

# ASSESSING STUDENTS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY ABILITY USING SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION TEST

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## ASSESSING STUDENTS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY ABILITY USING SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION TEST

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### ABSTRACT

Vocabulary development is critical from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. Vocabulary is a central factor in the process of language learning. This research is based on the idea that students are required to use English in daily interactions in the school's language program. Therefore, learning English vocabulary is crucial for improving students' language skills. Teachers must know the students' abilities before conducting the learning activities. This study used ex post facto research design to reveal students' vocabulary ability by conducting sentence construction tests. The study found that students' vocabulary is at a sufficient level. Therefore, students are required to improve their vocabulary to a higher level. This study highlights that various vocabulary activities should be intensified in the classroom to build up students' active vocabulary and enable them to speak communicatively.

Keywords: Students, English, vocabulary, ability

### INTRODUCTION

Language is a complex, specialized skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently (Astawa et al., 2017). A child learns the first language without any problem and practices as it is learned naturally. When language is learned naturally without any systematic practice, it is called acquisition (Mantra et al., 2019). However, language acquisition is the process by which a child acquires its mother tongue.

Therefore, vocabulary assessment is not only to decide what individual learners have achieved in a teaching and learning context but also to advance our understanding of the processes of vocabulary acquisition (Mantra &

Widiastuti, 2019). Whether in one's native or second language, acquiring new vocabulary is a continual process. There is a more significant distinction made between acquisition and learning. The term acquisition refers to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations with others who know the language (Widiastuti et al., 2020).

Anyone who attempted to learn a foreign language in school or when visiting a foreign country knows it is different from learning their native language. It means some children grow up in a social environment where more than one language is used and can acquire a foreign language in the circumstances similar to first language acquisition. One of the key issues in foreign language research and teaching is the differential success of children and adults in learning a foreign language (Hird et al., 2000).

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The role of age in language acquisition is a very disputed aspect of language learning theory (Adebileje & Akinola, 2020). While there is a great deal of variation in the estimates of the number of words known by native speakers of various ages and levels of education, there is general agreement that vocabulary acquisition occurs at an impressively fast rate from childhood throughout the years of formal education and at a slower pace on into adult life.

The acquisition is also in the context of learning a foreign language. Foreign language acquisition is thus distinguished from the first language and mother tongue. Native speakers' vocabulary seems to suggest that second language learners need to know many words. This is because studies of native speakers' vocabulary growth see all words as equal value to the learner. All languages have words. Language emerges first as words, historically and in terms of how we learned our first and subsequent languages (Mantra et al., 2021).

In teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language, especially in communicative skills in the classroom, a teacher should be creative in finding a way to effectively and efficiently arouse the student's interest to participate in vocabulary mastery at the school (Sun & Feng, 2009). Vocabulary is words or the total of words used in learning a language with the word's meaning. In learning vocabulary, we have to know the importance of it and also understand the words.

Vocabulary is needed at every stage of students' language development. This definition shows that vocabulary is the first element that English learners must learn to master English well (Imaniah & Nargis, 2017). In addition, with grammar, more can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. Students have been introduced to English vocabulary learning. The greater the

vocabulary mastered by them in the elementary class, the more outstanding the academic achievement they will achieve in the upper class. Vocabulary is one of the essential components in learning a second or foreign language (Suparsa & Mantra, 2020).

The vocabulary is developed using different methods and techniques, such as word games, word selection, word definition, search a word missing letter, matching, identifying words and completion (Deani & Widodo, 2020). Vocabulary has been called the building block of language learning. No one will say that vocabulary is unimportant. Vocabulary skill is one linguistic factor that influences the students' speaking ability. We have recently come to accept that our students have been right all these years when they have complained about knowing and not being taught enough words.

Vocabulary learning strategies are a branch of language learning strategies. Foreign language learners often need help regarding their vocabulary learning strategies (Handayani, 2020). Although learning vocabulary is challenging for foreign language learners, students can use various vocabulary learning strategies to overcome these challenges. Therefore, the strategy used in learning vocabulary is an essential topic for discussion in applied linguistics (Handayani, 2020).

Language learning is also influenced by factors related to the learner's environment. Several factors influence students' language learning strategies: (1) motivation, (2) gender, (3) cultural background, (4) attitudes and beliefs, (5) type of tasks, (6) age and language learning and stage differences, (7) learning style, and (8) tolerance of ambiguity. All those factors should be considered in teaching vocabulary to create effective learning processes.

The statement above reveals that vocabulary is essential, but the students

need to improve. This weakness was mostly caused by the English teacher's perception, who saw the small role of the study of vocabulary in language teaching. In addition, teachers can use tests to improve learning and the effectiveness of such instructional decisions by providing more objective information. The use of tests can have an immediate and direct effect on students' learning. Vocabulary tests have also been prepared as measures of general ability or intelligence and achievement in a particular subject field.

Presumably, good vocabulary knowledge and skills help students perform these tasks better than if they lack such competence. Still, neither vocabulary nor any other structural component of the language is the primary focus of the assessment. Once a sample of words has been selected, it is necessary to find out by assessing whether each word is known. In vocabulary studies, the criterion for learning vocabulary is generally difficult because of the large number of words that need to be covered in the time available for testing.

Based on the phenomenon described above, therefore, considering the importance of vocabulary in language teaching for the student's communication skills, this study was conducted mainly to analyze the students' vocabulary acquisition. This is because knowing students' vocabulary ability helps teachers plan more effective teaching and learning activities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The selection and use of an appropriate research design depend on the nature of the variables under investigation. The present study investigated the vocabulary by conducting a vocabulary assessment in the form of a teacher made sentence construction test. This study used an ex post facto research design. This is due to the fact that manifestation of the

variables has been previously and naturally taken place before the treatments were done. Thus, this study uses an ex post facto or non-experimental research design with descriptive analysis. In other words, the subjects under study have already occurred before the present investigation is conducted.

The data collected in this study were in the form of scores of the students' vocabulary measured using sentence construction tests. The main aim of this present study was to measure the acquisition of vocabulary mastery. The data obtained are analyzed; otherwise, they mean nothing of significance. The process of data analysis is first by scoring the students' answers of the sentence construction test. Then the results were converted using norm reference measure with five standard values, such as A (excellent acquisition), B (good acquisition), C (fair acquisition), D (insufficient acquisition), and E (poor acquisition).

## 23 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results and the discussion of the study were briefly elaborated and presented descriptively.

### Results

Table 1. Summary of the Research Findings

No	Raw Score	Standard Score	Total Subjects	Percent ages
1.	32 – 31	$\geq 30.93$ (A/Excellent)	5	16.67 %
2.	30 – 27	$\geq 26.24$ (B/Good)	3	10.00 %
3.	26 – 22	$\geq 21.56$ (C/Sufficient)	15	50.00 %

No	Raw Score	Standard Score	Total Subjects	Percentages
4.	21 – 17	$\geq 16.87$ (D/Insufficient)	5	16.67 %
5.	16 – 15	$\leq 16.87$ (E/Poor)	2	6.67 %
			30	100 %

The result of the data analysis by using norm reference measurement of five standard values clearly shows that:

1. There were five subjects or 16.67 % out of 30 students under investigation, showed excellent acquisition of vocabulary mastery.
2. There were 3 subjects or 10.00 % out of 30 students under investigation, showed good acquisition of vocabulary mastery.
3. There were 15 subjects or 50.00 % out of 30 students under investigation, showed sufficient acquisition of vocabulary mastery.
4. There were 5 subjects or 16.67 % out of 30 students under investigation, showed insufficient acquisition of vocabulary mastery.
5. There were 2 subjects or 6.67 % out of 30 students under investigation showed poor acquisition of vocabulary mastery.

Based on the above table, in general the research findings showed that the students could be considered as sufficient acquisition of vocabulary mastery. This is because the number of students who get sufficient acquisition in vocabulary mastery by using teacher-made sentence construction tests is valuably high. Their vocabulary areas were within academic vocabulary and daily used vocabulary.

## Discussion

The results of data analysis by using of norm-reference measure of five standard values showed that: (1) there were 5 subjects or 16.67 % out of 30 students under investigation showed excellent acquisition of vocabulary mastery, (2) There were 3 subjects or 10.00 % out of 30 students under investigation showed good acquisition of vocabulary mastery, (3) there were 15 subjects or 50.00 % out of 30 students under investigation showed sufficient acquisition of vocabulary mastery, (4) there were 5 subjects or 16.67 % out of 30 students under investigation showed insufficient acquisition of vocabulary mastery, and (5) there were 2 subjects or 6.67 % out of 30 students under investigation showed poor acquisition of vocabulary mastery. This means that the degrees of the students' acquisition of vocabulary mastery by using teacher-made sentence construction test were sufficient.

In learning English, students will focus on four skills that should be mastered, like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The four skills cannot be separated from one another because they are very closely related (Aswad et al., 2022). Besides the four skills, there is vocabulary study which is very important to support the four skills. The student's competence depends on their vocabulary mastery because vocabulary can influence the student's ability to study English.

Learning vocabulary is one of the first steps of learning a foreign language, yet a learner never finishes vocabulary acquisition. Studies of native speakers' speech seem to suggest that foreign language learners need to know a vast number of words. While this may be useful in the long term, it is an optional short-term goal. Vocabulary learning is only one goals of a range of essential purposes in the language classroom (Makhmudovna, 2022).

Vocabulary is a component of language material in learning English. Teaching English vocabulary is one of the most important language skills besides the other languages skill such as reading, listening and speaking. The student's communicative competence depends on their vocabulary mastery. With sufficient vocabulary, students can communicate and express the idea easily in both oral and written form.

Language learning success is the goal of every language learner. There are two components key to successful language learning, namely: what happens in the classroom and what happens outside class. Strategies related to how students behave towards their learning process are essential in language learning. Strategy learning has a vital role in implementing capability student language.

Because language is a means of communication, linguistic knowledge or knowledge of language vocabulary is the main thing in language learning. Therefore, linguistic knowledge is the center for communicative competence and the acquisition of foreign languages. The need for vocabulary learning and the role of students in developing their vocabulary learning is essential to study. Because learning vocabulary can only be done in class with practice outside the classroom, students must build their learning strategy significantly to develop their vocabulary (Hasbi et al., 2022).

In addition, learning sessions outside the classroom have the necessary support for participants to learn vocabulary development. Learners need to transfer what they have learned in class and choose a suitable strategy for learning. Students need to know how to learn vocabulary and monitor their progress. The importance of learning strategies vocabulary and the influence of internal factors and external cannot be separated. Use of student learning strategies mainly influenced by the process and their language learning

activities in an environmental context. The objective learner, the context of the learning situation, and the cultural values of the learner can expect to have a strong influence on the choice and acceptance of learning strategies Language. Appropriate language strategies are highly essential to be conducted to develop students' vocabulary.

## CONCLUSION

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in helping students learn about new words and is one way to build linguistic awareness, fostering language and literacy development. Based on the discussion of the findings above, it can be concluded that the student's vocabulary ability still needs to improve. Students still have the passive vocabulary. Therefore, teachers need to provide students with various learning activities to activate the students' vocabulary to be more active vocabulary. Having highly good vocabulary ability is very important to develop students' communication skills. This study also reveals that sentence construction test was effective in assessing students' vocabulary ability. Therefore, this study suggests that more intensive teaching activities should be carried out in the classroom, and students' vocabulary ability should be more often assessed to measure their vocabulary improvement.

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