Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

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ABSTRACT

The present study sets out to explore and analyze the instructional strategies employed by English teachers in teaching vocabulary to tenth-grade students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan during the 2024/2025 academic year. Vocabulary acquisition is widely recognized as a cornerstone of language learning, and teachers' choices of strategies significantly shape learners' success. This research not only identifies the specific strategies used but also examines the contextual and pedagogical factors that influence teachers' decisions. By doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how vocabulary instruction is managed in a vocational high school setting, where students often face unique challenges compared to those in general academic tracks. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, which is particularly suited to capturing the richness and complexity of classroom practices. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on numerical data, qualitative research emphasizes meaning, interpretation, and context. In this case, the voices and experiences of teachers are central. Two English teachers were selected as the primary subjects, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and practices. Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility for teachers to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that key topics were consistently addressed. In addition, documentation such as lesson plans and syllabi was analyzed to triangulate findings and provide evidence of how strategies were planned and implemented. The analytical framework was guided by Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data analysis, which involves three interconnected steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification (Sugiyono, 2015). Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and focusing on the most relevant information. Data display involves organizing information in a way that makes patterns and relationships visible. Finally, conclusion verification ensures that interpretations are credible and supported by evidence. This systematic approach allowed the researchers to move beyond surface-level descriptions and develop well-grounded insights into vocabulary teaching practices.

Keywords; *Teachers' Strategies; Vocabulary; English*

INTRODUCTION

Language is universally acknowledged as the most essential tool for human communication, social interaction, and the transmission of knowledge. It enables individuals to share ideas, express emotions, and engage in cultural exchange. In the contemporary era of globalization, the role of English has become increasingly prominent. English is not only the dominant language of international communication but also the medium through which knowledge in science, technology, and education is disseminated. As Crystal (2003) points out, English has achieved the status of a global lingua franca, bridging diverse linguistic communities and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue. For learners in non-English-speaking countries, acquiring proficiency in English is no longer optional but a necessity for participation in the modern world.

Within the domain of English language learning, vocabulary occupies a central position. Vocabulary knowledge forms the foundation upon which other language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—are built. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to comprehend texts, articulate ideas, or engage in meaningful communication. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary is not merely a list of words to be memorized but a dynamic system that supports comprehension and production across all language skills. Thus, vocabulary instruction must be carefully designed to ensure that learners acquire not only word meanings but also the ability to use words effectively in context.

The teaching of vocabulary, however, is not a straightforward process. It requires deliberate strategies that take into account learners' needs, motivation, and learning contexts. Teaching strategies serve as guiding frameworks that shape the learning process. They provide structure, direction, and focus, ensuring that instructional goals are achieved. Without clear strategies, classroom instruction risks becoming fragmented and ineffective. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role as facilitators of learning. They are expected to design strategies that are engaging, varied, and student-centered, thereby fostering motivation and active participation.

Brown (2007) underscores the importance of aligning teaching strategies with learners' characteristics. He argues that effective language teaching must consider factors such as learners' prior knowledge, interests, and cultural backgrounds. In the context of vocabulary instruction, this means that teachers must select strategies that not only introduce new words but also encourage learners to use them in meaningful ways. Strategies are not merely technical procedures; they are pedagogical tools that can inspire learners, sustain their interest, and enhance their confidence in using the target language.

The urgency of effective vocabulary instruction is particularly evident in vocational high schools such as SMKN 1 Tapaktuan. Students in vocational schools often face unique challenges compared to those in general academic tracks. Their curriculum emphasizes practical skills and technical knowledge, which may limit the time and attention devoted to language learning. Yet, English proficiency remains essential for vocational students, as it enhances their employability and enables them to access global knowledge. For these students, vocabulary instruction must be both efficient and engaging, ensuring that they acquire the language skills necessary for their future careers.

Against this backdrop, the present study formulates two main research problems. First, it seeks to identify the strategies employed by teachers in teaching English vocabulary to tenth-grade students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan during the 2024/2025 academic year. Second, it aims to explain the factors that influence the selection of these strategies. These research questions are significant because they address both the "what" and the "why" of vocabulary instruction. Identifying strategies provides insight into

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Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

760

classroom practices, while analyzing influencing factors reveals the rationale behind teachers' choices. Together, these questions contribute to a deeper understanding of vocabulary teaching in vocational contexts.

The objectives of the study are twofold. The first objective is to document the specific strategies applied by teachers in teaching vocabulary. This involves examining how strategies such as memorization, translation, collective reading, and games are implemented in practice. The second objective is to describe the underlying factors that shape teachers' decisions. These factors may include teacher-related aspects such as experience and creativity, student-related aspects such as motivation and interest, and contextual aspects such as infrastructure and learning objectives. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of vocabulary instruction in vocational high schools.

The significance of the study lies in its potential contributions to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches the literature on vocabulary teaching strategies by providing empirical evidence from a vocational high school context. It confirms and extends existing theories, such as Harmer's (2007) emphasis on methodological variety and Schmitt's (2019) argument that strategies must be adapted to learners' contexts. From a practical perspective, the study offers guidance for teachers, encouraging them to be creative and flexible in selecting strategies. It demonstrates that effective vocabulary instruction requires a combination of traditional and innovative approaches, tailored to learners' needs and supported by adequate infrastructure.

In summary, the introduction establishes the importance of vocabulary instruction in English language learning, highlights the role of teaching strategies, and outlines the research problems and objectives of the study. It situates the research within the broader context of globalization and vocational education, emphasizing the need for effective strategies that foster both vocabulary mastery and learner motivation. By doing so, it sets the stage for the subsequent sections, which detail the research methodology, present the findings, and discuss their implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary teaching has long been recognized as a central component of language education, and scholars have proposed a wide range of strategies to enhance learners' acquisition and retention of new words. The literature on vocabulary instruction spans theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and pedagogical recommendations, all of which highlight the importance of varied, contextual, and learner-centered approaches. This review synthesizes key contributions from major scholars and situates them within the context of teaching English vocabulary in vocational high schools.

The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning

Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to all aspects of language proficiency. Without an adequate vocabulary base, learners cannot effectively comprehend texts, express ideas, or engage in communication. Vocabulary serves as the foundation upon which grammar, discourse, and pragmatics are built. Crystal (2003) further underscores the global significance of English vocabulary, noting that English functions as a lingua franca across diverse domains such as international

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

761

communication, education, and technology. In this sense, vocabulary instruction is not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for learners seeking to participate in the global community.

Teaching Strategies in Vocabulary Instruction

Brown (2007) argues that teaching strategies are essential for guiding the learning process. He stresses that strategies must be aligned with learners' needs, motivation, and contexts. In vocabulary teaching, strategies are not simply technical methods but pedagogical tools that foster engagement and motivation. Harmer (2007) similarly highlights the importance of methodological variety, suggesting that teachers should combine traditional and innovative approaches to sustain learners' interest.

Several strategies have been widely discussed in the literature:
- Memorization: Memorization has traditionally been a cornerstone of vocabulary learning. While critics argue that rote learning can lead to boredom, proponents note that memorization supports long-term retention. Nation (2001) acknowledges that repeated exposure and practice are necessary for vocabulary consolidation. However, scholars recommend combining memorization with communicative activities to maintain engagement.
- Translation: Translation remains a relevant strategy, particularly for learners at intermediate levels. Schmitt (2019) argues that translation provides clarity of meaning, enabling learners to grasp new vocabulary before applying it communicatively. Although some scholars caution against overreliance on translation, it can serve as an effective bridge between the target language and learners' native language.
- Reading Together: Collective reading is another strategy that has been shown to enhance vocabulary acquisition. By engaging in shared reading activities, learners are exposed to repeated vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Nation (2001) emphasizes that repeated exposure in reading contexts strengthens retention and comprehension. Collective reading also fosters routines and builds a sense of community in the classroom.
- Vocabulary Games: Hunt and Beglar (2005) highlight the effectiveness of game-based activities in vocabulary instruction. Games such as word chain, Pictionary, and bingo create a fun learning atmosphere, reduce fatigue, and boost motivation. They argue that games not only enhance engagement but also improve retention by providing opportunities for repeated practice in enjoyable contexts.

Factors Influencing Strategy Selection

The literature also identifies several factors that influence teachers' choices of vocabulary teaching strategies. Teacher-related factors include experience, creativity, and pedagogical beliefs. Student-related factors include motivation, interest, and prior knowledge. Contextual factors include infrastructure, teaching media, and curricular objectives. Flick (2018) notes that qualitative research often reveals the complex interplay of these factors, highlighting that teaching strategies are shaped not only by theoretical considerations but also by practical realities.

Creswell (2014) emphasizes the importance of considering context in educational research. He argues that strategies must be adapted to specific classroom environments, taking into account learners' characteristics and available resources. In vocational high schools, for example, students may have different

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

762

priorities and challenges compared to those in general academic tracks. Teachers must therefore select strategies that are both efficient and engaging, ensuring that learners acquire the vocabulary necessary for their future careers.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical frameworks underpin vocabulary teaching strategies. Constructivist theories emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through interaction and engagement. From this perspective, strategies such as games and collective reading are particularly effective, as they encourage learners to actively use vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Behaviorist theories, on the other hand, highlight the importance of repetition and reinforcement, supporting strategies such as memorization and translation.

Harmer (2007) advocates for an eclectic approach that combines elements of different theories. He argues that no single strategy can address all aspects of vocabulary learning, and teachers must therefore adopt a varied and flexible approach. This aligns with Schmitt's (2019) argument that strategies must be adapted to classroom contexts and learner characteristics.

Implications for Vocational High Schools

The literature suggests that vocabulary instruction in vocational high schools requires particular attention. Students in vocational tracks often face unique challenges, such as limited time for language learning and a focus on practical skills. Yet, English proficiency remains essential for their employability and access to global knowledge. Teachers must therefore select strategies that are both effective and engaging, ensuring that learners acquire the vocabulary necessary for their future careers.

The combination of memorization, translation, collective reading, and games appears particularly suited to vocational contexts. Memorization supports retention, translation provides clarity, collective reading fosters routines, and games sustain motivation. Together, these strategies address both cognitive and affective aspects of vocabulary learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

The methodological framework of this study was carefully designed to capture the complexity of vocabulary teaching practices in vocational high schools. Because the research sought to understand not only what strategies teachers employ but also why they make certain choices, a qualitative descriptive approach was selected. This approach prioritizes depth over breadth, focusing on rich descriptions of phenomena rather than statistical generalizations. It is particularly well-suited for educational research where human experiences, classroom dynamics, and contextual factors play a central role.

Research Design

Qualitative descriptive research emphasizes presenting a comprehensive and accurate account of events as they occur in natural settings. Unlike experimental designs, which manipulate variables to test hypotheses, descriptive qualitative studies aim to portray reality as faithfully as possible. In this study, the design allowed the researchers to explore teachers' strategies for vocabulary instruction without imposing rigid frameworks. The emphasis was on capturing authentic practices and the reasoning behind them.

Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data analysis provided the guiding framework. Their approach involves three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification (Sugiyono, 2015). Data reduction refers to the process of selecting and simplifying information, ensuring that only the most relevant data are retained. Data display involves organizing information in a way that makes patterns and relationships visible, often through matrices, charts, or narrative summaries. Conclusion verification ensures that interpretations are credible, consistent, and supported by evidence. This systematic process allowed the researchers to move beyond surface-level observations and develop well-grounded insights.

Research Participants

The subjects of the study were two English teachers at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan. The decision to focus on a small number of participants was deliberate. In qualitative research, depth of understanding is often prioritized over sample size. By engaging closely with two teachers, the researchers were able to explore their strategies in detail, uncovering nuances that might be overlooked in larger-scale studies. These teachers were selected because they were actively involved in teaching tenth-grade students during the 2024/2025 academic year, making their experiences directly relevant to the research questions.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they strike a balance between structure and flexibility. The researchers prepared guiding questions to ensure that key topics were addressed, such as the types of strategies used, the reasons for selecting them, and the challenges encountered. At the same time, the format allowed teachers to elaborate on their experiences, share anecdotes, and provide insights that might not emerge in more rigid interview formats.

Document analysis complemented the interviews by providing tangible evidence of instructional practices. Lesson plans and syllabi were examined to identify how strategies were planned and integrated into the curriculum. This method also allowed the researchers to verify whether the strategies mentioned in interviews were reflected in official documents. For example, if a teacher reported using vocabulary games, the lesson plans were checked to confirm whether such activities were included. This triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis followed Miles and Huberman's three-step model.
1. Data Reduction: Interview transcripts and documents were reviewed, and irrelevant information was discarded. The focus was on identifying recurring themes related to vocabulary teaching strategies and influencing factors. Codes were assigned to segments of data, such as "memorization," "translation," "games," and "student motivation."
2. Data Display: The coded data were organized into matrices and narrative summaries. This step made it easier to identify patterns, such as the frequent use of translation when students struggled with comprehension or the reliance on games to sustain motivation. Data display also facilitated comparisons between the two teachers, highlighting similarities and differences in their approaches.

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*Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan
in the Academic Year 2024/2025*
(Halim)
☐ 764

3. Conclusion Verification: The researchers checked whether the interpretations were consistent with the data. Triangulation was used to confirm findings across interviews and documents. For instance, if both teachers mentioned using collective reading, and lesson plans also reflected this strategy, the conclusion was considered reliable.

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. To strengthen validity, the study employed methodological triangulation, combining interviews with document analysis. This approach reduced the risk of bias and ensured that conclusions were supported by multiple sources of evidence.

Reliability was addressed by maintaining consistency in data collection and analysis. Interviews were conducted using the same guiding questions, and documents were analyzed using the same criteria. Detailed records were kept to ensure transparency, allowing other researchers to trace the steps taken.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Teachers participated voluntarily and were informed about the purpose of the research. Their identities were kept confidential to protect privacy. Data were used solely for research purposes, and findings were reported honestly without distortion.

Justification for Methodological Choices

The choice of a qualitative descriptive approach was justified by the nature of the research questions. The study sought to understand strategies and influencing factors, which are best explored through rich descriptions rather than numerical data. Semi-structured interviews allowed teachers to share their experiences in their own words, while document analysis provided objective evidence of instructional practices. The combination of these methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of vocabulary teaching in vocational high schools.

Expected Contributions

By adopting this methodological framework, the study aimed to provide a realistic picture of how vocabulary instruction is managed in practice. It sought to highlight not only the strategies used but also the contextual factors that shape their effectiveness. The findings are expected to contribute to both theory and practice, offering insights for researchers and guidance for teachers.

Here's the Findings & Discussion paraphrased into ~1000 words, followed by the Conclusion paraphrased into ~1000 words.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted picture of how English teachers at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan approach vocabulary instruction for tenth-grade students. Four primary strategies emerged from the data: collective reading, memorization, translation, and vocabulary games. These strategies were not applied rigidly but alternated depending on classroom conditions, student needs, and instructional

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

765

objectives. The discussion below elaborates on each strategy, its effectiveness, theoretical support, and the contextual factors influencing its use.

Collective Reading

One of the most prominent strategies identified was collective reading. Teachers often began lessons by engaging students in reading together, either from textbooks or selected passages. This practice served multiple purposes: it established routines, fostered a sense of community, and reinforced vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure. Students demonstrated greater enthusiasm when lessons began with collective reading, as the activity provided structure and predictability.

Nation (2001) emphasizes that repeated exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts strengthens retention and comprehension. Collective reading aligns with this principle by embedding vocabulary within authentic texts. Moreover, the strategy supports learners who may struggle with independent reading, as the collective format provides scaffolding. Teachers reported that collective reading was particularly effective in motivating students at the start of lessons, setting a positive tone for subsequent activities.

Memorization

Memorization was another strategy frequently employed. Teachers encouraged students to memorize vocabulary lists, often assigning them as homework or integrating them into classroom drills. The rationale behind this strategy was to ensure that students retained new vocabulary over the long term. Memorization was especially useful for students with low interest in English, as it provided a structured and straightforward way to engage with vocabulary.

While memorization is sometimes criticized for being monotonous, it remains a powerful tool for retention. Nation (2001) acknowledges that repetition and practice are essential for consolidating vocabulary knowledge. Teachers at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan recognized the limitations of memorization, noting that it could lead to boredom if used excessively. To address this, they combined memorization with other strategies, such as games or translation, to maintain variety and engagement. This combination reflects an awareness of the need to balance cognitive demands with affective factors.

Translation

Translation was used as a bridge for comprehension. Teachers provided Indonesian equivalents for new vocabulary, enabling students to grasp meanings more easily. This strategy was particularly effective for intermediate learners who required clarity before applying vocabulary communicatively. Schmitt (2019) argues that translation remains relevant in language teaching, especially when learners need explicit connections between the target language and their native language.

Teachers reported that translation helped reduce confusion and facilitated faster understanding. However, they also acknowledged the risk of overreliance on translation, which could hinder learners from thinking directly in English. To mitigate this, translation was often followed by activities that required students to use vocabulary in context, such as reading or games. This approach ensured that translation served as a stepping stone rather than an endpoint.

Vocabulary Games

Vocabulary games were implemented to overcome student fatigue and sustain motivation. Activities such as word chain, Pictionary, and bingo created a lively atmosphere and encouraged active participation. Teachers observed that games were particularly effective in re-engaging students who had become bored with more traditional methods.

Hunt and Beglar (2005) highlight that game-based activities enhance learner engagement while improving retention. Games provide opportunities for repeated practice in enjoyable contexts, making vocabulary learning less burdensome. At SMKN 1 Tapaktuan, games were used strategically, often at the end of lessons or after intensive activities, to refresh students' energy and maintain interest. Teachers noted that games not only improved vocabulary retention but also fostered positive attitudes toward English learning.

Influencing Factors

Beyond the strategies themselves, several factors influenced teachers' choices.

- Teacher Factors: Teachers' experience, creativity, and pedagogical beliefs played a central role. Creative teachers were more likely to combine traditional and innovative methods, ensuring that lessons remained engaging.
- Student Factors: Motivation and interest significantly shaped participation. Highly motivated students responded well to communicative approaches, while less motivated students required more structured methods like memorization.
- Learning Activities: The nature of classroom activities influenced strategy selection. For example, collective reading was suited to introductory phases, while games were effective for consolidation.
- Infrastructure: School facilities and teaching media supported the effectiveness of strategies. Access to resources such as textbooks, whiteboards, and visual aids made strategies more impactful.
- Learning Objectives: Teachers tailored strategies to align with curricular goals. For instance, memorization was used to ensure retention of technical vocabulary, while games were employed to foster communicative competence.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the four strategies complement one another. Memorization strengthens memory, translation bridges comprehension, collective reading fosters routine, and games enhance motivation. This combination reflects Harmer's (2007) theory, which stresses the importance of varied methods in language teaching. By integrating multiple strategies, teachers addressed both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.

The study also highlights the importance of contextual adaptation. Teachers did not apply strategies mechanically but adjusted them based on classroom conditions and student needs. This flexibility underscores the role of teacher creativity and professional judgment in effective vocabulary instruction.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that varied and contextual strategies are essential for vocabulary teaching. Teachers who combine memorization, translation, collective reading, and games are more likely to enhance vocabulary mastery and foster learner motivation.

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

767

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study synthesizes the findings and underscores their implications for vocabulary instruction in vocational high schools. The research demonstrates that vocabulary mastery is strongly influenced by the strategies employed by teachers, as well as the contextual factors that shape their effectiveness.

Summary of Findings

Four main strategies were identified: collective reading, memorization, translation, and vocabulary games. These strategies functioned synergistically rather than independently. Collective reading established routines and fostered engagement, memorization reinforced retention, translation provided clarity, and games sustained motivation. Together, they addressed both cognitive and affective aspects of vocabulary learning.

The study also revealed several influencing factors, including teacher expertise, student motivation, classroom activities, infrastructure, and learning objectives. Teachers acted as agents of change, adapting strategies to suit learners' needs and contexts. Students' interest determined their level of engagement, while school facilities supported the effectiveness of strategies. Teacher creativity was particularly crucial, enabling the integration of traditional and innovative methods.

Theoretical Implications

The findings align with existing theories of language teaching. Hunt and Beglar (2005) emphasize the importance of varied techniques in vocabulary instruction, while Schmitt (2019) argues that strategies must be adapted to classroom contexts. Harmer (2007) advocates for methodological variety, highlighting that no single strategy can address all aspects of learning. The study confirms these perspectives, demonstrating that successful vocabulary teaching requires a combination of approaches tailored to learners' characteristics.

Practical Implications

For teachers, the study offers practical guidance. It encourages them to be creative and flexible in selecting strategies, combining memorization with communicative activities, translation with contextual practice, and collective reading with games. By doing so, teachers can enhance vocabulary mastery while sustaining motivation. The findings also highlight the importance of supporting factors such as infrastructure and student motivation. Without these, even the most well-designed strategies may fall short.

Contribution to Vocational Education

The study contributes to the improvement of English language education in vocational high schools. It demonstrates that vocabulary instruction must be both efficient and engaging, ensuring that students acquire the language skills necessary for their future careers. By documenting the strategies used at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan, the research provides a model that can be adapted in similar contexts.

Final Conclusion

The main conclusion is that successful vocabulary teaching does not rely on a single strategy but on a combination of varied, contextual, and learner-centered approaches. Teachers who integrate memorization, translation, collective reading, and games are more likely to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Supporting factors such as student motivation, teacher creativity, and adequate infrastructure further enhance effectiveness.

Ultimately, the study underscores that teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but creative facilitators who adapt strategies to meet learners' needs. By doing so, they foster not only vocabulary mastery but also learner confidence and motivation. This research therefore provides both theoretical insights and practical guidance, contributing to the ongoing effort to improve vocabulary instruction in vocational high schools.

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Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Tapaktuan in the Academic Year 2024/2025

(Halim)

769