

Teachers' Perspectives on Repetition as a Cognitive Strategy in Teaching English Vocabulary to Junior High School Students

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Abstract: This study explores English teachers' perspectives on the use of repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching vocabulary to junior high school students. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through six in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving two experienced English teachers from a junior high school in Helvetia, North Sumatra. The novelty of this research lies in highlighting teachers' viewpoints as the central lens for understanding how repetition functions cognitively and pedagogically in EFL classrooms. The findings reveal that teachers perceive repetition as a meaningful process that reinforces students' memory and facilitates vocabulary retention through contextual and varied practice. Despite challenges in maintaining engagement, repetition was viewed as an effective and adaptable strategy that bridges psycholinguistic theory and classroom application. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cognitive principles can inform vocabulary teaching practices in EFL contexts.

Keywords: repetition, cognitive strategy, vocabulary teaching, teachers' perspective, psycholinguistics

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary plays a crucial role in enabling learners to comprehend and produce the target language effectively (Maharani et al., 2023). Vocabulary is still the Cinderella of language teaching (Dewi, 2010). The role of vocabulary in learning a foreign language is inevitable, mastery of vocabulary is critical for students acquiring English (Suryati, 2025). Rich vocabulary will totally help students mastering English and its four major skills which cover listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Asyiah, 2017), without sufficient vocabulary, learners often face barriers in both communication and comprehension (Nation, 2001). However, acquiring and retaining new words remains one of the greatest challenges for EFL students, particularly at the junior high school level, where cognitive and linguistic abilities are still developing. As a result, teachers must employ effective instructional strategies that enhance students' vocabulary retention and recall.

Previous study from Bawawa (2020) examined the use of songs to improve students' vocabulary mastery and motivation in junior high school. The findings showed that songs effectively enhanced vocabulary learning through enjoyable exposure. However, the study focused on teaching media rather than the cognitive processes or teachers' strategic roles in supporting vocabulary retention. Therefore, the present study differs by exploring teachers' perspectives on repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching English vocabulary, addressing the need to connect psycholinguistic theory with classroom practice. Among the various strategies discussed in psycholinguistics, repetition has been recognized as one of the most fundamental and effective cognitive strategies for facilitating memory retention (Alnan & Halim, 2024).

Based on the study by Badriyatin. F et al. (2022), the use of games and flashcards was found to be effective in supporting students' vocabulary learning. These media helped learners engage more actively and remember new words more easily through enjoyable and visual learning experiences. Building on this idea, the present study analyzes how teachers perceive and apply repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching English vocabulary, focusing on how repeated exposure and practice can similarly enhance students' vocabulary retention in junior high school classrooms. While repetition may occur naturally when learners echo words they hear, such repetition does not necessarily indicate real language learning unless the words are used meaningfully and appropriately within context. True vocabulary acquisition happens when learners can apply repeated language forms in communicative or relevant situations. This perspective highlights that repetition becomes an effective cognitive strategy only when guided and contextualized by teachers in meaningful classroom activities (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006).

This study focuses on the perspectives of English teachers regarding the use of repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching vocabulary to junior high school students. Their insights are valuable in understanding how repetition is perceived and practiced as part of effective vocabulary instruction within the EFL classroom context. In line with this purpose, the research seeks to answer the following questions: How do English teachers perceive the role of repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching vocabulary to junior high school students? How do English teachers apply repetition in their classroom practices to enhance students' vocabulary learning and retention?

RESEARCHMETHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore teachers' perspectives on the use of repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching English vocabulary. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs, experiences, and classroom practices (Ugwu, Chinyere. N. and Eze Val, 2023). Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of how teachers interpret and apply repetition as a cognitive strategy in their classroom practices. Since the focus of this study is on the meanings, reasoning, and reflections behind teachers' instructional choices, qualitative methods are more suitable for capturing complex and context-based insights that cannot be fully represented through quantitative data (Rustamana et al., 2024).

The use of teachers' perspectives is also considered essential because teachers play a central role in shaping the learning environment (Lyu, 2025) and determining how cognitive strategies such as repetition are implemented in practice. While students experience the effects of these strategies, it is the teachers who plan, adapt, and monitor them based on their understanding of students' needs and classroom realities. Investigating teachers' viewpoints provides valuable information about how theoretical concepts from psycholinguistics are translated into practical classroom actions. In this sense, teachers are not only implementers but also reflective practitioners whose insights bridge the gap between theory and pedagogical practice.

Participants

The participants of this study were two English teachers from a junior high school located in Helvetia, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Both teachers have been teaching English for more than twenty years and are recognized as highly experienced educators with a deep understanding of language instruction and students' learning behavior. Throughout their careers, they have taught using various national curricula, adapting their teaching approaches to meet evolving educational standards. At the time of this study, the school implemented the 2013 Curriculum for third-grade students, the Merdeka Curriculum for second-grade students, and the Deep Learning-based Merdeka Curriculum for first-grade students. These diverse curricular implementations provided the teachers with valuable opportunities to integrate and reflect on different pedagogical and cognitive approaches in teaching English vocabulary within the EFL classroom context.

The selection of these participants was carried out using purposive sampling, as the study specifically aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the use of repetition as a cognitive strategy in vocabulary instruction. Teachers with extensive experience were considered suitable because their long-term classroom engagement enables them to provide insightful reflections on the effectiveness and challenges of using repetition in teaching English vocabulary. Their professional background also allows them to

connect classroom practices with cognitive and psycholinguistic principles, making their input particularly valuable for this study.

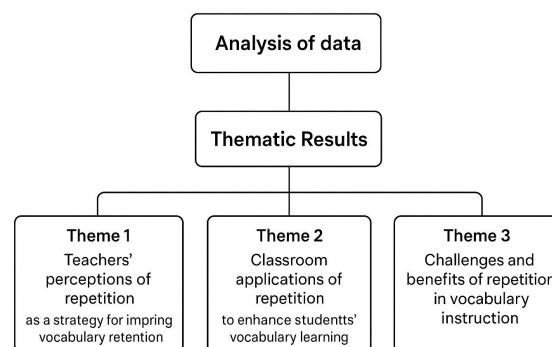
Data Collection

The primary data were obtained through six in-depth interview sessions conducted over a period of two weeks. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was held individually with the two participating English teachers. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to explore teachers' beliefs, experiences, and reflections while maintaining flexibility to follow up on relevant insights. The questions focused on how teachers perceived the role of repetition, how they applied it in classroom instruction, and what challenges or benefits they observed in their students' vocabulary learning process. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to the interviews, direct classroom observations were conducted to gain firsthand insights into how repetition was practiced during English lessons. The researcher observed several teaching sessions where the teachers implemented vocabulary activities involving repetition, such as drilling, recall exercises, and contextual practice. Observation notes were taken to record classroom interactions, instructional patterns, and students' responses during learning. This method helped validate and enrich the interview data by providing real evidence of how repetition functioned as a cognitive and pedagogical tool in the classroom. To complement the interview and observation data, teaching artifacts were also collected and analyzed. These artifacts included lesson plans (RPP), teaching modules, and teachers' personal notes used during classroom instruction. The documents were examined to identify how repetition was planned and integrated into the instructional design, as well as to understand how teachers aligned their teaching strategies with curriculum requirements. By combining interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study aimed to obtain a rich and holistic picture of how experienced English teachers conceptualized and implemented repetition as a cognitive strategy for vocabulary teaching within the EFL context.

Data Analysis

The collected data from interviews, classroom observations, and teaching artifacts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to identify, interpret, and organize patterns of meaning related to teachers' perspectives and practices regarding the use of repetition as a cognitive strategy in vocabulary instruction. The process of analysis began with data familiarization, in which the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts, observation notes, and teaching documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. During this stage, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and initial notes were made to highlight important ideas or recurring points mentioned by the teachers.



Picture 1. Analysis Data

Finding

This study aimed to explore how English teachers perceive and apply repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching vocabulary to junior high school students. The data were gathered through six in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and teaching documents, and were analyzed thematically. Three major themes emerged from the data: (1) teachers' understanding of repetition as a cognitive process, (2)

classroom implementation of repetition strategies, and (3) challenges and perceived benefits of using repetition in vocabulary teaching.

Teachers' Understanding of Repetition as a Cognitive Process

Both teachers perceived repetition as a key mechanism in vocabulary retention that strengthens students' memory through repeated exposure and practice. They emphasized that repetition is not only about repeating words mechanically but also about using those words in meaningful and communicative contexts. According to the teachers, repetition helps activate the learners' working memory, reinforcing the mental connection between word form and meaning. One teacher mentioned that consistent repetition enables students to "hear, see, and use the word many times until it becomes part of their memory." The teachers also believed that repetition works effectively when integrated with comprehension-based tasks such as sentence construction, short dialogues, and vocabulary games. This shows that repetition was understood not merely as rote practice but as a cognitive reinforcement tool that supports long-term retention and automatic recall.

Classroom Implementation of Repetition Strategies

Classroom observations revealed that the teachers consistently incorporated repetition throughout their teaching sessions. They employed various techniques such as drilling, vocabulary review, pronunciation practice, and contextual repetition through reading and speaking activities. Repetition was embedded in the lesson flow for instance, teachers began each class with a short vocabulary recall from previous lessons and concluded with reinforcement exercises to consolidate learning. The teachers also adapted repetition according to students' grade levels and curriculum requirements. In higher grades, repetition was integrated with communicative activities such as sentence reconstruction or dialogue practice, while in lower grades, it focused more on phonological repetition and word recognition. This flexible approach demonstrates that repetition was not treated as a single technique but as a pedagogical pattern supporting continuous vocabulary exposure across different learning stages.

Challenges and Perceived Benefits of Repetition

Although both teachers recognized the importance of repetition, they also acknowledged several challenges in its classroom implementation. The most common difficulty was maintaining student engagement, as repeated activities could become monotonous if not varied. Time management was another issue, since repetition often required additional class periods to be effective. However, the teachers agreed that the benefits outweighed the challenges. They observed that repetition significantly improved students' word recall, pronunciation accuracy, and confidence in using new vocabulary. Slower learners particularly benefited from repeated exposure, which helped bridge their learning gaps. Teachers also noted that repetition fostered a sense of familiarity and motivation, making students feel more comfortable using English words in real communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that repetition plays a significant role as a cognitive strategy in English vocabulary teaching at the junior high school level. The results provide meaningful insights into how teachers understand, interpret, and implement repetition within the framework of psycholinguistic theory, particularly concerning memory, attention, and language acquisition. This section discusses how the findings answer the research questions regarding teachers' perceptions of repetition and how it is applied in classroom practice. The research explored how English teachers perceive the role of repetition as a cognitive strategy in teaching vocabulary. Both participants viewed repetition as a process that supports students' mental rehearsal and strengthens memory retention through repeated exposure to linguistic input. Their understanding reflects the principles of the Working Memory Model proposed by (Pezzulo, 2007), which emphasizes the importance of the phonological loop in processing and storing verbal information. When students hear and use new vocabulary repeatedly, the repetition activates their working memory and facilitates the transfer of information to long-term storage (Ahmadvand & Nejadansari, 2014). The teachers' emphasis on meaningful repetition aligns with this concept, as they believe that words are better remembered when used in communicative and contextual situations rather than through mechanical drills alone.

The teachers described how repetition becomes more effective when learners engage actively with the words using them in sentences, dialogues, or tasks that require understanding and application. This indicates that repetition, when combined with comprehension, promotes deeper encoding of information

in memory. Thus, the teachers' perspectives demonstrate a balance between cognitive reinforcement and meaningful language use, supporting psycholinguistic views that language learning involves both form-focused practice and semantic engagement.

Then this research investigated how teachers apply repetition in classroom instruction to enhance vocabulary learning. The data from interviews and classroom observations showed that repetition was integrated throughout their teaching routines. The teachers used several strategies such as pronunciation drills, vocabulary recall, cumulative reviews, and contextual repetition through reading and speaking tasks. These findings are consistent with Nation (2001) concept of deliberate repetition, where repeated encounters with words are necessary for vocabulary consolidation. The teachers also used repetition adaptively adjusting the intensity and type of activity according to students' proficiency levels and the curriculum being implemented. For example, lower-grade students received more oral repetition and pronunciation practice, while higher-grade students engaged in sentence-level and communicative repetition. This flexible application demonstrates that repetition was not used rigidly but as an adaptive cognitive tool responsive to students' developmental stages and learning needs.

Furthermore, classroom observation revealed that repetition not only helped improve memory but also enhanced learner confidence and participation. Students who struggled with vocabulary appeared more engaged when activities involved familiar words or structured repetition, supporting the psycholinguistic view that repeated exposure reduces cognitive load and anxiety (Mehmood, 2025). Repetition thus functioned both as a cognitive and an affective support mechanism, helping learners move from conscious rehearsal to more automatic language use. However, the teachers also identified challenges related to sustaining student interest and managing classroom time. Repetitive activities, if not varied or meaningful, could lead to boredom and reduced motivation. This echoes findings from previous studies suggesting that repetition should be interactive and engaging to maintain its pedagogical value. The teachers addressed these challenges by incorporating games, visuals, and collaborative tasks to make repetition dynamic and enjoyable. Their approach aligns with the idea that cognitive learning is most effective when accompanied by emotional engagement, as positive affect supports attention and memory retention (Bepari & Imam, 2025)

Overall, the discussion highlights that repetition serves as a bridge between cognitive theory and teaching practice. From a psycholinguistic perspective, repetition enhances memory traces through rehearsal and retrieval processes. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers' intentional design of repetitive activities provides students with structured opportunities to encounter, process, and reuse vocabulary items until they become part of their active lexicon. The teachers' reflections demonstrate how theoretical insights on memory and language acquisition are translated into everyday classroom decisions, showing that experienced educators intuitively apply cognitive principles even without explicitly labeling them as such.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that repetition plays a crucial role as a cognitive strategy in enhancing English vocabulary learning among junior high school students. Based on the teachers' perspectives, repetition serves not merely as mechanical practice but as a meaningful process that strengthens students' memory through repeated exposure, rehearsal, and contextual use of words. The findings indicate that when repetition is implemented with purpose and variety through drills, communicative activities, and vocabulary reviews it effectively promotes vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, and learner confidence. From a psycholinguistic perspective, repetition activates working memory and facilitates the transfer of lexical information into long-term storage, aligning with theories of cognitive processing and language acquisition. Although challenges such as maintaining student engagement and managing instructional time were identified, the benefits of repetition far outweigh these difficulties. The study emphasizes that experienced teachers intuitively apply cognitive principles in their classrooms, bridging theory and practice. Therefore, repetition remains a vital and adaptable strategy for EFL instruction, and future teacher training should further develop awareness of how cognitive processes can inform effective vocabulary teaching within diverse curriculum contexts.

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