose one or many answers from the list of options presented. The multiple choice used by the researchers consisted of several answers that can represent the respondent's answers related to the questions presented in the questionnaire.

### Respondents

This study was conducted at Universitas Tidar, Magelang. The respondents were English education students at 4<sup>th</sup> semester. There were 40 participants who were available to fulfil the questionnaire that researchers gave.

### Data analysis

After the data collected, then it was continued to be analysed. In order to assess the results of the surveys, the mean of the responses to each question was determined. With the data that has been analyzed, the researchers can conclude what difficulties that students faced in memorizing English vocabulary and what solutions they can do.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to find out students' difficulties in memorizing English vocabulary at 4<sup>th</sup> semester of the English Education Department at Universitas Tidar. The survey asked students eight questions on the challenges they face and the strategies they plan to use. The researchers presented the finding in table form consisted of responses and the percentage of student answers. For more details, the following are the result of the questionnaire.

### 1. Students' difficulties in memorizing English vocabularies

#### *The difficulties experienced by students when memorizing vocabulary*

The researchers gave five answer choices for respondents. The respondents choose an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what are the difficulties students faced when memorizing vocabulary. The result of this question in the table 1.

Table 1. Difficulties students faced when memorizing vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Difficulty in pronunciation	19%
2	Difficult to translate	28,6%
3	Do not memorize vocabulary	38,1%
4	Limited time to study	23,8%
5.	Able to understand but unable to express it	42,9%

From data in table 1, it can be seen that the difficulties of students faced when memorizing vocabulary shows that the most responses were "able to understand but unable to express it" with the percentage of 42,9%. It showed that the difficulties students often experienced in remembering vocabulary were that students felt capable or understand the meaning of vocabulary but sometimes they were unable or did not understand how to express it.

#### *The student's reason do not start memorizing vocabulary at the beginning of the meeting*

The researchers gave seven answer choices for respondents. The respondents choose an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what are the reasons

students do not start memorizing vocabulary at the beginning of the meeting. The result of this question in the table 2.

Table 2. Students do not start memorizing vocabulary at the beginning of the meeting

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Do not understand how to memorize it	19%
2	There is still another time	23,8%
3	Lazy and trivial	66,7%
4	Join friends who have not done it yet	4,8%
5.	Unaccustomed and afraid of the wrong pronunciation	19%
6.	Shame	9,5%
7.	Do not have a Daily English Vocabulary book	9,5%

Table 2 show the questionnaire results about what area the reasons students do not start memorizing vocabulary at the beginning of the meeting shows that the most responses are "Lazy and trivial" with the percentage of 66,7%. It showed that the reason students did not start practicing vocabulary at the beginning of the meeting was because of their laziness. Students sometimes also thought that learning vocabulary is trivial.

## 2. The factors that make it difficult for students to memorise English vocabulary

### *Factors that make students felt difficult to remember and memorize vocabulary*

The researchers gave four answer choices for respondents. The respondents choose an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what are the factors that make it difficult for students to memorize vocabulary. The result of this question in the table 3.

Table 3. The factors that make it difficult for students to memorize vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	It takes a long time to think about translating what you want to say	57,1%
2	It is difficult to understand the text in English	28,6%
3	Not focusing on learning in one class with many people in it	38,1%
4.	Lazy to apply vocabulary in everyday life	38,1%

From the table 3, the questionnaire results about the factors that students felt difficult to memorize vocabulary shows that the most responses are "It takes a long time to think about translating what you want to say" with the percentage of 57,1%. It showed that the students felt that the main factor that makes them have difficulty in remembering vocabulary was about time. Students often thought too long when translated the words they wanted to says. So, they have difficulty in remembering the vocabulary.

### *The time when students want to start memorizing vocabulary*

The researchers gave four answer choices for respondents. The respondents choose an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to when they want to practice vocabulary. The result can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Students' time to start memorizing vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	At each subject meeting	90,5%
2	In the middle semester	14,3%
3	At the end of the meeting	19%
4.	Have no desire to practice memorization	4,8%

Table 4 shows that the most responses are "at each subject meeting" with the percentage of 90,5%. It showed that most students choose to practice vocabulary at each meeting. If at every meeting they practice vocabulary, it will add new vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary practice at each meeting will help students retain more of the material presented.

### *The students missed when memorizing vocabulary*

In this question, the researchers gave nine answer choices for respondent. The respondent chooses an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what students miss when practicing vocabulary. The result is as follows.

Table 5. Students missed when memorizing vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Seriousness	19%
2	Unable to make past-tense sentence	9.5%
3	I still do not know much vocabulary	28.6%
4	Nothing	4.8%
5.	Long memory of spoken vocabulary	28.6%
6.	Ease in assembling vocabulary into sentences	4.8%
7.	Addition of vocabulary as expected	9.5%
8.	Fluency in speaking practice	14.3%
9.	Confused in distinguishing the meaning of words	33.3%

Table 5 indicates students missed when practicing vocabulary shows that the most responses are "Confused in distinguishing the meaning of words" with the percentage of 33,3%. It showed that when practicing vocabulary, they often felt confused in distinguished a word.

### **3. The solutions to overcome the students' difficulties in memorizing vocabularies**

#### *The way students make a series of sentences from the vocabulary they choose*

In this question, the researchers gave four answer choices for respondent. The respondent chooses an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to how the students make a sentence from the vocabulary they choose. Table 6 show the result.

Table 6. Students make a series of sentences from the vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Choose the vocabulary and immediately arrange it spontaneously	57.1%
2	Choose the vocabulary and translate it into Indonesian first	61.9%
3	Copy a friend's work, then change it or edit it a little	9.5%
4.	Copy the work of friends and memorize it	4.8%

Table 6 indicate how the students make a sentence from the vocabulary they choose shows that the most responses are "Choose the vocabulary and translate it into Indonesian



first" with the percentage of 61,9%. It showed that students choose vocabulary and translated it into Indonesian before they make an English sentence. They thought that this as an easier way to make a sentence with the vocabulary they choose.

### *The results obtained by students during vocabulary exercises*

In this question, the researchers gave twelve answer choices for respondent. The respondent chooses an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what are the students result obtained during vocabulary practice.

Table 7. Students' ability in vocabulary exercise

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Add a lot of vocabulary	81%
2	Be confident	33.3%
3	Knowing sentence connectors	38.1%
4	Using the past tense	19%
5	Knowing how to pronounce correctly	33.3%
6	Knowing the meaning	52.4%
7	Happy	19%
8	Bored	4.8%
9	Discipline	9.5%
10	Accustomed to making through	38.1%
11	Accustomed to speaking English	23.8%
12	Train your memory or remember the vocabulary you practice	23.8%

Table 7 inform about what are the students result obtained during vocabulary practice shows that the most responses are "Add a lot of vocabulary" with the percentage 81%. It showed that with students diligently practicing vocabulary, it will increase their vocabulary mastery.

### *Solutions to overcome difficulties in memorizing vocabulary*

On the last question, the researchers gave five answer choices for respondent. The respondent chooses an answer or write other answers besides the ones given related to what is the student's solution to overcome students' difficulties in memorizing vocabulary. Table 8 shows the result.

Table 8. Solutions to overcome difficulties in memorizing vocabulary

No	Responses	Percentage
1	Stick a sticky note containing vocabulary in English in your room and then memorize it according to the target to be achieved	28.65%
2	Always want to know or be curious about the meaning of the vocabulary read and continue to write it down in notes	71.4%
3	Start saying small incidents in English	28.6%
4	Make a simple sentence using the vocabulary you just found	38.1%
5.	By watch movie or something else	4.8%

From the table 8, the questionnaire results about what is the student's solution to overcome their difficulties in memorizing vocabulary shows that the most responses are "Always want to know or be curious about the meaning of the vocabulary read and continue to write it down in notes" with the percentage of 71,45%. It showed that the solution taken by students to overcome difficulties in remembering vocabulary is that students have the desire to always find out what the meaning of the vocabulary read is and write it on notes so they do not forget. With these steps, it will make it easier for students to learn to remember vocabulary.

Based on the questionnaire given to participants, the researchers found that students' difficulties in memorizing vocabulary was able to understand but did not understand to express it (42.9%). The main factor that makes it difficult for students to memorize vocabulary is that it takes them a long time to translate what they want to say (57,1%), followed by their laziness to apply the vocabulary in their daily lives (38,1%).

The solution that students used to overcome difficulties in memorizing vocabulary is that they always want to know about the meaning of the vocabulary they read and write it down in notes (71,4%) and practice making simple sentences using the new vocabulary they just found (38,1%). To make it easier to use vocabulary in a sentence, they choose vocabulary and translate it into Indonesian first, then make a complete sentence (61,9%). Besides the difficulties students experience, they feel that there are produced while practicing vocabulary, including being able to add lots of new vocabulary (81%), knowing what it means (52%), knowing how to use it in a sentence, and knowing how to pronounce it.

In this study, the researchers tried to compare the findings with other studies that have the same problem regarding students' difficulties in remembering vocabulary. According to (Lutfiyah et al., 2022), learners were uninterested in acquiring vocabulary and were too lethargic to memorize it due to its intricacy, as one word can have multiple meanings. Meanwhile, (Kesmez, 2021; Sofeny & Muamanah, 2021) explained that the problems in memorizing words are usually the same for every learner. Despite the fact that each student has his or her own ways for overcoming problems in developing English vocabulary.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the results of this study showed that students were difficult in memorizing vocabulary vary widely. When the students learned about vocabulary, the difficulty they often faced was that they can understand what the meaning of word or sentence, but sometimes they were unable to express it. The fact that they still needed a long time to translate what they wanted to say made them difficult. They also felt lazy and thought that learning to memorize vocabulary was unimportant, and they were lethargic to apply terminology in their daily life. The student's solutions when they have difficulty to memorizing vocabulary is to find out what the unknown vocabulary means and write it down in a note, and always practice making sentences using new vocabulary. By continuing to practice memorizing vocabulary, students can gain knowledge about new vocabulary, know the meaning, and know how to pronounce it.

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