

# Students' Vocabulary Mastery: Mnemonic or Translation Technique

Nike Widia<sup>1</sup>, Ikariya Sugesti<sup>2\*</sup>, Sirniawati<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon

<sup>1</sup> nikewidianike04@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup> ikariya.sugesti@umc.ac.id, <sup>3</sup> sirniawati@umc.ac.id

**Abstract:** This study explores the comparative effectiveness of mnemonic techniques versus translation methods in enhancing vocabulary mastery among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A common issue faced by EFL learners is limited vocabulary knowledge, which impedes their ability to follow teacher instructions and complete classroom tasks effectively. Mnemonic techniques, which leverage associative memory and repetition, are posited to enhance vocabulary retention and understanding more efficiently than conventional translation approaches. A quantitative research methodology was employed, utilizing a quasi-experimental design. The participants consisted of seventh-grade junior high school students, assigned to two groups: the experimental group, taught using mnemonic techniques, and the control group, instructed through translation techniques. Vocabulary mastery was assessed using pre-tests and post-tests administered before and after the intervention. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the vocabulary scores of the experimental group, with an average increase of 25.42 points, compared to a 10.88-point gain in the control group. These results indicate that mnemonic techniques are more effective in improving vocabulary mastery, particularly among beginner-level EFL learners.

**Keyword:** *mnemonic techniques, vocabulary, English language learning, EFL*

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary has a very important role in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Thornbury (2002), says that without grammar, little can be expressed, but without vocabulary, no message can be conveyed at all. This shows that vocabulary is not just a part of language learning—it is basic. Without vocabulary, students cannot understand input or produce output, making grammar knowledge useless in real communication. This idea is supported by Lewis as mentioned in Farrokh et al. (2021), who states that vocabulary and word groups are the heart of learning and communication. These views strengthen the understanding that vocabulary is the building block of language ability. Therefore, any effort to improve language learning results must focus on vocabulary teaching.

Even though vocabulary is very important, many students in Indonesian EFL learning have problems learning new words. From watching classrooms, it becomes clear that students often have trouble understanding teachers' instructions and completing tasks because they have limited vocabulary (Ummul Husnul Auliya et al., 2024). This problem becomes an obstacle to reaching educational goals and makes students less confident in using English. Teachers often find themselves repeating instructions or switching to the first language to make sure students understand, which reduces students' contact with English.

To solve this problem, researchers have suggested using mnemonic techniques as an effective way to improve vocabulary learning. Mnemonic techniques are memory aids that improve memory by creating connections, using pictures, and using organized clues (Yates, 1966). These tools work well with how the brain processes and stores information, making difficult vocabulary more concrete and memorable. Lubis (2022), explains that mnemonic techniques make learning easier and more interesting, especially when students connect new words with images, letter combinations, or sounds. This suggests that mnemonic techniques not only help memory but also improve student motivation and interest. Also, Sternberg as mentioned in Kurniarahman (2023), point out that mnemonic techniques not only help students store information but also improve recall through meaningful learning experiences. This shows that mnemonic techniques promote deeper thinking processing, encouraging learners to build connections between new and existing knowledge, rather than depending on simple memorization.

Many studies support the use of mnemonic techniques in language learning. For example, Hill (2022), found that mnemonic techniques clearly improved students' vocabulary memory, particularly in EFL contexts. This finding is important because vocabulary memory is a continuing problem in foreign language classrooms, and techniques that directly deal with this challenge are highly valuable. Similarly, Thảo (2022), showed that both teacher-led and student-created mnemonic techniques had a big impact on vocabulary learning effectiveness. This flexibility shows that mnemonic techniques can be changed to fit different teaching styles and learner needs, making them a useful tool in EFL teaching. Building on this, Nurcahya & Sugesti (2020) emphasized the importance of fostering active student participation through collaborative learning activities such as pair or group work. When students engage in creating and applying mnemonic devices collaboratively, they not only internalize vocabulary more effectively but also develop critical thinking and cooperative learning skills.

Furthermore, Farrokh et al. (2021), proved that visual mnemonic techniques improved students' ability to remember vocabulary for a longer time, emphasizing the importance of including pictures and imagery in vocabulary teaching. This supports the idea that teaching should serve multiple learning styles—especially visual learners—so that students can learn vocabulary in ways that are most natural for them.

On the other hand, translation techniques, which involve giving students direct equivalents of English words in their native language, are still widely used in many EFL classrooms. Newmark (1988), argues that translation helps to check students' knowledge and supports the development of language skills through reasoning and practice. While this traditional method is helpful for initial understanding, it often fails to get learners involved in the type of deep processing necessary for long-term memory. Esmaili (2018), agrees that translation techniques can improve understanding and vocabulary recognition. However, while translation helps in understanding the meaning of words, it may not support long-term memory or active recall. Chirobocea-Tudor (2023), points out that translation activities often lack the interactive and thinking engagement needed for deeper vocabulary learning. This raises the concern that depending only on translation may result in passive learning where students recognize but cannot use vocabulary effectively.

Taken together, these studies suggest that mnemonic techniques are not only effective for vocabulary development but also highly adaptable to various instructional models and learner needs. They advocate for an inclusive, multimodal approach to teaching vocabulary, where students are actively engaged and exposed to strategies that align with their individual learning styles, particularly visual and kinesthetic modalities. As such, integrating mnemonic methods—whether teacher-directed or student-created—can substantially enrich the vocabulary learning experience and promote deeper, more durable learning outcomes.

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of mnemonic techniques compared to translation techniques in improving vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students. By focusing on

the differences in learning results between students taught using mnemonic techniques and translation techniques, this study wants to provide data-based recommendations for more effective vocabulary teaching. As supported by Ummul Husnul Auliya et al. (2024), creating a fun and engaging learning environment through mnemonic techniques can significantly improve students' vocabulary learning outcomes. This suggests that innovation in teaching techniques, especially those based on thinking psychology, can make a real difference in language education.

## METHOD

This research used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. According to Creswell John (2023), quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to explain, predict, or control things of interest. A quasi-experimental design was chosen because the participants were not randomly assigned but existing classes were used, which is suitable for classroom-based educational settings where randomization is difficult. The study was done at one of junior state in Cirebon, West Java during the second semester of the academic year 2024/2025. The population included seventh-grade students, and two classes were chosen as samples: the experimental class received mnemonic technique instruction, while the control class used translation techniques. The tool used was a multiple-choice vocabulary test focused on the topic of School Buildings. Pre-tests and post-tests were given to measure vocabulary learning. The vocabulary tested was based on the English textbook provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Education (*Kemendikbud*), ensuring content validity that matched with the national curriculum.

The reliability of the test tool was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.811, showing high internal consistency. Meanwhile, the validity test showed that most items were valid based on their *r*-values compared to the *r*-table. Only a few items were identified as invalid. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find mean scores, followed by other statistical tests such as normality and homogeneity tests. To find the significance of the treatment, an independent sample *t*-test was used to compare the post-test results between the experimental and control groups.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1.** Mean Score of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain
<b>Experimental (Mnemonic)</b>	44.65	70.06	25.42
<b>Control (Translation)</b>	58.63	69.50	10.87

Table 1 shows that although the control group began with a higher average pre-test score, the experimental group experienced a much greater improvement in their vocabulary scores after treatment. These findings suggest that mnemonic techniques are more effective in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL students, particularly those at the beginner level, due to their ability to facilitate stronger memory retention and engagement. This supports the idea that teaching techniques that support memory are important in vocabulary learning. As stated by Thornbury (2002), learning is remembering, meaning students must not only be shown vocabulary but also be able to recall it effectively.

The experimental class, which used mnemonic techniques, showed a higher average gain (25.42 points) compared to the control class (10.87 points). This finding matches the research by Ummul Husnul Auliya et al. (2024), who found that mnemonic techniques increased vocabulary mastery and made students more creative in building their own memory strategies. Their study also emphasized that mnemonic techniques helped improve student engagement, participation, and confidence.

Several students in the experimental group, such as Student 1 and Student 17, improved their scores greatly gains of 68 points were recorded. This matches with Lubis (2022), who observed that the

keyword mnemonic technique was highly effective because it made vocabulary simpler and connected it with daily experiences, making it easier to remember. Students no longer needed to memorize through repetition alone, but instead used meaningful connections that made words more relatable.

The improvement in vocabulary mastery was also supported by Farrokh et al. (2021), who concluded that visual mnemonic techniques helped students keep vocabulary in the long term and recommended their integration into teaching materials. Additionally, mnemonic techniques like memory palaces, letter combinations, and imagery—as discussed by Yates (1966)—were shown to support different learning styles, making them more inclusive. The present study further confirms that using these techniques in regular classroom teaching improves learning outcomes across diverse learner profiles.

Beyond score improvements, classroom observations showed that mnemonic strategies made learning more active and engaging. Students in the experimental class were observed actively participating, asking questions, and even creating their own mnemonic devices, which matches the findings of Thảo (2022), who noted that student-created memory techniques can improve ownership of learning and deepen vocabulary memory.

In contrast, the control group that used translation techniques showed moderate improvement. While they did experience some vocabulary growth, it was not as strong. This result supports Newmark (1988), who explained that translation techniques are mainly effective for helping learners understand the meaning of words, but may not engage them in ways that promote long-term memory. Similarly, Chirobocea-Tudor (2023), pointed out that translation is helpful in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) but may lack interactive depth in general EFL contexts.

Furthermore, Esmaili (2018), found that translation could improve vocabulary understanding, but its effect on recall is limited when compared to techniques that use imagery or personal engagement. The relatively lower gain of 10.87 points in the control group reflects this limitation. Student responses in the control group also suggested that learning felt boring and heavily dependent on memorization without context.

Statistical testing in this study rejected the null hypothesis ( $H^0$ ) and accepted the alternative hypothesis ( $H^1$ ), confirming a significant difference in vocabulary improvement between students taught using mnemonic techniques and translation techniques. These findings suggest that mnemonic techniques are more effective and should be considered a valuable alternative in teaching vocabulary.

This conclusion matches the recommendation of Sternberg as mentioned in Kurniarahman (2023), who emphasized the importance of engaging memory strategies in vocabulary teaching. When students are taught using techniques that make learning more interactive and memorable, their ability to keep and use new words improves considerably.

In addition, the findings of this study hold important pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and curriculum developers. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group underscores the potential of mnemonic techniques as an effective instructional strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery. Integrating mnemonic strategies into daily classroom practice can contribute not only to improved academic outcomes but also to increased student engagement and motivation, particularly among beginner-level learners who often struggle with vocabulary retention. These findings advocate for the incorporation of more cognitively engaging and student-centered methodologies within the EFL curriculum, moving beyond traditional rote memorization and translation-based approaches. Furthermore, the results highlight the necessity of professional development programs aimed at equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement mnemonic techniques effectively. By fostering a deeper understanding of such strategies, educators can enhance the quality of vocabulary instruction and promote long-term language acquisition. Accordingly, the Indonesian EFL curriculum may benefit from a pedagogical shift that emphasizes meaningful learning experiences, thus aligning instructional practices with research-based evidence on effective vocabulary teaching.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that mnemonic techniques are significantly more effective than translation methods in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The experimental group, which received vocabulary instruction through mnemonic strategies, demonstrated substantially greater gains in vocabulary performance compared to the control group taught using conventional translation techniques. This improvement was not only statistically significant but also evident in students' heightened engagement, active participation, and increased motivation throughout the learning process.

Mnemonic techniques—such as the use of visual imagery, acronyms, keyword associations, and narrative storytelling—offer distinct cognitive advantages that facilitate the encoding, storage, and retrieval of new vocabulary. These strategies are particularly beneficial for long-term retention and cater to diverse learning styles, thereby supporting more inclusive and differentiated instruction. In contrast, while translation techniques may assist in initial comprehension by providing direct word-to-word equivalents, they tend to promote passive learning. The relatively modest improvement observed in the control group reinforces the limitations of translation-based methods in fostering deep, meaningful vocabulary acquisition and active language use.

Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of empirical literature advocating for interactive, student-centered instructional practices in EFL classrooms. The demonstrated effectiveness of mnemonic instruction supports its integration into daily teaching routines as a means to enhance both linguistic competence and learner autonomy. Teachers are encouraged to adopt mnemonic-based activities to enrich vocabulary instruction and create a more engaging and cognitively stimulating learning environment.

Future research should consider exploring the application of mnemonic techniques across different educational levels, linguistic backgrounds, and learning environments. Additionally, combining mnemonics with digital technologies and multimedia resources may further amplify their impact on vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement. The promising outcomes observed in this study suggest that mnemonic strategies hold significant potential for broader implementation within EFL curricula and teacher training programs.

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