

How do English Teachers Apply Layered Vocabulary Teaching Strategies in Indonesian Junior Secondary EFL Classroom?

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study explores how English teachers apply vocabulary teaching strategies in EFL classrooms at the junior secondary level. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three experienced English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Wasuponda, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The findings reveal that teachers employed a diverse repertoire of strategies encompassing decontextualizing (word lists, flashcards, dictionary use), semi-contextualizing (word grouping, association, imagery, keyword method, physical response, semantic mapping), fully contextualizing (reading, listening, speaking, writing), and adaptable approaches (structured reviewing). These strategies were implemented through both planned instruction—deliberate preparation of materials and activities—and incidental teaching, in which teachers spontaneously explained unfamiliar words arising during classroom interaction. Although implementation varied according to individual preferences and contextual demands, the integration of multiple strategies effectively supported students' vocabulary acquisition, retention, and meaningful use. The study underscores the pedagogical value of flexible, layered strategies in resource-variable multilingual settings and carries important implications for teacher professional development, curriculum design aligned with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, and policy initiatives that promote strategic sequencing and learner autonomy in outer-circle EFL contexts.

Keywords: Vocabulary Teaching Strategies; Vocabulary Learning; English Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the basic elements in learning English as a foreign language, covering both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Recognition of the idea that a strong vocabulary allows students to comprehend texts and speech with greater ease, in addition to conveying

their thoughts clearly. Thornbury (is) “Without grammar, not much can be conveyed: Without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Fauziningrum et al., 2023), which insanity that the root of communication is vocabulary. Hence, it is appropriate to prioritize vocabulary teaching in EFL contexts henceforth.

Vocabulary acquisition is still a troublesome task for most of the students, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries like Indonesia. This is because students lacked the vocabulary needed to help them perform well in a foreign language (Saengpakdeejit, 2014; Megawati & Mandarani, 2016). Furthermore, learners easily forget the new vocabulary and lack of motivation to learn it (Vitasromo & Candra, 2019). Memorization or translation are still common in the practice of teaching; however, these methods tend to be tedious and less optimal for long term learning.

With these challenges, teachers must also be prepared to make more than choosing an appropriate vocabulary teaching strategy using those strategies meaningfully in their classroom practices. Strategies are one of the fundamental approaches to helping students learn language well (Holidazia & Rodliyah, 2020). Different approaches, such as the use of word lists, graphic organisers based on pictures and context-related activities and extensive outputs have been proposed to facilitate vocabulary learning (Fauziningrum et al., 2023). Besides, the classification by Oxford and Crookall (1990) on teaching strategies in vocabulary instruction can generally categorize as de-contextualizing, semi-contextualizing, fully-contextualizing or adaptable ones.

A number of earlier studies have explored vocabulary teaching strategies from different approaches. Fauziningrum et al. (2023) Translation and dictionary-based strategies were the most widely used by English teachers, however, these they were also relatively poor in terms of fostering active vocabulary use (e.g., Strategic Planning), and their discussion was not set in expressing how well or otherwise they would work within a classroom context (Zhang et al. In a similar but to the elementary level limited study, Deni and Fahriany (2020) reported on how teachers implemented games, songs, and visual media in creating an engaged learning environment for young learners as simply a triangle separating curriculum with teachers' characterist Combers. On the other hand, Vasu and Dhanavel (2016) found that even though teachers frequently used to guess from context, group work and sentences sequence among others; they avoided some strategies like flashcards and keyword method, but this study was analysed using quantitative data without information on how these strategies were implemented in real classroom practices. Although different vocabulary teaching strategies have been identified, the results of these studies suggest that most earlier studies are about types of strategies or teachers' understanding in general, and do not consider how those strategies are used in practice.

Thus, there has been unfulfilled research needs on what strategies in vocabulary teaching are implemented by English teachers and how are they carried out in the

classroom practices of junior high school. It is important to raise this prospect since a significant number of students at this level are still struggling with vocabulary learning because of poor exposure and ineffective instruction. Teachers must ensure that strategies are usable (fit the needs of students, classroom conditions and learning objectives). Furthermore, using layered vocabulary teaching strategies with junior high school students is a very sensible thing to do because of five considerable factors. First, according to the critical period hypothesis, their brain plasticity occurs during a stage when phonology and linguistic structures that are already capable of abstract and logical analysis are simple to utilize (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2023).

Second, building the lexical prime: they have the capacity for mental translation and are incredibly perceptive. This indicates that they are proficient in collocation, which helps them retain a variety of words and facilitates self-expression without requiring a lot of thought (Webb & Nation, 2022). Third, the confidence gap: the two previously mentioned factors are closely related to students' self-confidence and language anxiety (Derakhshan et al., 2021). Similarly, students with limited vocabulary will be depressed by their incapacity to express themselves in English. Fourth, exposure highlights how crucial it is for teachers to employ English-language resources in line with students' needs and identities as they grow from childhood to adulthood (Norton & De Costa, 2024). Last, how the brain and memory work: Squire & Genzel (2021) stated their hippocampus is in a state that makes it relatively simple for them to process and integrate information, including new words. In light of this, teachers must employ a range of instructional strategies to assist students in learning English as a first stage in the foreign language's acquisition, which significantly speeds up information acquisition and optimize their long-term memory working.

Based on these considerations, this study focused to know how the strategy of vocabulary teaching implemented by English teacher in class especially at SMP negeri 1 wasuponda. This study is anticipated to shed light on effective ways to teach vocabulary and enhance English language instruction in EFL contexts by elucidating how certain strategies are applied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Studies

Empirical research has consistently shown that vocabulary gains are stronger when instruction is explicit, repeated, and embedded in meaningful learning contexts. Moody et al. (2018) report that “targeted vocabulary instruction leads to increased word knowledge,” while “wide reading contributes to vocabulary development,” especially when learners can engage with texts frequently and meaningfully. They also cite evidence that “explicit vocabulary instruction embedded within meaningful texts and combined with multiple opportunities to practice results in significant vocabulary gains”. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for

layered vocabulary teaching because they indicate that students benefit from more than one instructional move or exposure.

The same review also highlights that no single strategy is sufficient to produce broad and transferable vocabulary growth. previous reviews found “inadequate evidence to suggest that direct teaching of word meanings can advance generalized comprehension,” and they therefore advocate “teaching flexible word-learning strategies and techniques for self-monitoring” (Moody et al., 2018). This argument reinforces the need for layered instruction in which teachers integrate explanation, contextual analysis, interaction, and review rather than relying on direct definition alone.

Recent teacher-focused research in Indonesia also suggests that vocabulary instruction typically involves multiple classroom strategies, although these are not always organized systematically as a layered pedagogical sequence. In a case study at the senior high school level in South Sulawesi, Farahdiba et.al (2024) found that the teacher used “discussion and demonstration strategies, using electronic media as a learning media, using games(applications), teaching vocabulary strategy”. The same study reports that the teacher also used strategies involving independent vocabulary learning, interaction with teachers and peers, memory-oriented techniques, and digital games.

This study is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that Indonesian EFL teachers already combine several techniques in practice, even if those techniques are not explicitly conceptualized as layers of instruction. Farahdiba et.al (2024) further identify “lack of motivation, phone dependency and self-confidence” as problems in teaching vocabulary. These findings suggest that research at the junior secondary level is needed to examine not only what strategies teachers use, but also how they sequence, adapt, and connect those strategies to support sustained vocabulary learning in classroom interaction.

The reviewed literature provides a strong foundation for investigating how English teachers apply layered vocabulary teaching strategies in Indonesian junior secondary EFL classrooms. Theoretically, prior studies show that effective vocabulary instruction is supported by interaction, schema activation, multimodal representation, and learner motivation. Empirically, existing research indicates that vocabulary teaching is more effective when it is explicit, repeated, contextualized, and supported by multiple opportunities for learner engagement.

Vocabulary in EFL Learning

Vocabulary is a foundational component of language proficiency because it enables learners to access meaning, participate in communication, and comprehend spoken and written texts. Moody et al. (2018) state that “a well-developed vocabulary has long been recognized as essential for success in reading,” and they further note that “vocabulary size is one of the strongest predictors of reading development” . This

position supports the view that vocabulary knowledge should be treated not merely as the accumulation of isolated lexical items, but as a multidimensional competence involving form, meaning, use, and relational knowledge across contexts.

In foreign language learning, vocabulary knowledge develops incrementally rather than instantaneously. Moody et al. (2018) explicitly argue that “word knowledge is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon,” but instead “falls along a continuum” from minimal familiarity to deeper and more flexible understanding. This continuum is particularly relevant in junior secondary EFL classrooms, where learners need repeated encounters with words and guided opportunities to extend lexical knowledge from recognition to contextualized use.

The Importance of Vocabulary

The significance of vocabulary in language learning lies in its direct contribution to comprehension, literacy development, and academic performance. Moody et al. (2018) explain that “larger vocabularies enable readers to access richer semantic resources to activate relevant background knowledge and integrate new information with existing knowledge, which leads to better comprehension”. In the same discussion, they add that “initial gaps in word knowledge may grow exponentially if no intervention is provided,” which underscores the importance of systematic vocabulary teaching in formal education.

For second and foreign language learners, vocabulary instruction is especially critical because limited lexical knowledge can hinder the development of broader literacy skills. Moody et al. (2018) note that “lack of L2 vocabulary may hinder the development of basic reading skills and text comprehension in the target language,” while research has also highlighted “the necessity of repeated exposure to vocabulary words, explicit instruction on learning strategies, and sufficient time to engage with new words”. These claims suggest that vocabulary instruction in Indonesian junior secondary EFL classrooms must be intentional, cumulative, and sufficiently varied to address both immediate comprehension needs and long-term lexical growth.

Vocabulary Teaching Strategies

Vocabulary teaching strategies refer to the instructional actions teachers use to introduce, explain, practice, and reinforce new lexical items in ways that support durable learning. A major implication of current scholarship is that effective vocabulary teaching cannot rely on a single method, because learners need multiple forms of mediation, rehearsal, and contextual application. Moody et al. (2018) report that “targeted vocabulary instruction leads to increased word knowledge,” and they identify “contextual analysis,” “semantic strategies,” and “repeated exposure” as common approaches used in empirical studies.

The literature also indicates that vocabulary instruction is most effective when it

combines explicit teaching with meaningful engagement. Moody et al. (2018) conclude that “explicit vocabulary instruction embedded within meaningful texts and combined with multiple opportunities to practice results in significant vocabulary gains”. This finding is particularly relevant to the concept of layered vocabulary teaching, because it implies that vocabulary learning should progress through sequenced instructional stages rather than through isolated explanation or memorization alone.

Layered Vocabulary Teaching

Although the term *layered vocabulary teaching strategies* is not always explicitly named in the literature, the concept can be derived from theoretical and instructional models that emphasize sequencing, scaffolding, and repeated engagement with target words. Moody et al. (2018) found that vocabulary practices are commonly grounded in “social constructivism and sociocultural theories, schema and psycholinguistic theories, motivation theory, and dual coding theory”. Taken together, these theories suggest that effective vocabulary instruction should move across several layers, including introducing meaning, building associations, supporting guided use, and consolidating learning through review and application.

From a social constructivist perspective, vocabulary learning develops through interaction and scaffolded participation. Moody et al. (2018) explain that “knowledge is constructed via interaction with others during social activities,” and they argue that “vocabulary instruction should be perceived as a social dialogue through which meanings are constructed via scaffolding and collaboration”. Within a layered teaching framework, this means that teachers do not simply define words, but create opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, share interpretations, and gradually assume greater responsibility for vocabulary use.

From a schema and psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary learning depends on how learners connect new words to prior knowledge and conceptual networks. Moody et al. (2018) describe schemas as “mental filing cabinets that allow individuals to process, encode, organize, and retrieve information”. In layered instruction, this theoretical view supports the use of semantic mapping, word association, comparison, categorization, and morphology-based analysis as intermediate stages that help learners move beyond superficial recognition toward deeper lexical understanding.

Dual coding theory also supports layered vocabulary teaching because it explains why words are more readily learned when verbal explanation is combined with visual support. Moody et al. (2018) state that “the human mind processes environmental stimuli via two mental systems (or codes), verbal and nonverbal,” and that “cognition occurs when representations from both codes become connected”. This means that visual prompts, illustrations, gestures, flashcards, and multimodal activities can function as an important instructional layer that strengthens form–meaning mapping before learners engage in broader

communicative use.

Motivation theory adds another important dimension to layered vocabulary instruction by emphasizing student engagement, autonomy, and interest. According to Moody et al. (2018), “students become intrinsically driven to read when they are curious,” believe in their abilities, and are given relevant and interesting materials . In vocabulary teaching, this implies that games, technology, collaborative tasks, and personally meaningful lexical content can serve as motivational layers that increase learners’ willingness to attend to and reuse new vocabulary over time.

Theoretical Relevance to Indonesian Junior Secondary EFL Classrooms

These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant to Indonesian junior secondary EFL classrooms, where learners often have limited exposure to English outside school and therefore depend heavily on classroom instruction for vocabulary growth. In such settings, layered vocabulary teaching offers a principled way to structure instruction from initial noticing to deeper use, especially when students need support in pronunciation, meaning, retention, and communicative application. A layered framework is also compatible with the developmental needs of adolescent learners, who benefit from explicit guidance, interactive practice, visual reinforcement, and repeated review across lessons.

Moreover, the notion of layering helps explain why vocabulary teaching should not be reduced to one-time explanation or translation. Moody et al. (2018) argue that “one size” of vocabulary instruction “does not necessarily fit all,” because students show differences in “needs, interests, and prior word knowledge”. Therefore, studying how English teachers apply layered strategies in Indonesian junior secondary classrooms is important because it can reveal how teachers adapt stages of instruction to suit learners’ characteristics, classroom realities, and pedagogical goals.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive qualitative design. A descriptive qualitative design was chosen to explore the vocabulary teaching strategies used by English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Wasuponda. This design aims to provide a comprehensive and straightforward description of an experience or phenomenon as it occurs in its natural context (Sugiyono, 2017; Sandelowski, 2010). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through rich and detailed narrative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study specifically focuses on exploring vocabulary teaching layered strategies from the teachers' perspectives. The goal is to identify the strategies used in the classroom context and to understand how these strategies are implemented in practice. Participants in this study were three English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Wasuponda who are actively involved in

teaching vocabulary to students. These teachers were selected based on their central role as primary practitioners responsible for implementing vocabulary teaching strategies.

Instruments and Procedures

Data collection in this study was carried out through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were specifically designed to explore in depth how English teachers apply vocabulary teaching strategies in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms at the junior high school level. To achieve this objective, the researcher developed an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions that focused on the teachers' actual practices, the specific strategies they used, the reasons behind their choices, and the challenges they encountered in implementing these strategies. All interviews were conducted in a private setting, audio-recorded with the participants' prior consent, and fully documented using a smartphone for accurate transcription and subsequent analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2017).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles et.al (2014). This interactive model consists of three concurrent and iterative stages data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification—which were applied systematically to ensure a rigorous and transparent interpretation of the interview data. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and transformed the raw data obtained from the interview transcripts. Irrelevant or repetitive information was discarded, while key themes, patterns, and significant segments related to vocabulary teaching strategies were highlighted and condensed.

This process made the voluminous data more manageable and sharpened the focus on aspects most relevant to the research objectives. Following data reduction, the researcher moved to the data display stage, in which the reduced data was organized and presented in structured forms such as narrative summaries, thematic matrices, and charts. This organized presentation facilitated a clearer understanding of the data, enabled the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging trends across the three participants, and allowed for easy comparison of the teachers' practices. In the final stage of conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher drew initial conclusions based on the reduced and displayed data. These conclusions were then continuously verified and tested by returning to the original transcripts to check for consistency and plausibility. This iterative verification process was carried out throughout the analysis to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings (Miles et al., 2014; Sugiyono, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents interview data on the application of vocabulary

teaching strategies by English teachers in the classroom, including de-contextualization: that is word list, flashcards, and dictionary use; semi-contextualization: that is word grouping, association, visual imagery, aural imaginary, keyword, physical response, physical sensation, semantic mapping; fully contextualization: that is reading, listening, speaking, writing; adaptable: that is structured reviewing.

De-contextualizing

This strategy teaches vocabulary out of context. The focus is on introducing words individually, without a direct link to a specific situation or usage.

Word List

One of the most consistently applied decontextualization strategies is the use of word lists to introduce new vocabulary before engaging students in further language activities. Teachers explain that providing a list of key vocabulary at the beginning of a lesson helps students gain initial exposure to important words related to the topic. The effectiveness of word lists in preparing students for learning is reflected in the following extracts below.

Extract 1 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memilih kata-kata yang relevan dengan materi, kemudian mengintegrasikannya dengan aktivitas kelas seperti word wall...melakukan penginapan sehingga siswa dapat berlatih dan memahami kosakata secara intensif.” (I select words that are relevant to the material, then integrate them into classroom activities such as word walls...and overnight stays so that students can practice and understand vocabulary intensively).

Extract 2 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“...biasanya saya tidak hanya memberi daftar kata, tetapi juga menyuruh siswa membuat kalimat atau mencari makna dalam teks.” (I usually don't just give a list of words, but also ask students to make sentences or find meanings in the text).

Extract 3 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“kadang saya gunakan untuk pengembangan kosakata siswa. Saya memberikan daftar kata lalu siswa diminta mempelajarinya dan menambah pemahaman mereka.” (Sometimes I use it for vocabulary development. I give students a list of words and ask them to study them and improve their understanding).

The findings suggest that word lists serve as an effective decontextualization strategy in vocabulary instruction. These lists are not an end in themselves, but rather a starting point for teachers to introduce target lexical items to students before deeper engagement. Overall, these data illustrate how teachers balance efficiency and effectiveness in vocabulary instruction and emphasize the importance of

professional development to design more contextualized and integrated vocabulary strategies.

Flashcards

Flashcards are used as visual aids to introduce new words in an engaging and interactive way. Teachers explain that flashcards help students connect vocabulary with visual representations, making abstract words easier to understand and remember revealed in the following extracts.

Extract 4 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memperkenalkan kosakata melalui visual dan teks terlebih dahulu, kemudian menggunakan permainan interaktif seperti menebak gambar, dilanjutkan dengan teknik pengulangan agar siswa mengingat kata-kata tersebut.” (I introduce vocabulary through visuals and text first, then use interactive games such as guessing pictures, followed by repetition techniques so that students remember the words).

In the interviews, teachers explained how they use flashcards as visual aids to introduce new words in an engaging and interactive way. Flashcards allow students to associate vocabulary with visual representations, making abstract words easier to understand and remember. This demonstrates that the use of flashcards aims not only to introduce vocabulary but also to increase student engagement with the material through an approach that combines visualization, games, and repetition as memory-strengthening strategies.

Dictionary Use

Another de-contextualizing strategy is the use of dictionary in vocabulary teaching. The teachers reported that encouraging students to use dictionaries helped them become more independent in learning new words. Rather than relying solely on the teacher’s explanation, students were guided to search for meanings on their own when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary illustrated in the following extracts.

Extract 5 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan kartu panduan, melakukan kegiatan dictionary race, dan juga memperbolehkan siswa menggunakan kamus digital atau aplikasi.” (I use guide cards, conduct dictionary races, and also allow students to use digital dictionaries or applications).

Extract 6 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya biasanya meminta siswa mencari arti sendiri lalu menjelaskan kembali, menggunakan kamus saat mengajar kosakata bukan hanya tentang mencari arti kata tetapi juga membangun keterampilan literasi memahami konteks dan meningkatkan kemandirian belajar siswa.” (I usually ask students to look up the meaning themselves and then explain it back, using a dictionary when teaching

vocabulary not only to find the meaning of words but also to build literacy skills, understand context, and increase student independence in learning).

Extract 7 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya mengingatkan siswa untuk menggunakan kamus ketika mereka menemukan kata yang sulit. Itu menjadi bagian dari proses belajar kosakata.” (I remind students to use a dictionary when they encounter difficult words. That is part of the vocabulary learning process).

In interviews, each teacher shared their approach to using dictionaries and digital apps in vocabulary learning. This suggests that dictionary use is an integral part of the ongoing vocabulary learning process, helping students overcome linguistic challenges as they learn. These findings indicate that the use of dictionaries, both physical and digital, is seen as an important element in vocabulary teaching strategies. An approach that focuses more on student engagement and literacy skill development suggests that teachers are not only teaching word meanings but also striving to equip students with broader skills for independent and contextual learning.

Semi-contextualizing

This strategy provides a partial context for learning vocabulary, often through word relationships or visualizations.

Word Grouping

Word grouping is one strategy that teachers often use in vocabulary teaching. This strategy involves grouping vocabulary into categories such as parts of speech or thematic groups. Teachers explain that word grouping helps students understand the relationships between vocabulary items, making them easier to remember and use appropriately. The following extracts illustrate how each teacher applied word grouping in their classroom practice.

Extract 8 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan semantic mapping, daftar pengelompokan kata, pelabelan kategori, dan concept mapping agar siswa memahami hubungan antar kata.” (I use semantic mapping, word grouping lists, category labeling, and concept mapping so that students understand the relationships between words).

Extract 9 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya meminta siswa untuk memberi atau membuat daftar kata sesuai dengan kelompok masing-masing kata misalkan kata benda kata kerja kata sifat.” (I ask students to give or make a list of words according to each word group, for example nouns, verbs, and adjectives).

Extract 10 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya mengenalkan kelompok kata seperti verb, noun, dan adjective, supaya siswa memahami jenis-jenis kosakata.” (I introduce word groups such as verbs, nouns, and adjectives so that students understand the types of vocabulary).

Teachers revealed how they implemented word clustering strategies in vocabulary instruction. This approach focused on basic learning about word types, allowing students to more clearly identify and classify vocabulary. Overall, these findings indicate that word clustering is an important strategy that helps students understand the relationships between words and types of vocabulary. Each teacher uses a slightly different approach, but all aim to strengthen students' understanding of how words are grouped and used in appropriate contexts.

Association

The association strategy involves linking new vocabulary with students' prior knowledge, everyday experiences, or familiar concepts. Teachers explain that when students can associate new words with something they already know, the learning process becomes more meaningful and easier to remember revealed in the following extracts.

Extract 11 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“... menghubungkan kata dengan gambar atau benda nyata, dan membuat rantai kata (word chains).” (... connecting words with pictures or real objects, and making word chains).

Extract 12 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya sering mengajarkan siswa kosakata baru dengan mengaitkannya dengan kehidupan sehari-hari atau pengalaman yang sudah mereka kenal.” (I often teach students new vocabulary by relating it to their daily lives or experiences they are familiar with).

Extract 13 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“Saya menggunakan strategi pengembangan kosakata agar siswa bisa menghubungkan kata baru dengan yang sudah mereka ketahui.” (I use vocabulary development strategies so that students can connect new words with those they already know).

From the data extract above, teachers explain how they apply association strategies to link new vocabulary to students' existing knowledge or experiences. This approach aims to strengthen students' understanding of vocabulary by leveraging their existing knowledge, making the learning process more meaningful and memorable. These findings indicate that association strategies play a crucial role in vocabulary learning. By linking new words to students' existing experiences or knowledge, teachers help students build deeper understanding and improve their retention of the vocabulary learned.

Visual and Aural Imagery

Another semi-contextualization strategy is the use of visual and auditory imagination in vocabulary teaching. These strategies involve helping students create mental images or auditory impressions of words to strengthen memory and pronunciation awareness. Visual imagination focuses on associating vocabulary with images, colors, or imagined objects, while auditory imagination emphasizes sound recognition, pronunciation, and repetition stated in the following extracts.

Extract 16 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan flashcards dan gambar berwarna, serta meminta siswa membuat kamus visual mereka sendiri” (I use flashcards and colorful pictures, and ask students to create their own visual dictionaries).

Extract 15 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan peniruan bunyi, whisper phone, dan storytelling imajinatif untuk membantu siswa mengingat pelafalan dan makna kata.” (I use sound imitation, whisper phones, and imaginative storytelling to help students remember the pronunciation and meaning of words).

Extract 16 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya biasanya menyuruh siswa mensimulasikan pengalaman perseptual seperti membayangkan objek di dalam pikiran mereka” (I usually ask students to simulate perceptual experiences such as imagining objects in their minds).\

Extract 17 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya mengucapkan kata dan siswa menirukan pelafalannya.” (I say the word and the students repeat the pronunciation).

The teachers explained how they use visual and auditory imagery strategies to teach vocabulary. This allows students to build strong associations between words and images, which can improve their retention of the vocabulary learned. This encourages students to use their imagination, which can deepen their understanding of the words being taught. This demonstrates that the use of visual and auditory imagery is an effective strategy in vocabulary learning. By associating words with mental images or experiences, and reinforcing pronunciation through sound imitation, teachers help students to more easily remember and use vocabulary in more meaningful and contextual contexts.

Keyword

Another semi-contextualization strategy is the use of keyword strategy. This strategy involves providing a familiar word (keyword) that is associated in sound or meaning with the new vocabulary item. The purpose is to help students remember

unfamiliar words by linking them to something already known seen in the following extracts.

Extract 18 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya meminta siswa menghubungkan kata baru dengan kata yang sudah familiar, lalu mengingatnya melalui gambar.” (Students connect new words with familiar words, then remember them through pictures).

Extract 19 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan kata kunci untuk memberikan kata baru, misalnya cook, wash, dan siswa mengembangkannya.” (I use keywords to introduce new words, such as cook and wash, and the students develop them).

From the interview data above, the teachers stated that they implemented the keyword strategy in vocabulary learning. In this way, students are given the opportunity to expand their understanding of existing words, making the vocabulary learning process more active and connected to students' existing knowledge. From this point, it can be seen that the keyword strategy is an effective tool for helping students memorize new vocabulary. By connecting new words with familiar words, both through verbal and visual associations, teachers make it easier for students to remember and use these words in broader contexts.

Physical Response and Physical Sensation

Physical Response and Physical Sensation is strategies involve linking vocabulary with body movement, gestures, or direct physical experience to strengthen comprehension and retention. Physical Response refers to students performing actions in response to verbal instructions, while Physical Sensation involves engaging students' sensory experience to make learning more concrete as shown in the following extracts.

Extract 20 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memodelkan tindakan dan meminta siswa menirukannya...seperti kegiatan simon says” (I model actions and ask students to imitate them...like Simon Says).

Extract 21 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya sering meminta siswa untuk memperagakan kata kerja, karena menghubungkan kata dengan gerakan tubuh meniru cara alami manusia belajar bahasa pertama” (I often ask students to act out verbs, because connecting words with body movements mimics the natural way humans learn their first language).

Extract 22 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memberi instruksi seperti mengambil benda atau berjalan ke pintu. Dengan tindakan langsung, siswa memahami makna kata kerja.” (I give instructions such as picking up an object or walking to the door. Through direct

action, students understand the meaning of verbs).

Teachers explained the application of the Physical Response and Physical Sensation strategies in vocabulary teaching. Through direct actions, students can understand the meanings of verbs in a more concrete and understandable way, as they are directly involved in the physical activity associated with the vocabulary. These findings indicate that Physical Response and Physical Sensation are effective strategies in vocabulary teaching. By associating words with body movements or physical experiences, students can understand the meanings of vocabulary more concretely and their memory for the words is strengthened.

Semantic Mapping

Semantic mapping is strategy involves visually organizing vocabulary into a network or concept map to show relationships among words. Through semantic mapping, students are encouraged to see how vocabulary items are conceptually connected rather than learned as isolated units as indicated by the following extracts.

Extract 23 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan semantic mapping, menghubungkan kata dengan gambar atau benda nyata...” (I use semantic mapping, connecting words with images or real objects...).

Based on the interview results, the use of semantic mapping indicates that teachers view vocabulary not as stand-alone units, but as part of an interconnected network of meanings. This indicates that the strategy not only helps students recognize word meanings but also helps them understand conceptual relationships between words more clearly and structured. With the support of visuals and concrete objects, students more easily build meaningful associations, group information, and remember vocabulary in a more complete framework. These findings indicate that semantic mapping functions as an effective semi-contextual strategy because it combines meaning organization with visual aids, making vocabulary learning more meaningful, systematic, and easier for students to understand.

Fully-contextualizing

This strategy involves learning vocabulary in full context, whether through reading, listening, speaking or writing.

Reading

Reading activities were identified as one of the primary methods used by teachers to teach vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Through reading, students encounter vocabulary within complete sentences and texts, allowing them to infer meaning

based on context rather than relying solely on direct explanation or memorization described in the following extracts.

Extract 24 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memperkenalkan kata baru secara lisan, kemudian siswa membaca teks dan mencari kata tersebut di dalam bacaan supaya mereka memahami penggunaannya dalam kalimat.” (I introduce new words orally, then students read the text and look for those words in the reading so they understand how they are used in sentences).

Extract 25 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“biasanya materi tentang teks bacaan pendek memberikan konteks nyata bagi siswa untuk memahami bagaimana kata digunakan dalam kalimat.” (Usually, material about short reading texts provides a real context for students to understand how words are used in sentences).

Extract 26 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya memberikan kosakata kepada siswa lalu mereka membaca dan memahami artinya.” (I give vocabulary to students, then they read and understand the meaning).

In this interview, the teachers explained how they use reading activities to teach vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This approach allows students to learn vocabulary in a more practical and applicable sentence context. From these findings above, it can be seen that reading activities are an effective method for teaching vocabulary, as they allow students to learn vocabulary in a more comprehensive and meaningful sentence context. Through reading, students not only memorize word meanings but also develop an understanding of how words are used in real-life communication.

Listening

Another entirely contextual strategy is the use of listening activities to support vocabulary learning. Through listening activities, students are exposed to vocabulary in spoken form through conversations, audio recordings, or teacher explanations. This exposure allows students to understand pronunciation, intonation, and contextual meaning simultaneously seen in the following extracts.

Extract 27 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“saya menggunakan kegiatan seperti memprediksi isi teks berdasarkan kata kunci, kemudian siswa mendengarkan dan mencocokkan dengan apa yang mereka dengar.” (I use activities such as predicting the content of a text based on keywords, then the students listen and match what they hear).

Extract 28 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“kegiatan mendengar biasanya saya menggunakan audio yang telah ada di setiap pembahasan khusus untuk kegiatan menyimak untuk membantu siswa

memahami pelafalan kata.” (For listening activities, I usually use audio that is already available in each specific discussion for listening activities to help students understand word pronunciation).

Extract 29 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya mengulang kosakata yang sudah diajarkan sebelumnya untuk melihat kemampuan siswa mengingat.” (I repeat the vocabulary that has been taught previously to see the students' ability to remember).

Teachers explained how they use listening activities to support vocabulary learning. This helps students reinforce their memory of the words they have learned and ensure they can use them correctly in appropriate contexts. From this, it can be concluded that listening activities are an effective strategy in vocabulary learning, as they allow students to understand vocabulary in spoken form, improve pronunciation, and remember words in relevant contexts. Through listening activities, students can develop their language skills more comprehensively, simultaneously involving the understanding of sound, intonation, and meaning of words.

Speaking

Another entirely contextual strategy is the use of speaking activities to encourage active vocabulary use. Through speaking tasks, students are required to produce vocabulary orally in meaningful communication contexts, allowing them to move from passive recognition to active language use put forward in the following extracts.

Extract 30 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“...siswa membuat dialog sederhana menggunakan kosakata baru, lalu mempresentasikannya di depan kelas supaya mereka terbiasa menggunakan kata tersebut secara langsung.” (...students create simple dialogues using new vocabulary, then present them in front of the class so that they get used to using those words directly).

Extract 31 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“saya menyuruh siswa mempraktikkan dialog sederhana yang tersedia di dalam buku sesuai dengan topik pembahasan.” (I asked the students to practice simple dialogues available in the book according to the discussion topic).

Based on interview data, the teachers explained the application of speaking activities to encourage the active use of vocabulary in meaningful communication. This approach provided students with structured speaking practice on relevant topics, enabling them to connect new vocabulary to more concrete communication situations. From these data, it can be concluded that speaking activities are an effective strategy for encouraging the active use of vocabulary. Through dialogues and presentations, students can practice expressing their ideas using the vocabulary

they have learned, which strengthens their understanding and application of that vocabulary in real communication situations.

Writing

The final contextualization strategy is the use of writing activities to reinforce vocabulary mastery. Writing requires students to actively produce vocabulary in structured sentences or paragraphs, allowing them to demonstrate their understanding of meaning, spelling, and grammar usage simultaneously shown in the following extracts.

Extract 32 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“siswa menulis 3-5 kalimat menggunakan kosakata baru secara mandiri. Kemudian kegiatan summarizing, meminta siswa menulis ringkasan pendek cerita atau teks menggunakan kosakata target, dan kegiatan creative writing, siswa diminta menulis cerita pendek atau puisi yang mencakup semua kosakata yang dipelajari hari itu.” (Students write 3-5 sentences using new vocabulary independently. Then there is a summarizing activity, asking students to write a short summary of a story or text using the target vocabulary, and a creative writing activity, where students are asked to write a short story or poem that includes all the vocabulary learned that day).

Extract 33 (Teacher NN, 01/20/2026)

“kegiatan menulis biasanya saya terapkan dengan menyuruh siswa membuat kalimat ataupun paragraph dengan kata yang telah dipelajari.” (I usually apply writing activities by asking students to make sentences or paragraphs with the words they have learned).

Extract 34 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saat mengajar kosakata, saya menuliskannya di papan atau kertas, menjelaskan maknanya, lalu memberikan kata kunci.” (When teaching vocabulary, I write it on the board or paper, explain its meaning, and then provide keywords).

The teachers explained how they used writing activities to strengthen students' vocabulary mastery. This approach encouraged students to integrate vocabulary into longer texts, strengthening their understanding and use. Although this approach relates more to the vocabulary introduction stage, this approach also helped students understand words through visualization and direct explanation. Overall, these findings indicate that writing activities are an important strategy in vocabulary learning. Through writing sentences, summaries, or creative works, students can deepen their understanding of vocabulary in a structured and applicable way. These activities help students integrate learned vocabulary into everyday use, strengthening their memory and understanding of the words.

Adaptable

Structured Reviewing

Structured reviewing was identified as a strategy used by teachers to reinforce previously learned vocabulary through systematic repetition and review activities. Structured reviewing refers to planned revision sessions that aim to prevent vocabulary loss and strengthen long-term memory retention. Rather than introducing new words, this strategy focuses on revisiting and consolidating previously taught vocabulary revealed in the following extracts.

Extract 35 (Teacher SS, 01/20/2026)

“...saya selalu melakukan pengulangan di akhir pertemuan atau di awal pertemuan berikutnya untuk memastikan siswa masih mengingat kosakata yang sudah dipelajari...” (...I always repeat at the end of the meeting or at the beginning of the next meeting to ensure that students still remember the vocabulary they have learned...)

Extract 36 (Teacher AS, 01/20/2026)

“saya mengulang kembali kosakata secara lisan dan meminta siswa menyebutkan arti atau membuat kalimat sederhana sebagai bentuk evaluasi untuk mengingatkan siswa akan kata-kata tersebut sekaligus akan makna dan pengertiannya.” (I repeat the vocabulary aloud and ask students to state the meaning or make simple sentences as a form of evaluation to remind students of the words as well as their meanings and definitions).

In these interviews, the teachers explained the application of structured review strategies to reinforce mastery of previously taught vocabulary through structured repetition and revision activities. This not only reminded students of the words they had learned but also helped them recall their meanings and usage in more applicable contexts. These findings indicate that structured review is an effective strategy for helping students retain vocabulary in long-term memory. Through structured review, both orally and in the form of evaluations, students are given the opportunity to reflect on and strengthen their understanding of the vocabulary learned, prevent word loss, and deepen their understanding of its use.

The present study reveals that English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Wasuponda, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, employed a multifaceted repertoire of vocabulary teaching strategies that spanned de-contextualizing, semi-contextualizing, fully contextualizing, and adaptable approaches. This hybrid pedagogical practice reflects a pragmatic balance between explicit, form-focused instruction and meaning-oriented, communicative engagement—consistent with the realities of large EFL classrooms in resource-variable outer-circle contexts (Kusumawati & Arifin, 2026; Wulyani et al., 2024). Rather than adhering rigidly to one paradigm, the three participating teachers (SS, NN, and AS) demonstrated teacher agency by sequencing strategies according to lesson objectives, learner needs, and time

constraints. Such flexibility aligns with Nation's (2013) four-strand framework and Schmitt and Schmitt's (2020) emphasis on integrating deliberate learning with incidental exposure, while extending recent empirical evidence that effective vocabulary pedagogy in Indonesian secondary settings benefits from layered, context-sensitive scaffolding (Ayana, 2024; Sarkhosh & Azizpour, 2025).

In the domain of de-contextualizing strategies, word lists, flashcards, and dictionary use emerged as foundational tools for initial lexical exposure. Teachers consistently introduced isolated target items prior to deeper engagement, a practice that reduced cognitive load and facilitated rapid form-meaning mapping—particularly valuable in time-constrained EFL lessons typical of Indonesian junior high schools. Teacher SS's integration of word lists with word walls and intensive rehearsal ("*penginapan*") exemplified spaced repetition principles, while NN and AS extended lists into sentence production and independent study. These extensions mitigated the well-documented limitations of pure decontextualization, such as shallow semantic networks and poor collocational knowledge (Sarkhosh & Azizpour, 2025; Webb, 2023). Flashcards were similarly employed interactively, through guessing games and repetition, transforming a seemingly passive aid into an engaging retrieval practice tool. Dictionary use further promoted learner autonomy via dictionary races, digital apps, and explanatory tasks, echoing recent findings that explicit strategy training enhances independence and literacy skills among EFL learners (Ayana, 2024). Collectively, these strategies resonate with Schmitt and Schmitt's (2020) observation that deliberate, form-focused learning remains indispensable for building foundational vocabulary size, especially when followed by immediate contextual reinforcement.

Semi-contextualizing strategies, including word grouping, association, visual/aural imagery, keyword method, physical response/sensation, and semantic mapping, served as critical bridges between isolation and full contextualization. By organizing words into grammatical or thematic clusters, linking them to prior knowledge, and engaging multiple sensory channels, teachers facilitated deeper cognitive elaboration and schema activation. Teacher SS's extensive use of semantic mapping, concept maps, and visual dictionaries, alongside NN's emphasis on daily-life associations and AS's keyword extensions, illustrates a shared commitment to relational learning. Physical response activities (e.g., Simon Says, TPR-style verb enactment) further grounded abstract items in embodied experience, mirroring the natural L1 acquisition process highlighted by NN and supported by Total Physical Response (TPR) research in multilingual Asian EFL contexts (Kusumawati & Arifin, 2026). These practices align with dual-coding theory and the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001, as cited in recent replications by Sarkhosh & Azizpour, 2025), demonstrating that partial contextual cues significantly enhance retention and transfer compared to purely decontextualized methods. In the South Sulawesi setting where students navigate Indonesian, local languages (Bugis/Makassarese), and English such strategies also leveraged learners' multilingual repertoires, fostering cross-linguistic associations that recent Indonesian studies identify as a unique strength (Wulyani et al., 2024).

Fully contextualizing strategies dominated meaning-focused strands of instruction through reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities. Teachers moved beyond isolated presentation to embed vocabulary in authentic discourse: SS's oral introduction followed by text-search tasks, NN's audio-based pronunciation focus, and AS's dialogic and summarizing exercises exemplify incidental and intentional learning in tandem. Speaking and writing tasks, in particular, required productive use (dialogue creation, creative writing, presentations), promoting the shift from receptive to productive knowledge, a key gap in many EFL programs (Nation, 2013; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). These findings corroborate Oxford and Crookall's (1990) contextual framework and recent meta-analytic evidence that communicative tasks yield superior long-term gains when vocabulary is encountered and used in extended discourse (Ayana, 2024). In resource-limited Indonesian classrooms, such activities also addressed equity concerns by providing equal access to contextual input regardless of students' varying home-language backgrounds.

Finally, the adaptable strategy of structured reviewing underscored teachers' awareness of the forgetting curve and the necessity of consolidation. Regular end-of-lesson or beginning-of-next-lesson reviews, oral recall, and sentence-production tasks exemplify Nation's (2013) fluency-development strand and recent calls for systematic retrieval practice (Zeng et al., 2025). This deliberate recycling prevented lexical attrition and reinforced depth of knowledge, particularly important in EFL settings where exposure outside class remains limited.

Overall, the teachers' repertoire illustrates a sophisticated, context-responsive pedagogy that navigates the tension between efficiency (de-contextualization for coverage) and depth (contextualization for retention and use). This hybrid model challenges earlier dichotomies favoring purely contextual approaches (e.g., Krashen's input hypothesis) and supports contemporary syntheses advocating balanced programs (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Sarkhosh & Azizpour, 2025). In the specific socio-educational context of South Sulawesi, characterized by large classes, variable digital access, and rich multilingualism, the observed practices promoted both cognitive engagement and learner autonomy, aligning with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum emphasis on 21st-century competencies (Kusumawati & Arifin, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Wasuponda applied a variety of vocabulary teaching strategies in their classroom practices, including de-contextualizing, semi-contextualizing, fully contextualizing, and adaptable strategies. The application of these strategies reflected both planned and incidental instruction. Teachers deliberately prepared vocabulary materials and activities as part of structured lessons, while also responding spontaneously to students' needs during classroom interaction. The combination of explanation, checking

understanding, and practice indicates that teachers actively facilitated vocabulary learning through multiple stages. However, the findings also show that not all strategies were applied consistently by every teacher, suggesting that strategy use was influenced by individual teaching preferences and classroom situations. Overall, the integration of various vocabulary teaching strategies contributed to meaningful vocabulary learning and supported students in understanding, using, and retaining new words effectively.

The findings carry important practical and theoretical implications for EFL vocabulary pedagogy in similar outer-circle contexts such as Indonesian junior secondary schools. The hybrid repertoire demonstrated by the teachers, sequencing explicit de-contextualized tools with semi and fully contextualized elaboration, offers a replicable model that balances efficiency and depth under typical time and resource constraints. Professional development programs should therefore emphasize strategic sequencing and digital scaffolding, while curriculum designers could embed explicit strategy-awareness modules aligned with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum to foster learner autonomy and 21st-century competencies (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Sarkhosh & Azizpour, 2025; Kusumawati & Arifin, 2026). At the policy level, teacher education must better acknowledge multilingual realities in South Sulawesi, promoting cross-linguistic associations and embodied techniques to leverage students' existing repertoires (Wulyani et al., 2024; Ayana, 2024).

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on self-reported interview data from only three teachers at a single school on a single date, without classroom observation or student outcome measures, which restricts verification of actual enactment and transferability to other regions or larger populations. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal mixed-methods designs incorporating classroom observations, pre/post-vocabulary assessments, and multi-site samples across urban–rural divides in Indonesia. Comparative studies contrasting espoused and enacted practices, along with intervention-based training on strategy sequencing, would yield scalable evidence for improving EFL vocabulary instruction in resource-variable ASEAN contexts.

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