

# Assessing Students' Vocabulary Learning Strategies use with particular reference to EFL First Year In-service Students of Ambo University

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.09.2019.p93109

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.09.2019.p93109>

## Abstract

Vocabulary learning is one of the important language skills Harmer (1991) clearly states, "If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh" (p.153). Effective use of vocabulary learning strategy is very important in language learning at higher education. This study is aimed at assessing vocabulary learning strategies used by in-service first year English Major Students at Ambo University in 2019 academic year. To conduct this study, descriptive survey design was employed. There were 124 English major in-service students. From 124 students, fifty students were selected by using simple random sampling techniques to fill questionnaires. Five of them were selected for interview using availability sampling technique. Questionnaire and interview were used as data gathering instruments. Questionnaires were used to gather data concerning the types of vocabulary learning strategies used and challenges in learning vocabulary learning strategy while interview was used to triangulate data collected by questionnaires. The findings of this study indicated that most students were unable to use most of vocabulary learning strategies. The most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies types was memory vocabulary learning strategy (M=3.454). Discovery vocabulary learning strategy was the second most-used vocabulary learning strategy (M=2.930). The third most-used vocabulary learning strategy was metacognitive vocabulary learning Strategies (M=2.875), cognitive vocabulary learning strategy (M=2.828), social vocabulary learning strategies (M=2.816). However, consolidation vocabulary learning strategy (M=1.839) was the least-used vocabulary learning strategy type. The data collected using open-ended questionnaires and interview indicated that the challenges of vocabulary learning strategies use are students' lack of background knowledge on vocabulary learning, overuse of dictionary in learning new vocabulary and teacher use of limited input. Therefore, the students should be aware of the least-used vocabulary learning strategies and how to use these strategies. This enables them to be more self-directed in English language learning. All concerned bodies should create good environment to minimize the challenges of learning new vocabulary learning strategies.

**Key words:** *Vocabulary learning, Strategy, Challenges, Strategy use*

## Introduction

Interest in the teaching of English to young learners has been steadily growing in recent years. Thus, a great many different techniques are employed to be successful. The recent studies have greatly increased our understanding of the role of vocabulary in the acquisition of a second language. Coady and Huckin (1997) states second language vocabulary acquisition has become an increasingly interesting topic of discussion for researchers, teachers, curriculum designers, theorists, and others involved in second language teaching. That is, vocabulary teaching has begun to gain the importance that it deserves in the field of language teaching.

In the 21st centuries, English has become an indispensable part of educational curriculum in Ethiopian schools. Despite all the efforts and investments devoted to cultivate and popularize English among Ethiopian language learners, the resultant outcome could not live up to the authorities' expectations. Generally speaking, the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Ethiopia is not satisfactory. A great body of research has proved that different factors are involved in this process. Currently, English has dominated the context of foreign language learning and teaching in Ethiopia. English language is considered by many as the international language. Its acquisition can guarantee the availability of opportunities to employment, traveling, higher education, and even better life (Crystal, 1997). It is mandatory for the academicians to rethink and renovate their teaching strategies with the changing times. With the views of the demanding English in the globalized world, there has been a constant change in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, vocabulary teaching methods and techniques need desirable and radical changes (Sanaoui, 1996).

Nowadays, Ethiopia is making rapid progresses in all spheres. Vocabularies of a language build a language just like bricks for constructing a building because language is made up of words (Thornbury, 2002). Having good stock of vocabulary is must for learners to use language effectively. English language has vast vocabulary in the world; it is the richest language of the world. For that reason, the study of vocabulary has occupied the central place in today's language teaching and learning activities, developing and enriching English. Even, Wilkins rightly says.

*“Without grammar very little can be conveyed....but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p.111, quotes in Lewis, 2000). Thornbury opines (2002): “If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement, if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words.”*

According to Nations (2001), we do our own tasks through words, so they are powerful tools. Throat et.al (2001) clearly states, ‘Words are the building block of language’. Nagy (2003) appropriately remarks, “Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean.” Learning strategy use is a key aspect of developing engaged and successful

learners. For many English students vocabulary learning strategy use involves looking words in dictionary and classroom learning new word from teachers.

Vocabulary learning seems to be given little emphasize in foreign countries (Fan, 2003). This lead to the obstacle in English language limited vocabulary size (Kashani & Shafiee, 2016). If the students have limited size of vocabulary, they will not have base vocabulary to work with; they cannot study grammar; they cannot do spelling and pronunciation exercise; they cannot read and write. According to Hunag (1997), Asian college students had serious problems in vocabulary learning. The researcher's experiences in university as a student and as an instructor support that Ethiopian university students also have serious problems in English vocabulary learning. There is gap between vocabulary use expectations of university graduates. This problem might arise from lack of vocabulary learning knowledge and use. Teachers followed traditional methods of vocabulary learning strategies and the students were not aware of vocabulary learning strategies. They (English teachers) know how important pre-reading activities are, and they realize that the words should be learned in context (Milulecky, 1990). We were frequently scan the vocabulary to find words that are unfamiliar, before giving assignment on that passage (Milulecky, 1990), and our teachers introduced new words before the class reading started (Sedita, 2005).

The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in FL learning has been recently recognized by the theorist and researcher in the field. They identified numerous types of instructional modes, approaches, vocabulary building activities, exercises, practice and skills proved to be effective in developing children and college students' vocabulary in EFL environments. Nation (2001) properly states that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but a

Vocabulary learning seems to be given little emphasize in foreign countries (Fan, 2003). This lead to the obstacle in English language limited vocabulary size (Kashani & Shafiee, 2016). Also aims at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge. However, nowadays methodologists and linguists suggest that teachers can decide and select the words to be taught on the basis of how frequently they are used by speakers of the language. There are few studies conducted internationally and locally concerning students' vocabulary learning strategy at colleges and university levels. For example, Suleiman (2017) conducted investigating the use of vocabulary learning strategies among English major students (a case study of Al-Fashir University). He found that students tended to use metacognitive strategies (75%) as the most frequently used strategy, and social strategies (31.3%) as the least used strategies than other strategies. For Sadaf and Zoya (2014), Aligarh Muslim University in India used memory strategies most frequently while they used metacognitive strategies least. In addition to international researches, Miressa (2017) carried out research

on an Assessment of the Practice of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies in EFL Classes: Kellem Secondary School Grade 9 and 10 English Teachers in Focus. His study revealed that teachers were not capable enough on the knowledge and the theoretical orientations of vocabulary teaching strategies in EFL classes. This study is aimed at assessing vocabulary learning strategies used by first year in-service students at Ambo University in 2019 academic year. The following research questions guided this research study.

1. What vocabulary learning strategies first year in-service students use in learning English language?
2. What are the most and least used vocabulary learning strategies among English as a Foreign Language students?
3. What are the challenges of learning vocabulary learning strategies?

The general objective of this study was to assess vocabulary learning strategies employed by in-service first year English Major Students at Ambo University in 2019 academic year.

Specifically, this study was aimed to:

1. assess vocabulary learning strategies used by in-service first year major English students.
2. identify the most and least used vocabulary learning strategies among English as Foreign Language students.
3. investigate challenges of vocabulary learning strategies.

The findings of this study help different stakeholders. English is learnt from KG to university level in Ethiopia. In university, it is taught as a subject and the students learn all subjects in English. Therefore, the knowledge about vocabulary learning strategies is very important for higher education students. This means, the finding of the study may help higher education students in using vocabulary strategies. They study also pave the ground for further studies around vocabulary learning strategies. The study might also help EFL teachers in teaching vocabulary learning strategies so that they can improve their students' English language.

## **Review Literature**

### **Definition of Vocabulary and Aspects of Its Knowledge**

Herbert and Kamil (2005) defined Vocabulary as the knowledge of the meanings of words. A word is more than its meaning (Cook, 2001). According National Reading Panel (NICHD) (2000), Vocabulary is broadly defined as the knowledge of words and word meanings. This means to know the word's meaning, to pronounce the

word correctly, to spell it correctly and able to use in a sentence i.e. recognizing the word's grammatical category (identifying whether it is a noun, a verb, how it creates plural form, and the tenses (Moon, 1997, 1998). Recent vocabulary researches show us that the definition of vocabulary is much more than single words. The studies draw on an understanding of lexis which refers to all the words in a language (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009; Nation, 2001; Alali & Schmitt, 2012).

Carter (1992) has also defined vocabulary knowledge in similar ways of categories such as pronunciation, spelling, grammatical properties, syntactical features, collocations, associations and senses, etc. Laufer (1998) categorized word knowledge as the form, the word structure, the syntactic pattern of the word in a phrase or a sentence, meaning, common collocations, and the lexical relations of the word with other words, such as synonym, antonym, and hyponym, and finally common collocations. As the children learn lexical chunks or phrases of two or more words, they are also part of vocabulary knowledge. For instance, *Good morning, Nice to meet you* and etc.)

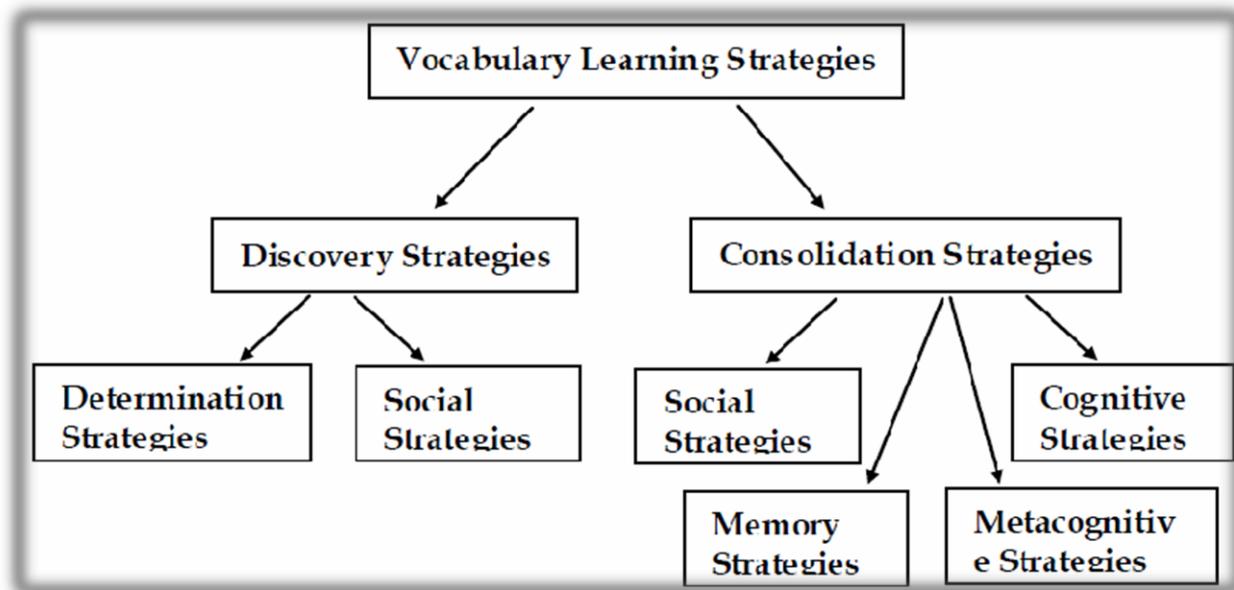
English has a large number of multiple-word-item lexemes which behave as a single word and as a single meaning. For instance, *pass away, bite the dust, kick the bucket, and give up the ghost* all meaning to die). Compound words like (playpen), phrasal verbs (give up), fixed phrases (ladies and gentlemen), idioms (put your nose to the grindstone), and proverbs (A stitch in time saves nine) are all multiword units that should be included in vocabulary knowledge (Wray, 2002). Mastering of multiword units is important since they facilitate fluency in language use and play important roles in their lives and future careers (Pullen et al., 2010). To do so, vocabulary learning strategy knowledge and use is very important. It is connected to better reading or listening ability and oral or written communications (Neuman & Wright, 2014). What words represent for its concept is understanding a word's meaning. Jalongo and Sobolak, (2011) argue that vocabulary knowledge connected to experience and knowledge and the meaning varies depending on the linguistic contexts including in literal and figurative contexts.

The concept of a word can be seen in many ways. Three of these aspects are very important aspects that the teachers need to be aware of them. The aspects that focus on are *form, meaning, and use* are significant in vocabulary teaching and learning. The form of a word involves its spoken form (pronunciation), written form (spelling), and parts of the words like prefix, root, and suffix (Nation (2001). In addition to this, Nation states meaning comprises the concept that items refers to and the associations which come to our mind when we think about a specific word or expression. This means form and meaning work together in this case. In addition to this, Schmitt (2008, p.333) contends that while it is true that the form-meaning link is the first and most essential lexical aspect which must be acquired, and may be adequate to allow recognition, a learner needs to

know much more about lexical items, particularly if they are to be used productively. According to Nation (2011) both receptive and productive dimension are included in these three aspects of vocabulary. Therefore, knowing these three aspects help English language teachers to build their students' vocabulary knowledge. Nation (2011) advises teachers that they need to include these aspects which help their students' vocabulary knowledge and use. In this day and age, vocabulary should be based on 'thinking activity.' Vocabulary is better acquired if teachers used situations that help learners to acquire it (Richards, 1998). Therefore, teachers should be active, decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thought, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p.81). Vocabulary learning strategies used by college students are word lists, dictionary, contextual guessing, word part, association, synonyms and antonyms, medias, self testing. Many of these strategies require deeper mental processing while others do not require (Schmitt, 1997).

### **Types of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Vocabulary learning strategies have been classified differently by different researchers (Oxford, 1990. For instance, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified strategies in three broad categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective, each of which includes lots of sub-strategies. Cohen and Macaro (2007) and Farhady (2006) have identified eight different vocabulary learning strategies as memorization strategies, repetition strategies, association strategies, key word method, inferencing strategy, dictionary use, semantic grid strategies, and word lists whereas Oxford (1990a) developed a strategy system that contains six sets of L2 learning behaviors: *affective* (e.g., anxiety reduction through laughter and meditation), *social* (e.g., asking questions), *metacognitive* (e.g., planning for language tasks), *memory-related* (e.g., grouping and imagery); *general cognitive* (e.g., summarizing and practicing), and *compensatory* (e.g., guessing meanings form the context). Oxford (1990) considered vocabulary learning strategies to direct and indirect. According her, direct vocabulary acquisition studies emphasize that vocabulary can be learnt using tools such as dictionaries and vocabulary lists that make the students pay more attention into explicit interaction with the meaning and form of vocabulary whereas indirect strategies enhance learning indirectly. It is defined as a strategy of word learning which arises without the particular intention to emphasis on word. Nyikos and Fan (2007) classified the 38 strategies that the learners such as macro strategies of memorization, dictionary use, practice, note-taking, and group work. Gu and Johnson (1996) divided into metacognitive regulation, dictionary strategies, guessing strategies, memory strategies (rehearsal and encoding), and activation strategies. In their discussion, Gu and Johnson (1996) highlight that learners employ a combination of strategies rather than single vocabulary learning strategies in learning vocabulary. Schmitt (1997) classified vocabulary learning strategies as follows:



*Schmitt's Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997, p. 205-210)*

## Materials and Methods

To conduct the study, descriptive survey design was employed. As it is stated in Key (1997:1) descriptive survey research is used “to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena to describe ‘what exists’ with respect to variables or conditions in a situation.” Specifically a descriptive survey method is used to describe the state of a situation as it is. In this method both quantitative and qualitative data will be used. The quantitative data was obtained through questionnaire and the qualitative data was gathered through interview. Data were gathered from First Year in-service English Major Students at Ambo University. There were 124 First Year in-service English Major Students in 2019. Among these, 50 of them were selected using simple random sampling technique. Forty-one of them were males and 9 of them were female. All the selected students filled and returned the questionnaires. Five students took part in the interview. These students were selected using availability sampling techniques. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data from the participants of the study. The participants of the study were asked about their personal experiences in vocabulary strategies use and challenges during the interview. The questionnaire in this study was five point Likert scale (frequency scale), in which the respondents use never-always. It contained 43 items. The items 1-8 were discovery vocabulary learning strategies, 9-13 social vocabulary learning strategies, 14-15 consolidation vocabulary learning strategies, 16-29 memory vocabulary learning strategies, 30-38 cognitive vocabulary learning strategies and 39-42 were metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies. In addition to this, two open-ended questions were used to gather information about the challenges of vocabulary learning strategies.

## Data analyses

Before using in the main study, all of the data gathering instruments were reviewed by the PhD candidates at Ambo University. This helped the researcher to ensure face validity of the instruments. In addition to this, the instruments were piloted to similar participants of the study which determined the construct validity. The instruments were then revised based on their comments and suggestions. The data gathered through questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 21.00 version. When analyzing data, the means were compared to identify which vocabulary learning strategy the students employed in their vocabulary learning. The internal consistency of questionnaire was high (Cronbach alpha = .863).

*Table 1: Reliability of Questionnaires*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.863	.778	42

*Table 2: Analysis of participants' discovery vocabulary learning strategy use*

	<b>Discovery Strategies</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1	I analyze the type of new words; for example, whether it is a noun, verb, pronoun, or adjective	2.30	.863
2	I analyze the affixes and roots of new words.	2.74	.664
3	I analyze any available pictures or gestures accompanying	2.02	.795
4	I guess the meaning of new words from text or context.	4.08	.778
5	I use a bilingual dictionary, for example, English-Afan Oromo dictionary to find the meaning of new words	4.58	.538
6	I use a monolingual dictionary, for example, English-English dictionary to find the meaning of new words.	2.62	.490
7	I use word lists to find the meanings.	3.50	.505
8	I use flash cards to find the meanings.	1.60	.535
	<i>Total men and standard deviation</i>	<i>2.930</i>	<i>.14892</i>

The above table 2 intended to present data gathered students' discovery students 'vocabulary learning strategies. Accordingly, the most-used were 'I use a bilingual dictionary, for example, English-Afan Oromo dictionary to

find the meaning of new words'(M=4.58, SD=.538), 'I guess the meaning of new words from text or context' (Mean= 4.08, SD=.778) and 'I use word lists to find the meanings' (M=3.50, SD=.505). The least used discovery vocabulary learning strategy was 'I use flash cards to find the meanings' (M=1.60, SD=.535).

Table 3: Analysis of participants' Social vocabulary learning strategy use

	<b><i>Social vocabulary learning strategies</i></b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
9	I ask the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new Words.	3.34	.593
10	I ask the teacher for a sentence including the new word.	2.46	.503
11	I ask my classmates for the meaning of new words.	2.00	.782
12	I discover the meaning through group work activity.	4.28	.757
13	I discover the meaning through group work activity.	2.00	.808
	<i>Total mean and std. deviation</i>	2.816	.13346

The most used social vocabulary learning strategy was 'I discover the meaning through group work activity' (M=.4.28, SD=.757). 'I ask the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new words' (M=.3.34, SD= .593) was the second frequently used strategy. The least used in social vocabulary learning strategy was 'I discover the meaning through group work activity' (M=.2.00, SD=.808).

Table 4: Analysis of participants' consolidation vocabulary learning Strategy use

	<b><i>Consolidation vocabulary learning Strategies</i></b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
14	I study and practice the meaning of new words in pairs or am group in a class.	1.92	.724
15	My teacher checks my word lists for accuracy.	1.74	.694
	<i>Total mean and sd. deviation</i>	1.8300	.12728

The items number 14 and 15 were intended to identify the participants' use of consolidation vocabulary learning strategy. Accordingly, consolidation vocabulary learning strategies were the least strategy used. As it can be seen from the above table 4, the two means of the item number 14 and 15 were below 2.

*Table 5: Analysis of participants' memory vocabulary learning Strategy use*

	<b>Memory vocabulary learning Strategies</b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
16	It is easy for me to learn new words when they have pictorial representation of their meaning (e.g., images, and drawings with	3.76	.744
17	I image word's meaning.	3.44	.501
18	I connect the word to a personal experience.	3.62	.490
19	I associate the word with its coordinates, for example, fruits (apple, orange,	3.08	.724
20	I connect the word to its synonyms.	4.14	.729
21	I use the new word in a sentence.	4.06	.767
22	I study the spelling of a new word.	3.88	.773
23	I study the sound of a new word.	3.02	.769
24	I say new words aloud when studying.	3.18	.720
25	I image word's form to remember it.	3.36	.722
26	I remember the affixes and roots of new words.	3.94	.740
27	I remember the part of speech of new words.	2.96	.807
28	I try to use my own language to explain, and remember the meaning of new words.	3.80	.700
29	I use physical actions when learning a new word	2.12	.746
	<i>Total mean and sd. deviation</i>	<i>3.454</i>	<i>.09464</i>

The most frequent memory vocabulary learning strategy was 'I connect the word to its synonyms (M=.4.14, SD=.729). The second most-used memory learning strategy was the students' use of the new word in a sentence (M=4.0621, item No 21). The third most-used strategy was 'I remember the affixes and roots of new words' (M=3.94). The least used memory vocabulary learning strategy was ' I use physical actions when learning a new word' (M=.2.12, SD=.746).

*Table 6: Analysis of participants' cognitive vocabulary learning Strategy use*

	<b>Cognitive strategies</b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
30	I verbally repeat new words several times.	3.12	1.136

31	I write new words several times.	3.14	1.107
32	I use wordlists, and revise them over time.	3.56	.760
33	I use flash cards to remember words.	1.88	.773
34	I take notes about new words.	3.30	.678
35	I use the vocabulary section in my textbook.	3.30	.580
36	I listen to a CD of word lists.	1.96	.638
37	I put English labels on physical objects.	1.78	.648
38	I keep a vocabulary notebook.	3.42	.758
	<i>Total mean and sd. deviation</i>	2.828	.20069

The above table 6 showed that the most frequently used cognitive vocabulary learning strategies was 'I use wordlists, and revise them over time' (M=.3.56, SD=.760). Next to this, 'I take notes about new words (M=3.30, SD=.678) and 'I use the vocabulary section in my textbook' (M=3.30, SD=.580). The least three cognitive vocabulary learning strategies were 'I listen to a CD of word lists' (M=1.96, SD=.638), 'I put English labels on physical objects' (M=1.78, SD=.648) and 'I use flash cards to remember words' (M=1.88, SD=.773).

*Table 7: Analysis of participants' Metacognitive vocabulary learning Strategy use*

	<b>Metacognitive strategies</b>	Mean	Std. deviation
39	I use English social media (song, films).	3.46	.734
40	I test myself with word lists.	1.88	.627
41	I skip or pass new words.	3.80	.756
42	I continue to study new words over time.	2.36	.525
	<i>Total mean and sd. deviation</i>	2.875	.10647

Frequently used metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies were 'I skip or pass new words (M= 3.80, SD=.756) and 'I use English social media (song, films) (M=3.46, SD=.734). Next to this, 'I keep a vocabulary notebook ( M=3.42) was used. The least metacognitive vocabulary learning strategy used was 'I test myself with word lists (M=1.88, SD=.627).

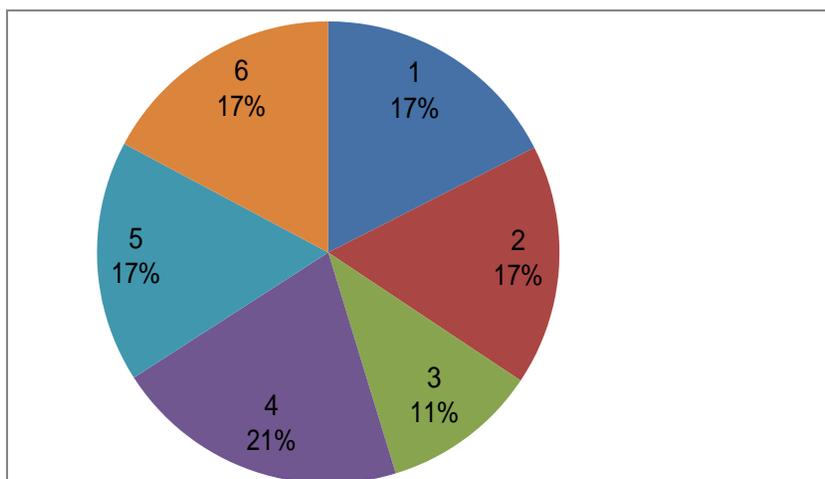
*Table 8: Analysis of overall students' vocabulary learning strategy use*

	<i>Types of vocabulary learning strategy</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
1	Discovery vocabulary learning strategy	2.930	.14892
2	Social vocabulary learning strategies	2.816	.13346

3	consolidation vocabulary learning Strategies	1.8300	.12728
4	memory vocabulary learning Strategies	3.454	.09464
5	cognitive vocabulary learning Strategies	2.828	.20069
6	Metacognitive vocabulary learning	2.875	.10647

The purpose of this study is to investigate which type of vocabulary learning strategy the samples employ in learning vocabulary. Accordingly, memory vocabulary learning Strategies (M=3.454, SD=.09464) was the most frequently used type of vocabulary learning strategy. To this contrary, consolidation vocabulary learning Strategies (M=1.8300, SD=.12728) was the least employed vocabulary learning strategy by the participants of the study. The following pie chart indicated the percent of respondents' use of the strategies. Accordingly, Discovery vocabulary learning strategy represent Social vocabulary learning strategies, cognitive vocabulary learning Strategies and Metacognitive vocabulary learning Strategies represent 17%.

As it can be seen in the pie chart, the highest percentage of memory vocabulary learning Strategies which is 21% of all vocabulary learning strategies.



This study also intended to identify the challenges of learning vocabulary learning strategies. In order to collect data for this, interview and open-ended questions were used. The data gathered through these two instruments indicated the following challenges of learning vocabulary learning strategies: The English teachers themselves do not aware of most of the vocabulary learning strategies, students' family background, students lack of confidence to use English, the curriculum is inappropriate for helping students to improve their vocabulary learning strategies, students' lack of motivation, students' lack of practice vocabulary, overcrowdings of the classroom, lack of awareness, the students' overall language proficiencies, nature of materials used, inadequate attention given to vocabulary learning, lack of enough knowledge how to apply strategies, lack of use of

English extensively, limited knowledge of vocabulary, lack of guided vocabulary learning practice and lack of practice with materials that are related to students' culture.

## Summary of findings and discussions

In any language learning, vocabulary is the focal point of acquisition. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge of the learners led to difficulties in second language learning. One of the possible causes for the vocabulary learning problem is because there has been little focus on vocabulary instruction in the L2/FL classroom and the students' lack of awareness on how to use vocabulary learning strategies. Because of this, emphasis should be given on vocabulary development in the process of language learning. The aim of this study was to investigate in-service English major students' vocabulary learning strategy use and challenges of vocabulary learning strategy at Ambo University in 2019. The data were gathered using two types of data gathering instruments: questionnaires and interview. The result gathered through these instruments indicated that the respondents used some of the vocabulary learning strategies very frequently in learning vocabulary. For instance, they used bilingual dictionaries to find the meaning of new words ( $M=4.58$ ), and guessed the meaning of new words from text or context (Mean= 4.08) (see table 2). In a similar way, they frequently discovered the meaning through group work activity ( $M=4.28$ ) (see table 3). They also connected the word to its synonyms ( $M=4.14$ ) (table 4). To this contrary, the samples did not use many of the vocabulary learning strategies frequently. For instance, they used flash cards to find the meanings ( $M=1.60$ ) (table 2). Discovering the meaning through group work activity was also least used vocabulary learning strategy by the respondents ( $M=2.00$ ) (table 3). Additionally, their use of physical actions when learning a new word was low ( $M=2.12$ ) (table 4). Finally, their use of listening CD of word lists ( $M=1.96$ ), putting English labels on physical objects ( $M=1.78$ ) and using flash cards to remember words ( $M=1.88$ ) were very low.

This study also investigated which type of vocabulary learning strategy the samples employ in learning vocabulary. Accordingly, the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies types was memory vocabulary learning strategy ( $M=3.454$ ). This study is in line with Schmitt's (1997) who found that highest number of her subjects used discovery vocabulary learning strategies, especially bilingual dictionary use in learning new vocabulary. The second most-used vocabulary learning strategy was discovery vocabulary learning strategy ( $M=2.930$ ). Metacognitive vocabulary learning Strategies ( $M=2.875$ ) was the third most-used. Consolidation vocabulary learning strategy ( $M=1.839$ ) was the least-used vocabulary learning strategy type. This finding is contrary with Oxford's (1990) who found that conscious use of vocabulary learning strategies is one of the features of good learners. In a similar way, Nation (2001) suggests that the students should consider all vocabulary learning strategies as a means of learning English. The data collected using open-ended

questionnaires and interview results showed the challenges of vocabulary learning strategies. These challenges were students' lack of background knowledge on vocabulary learning, students lack of training on how to learn new words, lack of appropriate reading texts in schools, overuse of dictionary in learning new vocabulary and teacher use of limited input.

## Recommendations

Based on the results and discussions of the findings, the following recommendations were forwarded for the concerned bodies:

Consolidation vocabulary learning strategy was the least vocabulary learning strategy employed by the participants of the study. Therefore, the instructors should aware the students about how to use these strategies. The students can be willing to try new vocabulary learning strategy if the teachers instructed and introduced them. This recommendation is also work for other least employed strategies. The instructors should consider vocabulary as the major elements of teaching English language.

The students should do all their best to study on their own and learn all vocabulary learning strategies on how and when to use. They need to be aware of vocabulary learning strategies development can be through different ways.

All concerned bodies should create good environment to minimize the challenges of leaning new vocabulary learning strategies.

In Ethiopian higher education contexts, a few studies on vocabulary learning strategies were carried out. Therefore, future researchers in EFL should give emphasizes on students' vocabulary learning strategies.

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