

# Teachers' Strategies to Increase Vocabulary's for Young Learners: Teachers' Use and Perception

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**Abstract:** Teaching English vocabulary to young learners is an essential component of early language education, serving as a cornerstone for building effective communication skills, fostering cognitive development, and enabling academic success. Studies on strategies teachers use and their perception on the effectiveness of the strategies they implement towards the teaching of vocabulary to young learners are still scarce. The purpose of this study was to examine the methods used by teachers to teach words/vocabulary to young students in English and to ascertain how these methods were perceived by the teachers themselves. A qualitative method was employed to seek answers. This study used interviews and observation as its instruments. Four teachers with a degree in English education who have been teaching young students in the language for more than a year made up the research participants. The results revealed that the teachers used games, pictures, memorizing techniques, translations, realia, action/mime/gesture, and songs. The teachers felt that various techniques were appropriate for teaching vocabulary to younger students since the teachers could combine more than two strategies in a single session. As a result, they used a variety of techniques and activities in their instructions to help young students enjoy studying English vocabulary

**Keywords:** multiple strategies, vocabulary's enhancement, EFL young learners, teachers' perception, teachers' practice

**Abstrak:** Bahasa terdiri dari kata-kata. Kata-kata sangat penting dalam hampir setiap aspek kehidupan kita karena kata-kata diperlukan untuk berbicara, menulis, mendengarkan, dan membaca. Mengajarkan kosakata bahasa Inggris kepada pelajar muda merupakan komponen penting dari pendidikan bahasa awal, yang berfungsi sebagai landasan untuk membangun keterampilan komunikasi yang efektif, mendorong perkembangan kognitif, dan memungkinkan keberhasilan akademis. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk meneliti metode yang digunakan oleh guru untuk mengajarkan kata-kata/kosakata kepada siswa muda dalam bahasa Inggris dan untuk memastikan bagaimana metode ini dipersepsikan oleh guru itu sendiri. Untuk menjawab pertanyaan penelitian, metode kualitatif digunakan. Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara dan observasi sebagai instrumennya. Delapan guru dengan gelar dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggris yang telah mengajar siswa muda dalam bahasa tersebut selama lebih dari setahun menjadi peserta penelitian. Menurut hasil penelitian, guru menggunakan permainan, gambar, teknik menghafal, terjemahan, realia, aksi/mimik/gestur, dan lagu. Guru merasa bahwa teknik tersebut sesuai untuk mengajarkan kosakata kepada siswa yang lebih muda karena guru dapat menggabungkan lebih dari dua strategi dalam satu sesi. Oleh karena itu, mereka menggunakan berbagai teknik dan aktivitas dalam instruksi mereka untuk membantu siswa muda menikmati pembelajaran kosakata bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** strategi, peningkatan kosakata, pembelajar muda EFL, persepsi guru

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary serves as a critical component of communication (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Transcending the role of mere word collection to become a comprehensive toolset for the effective and efficient exchange of ideas and information. This expansive function of vocabulary is evident both in everyday interactions and professional environments, where the precise articulation of thoughts and clear understanding of others' messages are paramount. In everyday life, vocabulary enhances personal expression and comprehension. People use words not just to convey basic information, but also to express emotions, intentions, and nuances of thought (Williams et al., 2020). A rich vocabulary allows for this expression in much finer detail. For instance, describing feelings with words like "joyful" or "content" instead of just "happy" provides a clearer picture of one's emotional state. This precision helps in reducing misunderstandings and deepening interpersonal relationships by enabling clearer communication, which in turn fosters empathy and connection. Moreover, everyday vocabulary adapts to social and cultural contexts, evolving as it absorbs new words that encapsulate contemporary lifestyles and technologies. This adaptability of language reflects and supports the dynamic nature of human relationships and societal norms, continually facilitating relevant and resonant communication.

The foundation for developing successful communication skills, promoting cognitive development, and facilitating academic achievement is the teaching of English

vocabulary to young learners (Nguyen, 2021). Understanding the impact of vocabulary acquisition at an early age provides insights into its role in shaping a child's future learning experiences and linguistic capabilities. Therefore, the early years of a child's life are critical for language acquisition. During this period, children are particularly receptive to new sounds and patterns. Vocabulary is a key element of language learning; it is through words that children learn to express their thoughts and emotions, interact with others, and explore the world around them. For young learners, especially those learning English as a second language, a robust vocabulary acts as a scaffold that supports the development of speaking, reading, and writing skills. As they expand their vocabulary, they are better equipped to form sentences, follow stories, and eventually, construct narratives of their own.

Vocabulary learning is closely linked to cognitive development. The process of acquiring new words and associating them with meanings involves complex cognitive functions including memory, abstract thinking, and sound discrimination. This cognitive exercise strengthens neural connections in the brain, promoting faster and more efficient processing of information. Research has shown that early vocabulary development is a strong predictor of reading comprehension and overall academic performance in later years. Children with a richer vocabulary tend to have higher academic achievement, as they can grasp complex concepts and instructions more effectively (Levlin et al., 2022). Effective communication is fundamental to success in both personal and

academic contexts. For young learners, vocabulary acquisition enhances their ability to communicate clearly and confidently. Knowing the right words allows children to convey their thoughts and feelings more precisely, making interactions with peers and adults more meaningful. Additionally, a diverse vocabulary enables children to understand others better, fostering empathy and social skills. These interpersonal capabilities are crucial as they navigate through school and beyond, influencing their social integration and collaborative abilities.

In educational settings, vocabulary serves as a gateway to all areas of learning. From reading comprehension in language arts to problem descriptions in mathematics, vocabulary is integral to understanding academic content (Lee et al., 2013). Teachers often use vocabulary-rich instructions to explain concepts across subjects, and students with a strong vocabulary base are better prepared to follow these lessons. Moreover, standardized tests frequently assess vocabulary knowledge, directly impacting students' academic evaluations and opportunities. So teaching vocabulary to young learners comes with its challenges. Children at this age have varying levels of attention and retention, requiring teachers to employ creative and engaging methods to sustain interest and facilitate learning. Techniques such as songs, games, visual aids, and story-telling are particularly effective, as they make learning enjoyable and memorable (Malik et al., 2020; Obaid, 2021; Salhi & Kuprina, 2021; Shaban & Shamshad Junejo, 2024). Moreover, repeated exposure and

contextual learning, where vocabulary is taught through thematic units or stories, help reinforce word meanings and usage.

The strategies teachers use to teach vocabulary to young learners are crucial, shaping the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition which is foundational to language learning (Alfadil, 2020). Young learners are at a critical stage of cognitive development, where their brains are highly receptive to new information. Effective teaching strategies help to optimize this window of opportunity, facilitating easier and deeper learning of new vocabulary (Riordan et al., 2019). These strategies can enhance cognitive processes such as memory, pattern recognition, and associative learning which are vital for understanding and using new words (Andrä et al., 2020). Vocabulary is the building block of language proficiency. Early vocabulary skills are strongly linked to later success in reading comprehension and other academic. Teachers' strategies are essential in laying this foundation areas as they help to ensure that learners not only memorize words but also understand their meanings, uses, and nuances. This understanding is critical for developing the ability to communicate effectively and to further explore and master a language.

Effective teaching strategies are key to keeping young learners engaged and motivated. Children are more likely to enjoy learning when it involves fun, interactive, and age-appropriate activities. Techniques such as games, songs, and stories not only make learning more enjoyable but also more memorable. Positive early experiences with language learning can foster a lifelong interest in exploring languages and

cultures. Children have varied learning styles, and a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching vocabulary often falls short. Skilled teachers employ a range of strategies to cater to different preferences and strengths, whether visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or a combination. This personalized approach helps ensure that all students have the best possible chance to succeed, regardless of their individual learning styles. Vocabulary teaching strategies also play a role in social and cultural integration, especially in diverse classrooms. Through language, teachers can introduce young learners to different cultures, fostering a sense of global citizenship and respect for diversity. Additionally, language is a key component of social interaction; thus, equipping children with a broad vocabulary can help them navigate social situations more effectively, enhancing their communication skills and social confidence.

Many investigations have concentrated on the subject of the teacher's strategies when teaching vocabulary, with different focuses. Patra et al., (2022) conducted research employing a vocabulary-learning strategy that made studying in the classroom enjoyable and engaging, increasing the significance and retention of language. Soleha (2022) carried out research on vocabulary teaching methods, to see how colorful images could increase young student's ability in vocabulary. Other conducted a study on how critical issues in vocabulary teaching for young learners in today's globalized world (Levlin et al., 2022). (Butler, 2019) synthesized recent knowledge from the related fields and to provide theoretically sound and evidence-based information that is useful for

teaching vocabulary to young learners of second/foreign language. While other researchers focused on a specific technique as chants and singing to help increase students' ability in learning vocabulary (Evawati, 2014). A case study aims at investigating the teachers' beliefs about the role of exposure, motivation, and practice in English class in elementary school and how they translate their beliefs into routine instructional actions was also conducted (Meisani, 2022).

Based on the abovementioned previous research, the studies on how teachers perceived and examined their choice of teaching strategies in teaching vocabulary for young learners were still on scarce, especially studies in which both teacher's choice of vocabulary teaching strategies and teachers' perception on those choice were conducted in one study. Thus, this study was aimed at: 1) identifying various strategies teachers use to enhance vocabulary learning among young learners, and 2) exploring teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. This study was intended to fill gaps on this area which have not been researched yet.

## **2. METHODS**

Qualitative research examines the richness, depth, and complexity of phenomena. Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a methodology that aims to investigate and comprehend the significance that individuals or groups attribute to social or human issues.

Emerging processes and questions are part of the research process. The researchers used Mackey and Grass's (2005) definition of qualitative research, which states that it is research that is based solely on descriptive data and does not make use of statistical methodologies.

This design is used for this study because it is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014)

## 2.1 Research Design

This study was descriptive and qualitative in nature. It focused on the methods teachers used to teach vocabulary to young students. Additionally, the study explored teachers' perceptions of how best to implement those methods.

### 2.1.1 Participants

Four teachers who have had at least one year of experience in teaching English for young learners were the participants of the study.

### 2.2.1 Technique of Data Collection and Instruments

In this study, the researchers examined qualitative data from two sources namely observations and interviews. For the Classroom Observations, the researchers performed non-participant observations in classrooms to see the strategies in action, note contextual factors such as class size, resources, and student demographics, and use an observation checklist to systematically document teaching practices and student interactions towards the teachers'

implementation of various strategies for teaching vocabulary for young learners.

For the observation, the following guideline was checked:

Classroom Observation Notes			
Date			
Class			
Students			
Students' age			
Students' level			
Teacher			
Strategy used by the teacher		Tick (√)	Notes
1. Realia			
2. Pictures			
3. Translation			
4. Action/Mime/Gesture			
5. Enumeration			
6. Game			
7. Memorization			
8. Song			
9. Others			
Methods used by the teachers			
1. Direct/Natural Method			
2. Suggestopedia Method			

3. Total Physical Response (TPR) Method	:		
4. Lexical Approach	:		
5. Others	:		
Media to present the vocabulary			
1) Whiteboard	:		
2) Video/Audio	:		
3) Infographic	:		
4) Book	:		
5) Flashcard	:		
6) Board game	:		
7) Others	:		
<b>Students' reaction in the teaching-learning process</b>			
<b>The problem faced by the teacher in the teaching-learning process</b>			
<b>Problem solving by the teacher</b>			
<b>Teaching-learning process</b>			

1) Opening	:		
2) Core activities	:		
3) Closing	:		

The interview was based on the following list:

- 1) How long have you been teaching young students English?
- 2) Have you ever received specialized training for instructing young students? What was the duration of the course? A month, a term, or a year?

- 3) What methods do you use to teach vocabulary to young students? Why did you select such techniques?
- 4) What are the typical techniques you employ? Do you combine the strategies you just mentioned when teaching? How frequently? Never? Never, seldom, or constantly?
- 5) How do you go about evaluating their vocabulary skills? How many times did you examine or evaluate them?
- 6) When teaching vocabulary, what are the main obstacles or sources of irritation for you? How do you handle it?
- 7) How should novice educators approach teaching language to young students?

This interview questions were conducted to the four English teacher. The interview guide with open-ended questions allowed for in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges. Record and transcribe interviews were provided for detailed analysis.

## 2.2 Technique of Data Analysis

The information gathered from the field notes and interviews was analyzed in the following ways: first, making data transcript from audio recorded. The result of observation and interviews are collected and transcript in written language. All record data were written by sentence. The transcript should be written in a computer file by being different name based on content, date, and time of observation. Second, giving code. All data that was written in sentence was given code that expressed theme, activities, condition as supporting research data. Third, making writing data duplicate for copying the data. The original data is saved and copying was

used as analysis material. Fourth, collecting the same code data and submitted it in one data. Finally, the fifth, the data are interpreting to find out the actualization of teachers' strategies in teaching vocabulary to young learners.

### **3. RESULTS**

This section provides findings to answer the questions this study aims for. The first research question is “What are teachers’ strategies to help young learners in learning vocabulary?” The result to this question is that the teachers used various strategies to help young learners in learning vocabulary. The results were based on the observation conducted on the teachers.

#### **3.1 Interview at class C with teacher H**

In 2010, Mr. H began instructing young students. He spent approximately three months in a training program in Jakarta. He used every technique that has been mentioned in the chapter two in addition to storytelling. He used the approach based on the circumstances of the students. He used a variety of techniques to get his students excited about a lesson. In his lesson, he frequently used game, picture, realia, and memorizing strategies. These techniques can boost pupils' enthusiasm for studying. Through conversation, he assessed his pupils' recall of the words from the greeting part. The nature of the younger students presented him with a challenge. Some kids lack motivation to learn, which is another barrier. His approach is to carefully

consider the state of the students before deciding on the best course of action. In order to improve his students' willingness to learn, he also discussed the significance of studying English. He stated that since educating young learners differs greatly from teaching adults, training is especially crucial for novice educators.

#### **3.2 Interview at class A with the teacher NN**

In 2018, Ms. NN started teaching young students. On her campus, she enrolled in a special education course that prepared her to instruct young students. She taught her students language through games, realia, pictures, translation, memorization, and songs. She believed that the classroom environment might be enhanced by using those techniques. She alternated between two or three approaches for every meeting. Because younger students required a variety of activities to prevent boredom, she frequently incorporated games, drawings, and memorization into her lessons. Every meeting, she evaluated her students in the first portion by asking them to participate in a quick chat or small group discussion. She had trouble with young, boisterous students. She therefore frequently utilized the game to manage this illness. She lost a great deal of energy as a result. She recommended doing the training course if one wished to educate young learners as a new instructor, due to the fact that young learners differ from adults in certain ways. For the teaching and learning process to be more effective, the teacher needed to be more knowledgeable and motivated.

From the interview, the information gathered on "What are teachers' perceptions in applying the strategy in teaching vocabulary process?" was that the teachers had nearly identical opinions about how to use the method in vocabulary instruction as the following: first, those strategies were appropriate for young learners since they allowed the teacher to construct more engaging and diverse activities. Second, the teacher had chosen the strategies based on the students' needs and the classroom environment. Finally, the teachers switched up the strategies to make young learners enjoy the learning process, as young learners are eager to learn through various activities.

### **3.3 Observation in class A with teacher NI**

She employed a variety of techniques, including pictures from a book, memorization in which the teacher instructed the students to memorize the vocabulary and to mention it orally before the teacher closed the class, gestures, games like "Get the Star," and translation. The teacher wrote the vocabulary into the young learners' mother tongue on the whiteboard. The responses from the younger students showed how much they enjoyed the process of teaching and learning. While they were playing games, their excitement was more apparent. Young students and teachers had excellent communication, as evidenced by the students' quick questioning when they run across problems. The young student who always wanted more attention from her and moved around was the teacher's dilemma. She then requested that young student to give an example of the term.

### **3.4 Observation in class B with teacher GK**

She used a variety of techniques, including "guessing me" games, pictures from books, translation (teacher and young students translated the new vocabulary together), memory (teacher instructed them to memorize the vocabulary and they mentioned it orally before the instructor closed the class), and memorizing of the vocabulary. The young students appeared to be enjoying and learning from the process. The game they played in the classroom created a really dynamic mood. There was good contact between the teachers and the younger students. The teacher's issue was that one of the younger students who was drowsy, so she spent more time with him.

### **3.5 Observation with class C with teacher H.**

He applied four different approaches. Pictures from a book, dictation translations by the teacher, the game "Bingo!", and memorization—where students individually stated their vocabulary words in front of the class—are his strategies. The young students appeared really contented, particularly when they finished the game. The teacher's challenge came from a particular student who insisted on addressing her friends' queries in order to demonstrate her presence. In order to solve this issue, the teacher suggested that she give her friends another chance.

### **3.6 Observation in class D with teacher NN**

Three strategies were used by the teacher in her class, according to the observation. These were games (Snake Word), realia (a doll, a



person), and translation (teacher translating the new vocabulary verbally). All of the young students were engaged in lively and enthusiastic learning activities that were a lot of fun. The teacher's issue was that pupils occasionally mispronounced words or spelt them incorrectly. Throughout the teaching-learning process, the teacher inquired about the terminology multiple times. It was done to make sure young students had a fluid memory of the word. From the observation, the teachers showed that they usually used games, pictures, memorization, translation, realia, action/mime/gesture, and songs as strategies to teach English vocabulary to young learners.

The second research question is "What are teachers' perceptions in applying the strategy in teaching vocabulary process?". The answers to this question were gained through interview to the teachers of the two schools. The following is the synopsis of each interviewee.

### **3.7 Interview at class A with teacher NI**

In 2008, Ms. NI began teaching young students. She took special education classes from her Medan campus to learn how to instruct young students in English. To keep the kids from getting bored in her class, she employed a variety of techniques. Her techniques included role-playing games, pictures, realia (actual objects), songs, games, translation, action/gesture/mime, and storytelling. The most popular ones were memory exercises, games, and images. She defined young learners as pupils who enjoyed a variety of activities due to their propensity for boredom. In addition, she combined three or four different techniques in a single meeting to

maintain the enthusiasm of the young students for their studies. At the start of every meeting and during the teaching and learning process, she assessed her pupils' vocabulary proficiency. She ran into the problem of the young students' character still needing guidance. For example, young students who rapidly become bored, those who believe they were smarter than their peers, and so on. She pushed herself to come up with new lessons to teach her students and frequently offered them guidance and rewards in the form of small gifts. Some of her top tips for teaching young learners are getting to know their traits, developing strong classroom management skills, and consistently revising lesson plans so that the students like every task the teachers presented.

### **3.8 Interview at class B with teacher GK**

In 2019, Ms. GK started teaching young students in English. She holds a degree from a Banda Aceh institution. Although she did not have any specialized training, she did take a course at her college on teaching English to young students. She used visual aids such as flashcards, drawings, posters, and book illustrations, as well as games, memory exercises, storytelling, mime, and gestures in role-playing or drama. Although she had used a variety of techniques, drama was better suited to her students' personalities. She frequently used picture (drawing), game, translation, and memorizing techniques. Because her students liked the process of learning through diverse activities, she combined such strategies. Every early meeting, she conducted a welcoming section assessment of her students. Through regular conversation, she attempted to jog the

students' recollection of the preceding terminology. During the learning process, she also abruptly inquired about the meaning of a few vocabulary terms. She did it to find out how well her students remembered things. She believed the ability of young learners to pronounce words correctly and the fact that some pupils were not satisfied with their own abilities were the biggest educational problems.

Based on the data obtained, the researcher identified various perspectives on the strategies used by teachers to help young students learn vocabulary and what teachers' perceptions are about the application of these strategies in teaching English vocabulary. The findings of this study revealed seven effective and frequent ways for teaching vocabulary to young learners. They are game, picture, memorization, translation, realia, action, mime, gesture, and song. The researchers highlighted the strategies most commonly utilized by the teacher. The findings were validated by multiple earlier investigations, as indicated in Korompis et al., (2022); Muhsinin et al., (2024) showed that the picture technique is effective for teaching vocabulary to young learners. Liyaningsih performed research and discovered that the most prevalent strategies employed by teachers are translation, memorization, games, and songs (Achmad YW, Reza P, 2021). In addition, Bhatti et al., (2022); Korompis et al., (2022) that there are two ways for teaching vocabulary to young students namey memory and translation. Wati & Agustin (2022) concluded that pictures, realia, games, and songs were helpful strategies for young students. Amalia also recommended four strategies: picture, realia, translation, and memorizing. The

results are in line with Baroroh & Imania (2024) teaching young learners is different from teaching adult learners. Consequently, instructors of children and adults use different teaching methodologies and practices.

In order to select effective strategies, the teacher also kept an eye on the state of the class and the students; because maintaining eye contact is a key characteristic of teacher competence (Smidekova et al., 2018). Based on their observations, young students were eager to learn through a variety of enjoyable activities, so they experimented with new concepts to liven up the classroom. The two most popular strategies used in the classroom, according to all the teachers, are games and pictures. This result ties well with previous studies Nguyen Nguyen (2021) wherein the argument lies heavily on the fact that games influence students' vocabulary learning and evaluate their attitudes about strengths and weaknesses in vocabulary learning. Furthermore, Andrä et al., (2020) integrating images into pedagogy has shown potential to enhance students' foreign language vocabulary learning. These things might be due to sufficient strategies to improve students' vocabulary. These can be used alone or in combination, and the main thing is that the students appreciated every activity that was made with a game or picture.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study aims to describe teachers' perceptions of the strategies used by teachers in

teaching English vocabulary. Based on the results and discussion above games, pictures, memorization, translation, realia, action/mime/gesture, and songs are popular strategies used by teachers to teach English vocabulary to young learners. The teachers' perspectives on using the technique to teach vocabulary were nearly identical. First of all, the teacher could design more engaging and varied exercises using those strategies, which made them suitable for younger students. Secondly, the teachers selected the teaching methods according to the pupils' circumstances and the classroom environment. In the end, teachers employed a variety of strategies to engage students in the learning process since they are eager to learn through a range of activities. This research has a limitation that was only focused on teachers where they were asked for their opinions about various vocabulary teaching strategies for students. In the future, it would be more comprehensive if similar research also involved students where they were asked to assess their understanding of English vocabulary against the strategies taught by the teachers.

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