



## DEPTH AND BREADTH OF PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LEARNERS

**Gemma R. Pascual**, Associate Professor II, Cagayan State University – Lal-lo Campus,  
Cagayan North, Philippines

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**Abstract:** *The study generally assessed the depth and breadth of productive vocabulary knowledge of EFL Learners. Specifically, it determined the profile of the language learners as regards to age, sex, course enrolled, year level, and educational attainment, occupation and income of parents. It also assessed the student's frequency of reading specific literary pieces and English references; student's extent of English language exposure; the vocabulary performance level of the learners and the relationship between the different profile and frequency of reading texts and English language exposure to their acquisition of vocabulary. The study used the descriptive correlational design. Data were elicited from the 100 EFL learners enrolled in both the elementary and secondary levels chosen by simple random sampling technique. Data were gathered from the result of the Vocabulary Levels Test designed by Paul Nation and a questionnaire to gather personal information from the learners. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To determine the vocabulary performance level, the mean score and standard deviation were used and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson  $r$ ) was used to determine relationships. Majority of the learners performed high in the 2000-word level; had enough vocabulary in the 3000-word level, had not obtained mastery level in the 3000 and 5000-word levels. However, they performed better in the University word level compared to their performance in the 5000-word. Sex and course of the learners significantly affected their level of vocabulary knowledge. The learners who frequently read materials written in English and those who frequently use the English language in writing their ideas have wider vocabulary knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *English language exposure, productive vocabulary knowledge, literary pieces, reading texts, word level*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Study Background

In the last 25 years, the field of second language acquisition has seen renewed interest in vocabulary learning and acquisition. There are many dimensions to vocabulary learning and



acquisition as reflected in the multitude of different areas of research being done on the topic.

There exists conflicting views among language professionals concerning the relative superiority of two approaches to learning second language vocabulary: learning words in context vs. learning words out of context. Moreover, in recent literature dealing with vocabulary acquisition, there can be seen increasing advocacy for explicitly teaching words out of context at an early stage of language acquisition, with more context-based vocabulary learning taking place at later stages of language development. To justify, these advocates often draw attention to the paradoxical situation facing the novice L2 (second language) learner of having to learn vocabulary through extensive reading or listening when they don't know enough words to read or listen well. This suggests the logical impotence of helping beginners explicitly learn the basic 3000 word families thought to represent the fundamental lexical competence by which learners can read independently and acquire language in a natural manner (Broady, et al, 2010).

In the other side, research in vocabulary in second or foreign language (L2) is characterized by a great deal of fragmentation as well as inconclusive results. The readers who read articles and books with the hope of finding answers to questions concerning vocabulary acquisition and development are often left with more doubts than certainties. However, knowledge of the number of words known by L2 learners is crucial in any learning context, but of paramount importance when such learning takes place in primary or in secondary education. In this context, learning as measured by tests, is going to be reflected in school, and as a result is going to have an impact on student's lives. At the beginning of a new school year, teachers need to know how many words students know productively in order to be in a position to assess students' vocabulary gains at the end of the course and diagnose possible gaps. Teachers need also to estimate their students' vocabulary size to set language levels in each course, to program language activities and to carry out motivated selections and materials. Such knowledge is also important for test and textbook designers as well as vocabulary researchers: for the former because they are better informed to create materials and tests suitable to different levels and educational needs, and for the latter, because empirical data from different groups of subjects can provide



baseline for comparison and help identify patterns for vocabulary development (Schmitt, 2010).

This paper attempts to synthesize for the reader the major findings of research into vocabulary learning and acquisition among the students of Cagayan State University at Lal-lo as an attempt to find solutions to the perennial problem of faculty/teachers that could not make their students express their ideas orally and in writing.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The determined the profile of the language learners as regards to age, sex, course enrolled, year level, and educational attainment, occupation and income of parents. It also assessed the student's frequency of reading specific literary pieces and English references; student's extent of English language exposure; the vocabulary performance level of the learners and the relationship between the different profile and frequency of reading texts and English language exposure to their acquisition of vocabulary.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

The study used the descriptive correlational design. It described the profile variables, the student's frequency of reading specific literary pieces and English references; student's extent of English language exposure; and the vocabulary performance level of the learners. It further determined the relationship between the different profile and frequency of reading texts and English language exposure to their acquisition of vocabulary.

### **Respondents**

Data were elicited from the 100 EFL learners enrolled in the College of Teacher Education both in the elementary and secondary levels. They were chosen by simple random sampling technique.

### **Instruments**

The Vocabulary Levels Test designed by Paul Nation (2000) and a questionnaire to gather personal information from the learners were used in the study. The Vocabulary Levels test was a 90 item C-test type composed of 18 statements. Each statement has a missing vocabulary with the first 2-5 letters given to serve as a clue to the vocabulary word asked. These 18 words represent the vocabulary identified in the different levels (2000, 3000, 5,000, university and 10,000).



The questionnaire was composed of two parts. Part I elicited information about the profile of the respondents and Part II determined the frequency of reading literary pieces and English references and Part III elicited data on the extent of use of the English language in reading, speaking, listening and viewing.

### **Analysis of Data**

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency count and percentages for the profile variables, weighted mean using the 3-Point scale for the frequency of reading literary pieces and frequency of using English language in reading and writing and media exposure. To determine the vocabulary performance level, the mean score and standard deviation were used and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson r) was used to determine relationships.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Frequency of Reading Specific Literary Pieces**

The students sometimes read materials such as news, fables, adventure stories, fairy tales, and grammar books. Students had not yet designed a specific schedule in reading to acquire a wide range of vocabulary. This situation is attributed to the emerging phenomenon that students are less interested to read. They prefer to watch television dramatization of the novels they are supposed to read.

### **Students' Frequency of Reading English References**

The students always read the Bible an indication that the students and their families used to read the Bible in church services. Students sometimes read other materials like novels, newspapers, textbooks, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. They only do this as needed or when their academic subjects require them to do so. This trend shows students' lack of interest in reading.

### **Extent of English Language Exposure**

The students always listened to English as they have mobile phones where songs are saved. In listening to songs, they do two things at the same time. As they learn English words, they are also entertained by the songs they hear. They become more inspired to learn English words.

### **Vocabulary Performance of the Students**

The productive vocabulary knowledge of the students is presented in different levels – the 2000 word, the 3000 word, the 5000 word, the university word and the 10000 word levels.



The 2000 word contains the frequency words that all learners need to know in order to function effectively in English. They need to know these words to enable them to read complicated texts.

The majority of the learners performed high in the 2000-word level. Out of the 18 words being tested, the students (70 percent) obtained scores 16 and above. The students have a wide range of vocabulary in the 2000-word level. Hence, they know at least 90% of the words they need to know in this level.

Similarly the 3,000-word contains the frequency words that all learners need to know in order to function effectively in English. They need to know these words to enable them to read complicated texts. However, the level of difficulty of the vocabulary words is greater.

Out of the 18 vocabulary words used as representatives, the highest score garnered was only 17. However, most of the students obtained scores from 9-11. Generally, out of the 100 respondents, 63 students obtained scores higher than the mean (9.24). The learners have enough vocabulary in this particular level, but they have not obtained mastery level.

**Table 1. Vocabulary performance of the students**

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
2000 Word Level	15.14	2.17
3000 Word Level	9.24	3.05
5000 Word Level	9.26	3.642
University Word Level	9.75	3.11
10,000 Word Level	4.68	1.97

The 5000-word level represents the upper limit of general high frequency vocabulary that is worth spending time on in class. In this study, the mean score was 9.26. Sixty percent of the students performed higher than the mean score. Hence, the students have not obtained mastery level. According to Nation, to obtain mastery, learners must at least obtain a score of 16 out of 18. The learners lack the necessary vocabulary knowledge to express themselves in their classes.

The University Word level contains words which help learners in reading their textbooks and other academic reading materials. The learners performed better in this level compared to their performance in the 5000-word. The majority got 14 and below.



The learners have not acquired the vocabulary words to help them function well in class. This finding conforms to the findings of Nation that the vocabulary level of the students declines as the level increases.

Finally, the 10,000-word level contains the more common lower-frequency words in the language. These are the words that are rarely used in daily conversations, but are useful in class discussions. The learners obtained a very low score since 100 percent obtained scores from 9 – below. They do not know most of the words in this particular level.

### **Relationship between Vocabulary Performance of the Students and Select Variables**

Results revealed that sex and course of the learners significantly influenced their level of vocabulary knowledge while the rest of the variables like age, educational attainment, occupation and income of parents did not. Female learners performed better than the males. Hence, the former have wider vocabulary knowledge than the latter. On the other hand, BSEd learners performed better than the BEEd which means that the BSEd learners have obtained wider vocabulary knowledge needed to understand texts in their classes.

Moreover, learners who frequently read materials written in English and those who frequently use the English language in writing their ideas have wider vocabulary knowledge. The more frequent the English language is used in both reading and writing, the wider the vocabulary acquired.

**Table 2. Relationship between vocabulary performance of the students and select variables**

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Probability	Statistical Inference
Sex	.220 <sup>*</sup>	0.028	Significant at 0.05 level
Course	.421 <sup>**</sup>	0.000	Significant at 0.01 level
Frequency of Reading English Materials	.237 <sup>*</sup>	0.018	Significant at 0.05 level
Frequency of Using English in Writing	.312 <sup>**</sup>	0.002	Significant at 0.01 level

## **CONCLUSIONS**

EFL learners have not yet designed a specific schedule in reading to acquire a wide range of vocabulary. They use the English language in their daily conversation and other forms of communication. Learners acquire enough vocabulary needed to function effectively in



English and to read complicated texts, however, they lack most of the vocabulary needed to perform well in their academic subjects.

Further, the female learners acquire wider level of vocabulary compared to the males and the BSED outranks the BEEd in terms of productive vocabulary. Finally, the more frequent the learners use the English language in reading and in writing, the wider the productive vocabulary they acquire.

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