

Investigating Indonesian EFL Learners' Learning and Acquiring English Vocabulary

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Abstract

The process of how EFL learners' learning and acquiring English vocabulary has become the popular issue since English has considered as an International language in Indonesian schools. In this study, the researchers focused on verifying learners' strategy in enhancing their English vocabulary. This study was quantitative research that employed longitudinal survey. The subject of this study was learners of junior high school in Parepare. The data gained through questioner, which was distributed to 100 students at the junior high school in Parepare. The findings indicated that the EFL learners' strategy in learning English vocabulary such as doing the assignment, practicing English pronunciation, learning English tenses, practicing English dialogue, English translation exercise, reading English text, memorizing and writing practice. In addition, the Indonesian EFL learners acquired English vocabulary through the dictionary, reading English book, listening to and watching English songs and movies, playing the game, the internet, and reading English advertisement.

Keywords: EFL learners, learning strategy, acquiring vocabulary

1. Introduction

Teaching vocabulary often given little priority in foreign language learning program and it also frequently taken for granted to be acquired autodidactic. In addition, it also received little attention in many course book and exercise sheet. Although the purposes of the curriculum are specific to the teaching aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, and speaking, but it still has less emphasis on the role of vocabulary. However, the status of the current vocabulary seems to have changed. The idea of the word has been "expanded" including lexical phrases and everyday vocabulary, it has been suggested to conduct early stage of research before teaching, and it has played an important role in the interaction and communication in the classroom.

In the late 1970s, the attention to vocabulary learning has been attracted scholars to be studied. It was begun by a very famous British linguist, David Wilkins in 1972. David Arthur Williams in (Lin, Wang, & Du, 2013) stated, "without grammar, very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Moreover, the better communication of EFL learners depends on how more vocabulary they have (Sarani & Shirzaei, 2016; Bin-Tahir, 2012; Ostovar-namaghi & Malekpur, 2015). This indicates that mastering the vocabulary is a must to bridge the use of the English (Ivone, 2005), either the building of a sentence or conversation. They way of communication through English, of course, reflect whether someone could actually speak English or only a little English. Therefore, EFL learners must have deeper effort in mastering English vocabulary to have good English communication.

The vocabulary has played an important role in mastering a language. It is believed that more vocabulary mastered by students, the easier they are to develop the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As stated by Lin et al. (2013), Hassan & Abubakar (2015), Bin-Tahir (2015), and Bin-Tahir & Hanapi (2017), that vocabulary is an integrated part of a language. It is believed that with the increased of learners vocabulary will effect to the better speaking and writing. In addition, their researches show that the results of speaking and writing tests tend to increase. In short, the vocabulary is the main core of language skills that provide the basis of how students use the language. Without mastering a lot of vocabulary and new strategies in learning vocabulary, students often have difficulty in learning, they are afraid to use the language and develop

their capability independently like listening to the radio, listening to the speech of the native speaker, using language in different contexts, reading, and watching television. However, the research on vocabulary in recent years has managed to explain the level of learning vocabulary needed by learners to process a variety of oral and written texts, also the kind of strategies used by learners in understanding, using, and remembering the words.

Learning English as a Foreign language is assumed to be learned from an early age before an individual enters puberty. It is believed that there will be some obstacles faced by the learners when they already reached puberty, which affected to the inoptimal of vocabulary mastery, especially in mastering the pronunciation of expression in foreign language. According to, (Lenneberg, 1967), “there was a neurologically based “critical period”, which complete mastery of language, but it is no longer possible because it will end around the onset of puberty”. In addition, an individual has an important period (sensitive period) to be easily and quickly master the language, which is called the “critical period” when the individual has not yet entered puberty. When puberty comes the “critical period” fade so will have difficulty to master a foreign language like English. Others experts, (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) observed the children of family immigration coming from other countries and settled in the USA. The study found that children who have not reached the immigration puberty can speak in English with a good pronunciation like a native speaker. While parents can not reach capabilities such as children. Indeed, the parents can speak fluently but they have difficulty in pronunciation, diction, and grammar which should be used. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to investigate how Junior High Schools’ Students in Parepare learn and acquire English vocabulary.

2. Review of Literature

The EFL learners’ success in largely is determined by the mastery of vocabulary. The ability to recognize words and to associate meaning with a certain combination of letters that form the word referred to the vocabulary (McWhorter, 2016). Furthermore, (Hornby, 1995) assume that vocabulary is the total number of words in a language, all the words known by a person or used in a particular book, subject, etc and a list of words with their meaning. In addition, some others scholars who already discuss their attention to vocabulary such as Ur (1999), Nation (2001), Schmitt & McCarthy (1997), etc. among these scholars seem to have similarity in defining vocabulary. In short, the agree that English vocabulary is a number of English words belong to EFL learners which they used as an element of language to ensure their communication process.

In language learning, of course, there is no magic formula for success (Altmisdort, 2016). However, there are some clues and tips. However, a person should understand the differences between language learning and language acquisition. Moreover, there has been the countless issue about learning and acquisition of vocabulary. Separately, learning and acquisition will be seen in different paragraph of this article.

Learning is viewed as the conscious way to know something new of learners. (Wilson & Peterson, 2006) claims that learning is a process of active construction involving social phenomenon and individual experience. Along with this, it is known that there have been many discussions and research toward the student’s strategies in learning vocabularies. Vocabulary learning strategies are basically actions made by the learner in order to help the learner to understand the meaning of words, learn and remember them in later occasions Schmitt & McCarthy (1997), Min (2013). Stein & Ph (1999) stated that classroom teachers played an important role in defining the comprehensive approach to developing students’ vocabulary so as to achieve a high quality and quantity of output over the maximum of the second language. Bei (2011) describes that when children imitated the language produced by those around them, e.q. teachers, their attempts to reproduce what they heard received “positive reinforcement”. Moreover, learners should be able to choose from available learning strategies to enhance their vocabulary mastery (Nation, 2001).

The acquisition is the process by which humans perceive and comprehend language, produce and use words and sentences to communicate (Altmisdort, 2016). The process of language acquisition is very similar to the process of children use and obtains their first or second language. It requires meaningful interaction in the language use. The speech is concerned not with the form of their words but by their message conveying and understanding. The error correction and teaching grammar are not relevant to the children language acquisition (Brown & Hanlon, 2004; Brown, Cazden, & Bellugi, 1973) in (Morès & Philip, 2011). The conscious language *learning*, on the other hand, is intentional endeavors to help a great deal by error correction and the presentation of explicit rules (Krashen, 1981). If the learners firstly are aware of this difference, they can solve the problem much more easily.

Most of the language learners are not aware of the distinction between acquisition and learning. Language acquisition is a subconscious process; language users are usually unaware of the fact that they acquire the language, but they just are aware of the fact that they use the language to communicate. Learning refers to

conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. Learning is “knowing about” a language, known to most people as “grammar”, or “rules” (Krashen, 1982).

In language learning, the use of learning strategies for vocabulary acquisition is very critical and many researchers have identified a number of strategies to learn vocabulary that can be taught to students (Asgari & Bin Mustapha, 2010; Bei, 2011; By, Bardel, Lindqvist, & Laufer, 2013; Bin-Tahir, 2017; Diyono, 2009; Salikin & Bin-Tahir, 2017; Hashemi & Hadavi, 2015, etc.) Language learning strategies are defined as an activity that is used by learners in order to make their learning easier and more effective and can be used or transferred to other situations (Oxford, 2003). These strategies help the students to learn autonomously to acquire vocabulary so that they will be responsible for their learning achievement (Nation, 2001). With or without the presence of teachers, learners can learn the vocabulary using these strategies. In other words, they can learn new words independently at their own convenient time. Learners may utilize different learning strategies and they should be taught how to use the strategies.

The role of vocabulary in language use is obvious as it is an inseparable aspect of every language (Astika, 2016). Students who have insufficient of lexical knowledge will not be able to communicate smoothly and negotiate the meaning of conversation effectively. In order to be able to negotiate meaning properly in interactions, students must understand the sentence structure and vocabulary. The lack of vocabulary will make the learners are unable to understand the texts or comprehend the meanings of the conversation (Hemmati & Asmawi, 2015; Ismail, 2015; Kulikova, 2015; Mukoroli, 2011; Stein & Ph, 1999, etc.) The proficiency in vocabulary holds a key role in language use; the more vocabulary a learner has, the more successful the learner is in expressing ideas or thoughts. It is especially obvious in speaking where learners have to remember and produce words necessary for successful communication.

3. Method

This study describes EFL Learners' Strategy in Learning and Acquiring English Vocabulary of Indonesian Junior High School Students in Parepare. To meet the need of the study, we employed a longitudinal survey design that used a sample from a population with the distribution of the questionnaire as the principal instrument of data collection (Singarimbun & Efendi, 1989).

The participants of this study were the first year students from four junior high schools in Parepare, South Sulawesi, using random sampling technique, which the total number of sample for the study was 100 students. In this study, the data were collected by using a closed-ended questionnaire as described in the research instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to the samples with the help of the English teachers at the schools; the questionnaire was administered to the students during an English lesson. Considering that the research samples were the beginner, the questionnaire were provided in Indonesian to meet the students well-understanding to the statements or questions (Attached in the Appendix A). The data from the questionnaire were tabulated and calculated in percentages. The questionnaires were analyzed using the Survey Monkey research tool.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the collected from the questionnaire in which the respondents gave their view on how they learn and acquire English as Foreign Language.

The first question of the questionnaire asked the respondents' score on English lesson at preceded semester. Interestingly, the result shows in figure 1 that most of the respondents got a very good score in 85 to 100. In the second level is the score of respondents who got 70-84 points are still in a good scores' classification according to the rubric score acknowledge in Indonesia and it is less than they got a 0-69 score. It can be seen in figure 1.

What is your English score at the previous semester?

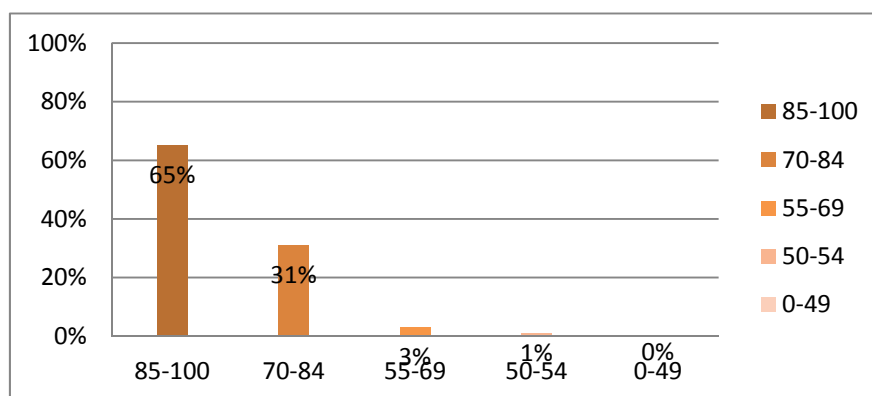


Figure 1. Students' score at the previous semester

It is logic because according to (Genesee, 1976) "Full hemispheric lateralization of the two types of functions allegedly achieved by around the age of 13 years or around puberty". Generally, the age of 13th is the age of Indonesian learners who are in the First year of their junior high school. As the result, they will learn a foreign language easily. Accordingly, (Johnstone, 2002) stated that younger learners who tend to be less "language anxious" than many older learners and therefore may be able to absorb language well rather than block it out. Again it is an evidence to (Lenneberg, 1967) discovery that there are neurologically based on "critical period" which complements the mastery of the language, but it is no longer possible because it will end in the period of puberty. Other psycholinguistics expert exposed that early exposure to a second language is advantageous because it capitalizes on the innate language learning ability possessed by children from their birth (Genesee, 1976).

The second question asked about the learners' interest in English and most of them (90%) have high interest in English learning. According to Neil cited in (Felder & Brent, 2005), it said that when a student has an interest in English, he/she will fit several factors of a good learners' characteristics. There is no doubt that if a student is interested in something, he will take the initiative in the learning process and do not feel boring. However, since English does not stand as priority language that is used in daily life for most Indonesian, students do not give "top priority" to learn English as well as the aim of learning English. From figure 2, it is clear that a great part of participants does not have much interest in learning English.

Do you feel interest in learning English?

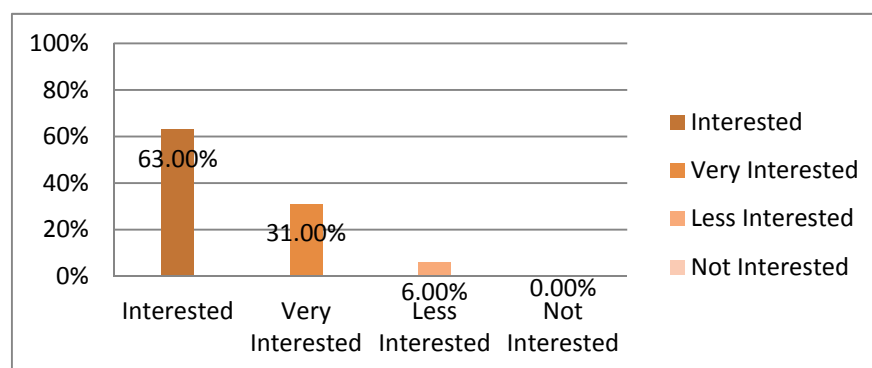


Figure 2. Learners' interest in learning English

The third question given in the questionnaire is about learners' feeling towards the simplicity of English. From figure 3, it is shown that majority of participants feel that English is simple but not very simple. Even, those who feel that English is difficult are in the second rank. It may regard to what (Tabors, 1998) proposed the program for children whose home language is not English. Accordingly, there are three main types of programs proposed by him such as first-language classrooms, bilingual classrooms, and English-language classroom. Through serving learners' with appropriate programs, it is believed that it can help children to maintain their language

acquisition.

Do you think English is difficult?

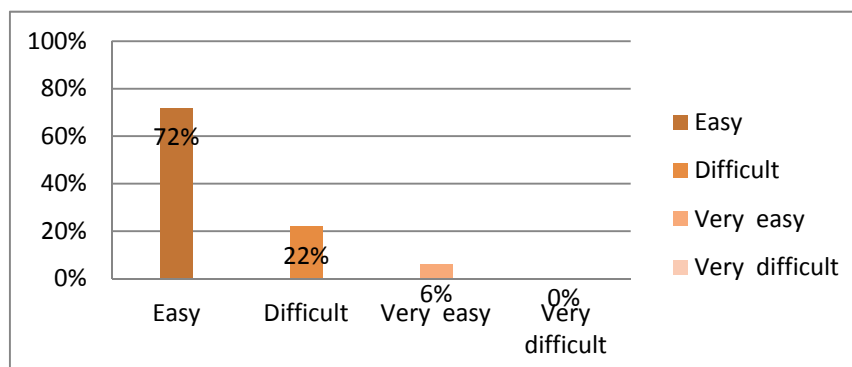


Figure 3. Learners' feeling towards English learning

The fourth question is about learning vocabulary strategies (figure 4). In this questionnaire, the researchers listed eight learning strategies. The participants are allowed to tick out more than one strategy that they usually used. The first strategy in learning vocabulary that the participants prefer to use is in doing their assignment. More than a half of participants learn vocabulary when they are doing their assignment given by the teacher in the school. In this strategy, the participants were getting the opportunity to learn new words as well as review the words they were known. The second and the third strategy in learning vocabulary by the students was through learning to pronounce and learning tenses. In helping them to practice pronunciation, they can listen to tapes, movies, music, and their teachers when they are in class. By giving attention to the sound of every word they can imitate the way of good pronunciation. Meanwhile, learning tenses is helpful for participants to choose appropriate vocabulary to meet the requirement of the tenses. In addition, learning vocabulary through pronunciation practice and learning tenses is the feasible way to operate.

Which of the following strategy you use in learning English vocabulary?

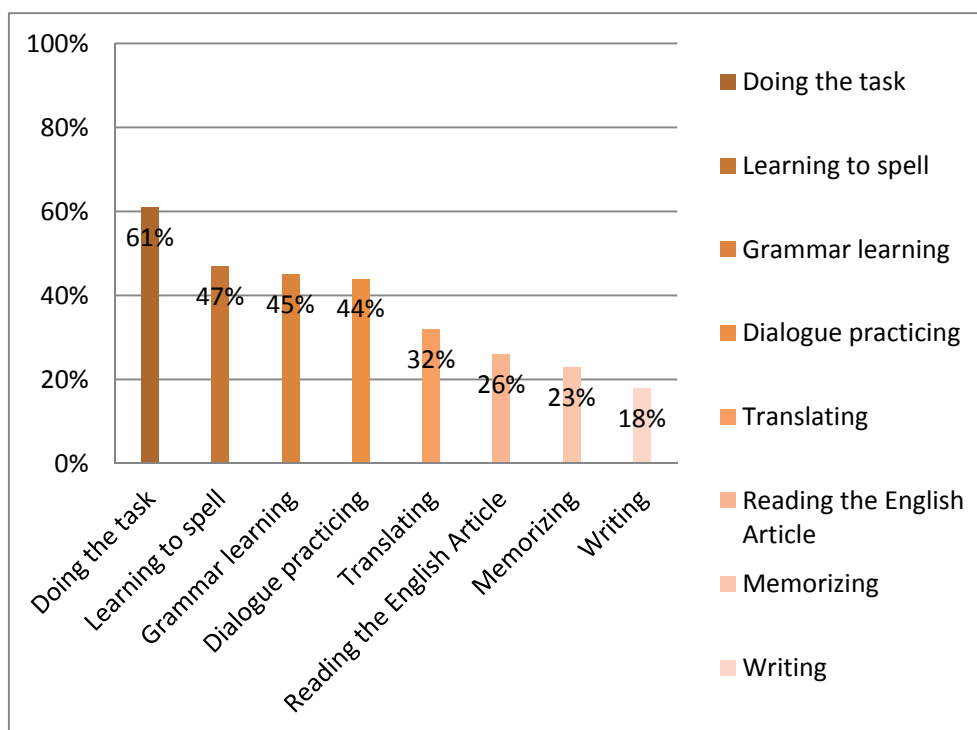


Figure 4. Learners' strategy in learning vocabulary

The fourth learning strategy in achieving vocabulary done by the participants was dialogue practice. They practiced speaking mostly in the school with their classmates based on teachers' instruction. As the proverb say "the more you practiced the more you get". In accordance, by practicing a lot they will learn some vocabularies.

The fifth and the sixth learning vocabulary strategy was through practicing translation and reading English text followed by memorizing, and the last is writing practice. Regarding what (Krashen, 1981) mean by learning that is the conscious process, all these strategies listed above were done by the participants because of their teachers' instruction. In addition, language learning is a structured and formalized process by which students is taught a foreign language (Krashen, 1982), accordingly, it is assumed that students strategy in learning vocabulary is not natural but by setting. It can be claimed that the success of the students in getting more vocabulary mostly be affected by teachers.

On the contrary, (Krashen, 1982) said that language acquisition is a natural process by which children learn the language without any formal teaching or subconscious process (Krashen, 1981). Based on these point of view, learners awareness to the importance of EFL leads them to acquire English vocabulary through their own strategy. Moreover, the potential of the different strategy of each learner is wide open. The evidence can be seen in the following data that regards to learners choice of the prepared questionnaire (figure 5):

Which of the following strategy you use in acquiring English vocabulary?

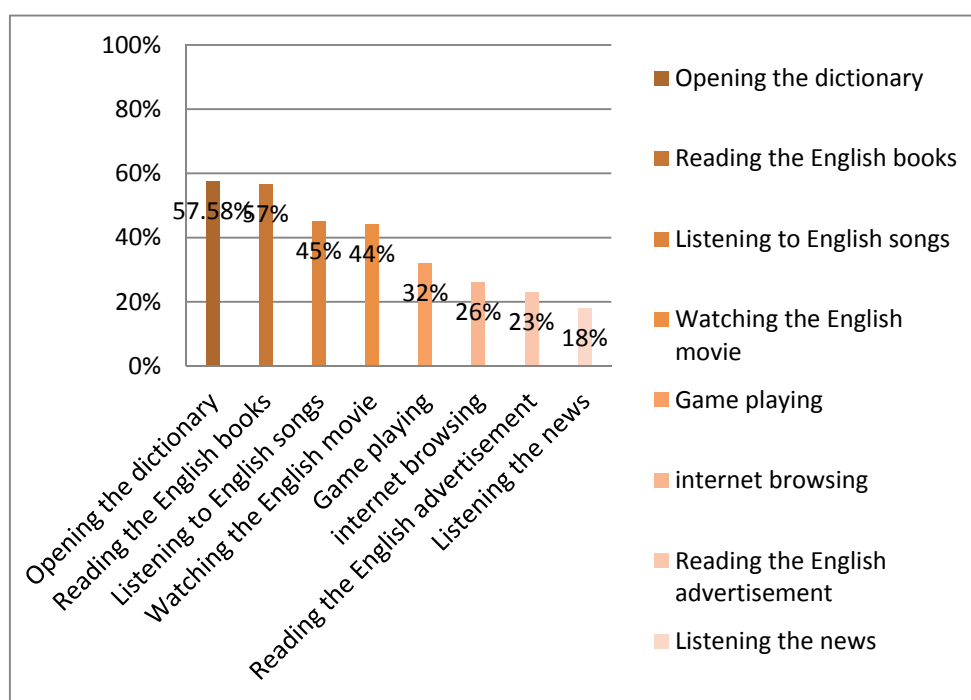


Figure 5. Learners' strategy in acquiring vocabulary

By the virtue of data in figure 5, it shows that most of the EFL learners' acquire English vocabulary through dictionary because of the idle of curiosity. The sense of curiosity may lead the learners to look up the odd words at the dictionary and directly acquire them as new information. Curiosity may be defined as a desire to know, to see, or to experience that motivates exploratory behavior directed towards the acquisition of new information (Borowske, 2005; Litman, 2005; R., Jablon, & Wilkinson, 2006; Zion & Sadeh, 2007). In addition, Day's Zone of Curiosity in (Borowske, 2005) shows that interest is a part of curiosity and accordingly curiosity is often described in terms of positive affective, and acquiring knowledge when one's curiosity has been aroused is considered intrinsically and highly pleasurable (Kashdan, Gallagher, Silvia, Breen, & Steger, 2009).

Standing at the second choice of EFL learners in English vocabulary acquisition was reading a book such as novel, comic, short story, etc. It is common known that reading provides students the best way to learn new words and review the words they known. It is helpful for students to memory vocabulary. In addition, reading is a feasible way to operate. Students can read at any time in their daily life. Basically, reading a book is a need

whether for pleasure or looking for information as well as acquiring new vocabulary inside.

Another way to acquire English vocabulary as in figure 5 is listening to English songs, watching English movie, playing the game, the internet, reading and listening to the advertisement. All those strategies were chosen by learners as their subconscious process of acquiring foreign language especially English vocabulary. These findings stood behind some scholars findings such as (Batluk, 2015) who suggest that vocabulary acquisition was the primary aspect of language learning that benefited from listening to songs, followed by listening skills. Moreover, well-selected movie materials could enhance students' language learning process and increase their motivation to learn the target language (Kabooha, 2016).

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the results of this study shows the common point of the EFL learners' who have a good learning efficiency. They are willing to use several kinds of learning and acquisition strategy, and positive attitude toward English. This study born out some ways of EFL learners in learning English vocabulary such as in doing the assignment, practicing English pronunciation, learning English tenses, practicing English dialogue, English translation exercise, reading English text, memorizing and writing practice. In addition, Indonesian EFL learners acquired English vocabulary through English dictionary, reading English book, listening to and watching English songs and movies, playing the game, the internet, and reading English advertisement.

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Appendix A

Angket Penjajakan strategy belajar kosakata Bahasa Inggris siswa SMP di Kota Parepare.

Terima kasih atas partisipasi anda mengisi angket tentang strategi yang digunakan dalam belajar kosakata Bahasa Inggris. Angket nomor (1) diisi dengan melingkari salah satu pilihan sesuai dengan nilai yang anda peroleh pada semester sebelumnya. Angket nomor (2) s/d dan (3) dijawab dengan mencentang (√) salah satu pilihan yang tersedia. Angket nomor (4) dan (5) dengan melingkari lebih dari satu pilihan sesuai dengan pengalaman belajar anda. Angket nomor (6) diisi apabila strategy belajar bahasa inggris anda tidak tercantum dalam pilihan nomor (4) dan (5).

1. Berapakah nilai bahasa inggris anda semester sebelumnya?
 - a. 85-100
 - b. 70-84
 - c. 55-69
 - d. 50-54
 - e. 0-49
2. Apakah anda senang belajar bahasa inggris?
 - a. Sangat senang
 - b. Senang
 - c. Kurang senang
 - d. Tidak senang
3. Apakah anda merasa bahasa inggris itu mudah?
 - a. Sangat Mudah
 - b. Mudah
 - c. Sulit
 - d. Sangat sulit
4. Yang manakah strategy berikut ini yang anda gunakan dalam belajar kosakata bahasa inggris? (The learning vocabulary strategies)
 - a. Belajar tenses di sekolah dan di rumah
 - b. Menghafal karena disuruh oleh guru

- c. Belajar mengucapkan kosakata bahasa inggris di sekolah
 - d. Praktek berdialog menggunakan bahasa inggris di sekolah
 - e. Mengerjakan tugas dari guru
 - f. Latihan menerjemahkan karena tugas dari sekolah
 - g. Membaca tulisan berbahasa inggris karena disuruh oleh guru
 - h. Latihan menulis karena ada tugas dari sekolah
5. Yang manakah strategy berikut ini yang anda gunakan dalam belajar bahasa inggris? (The vocabulary Acquisition strategies)
- a. Membaca buku bahasa inggris seperti novel, komik, cerpen, dll
 - b. Membaca iklan, poster dan spanduk berbahasa inggris
 - c. Mendengarkan lagu berbahasa inggris
 - d. Mendengarkan iklan berbahasa inggris lewat televisi atau radio
 - e. Menonton film berbahasa inggris
 - f. Bermain game berbahasa inggris
 - g. Bermain internet
 - h. Menggunakan kamus karena rasa ingin tahu

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