

Vocabulary Instructions for EFL Learners

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Abstract

The importance of teaching vocabulary has been emerged since 1980s, however not much research evaluate its effectiveness for EFL learners. On the other hand, the knowledge of words is a fundamental tool in order to bridging the language gap and connecting the skills as well. The following research is intended to find out how much is the vocabulary size of the BBI students and its relation to their language proficiency. Furthermore, to find out the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching techniques applied in the classroom during their semester program. The outcomes of this research is hopefully could increase the learners' vocabulary skill and help them to understand new words and communicate it properly.

Keywords: *vocabulary instructions, vocabulary size, language proficiency*

1. Introduction

Language competence is successfully achieved whenever a learner is able to understand the language and produce it properly. The most important tool in performing their language ability is by mastering English vocabulary. Learners' knowledge of words help them to determined sentences, understanding texts, and uttering the words properly. Therefore, it is crucial to increase learner's vocabulary skill in order to support their process of language learning in the future.

The definition of vocabulary is accepted variously, from students' recognition to print-text "sight words" ; "meaning vocabularies"; until "academic vocabularies". Furthermore, "Students' vocabulary knowledge is a building process that occurs over time as they make connections to other words, learn examples and non-examples of the word and related words, and use the word accurately within the context of the sentence" (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005 taken from Gibbons, G 2009).

Why vocabulary is so important? John Anderson states, "the quality of our thoughts depends upon the precision of our language (Anderson 1971, taken from Stotsky...) Moreover in having larger capacity of vocabulary greatly improves

learners' language production such as in speaking and writing skills. Cahyono and Widiati (2008) add that vocabulary teaching aims at enabling learners to understand the concepts of unfamiliar words, gain a greater number of words, and use words successfully for communicative purposes.

Regarding to the development of language teaching methods, vocabulary teaching was lesser important comparing to other language elements such as grammar teaching (Meara 1984). Before 1980s, vocabulary was best taught through drilling and focused only on their pronunciation adopted by audio-lingual method. More recent decades, it has been viewed as a core component of language proficiency. Nation (2002) argues that vocabulary learning deserves to be controlled and monitored; furthermore there should be greater attention from language programs and textbooks that focused mainly on vocabulary learning (Furnaeux 1999). With the emergence of communicative language teaching, recently vocabulary teaching contributes its effective techniques in order to increase learners' ability in producing the language. The latest years, EAP (English for Academic Purpose) becomes aware to the needs of vocabulary teaching in order to equip the academic students with technical words which in line with their subject chosen (Seal, 1991). More importantly, the computerized analysis of language data by lexicographers and researchers has resulted in the ability to work on vocabulary with considerably more confidence (Harmer, 2000). From a corpus of millions of words, computers can give information about, for example, how often words are used and in what linguistic contexts. As a result of such knowledge, it is reasonably easier to discuss word meaning, word-use extension, collocations, and the grammar of words.

Vocabulary teaching for BBI students in Universitas Bunda Mulia has been taught under the subject of Reading and Vocabulary. Each chapter of their handbook provides list of vocabulary which is included in their passage. For the tasks, students are asked to select which words are new to them and find the meaning by themselves, after they understand its meaning they may continue to read and use its meaning to help them in understanding the passage easier. However due to time constraint and many elements of materials should be covered, the vocabulary teaching is considered ineffective. In this case the

lecturer usually asks them to learn the new words by themselves at home where most of this instruction is not very useful. On the other hand reading activities mostly do inside the classroom and it costs some time to read and understand the passage. As a result the students only have lesser time in focusing the vocabulary part and finally lack of vocabulary capacity. Their language production also needs to be increased as their subjects in the next semester required more on words knowledge. Therefore the following research is intended to find out how much the vocabulary size they have during their learning process and whether the vocabulary approaches is effectively applied to increase their language proficiency level. Based on the problems occurred in vocabulary teaching as mentioned earlier, this research is intended to find out the vocabulary size and also the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching in order to increase their proficiency level. Therefore, a research question for this study is *which size of vocabulary level that the English students have?*

2. Measuring Vocabularies

The knowledge of words is basically started from unknown to knowing process and then developed to fully mastered level. Measuring learners' vocabulary can be done by identifying their vocabulary size. How many words does a foreign learner need to understand a text? According to Nation (2006) there are various sizes of vocabulary depends on the learner language background. Learners need around 6,000 word families to read novels written for teenagers, to watch movies, and to participate in friendly conversation. On the other hand 8,000 to 9,000 words are needed to read newspapers, novels, and some academic texts. Furthermore he elaborates that there are three main levels can be measured on the vocabulary size. A high-frequency vocabulary of around 2,000 words, a mid-frequency vocabulary of an additional 7,000 words making a total of 9,000 and the remaining low-frequency vocabulary of at least another 10,000 words but potentially higher. Adult native speakers seem to have the vocabulary size of around 20,000 words but for most foreign language learners this could be a very long-term goal.

On the other hand, a foreign language learner needs up to 2,000 words frequency in order to understand 80% of a text. Hua Zhong (2011) gathers some data related to academic EFL's vocabulary size. Sutariyah et al (1994, taken from Hua Zhong: 2011) states that an EFL learner needs 4,000 – 5,000 words in order to be able to read an economic book. For knowing 98% of the running words in a text, he or she needs up to 8,000 – 9,000 words family which is also for comprehension written text, newspapers, and 6,000 – 7,000 for spoken text such as newspapers and novels (Nation 2006). For watching television in different genres it is needed from 5,000 to 9,000 words in order to coverage 98% of the TV programs. The following is detailed information on how proper nouns contained in various texts. It also exposes on how many word families will be needed to cover in order to understand a single passage.

<i>Texts</i>	<i>98% coverage</i>	<i>Proper nouns</i>
Novels	9,000 word families	1-2%
Newspapers	8,000 word families	5-6%
Children's movies	6,000 word families	1.5%
Spoken English	7,000 word families	1.3%

Table 1 Word families

For the word occurrences in the text, the following table describes how a learner able to understand the passage based on its frequency. The most occurrence will have a low frequency level, on the other hand least occurrence will likely make various vocabulary slightly occur in the passage.

Level	1000 word family lists	Learning procedures
High frequency	1000-2000	Reading graded readers Deliberate teaching and learning
Mid-frequency	3000-9000	Reading mid-frequency readers Deliberate learning
Low frequency	10,000 on	Wide reading Specialised study of a subject area

Table 2. Frequency word level

2.1 Productive and Receptive Knowledge

There are some ways where a learner starts to access words of English such as through reading passages, listening and watching English sources. Here,

their vocabulary knowledge can be learnt incidentally. Some vocabulary research found out that there are two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge those are “receptive” and “productive” dimension. Furthermore there are different perspectives underlie the following terms. Regarding to the translation process, Warning (1997, taken from Hua Zhong: 2011) explains that ‘receptive’ is the ability to provide a specific first language (L1) translation of the second language words (L2) . ‘productive’ is mentioned as the ability to provide *specific* L2 equipment for an L1 words.

Webb (2008, taken from Hua Zhong: 2011) adds *receptive* vocabulary as the ability to recognize the form of a word and to define or find a synonym for it. Thus, *productive* vocabulary is to recall the form and meaning of a foreign language word.

Nation (1990) furthermore explains *receptive* vocabulary as the ability to recognize the form and retrieve the meaning in listening and reading and *productive* is the ability of production and use of the target language by retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken and written form of a word in the target language to express a meaning by speaking or writing.

In order to get a better understanding about *receptive* and *productive* (*expressive*) vocabulary, the following is the illustration that links the two vocabulary knowledge and how it connects to other language skills.

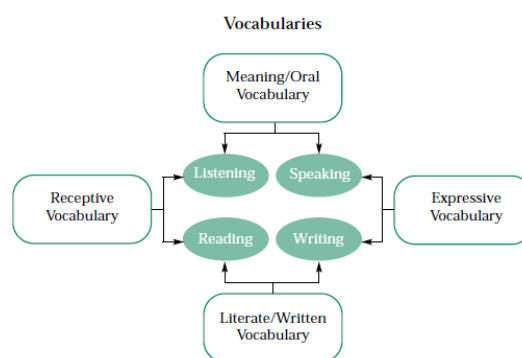


Figure 1. Type of Vocabularies

Generally the term ‘receptive’ understands as how we get the vocabulary from listening and reading for example when we involved in a conversation as a

listener, watching television programs as well in reading either newspapers, magazines, articles, etc. After we receive the vocabulary then we try to understand the meaning and observe on how we could use it properly. On the other hand *expressive* or *productive* vocabular used as the output from what we have heard or read previously. *Literate/written vocabulary* links on the vocabulary exposed in some reading passages and further to be performed in a written text. For *meaning / oral vocabulary* it connects the listening and speaking ability. (Pikulski and Templeton: 2004)

2.2 Vocabulary Instruction

Process in learning the vocabulary can be done either incidently or instructionally. Incidently regarding to the exposure of English language that students have outside the classroom whereas instructionally are obtained inside the classroom with a teacher instruction. In this case reading class is the best way to teach vocabulary to students. Reading textbooks usually provides some new words with some various topics, here students could learn a lot of new words and know how to use the words properly as well.

In order to learn vocabulary effectively, there are some strategies and techniques in order to incerase their proficiency at learning words. The following strategies is taken from Graves (2006):

- ✓ Using context clues to unlock the meanings of unknown words
- ✓ Using word parts to unlock the meanings to unknown words
- ✓ Using the dictionary and related reference tools
- ✓ Developing a strategy for dealing with unknown words
- ✓ Adopting a personal approach

For an effective and efficient vocabulary instructional routine, the following are some steps elaborated by Feldman and Kinsella (2005)

1. Pronounce – guiding the students correctly pronouncing the word. Engage all students in saying the word together or three times.

2. Explain – using language familiar to the students and provide a clear meaning of the words. Providing a synonym or known phrase would be more useful.
3. Provide examples – by taking other words of variety of contexts until students firmly grasp the meaning.
4. Elaborate – providing learners an opportunity to elaborate word meanings by generating their own additional examples and visual representations.
5. Assess – involving quick informal checking or understanding during the lesson and summative evaluation in the form of quiz or test.

2.3 Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Besides classroom instructions, students are also needed to raise their passion on reading thus practicing skills would not need be the main focus. Extensive reading would be the best way to offer students choosing kinds of books they like to read about. At first, reading a simple book will consume their energy to understand the passages but after awhile the students will find another interesting point of reading that is story line. Therefore, it is necessary for them to choose books that they are comfortable with. However once they have started to read, some unknown words will unlikely occur, this will raise their curiosity toward the words. Some of the students will try to find the meaning from dictionary, others will try to guess from the context, while the rest will leave the meaning unknowingly. Every time the students acquire at least partial meaning of the words, it is called incidental learning. The process is mentioned as absorbing word meaning subconsciously (Ponniah, 2011). According to Carey (1978, taken from Ponniah, 2011) assures that some part of the words which were occurred since the students have started reading is referred to as “fast mapping” where this will lead students to finally understand the whole meaning after the words were repeatedly occur in the text.

Extensive reading is one method that could facilitate the students to have enrich their vocabulary incidentally. One benefit of implementing the extensive reading, is that students incidentally grab some new vocabularies through the

book they read. One example research from Elley (1991) with her “Book Flood” studies. Based on her studies of eight months, came some improvements in language skills including reading comprehension, language structures, word recognition, oral repetition and writing. Furthermore, Elley (1991:378-379) elicits those benefits she got to the following factors:

1. Extensive input of meaningful print
2. Incidental learning
3. The integration of oral and written activity
4. Focus on meaning rather than form
5. High intrinsic motivation.

Besides it gives benefit in many factors, incidental reading defines as reading without any intention other than enjoying the words played in the story where students interested to read up to the end of the book. Incidental vocabulary learning motivates learners since it involves learners’ ability in guessing the new words from contextual clues (Jameel, 2011). Evenmore, extensive reading creates an enjoyable reading environment since they are free to choose what they want to read for themselves from reading materials (Hammer 2003, Nation 2001 taken from Jameel 2011).

3. Research Methodology

The following research will apply descriptive and experimental methods. Furthermore pre and post test would be taken from Paul Nation Vocabulary Test of 14,000 version containing 140 multiple-choice items, with 10 items from each 1000 word family level. (Nation 2012). The result then would be classified into some size of levels.

For the experimental method, there is no control group and some treatments would be applied in the classroom activities for three months. The final result will be taken compared with the pre test and discussed for further explanation.

The subjects are taken from the 22 second semester of BBI students who are taking Reading and Vocabulary 2. The duration of vocabulary section is

around 30 minutes including classroom exercises. For the vocabulary list, it is adopted from Interactions 2 (Hartmann and Kirn:2007).

The data will be gathered from the vocabulary size level 140 items which is adopted from Paul Nation Vocabulary Test. Result of the test would be calculated based on the test vocabulary categorization for further analysis and discussion.

After the data gathered, it will be calculated by using Microsoft Excell and furthermore the sum will be used to relate with the students experience in reading. The result will be elaborated descriptively based on the theories on receptive vocabularies learning and incidental reading process.

4. Results on Vocabulary Size Test

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the vocabulary size test was delivered in two classes those are 2PBI1 and 6PBI1 where both have been exposed with various English passage, either academic or pleasure readings. For 2PBI1, for two semesters they have been taught strategies in reading and vocabularies also they have to read various books they like as their project assignments. On the other hand, 6PBI has learned Reading and Vocabulary for 2 semesters and ended with extensive reading on the 5th semester.

Based on their experiences and learning process during their reading classes, it is assumed that the students' vocabulary knowledge is also varied depending on learning progress. In order to measure their receptive vocabulary skills, the vocabulary size test of 14000 was delivered. Furthermore the overall result is shown as follows:

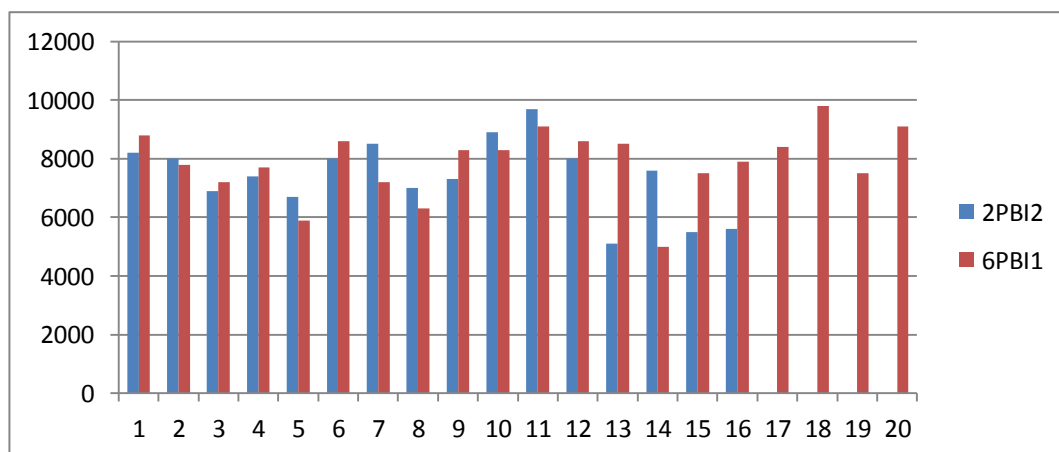


Figure 2 Overall result on Vocabulary Size Test

The average score numbers are resulted variously in both classes, the second semester students shows lower score than the sixth one. For 14000 as the perfect score, the second semester achieved 7400 and 7875 for the sixth semester. For the detailed scores of the vocabulary size on each class are shown below,

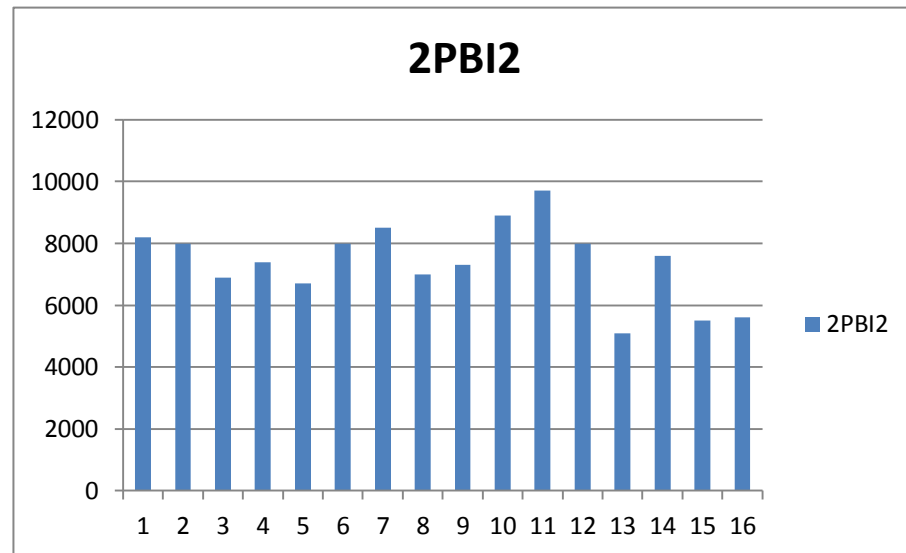


Figure 3 Overall result on Vocabulary Size Test

From the graph, it can be seen that student 12 achieved the highest that is 9700 whereas the lowest score is for student 14 with the score of 5100. There are six students who obtained around 8000 points. Furthermore students who have higher scores are not necessarily smart students; some of them are average ones. However these students are those who like to spend their time with reading, such as novels and English newspapers. It can be supported from their reading report where they always list down their reading journal sustainably.

Furthermore the following is the result shown by the sixth-semester students who have experienced the extensive reading taught in the class. Some students who participate in the class are also part-time teachers where they are actively using English whenever they teach. The vocabulary score is shown below,

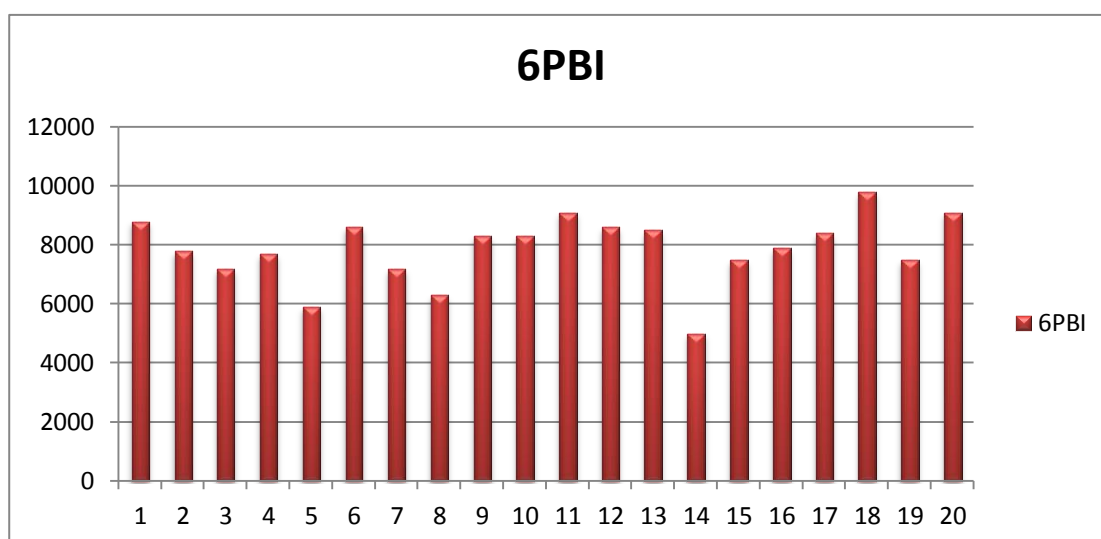


Figure 4 Overall result on Vocabulary Size Test

There are twenty students involved in this test, and the result shows that they achieved for 7875. The highest score is obtained by student 18 with the score 9800, regarding to her profession as an English teacher where she may use English more often than other students. Other higher scores achieved by students 20, where he got 9100. One reason that may explain his score is that this particular student is not only clever but also he loves reading and blogging therefore his exposure to English vocabulary is wider. On the other hand the least score is achieved by student 14 which apparently he is one of the passive students in the class. He may not take many opportunities in expanding his skill in reading or maybe uninterested in it.

Based on the vocabulary test, it shows that there are certain group of words were answers correctly, on the other hand there are number of vocabularies have lesser correct numbers.

Vocabulary	Total words	Correct Answers
<i>see, time, period, poor, drive, jump, shoe, standard, basis, stone, upset, pub, circle, microphone, soldier, dinosaur, lonesome, quiz, input, vocabulary, cube, bacteria, thesis, yoghurt, kindergarten, eclipse, octopus, mystic, yoga, puma, reptilian, plankton, atop</i>	33 words	35 – 30

<i>maintain, drawer, patience, nil, scrub, strap, dash, compound, crab, weep, haunt, butler, accessory, olive, stealth, null, authentic, puritan, monologue, egalitarian, pigtail, alum, caffeine, beagle, thesaurus</i>	25 words	25 - 29
<i>jug, deficit, nun, compost, premier, azalea, palette, mumble, counterclaim, marsupial</i>	10 words	20 – 24
<i>pro, pave, devious, weir, whim, perturb, lintel, peasantry, aperitif, hutch, haze, soliloquy, impale, jovial, atoll, bawdy</i>	16 words	15-19
<i>figure, threshold, cavalier, quilt, shudder, bloc, demography, gimmick, erratic, marrow, hallmark, upbeat, crowbar, excrete, emir, hessian, gauche</i>	17 words	10 -14
<i>remedy, peel, miniature, tummy, allege, fracture, malign, veer, bristle, regent, fen, lectern, pallor, aperitif, refectory, coven, talon, rouble, communiqué, canonical, augur, erythrocyte, cordillera</i>	23 words	5 - 9
<i>restore, candid, miniature, locust, cranny, ruck, spleen, trill, ubiquitous, skylark, didactic, limpid</i>	12 words	1- 4

Table 3. List of vocabulary

The groups of vocabulary above shown that there are 33 words are the most correct words among 35 numbers. If it is analyzed carefully, those are word families which are commonly occurred in kinds of passages. Furthermore, the vocabularies are probably productively used by the students. On the other hand, the least score group of words probably uncommon for the students since these words are likely occurred in magazine or a very specific article.

From the SSR (sustained silent reading) result, it is shown that students gain their interest in reading progressively. Based on the class observation, they wrote their reading journal daily and could have read up to ten to fifteen pages daily. However, there are some students who still have lack of interest since it seems that they are unmotivated in reading. At the end of the semester, the students were asked to make a book review based on the book that they have read. Most of them stated that they enjoy reading their chosen books and will likely to read another book in the future even though it is not part of the assignment.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to measure how the size vocabulary level of BBI students is particularly on 2nd and 6th semester. It may be of researcher and teacher's interest to make a word available for receptive and more importantly, for productive use. However the results shows that students with the average of seven thousands-vocabulary level are basically able to cover general academic readings, newspapers, and novels.

It is found that receptive learning contributes more to receptive knowledge, whereas productive learning more likely leads to increase in productive knowledge. (Zong, 2011). However during the observations, it was found that students are still having difficulties in understanding some sentences. They usually consult the dictionary but mostly skip the difficult words instead. It suggested that besides writing down their reading journal, students can also create *a glossary log* where they can collect and write down every new word in a simple notes besides the book.

Besides teaching and learning tasks, personal factors like needs and motivation also influence the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge. Here, students who are more successful achieve higher score than the less ones. It suggested that the advanced learners can contribute more in order to raise the motivation the lesser ones. *Reading group* could be very useful either for both level of the students, where the ones who love reading could share their interest and passion toward the book with other member of the group who have lesser motivation in reading.

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