

## Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Class Ten Students

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### Abstract

Learning vocabulary is a key component of communication and comprehension. Students need to use effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) to learn and retain new words and expand their word knowledge. This quantitative study used a descriptive survey research design to find out the VLS of class ten students. The participants consisted of 30 class ten students who were sampled using stratified sampling method. The data was collected employing structured questionnaire which included 30 rating scale questions. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency counts to identify the most and least used strategies. The findings revealed that the students used a range of strategies, but some were more dominant than others. One of the most common cognitive strategies was guessing the meaning of unknown words from context, indicating that the students relied on their prior knowledge and reading skills. Similarly, one of the most popular social strategies was asking for clarification from teachers or peers, suggesting that the students valued the role of interaction and feedback in vocabulary learning. These results demonstrated that the students were flexible and resourceful in their strategy use and could adapt to different vocabulary learning tasks and goals. The study has some limitations, such as the limited sample size and the potential inaccuracies in self-reported data. Therefore, further research with larger and more representative samples is recommended. Despite these limitations, this study contributed to the understanding of VLS among class ten students in Nepal and offered implications for vocabulary teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Class ten, cognitive, learning, metacognitive, social, strategies

## **Introduction**

Vocabulary is regarded as the essential element of language. Learning vocabulary is considered as complex and dynamic process. Therefore, students need to use appropriate (VLS) to develop language proficiency. Schmitt (1997) argues that VLS are important for vocabulary development because they can help learners to determine the meaning of unknown words, consolidate the meaning and form of new words in memory, retrieve the words from memory when needed, and monitor and evaluate their own vocabulary learning. The use of VLS can have a significant impact on the language proficiency and academic performance of class ten students, who face various challenges and difficulties in learning vocabulary (Shrestha, 2008 & Khanal, 2013). Moreover, VLS can improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of language. Further, VLS can help learners to infer the meaning of unknown words from context clues, use cognates or word parts to guess the meaning of new words, use dictionaries or thesauruses to look up the meaning and synonyms of unfamiliar words, review and practice the words regularly using flashcards or games, and use the words in oral or written communication. Therefore, VLS are essential for class ten students to enhance their vocabulary size and knowledge, which are vital for understanding and producing various texts and messages in different contexts and situations.

Although there is a large body of research on VLS in general, there is a lack of studies that focus on the specific strategies used by class ten students in Nepal. Furthermore, most of the existing studies have focused on general language learning strategies and their applicability across a broad spectrum of age groups, without paying attention to the distinctive needs and characteristics of class ten students (Schmitt, 2000 & Folse, 2004). Class ten students are at a crucial stage of their education, as they have to prepare for the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), which tests their English proficiency among other subjects. Moreover, class ten students face various challenges and difficulties in learning vocabulary (Shrestha, 2008 & Khanal, 2013). Therefore, it is important to find out the VLS used by class ten students and identify most frequently used strategies. The purpose of this study is to investigate the VLS used by class ten students in Nepal.

The study is expected to provide insights into the current situation of vocabulary learning among class ten students and suggest implications for teachers, learners, and curriculum developers. The study is also expected to contribute to the existing literature on VLS and language learning in general.

## **Literature Review**

One of the most important aspects of language learning is vocabulary. It is the collection of words that we know and use in a language. Vocabulary learning is a cornerstone of language learning, forming the foundation for effective communication and academic success (Nation, 2013). VLS are the techniques or contrivances that students use to learn new words and use them well. Oxford (1990) defines VLS as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use, often consciously to improve their word power.

These strategies encompass a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and social processes that learners engage in to enhance their language skills Pintrich (2004). Cognitive strategies involve the mental processing of words, such as memorization, guessing from context, using dictionaries, taking notes, analyzing word structure, using word parts, making semantic networks, and using vocabulary in use. These strategies help learners to store and retrieve words in their memory, as well as to understand and produce words in different contexts (Gu, 2003). Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand involve the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of vocabulary learning. These strategies help learners to set goals, plan their learning activities, check their progress, and reflect on their outcomes. Metacognitive strategies also help learners to regulate their motivation, emotions, and attitudes towards vocabulary learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Social strategies involve the interaction with other people, such as peers, teachers, or native speakers. These strategies help learners to communicate effectively, seek feedback, cooperate with others, and learn from social contexts. Social strategies also help learners to develop their cultural awareness and intercultural competence (Oxford & Schramm, 2007).

Nation (2001) categorizes these strategies into two main types: "direct strategies" and "indirect strategies." Direct strategies involve explicit attempts to memorize words and phrases, such as rote memorization and vocabulary notebooks. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, involve inferring word meanings from context, guessing intelligently when reading, and using word parts (such as prefixes and suffixes) to deduce meanings.

Class Ten represents a critical juncture in the educational journey of students, and age plays a significant role in vocabulary acquisition. Research in language development suggests that vocabulary growth occurs at different rates across the lifespan (Hart & Risley, 1995). While young children experience rapid vocabulary expansion, older learners, such as class Ten students, may employ more sophisticated cognitive strategies to acquire and deepen their vocabulary knowledge (Folse, 2004).

Empirical research sheds light on the VLS employed by class ten students in diverse educational contexts. Mohsen (2011) investigated the VLS of Iranian high school students, a demographic that closely aligns with class ten students in many educational systems. The study revealed that these students predominantly employed direct strategies, such as memorization and vocabulary notebooks, to expand their vocabulary. This finding underscores the pragmatic approach class ten students often adopt when faced with academic demands. Furthermore, Sareban (2013) studied the impact of VLS on the academic achievement of high school students. While the study encompassed a broader age range, the findings underscored the importance of VLS for success in academic settings. Effective VLS were associated with higher academic achievement, demonstrating the practical relevance of this research area.

The theoretical framework of VLS provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes that underlie vocabulary acquisition. Class Ten students, positioned at a critical phase in their academic journey. The choice of strategies may be influenced by the demands of specific subjects, with more technical subjects favoring direct strategies, while subjects requiring critical analysis may prompt the use of indirect strategies.

## **Methodology**

This cross-sectional descriptive survey employed a quantitative approach to find out the VLS used by class ten students. The sample population for this study consisted of 30 class ten students who studied in community schools within Baijanath Rural Municipality of Banke district in the academic year 2023. I followed systematic process to select the sample. First, I used convenient sampling to select Baijanath Rural Municipality as the study area. Second, I selected three secondary level community schools from within the municipality using a simple random sampling technique. Finally, I applied a stratified random sampling method to choose 30 class ten students, with ten students selected from each of the three selected schools. This method ensured the participation of both boys and girls in the sample.

I used structured questionnaire as the technique of data collection. The research survey consisted of 30 closed-ended rating scale questions, meticulously designed to find out three distinct categories of VLS employed by the participants. These categories encompassed cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, with each category comprising 10 questions. Respondents were presented with a consistent set of response options for each question, including "Always," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never." This methodological approach ensured uniformity and allowed participants to express the frequency with which they engaged in specific VLS. I used descriptive statistical methods to analyze the data collected from structured open-ended rating scale questions. Specifically, I calculated measures such as the percentage, mean, median, mode and standard deviation to understand central tendencies and examined the distribution of responses using frequency tables. This quantitative analysis helped me to gain insights into the overall patterns and characteristics of the data, providing a clear and objective summary of respondents' responses.

The study has some limitations worth noting. Firstly, the small and local sample of 30 class ten students may not represent the wider population. Secondly, the use of only rating scale questions could introduce response and recall biases that affect the accuracy of the results. Thirdly, the quantitative approach, while useful for VLS analysis, did not capture the nuances or context-specific factors that might influence these strategies. Lastly, the cross-sectional design only gave a static view of VLS.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study are organized into three sections that describe the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies that students used to learn vocabulary.

### **Cognitive Strategies Used for Learning Vocabulary**

Table 1 below shows how class ten students answered about their cognitive strategies used for learning English vocabulary.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Responses on Cognitive Strategies*

S.N.	Rating Scale	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Learning Strategies I use the glossary of my book to learn new words.	6	20	21	70	2	6.67	1	3.33
2	I guess the meaning of new words.	13	43.33	12	40	3	10	2	6.67
3	I note down the difficult words	13	43.33	9	30	5	16.67	3	10
4	I look up the meaning of new words in English vocabulary	8	26.67	12	40	7	23.33	3	10
5	I ask teacher to elaborate the meaning of new words	14	20	8	26.67	6	20	2	6.67
6	I consult the guide book to learn the meaning of new words	6	23.33	15	50	6	20	3	10
7	I use English-Nepali dictionary to learn new words	7	16.66	13	43.33	8	26.67	2	6.67
8	I use the word list prepared by the teacher	5	13.33	20	66.67	3	10	2	6.67
9	I use reference materials	4	20	12	40	10	33.34	4	13.33
10	I match the meaning of its new words and organize words alphabetically	6		4	13.33	16	53.34	4	13.33
	Mean	7.2	24.11	13.6	45.33	6.2	20.67	2.8	9.33

The research findings reveal distinct patterns in cognitive VLS among the participants. A significant proportion of participants (43.33%) consistently employ the strategy of guessing the meaning of new words, while an equal percentage (43.33%) regularly note down difficult words as part of their vocabulary learning process. Moreover, a substantial majority (66.67%) frequently utilize word lists provided by teachers. Participants also frequently consult guidebooks (50%) and seek clarifications from teachers (50%) when encountering unfamiliar words. Conversely, strategies such as using English-Nepali dictionaries (43.33%) and employing reference materials (40%) exhibit a moderate level of usage among the participants. Additionally, organizing words alphabetically based on their meanings is a strategy that is frequently utilized by 53.34% of the participants. These statistical measures showed that there was a high variation in the use of VLS among class ten students, as shown by the large standard deviations for both frequency and percentage. This suggested that the students had different

levels of proficiency, learning styles, and goals in learning English vocabulary. The results also suggested that some strategies were more preferred than others, as shown by the high modes for both frequency and percentage. This implied that the students had some commonalities in their vocabulary learning behaviors and preferences.

The study also presented some key statistical measures for the learning strategies used by the participants. The mean frequency of the learning strategies was 7.2 (24.11%), with a median of 6.5, a mode of 13, and a standard deviation of 3.42 (4.06%). This suggests that there is a considerable variation in how often different strategies are used. The most common strategy (mode) is used by a very small number of participants. The median indicates that half of the strategies are used more frequently than others, while the other half are used less frequently. The standard deviation shows that there is a moderate spread in the frequencies of different strategies, indicating a varied range of learning approaches among the participants.

This result provides an insight into the VLS used by class ten students and the factors that influence their choices and preferences. The result shows that the students tend to use more active strategies than passive strategies, which indicates that they are aware of the importance of engaging with the new words in meaningful ways. However, the result also reveals that there is a lack of diversity and balance in the use of VLS, as some strategies are overused or underused by the students. This suggests that the students may not have a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy, or may not have access to adequate resources and guidance to use them effectively. The result also indicates that there is a high variation in the use of VLS among class ten students, which reflects their individual differences in proficiency, learning styles, and goals. This implies that the students may need more personalized and differentiated instruction and feedback to optimize their vocabulary learning outcomes. The result also implies that some strategies are more preferred than others by class ten students, which reveals their commonalities in vocabulary learning behaviors and preferences. This indicates that the students may share some similar challenges and opportunities in learning English vocabulary, and may benefit from collaborative and cooperative learning activities.

This result is consistent with some previous research studies that have investigated the use of VLS by EFL learners. For example, Fan (2003) found that guessing, noting, and asking were among the most frequently used strategies by Chinese EFL learners, while using reference materials, word lists, and matching were among the least frequently used strategies. Similarly, Zhang and Lu (2014) reported that guessing and asking were positively related to the depth of vocabulary knowledge of Chinese EFL learners, while using reference materials and word lists were negatively related. These findings suggest that active strategies that involve inferring, recording, and seeking information are more effective and preferred than passive strategies that involve consulting, copying, and matching information.

However, this result also contrasts with some other research studies that have explored the use of VLS by EFL learners from different contexts and backgrounds. For instance, Catalán (2003) found that using dictionaries was the most frequently used strategy by Spanish EFL learners, while guessing was the least frequently used strategy. Likewise, Nassaji (2006) found that

using dictionaries was positively related to the depth of vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL learners, while guessing was negatively related. These findings suggest that passive strategies that involve consulting information are more effective and preferred than active strategies that involve inferring information.

### Metacognitive Strategies Used in Learning Vocabulary

The following table summarizes the results about meta-cognitive strategies used for learning English vocabulary.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Responses on Meta-Cognitive Strategies*

S.N.	Rating Scale	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I connect the new words with its synonyms and antonyms	3	10	15	50	5	16.67	7	23.33
2	I play vocabulary games such as cross words, puzzles	2	6.67	12	40	10	33.33	6	20
3	I repeat the new rods orally	3	10	12	40	12	40	3	10
4	I spend a lot of time to memorize new words	8	26.67	10	33.33	7	23.33	5	16.67
5	I use internet related English language to learn new words	10	33.33	8	26.67	7	23.33	5	16.67
6	I watch English films and TV programme	6	20	15	50	6	20	3	10
7	I read English language newspapers	10	33.33	8	26.67	6	20	6	20
8	I listen carefully in the classroom	16	53.33	8	26.67	4	13.33	2	6.67
9	I connect the words to personal experience	4	13.33	15	50	7	23.34	4	13.33
10	I memorize the meaning of prefixes and suffixes	4	13.33	15	50	4	13.33	7	23.34
	Mean	6.6	22.244	11.3	37.344	8.16	8.05	6	1.35
	Median	5.5		13.33		12.5		40	
	Mode	3		10		8		50	
	Standard Deviation	4.348	14.845	3.158	11.531	1.181	1.95	2.828	1.343

The findings reveal diverse metacognitive VLS employed by the participants. Notably, connecting new words with synonyms and antonyms is a commonly practiced strategy, with 50% of participants frequently utilizing this approach. Playing vocabulary games, such as

crosswords and puzzles, is also moderately popular, with 40% of participants regularly engaging in such activities. Furthermore, repeating new words orally and spending substantial time on memorization are strategies adopted by 40% and 33.33% of participants, respectively. The internet serves as a valuable resource, with 33.33% of participants regularly using it for English language-related learning. Additionally, watching English films and TV programs is moderately common, with 50% of participants employing this strategy. Reading English language newspapers is frequently practiced by 33.33% of participants. Notably, active listening in the classroom emerges as a highly prevalent strategy, with 53.33% of participants consistently focusing on classroom learning experiences. Connecting words to personal experiences and memorizing the meanings of prefixes and suffixes are strategies that find favor among 50% of participants. These findings underscore the versatility and adaptability of VLS among class ten students, reflecting a blend of classroom-based, interactive, and self-directed approaches to vocabulary acquisition.

The study also reported some important statistical measures for the learning strategies used by the participants. The mean frequency of the learning strategies was 6.6 (22.244%), with a median of 5.5, a mode of 3, and a standard deviation of 4.348 (14.845%). This indicates that there is a lot of variation in how frequently different strategies are used. The most common strategy (mode) is used by only a small fraction of the participants. The median shows that half of the strategies are used more often than others, while the other half are used less often. The standard deviation reveals that there is a large spread in the frequencies of different strategies, indicating a diverse range of learning approaches among the participants.

The study aligns with previous research in VLS, as it underscores the effectiveness of connecting new words with synonyms and antonyms, a strategy recognized for its role in enhancing vocabulary retention (Nation, 2001). Similarly, the study's findings of playing vocabulary games like crosswords and puzzles align with established research indicating the benefits of interactive and engaging learning approaches (Mehrpour et al., 2018). Active listening in the classroom, a prevalent strategy among participants, aligns with the well-documented importance of classroom-based instruction in vocabulary acquisition (Waring & Takaki, 2003).

However, the study contrasts with contemporary pedagogical approaches by revealing strategies such as repeating new words orally and memorization, which may differ from modern principles that emphasize more contextual and interactive learning methods over rote repetition (Nation, 2001). The preference for watching English films and TV programs as a strategy may also contrast with research highlighting the advantages of extensive reading and active text engagement (Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998). Additionally, strategies like connecting words to personal experiences and memorizing prefixes and suffixes, which reflect a more personalized and metacognitive approach, may differ from studies that focus on standardized vocabulary learning techniques (Nation, 2001). These distinctions highlight the diversity of vocabulary acquisition approaches among learners and underscore the need for adaptable instructional methods to cater to individual preferences and needs.



### Social Strategies Used for Learning Vocabulary

The following table shows respondents' response regarding the use of social strategies for learning English vocabulary.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Responses on Social Strategies*

S. N.	Rating Scale	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I use new words while speaking	10	33.33	8	26.67	6	20	6	20
2	I interact to the teacher about new words	12	40	11	36.66	5	16.66	2	6.67
3	I learn the words by group work and pair work in class	8	26.66	12	40	5	16.67	5	16.67
4	I ask the teacher about new words	5	16.67	15	50	6	20	4	13.33
5	I cooperate with friends to learn new words	5	16.67	12	40	10	33.33	3	10
6	I participate in classroom discussion	8	26.66	12	40	7	23.34	3	10
7	I reply the answer while teacher asking question	4	13.33	12	40	10	33.34	4	13.33
8	I speak English with my classmate	3	10	8	26.67	12	40	7	23.33
9	I ask my teachers to translate new words into Nepali	2	6.67	10	33.33	15	50	3	10
10	I sue communicative functions while talking English according to situation	3	10	8	26.67	14	46.66	5	16.67
	Mean	6.6	20	10.	36	7.5	25	5.7	18.99
	Median	5.5		10.		6.5		4.5	
	Mode	5.8		12		5.1		3.4	
	Standard Deviation	30.	6.67	2.9	6.67	3.3	7.27	2.0	6.67
		3		6		0		8	

The analysis and interpretation of responses regarding social strategies for learning English vocabulary, as summarized in Table No. 3, demonstrate varying degrees of engagement among class ten students. When it comes to using new words while speaking, a significant portion, constituting 33.33% of respondents, actively employs this strategy. Similarly, interacting with teachers about new words is a common practice, with 40% of respondents actively engaging in this approach. Learning words through group work and pair work in the classroom is favored by 40% of respondents, while asking teachers about new words is frequently done by 50% of participants. Cooperative learning with friends to acquire new words is another prevalent

strategy, with 40% of respondents adopting this approach. Engaging in classroom discussions is practiced by 40% of participants, and responding to teacher's questions with new words is employed by 40% of respondents. Speaking English with classmates is reported by 26.67% of participants. Seeking translations from teachers for new words is done by 50% of respondents, and using communicative functions based on situational context is employed by 46.66% of participants. These findings illustrate the diverse social strategies employed by class ten students for vocabulary acquisition, with varying levels of preference for each strategy.

In addition to these findings, the study also provided some key statistical measures. The mean frequency of the learning strategies used by the participants was 6.6 (20%), with a median of 5.5, a mode of 5.8, and a standard deviation of 30.3 (6.67%). This suggests that there is a fair amount of variation in how often different strategies are used. The most common strategy (mode) is used by just over half of the participants. The median indicates that half of the strategies are used more frequently than others, while the other half are used less frequently. The standard deviation shows that there is a wide spread in the frequencies of different strategies, indicating a diverse range of learning approaches among the participants.

The study resonates with established principles in vocabulary acquisition research when examining social strategies for learning English vocabulary. The active engagement of 33.33% of respondents in using new words while speaking aligns with communicative language learning approaches emphasizing real-world language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Similarly, the common practice of 40% of respondents interacting with teachers about new words aligns with the importance of teacher-student interactions in vocabulary development as emphasized in previous studies (Qian, 2002). The prevalence of cooperative learning with friends, adopted by 40% of respondents, reflects the well-documented benefits of peer collaboration in language learning, supported by sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978).

However, contrasting with these findings, some differences emerge. The high frequency of asking teachers about new words (50% of participants) may contrast with research advocating for learner autonomy and self-directed learning in vocabulary acquisition, indicating a shift in pedagogical approaches (Cotterall, 1995). Seeking translations from teachers for new words (50% of respondents) might differ from studies promoting monolingual approaches for vocabulary learning, emphasizing the advantages of using the target language exclusively (Laufer & Girsai, 2008). Additionally, the diverse range of frequencies and preferences among participants, as indicated by the wide standard deviation (30.3), highlights the individualized nature of vocabulary learning approaches in this study, which may differ from research emphasizing standardized instructional methods (Nation, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies for learning English vocabulary used by class ten students. The results showed that students used a variety of strategies, such as guessing word meanings, noting down difficult words, connecting new words with synonyms and antonyms, playing vocabulary games, engaging with the internet, active listening in the classroom, using new words while speaking, interacting with teachers,

and engaging in group and pair work. These findings indicate that students are adaptable and versatile in their vocabulary learning process.

The study has implications for language teachers and policymakers. Language teachers should diversify their teaching approaches to cater to the different learning preferences of students. They should also foster metacognitive awareness among students to help them plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process. Moreover, they should create opportunities for collaborative learning experiences that facilitate vocabulary acquisition through interaction and communication. Policymakers should recognize and respect the diverse strategies of students and support them in their language learning journey. They should also harness the motivation of students to engage with vocabulary in meaningful ways and create stimulating classroom environments that make learning enjoyable and effective. The study revealed the dynamic and adaptable nature of VLS among class ten students. By understanding and supporting these strategies, language teachers and policymakers can enhance the language proficiency and academic achievements of students.

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