

Correlation of Students' Vocabulary Range to their Listening and Speaking Performance

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to identify the correlation of vocabulary range to performance in listening and speaking. The study used the descriptive correlation research design to establish the relationship of the students' vocabulary size to their Listening and Speaking Skills. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength of relationship between the two variables- vocabulary size and Listening and Speaking Skills. Vocabulary Level Test, adapted from Nation (1990) [1], was used to measure vocabulary range, and the listening and speaking skills final mark was used for students' performance in listening and speaking. Based on the findings, vocabulary range has no significant relationship to listening and speaking skills of students. The result shows that students who have average vocabulary range can still achieve high performance grade in speaking and listening courses.*

KEYWORDS: vocabulary range, listening and speaking performance

INTRODUCTION

The proficiency of students to listen efficiently and to speak effectively can affect their studies and their everyday academic journey. Many students have different brilliant ideas they want to share, but they have limited English vocabulary to use to express these ideas. If they encounter some problems on the lessons being discussed, they are afraid or reluctant to ask questions for clarifications because they lack the oral communication skills needed in the teaching-learning process.

What is the connection of students' listening and speaking skills to their vocabulary knowledge? Vocabulary is very important because it's the foundation of all languages. It's the medium that we can use to express our thoughts and emotions, share information and knowledge, understand others and develop different aspects of relationships. Learning and mastering a foreign language such as English require hours of working through textbooks, doing grammar exercises and attending English courses. Many language experts believe that learning or clearly understanding vocabulary

is very crucial when it comes to success in learning a foreign language or mastering a second language.

Knowing the vocabulary range of learners and the correlation of this to their listening and speaking skills is very important. Based on many scientific researches, vocabulary aids reading development and increases comprehension. Students with low vocabulary size tend to have low comprehension and students with satisfactory or high vocabulary size tend to have satisfactory or high comprehension scores. When vocabulary size and English performance of students are clearly identified, teachers can easily develop effective and efficient instructional materials, classroom activities or lessons that are appropriate to the academic needs of the students.

In this study, the researcher investigated the vocabulary range of learners and the correlation of this to their listening and speaking performance. The researcher specifically documented and correlated the identified vocabulary range of respondents, their grades in listening and speaking skills.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Skills in listening have significant role in the success of English language learning. The capability to listen effectively contributes to the success of a meaningful communication. Mendelsohn (1994) [2] specified that, of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%. This only shows that students have more exposure to listening activities. Nunan (1998) [3] emphasized that listening involves an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages. Listening considered as a passive skill is a misinterpretation that may be connected to the process on how it is being assessed. Students are instructed to quietly do activities in the language lab, listen to pre-recorded dialogues, and write the answers to questions based on the audio.

Purdy (1997) [4] defined listening as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal), needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings". Rost (2002) [5] defined listening as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy.

Miscommunication usually happens when students have inefficient listening comprehension. Underwood (1989) [6] enumerated seven causes of obstacles to efficient listening comprehension. First, listeners cannot control the speed of the speaker's delivery. Second, listeners cannot always repeat misheard or misunderstood words. Third, listeners with limited vocabulary usually stop and think about the unfamiliar word and cause them to miss some parts of the speech. Fourth, listeners may fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another. Fifth, listeners may lack contextual knowledge. Sixth, listeners have difficulty in

concentrating in a foreign language. Seventh, listeners become worried and discouraged if they fail to understand a particular word or phrase.

To develop efficient listening comprehension, students should be guided during the listening process. DeVito (2000) [7] has divided the listening process into five stages: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Receiving stage is the intentional focus on hearing a speaker's message, which happens when listeners filter out other sources so that they can focus on the speaker's message. In the understanding stage, listeners attempt to learn or identify the meaning of the message. Remembering stage begins with listening; if listeners can't remember something that was said, they might not have been listening effectively. If understanding has been inaccurate, recollection of the message will also be inaccurate. The evaluating stage is judging the value of the message where the opinion or idea of the listener will influence how the message is evaluated. Responding stage is sometimes referred to as feedback where the listener becomes the speaker expressing his ideas on the topics or questions being discussed.

To be acknowledged as proficient in a foreign or second language, one must know how to speak the language fluently. Speaking does not focus only on accuracy or grammatically correct sentences, but it also includes comprehensive areas of vocabulary knowledge, functions, pragmatics and social skills. In current teaching methodologies employed in the acquisition of a second or foreign language, the first emphasis in speaking is fluency rather than accuracy.

Oral communication or speaking skills are very crucial in language courses. Brown (1994) [8] and Burns & Joyce (1997) [9] agreed that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. Carter & McCarthy (1995) [10] and Cohen (1996) [11] believed that speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the language skills that is very essential for assured meaningful language use. Vocabulary magnitude is an indicator of how well the second language learners can achieve academic language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and grammar. Nouri & Zerhouni (2016) [12] claimed that vocabulary knowledge performs a significant role in the process of language learning or acquisition and cannot be neglected in second or foreign language courses. Students have difficulty understanding what they have read and listened to when they encounter difficulty comprehending the exact meaning of the words used in the texts.

Vocabulary is significant to English language teaching because without adequate vocabulary size students cannot comprehend and recognize ideas of others or they will have difficulty expressing their own ideas. Hornby (1995) [13] defined vocabulary as the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings. According to Neuman & Dwyer (2009) [14]

vocabulary can be defined as words that we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking and words in listening. Nation (1990) [1] divided vocabulary knowledge into two types: receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. He defines receptive vocabulary as knowledge of words or lexical units that the language learners recognize from listening and reading, but cannot use the words productively in communication. Laufer & Goldstein (2004) [15] explained that productive knowledge is usually associated with speaking and writing while receptive knowledge is associated with listening and reading.

Lewis (1993) [16] claimed that lexis or vocabulary is the center or heart of a language. As students gain confidence in using and expressing their ideas in English, it is still important for them to acquire and understand more useful vocabulary knowledge and to develop their own personal vocabulary learning strategies. Wilkins (1972) [17] stressed that without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. It only shows that without vocabulary ideas can be hardly transmitted while without grammar some misunderstanding might happen in the process of transmitting the ideas. This impression is experienced by all people when they are in a new place where different languages are being used. Some useful words and expressions can really help people to survive in a foreign country. Schmitt (2010) [18] noted that learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books. When students can't understand the words used by the teacher in the lesson, they tend to use Google translate for a better understanding of the lesson at hand. Clear understanding of vocabulary helps students discuss and express their opinions with others in English.

One fundamental thing that teachers should note regarding the size of vocabulary needed to perform the language is how large the text coverage needed to gain adequate comprehension without outside assistance such as dictionaries and online translation. In short, teachers should know how to identify the number of unfamiliar vocabulary that should be explained before asking comprehension questions. Chang and Read (2006) [19] discovered that vocabulary teaching before a comprehension task helped less than hearing the input twice or reading and discussing the topic beforehand. Words will have to be met in many different contexts in order to develop mastery of the different word knowledge types, and this entails a long-term recursive approach to vocabulary learning. Single period of instruction may not only be ineffective, but may actually be counterproductive under certain circumstances. According to Laufer and Yano (2001) [20], L2 learners in academic settings are expected to overcome a vast amount of reading materials intended for native speakers, and yet studies conducted across high schools and universities indicate that their vocabulary knowledge does not amount to a quarter of the vocabulary known by their native speaking peers.

According to Nation (1993) [21], knowledge of around 3,000 word families is the threshold needed for tapping other language skills. Without this threshold, learners encounter problems understanding the language they are exposed to. Ellis (1997) [22] argued that vocabulary knowledge is a predictor of learners' discourse comprehension, which allows grammatical rules

to be patterned in the learners' mind. Having inadequate vocabulary hampers learners' reading comprehension in a way that makes it more likely the learners will face difficulties in the path of academic performance. Meara (1996) [23] believed that learners with big vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than learners with smaller vocabularies.

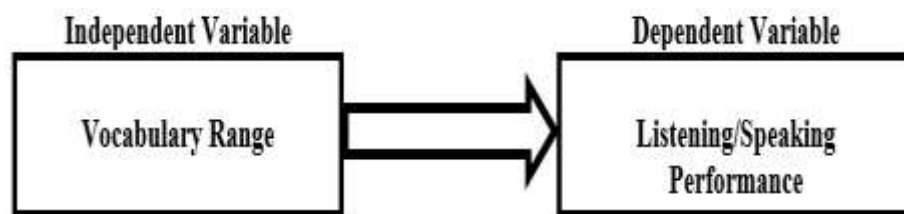
English language performance of students is very crucial in validating their overall development because this performance reflects the extent and quality of instruction in their educational lives. There are many factors that affect performance of learners and vocabulary size is just one of the factors that could guide teachers in assessing students' potentials. Nation (2001) [24] explained the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are highly related since lexical knowledge can assist language learners in comprehending written texts, and also reading may help in developing learners' lexicons.

Nation (2006) [25] found that in the level of 98% text coverage, 8,000 to 9,000 word families are needed by readers in order to gain sufficient comprehension of written texts without using any assisting comprehension tools, and 6,000 to 7,000 word families needed for spoken texts. It suggests that readers should master all the high frequency words consisting of 2,000 word families as well as the mid frequency words consisting of 7,000 word families. Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) [26] concluded that 2,000 to 3,000 word families, which are high frequency words, are needed in order to participate effectively in basic everyday oral communication. Van Zeeland & Schmitt (2012) [27] also claimed that learners need to know 2000-3000 word families for 'adequate' listening comprehension.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This part presents the research paradigm, research objectives, research methodology, research respondents and instruments used in the study.

Research Paradigm



Research Objectives

General Objective: This study aimed to identify the impact of students' vocabulary range to their performance in listening and speaking skills.

Specific Objectives: It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the vocabulary range of B1 Plus students?
2. What is the respondents' performance in listening and speaking skills?
3. Is there a significant correlation between the respondents' vocabulary range to their listening and speaking performance?

Hypothesis: "There is no significant correlation between the respondents' vocabulary range to their listening and speaking performance".

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive correlation research design. The study established the relationship of the students' vocabulary ranges to their performance in listening and speaking. The correlation method interpreted the relationship between the performance of students in listening and speaking skills to their vocabulary range. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviation, and weighted mean were used to analyze data to answer descriptive questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between vocabulary range and performance in listening and speaking.

Respondents and Research Instruments

The respondents of this study were the B1+ students from the English Language Institute of Royal Commission for Jubail, Saudi Arabia. The chosen section was identified by systematic and convenience sampling where all students in the section were included in the study. There were two research instruments involved in this study: Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) and Listening & Speaking final marks of respondents. The Vocabulary Level Test (Version A) adapted from Nation (1990) was used to measure vocabulary range. The VLT test is designed to measure learners' vocabulary level that can be considered as an indicator of the coverage of vocabulary in a text. A learner's total score needs to be multiplied by 100 to get their total vocabulary range of word families.

DATA COLLECTION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Identified B1 plus students took the Vocabulary Level Test, and Listening & Speaking Final Marks of respondents were collected. The data gathered were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviation, and weighted mean were used to analyze data to answer descriptive questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the correlation between vocabulary range and listening and speaking performance of respondents.

The following questions were answered based on the analyzed and treated data.

1. What is the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents?
2. What is the respondents' performance in listening and speaking?
3. Is there a significant correlation between respondents' vocabulary range and their listening and speaking performance?

Vocabulary Range (VR)

Table 1. Vocabulary Range of B1 Plus Respondents

Number of Respondents	Mean of Vocabulary Range (raw score)	Mean of Vocabulary Range (total score= r _s x100)
28	70.5714	7,057.1429

Table 1 shows the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents. Based on the table, the mean of respondents' vocabulary range (raw score) is 70.5714. Using the formula indicated by Paul Nation in getting student's vocabulary range (total score of word families), the mean vocabulary range of B1 Plus students is 7,057.1429, which is near to the target vocabulary level of 8,000 to have a 98% comprehension to complex spoken and written texts. It is statistically safe to claim that B1 Plus students have met or exceeded the (30) 3,000 word families' threshold needed for developing other language skills.

Listening and Speaking Performance

Table 2. Performance of Students in Listening and Speaking

Number of Respondents	Total of Listening and Speaking Mark	Mean of Listening and Speaking Mark
28	2461.0012	87.8929

The table show the total mark and mean mark of students in listening and speaking skills. Based on the table, the mean mark in listening and speaking is 87.8929 which is relatively high. Based on the grading system in the college, (A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D, F), the equivalent of 87.8929 is "B+" which is very close to the highest marks "A" and "A+".

Vocabulary Range and Listening/Speaking Performance

Table 3. Correlation between Vocabulary Range and Listening/Speaking Performance

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Voc Range	70.5714	11.36084	28
LS Mark	87.8929	10.96911	28
Correlations			
		Voc Range	LS Performance
Voc Range	Pearson Correlation	1	.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.359
	N	28	28
LS Mark	Pearson Correlation	.180	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.359	
	N	28	28

*. No Correlation

The table shows the correlation of vocabulary range to performance in listening/speaking. The result shows that there is no significant correlation of vocabulary range (70.5714) to performance in listening/speaking (87.8929) with the correlation of .180. Based on the result, there was no definite direction of the relationship. This only shows that there is a chance or possibility to get high mark in Listening and Speaking courses even if students have average vocabulary size.

Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) concluded that 2,000 to 3,000 word families, which are high frequency words, are needed in order to participate effectively in basic everyday oral communication. Van Zeeland & Schmitt (2012) also claimed that learners need to know at least 2000-3000 word families for 'adequate' listening comprehension. These two studies from Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) and Van Zeeland & Schmitt (2012) validate the result of this research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This part summarizes all the research questions with their answers based on the analyzed and interpreted data.

What is the vocabulary range of B1 Plus respondents?

The vocabulary size of B1 Plus students is 70.5714 or 7,057.1429 vocabulary word families. This is reasonably near to the target vocabulary size of 80.0 or 8,000 word families to have a 98% comprehension to complex spoken and written texts.

What is the respondents' performance in listening and speaking?

The respondents' performance in listening and speaking is 87.8929. This is B+ equivalent (86 to 90 from 100 points) in the rating scale used in the college.

Is there a significant correlation between respondents' vocabulary range and their listening and speaking performance?

There is no significant relationship between Vocabulary Size (70.5714) and Listening/Speaking Mark (87.8929) with the correlation of .180.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following statements are the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Vocabulary range is not a valid predictor for the performance of student in listening and speaking courses. If student's vocabulary size is low, his performance listening and speaking can still be average or even above average depending on the process of assessing these skills.

One factor that affects performance of students in listening and speaking is assessment procedure. Since speaking tests are usually done face to face with the evaluator, students have the chance to inquire about unfamiliar words on the questions asked. On the other hand, listening tests are conducted in computer labs wherein students have the chance to listen repeatedly on the recorded tasks. Based on this factor, it can be concluded that teachers who facilitate speaking tests give clear and comprehensible instructions to respondents during the speaking tests and listening tests.

Another factor that affects performance is the level of difficulty of the instrument used in the assessment. If the level of difficulty on the tasks given in the assessment is low or easy, the assessment result will automatically become high. Based on this factor, it can be concluded that the level of difficulty of the assessment instrument used during the speaking tests and listening tests are relatively easy or moderate.

Vocabulary enrichment activities should be integrated in all English courses like Grammar, Reading and Writing, E-learning to develop vocabulary size of students.

Teachers and examination planners should consider evaluating the nature and level of difficulty on Speaking and Listening tests or exams to validate the relationship of vocabulary knowledge and Listening/Speaking skills.

Other researchers can investigate on the reasons why vocabulary size does not correlate to Speaking/Listening skills vocabulary.

Statement of Competing Interest

The author has no competing interests.

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