Research Article

Measuring Vocabulary Knowledge of English as a Foreign Language among Undergraduate Jordanian Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aimed at measuring the size of vocabulary knowledge of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among undergraduate Jordanian students at different Jordanian universities. For this purpose, research questions were presented and the answers to these questions were provided and discussed. The participants of this study consisted of 39 undergraduate Jordanian students. A vocabulary test was used by the researcher to investigate the vocabulary storage of undergraduate Jordanian students. The results of the study indicated that the vocabulary size of Jordanian undergraduate students is fairly high. This is particularly true with the first few thousand-word list: 2000 and 3000-word list. However, for the 5000-word list, 10000-word list, university students have a lack of vocabulary storage which normally resulted in many difficulties in English language skills.

Introduction

Vocabulary is considered to be the soul of language, as it is a great significance to language learners. Words can be simply described as the building blocks of a language since they refer to objects, actions, and thoughts. Without vocabulary, merely no messages can be delivered. The ultimate role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by many theorists and researchers in the field language acquisition. Consequently, several types of approaches, techniques, exercises and practice have been presented into the field of vocabulary teaching (Hatch & Brown, 1995). It is highly recommended that teaching vocabulary must not only involve of teaching certain words but also concerns at equipping learners with the essential strategies to expand their vocabulary knowledge (Hulstjin, 1996; Goebel, 2001).

Moreover, the ultimate goal for English language learners is to improve the communication skill which will result a successful and better communication in their academic and daily life. Successful communication can be defined as delivering a comprehensible message to the hearer. So the researcher notices through his little experience in teaching that the most common problem that the Jordanian undergraduate students face is that they cannot express their thoughts and ideas freely through vocabulary knowledge.

Problem Statement

Communication competence greatly depends on vocabulary storage. Whenever the vocabulary storage increased, the more skilled communicator learners would be achieved, and vice versa; that is, vocabulary and communication skills are very interrelated. Through the researcher's observation, Jordanian undergraduate students seem to have failed in terms of communicative competence in English, and this most probably occurred due to their limited number of vocabulary. Although previous studies conducted on vocabulary ((Alahmad 2020 ; Shakibaei, Namaziandost, & Shahamat, 2019 ; Namaziandost, Neisi, & Banari, 2019 ; Javier & Jubay, 2019 ; Alshalan, 2019 ; Sarifa, 2018) have revealed interesting findings, little attention so far has been paid to measuring the size of vocabulary knowledge of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among

undergraduate Jordanian students at different Jordanian universities. Thus, this research is concerned with measuring vocabulary storage in undergraduate Jordanian learners and in relative with communicative skills. In other words, it seeks to investigate the vocabulary storage of the students, and whether or not, this capacity will play a role, or even contribute positively, in enhancing the successfulness of communication skills.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To measure the vocabulary storage of EFL undergraduate learners i.e. how many words do they have.
2. To specify the number of the words which undergraduate students know based on Nation's 1990 Vocabulary Levels Test.

Research Questions

The study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the vocabulary size of EFL undergraduate students?
2. How many words do EFL undergraduate students know from the 2000-word level, 3000-word level, 5000-word level, university level and 10000 word levels?

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to encourage educators to develop some methods for learning difficult vocabulary by using different words i.e. the word that does not exist in their material to serve them in different situations. Moreover, the study tries to motivate undergraduate students at Jordanian universities to increase their vocabulary knowledge formally in the classroom and informally through communication with others outside the classroom.

Previous Studies

Jordanian students are often disappointed, and frustrated when they try to communicate with others in English language, or when they fail to convey their massages to others because they lack enough vocabulary to have meaningful conversation. Which normally it results spending time looking for appropriate words. In fact, this shows that vocabulary items and words use are very essential for students as they lead a better communication experience.

Vocabulary knowledge is an essential component in second language (L2) acquisition. By learning new words, students will be able to master their listening, speaking, reading and writing vocabularies and can improve receptive and productive in L2. Nassaji's (2004) study revealed that ESL students who had a huge capacity of vocabulary knowledge had more effective use of certain types of lexical strategies than their weaker counterparts. Depth of vocabulary knowledge has resulted a significant contribution to inferential success over and above the contribution made by the learner's degree of strategy use. Pawar, Kajave and Mali (2005) also found that English language learners who have limited vocabulary storage were unable to understand texts at the grade level than their English-only peers. Such students were described as poor on assessments in these areas and were at critical point of being diagnosed as learning disabled.

Consequently, Kawauchi (2005) elaborated that vocabulary competence and skills are main tools for successful communication in a second language. Words are the basic of meaning. Sentences, paragraphs, and whole texts are contextualized from words. Language ability is often considered as the number of words that the learners have.

A key issue is that estimates of vocabulary size vary wide. As such, considering the total number of vocabulary size for first graders approximately about 2,500 (Dolch 2002 & Smith 2002) to about 25,000 (Shibles & Smith, 2002), and for university level students from 19,000 (Doran & Kirkpatrick, 2002) to 200,000 (Hartmann, 2002), the situations here with such wide variety make it impossible to simply ask someone how many words you know. As a result, estimates must be based on testing people's vocabulary knowledge of a sample of words and extrapolating to a final state. To demonstrate such tests, decisions must be made about what is taken as evidence of knowledge of a word, what constitutes a single word (e.g., should individuals who know the word *walk* be credited with knowing the word walking?), and how a sample of words is selected to represent the language. All these considerations open the door to huge discrepancies in vocabulary size estimations. Furthermore, to help students improve their vocabulary, it will be necessary to put into practical side of what is already known about vocabulary acquiring and evaluate and refine the results.

It has been suggested that many different strategies to teach specific words related to specific context as well as particular sets of words related to specific subjects (Graves, 2000). There are numerous aspects to learn a word – the meaning, the

spelling and pronunciation, the structure of the word, and the other words it can be used with, and so on. In addition, a one's storage of vocabulary is a net of words that function as an interconnected net rather than as separate items (Meara, 2004).

Nagy & Scott (2000) classify several dimensions that elaborate the complexity of what it means to know a word. First, word knowledge is incremental, which is related to the meaning that readers need to have several exposures to a word in text variety before they "know" it. Second, word knowledge is multidimensional. This is because many words have multiple senses.

Arab learners of English face many problems in productive skills (speaking and writing). This fact has been clearly discussed by many researchers. Such as. Abdul Haq (1982), Harrison, Prator and Tucker (1975), Abbad (1988) and Wahba (1998). Jordanian students, for example, learn English in their home country where Arabic is their native language. So English is limited in Jordan only through formal classes, i.e. in the classroom, language tutors are native speakers of Arabic. This has resulted a little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language which is only possible when students face native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists or any other purpose.

To sum up the previous studies, vocabulary storage is fundamental in language learning: students should have enough amount of vocabulary storage to allow them expressing their thoughts and feelings. Few studies were carried in Jordanian context about vocabulary size. Studies showed that Jordanian students usually lose many vocabulary since the contact with native speakers is limited in Jordan. Finally, it is highly recommended to carry such studies to assess the vocabulary storage of Jordanian students which will determine the logical number of words and how to apply them in text.

Methodology
A vocabulary test has been used by the researcher to investigate the vocabulary storage for undergraduate Jordanian students. This instrument was designed by (Nation, (1990) to measure knowledge of both academic and general vocabulary and it consists of samples of words at five frequency levels. Each level covers words of particular kind of vocabulary. This test design is based on Nation's 1990 Vocabulary Levels Test.

The subject of this study consists of 39 undergraduate Jordanian students who were currently studying at Jordanian universities. It was quite difficult to have a larger sample due to time constrains. In addition, students were occupied with other academic matters.

Results and Conclusion
The test items were consisted of 18 points in this level. All items were nouns. The mean score is 12.9 with standard deviation (SD) of 2.7. If student scores 9 out of 18 (50%) on the 2,000-word level, this indicate that they know approximately 50% (1000) of the first 2,000 words of English. If this logic has been applied to the results of the rest of the test (i.e., the 3,000, 5,000, University Word Level, and the 10,000-word level), an approximate estimate of vocabulary storage can be considered.

The vocabulary test 2000-word level consisted of 18 points. Each point was given 1 point and so the total score of the test was 18 marks. In order for any student to get a high grade in this level, he/she must score 12 and above. The result showed there are no one who got less than 6 marks, while there were 19 students who obtained between 7 to 12 marks. The highest scores were recognized in the third category (the high level), as 20 students out of 39 achieved more than 13 to 18. This represent that the majority of the students have passed the test successfully. The result could be justified by saying that the Jordanian undergraduate students have the vocabulary of simplified reading books. Yet, knowing only the 2000 most frequent word families or 80% of the words in a written text gives a second language learner only a general idea of what is being stated in a text, without ensuring deep reading comprehension. A much better reading comprehension power is ensured if a reader knows the meanings of at least 90% of the words in a text.

While in the second category 3000 words level 23 students scored between 7-12 marks. In the third category 4 students scored between 13-18 marks. The majority of the students did not accomplish high score due to the difficulty of this level. This result could be enlightened by saying that the Jordanian undergraduate students have no basis for beginning to read un-simplified texts.

The third level 5000 word consisted of 18 points as the two levels above. Each point is given 1 point. The total score of the test is from 18marks. In order for any student to get high knowledge in this level he/she must score 12 marks and above, out of 18. The result shows only 6 students out of 39 have scored 12 and above in 5000 words level, which means that the majority of the students' level has been decreased. This result could be clarified by saying that the Jordanian undergraduate students' lack of vocabulary knowledge and general reading like fiction, magazine and university books.

The university word level consisted of 18 points. Each point was given 1 mark so the total score of the test is from 18marks. In order for any student to get high knowledge of vocabulary he/she must score 12 marks and above. Only 17 students at the first category scored less than 5. At the second category, 14 students scored 7-12 marks. While at the third category 8 students scored 13-18 marks. This result could be categorized by saying that the Jordanian undergraduate students did not achieve the specialized vocabulary of university texts.

Comparing the last level (10000) which represent the most difficult level in regards with all the previous levels above, it consisted of 18 points. Each point is given 1 mark so the total score of the test was out of 18marks. In order for any student to safe knowledge of vocabulary storage, he/she must score 12 marks and above as it is clear no student out of 39 have scored 12 and above in this level. This means that the majority of the students could not be able to last representing vocabulary knowledge. This result clearly revealed that the Jordanian undergraduate students did not have a wide large of vocabulary storage similar with the 5,000-word level, combined with learning prefixes and roots.

To conclude, we can say that there are 6 categories in which we can classify our students' level based on the whole test. As mentioned before, the whole test was out of 90 marks, 1 student was considered as 'very weak', while there were 12 students who can be labeled as 'weak'. And there were 14 students who are categorized as 'average', while 9 students proved to be as 'good'. In addition, 3 students were described as 'very good'. Finally, no student was classified as 'excellent'. This result indicate that the Jordanian students' level of vocabulary is in a very critical condition and that will affect their academic careers. Jordanian undergraduate Arab students will face many problems in the all languages skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. Based on the results, the lack of vocabulary and misusing it in different situations are considered to be the most important points. Future research could be done to investigate this area with a larger number of students.

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