
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Lexical Processing Strategy Use and Vocabulary Performance of Primary School Learners Towards Semantics-Oriented Language Learning Intervention

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| ABSTRACT

In the context of primary education, vocabulary development serves a fundamental pillar for reading comprehension, effective communication, and long-term academic success. This study examines the lexical processing strategies employed by Grade 6 learners and their vocabulary performance in selected public elementary schools in Roxas, Isabela, Philippines. The research employed descriptive-correlational design in determining the profile of the learners, their lexical processing strategy uses in initial discovering of words and consolidating new word forms and meanings, and their vocabulary performance. The methodology involved administering a teacher-made vocabulary performance test aligned with Grade 6 English curriculum standards, and an adapted Schmitt Vocabulary Learning Strategies Survey. Data were collected from Grade 6 learners from across four selected elementary schools using stratified sampling to ensure accurate representation. Findings of the study revealed that the respondents exhibited average to low level vocabulary performance, with limited depth in their vocabulary knowledge. The learners utilized a range of lexical processing strategy uses in discovering and consolidating new word forms and meanings, with varying frequencies across different specified strategies. Findings underscore the importance for targeted semantics-oriented language learning interventions. In conclusion, this study contributes to addressing the gap in lexical processing strategy use and vocabulary performance among primary school learners in ESL contexts. Through identifying the lexical processing strategy use and vocabulary performance of Grade 6 learners, the study provides a basis for designing semantics-based activities such as concept mapping, semantic feature analysis, thematic clustering, contextual inference training, and multi-modal meaning making tasks. These interventions are expected to enhance vocabulary development and support teachers in delivering more effective instructions for young learners.

| KEYWORDS

Lexical Processing Strategies, Vocabulary Performance, Semantics-Oriented Language Learning Intervention, Primary School Learners

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Language acquisition is a complex process that is central to communication and intellectual skills. Vocabulary development is a key part of this process, a building block of comprehension as it helps learners to understand and share ideas. For children in primary school, having a strong vocabulary is important not only for academic success but also for being able to communicate and learn throughout their lives (Nation, 2022). Hence, having a good vocabulary in early childhood can predict how well a person will read and what literacy skills they will develop in the future.

In countries like the Philippines, where English is not the primary language, expanding one's vocabulary is essential for both educational and economic advancement. Its K-12 Basic Education Curriculum strives to help learners to improve their communication abilities so that they may excel in academics and in future endeavors. The Integrated Language Arts Curriculum

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establishes goals for vocabulary development and requires learners to be capable of working independently on oral and written texts by Grade 3 and verbal communication with proper grammar by Grade 6.

Research indicates that effective vocabulary teaching in ESL contexts relies on a balance of explicit instruction, context-based learning, and active learning (Rodríguez-Pérez, 2023). Although vocabulary learning is very crucial, few studies have been conducted on the use of vocabulary learning strategies among primary school learners (Fraser, 1999; Loucky, 2006; Shieh, 2023). Research has mainly been conducted on middle school or university students (Teng, 2015), and thus, there is a significant gap in the research on how young learners apply these strategies during the most important stages of language learning. Existing research indicates that the teaching of single strategies, such as word breaking, context clues, and use of memory aids, is beneficial to primary learners, but few studies have examined how the strategies affect vocabulary performance in early learning (Teng, 2024; Brugger & Juska-Bacher, 2022). With the objective of filling the gap in the research, this study proposes planning semantics-based language learning intervention to address the needs of the learners in terms of their vocabulary performance and lexical strategies.

Empirical studies show that semantics-based methods including concept mapping, theming, and contextual word association enable students to remember and grasp new vocabulary better by linking them to meaningful language (Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2020). Through active vocabulary activities like storytelling, performance-based and real-world application, and collaborative learning, semantics-based instruction ignites deeper thinking, which aids to the vocabulary development of the learners (Teng, 2021).

The strategies that primary school learners employ to increase their vocabulary are the primary focus of this study. The findings further point to semantics-based language interventions with specific vocabulary-learning strategies for the Grade 6 learners. As a result, helping English language teachers be equally equipped with knowledge concerning effective strategies for teaching that aligns with current paradigms for language acquisition. By utilizing these key components, this study advances the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which is high-quality education that guarantees inclusive and equitable literacy development for all (UNESCO, 2023).

2. Literature Review

Vocabulary is an underlying pillar in language development, and in this respect even more for primary school learners, enabling the efficient learning of literary and academic language and communication skills (Nation, 2022). Both planned and unplanned word learning are efficient, where beginning instruction takes the central place in the success of reading and language development.

Research overviews that children can gain new words via both on-purpose and accidental learning activities, thereafter, they could put them into production and understand them as well (Schmitt, 2020). It has been indicated by Biemiller (2005) that vocabulary growth in early education has a critical effect on reading comprehension and overall language proficiency, hence the promotion of word learning through structured vocabulary instruction is to be established.

A recent systemic review made by Yao (2023) brought up a range of awareness-building and incidental learning exercises that had a significant effect on vocabulary learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Explicit teaching (e.g., teaching word meanings and the process of word formations), and implicit exposure (e.g., reading and listening to stories) were found to be the most effective methods when combined, which is consistent with the dual-process model concept. These results coincide with the former studies in terms of the necessity for context-based learning and semantic processing to support vocabulary retention (Teng, 2021).

Lexical processing strategies (LPSs) represent mental techniques, which the learners utilize to understand, memorize and recall word meanings in a nimble way (Fraser, 1999). Effective LPSs serve as a framework for vocabulary growth that empowers learners to figure out word meanings in context, extract morphology patterns out of words and apply the use of good memory for great many times of recall (Shieh, 2013).

A survey by Brugger and Juska-Bacher (2021) which looked at lexical inferencing strategies learned by primary school learners during reading discovered that pupils who do deliberately use the information to solve the puzzles such as context hints, word morphology analysis, and background knowledge evidence higher vocabulary improvement. This study reveals that primary learners are benefited a lot from inferencing lessons by the teachers, which encourage them to find the meanings from the text rather than translation or direct teaching.

Teng (2024) and Zhang (2023) emphasized the importance of metacognitive awareness in the efficient application of lexical processing techniques. The ability of students to think critically on their own thought processes is closely linked to their vocabulary learning success. Students who proved to be more metacognitively attentive, who monitored and evaluated their strategies throughout language tasks were more adept at selecting and implementing the appropriate lexical strategies. The study points that metacognition is not merely an extra skill, but is crucial for successful vocabulary learning. This idea is critical for teachers because it implies that vocabulary instruction should include helping pupils develop more self-regulation in order to achieve a more efficient vocabulary instruction. Teachers should combine reflective exercises and strategy training to help students become aware and purposeful users of lexical processing techniques (Teng & Zhang, 2024; Oxford, 2017).

The results of the studies of Borovsky, (2022) take a cognitive approach to vocabulary development by examining the mental processes involved in semantic processing. Their study concentrated on how children build meaning, retain new words, and form networks of word associations. Results demonstrated that inferential reasoning and semantic mapping are important processes that promote enhanced vocabulary retention.

The essence of learners' involvement in active cognitive tasks like recognizing word patterns, creating meanings in context, and making connections between new words and prior knowledge are also emphasized. In contrast to traditional approaches that prioritize memorization, Johnson and White support dynamic teaching strategies that engage students' cognitive abilities and result in significant and enduring learning outcomes.

Individual cognitive styles are a significant variable in vocabulary research (Oxford, 2017; Teng, 2024). Their study focused on how learners' individual differences and learning styles influence their lexical strategies. Results to their study showed that while some students prefer analytical strategies, such as dissecting word roots and affixes, others prefer visual or contextual methods, such as connecting new words to images or narratives. These are significant academic ramifications to this study- hence suggesting that there isn't a single vocabulary teaching strategy that works most effectively for every student. Rather, teachers should exert effort in modifying their teaching pedagogies to cater their learners' needs targeting their interests to achieve a more efficient teaching and learning process, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, well-crafted and tailored instruction that caters to students' interests and strengths leads to increased engagement and improved vocabulary.

Furthermore, researchers suggest that formative assessments in determining the cognitive profiles of learners are highly important. By doing this, teachers can assess, evaluate and determine appropriate teaching strategies that work for learners and offer targeted support in catering their strengths and interests, which later on improves the overall efficacy of language instruction (Teng, 2024; Oxford, 2017).

The implementation of semantics-oriented language interventions over extended periods of time were carried out by Apthorp et. al. (2017) proving that there is a long-term impact of such interventions. These interventions were proven with result that the vocabulary development of primary learners- through integration of activities that emphasized the conceptual connections between words, such as conceptual mapping, thematic word groupings, and story-based learning. The findings in their study are found reliable: stronger vocabulary retention, comprehension, and articulation of new words- all greatly improved. These results stands to provide strong evidence that, with systematic implementation, semantics-based interventions can enhance young learners' vocabulary development and language proficiency over time.

These long-term studies show how scalable and long-lasting these interventions are, and they provide compelling evidence for incorporating them in national curricula and educational governance regulations related to early childhood development of language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. This design is chosen for it is appropriate in providing a description of the variables under study and the existing relationships among them (Sousa et al., 2007). It also provides a comprehensive description of primary school learners' vocabulary performance levels and lexical processing strategy uses and employs exploring the correlations among other variables.

3.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within Roxas, Isabela. Specifically, the research focused on selected educational institutions categorized as medium and big schools: Roxas West Central School, Roxas East Central School, Bantug Lintao Elementary School, and San Rafael Elementary School. Each of these institutions play a vital role in shaping the academic and social landscape of Roxas, Isabela, serving as pillars of education and community engagement.

3.3 Respondents of the Study

The target population of this study included the primary school learners in the intermediate level, specifically Grades 6 pupils enrolled for the School Year 2024-2025. The researcher applied Cochran's formula in determining the sample size with 95% level of confidence and 0.05 as margin of error and subsequently utilized stratified random sampling technique in selecting the respondents of this study. This sampling method was implemented to collect data and analysis allowing the researcher to acquire specific and efficient information. To present the number of respondents in every stratum or section, below is the actual number.

Table 1. Population and Sample of Grade 6 Primary Learners

School	Population	Sample
Roxas Central School	297	121
Roxas West Central School	112	45
Bantug Lintao Elementary School	96	39
San Rafael Elementary School	61	25
TOTAL	566	230

Table 1 presents the population and sample distribution of Grade 6 primary learners from four selected elementary schools in the study area.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the school heads of the four selected schools (Roxas Central School, Roxas West Central School, Bantug Lintao Elementary School, and San Rafael Elementary School) down to the English language teachers of the respective schools. Likewise, the consent of the study's participants was sought at the outset of data gathering for ethical considerations and that they would not be coerced to participate in the study. The respondents were also informed of the objectives of the study and were assured of anonymity, data protection, and confidentiality of responses as the data gathering procedures took place.

After getting the approval from the School Head and the consent of the respondents of the study, the researcher coordinated and asked for the respondents' English class schedules in their respective schools for the administration of questionnaire and conduct of vocabulary performance assessment. Once scheduled, the researcher administered the research questionnaire on lexical processing strategy use of the respondents. After obtaining their responses, the researcher retrieved the instrument from the respondents and checked if these are all answered properly. Afterwards, the vocabulary performance test was administered immediately and the respondents were given one (1) hour to accomplish the test. Then, the vocabulary test was collected and underwent analysis and interpretation to explain the findings of the study.

Additionally, to validate the quantitative results of the study, a think-aloud session was used as an intervention after the data has been analyzed, and the most used and least used lexical processing techniques have been determined. The study strictly followed data privacy ethical guidelines specifically in the think-aloud protocol. There were no collection or retention of personally identifying information. Codes that prohibit individual tracing were used to anonymize all answers.

Parents or legal guardians of the participants were asked to give their full informed consent before any data was collected. Participants were reminded that they could stop answering at any time when they would feel uncomfortable without facing consequences and that their participation was entirely voluntary.

The researcher made sure that all of the activities such as think-aloud sessions, vocabulary tests, and surveys were age-appropriate, non-invasive, and carried out in a secure, encouraging setting in order to minimize any potential conflict.

3.5 Research Instruments

The research instruments employed in this study were 40-item survey questionnaire and a 40-item test. The survey questionnaire consisted two parts. Specifically, the Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Survey revised by Loucky (2006) was used to determine the lexical processing strategy use of the respondents.

In the first part of the survey questionnaire, the respondents provided personal information regarding their sex and first language. The second part was divided into two domains such as initial discovery of new word meanings and consolidating new word forms and meanings. The first domain on the initial discovery of new word meanings comprised of 19 items which are further categorized into four phases of lexical processing such as attending and assessing (items 1-4), accessing (items 5-9), archiving (items 10-13), and analyzing (14-19). On the other hand, the second domain consisted of 21 items which are further classified into four phases of lexical processing such as anchoring (items 20-24), associating (items 25-27), activating (items 28-

32), and reassessing, reviewing, recycling (items 33-40). The respondents rated the 40 indicators using a 4-point Likert scale with their respective rankings: 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Almost Always, 4 = Always.

To further enhance the credibility of the questionnaire, the research study employed triangulation by incorporating a think-aloud session as additional data collection method.

Moreover, a researcher-made and multiple-choice type of vocabulary test was also used as a research instrument to determine the vocabulary performance of the respondents. It followed the content and performance standards on vocabulary domain for Grade 6 pupils. Its Table of Specifications consists of competencies such as inferring meaning of figurative language through context clues, borrowed words, and content specific terms using context clues and other strategies, and clarifying meaning of words using dictionaries, thesaurus, and online resources, with 10 test items for each competency.

The test items underwent review and validation by three language coordinators consisting of Language Coordinators for item analysis, corrections, suggestions, and comments. Likewise, to ensure a reliable data, the aforementioned vocabulary test underwent reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha and item analysis. Items that were deemed very easy or very difficult were excluded from the final test before its administration to the target respondents.

The scores of the respondents in the vocabulary test are analyzed using the following interpretation scale:

Table 2. Scale for Vocabulary Performance Level

Range of Scores in Vocabulary Test	Description
28-40	High vocabulary performance
14-27	Mid/average vocabulary performance
0-13	Low vocabulary performance

3.6 Statistical Treatment of Data

To ensure a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the data collected, the statistical tools to be employed in this study have been carefully selected based on the nature of the research questions and the types of variables involved. The data are analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) was used to summarize the profile of the respondents (sex and first language), their lexical processing strategy use (based on weighted mean), and their vocabulary performance (categorized into low, average, and high).

The study also incorporated a focused analysis of the least-used lexical processing strategies as identified by the survey results in order to guarantee that the semantics-based language learning intervention is based on empirical findings.

Weighted mean scores based on a 4-point Likert scale will be used to evaluate each of the eight subdomains in Loucky's (2001) taxonomy: Attending and Assessing, Accessing, Archiving, Analyzing, Anchoring, Associating, Activating, and Reassessing, Reviewing, Recycling. The least frequently used strategies by learners fall into the "Sometimes" used (1.75–2.49) and "Never" used (1.00–1.74) ranges. The learners' vocabulary performance scores are analyzed in conjunction with these underutilized strategies. In order to determine whether low-frequency strategy use and poor vocabulary performance are statistically related, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation is used. This directed how instructional activities that are strategy-focused are prioritized. Therefore, those strategic areas that have been identified as weak or rarely used were used as the foundation in crafting the semantics-oriented intervention. By addressing particular cognitive gaps in lexical processing and encouraging meaningful, context-based vocabulary acquisition, the resulting of language learning intervention is both data-driven and pedagogically intentional.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 3. Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency N=230	Percent
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	100	43.50%
Female	130	56.50%
<i>First Language</i>		
Ilokano	67	29.10%
Tagalog	154	67.00%
Others (Ybanag/Cebuano)	9	3.90%

Table 3 presents the demographic profile of 230 Grade 6 learners of Roxas, Isabela as to their sex and first language.

The sample is composed of 230 Grade 6 learners, with a larger proportion of females with a frequency of 130 or 56.5% than males with 100 or 43.5%. This female dominance mirrors DepEd's enrollment summary that explicitly reports more female learners in Elementary including Kindergarten (DepEd, 2022).

Tagalog speakers make up the majority with 154 or 67% of the sample, followed by Ilokano with 67 or 29.1%, and a small group from other language groups (Ybanag/Cebuano) with 9 or 3.9%. This multilingual context is important in identifying each language's lexical approaches since first language (L1) influences second language (L2) learning strategies and metalinguistic awareness (Cummins, 2000).

Table 4a. Strategies on the Initial Discovery of New Word Meanings

Lexical Processing Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Description
Attending and assessing		
1. evaluate which words I know.	2.83	Almost Always
2. guess unknown words.	2.4	Sometimes
3. mark words for study.	2.77	Almost Always
4. skip words if it is no need to study.	1.92	Sometimes
Weighted Mean	2.48	Sometimes
Accessing		
5. asking friend(s) or the teacher in the first language or mother tongue.	2.81	Almost Always
6. asking the teacher in the second language (L2).	2.44	Sometimes
7. using a computerized/ online bilingual dictionary	2.5	Sometimes
8. using a printed bilingual dictionary.	2.12	Sometimes
9. finding the L2 meaning in a monolingual English dictionary	2.32	Sometimes
Weighted Mean	2.44	Sometimes
Archiving		
10. copying word lists in vocabulary notebook or write repeatedly	2.57	Almost Always
11. copying word lists on cards.	2.16	Sometimes
12. copying word lists on computer.	2.13	Sometimes
13. copying word lists in margin or take vocabulary notes.	2.43	Sometimes
Weighted Mean	2.32	Sometimes
Analyzing		
14. analyzing base/root word	2.71	Almost Always
15. beginning or endings	2.66	Almost Always
16. taking note of spelling and pronunciation	3.03	Almost Always
17. Grammar: find parts of speech.	2.8	Almost Always
18. using scales to learn adverbs and adjectives.	2.71	Almost Always
19. using word origins.	2.67	Almost Always
Weighted Mean	2.76	Almost Always
Grand Mean	2.5	Sometimes Use

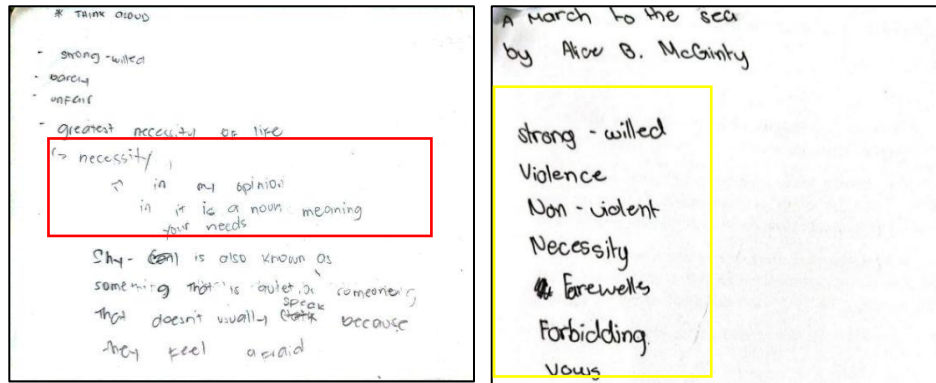
Table 4a reveals that when encountering a variety of vocabulary in their initial discovery phase, the respondents in general, tend to engage in various initial discovery strategies infrequently, evidenced by a grand mean of 2.5 indicating "Sometimes" use. At this developmental stage of vocabulary acquisition, Grade 6 learners are still navigating in most vocabulary domains – typically transitioning from foundational to more intermediate English skills, making them particularly vulnerable as they navigate increasingly complex vocabulary. Studies that employed lab reports, interviews, and simulations reveal that middle-school aged children engage in strategies like these only sometimes, and often skipping them without teachers' prompts (Kranz et al., 2022; Hofstein et al., 2005).

Analyzing

The respondents' Analyzing strategy under initial discovery phase reported a high frequency of use, with a weighted mean of 2.76, which falls under the category "Almost Always" as they show higher frequency of uses particularly in "taking note of spelling and pronunciation" in item 16 and "finding parts of speech" in item 17.

Thereupon, responses to these mentioned strategies of the Grade 6 learners showcase the application of these in the initial process of vocabulary acquisition. As an example, student participants from the conducted think aloud session utilized these strategies as shown in the following figures:

Figure 1. Analyzing Strategy Using Parts of Speech and Note-Taking



The hand written note, emphasized in the red box, on the phrase "greatest necessity of life" outlining "necessity" with the respondent's independent thinking on the word's part of speech as a noun meaning "needs," support the result on the use of "Finding parts of speech" as a processing support on vocabulary acquisition during the initial discovery domain. Also, the list of words emphasized in yellow box, shows the use of note taking in spelling – this list was written down by a participant before reading the passage and processing its content and the context of the words.

This is an implication of a well-oriented vocabulary processing strategy since it shows that learners depend on morphological awareness in determining the meanings of new or unfamiliar words, especially in English. These also imply that Grade 6 learners analyze word structures actively rather than relying on rote memorization of words which demonstrates a holistic approach to meaning-making. Colenbrander, et. al., (2024) also emphasized that morphological knowledge, especially when learners analyze common morphemes, relates strongly to vocabulary and reading comprehension in adolescent readers. In addition, this illustrates the application of metalinguistic strategies, which are essential to learning advanced vocabulary.

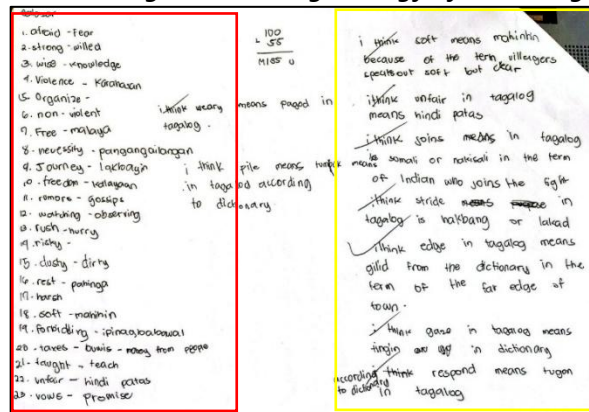
In conclusion, the handwritten notes serve as concrete proof that Grade 6 learners utilize their morphological awareness and note-taking strategies as useful tools in vocabulary processing. Through the active processing of parts of speech and word structure, the students show an advanced level of holistic vocabulary processing that transcends simple memorization. Fostering such metalinguistic strategies in instruction can further strengthen learners' vocabulary development and reading comprehension in bilingual contexts.

Attending and Assessing

The respondents' use of Attending and Assessing strategy also yielded a weighted mean of 2.48. Among their responses on the uses of specific strategies, the respondents most commonly employed initial discovery strategies as they "evaluate which words they already know" in item 1.

In validating the manifestation of this data through the think aloud session, the respondents tend to strategize their vocabulary processing by evaluating the words they already know. In the initial process of the think aloud session wherein the student participants were given the passage prior to the actual reading, they enumerated the words they already know, and processed the meanings that they have in mind and later confirmed if their meanings were correct during their reading.

Figure 2. Attending and Assessing Strategy by Evaluating Words



The figure above shows a hand written note, as emphasized in the red box, of enumerated list of words from the passage that the student participant has prior knowledge of. This was done before the think-aloud session as the participants were encouraged to list the words that they are familiar with as they browse their copy of the passage.

For every word enlisted, the student participant provided a meaning to the word, i.e., the word “soft” in item 18 on the note was defined by the student participant as “mahinhin” and later put it in sentence definition, depending on how the word is used in the context of the passage, as emphasized in yellow box. The check marks before the definitions are the confirmation of the student participant that the meanings she provided in the initial phase of the think-aloud are correct and that her prior knowledge of the words are accurate. This proves that the learners tend to attend and assess their vocabulary through evaluating which words they know.

Their ability to assess the words they already know also proves that they already have a substantial vocabulary bank or lexical repertoire. This is supported by the normative data of Biemiller & Slonim (2001) proving that by Grade 6 level, average learners know 9,000 root word meanings which reflects vocabulary growth from earlier grade levels. Moreover, recent studies highlight that incidental vocabulary learning, whether in reading or listening, is dependent on learners' capacity to attend to unfamiliar vocabulary, usually by means of contextual hints (Wise, 2024). This clearly proved that primary school learners at Grade 6 level possess a rich vocabulary repertoire, and the role of attention is very critical in facilitating vocabulary acquisition from text.

On the other hand, among the items under Attending and Assessing strategy, the least used is “skipping words if these are not necessary for study” in item 4. Without explicit need, i.e., no test or assignment or the need to require mastery, Grade 6 learners tend to skip words rather than employ strategies that utilize contextual and morphological analysis, or dictionary consultation.

Though this strategy might help with fast reading, regular avoidance of unknown words could restrain vocabulary development and limit chances for unintentional learning. Consequently, habitual avoidance of these items will constrain vocabulary development in terms of breadth, depth, and development, particularly in primary/elementary learners. For instance, vocabulary learning in contexts of information, as well as learners' capacity to recognize unfamiliar vocabulary, is supported by findings indicating developmental patterns of vocabulary learning, as well as slower development in learners who do not strategically attend to vocabulary (Wise, 2024). Moreover, meta-analysis and review studies have supported the notion that incidental second language vocabulary learning, like its first language counterpart, is facilitated by engagement rather than avoidance, although the effects are small without the consideration of unknowns (Webb et al., 2023). In younger ESL learners, skipping unknown vocabulary during meaning-focused activities limits opportunities for partial vocabulary learning and reinforcement, thus widening vocabulary gaps (Reynolds, 2025; Kurokawa, 2025, syntheses). In conclusion, although skipping is functional for immediate convenience without external pressures, consistent avoidance limits unintentional vocabulary learning and development in elementary students.

Accessing

The respondents' Accessing strategy also revealed infrequent use that yielded a weighted mean of 2.44. Among the items under this strategy, the respondents tend to “Almost always” ask friends or teachers about unknown words in first language ($M = 2.81$) as a form of active, and social help-seeking behavior, while “using a printed bilingual vocabulary” is “Sometimes” used ($M = 2.12$). This happens because at the stage of their vocabulary development, they are still in the process of expanding their native language lexicon and tend to leverage to more knowledgeable others to clarify ambiguities in words they are still foreign to.

The conducted think aloud session revealed that the student participants rely on translation and social help-seeking behavior during the process of vocabulary acquisition.

SP22: I think the word "broken" means damaged, also in Tagalog, it means nasira.

T/R: What made you say that?

SP22: The story says, "every law broken" because "they marched to break the law for their village's freedom from the unfair taxes of Britain."

T/R: Correct. What else do you have in mind?

SP5: Ma'am, I think 'joins' in Tagalog means sumali or nakisali from the term "every Indian who joins the fight,"

T/R: Good thinking! How about the others? What words do you also have in mind?

SP12: Ma'am, does dawn mean "madaling araw" in English?"

Above is a segment of the teacher-researcher and the student participants' think aloud session transcription that presents the dialogues on how they strategize their vocabulary – seemingly comfortable with the L1 translation use and social seeking use.

The think-aloud session revealed that the learners rely on the use of the first language (L1) to translate their vocabulary, and social help-seeking behaviors. From the dialogue in the above segment, it was clear that the learners were using the first language to provide the equivalents of the English vocabulary. They also sought the teacher-researcher's confirmation throughout the think-aloud method.

This implies that the learners feel more confident and secure when they associate new or target words with their mother tongue and when they get immediate validation from the teacher. For instance, SP22 explained that "broken" means "damaged" and then immediately provided the translation in Tagalog "nasira" and provided evidence from the sentence "every law broken." Likewise, SP5 provided the translation of "joins" as "sumali" or "nakisali," and SP12 asked the teacher directly, "Ma'am, does dawn mean 'madaling araw'?" These show the role of translation as a bridge in the meaning-making process and the role of social help-seeking in verifying the learners' understanding in a supportive environment.

These actions are consistent with recent studies on the application of vocabulary learning strategies among EFL learners. L1 translation is still a popular and useful strategy for learners, especially since it enables bilingual learners to relate unfamiliar words in the English language with familiar mother tongue concepts, thus making meaning and facilitating comprehension and retention during reading (Aljasir, 2025; Ghalebi, 2020). In the same way, social help-seeking strategies are commonly used by learners in order to minimize uncertainty and confirm comprehension, especially among primary and secondary learners (Peter & Hashim, 2023; Investigating the Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies among ESL Learners in Primary School, 2025). Other studies on Filipino and other Asian EFL learners have shown that learners have a natural tendency to resort to L1 translation and consult teachers in order to clarify meaning during reading, thus boosting learners' confidence and improving comprehension and retention.

On the other hand, the use of printed bilingual dictionary was reported as the least used item under Accessing strategy with a mean of 2.12 in item 8. This indicates low adoption of dictionaries as tool to access the meaning of unfamiliar words among the Grade 6 learners. This also imply that Grade 6 learners rarely rely on printed bilingual dictionaries for they appear to prefer more immediate alternatives, such as asking friends or teachers who they recognize as more knowledgeable others in their first language. The limited use of these tools reflects social dependence rather than independent consultation from printed resources. Recent studies of Ayana et. al. (2024) confirm that ESL/EFL learners often underutilize printed bilingual dictionaries and that primary school learners show only moderate to low preference for conventional dictionary use with gathered mean of around 2.11-2.30, and tend to depend on direct L1 translation or depend on seeking social help from others rather than engaging with printed resources. This pattern appears to be common in the initial phase of vocabulary acquisition processes because printed bilingual dictionaries may require more time and effort than social help-seeking, however leading to surface-level rather than strategic vocabulary accessing among primary school learners.

Overall, this evidence demonstrates that Grade 6 learners in this context effectively employ L1 translation and social help-seeking as key strategies to acquire and confirm vocabulary during reading rather than the use of printed bilingual dictionaries. These strategies reflect both their linguistic reality as bilingual students and their need for teacher and peer support in building vocabulary confidence. Recognizing and building upon these natural strategies can lead to more effective and culturally responsive vocabulary instruction, however explicit instruction on effective dictionary use is also essential in promoting learners autonomy and deeper vocabulary processing.

Archiving

Archiving strategies for initial vocabulary discovery garnered the least frequency use with a weighted mean of 2.32, indicating low overall adoption of organized vocabulary recording methods. Under this domain, "copying word lists into a vocabulary

notebook or writing words repeatedly” was the most commonly employed approach as shown in item 10 with a mean of 2.57 marked as “Almost Always” used by the respondents, while “copying word lists on computers” is the least used which yielded a mean of 2.13.

Figure 3. Archiving Strategy by Copying Word Lists

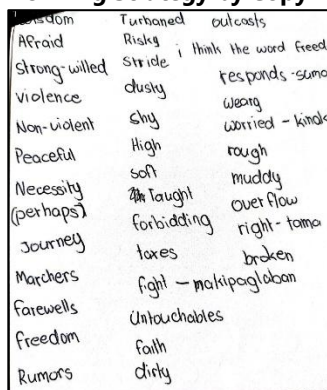


Figure 5 shows a handwritten copied words listed on a paper by a student participant in the think-aloud session. Almost all of the student participants copied words and listed them on papers. However, as observed by the teacher-researcher, copying word lists on computer or phones was a least used strategy by the student participants during the think-aloud session.

This reveals that while learners in Grade 6 level are capable of engaging in basic archiving strategies within the initial discovery phase, they still have a tendency to prefer traditional methods which are easier and exert less effort compared to more complex methods. For example in Figure 5, simply writing out lists of words appears to be more appealing to learners in Grade 6 compared to digital recording strategies.

This pattern reveals a preference among young learners for low-effort, mechanical repetition techniques—such as manual writing—over more structured archiving practices that require systematic note-taking and long-term organization for future review. It also suggests limited comfort or access to digital tools for vocabulary recording, alongside a lack of diverse archiving habits.

Recent studies with primary ESL/EFL learners support this trend: young learners often favor simple, immediate cognitive strategies like repetition and rote writing for consolidation and discovery, while underutilizing organized methods such as keeping structured notebooks or digital archiving due to higher cognitive demands, perceived effort, or insufficient scaffolding (Kho et al., 2021; Logojan, n.d.). In Malaysian primary education contexts, cognitive strategies involving mechanical repetition (e.g., writing repeatedly) received moderate to high ratification, whereas more organized consolidation (including archiving/notebooks) showed inconsistent or lower use unless teacher-guided (Kho et al., 2021).

Similarly, elementary learners exhibit lower frequency for thematic organization, rote review, or digital/notebook archiving, gravitating toward shallower, effort-minimizing approaches like repetition that align with developmental maturity and classroom norms (Logojan, n.d.; Aljasir, 2025). Beginner/younger profiles prioritize basic repetition over complex encoding like note-taking or digital tools, reflecting familiarity, lower cognitive load, and preference for tangible, immediate reinforcement (Aljasir, 2025).

In conclusion, while archiving strategies are the least utilized in vocabulary discovery, it is evident from the results that, despite the preference for traditional methods of note-copying and repetition, there is an inherent need for learners to utilize recording as an aid. The presence, though small, of archiving strategies provides an opening for vocabulary teaching to be improved through better archiving strategies, such as note-taking and the gradual use of technology, to enable learners to progress from superficial recording to more in-depth vocabulary archiving and acquisition in bilingual learning.

Table 4b. Strategies on Consolidating New Word Forms and Meanings

Lexical Processing Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Description
Associating		
20. using pictures/hints	2.83	Almost Always
21. noting similar sounds	2.62	Almost Always
22. noting similar form	2.65	Almost Always
23. acting it out	2.48	Sometimes
24. building a link or mental hook/ clue	2.62	Almost Always
Weighted Mean	2.64	Almost Always

Anchoring		
25. alphabet	2.71	Almost Always
26. grammar	2.93	Almost Always
27. related word groups through		
a. synonym/antonym	2.79	Almost Always
b. under simple known keywords	2.71	Almost Always
c. with concept maps	2.45	Sometimes
d. I don't organize.	2.33	Sometimes
Weighted Mean	2.65	Almost Always
Activating		
28. using paraphrases or in my own speaking	2.76	Almost Always
29. using written sentences	2.66	Almost Always
30. acting in a play/skit or using physical action	2.26	Sometimes
31. drawing a picture to show real use	2.27	Sometimes
32. writing a creative vocabulary story	2.46	Sometimes
Weighted Mean	2.48	Sometimes
Reassessing, Reviewing, Recycling		
33. studying regularly; repeat words over time	2.8	Almost Always
34. reviewing card/notes	2.7	Almost Always
35. reusing words actively	2.74	Almost Always
36. reviewing by lists recognizing meanings	2.64	Almost Always
37. recalling new words from memory links	2.61	Almost Always
38. reproducing story or learned sentences	2.52	Almost Always
39. using words in new contexts	2.57	Almost Always
40. reviewing with others	2.92	Almost Always
Weighted Mean	2.69	Almost Always
Grand Mean	2.61	Almost Always

Table 4b unveils that in the process of consolidating new word forms and meanings, Grade 6 learners tend to engage in various strategies to almost frequent use, evidenced by a grand mean of 2.61. The data reflect a transitional stage in the Grade 6 learners' autonomy in vocabulary development, where consolidation is present but can be limited by various factors.

Reassessing, Reviewing, Recycling

Among the strategies involved in consolidating new word forms and meanings, Table 4b indicates that the respondents showed an "Almost Always" frequency of employing strategies related to reassessing, reviewing, and recycling vocabulary with engagement and frequent use in strategizing their consolidation through "reviewing with others" in item 40 with a mean of 2.92. Also, "studying regularly and repeating words" over time show almost always use as shown in item 33 with a mean of 2.8. These indicate that they tend to frequently review their vocabulary in collaboration with peers as a social strategy that provide immediate response while having a more collaborative vocabulary engagement.

Figure 4. Reassessing, Reviewing, and Recycling by Reviewing with Others and Repeating for Review

<p>2. Which of these strategies helped you the most? Why?</p> <p><i>Example: "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning."</i></p> <p><u>My classmates telling about it when they volunteered</u></p> <p>3. When will you use this strategy again?</p> <p><i>Example: "I will use it when I read new stories in English class."</i></p> <p><u>I will use it when i read English books</u></p> <p>4. How can you remember new words better next time?</p> <p><i>Example: "I will make a drawing or group the words with their opposites."</i></p> <p><u>I will write in my notebook</u></p>	<p>2. Which of these strategies helped you the most? Why?</p> <p><i>Example: "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning."</i></p> <p><u>I wrote it down to remember later helped me to answer the questions clearly.</u></p> <p>3. When will you use this strategy again?</p> <p><i>Example: "I will use it when I read new stories in English class."</i></p> <p><u>I will use it to teach my niece.</u></p> <p>4. How can you remember new words better next time?</p> <p><i>Example: "I will make a drawing or group the words with their opposites."</i></p> <p><u>I will repeat so i will remember it.</u></p>
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The reflection notes after the think-aloud session, particularly the response highlighted in the red box, show that one student participant identified "My classmates telling about it when they volunteered" as the strategy that helped them the most in processing vocabulary. In contrast, responses highlighted in yellow boxes indicate other participant relied on writing things down for later review and repeating words to aid memory. These reflections fall under Reassessing, Reviewing, and Recycling vocabulary by reviewing with others and repeating for review.

This evidence reveals that learners employ both social and individual strategies when reflecting on what helps them process new vocabulary. For example, the student in the red box depended on listening to classmates' volunteered explanations during the session, showing reliance on peer input for clarification and confirmation. Meanwhile, the yellow-highlighted responses demonstrate personal review techniques such as writing down information clearly for later recall and repeating words to strengthen memory. Together, these responses illustrate how Grade 6 learners naturally combine social collaboration with individual repetition and note-taking to reinforce vocabulary learning.

Kesmez (2021) also claim that social consolidation strategies are highly preferred by young learners for collaborative engagement and enhanced retention. These results are in line with vocabulary consolidation studies among young ESL/EFL learners, in which social approaches like studying or reviewing with peers are often preferred because of their ability to facilitate collaborative engagement, motivation, and improved retention (Kesmez, 2021; Ariffin, 2021). Peer collaboration has been observed to have a positive effect on vocabulary development due to opportunities for immediate correction, discussion, and collaboration, especially in elementary and young learner environments (Ariffin, 2021; Jalalzai, 2023).

Moreover, another frequently used approach under this strategy is with the use of reviewing through repetition. From the student participants' reflection responses, "wrote down to remember" and "repeat it so I will remember," the use of reviewing strategy is found to be evidently used by the Grade 6 learners. This may also involve the maintenance rehearsal, which is the repetition of information to maintain it in short-term memory or to create basic familiarity with the information, often used by younger students to complete basic memorization needs (Craig & Watkins, 1973). Moreover, spaced repetition has been noted to be effective in facilitating the most efficient and effective mode of learning, which stops the forgetting curve and enhances memory traces in a more lasting manner than cramming or repetition (Kang, 2016). While the simple repetition, as observed in the reflections of the Grade 6 learners, may be natural to them, the literature emphasizes the need to encourage them to use spaced repetition to maximize the benefits to their retention needs.

In conclusion, the reflection notes demonstrate that Grade 6 learners actively use both peer-assisted review and individual repetition strategies to reassess and recycle newly encountered vocabulary. This balanced reliance on social input from classmates and personal techniques like writing and repeating reflects a practical, multi-faceted approach to vocabulary consolidation. Encouraging explicit instruction in these reassessment and recycling strategies can further empower learners to take greater ownership of their vocabulary development beyond the initial discovery phase.

Anchoring

The respondents' Anchoring strategies are also presented with an almost always use of consolidating word meanings, with a weighted mean of 2.65. Specifically, the most frequently used approach in this domain uses is by fixing meanings in memory by grammar. The conducted think aloud session revealed that the student participants strategize their vocabulary consolidation infused with grammar as shown below:

SP13: Ma'am, I think rumors means gossips.

T/R: Oh, very good. Why?

SP13: Because it's the synonym of gossip, right?

T/R: Very good.

...

SP14: I think the meaning of praise is to give worship to an object or to a person.

T/R: Okay, very good. To worship. What made you say that praise means worship?

SP14: It is the synonym of praise."

The above segment of the teacher-researcher and the student participants' think aloud session transcription presents the integration of grammar particularly depending on the use of synonyms as they process and strategize the consolidation of word meanings on their own. This finding indicates that learners actively anchor new vocabulary by connecting it to known grammatical structures and semantic relationships rather than relying on context clues or rote repetition alone. For example, SP13 associated "rumors" with "gossips" by recognizing it as a synonym, while SP14 explained that "praise" means "to give worship to an object or to a person" because "it is the synonym of praise," using synonymy as a grammatical and semantic anchor to consolidate meaning. These instances demonstrate how students infuse grammar awareness (specifically synonym knowledge) into their vocabulary consolidation process.

These behaviors align with recent research on vocabulary consolidation strategies. A 2025 meta-analysis found moderate correlations between morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge in both monolingual ($r = .43$) and bilingual learners, with the strength of the relationship increasing with age (Cheng et al., 2025). Studies on EFL/ESL learners further show that cognitive strategies involving synonym links and grammatical categorization are frequently used for anchoring and consolidating vocabulary, especially among primary and secondary students (Aljasir, 2025)

In conclusion, the anchoring strategies employed by the Grade 6 learners highlight their preference for consolidating vocabulary through grammatical links, particularly synonym recognition. This approach reflects a metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness that enables students to anchor new word meanings more securely. Strengthening instruction in grammar-vocabulary integration can further enhance learners' ability to consolidate and retain new vocabulary effectively in bilingual classroom settings.

On the other hand, the "not organizing at all" strategy is found to be the least used strategy under Anchoring strategy in item 27d of Table 4b. Within the context that focuses on traditional ESL teaching, students may avoid "not organizing" strategies merely because they believe that these strategies are unproductive and less effective in comparison to teacher-modeling strategies such as grammar anchoring (Deylamsalehi et al., 2015). This low usage implies that these Grade 6 ESL learners are aware of ineffective and unproductive methods and are avoiding these approaches in favor of more structured and teacher-directed methods. For example, instead of trying to organize vocabulary in a disorganized fashion, these ESL learners prefer more grammar-based methods of anchoring words in terms of their use as synonyms, as these are more effective for memorization. In terms of traditional ESL classrooms, these learners may be aware that disorganized approaches are less effective than more directed approaches.

This pattern is consistent with recent research on vocabulary learning strategies among EFL/ESL learners. Studies show that learners in traditional instructional settings tend to favor structured cognitive and metacognitive strategies (e.g., grammar anchoring and synonym linking) while underutilizing disorganized or passive approaches, as they perceive the latter as less effective for retention (Peter & Hashim, 2023; Investigating the Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies among ESL Learners in Primary School, 2025). A 2025 meta-analysis further confirms that EFL learners, particularly at the primary level, prioritize organized consolidation techniques that align with teacher modeling, leading to stronger vocabulary anchoring and long-term retention compared to unorganized methods (Aljasir, 2025; Cheng et al., 2025).

Therefore, the minimal use of the "not organizing at all" strategy highlights that Grade 6 learners in this traditional ESL context prefer straightforward, structured anchoring techniques, especially those involving grammar and teacher-modeled patterns. This preference reflects their awareness of strategy effectiveness and their reliance on familiar, organized approaches for successful vocabulary consolidation. Vocabulary instruction can build on this by explicitly teaching a wider range of structured anchoring strategies to further enhance learners' independence and retention.

Associating

The respondents also showed frequent use of Associating strategies, as evidenced by a weighted mean of 2.64. Among the items, the most commonly used was "using pictures or hints" in item 20. This indicates that the learner tends to make meaningful associations between new words and familiar visual stimuli through the aid of pictorial or visual tools, which enhances the semantic processing of the new words.

Figure 5. Associating Strategy Using Picture or Hint

1. What did you do when you met a word you didn't know?

- I guessed from the sentence or story.
- I looked for word parts (prefix, suffix, base).
- I asked my classmate or teacher.
- I skipped the word.
- I imagined a picture or acted it out.
- I wrote it down to remember later.
- I used it in my own sentence.

(You may check more than one.)

2. Which of these strategies helped you the most? Why?

Example: "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning"

Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning

The post think-aloud reflection note shows that the student participant frequently employed associating strategies. In question 1, the learner checked "I imagined a picture or acted it out" as one of the actions taken when encountering an unknown word. In question 2, the same participant wrote that "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning" as the strategy that helped the most. These responses, highlighted in the red boxes, provide direct evidence of the learner's use of visual imagery and pictorial hints during vocabulary processing.

This evidence reveals that the Grade 6 learner actively creates mental associations between unfamiliar words and visual representations to support meaning-making. For example, by imagining a picture or acting out the word and later explaining that guessing was helpful because "the picture gave a clue about the meaning," the student demonstrates the use of visual hints as a powerful tool for semantic processing. Rather than skipping the word or relying solely on textual context, the learner combines story guessing with pictorial association, showing a preference for multisensory strategies that make abstract or new vocabulary more concrete and memorable.

Visual aids enable the concretization of abstract words, facilitate dual processing of the newly learned vocabulary, and aid retention of the learned material, especially among elementary and middle-grade students who tend to learn from multiple sources of information (Paivio's dual-coding theory; Sino, 2024; Logojan, n.d.). Among primary school pupils, the frequency of using visual tools like pictures or contextual visuals to infer the meanings of new words was found to be moderate to high, especially because the learner tends to enjoy the methods more than textual tools (Goundar, 2019; Kho et al., 2021). For example, with reference to the Malaysian primary ESL settings, the strategies that incorporate visual aspects like the inclusion of pictures in textbooks or stories have a slightly higher degree of endorsement than the other methods of memory, which is consistent with the overall trend of preferring picture association, as seen in the study by Kho et al. (2021). Similarly, there have been trends where children have often relied on the inclusion of images to connect the meanings of the words with their knowledge, which is consistent with the cognitive benefits of using knowledge to facilitate language learning, as seen in the studies by Gu (2018) and Arvizu (2020) and Sino (2024).

In conclusion, the reflection template clearly illustrates that Grade 6 learners frequently apply associating strategies by imagining pictures or using visual hints to process unfamiliar vocabulary. This visual-association approach helps transform abstract words into more concrete mental images, thereby facilitating better comprehension and retention. Teachers can strengthen vocabulary instruction by intentionally incorporating picture-based activities and encouraging learners to link new words with visual clues, building on students' natural preference for this effective associating strategy.

On the other hand, acting out the word had a slightly lower mean of 2.48 indicating sometimes use. This implies that although kinesthetic strategies can be effective in engaging learners through bodily movements and embodiment, especially for concrete vocabulary and for kinesthetic learners, their use is not as widespread as more passive strategies such as learners' use of visual associations or grammar anchoring. Learners may prefer less physically demanding strategies in the consolidation stages, perhaps as a function of a teaching context where sitting, talking, and writing is privileged over physical performance. In studies involving primary school children, strategies involving physical action or gestures in word learning have lower means of use or are less frequently employed when not explicitly taught by the teacher for abstract as opposed to concrete/concrete-action-oriented vocabulary (Kho et al., 2021) Similarly, Logojan (n.d.) states that the use of word enactment or drawing is more appropriate in lower levels, though there is a lack of consistent application among elementary students unless supported, as students may find it a process that requires effort, is embarrassing in a peer group, or is less efficient in remembering the content in comparison to more familiar cognitive associations such as pictures or grammatical rules. \

In a learning situation that has a more traditional ESL program in place, where consolidation activities may involve more review, repetition, or peer discussions instead of the more dramatic approach of enactment, the use of physical learning strategies is likely to be less utilized, especially in the middle school years as students encounter more abstract words in the language (Chen, 2025; Rachmawati, 2018).

Activating

Among the areas of strategy use in consolidating new words' form and meaning, the Activating strategy recorded a fair level of engagement among the Grade 6 respondents, however the least used among all subdomains as it had a weighted mean of 2.48, which falls under "Sometimes Use." In the Activating strategy, the use of paraphrases or personal speaking recorded the highest among the respondents, that yielded a weighted mean of 2.76, which falls under "Almost Always," implying that the respondents often activate the words by using the meanings in paraphrases in their own words or in personal speaking.

Figure 6. Activating Strategy by Using Paraphrases or Personal Speaking

<p>2. Which of these strategies helped you the most? Why? <i>Example: "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning."</i> Using Looking for word parts help me the most because to understand the mean</p> <p>3. When will you use this strategy again? <i>Example: "I will use it when I read new stories in English class."</i> I will use it every time I encounter a new word in my reading</p> <p>4. How can you remember new words better next time? <i>Example: "I will make a drawing or group the words with their opposites."</i> I will try to use the new words in my daily conversation</p> <p>5. My favorite new word from today is: <u>protest</u></p> <p>What does it mean? I will use protest to describe an objection, disagreement, or dissent How will I use it? that I disagree with.</p>	<p>2. Which of these strategies helped you the most? Why? <i>Example: "Guessing from the story helped me because the picture gave a clue about the meaning."</i> <u>using word parts from the story</u></p> <p>3. When will you use this strategy again? <i>Example: "I will use it when I read new stories in English class."</i> <u>I will use it when I read books or magazine</u></p> <p>4. How can you remember new words better next time? <i>Example: "I will make a drawing or group the words with their opposites."</i> <u>I will make journal or writing words</u></p> <p>5. My favorite new word from today is: <u>fear</u></p> <p>What does it mean? <u>nototakot</u> How will I use it? <u>by using fear</u></p>
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The sample responses in the learner reflection, emphasized in the red boxes, show examples of activating strategies used by the student participants. One student stated that “using word parts from the story” helped the most in understanding the meaning, while another wrote that they would use the strategy again when they “read books or magazine.” In response to how they can remember new words better next time, a participant indicated “I will make journal or writing words.” Another response highlighted the intention to use the new word “protect” in an opinionated statement: “I will use protect to express my opinion on topics that I disagree with.”

These responses demonstrate that learners actively engage in activating strategies by planning future use of newly encountered words and reproducing them through personal writing and expression. For example, the decision to make a journal or write words, along with the specific plan to use “protect” in opinionated statements, illustrates how students move beyond passive recognition to active production and personalization of vocabulary. This reflects a conscious effort to consolidate word meanings by integrating them into their own spoken or written output, particularly in meaningful contexts such as reading materials or expressing personal opinions.

Study on ESL learners’ vocabulary strategies support the value of activating strategies in vocabulary learning and found that active production techniques, such as using new words in sentences, journals, or personal expressions, were moderately to highly employed and positively associated with long-term retention (Aljasir, 2025). Similarly, learners who planned to use newly learned words in future writing or speaking tasks showed significantly better vocabulary consolidation compared to those who relied only on receptive strategies. These activating practices align with the involvement load hypothesis, which emphasizes that deeper processing through active use and personal investment leads to stronger vocabulary acquisition among bilingual learners (Cheng et al., 2025).

These active approaches are well-suited to Grade 6 learners in a typical classroom environment, where peer interaction and recycling facilitate enhanced vocabulary acquisition. These indicate that these vocabulary approaches likely appeals to learners as they promote active recall, deeper processing, and natural integration of words into spoken language without requiring elaborate preparation. Methods involving sentence construction or story retelling and active use of words facilitate vocabulary consolidation through repetition and application, enabling learners to commit forms and meanings to memory more effectively (Horst et al., 2011)

On the contrary, the creative and embodied practice of “acting in a play/skit” under the Activating strategy received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.26$), falling well into the “Sometimes” category. This indicates limited application of performative and kinesthetic methods among Grade 6 learners when activating newly learned vocabulary. In comparison, more verbal and cognitive activation strategies (such as paraphrasing, using words in sentences, and speaking practice) appear to be used more frequently than embodied methods like role plays, skits, or dramatic enactment.

The infrequency of use of acting and skit indicates the preference of Grade 6 learners towards more socially safer modes of activating vocabulary. For instance, whereas the learners can easily create sentences and rephrase words, it is not very common for them to perform actions or act out words. This is because there is a clear indication on the part of the learners towards modes of activation that are more immediate and less socially risky.

The research findings confirm the fact that young EFL/ESL students seem to prefer verbal and cognitive activation techniques to more physically and performance-oriented techniques. The reason why verbal techniques like sentence building and paraphrasing are used is the ease with which students get to practice their output in class without having to face the embarrassment of dramatic presentation or role-playing (Kho et al., 2021). It is also important to point out that although acting out words is one of the most effective memory techniques for remembering words, its practical implementation in class has been constrained by various factors (Sino, 2024; Aljasir, 2025). It is, therefore, evident that the low average score ($M = 2.26$) in the item “acting in a play/skit” indicates that Grade 6 students use activating strategies that involve performance less often than those involving language and cognition. It is clear that the preference for relatively risk-free verbal activation reduces the chances of sensory-motor involvement that would enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Table 5. Vocabulary Performance of Grade 6 learners.

Vocab Test Scores	Frequency N=230	Percent
Low (0-13)	72	31.30%
Average (14-27)	139	60.43%
High (28-40)	19	8.27%
		100%

Table 5 presents the summarized vocabulary test results gained from 230 Grade 6 respondents.

For the Grade 6 learners under the K-12 curriculum of the Philippines, vocabulary performance is assessed by the level of learners' vocabulary inferencing skills of the words' utilization in figurative language, borrowed words, and terms under specific contexts, as well as the clarification of words' meanings by referring to dictionaries, thesaurus, and online (DepEd, 2016). Table 5 shows the vocabulary performance of the respondents, as measured by the 40-item test that follows the K-12 curriculum's Vocabulary domain standards.

Majority of the respondents with 139 or 60.43% scored within the Average range (14-27), while 72 or 31.30% of the respondents scored in the Low range (0-13), and only 8.27% in the High range (28-40). This shows that among the 230 respondents, most Grade 6 learners have average vocabulary command, and a significant minority fall into low vocabulary performance, while very few have advanced lexical proficiency.

The largest group, comprising 139 or 60.43% of the respondents have average vocabulary command. This signifies the receptive ability to strategize one's vocabulary however finds difficulty in other vocabulary competencies. This indicates basic ability in inferring meanings of words in figurative language, borrowed words, and content specific terms using context clues. However, this level of vocabulary performance shows difficulty and struggle in clarifying word meanings using dictionaries, thesaurus, and online resources. Furthermore, this central concentration shows that most of these learners, who are between the ages of 11 and 12, have a receptive vocabulary that permits a partial comprehension of well-known words and expressions but is still insufficiently developed for consistent independent comprehension of age-appropriate English texts.

Young ESL learners tend to attain a moderate or average level of receptive vocabulary knowledge, showing strengths in basic context clue inference but deficits in the use of dictionaries/references, as they find it difficult to process definitions, lack metacognitive strategies, and prefer context clue guessing over the use of dictionaries/references for clarification (Knight, 1994; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Kho et al., 2021). These align to the claims of Alahmadi (2020) on primary and middle-grade ESL learners showing that average-performing students use more receptive strategies such as context clue guessing, while productive/independent clarification strategies such as the use of dictionaries/references lag behind, as they require a higher level of autonomy and use of dictionaries/references, which is gradually developed.

The second group comprised a total of 72 or 31.30% exhibiting a low level of vocabulary performance. These respondents had a limited capacity for utilizing context clues for content-specific terms, borrowed words, and figurative language. They also had difficulties in explaining the meaning of a word using a dictionary, a thesaurus, and the internet. This level of performance is associated with a receptive vocabulary that enables learners to partially comprehend familiar words and phrases but is not adequate for learners to independently comprehend age-appropriate complex English texts. Studies on L2 learners' vocabulary acquisition show that such profiles are common for young ESL learners, especially at the elementary-to-intermediate level, where learners' vocabulary knowledge is incrementally developed but restricted by limited exposure, instruction-centered input, and opportunities for lexical engagement (Kho et al., 2021; Alahmadi et al., 2020).

Moreover, this level also coincides with the findings concerning the impact of limited vocabulary knowledge below specific thresholds on the ability to comprehend reading materials independently. Though the thresholds for minimal comprehension range from 3,000 to 5,000 word families (corresponding to 95% text coverage, including proper nouns), and optimal independent reading comprehension requires 6,000 to 8,000 word families (98% coverage), the fact remains that the majority of young L2 students fail to reach even the lower thresholds and thus experience problems with unsimplified reading materials (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Nation, 2006). At this level, students in similar ESL settings, including primary studies, also tend to demonstrate their receptive skills in basic inference but continue to show deficiencies in tool-based clarification and comprehension due to developmental and instructional limitations (Kho et al., 2021).

The third group of respondents, which comprised 19 or 8.27%, had a high level of vocabulary performance. This group showed high proficiency in inferring the meanings of content vocabulary, borrowed words, and figures of speech through the use of

context clues and the like, and in the clarification of word meanings through the use of dictionaries, thesauruses, and the internet, among others. This is indicative of the respondents' high level of vocabulary performance, which is reflective of their proficient and strategic vocabulary ability to comprehend and interpret age-appropriate English texts, including those with figures of speech, borrowed words, and content vocabulary.

These indications align with the studies of Kho et al. (2021) that, at the elementary to middle levels of high proficiency subgroups, there is a remarkable excellence in the use of context clue inference and the use of a reference tool, owing to the development of more metacognitive awareness, exposure, and effective strategy use. Additionally, Ilter (2019) claimed that young learners of high proficiency actively use contextual inference to understand figurative words and borrowed words, as well as the use of a dictionary to clarify words more accurately, resulting in deeper processing of words, which consequently improves the learners' comprehension of the texts. In a similar context, high-performing learners exhibit positive attributes in the use of both inferential strategies and tool-based verification, differentiating themselves from the average or low-performing learners, whose skills remain underdeveloped (Alahmadi et al., 2020). These attributes resemble the incremental patterns of vocabulary development in ESL, wherein a smaller percentage of learners reach higher levels of proficiency through constant engagement and effective strategy use.

Table 6. Least Used Strategies for Initial Discovery of Word Meanings

Initial Discovery Strategies	Weighted Mean
Attending and assessing	2.48
Accessing	2.44
Archiving	2.32
Analyzing	2.76

Within the domain of initial discovery strategies, the least frequently employed subdomain is the Archiving strategy with a weighted mean of 2.32 falling to Sometimes Use and specifically centered on independent contextual inference and deeper semantic evaluation.

At this developmental stage of vocabulary acquisition, Grade 6 learners are still navigating in most vocabulary domains – typically transitioning from foundational to more intermediate English skills, making them particularly vulnerable as they navigate increasingly complex vocabulary. Studies reveal that middle-school aged children engage in strategies like these only sometimes, and often skipping them without teachers' prompts (Hofstein et al., 2005).

The low engagement with these discovery strategies thus represents a key leverage point for intervention, as building inference skills can directly address the weakest competency—clarifying meanings using external resources (35.13%)—by encouraging learners to combine context with dictionary consultation rather than treating them as separate processes.

Table 7. Least Used Strategies for Consolidating New Word Forms and Meanings

Consolidating Strategies	Weighted Mean
Associating	2.64
Anchoring	2.65
Activating	2.48
Reassessing, Reviewing, Recycling	2.69

Among the consolidating strategies, the least frequently employed subdomain is the Activating strategy with a weighted mean of 2.48 falling to Sometimes Use and specifically centered on multimodal and embodied elaborations.

Also, learners showed minimal use of organized note-taking, digital or analog archiving for future review, or creation of personal word collections, which limited opportunities for spaced repetition and long-term storage. Productive activation was similarly rare and words were seldom incorporated into original storytelling, dramatization, role-play, real-world application, or extended writing/speaking tasks. Multimodal strategies, such as drawing pictorial associations, using gestures to embody meanings, or creating visual mnemonics, were also infrequently applied despite evidence of their effectiveness for diverse cognitive profiles.

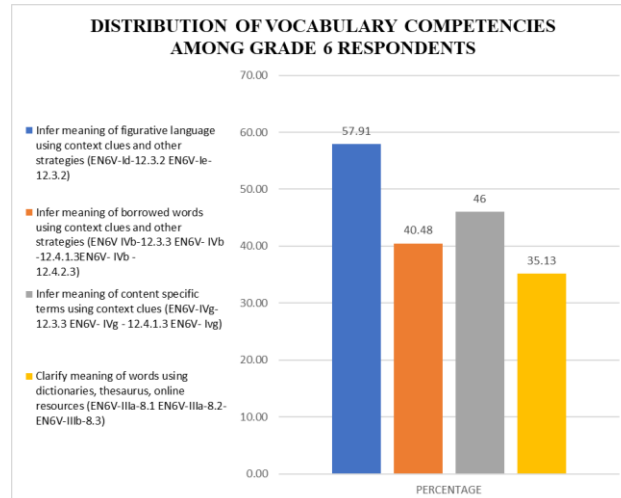
Figure 7. Distribution of Vocabulary Competencies Among Grade 6

Figure 7 reveals the distribution of Vocabulary Competencies of Grade 6 learners under the Vocabulary Domain of the K-12 Basic Curriculum in English.

The least mastered competency among Grade 6 learners was clarifying the meaning of words using dictionaries, thesauri, and online resources (EN6V-IIId-8.1, EN6V-IIId-8.2, EN6V-IIId-8.3), with a low average score of only 35.13%. This marked weakness corresponds closely with the study's findings on learners' underutilization of Accessing strategies and their limited independent reliance on reference resources. Learners tended to rely on basic printed bilingual dictionaries without engaging in deeper semantic processing or exploring varied resources such as thesauri and online tools.

This low mastery level indicates that while learners may occasionally look up words in a dictionary, they rarely use these tools strategically or comprehensively to clarify nuanced meanings, synonyms, or contextual usage. For example, many students depend on quick bilingual translations rather than consulting a thesaurus for related words or online resources for example sentences and collocations. This surface-level approach limits deeper semantic processing and vocabulary expansion, aligning with the observed preference for simple, non-systematic methods during vocabulary consolidation and archiving.

Research also indicates that while bilingual dictionary use can support vocabulary gains when applied skillfully, many young learners engage in superficial consultation without exploring synonyms, examples, or online tools, resulting in weaker overall vocabulary development. Furthermore, studies confirm that many ESL/EFL learners, particularly at the elementary level, underutilize dictionaries, thesauri, and online resources for effective vocabulary learning. Primary school ESL learners often show only moderate or low preference for dictionary use ($M = 2.11$), favoring quicker alternatives such as translation apps, which may hinder deeper semantic processing and long-term retention (Alahmadi et al., 2020; Ayana et al., 2024).

Therefore, the low mastery with 35.13% in clarifying word meanings using dictionaries, thesauri, and online resources reveals a critical gap in learners' ability to use reference tools strategically for vocabulary development. This weakness mirrors the study's findings on limited archiving and independent resource consultation, highlighting learners' reliance on basic bilingual dictionaries rather than deeper semantic exploration. Targeted instruction on effective dictionary skills, thesaurus use, and online resources is therefore essential to help Grade 6 learners move beyond superficial lookups toward more productive and independent vocabulary learning.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, key conclusions were drawn that highlight its significance and relevance in educational contexts.

First, Grade 6 learners have a demographic profile skewed towards females, with Tagalog speakers predominating, followed by speakers of Ilocano, and then speakers of other languages. This profile is typical of the kind of enrollment profile in public elementary schools in a multilingual Philippine province, making it an ecologically valid basis for an investigation of how learners process their exposure to English language.

Second, Grade 6 learners display a range of strategies, particularly as they process vocabulary. They tend to use form-focused, analytical strategies, especially at the beginning, analyzing morphology and spelling. They also seem to favor social, repetitive, and mnemonic strategies, particularly for consolidating their vocabulary. However, they rarely use independent, deep semantic

strategies, such as making inferences or organizing their knowledge, and they also rarely use active productive strategies, such as dramatization, creative creation, or applying their vocabulary over longer contexts.

Lastly, a majority of learners scored within the average level of vocabulary. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of learners scored low, and only a small percentage scored high. This implies that although learners may have the ability to recognize words on the surface level, their ability to utilize their vocabulary, such as semantic integration and collocation, is limited and only surface-level rather than elaborative.

Therefore, the study contributes valuable insights into the vocabulary skills development of primary school learners through identifying their vocabulary performance levels and their lexical processing strategy uses, and highlights the essence of vocabulary instructions that cater diversity of learning needs. By enhancing vocabulary competence and performance through targeted interventions, educators contribute to stronger comprehension skills, preparing the learners for language proficiency and academic achievements.

5.2 Ethical Considerations

In lined with institutional and educational research guidelines, these protocols ensured that all research procedures applied in this study complied with ethical standards with minors, and these protocols have been granted approval by the Institutional Ethics Review Board with IREB Protocol number 2025-03-074.

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