Students' Academic Vocabulary Mastery: A Descriptive Study at English Language Education of FKIP-UIR

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the first-year English language education students at FKIP-UIR Pekanbaru's academic vocabulary proficiency. Data interpretation is part of the descriptive research methodology. Three levels of vocabulary knowledge are tested in this study using several measures: meaning identification, written form recall assisted by initial letter, and matching exercise. The analysis of the data revealed that the average score on the meaning recognition test is 54,16, which is categorized as a poor to the ordinary degree of mastery. The written form recall test with initial letter assistance yields an average score of 57,5 and is categorized as having a poor to an average degree of competence. While the average score in the corresponding exercise is 62,08,

Keywords: Academic, Vocabulary, Mastery, Recall, Descriptive

Introduction

The university's students have an amazing deal of instructional necessities in involving, performing, and accomplishing their educational observation and tasks. Vocabulary, especially for academic vocabulary, is one of the challenging learning activities and tasks to meet (Naeini, 2015; Al-Khasawneh, 2019). In the context of English as a second language and English as a foreign language mastery, vocabulary knowledge is critical to ensure English language learning success (Al Qahtani, 2015). It is critical for tertiary students to have a large vocabulary so that they can comprehend the words of others and express themselves verbally and in writing.

Academic Vocabulary plays a crucial function in gaining language knowledge. Academic vocabulary is likewise an essential ability for getting to know to examine, speak, write and pay attention. Without sufficient academic vocabulary, human beings cannot communicate and explain their feeling in form of spoken and written effectively (Al Qahtani, 2015). The students are able to speak, write, study and concentrate on academic tasks if they understand educational or academic vocabulary. Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Al-Khasawneh, 2019). It means that even if someone has good grammar but it will be useless if they do not have much vocabulary.

When learning English, it is important to focus on developing academic vocabulary because it is one of the most important aspects of language proficiency. However, students may also develop their vocabulary on their own as they go through life, depending on their needs and level of education. Academic vocabulary is one of the linguistic skills that should be taught and learned. It is undeniable that it will be challenging to grasp a language without becoming proficient in a certain number of vocabularies. A language learner cannot communicate clearly or express his or her ideas in both spoken and written form without a sizable vocabulary (Folse, 2011; Dehham, 2021). Any language acquisition process relies heavily on vocabulary development, particularly when it comes to introducing and reinforcing new lexical items. The aforementioned justification states that vocabulary

and words are always related. Learning a language entails learning the words, comprehending their meaning, and utilizing them in sentences.

From the points of view of the experts above, it suggests that academic vocabulary is required in an academic setting to follow through and succeed (Banister, 2016). When students do not understand the language spoken in classrooms well, they can lose the trust they need to pursue their studies with enthusiasm. Another important aspect of learning academic vocabulary is the outcome that students need, whether in a job or academic environment, as a lack of skills and poor communication skills paralyze or hinder the efficiency and creativity of students (Dakhi & Fitria, 2019; Smith et al., 2020). A final explanation of why academic vocabulary is vitally important is that it can be used as an educational resource to promote critical thought, problem-solving, and decision-making skills for students (Khani & Tazik, 2013; Masrai & Milton, 2021).

The set of words used in a language is known as a vocabulary. These words can be a collection of words in the form of single things, phrases, or fragments, and they can express common meaning(s). As a result, Hamza et al., (2017) considered lexis or vocabulary to be the root or heart of a language.

The language employed in academic texts is referred to as "academic vocabulary." In order to categorize a book as a good academic text, Al-Khasawneh (2019) underlined the importance of accurately employing academic vocabulary. In all academic disciplines, the subject is taught using academic terminology. According to Smith et al., (2020), academic vocabulary and terms give learners the ability to analyze, infer, and make judgments based on discipline in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In order to understand the academic concepts they are studying, learners must be able to comprehend subject jargon. Schmitt (2008) asserts that many college-level students are unable to comprehend the vocabulary of the AWL in terms of academics. 3,000 words may be recognized by EFL students, but they may not be able to produce them.

Setting language learning goals for vocabulary is aided greatly by using an academic word list. Language learners, as well as course and content producers, will benefit from a word list. A word list aids course designers and content designers in the collecting of texts and the construction of appropriate learning activities for language learners. Word lists are especially important while learning EFL since they help with the use of the lexis when learning a language from a set of verbs. The objective of a word list for lecturers is to assist them in determining which terms are valuable to students as they learn a language.

Coxhead (2000) created the Scholarly Word List (AWL), which is a 570-word expansion of the General Service List (GSL) (West 1953). The importance of this list is that it focuses on generic academic concepts that are not directly related to any one subject but are critical for university students to understand. Durrant (2016) emphasized that Coxhead's powerful AWL is based on a bigger, more representative corpus. Because the AWL is frequently applied to a variety of fields (Durrant, 2014), this is a significant advancement in the technological field of word use. Nation (2006) points out that knowing headwords aids in interpreting derivational types and provides a higher degree of word coverage. The AWL has been described as the most representative list of academic vocabulary" and "a list that has transformed the learning of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Yang, 2015).

According to Schmitt et al., (2001) the primary focus of general English learners should be on knowing roughly 3,000 high-frequency words, as well as a way to deal with unfamiliar terminology and learn new topics as they come across. They also recommended that EAP students study 2,000 most common general English words first, before focusing on a smaller number of keywords. Banister (2016) also mentioned that the AWL is a useful tool for helping students focus on important terms in discipline-specific books and that the AWL-related websites allow for further in-depth interaction with those words. The AWL has also been recognized as having the ability to improve learners' lexical capital due to its straightforward and achievable objectives.

English-speaking EFL students had a relatively lower level of academic vocabulary skills (Nation, 2006; Schmitt, 2008). Both researchers came to the conclusion that learners are likely to struggle with English language learning in a productive way and with response understanding due to this vulnerability. The ability of learners to read, write, talk, and listen is said to be positively correlated with vocabulary size, according to researchers.

Language has a considerable impact on reading comprehension (Nation, 2006; Schmitt, 2008; Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010; Brooks et al., 2021). Matsuoka and Hirsh, (2010) claimed that a person's vocabulary understanding has a significant impact on their level of positive reading comprehension. The link between speaking, listening, and academic vocabulary has gotten less attention, according to credible studies mentioned by (Milton & Treffers-Daller, 2013; Alharthi, 2019; LaScotte, 2020).

In general, a review of the above statement indicates that awareness and successful use of academic vocabulary is essential for tertiary learners' overall academic success. The terms included in the AWL are those that are essential for effective academic learning. These words are essential in tertiary lectures to guarantee academic success. In these circumstances, writing effectively is essential, and writing effectively requires understanding word forms, meanings (concepts, referents, associations), and effective usage (grammar functions, collocations, registers, and frequencies) (Schmitt et al., 2019). Schmitt et al., (2001) assert that vocabulary deficits have an effect on both oral and written communication among learners. Schmitt et al., (2001) claim that kids need to be familiar with between 3,000 and 5,000-word families in order to read competently and take part in the meaningful spoken conversation at an advanced level. Nation (2006), on the other hand, refuted the assertions and underlined the necessity of a larger word limit of 8,000.

In a study involving students in intensive English programs, Brun-mercer and Zimmerman (2015) discovered that individuals who lacked a solid understanding of a word's register would have trouble effectively and appropriately employing academic terminology. They suggested the registry teach new words in this situation-specific fashion. A study on academic essay writing by ESL students from the perspective of a lecturer revealed that instructors place a high priority on the usage of acceptable language in their assessments (Durrant, 2016). Vocabulary errors received a harsher evaluation from professors when compared to other language faults when categorizing flaws in written communication. Lexical errors are also thoroughly examined because improper use of words directly changes the meaning of the text (Durrant, 2016).

Obviously, the importance of vocabulary learning arises from the fact that vocabulary is so important in language instruction. There would undoubtedly be effects on vocabulary evaluation from the growing interest in vocabulary study. As was previously mentioned, a strong correlation was established between vocabulary size and linguistic proficiency. The learners do better linguistically as their vocabulary size grows. For instance, it was claimed that vocabulary was proven to be a good predictor of increased accomplishment in reading ability (Brooks et al., 2021). This implies that vocabulary testing is crucial for classroom learning and practice. It provides insightful data on how language learners' vocabulary expands, aids researchers and practitioners in understanding the number of terms foreign language learners are familiar with, the rate at which their target words graduate, and the relationship between these variables.

Vocabulary assessments, like other language skills evaluation methods, can be used for a variety of purposes: they can help assign learners to an appropriate learning group (placement test); they can be used to determine what has been learned (realization test); they can help identify learning differences in vocabulary knowledge become better classroom preparation (diagnostic test); they can provide good indicators in global measures (e.g. TOEFL) and allow better acculturation (e.g. TOEFL); they can provide good indicators in global (Schmitt et al., 2001). Naturally, these examinations will include both the vocabulary knowledge of vocabulary learners and the level of word comprehension.

According to Brooks et al., (2021) it may be crucial to incorporate vocabulary instruction into classroom activities since this will affect students conduct in the classroom and encourage them to acquire new words. Despite the increased interest in using vocabulary in the curriculum of EFL courses, he continues, there is no purpose in avoiding vocabulary study. The literature also supports the complex use of terminology that is tested in many ways during study.

Methods

In this study, the researcher combined a descriptive methodology with data interpretation. The researcher wants to evaluate how well the students know academic vocabulary. A descriptive method is used primarily to describe a process or phenomenon in terms of what has occurred or is occurring.

In this research, total sampling was used. Respondents are from FKIP-UIR English Language Education majors. The fifty (48) second-semester students who take the academic vocabulary course comprise up the entire research sample.

The test is utilized as a research instrument in this research, and it includes the Academic Word List Website (http://www.englishvocabularyexercise.com/A WL/id21/html). This study examines three levels of vocabulary knowledge using a variety of methods, including meaning recognition, written form recall aided by the first letter, and matching tasks.

The 80-item exams, which are administered trice (three times), include 20 meaning recognition, 30 written form recall with initial letter assistance, and 30 matching exercise items. All of the information from the three tests—the matching exercise, written form recall assisted by initial letter items, and recognition items—is itemized and transformed into a number code. Each tests correct answer received a "1," whereas each incorrect or missing response received a "0."

The researcher will implement the following category to assess students' skill in academic vocabulary:

Table 1. Students' Qualification of Academic Vocabulary Mastery

Range	Qualification
80 – 100	Good to Excellent
60 – 79	Average to Good
50 – 59	Poor to Average
0 – 49	Poor

Brown, D (2011: 25)

Result and Discussion

The Result of Test

There was one student who scored 80 on the meaning recognition test. Thirteen pupils had grades below 80, and thirty-four received grades below sixty. It is categorized as having a poor to medium degree of expertise due to the average score of 54,16. The classification table for the results of the meaning recognition test is shown below.

Table 2. Meaning Recognition Test Result

Score	Category	Number of Sudents
80 – 100	Good to Excellent	1
60 – 79	Average to Good	13
50 – 59	Poor to Average	34
0 – 49	Poor	-

31 students received scores below 80 on the written form recall test with initial letter assistance. They were in the good to average range. There were 8 students who received a score below 50 and 9 students who received a score below 60. The degree of mastery ranges from bad to medium, with an average score of 57,5. The classification of written form recall aided by the initial letter result, is shown in the table below.

Table 3. Written form Recall Aided by Initial Letter Test

Score	Category	Number of Students
80 – 100	Good to Excellent	-
60 – 79	Average to Good	31
50 – 59	Poor to Average	9
0 – 49	Poor	8

There were 2 students who scored above 80 in the matching exercise. There were 31 students who received a score of less than 80. And 15 students received a score of less than 60. The average score is 62,08, and it falls to the average to good level of mastery category. The classification of the matching   exercise result is listed on the table below.

Table 4. Matching Exercise test

Score	Category	Number of Students
80 – 100	Good to Excellent	2
60 – 79	Average to Good	31
50 – 59	Poor to Average	15
0 – 49	Poor	

Discussion

In this research, three components of vocabulary knowledge—meaning recognition, written form recall aided by first letter, and matching exercise—are assessed in order to know students' academic vocabulary mastery.

The computation shows that the first-year English Language Education students at FKIP UIR have poor to average levels of proficiency in learning academic vocabulary at three levels of vocabulary knowledge. The results of the students' average vocabulary test score provide proof of this. One student was the only one with an AWL score of 80; 28 (twenty-eight) students had scores below 60; and 19 (nineteen) students had scores below 80. The average AWL test result is 57,91, which is in between low and average.

From the computation, it is found that the first year students of English Language Education of FKIP UIR have poor to average level in mastering academic vocabulary of three level of vocabulary knowledge. It is shown by evidence of the mean score of students' mastery in academic vocabulary. Only one student (the only student) achieved an AWL score of 80, 19 students (19 students) received a score of less than 80, and 28 students (28) received a score of less than 60. The average AWL test score is 57,91, which is considered below average to poor.

Meaning Recognition

There was one student who received an 80 on the meaning recognition test. There were 13 students who received a score of less than 80 and 34 students who received a score of less than 60. The average score is 54,16, and it falls into the poor to average level of mastery category.

Written from recall aided by initial letter

There were 31 students who scored under 80 on the written form recall aided by initial letter test. They were on the average to good side of things. There were 9 students who received a score of less than 60 and 8 students who received a score of less than 50. The average score is 57,5 and the level of mastery is classified as poor to average.

Matching Exercise

In matching exercise test, there were 2 students who scored above 80. There were 31 students who received a score of less than 80. And 15 students received a score of less than 60. The average score is 62,08, and it falls into the average to good level of mastery category.

The research result of students' academic vocabulary mastery with Academic Word List test (AWL) in three level of vocabulary knowledge: meaning recognition, written form recall aided by initial letter, and matching exercise can be seen in the table.

Table. 4 Total Students' Score Classification of Academic Vocabulary Mastery

No	Classification		Frequency (Person)	Percentage
	Score	Level of Mastery		
1.	80 - 100	Good to Excellent	1	2,
2.	60 - 79	Average to Good	1	39,
3.	50 - 59	Poor to Average	2	58,
4.	0 - 49	Poor	-	
	Total		4	10

(Students' Academic Vocabulary Mastery)

From the table 4, described the total students' score classification of academic vocabulary mastery with AWL Test. There was only 1 students who get score 80 and in the level good to excellent. There were 19 students get the score under 80 and in the level of average to good and there be 28 students who get the score under 60 and in the level of poor to average. The average score in the AWL tests is 57.91 and it is classified into poor to average. It means that students' academic vocabulary mastery of the first year is in Poor to Average level.

Conclusion

According to data analysis, students' proficiency with academic vocabulary on the AWL test in English Language Education: The typical result on the recognition exercise exam is 54,16. The average score in the written form memory helped by beginning letter test is 57, 5. And the average result in the corresponding exercise exam was 62,08. It falls under the poor to average category. Therefore, it can be said that first-year students in FKIP's English Language Education program have weak to average vocabulary mastery. The author made several recommendations based on the findings of this research, and they are; (1) The lecturer should stimulate the students' attention in English language instruction, particularly in academic vocabulary classes so that they are not bored and may actively participate in the teaching and learning process. To increase the students' vocabulary, the lecturer may employ a fresh technique or a predetermined formula with the use of suitable methods, techniques, strategies, or media.(2) The lecturer should investigate the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, such as word parts, lexical relationships, parts of speech, context cues, the use of words in original context, and so forth, to have a better outcome in every meeting. To achieve better results, the lecturer may also assign or administer various vocabulary tests. (3) In the current global era, it is advised that students learn from the internet, where they can access a variety of vocabulary-related resources, including articles, magazines, and newspapers. This will help the students in their quest to succeed in their academic vocabulary courses, as they can learn new words (vocabulary) from articles, magazines, and newspapers.

Acknowledgments

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