Impact of Students' Vocabulary Level to their Reading and Writing Performance

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to identify the impact of vocabulary level to performance in reading and writing. The study used the descriptive correlation research design to establish the relationship of the students' vocabulary size to their reading and writing skills. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength of relationship between the two variables- vocabulary level and reading and writing skills. Vocabulary Level Test, adapted from Nation (1990) [1], was used to measure vocabulary level, and the reading and writing final mark was used for students' performance in reading and writing. Based on the findings, vocabulary level has significant relationship to reading and writing performance of students. The result shows that students who have average vocabulary level can achieve average performance in reading and writing courses. Vocabulary level is a valid indicator of reading and writing performance.*

KEYWORDS: vocabulary range, reading and writing performance

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in the academe. Students lacking comprehension skills face challenges in academic life, from understanding a classroom lecture to acquiring new knowledge. Reading as an academic task for a non-native speaker of English is not easy to master. In general, reading is a complex process that involves many different skills. These skills lead to the ultimate goal of reading: reading comprehension, or understanding on what has been read in a textbook, magazine, newspaper, or PowerPoint of the lesson. Reading comprehension can be challenging for varied reasons. Identifying and knowing the skills involved can help students develop their reading comprehension.

On the other hand, writing as an academic task is considered the hardest part of English instruction and learning. Efficient and effective writing skills are needed in communication to achieve a

comprehensive and meaningful discussions of ideas. Good writing skills allow students to communicate their ideas or messages with clarity and simplicity. Students are usually required to write essays in examinations, reports in course projects, and writing portfolios. These writing activities require a higher level of writing skills.

What is the connection of students' vocabulary level to their reading and writing performance? Vocabulary is very important because it's the medium that we can use to express our thoughts and emotions, share information and knowledge, understand others and develop different aspects of relationships. In order to comprehend a reading text, the reader should have a clear understanding on the important vocabulary used on the text. In order to write a feedback on a text read, the writer should have enough vocabulary to explain his ideas related to the reading text. In this context, reading, writing, and vocabulary level are inseparable because they are closely involved in doing the tasks.

Knowing the vocabulary level of learners and the correlation of this to their reading and writing skills is very important. Based on many scientific researches, vocabulary aids reading development and increases comprehension. Students with low vocabulary size tend to have low comprehension and students with satisfactory or high vocabulary size tend to have satisfactory or high comprehension scores. When vocabulary size and English performance of students are clearly identified, teachers can easily develop effective and efficient instructional materials, classroom activities or lessons that are appropriate to the academic needs of the students.

Based on the study of Coyne, M. D. et.al. (2022) [2], students with language and learning difficulties can be assisted through classroom instruction and supplemental vocabulary intervention. Students who received supplemental vocabulary intervention outperformed control group students. In addition, students who received the intervention also eliminated vocabulary learning differences with typically achieving students who received only classroom vocabulary instruction on words targeted for instruction. Findings suggest that supplemental vocabulary intervention that reinforces content taught during classroom instruction can accelerate the learning of at-risk students.

In this study, the researcher investigated the vocabulary level of learners and the impact of this to their reading and writing performance. The researcher specifically documented and correlated the identified vocabulary level of respondents, and their grades in reading and writing skills.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature focuses on three parts: Reading, Writing, Vocabulary.

Reading is indispensable in the lives of students and people as a whole. What is reading? Leipzig (2022) [3] illustrated reading as a multifaceted process involving word recognition,

comprehension, fluency, and motivation. To develop word recognition, children need to learn: phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, decoding, sight vocabulary. To develop comprehension, children need to develop: background knowledge, oral and print vocabularies, how the English language works, how print works, various kinds of texts, various purposes for reading. To develop fluency, children need to: develop a high level of accuracy in word recognition, maintain a rate of reading brisk enough to facilitate comprehension, use phrasing and expression so that oral reading sounds like speech, transform deliberate strategies for word recognition and comprehension into automatic skills, strategies for constructing meaning. To develop and maintain the motivation to read, children need to: appreciate the pleasures of reading view reading as a social act, see reading as an opportunity to explore their interests, purposes, become comfortable with a variety of different written forms and genres.

Goodman (1998) [4] defined reading as a receptive language process. He claimed that reading is a psycholinguistic process which starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning constructed by the reader. Based on this author's statement, it can be said that in this process there is an essential interaction between language and thought. He also argued that "the writer encodes thoughts as language and the reader decodes language to thought.

 Reading comprehension gives meaning to what is read. This meaningful or productive reading occurs when words on an article are not just meaningless words but thoughts and ideas. Reading comprehension is required to succeed in the academe, work, and life as a whole. There are five stages of the development of reading. Childhood education theorist Jeanne Chall (1983) [5] comprehensively explained the stages of reading development. Stage 0 or the Pre-reading Stage (Ages 6 months - 6 year) focuses on the development of knowledge about letters and words through sounds. Stage 1 or Initial Reading, or Decoding Stage (Ages 6-7) focuses on learning how to read letters and associating these with the corresponding parts of spoken words. Stage 2 or Confirmation, Fluency Stage (Ages 7-8) focuses on confirming what is already known to the reader. Stage 3 or Reading for Learning the New (Ages 9-13) focuses on reading to "learn the new" knowledge, information, thoughts and experiences. Stage 4 or Multiple Viewpoints (Ages 14-18) focuses on reading a variety of viewpoints, an ability to deal with layers of facts and concepts added. Stage 5 or Construction and Reconstruction (18 and Above) focuses on the preference of the reader on what to read or not to read. To reach this stage is to be able to use selectively the printed material in those areas of knowledge central to one's concern.

The reading development of the learner is closely associated to his comprehension level. The connection can be explained through the "Schema Theory". According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. Anderson (1977) [6] pointed out that reading comprehension operates in two directions, from bottom up to the top and from the top down to the bottom of the hierarchy. Bottom-

up processing is activated by specific data from the text, while top-down processing starts with general to confirm these predictions. This theory emphasizes the mental connections learners make between pieces of information and can be a very powerful component of the learning process.

The fundamental principle of schema theory assumes that written text does not carry meaning by itself and that it can only provide direction for learners as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge. Ausubel (1967) [7] claimed that Schema Theory is crucial for teachers to realize that students can remember substantial amounts of new information only if they are able to cluster it with their related existing ideas. People forget information if they do not work to integrate it into their existing mental frameworks.

According to An (2013) [8], there are three major types of schemata: linguistic, formal and content, all of which correlate to reading comprehension. Linguistic schemata refer to a reader's existing language proficiency in vocabulary, grammar and jargon. Without it, it may be impossible for the reader to decode and subsequently comprehend the text. Formal schemata are the organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts, and readers will us their schematic representations of the text. Lastly, content schemata refer to the background knowledge of the content area. This may include topic familiarity, cultural knowledge, and previous experience with a field. A good reader combines and employs all these schemata to maximize his reading comprehension. Duke and Pearson (2002) [9] emphasized that good readers make predictions, read actively and selectively, draw on prior knowledge, and questions and evaluate the text and author.

Another factor to be considered and understood in reading is the comprehension levels: literal, inferential and the critical or evaluative levels. Literal, inferential and evaluative levels of comprehension were clearly explained by the Department of Education and Training of Victoria State Government (2021) [10]. Literal comprehension occurs at the surface level when a reader/viewer acknowledges what they can see and hear. The details are stated and clear for anyone to identify. Literal comprehension is often referred to as 'on the page' or 'right there' comprehension. This is the simplest form of comprehension. Inferential comprehension requires the reader/viewer to draw on their prior knowledge of a topic and identify relevant text clues (words, images, sounds) to make an inference. Inferential comprehension is often referred to as 'between the lines' or 'think and search' comprehension. Evaluative comprehension requires the reader to move beyond the text to consider what they think and believe in relation to the message in the text. It is at this point that readers/viewers are required to justify their opinions, argue for a particular viewpoint, critically analyze the content and determine the position of the author. Evaluative comprehension is often referred to as 'beyond the text' and includes 'big picture' comprehension. Often there is no right or wrong answer but rather justification for thinking in a particular way.

Writing is a very significant skill of students throughout their academic lives because it allows them to form and express their ideas clearly through well-constructed text. Nunan (2003) [11] explained that writing is both a physical and mental act. At the most basic level, writing is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Jones, Reutzel, & Fargo (2010) [12] agreed that writing is a fundamental component of language. When a child writes, thoughts and knowledge are blended together creating a unique meaning.

According to Rao (2017) [13], writing is a medium of communication that involves the depiction of a language with written symbols. Writing is considered an imperative skill for good language production. It is thought of as a significant skill mainly in the content of English as a second language and the majority of the learners face numerous challenges while writing. Some language scholars also noticed the difficulty of mastering writing skill in second or foreign language. Based on the observation of Heaton (1979) [14], writing skill in a foreign language is complex and difficult to learn not only the ability to use structures, but also conceptual of varied skills such as stylistic and mechanical skill. Stylistic skill is the ability to manipulate sentences and use language effectively whereas mechanical skill is the ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language such as punctuation and spelling. Berman & Cheng (2010) [15] noted that students identify the skill of writing, as more difficult than listening and reading. Nesamalar, Saratha & Teh (2001) [16] observed that writing is the skill that most students are least proficient in when acquiring a new language. Andrew (2019) [17] emphasized that students face a number of writing difficulties at different levels of their study, these challenges can usually be categorized into cognitive, psychological, linguistic and pedagogical problems.

In the tertiary level, students are expected and required to do many challenging writing tasks along the way. It is expected that they should have already accumulated enough or sufficient vocabulary to efficiently complete any writing tasks. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the language skills that is very essential for assured meaningful language use. Vocabulary level is an indicator of how well the second language learners can achieve academic language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and grammar. Nouri & Zerhouni (2016) [18] claimed that vocabulary knowledge performs a significant role in the process of language learning or acquisition and cannot be neglected in second or foreign language courses. Students have difficulty understanding what they have read and listened to when they encounter difficulty comprehending the exact meaning of the words used in the texts.

Vocabulary is significant to English language teaching because without adequate vocabulary size students cannot comprehend and recognize ideas of others or they will have difficulty expressing their own ideas. Hornby (1995) [19] defined vocabulary as the total number of words in a language;

vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings. According to Neuman & Dwyer (2009) [20] vocabulary can be defined as words that we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking and words in listening. Nation (1990) [1] divided vocabulary knowledge into two types: receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. He defines receptive vocabulary as knowledge of words or lexical units that the language learners recognize from listening and reading, but cannot use the words productively in communication. Laufer & Goldstein (2004) [21] explained that productive knowledge is usually associated with speaking and writing while receptive knowledge is associated with listening and reading.

Lewis (1993) [22] claimed that lexis or vocabulary is the center or heart of a language. As students gain confidence in using and expressing their ideas in English, it is still important for them to acquire and understand more useful vocabulary knowledge and to develop their own personal vocabulary learning strategies. Wilkins (1972) [23] stressed that without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. It only shows that without vocabulary ideas can be hardly transmitted while without grammar some misunderstanding might happen in the process of transmitting the ideas. This impression is experienced by all people when they are in a new place where different languages are being used. Some useful words and expressions can really help people to survive in a foreign country. Schmitt (2010) [24] noted that learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books. When students can't understand the words used by the teacher in the lesson, they tend to use Google translate for a better understanding of the lesson at hand. Clear understanding of vocabulary helps students discuss and express their opinions with others in English.

One fundamental thing that teachers should note regarding the size of vocabulary needed to perform the language is how large the text coverage needed to gain adequate comprehension without outside assistance such as dictionaries and online translation. In short, teachers should know how to identify the number of unfamiliar vocabulary that should be explained before asking comprehension questions. Chang and Read (2006) [25] discovered that vocabulary teaching before a comprehension task helped less than hearing the input twice or reading and discussing the topic beforehand. Words will have to be met in many different contexts in order to develop mastery of the different word knowledge types, and this entails a long-term recursive approach to vocabulary learning. Single period of instruction may not only be ineffective, but may actually be counterproductive under certain circumstances. According to Laufer and Yano (2001) [26], L2 learners in academic settings are expected to overcome a vast amount of reading materials intended for native speakers, and yet studies conducted across high schools and universities indicate that their vocabulary knowledge does not amount to a quarter of the vocabulary known by their native speaking peers.

According to Nation (1993) [27], knowledge of around 3,000 word families is the threshold needed for tapping other language skills. Without this threshold, learners encounter problems understanding the language they are exposed to. Ellis (1997) [28] argued that vocabulary knowledge is a predicator of learners' discourse comprehension, which allows grammatical rules to be patterned in the learners' mind. Having inadequate vocabulary hampers learners' reading comprehension in a way that makes it more likely the learners will face difficulties in the path of academic performance. Meara (1996) [29] believed that learners with big vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than learners with smaller vocabularies.

English language performance of students is very crucial in validating their overall development because this performance reflects the extent and quality of instruction in their educational lives. There are many factors that affect performance of learners and vocabulary size is just one of the factors that could guide teachers in assessing students' potentials. Nation (2001) [30] explained the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are highly related since lexical knowledge can assist language learners in comprehending written texts, and also reading may help in developing learners' lexicons.

Nation (2006) [31] found that in the level of 98% text coverage, 8,000 to 9,000 word families are needed by readers in order to gain sufficient comprehension of written texts without using any assisting comprehension tools, and 6,000 to 7,000 word families needed for spoken texts. It suggests that readers should master all the high frequency words consisting of 2,000 word families as well as the mid frequency words consisting of 7,000 word families. Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) [32] concluded that 2,000 to 3,000 word families, which are high frequency words, are needed in order to participate effectively in basic everyday oral communication. Van Zeeland & Schmitt (2012) [33] also claimed that learners need to know 2000-3000 word families for 'adequate' listening comprehension.

What is the impact of vocabulary knowledge to students? According to the study of Irvin, Sandra and Blankenship, K.G. (2022) [34], high vocabulary level can assist academic success and the ability to learn new words. The study also discovered further support for the relationship between prior vocabulary knowledge and learning novel words. Students with higher vocabularies learned more words (i.e., achieved higher gain scores on the experimental measure) than students with lower vocabularies. This finding supports research that states learners with higher vocabularies have an increased word learning ability compared to peers with lower vocabularies. This study provides evidence that vocabulary knowledge has a significant positive correlation with undergraduate GPA, supporting the correlation between academic success and verbal ability. The

implications of these findings suggest that an essential factor in learning material and basic terms is beyond students' immediate control.

In their study, Dong Y, et. al. (2020) [35] discovered that vocabulary knowledge contributed a large proportion of variance on text comprehension and might also support the independent hypothesis of the impact of vocabulary knowledge on reading comprehension. In each education stage, the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension was independent in that it did not interact with any significant moderators. This study informed that the vocabulary knowledge not only determined text comprehension progress through facial semantic meaning identification but also suggested that the coordinate development of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and inference would be better in complexity comprehension task performance.

Another study that supports the positive impact of vocabulary knowledge is the research of Al-Khasawneh, F. (2019) [36]. The study revealed that the overall vocabulary size (2025) of respondents helped them comprehend 90% of written texts. This only shows that vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor for comprehending written texts. The results also showed a significant relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension. The study provided some implications for educational stakeholders such as putting more emphasis on teaching vocabulary and using different teaching strategies that assist in the acquisition of vocabulary in general and academic vocabulary in particular.

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This part presents the research paradigm, research objectives, research methodology, research respondents and instruments used in the study.

Research Paradigm
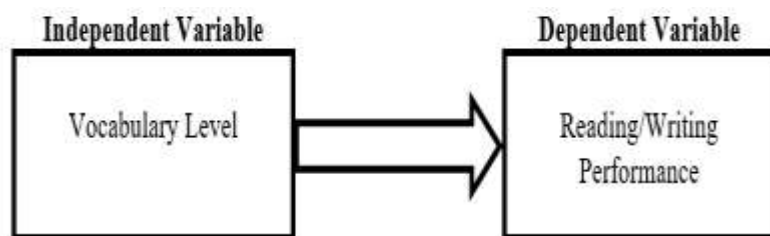
Research Objectives

General Objective: This study aimed to identify the impact of students' vocabulary level to their performance in reading and writing skills.

Specific Objectives: It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the vocabulary level of B1 Plus students?

2. What is the respondents' performance in reading and writing skills?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' vocabulary level to their reading and writing performance?

Hypothesis: "There is no significant relationship between the respondents' vocabulary level to their reading and writing performance".

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive correlation research design. The study established the relationship of the students' vocabulary level to their performance in listening and speaking. The correlation method interpreted the relationship between the performance of students in reading and writing skills to their vocabulary level. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviation, and weighted mean were used to analyze data to answer descriptive questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between vocabulary range and performance in reading and writing.

Respondents and Research Instruments

The respondents of this study were 28 B1+ (male) students from the English Language Institute of Royal Commission for Jubail, Saudi Arabia. The chosen section was identified by systematic and convenience sampling where all students in the section were included in the study. There were two research instruments involved in this study: Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) and reading and writing final marks of respondents. The Vocabulary Level Test (Version A) adapted from Nation (1990) was used to measure vocabulary range. The VLT test is designed to measure learners' vocabulary level that can be considered as an indicator of the coverage of vocabulary in a text. A learner's total score needs to be multiplied by 100 to get their total vocabulary range of word families.

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION

Identified B1 plus students took the Vocabulary Level Test, and reading and writing Final Marks of respondents were collected. The data gathered were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviation, and weighted mean were used to analyze data to answer descriptive questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the correlation between vocabulary level and reading and writing performance of respondents.

The following questions were answered based on the analyzed and treated data.

1. What is the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents?

2. What is the respondents' performance in reading and writing?

3. Is there a significant relationship between respondents' vocabulary range and their reading and writing performance?

Vocabulary Range (VR)

Table 1. Vocabulary Range of B1 Plus Respondents

Number of Respondents	Mean of Vocabulary Range (raw score)	Mean of Vocabulary Range (total score= rsx100)
28	70.5714	7,057.1429

Table 1 shows the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents. Based on the table, the mean of respondents' vocabulary range (raw score) is 70.5714. Using the formula indicated by Paul Nation in getting student's vocabulary range (total score of word families), the mean vocabulary range of B1 Plus students is 7,057.1429, which is near to the target vocabulary level of 8,000 to have a 98% comprehension to complex spoken and written texts. It is statistically safe to claim that B1 Plus students have met or exceeded the (30) 3,000 word families' threshold needed for developing other language skills.

Reading and Writing Performance

Table 2. Performance of Students in Reading and Writing

Students	Reading/Writing Raw Score	Reading/Writing Mean Score
28	2045.9992	73.0714

Table 2 shows the performance of students in reading and writing. Based on the table, respondents mean score is 73.0714. The mean mark of respondents in reading and writing is relatively low.

Vocabulary Level and Reading/Writing Performance

Table 3. Relationship between Vocabulary Level and Reading/Writing Performance

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Voc Level	70.5714	11.36084	28
RW Mark	73.0714	10.05145	28

Correlations			
		Voc Level	RW Mark
Voc Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.473*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	28	28
RW Mark	Pearson Correlation	.473*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	28	28
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Table 3 shows the relationship between vocabulary level and reading/writing performance. Based on the result, there is significant relationship between Vocabulary Level (70.5714) and Reading/Writing Mark (73.0714) with the correlation of .473*, which is significant at 0.05 level. This only shows that when student's vocabulary size is low, his reading and writing mark is relatively low too. The vocabulary size of a learner determines his mark in reading and writing courses.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This part summarizes all the research questions with their answers based on the analyzed and interpreted data.

What is the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents?

The vocabulary size of B1 Plus students is 70.5714 or 7,057.1429 vocabulary word families. This is reasonably near to the target vocabulary size of 80.0 or 8,000 word families to have a 98% comprehension to complex spoken and written texts.

What is the respondents' performance in reading and writing?

The respondents' performance in reading and writing is 73.0714.

Is there a significant correlation between respondents' vocabulary level and their reading and writing performance?

There is a significant relationship between Vocabulary Level (70.5714) and Reading/Writing Mark (73.0714) with the correlation of .473*, which is significant at 0.05 level.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following statements are the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Vocabulary level is a valid predictor for the performance of student in reading and writing courses. If student's vocabulary size is low, his performance in reading and writing will be relatively low also. The result of this study validated the claims of the different researches about the impact of vocabulary knowledge.

Though the performance of respondents in reading and writing correlates to their vocabulary level, there is a need to develop or improve reading and writing skills because the mean score (73.0714) is still relatively low when this is equated to the grading system. On the other hand, though vocabulary level of students is near to the target vocabulary level of 8,000 word families to have

a 98% comprehension to complex spoken and written texts (Paul Nation, 2006), the respondents' vocabulary level of 7,057.142 should be elevated to achieve the 98% comprehension.

To develop the vocabulary level of students, language teachers should be motivated to create or develop vocabulary in contexts activities aligned with the contents in the macro skill courses-Reading and Writing, Speaking and listening. Zarfsaz, E, and Yeganehpour, P. (2021) [37] revealed that teaching vocabulary in contexts had a substantial impact on learners' vocabulary learning and retention. This suggests that understanding and remembering the meaning of words is much easier when presented in context.

Curriculum planners should consider supporting and assisting language teachers by providing vocabulary enrichment activities that are comparable to the questions given in assessment to develop knowledge in reading and writing, and ensure higher performance in these skills. The result of this study provided an inference to putting more emphasis on teaching vocabulary by using different teaching strategies that assist in the acquisition of vocabulary to improve reading and writing performance.

To encourage the development of students' vocabulary level, teachers should emphasize the importance of vocabulary in the improvement of reading and writing skills and language learning as a whole.

STATEMENT OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author has no competing interests.

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