

# Students' Learning Strategies to Acquire Vocabulary Using TikTok

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Received : November 2, 2024  
Revised : December 28, 2024  
Accepted : December 28, 2024  
Published: December 31, 2024

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DOI: [10.29303/jeef.v4i4.791](https://doi.org/10.29303/jeef.v4i4.791)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to identify the learning strategies used by students in acquiring vocabulary through TikTok, the hurdles that they face, and how they overcome them utilizing the Oxford's (1990) theory. This study is designed to use a qualitative descriptive method. The majority of the data in this study are collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The subjects of this study consist 66 of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Mataram who use TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. The analysis reveals that the overall use of learning strategies in acquiring vocabulary through TikTok is at a medium level, with an average score of 2.73. The most frequently used strategy is the affective strategy, with an average score of 3.06. Meanwhile the least utilized strategy is the social strategy, with an average score of 2.04. Other strategies include memory (3.05), cognitive (2.87), compensation (2.87), and metacognitive strategies (2.52). Furthermore, the findings indicate that the most common hurdles faced by students include difficulties in understanding vocabulary, reported by 30% of the students, followed by a lack of detailed explanations (20%), variability in content quality (18%), and inaccurate subtitles (14%). Students primarily overcome these hurdles by using additional tools (27%), followed by asking experts (18%), repeating videos (15%), and seeking other videos (11%). The implications of these findings suggest that enhancing students' awareness of effective learning strategies and improving content quality could significantly benefit vocabulary acquisition through digital platforms.

**Keywords:** students learning strategies, TikTok, vocabulary acquisition

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial for effective communication in English, as emphasized by Wilkins (1972), who noted that without vocabulary, language cannot be conveyed. According to Hatch and Brown (1995:1) vocabulary is a list of words for a particular language or a list or collection of words that may be used by speakers of a language. Meanwhile Hornby (1995) defines vocabulary as the total number of words in a language. Consequently, expanding vocabulary is essential for successful language learning, necessitating effective learning mediums. Anything that may be used to stimulate students' thoughts, feelings, attention, and abilities or skills in order to promote the learning process is considered learning media. One innovation that will keep evolving in the field of education is learning media according to Andriah & Amir (2021).

Recent studies suggest that TikTok is one of example of audio-visual learning media that can serve as an innovative platform for vocabulary acquisition. Learning videos are an example of audio-visual learning media. According to Susilowati (2018), TikTok is an app that offers users distinctive and captivating special effects that they may use with ease to produce short movies with outstanding results that they can share with friends or other users. Research by Alghameeti (2022) highlights that TikTok's visually engaging content significantly enhances communication skills, with many students finding the short video format exciting and engaging. Gao et al. (2023) found that TikTok use in classrooms improved MICE students' oral communication skills and boosted their confidence in speaking English, while also making grammar learning more enjoyable.

Moreover, Bernard (2021) demonstrated a strong correlation between TikTok usage and vocabulary gains among ESL students, attributing this to the app's diverse content and practical features like audio and subtitles. A study by Sofeny et al. (2022) reported a significant increase in

vocabulary scores among young students using TikTok, indicating its potential as an effective educational tool.

However, vocabulary acquisition varies among students due to individual learning strategies, as noted by Oxford (1990) and Schmitt (2000). Personalization of learning strategies is essential for maximizing outcomes. The importance of tailoring strategies to individual needs is echoed in research by Nation (2001), who emphasizes that understanding students' preferences and motivations can enhance their learning experience.

According to Oxford (1990, p.8), "language learning strategies are specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more purposeful, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." In contrast, O'Malley & Chamot (1990, cited in Olah, 2006, p.190) described "language learning strategies as specific thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them understand, learn, or retain new information." Then, according to Ellis (1997, p.76), "language learning strategies are specific approaches or techniques that learners use to try to learn a second language."

Cohen (1996) suggests that language learning strategies should; a. have specific goals to help people improve their knowledge, b. include cognitive processes, c. improve language performance and communication strategies, and d. can be divided into cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social forms.

Preliminary observations at SMPN 1 Mataram revealed diverse vocabulary acquisition methods among students, with many utilizing TikTok's engaging features for learning. This prompts further investigation into the specific learning strategies students employ when using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting this study with the following research questions: 1. What types of learning strategies are used by students for acquiring vocabulary through the use of TikTok? 2. What are the hurdles faced by students in acquiring vocabulary using

TikTok? 3. How do the students overcome the hurdles to acquire vocabulary using TikTok? The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the types of learning strategies used by the 8th-grade students at SMPN 1 Mataram to acquire vocabulary using TikTok, the hurdles faced by students, and the ways students overcome these hurdles.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative study. According to Arikunto (2010:3) "descriptive research is research that is intended to examine a situation, condition, or other things whose results are presented in the form of a research report". This research was conducted at SMPN 1 Mataram in the 2024/2025 academic year. The researcher involved 66 8th grade students. In collecting research data using *focus group discussions* (FGDs), questionnaires, namely the SILL questionnaire by Oxford 1990 version 7.0, interviews, and documentation. This questionnaire instrument consists of 26 modified questions related to the learning strategies used by students in acquiring vocabulary using TikTok, the hurdles they face, and how they overcome them. Then the items are evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. This number shows how often students use the strategy. To analyze the collected data, a technique developed by Miles and Hubberman (1994) was used, namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Then the results of the descriptive analysis of the average student learning strategies are classified into several levels according to the SILL Profile of Results by Oxford (1989) based on the following table.

Table 1. Scoring Description of SILL version 7.0

Degree of LLSs Use	Description	Scores
High	Always or almost used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Students' Learning Strategies to Acquire Vocabulary Using TikTok

The classification of the use of English Language learning strategies to acquire vocabulary using TikTok by students is illustrated in the following table:

Table 2. The Use of Language Learning Strategy by Students

No	Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Category
1	Affective Strategy	3.06	Medium
2	Memory Strategy	3.05	Medium
3	Cognitive Strategy	2.87	Medium
4	Compensation Strategy	2.87	Medium
5	Metacognitive Strategy	2.52	Medium
6	Social Strategy	2.04	Low
	<b>Average</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>Medium</b>

Based on the students' answer from the questionnaire and interview given, it can be seen the students applied six types of language learning strategy. It can be seen from the table above that of the six language learning strategies English according to SILL Oxford, Memory Strategy is the most frequently used strategy by 8<sup>th</sup> grade students of SMPN 1 Mataram who took part in the research. This strategy is in the

category medium, namely with an average of 3.05. The other three strategies are also in place medium category with average Cognitive Strategy (2.92), Compensation Strategy (2.92), Metacognitive Strategy (2.46), and Affective Strategy (2.99), which means that students the use of these four strategies is sometimes used by them. Meanwhile Social Strategies (2.04) in place Low category, which means this strategy usually not used by the students.

Memory strategies is the most frequently used by the students to acquire vocabulary. According to Oxford's theory (1990), memory strategies are techniques designed to help students remember and acquire new information. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various cognitive strategies to improve their understanding and vocabulary acquisition. These strategies include students using the "save" feature on TikTok, repeating learning videos, associating vocabulary with images on TikTok, and trying to imitate the pronunciation of vocabulary in the video. This strategy falls into the medium category, which means sometimes used by the students. The use of this strategy shows that students are trying to optimize their learning experience in a creative way. Although this strategy falls into the medium category, meaning that students sometimes use these strategies. However, although these results show the positive potential of using TikTok in vocabulary learning and acquisition, there is an urgent need to increase students' awareness of more effective memory strategies. Research by Pratiwi and Syafrizal (2024) emphasizes the importance of students' perspectives, and if they feel that TikTok features are not fully effective, this may affect their motivation and engagement.

The next strategy is cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies in language learning, as outlined by Oxford (1990), refer to techniques that help students use and understand concepts in the target language—in this case, English. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various cognitive strategies to improve their understanding and vocabulary acquisition. This strategy includes students using subtitles to help understand the meaning of the vocabulary in the video, taking notes on the vocabulary in the TikTok video, trying to use the vocabulary obtained in speaking or writing, and trying to understand the meaning of the vocabulary by looking at various examples on TikTok. This strategy is in the moderate category. This means that there are students who are studied who have not been fully used by students. Overall, although the results show that students use several cognitive strategies with varying degrees of effectiveness, there is a need to increase their awareness and habit of recording new vocabulary. This research not only reflects current practices, but also opens up opportunities for interventions that can help students utilize cognitive strategies more effectively in their language learning.

As for compensation strategies, these strategies play an important role in helping students overcome the challenges they face when learning English vocabulary. According to Oxford (1990), this strategy includes techniques that allow students to overcome their limitations in language acquisition. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various compensation strategies to learn and acquire vocabulary. These strategies include students making simple sentences from the vocabulary they get, using synonyms if they have difficulty remembering the correct vocabulary. They also try to overcome their own limitations in understanding new vocabulary by asking experts such as teachers, friends, family,

etc. and using additional tools to help them understand the vocabulary they are learning. This strategy falls into the medium category, meaning that this strategy is sometimes used by students. This shows that although students are trying to overcome their vocabulary limitations, they may not fully rely on this strategy in every learning situation. Overall, the results of this study show that students used compensatory strategies with varying degrees of effectiveness, but still in the medium category. Although students showed a willingness to seek help and adapt to the vocabulary they learned, there is a need to improve their understanding and skills in using available resources more effectively.

The next strategy is metacognitive strategies. According to Oxford (1990), metacognitive strategies are techniques that students use to control and supervise their learning process, which includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various metacognitive strategies to learn and acquire vocabulary. These strategies include students following trusted accounts, using the "Not Interested" feature, creating a study schedule, monitoring how much vocabulary they have learned from TikTok. This strategy falls into the medium category, which means sometimes used by the students. It can be interpreted that although there is awareness among students about the importance of planning and monitoring in learning, they may not have fully implemented these strategies consistently.

Next is the affective strategy. In the context of Oxford's theory (1990), affective strategies focus on managing students' emotions and attitudes in the learning process. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various metacognitive strategies to improve their understanding and acquisition of vocabulary. These strategies include students giving themselves rewards for achieving vocabulary learning, always reminding themselves that mistakes in learning are part of the learning process, if they feel stressed while learning, students always try to handle it well, and try to create a fun learning environment. This strategy falls into the medium category, meaning that this strategy is sometimes used by students. This shows that students are quite active in using these strategies, but still having the opportunity to increase their effectiveness.

The last strategy is social strategy which is the least frequently used by the students. In the context of Oxford's theory (1990), social strategies focus on interacting with others and utilizing social resources in the learning process. In the context of using TikTok, students apply various metacognitive strategies to improve their understanding and acquisition of vocabulary. These strategies include students using the comment feature to ask about vocabulary that is not yet understood, making learning videos with new vocabulary that is obtained, joining study groups on TikTok, and asking other users about vocabulary that is difficult to understand. This strategy falls into the low category, meaning it is usually not used by students. This shows that although students have some attempts to interact and collaborate, their participation in social activities that support vocabulary learning is still limited.

### The Hurdles Faced by the Students

Based on the results of this study, here are some of the hurdles faced by students which is displayed in chart form to make it easier to analyze;

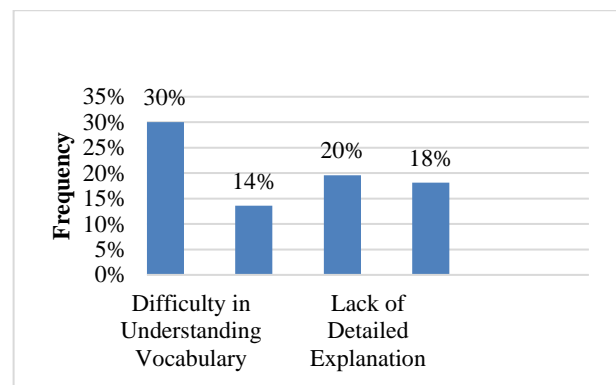


Figure 1. The Hurdles Faced by the Students

The figure above shows the hurdles faced by students in acquiring vocabulary using TikTok. Based on the table above, the hurdles faced are difficulty in understanding vocabulary, inaccurate subtitles, lack of detailed explanation, and variability of content quality. Here is a more detailed explanation;

Total of 30% students reported difficulty in understanding new vocabulary when learning through TikTok, which is in line with Oxford's (1990) theory regarding the importance of clear and accurate information delivery in language learning. This theory emphasizes that vocabulary comprehension is strongly influenced by the way information is presented. This suggests that many students feel overwhelmed by vocabulary that may be unfamiliar or hard to reach, which could hinder their learning process. This difficulty can be caused by the speed of pronunciation, unclear context of use, or lack of practice in using the vocabulary.

A total 14% of respondents indicated that the subtitles that appear in the videos are often inaccurate. These inaccuracies can lead to confusion and errors in comprehension, given that subtitles are an important tool for students to understand the material being taught. This suggests the need for improvement in the quality of subtitles provided in learning videos. The studies by Bernard (2021) and Pratiwi & Syafrizal (2024) further support this by demonstrating that effective vocabulary acquisition requires clarity and relevance in content.

A total 20% of students felt that the explanations provided in the videos were not detailed enough. This means students may feel that they are not getting in-depth or comprehensive information about the new vocabulary. The lack of clear and detailed explanations may result in hurdles in acquiring and using the vocabulary in the right context. Research by Juwita and Syahputra (2024) supports this, showing that educational videos that do not provide comprehensive explanations can hinder vocabulary acquisition.

A total 18% of students observed variations in the quality of content presented on TikTok. This means that not all learning videos are of the same standard in terms of information, delivery or accuracy. This variability can confuse students and make it difficult for them to determine which videos are reliable for vocabulary learning and acquisition and acquisition. Research by Pratiwi and Syafrizal (2024) also showed that consistency in teaching quality is essential to increase student motivation and engagement. In other words, this finding is in line with previous research that emphasizes

the need for consistent and high-quality teaching approaches to support effective learning.

Overall, the results of this study are in line with the theory used as well as previous research, suggesting that the challenges students face in learning vocabulary through TikTok can be overcome by ensuring accuracy of information, providing more detailed explanations, and maintaining consistency in content quality. This research provides important insights for the development of more effective learning strategies through digital platforms.

### The Way Students Overcome the Hurdles

From several hurdles faced by students in acquiring vocabulary using TikTok, they also have ways to overcome them which is displayed in chart form to make it easier to analyze;

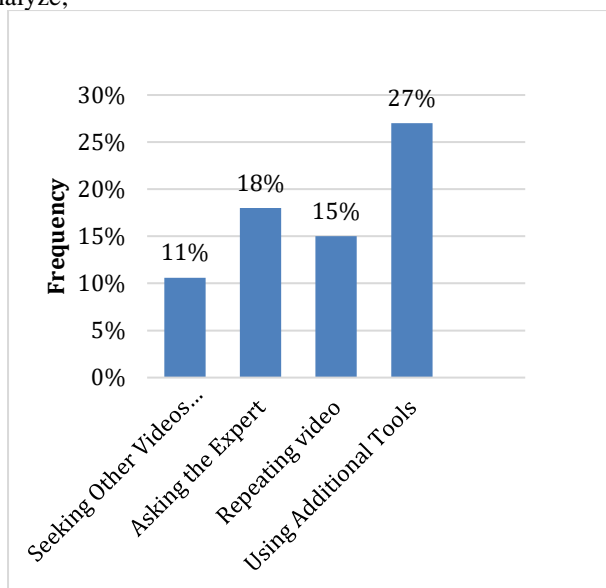


Figure 2. The Way Students Overcome the Hurdles

Based on figure 2, about 11% of students reported that they look for videos or other sources to understand difficult vocabulary. This suggests that although TikTok is the platform they use, students recognize the need to get additional information from other sources to supplement their acquisition. This may reflect dissatisfaction with existing content or a desire to gain more diverse perspectives. This action reflects the use of compensatory strategies according to Oxford's (1990) theory, which emphasizes the importance of seeking alternatives to overcome obstacles in learning. By seeking additional sources, students not only broaden their horizons but also find explanations that may be easier to understand.

A total 18% of respondents indicated that they seek help from experts such as teachers or tutors, when faced with hurdles. This indicates that students tend to seek guidance from more experienced people to ensure a better understanding of the vocabulary they are learning. It also signifies the importance of social support in the learning process. Research by Juwita and Syahputra (2024) supports this, showing that students who get guidance from experts can more easily understand new vocabulary, as they receive more contextualized and in-depth explanations.

A total 15% of students used the strategy of repeating video, but its effectiveness varied. This indicates that although repetition is considered a useful way to understand vocabulary, students still face challenges in capturing the broader context.

This indicates the need for additional approaches, such as contextual explanations or more interactive exercises, to deepen their understanding.

A total of 27% of students shows that most of respondents use additional tools, such as online dictionaries or language learning apps, to help understand vocabulary. This shows that students actively seek other ways to support their learning, which demonstrates perseverance and motivation to overcome challenges in learning vocabulary. Research findings by Bernard (2021) show that digital tools can improve students' understanding of vocabulary by providing quick access to definitions and contexts of use.

Overall, the ways in which students overcome these hurdles are very much in line with Oxford's theory and previous research, which highlights the importance of compensatory strategies in language learning. These measures show that students actively seek support and resources to improve their understanding of vocabulary, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their learning.

### CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that students face several hurdles in acquiring vocabulary through TikTok, including difficulty in understanding vocabulary (30%), lack of detailed explanations (20%), variability in content quality (18%), and inaccurate subtitles (14%). However, students demonstrated the ability to overcome these challenges through various strategies. These include using additional tools such as Google Translate to understand vocabulary (27%), seeking guidance from more experienced individuals or experts (18%), repeating videos to enhance comprehension (15%), and exploring other videos or resources (11%). These efforts reflect students' awareness of the importance of information quality and their proactive initiative to improve their learning experience.

To enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition via TikTok, educators and content creators are encouraged to design high-quality, accurate, and contextually rich learning materials. Teachers should actively foster students' use of underutilized strategies, particularly social and metacognitive strategies, to improve interaction and self-regulation. Furthermore, integrating TikTok with supplementary educational tools and methods can provide a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of TikTok-based learning strategies and examine its potential role in developing other language skills beyond vocabulary acquisition.

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