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An Analysis of the Significance of Vocabulary in Fostering ESL/EFL Students' Writing Skills: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Writing skill is an important tool for academic success of any professional individual. This paper aims to analyze the indispensability of having vocabulary knowledge which in turn helps foster ESL/EFL students' writing performance for their academic success. To this end, the researcher has gathered the past research papers in order to collect the important details of the relationship between vocabulary and writing skills. Moreover, this paper presented theoretical perspectives of vocabulary and writing. In a similar vein, the researcher detailed the students' and researchers' perceptions on the role of vocabulary in fostering skills of the ESL /EFL students. It also mentioned the results of the past studies that show the clear correlation between vocabulary and writing and their contribution to development of writing skills with the required amount of evidence. The conclusion provides some important points for ESL practitioners and students with respect to developing vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Writing skills, Vocabulary knowledge, ESL/EFL students, Evidence based research

1. Introduction

Due to ever changing globalization and industrialization, communication has become pivotal part of one's life to progress in and keep up with employability. In this case, language as a tool to communicate becomes substantial for a successful person in any trade. Therefore, it is of downright momentous to develop and enhance language ability and language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Additionally, language is amalgamation of vocabulary and grammar; where vocabulary functions as building block of language and on the other hand, grammar sets linkage to words. Also, any language skill improves with profound daily practice and knowledge of respective aspects of the stipulated skill. Students usually learn

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language skills with the help of teachers and training in it. When it comes to writing skills, which is regarded of as a means of translating and expressing a writer's ideas and thoughts into texts, therefore the writer must have access to a large vocabulary and select words that are appropriate for his writing purpose ((Qasem et al., 2021).

According to Richard (2003: xv), writing is the most crucial ability for students to master. For students to improve their writing, more practice is required. Furthermore, among mentioned language skills, writing and speaking are known to be productive skills which are learned to advance students' academic and professional credibility. In addition, for any millennial, having effective writing skills is highly expected and also necessary for progress in professional growth, academic success and personal development. So, what aspects can be said to be important for fostering writing is an important question to be answered. The more accurate and appropriate answer is that vocabulary, grammar, organization, the formation of a design concept, and the recording of mental representations of knowledge and experience with subjects are all important factors (Jozsef, 2001, p. 5). Any writing process includes the systematic expression of ideas and thoughts. For this process, vocabulary is a must, so students or writers should have adequate amount of vocabulary to continue their flow of writing. For students, learning vocabulary is crucial since it makes it simpler for them to construct and write sentences for communication. In other words, when a student is well equipped with vocabulary knowledge he/she will apply the learned words in communicative sentences with the help of grammar. In contrast, owing to lack of vocabulary, majority of the students struggle to express their ideas, feelings and opinions in written form.

The students who have adequate vocabulary knowledge feel easy and comfortable to express themselves in writing and become effective writers as well. So the present study services to highlight the vocabulary knowledge and how it helps writes develop competence in writing skill by looking at various empirically conducted studies in the recent past. There have been many studies which highlighted and corroborated the significance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills; such studies are as follows: (Qasem et al., 2021), (Aksoy, 2021), (Boudribila, 2019), (Azro et al., 2018), and (Maskor & Baharudin, 2016) (Teaching & Faculty, 2015), (Aslanabadi, 2013). So, keeping in mind the importance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills, this article will focus on reviewing several research studies that look at both vocabulary and writing skills. The aims of this research are to: (1) analyze the importance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills; (2) present theoretical perspectives on writing and vocabulary; and (3) mention the students' perceptions on the effects of vocabulary on writing performance. Keep in mind the aims of this study; the main contribution of the paper is to report the evidence of the relationship between vocabulary and writing skills.

2. Theoretical Perspectives of writing and its relation to lexical proficiency:

2.1 The Definition of writing

Writing, being one of the most important productive skills, can be defined by many authors in the following ways: Coulmas (2003: 1) views writing as "a method of capturing language by means of visual or tactile markings." cited in Boudribila, 2019). In other words, writing can be described by Alamargot and Chanquoy (2001:1) as the conversion of abstract ideas into specific language constructions. Moreover, writing a narrative requires the ability to organise and generate ideas, establish strategies for ideas examine and improve previous work, and keep track of writing performance (Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009) cited in Maskor & Baharudin, 2016). It is worthwhile to know what the components of writing are. According to Oshima and Houge, cited in Azro et al. (2018), writing consists of five different elements: content, organization, language usage, mechanism, and vocabulary.

2.2 Types of Writing

Writing can be classified into different types based on its purpose and audience. So, the types of writing are academic writing, creative writing, general writing, scientific writing, and science writing. The description of each type of writing is detailed in the table 1 below.

Table 1 - Types of Writing

No	Type of writing	Description
1.	Academic Writing	According to Sultan (2013), academic writing is a particular form of writing employed by people in the academic and research communities that is characterized by its critical analysis, detachment from subjectivity, and presentation of well-organized, convincing arguments grounded in facts and logic. (p. 139)
2.	Creative Writing	The study of writing, including poetry, fiction, theatre, and creative non-fiction, and its settings via creative output and process reflection is known as creative writing. (Bennett, A., Clarke, G., Motion, A., & Naidoo, B. (2008).)
3.	Scientific Writing	Technical writing by a scientist for a peer audience of other scientists is known as scientific writing. For instance, what would be referred to as scientific writing is published in periodicals like Nature and Science. (Duke Graduate School Scientific Writing Source (n.d))
4.	Science Writing	Writing about science for the general public is known as science writing. Anybody with a scientific curiosity is the audience, which is considerably broader. Scientific American, Discover Magazine, and even National Geographic all publish science journalism. (Duke Graduate School Scientific Writing Source (n.d))
5.	Technical Writing	This writing includes a wide range of documents to inform or persuade a target audience with a specific need. Those documents include Memos, Graphics, Letters, Fliers, Reports, Newsletters etc., (Anderson, P. V. (1991))

2.3 Vocabulary and kinds of Vocabulary

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "vocabulary refers to words available in a particular language or words known and used by a person in a particular language. As previously stated, vocabulary is critical for language development; without it, our language or communication will not be established. It serves as a tool to make any person an expert speaker or communicator in any language, for that matter.

That is what Wilkinson (1972) says about the importance of vocabulary: "Without grammar, little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Therefore, vocabulary is very essential for any second language learner to progress and succeed in language skill improvement.

Table 2 - Types of Vocabulary

No	Type of vocabulary	Description
1.	High frequency vocabulary	They contain both content terms and structural words (in, for, the, of, a, etc). (Government, forest, production, boundary, etc). West's General Service List of English Terms, published in 1953 and including over 2,000 word families, is the most widely used collection of high frequency words. (West (1953))
2.	Low-frequency vocabulary	Words like bygone, perplexed, perpetuity, blasphemy, pastoral, etc. are included in this category. Almost 5% of academic texts' running words are made up of them. There are too many terms that have low frequency. (West (1953))
3.	Academic Vocabulary	These terminologies (strategy, period, balanced, sustained, etc.) are often used in various academic works. Around 9% of the running words in the text are comprised of these terms.

		570 word families that are not included in the GSL but that are widely used in academic literature across fields (based on corpus research in the arts, business, law, and science) make up this general-purpose academic word list, which is especially useful for reading (Coxhead, A. (2000))
4.	Technical Vocabulary	Technical terms are intimately tied to the text's subject and theme (indigenous, regeneration, timber, etc). As soon as we see them, we may infer the subject being discussed. In a text, they cover around 5% of the running words. Depending on the issue, they are said to vary.
5.	Business vocabulary	This vocabulary refers to words which are used in business purposes. A 560-word alphabetized collection of terms from Nelson's (2000) Business English Published Materials Corpus that appear 10 or more times in five books but are not included in the GSL or AWL.

2.4 The Importance of Vocabulary in Promoting Writing Skills

Since vocabulary is considered an effective tool to boost language skills, Moreover, the quality of our writing depends on the size of our vocabulary. Over the past two decades, researchers' attention on vocabulary has ventured into the field of ELT to develop language skills. Also, there have been several studies conducted to accentuate the significance of vocabulary in enriching writing skills.

According to Cameron (2001: 72), developing a practical vocabulary is critical to learning a foreign language at the fundamental level. Besides, the capacity of L2 writers to choose the right word to convey their semantic intention will be improved as their vocabulary grows (McCutchen & Stull, 2015), cited in Qasem, H., Asaad, M., & Shabdin, A. A. (2021). This means that an L2 writer's ability to produce a well-made writing piece depends on the level of vocabulary knowledge with which the writer can express the intended meaning to the respective audience. Thus, it can be stated that vocabulary plays an important role in promoting students' writing skills.

2.5 The past studies and results based on the correlation between vocabulary and writing skills

In order to provide the evidence for the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing skills, the researcher has listed out various studies which have highlighted the positive inferences about the role of vocabulary in enriching writing skills of the students.

Table 3- Evidence for the Relationship between Vocabulary Knowledge and Writing Skills

No	Researcher/s and year of the study	Focus of the study	Results and used methodology
1.	Qasem, H., Asaad, M., & Shabdin, A. A. (2021).	morphological awareness and productive vocabulary knowledge in L2 postgraduate students' academic writing	The findings also demonstrated that teaching and learning vocabulary to L2 postgraduate students might assist them by enhancing their writing productivity, enabling them to create texts and effectively communicate their views.
2.	(Teaching & Faculty, 2015)	The Link Between Writing and Lexical Competency	The study's findings showed that a reliable indicator of students' writing ability was their level of lexical competence encompassing the key vocabulary knowledge domains.

3.	Somantri, G. G., Widiastuti, R., & Indriani, E. A. (2020).	The connection between students' mastery of vocabulary and their writing ability	The author comes to the conclusion that there is a strong, significant, and favorable association between students' vocabulary proficiency and their writing ability.
4.	Azro, B. N., Of, F., & Training, T. (2018).	The Relationship Between Writing Ability And Vocabulary	The study's outcome was demonstrated by the 0.383 coefficient of correlation (rxy). It shows that the two variables have a little association with each other.
5.	Boudribila, W. (2019).	An examination of the connection between writing proficiency and vocabulary size	The results demonstrated a substantial relationship between both variables—vocabulary size and writing competence.
6.	Ratnaningsih, P. W., & Clara, C. (2021).	The Impact Of Vocabulary On Writing Ability And Reading Ability As A Moderating Factor	This study's findings demonstrated that vocabulary had a favorable, substantial impact on writing ability.
7.	Aksoy, H. (2021)	The relationship between Turkish language learners' levels of grammar and vocabulary and their writing abilities	Language and vocabulary have been found to have a favorable and significant impact on writing abilities.
8.	Ali, J., & Ali, M. (2016).	Exploring at How Vocabulary Helps EFL Students Improve Their Writing Skills	The researcher explored the relations between vocabulary and writing skills and suggested some recommendations.

2.6 Theoretical Perspectives of Writing and Vocabulary

Effective writing requires two components of vocabulary knowledge: knowing a large number of words and knowing these words well (Brun-Mercer & Zimmerman, 2015). At the same time, vocabulary dimensions (viz., depth and breadth) have a crucial role to play in enhancing writing proficiency. Previous studies explored the close-up relationship between vocabulary and writing performance. Such studies revealed that a student's vocabulary depth is the most important factor in shaping the quality of their writing ability, as vocabulary depth encompasses all aspects of a word (Read, 1993, 2000), as cited in Atai, M. R., and Dabbagh, A. (2010). Similarly, Schneider and Connor (1990) came to the conclusion that fluent topic development is influenced by vocabulary depth, as cited in Atai, M. R., and Dabbagh, A. (2010).

Concerning this, it can also be observed that there is a relationship between the depth of vocabulary and writing skills. In a study executed by Batty (2007) on the depth of vocabulary and written assessment, it was found that performance on the Word Association Test (WAT), which measures vocabulary depth, had a substantial predictive association with the written component of the Basic English Proficiency Test. In addition to vocabulary depth, another dimension of vocabulary, i.e., productive vocabulary has a significant role to play in order to enhance the writing performance of the students. This productive vocabulary is associated with productive skills such as writing and speaking skills, so productive vocabulary is a good predictor of the writing performance of ESL students. Nation (2001) emphasized that effective vocabulary knowledge requires finding and generating the proper spoken or written word form when attempting to convey a meaning through speaking or writing.

2.7 Students' Perceptions on the effects of vocabulary on writing performance

Many scientific publications have documented the effects of vocabulary on writing skills, where students expressed a plethora of positive responses to the correlation between vocabulary and writing skills. In addition, students who have a good amount of vocabulary identify the writing process as easy and comfortable, whereas

students who lack sufficient vocabulary observe the writing process as cumbersome because of the fact that writing requires translating and expressing a writer's ideas and thoughts into texts; therefore, the writer must have access to a large vocabulary and select words that are appropriate for his writing purpose (Qasem, H., Asaad, M., & Shabdin, A. A. (2021)).

Even the study conducted by Teaching, S. E., and Faculty, E. (2015) concluded that overall lexical proficiency was related to writing performance and could predict how proficiently students would write. Furthermore, in another study conducted by González (2017), it was discovered that, because of a limited vocabulary, university students who are learning a second language have trouble writing and expressing their ideas and views. A complete list of past studies—which have paid attention to vocabulary and writing skills correspondence—has been mentioned in Table 2. Based on the students' responses regarding vocabulary and writing skills, it can be assumed that the importance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills

2.8 Researchers' views on the importance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills

In the vocabulary development field, it has become clear that vocabulary mastery is a good predictor of writing quality (Lee, 2003; Munice, 2002; Reid, 1993; Schmitt, 2000), as cited in (Teaching, S. E., & Faculty, E. (2015)). Moreover, Read (2004) also claims that second language learners are aware that a limited vocabulary might make it difficult to communicate effectively in the target language. Harris (1979: 68) suggested that students take into account a number of factors, including grammar, form, vocabulary, mechanics, and style. Fletcher (1993) in Yonek (2008: 23) asserted that "a writer who has a wide vocabulary may express a wide range of ideas on paper." Also, Karakoç & Köse (2017) studied 175 EFL students in order to investigate the association between vocabulary size and reading and writing skills.

The results showed that there is a correlation between vocabulary and writing skills. Similarly, researchers have also expressed their views on the importance of vocabulary for writing improvement through recommendations in their work. For example, Ratnaningsih, P. W., and Clara, C. (2021), who conducted a study, mentioned the primary conclusions of the study as being that students are unaware of numerous vocabulary-related issues and that they are unaware of vocabulary acquisition. EFL writing suffers from insufficient vocabulary and methods. The study suggested that teachers should concentrate on teaching vocabulary and that students should be aware of various vocabulary-related issues as well as vocabulary learning methodologies.

So, this implies that both the students and teachers should concentrate on vocabulary learning methods and acquisition processes to develop vocabulary. At the same time, they find it difficult to perform written tasks due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge. There, it is downright significant to have vocabulary knowledge to enhance writing skills.

2.9 Study design and setting

In this first article of a three-article series, we introduce the evidence-based research approach. Evidence-based research is the use of prior research in a systematic and transparent way to inform a new study so that it is answering questions that matter in a valid, efficient, and accessible manner.

3 Conclusion

Regarding the significance of vocabulary knowledge in promoting the writing skills of ESL/EFL students, this paper reviewed the various studies to explore and examine the significance of vocabulary knowledge in promoting the writing skills of ESL/EFL students. In addition to that, the researcher explained the previous researchers' work, which paid attention to developing writing performance through vocabulary knowledge. It also furnished theoretical perspectives on the relationship between the two variables such as vocabulary and writing skills. At the same time, students' perceptions on the effects of vocabulary on writing performance and researchers' views on the importance of vocabulary in promoting writing skills have been highlighted in recent scientific work.

The findings of past research revealed that there is a correlation between vocabulary and writing skills, where students with high levels of vocabulary demonstrated effective writing performance, and on the other hand, students with low levels of lexical knowledge expressed difficulty in executing writing activities.

Therefore, it can be inferred for ESL/EFL educators, instructors, and researchers that the greater the vocabulary knowledge, the higher the writing performance among students. In terms of developing vocabulary knowledge, students should become acquainted with various vocabulary learning strategies and language learning strategies in order to improve a large amount of vocabulary over time. It is also the responsibility of the ELT practitioners to ensure that students are well aware of the mentioned strategies to develop vocabulary, which in turn helps improve writing skills.

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