

FOCUSING ON THE ACADEMIC WORD LIST ON AN EAS PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Vocabulary is very essential for language learning, and is extremely useful for second language learners to achieve higher levels of proficiency. This is especially true for learners wishing to study at the academic level in English speaking communities, where comprehension of academic discourse requires large vocabulary sizes and the knowledge of certain vocabulary common in this domain. This paper evaluates the teaching of the academic vocabulary (or the Academic Word List AWL) in an English for Academic Study programme (EAS) that aims to prepare students intending to enter universities in the UK. It first describes the course and the issues which prompted the study, and then examines previous research in vocabulary learning and applies some of the key findings to the development of a research project. This project had two elements: testing the receptive and productive vocabulary of the learners over a term period (ten weeks) to measure their vocabulary growth; and surveying students and teachers to record their opinions about teaching the AWL in an EAS programme. The results of the vocabulary tests suggest that the direct focus on the AWL leads to larger and faster gains of the vocabulary considering the short duration of the term. The surveys show that students appreciated the direct focus on the AWL and recommended it. Teachers also recommended this action and gave useful suggestions and implications.

Key words: academic vocabulary, words knowledge, AWL, vocabulary assessment

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, second language vocabulary learning has been an increasingly interesting topic of discussion in the field of language acquisition among linguists, theorists, researchers, educators and others involved in the industry. All seem to agree upon vocabulary of being a very essential element in language, and for language proficiency. There is a very great deal of literature which discusses different aspects of vocabulary including: its impact on other skills of language, especially on reading comprehension (Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Hu & Nation, 2000; Laufer, 1989) and reading overall abilities (Laufer, 1992; Nation, 1990), aspects of word knowledge (Richards, 1976) (*cited by* Nation, 2001), (Rod Ellis, Shawn Loewen, Catherine Elder, Rosemary Erlam, Jenefer Philp, 2009; Nation, 2001, 2005) and how it is assessed (Nation 2001; Read, 2000; Schmitt, 2000), judging vocabulary size and considering its coverage of (Nation and Waring 1997; Coxhead, 2000; Schmitt, 2000, Alderson, 2007), and other related issues which involved: the influence of L1 on vocabulary acquisition (Swan 1997) and learner strategies (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995, Nation 2001, Schmitt 2000). However, the most central issue that has attracted most of the literature, debates and concerns of scholars has been over the topic of whether or not vocabulary is to be taught explicitly, and what is the best way for teaching.

1.1. Vocabulary in the curriculum.

A number of scholars and linguists, who have also been known figures in the field of second language vocabulary acquisition, have reported in their works the neglect of vocabulary teaching in previous SLA literature (Richards 1976 (*cited by* Zimmerman, 1997); Meara, 1980; Sokmen, 1997; Carter and McCarthy 1988). Clear evidence of that can be inferred from the huge research and focus on ELT approaches that target functional linguistic aspects rather than lexical. e.g. the Grammar Translation Method was based on the emphasis on teaching grammar rules explicitly, and "vocabulary was only selected to illustrate those rules" (Schmitt 2000), the *Direct Method* which involved teaching vocabulary in a limited basis, the *Audio-Lingual Method* which focused on pronunciation and

oral drills of sentences, and vocabulary were chosen for more drills, and *Communicative Language Teaching*, where the focus is on meaning and vocabulary was taught only for language uses as "it was assumed that ... would take care of self" (Coady, 1993). Vocabulary teaching and research was not totally ignored, however, in that time (Wilkins 1974) From the mid 1980s, there has been an increasing number of publications that addresses the importance of vocabulary and therefore, recommending a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary (Nation 1990). Researchers and educators have noted that language learners – even at high proficiency stage – feel that "many of their difficulties in both receptive and productive language use result from an inadequate vocabulary" (ibid:2). The increasing interest in vocabulary was shown by a growing number of books and guidelines that was dedicated to vocabulary learning and instruction ((Carter, 1998; Lewis, 1993; Nation, 1990, 2001, 2007; Schmitt 2000). Besides, newly developed approaches to language teaching have been introduced such as; Discourse-based language teaching (Carter and McCarthy 1988), the Lexical Phrase Approach (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), the Lexical Approach (Lewis 1993; Willis 1990), which focus on developing learners' proficiency with lexis. They are mostly based on the idea that an important part of language acquisition is to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as "chunks," and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar (Lewis 1993). Moreover, studies have shown recently more interest in vocabulary teaching and learning. This was can be told by a very large proportion of studies that had discussed, developed and tested out many techniques and strategies that enhance classroom-based vocabulary learning. Studies such as; explicit word teaching (Tomeson & Aarnoutse, 1998) that can help to comprehend targeted texts (Meara, 1995), learning words through extensive reading (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989) or through simplified materials (Hafiz and Tudor 1989; Nation and Wang 1999,(Horst, 2005), instruction via dictionary use (Nagy, 1997) and the usefulness of notebooks (Schmitt and Schmitt 1995), context clues such as context synonyms, antonyms, pictures etc.. (Baumann et al 2003), or word-part clues (morphology) (Carlisle 2004), and the most recent; using computer technologies for vocabulary instruction (Laufer and Hill 2000; Al-Seghayer 2002). Depending on my review, I think vocabulary approaches fall in a way or another into one of Oxford & Crookall (1990) four categories of most common techniques of vocabulary instruction; decontextualising (examples: word lists, flashcards, and dictionary use); semicontextualising (word grouping, association, keyword); fully contextualising (reading, listening, speaking, and writing); adaptable: (structured reviewing). However, much of this great deal of literature has been slow to filter into mainstream pedagogy, and, therefore, no clear strategies were named as best means for teaching (Schmitt 2008). For one, vocabulary depends on a variety of factors (ibid), and many researchers have linked vocabulary research with reading (Coady, 1993); Zimmerman 1997, National Reading Panel 2000). Nonetheless, recent literature has clearly emphasized the importance of vocabulary instruction, and that many aspects of vocabulary knowledge require explicit teaching such as; forms-related aspects of words - like different derivatives of words (affixes, pronunciation and stress-, and collocations Related to this, meaning focused vocabulary learning needs to be supported by a focus on form as it has been noted that the mind has a finite processing capacity, and any attention given to meaning will diminish the resources available for attention to form and vice-versa (Barcroft, 2004).

To sum up, it seems that recent SLA literature is no longer debating over the value of vocabulary teaching, but over the best and effective way to be. For both researchers and practitioners trying to work this out, (N. Schmitt, 2008) has suggested that: "a good starting point is to outline reasonable vocabulary learning goals" (331: ibid); defining vocabulary needs: both comprehension needs and learner needs, and considering essential vocabulary.

1.2 The importance of vocabulary for language skills and for learners.

1.2.1. The vocabulary required for comprehension.

For written and spoken discourse to be successfully comprehended, researchers have looked at the percentage of lexical items that needs to be known by the reader/listener. Early estimates show that around 95% coverage of known items of written texts is sufficient for the learner's comprehension (Laufer 1989). This figure has been updated by (Hsueh-chao and Nation 2000) who suggested the percentage to be 98–99%. In their study, Hsueh-chao and Nation have examined the effects of unknown vocabulary on reading comprehension using four versions of texts rated according to lexical coverage: 80 %, 90%, 95%, and 100%. Their study showed poorer comprehension with learners from the 80% lexical coverage condition. Regarding spoken discourse, although it may vary

according to the degree of formality (Adolphs & Schmitt, 2003), Larson and Schmitt (n.d. cited from Schmitt, 2008) suggest that a coverage around 90% might be adequate. Their participants show similar degrees of comprehension from passages with 95% and 100% coverage of known items, and also from passages with 90% coverage, learners show similar comprehension with the 97.5% coverage.

These figures suggest that a fairly extensive vocabulary is required for learners to read efficiently and listen with ease in L2 contexts.

1.2.2. How many words are needed for text coverage?

Studies show that the average educated native speakers of English appear to have a range of vocabulary size of 15,000-20,000 word families (Goulden et al 1990). Fortunately, learners do not need to master all of those words – thanks to many researchers of word frequency and text coverage – as they can function efficiently in language with much smaller vocabulary size. One of the best descriptions of frequent vocabulary covering texts is Coxhead and Nation's (2001) four levels of word frequency: high frequency words, academic vocabulary, technical vocabulary, and low frequency words. High frequency words are the most frequent 2,000 words of English, as they cover almost 80% of the running words in academic text. They were compiled by West (1953), who called them the general service vocabulary list (GSL). *Academic vocabulary* is less common in conversations and general texts, but appears very commonly in academic texts. It consists of 570 word families forming the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000). It covers around 8.5%-10% of the running words in academic texts, and therefore, making the difference 10% between 80% and 90% (this additional 8.5-10% is very significant for text comprehension, see 1.1.2.1.). The technical vocabulary appears less commonly and depending on the subject area (see for more details Chung & Nation, 2003). It could provide coverage of up to 5% of the running words. The remaining proportion of texts (around 5%) is covered with the low frequency words of English. They consist of words that occur once or twice and then will not be met again for a long time.

Based on their research of comprehension levels, many authors have also analyzed the vocabulary size levels required. Laufer (1989) has suggested that at least 3,000 word families, corresponding to about 4800 words, are required for texts comprehending. Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) found that 2,000 word families (4000 individual words) is sufficient if 95% coverage is required for comprehension, and from a further study (Adolphs and Schmitt 2004), they examined wider spoken contexts of CANCODE¹ and suggested the 4,000 word forms for above 96% coverage (noting the variation depending on context). Nation (2006, cited in Schmitt 2008) also suggested 3,000 word families plus proper nouns for the 95% coverage.

Therefore, assuming that advanced learners preparing to study at a graduate level should have already mastered the GSL, learning the AWL would be very essential.

2. Purpose of the study: The benefits of focusing on academic vocabulary in an EAS program.

Nation and Newton (1997) suggest that learners aiming to study at a graduate level should learn high frequency words first, and then focus on academic vocabulary. Academic vocabulary refers to lexical items that appear frequently in academic texts. Together with the GSL (80%), it makes about 10% of coverage of advanced texts, which, as reviewed in 1.1.2.1., considers very essential for comprehending both written and spoken discourse. Assuming that university students should already have a range of 2,000 word level (see Schmitt 2008) would strongly suggest the essentiality of academic vocabulary for the learners' success. However, for learners studying in an English programme preparing for their academic study, is it better to directly teach the AWL, or should it be left to be learned by other input of their course. Trying to answer this argument is actually the purpose of my study as I aim to report on the usefulness of focusing on academic vocabulary in an EAS program.

¹ The CANCODE stands for Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse English, and it is a 5-million word corpus of spontaneous spoken discourse, which was compiled in the mid 1990s.

3. Methodology

3.1. The context of the study.

The context for this study was the intensive course of English for Academic Study program (*EAS*) in the School of Humanities (Modern Languages) at the University of Southampton, Southampton UK. The *EAS* program is designed to help non-English speaking students raise their levels of English and reach the scores required to study in colleges and universities in the UK. The students are mostly either recent high school graduates or graduate students aiming for higher education.

The school runs three courses over the year time period, ten weeks each. They are the Autumn course which starts in October, Spring which starts in January, and Summer which starts in April. Some students book the three courses, and some can enrol later in the academic year after being assessed by the school to be put in the right level that matches with their level of proficiency. Further assessments occur at the end of each course, and students with high scores are moved into higher level classes.

The *EAS* program consists of three lessons a day (100 minutes each), five days a week. The lessons cover reading, writing, listening and structured speaking practice (presentations) and grammar, and two classes of independent learning held in the language resource centre (LRC). There are nine class levels in the entire program named after colours that represent levels known to the coordinator and tutors of the program. There are certain groups for beginners, intermediate and advanced. Usually, there are more advanced groups of students in Summer than in Autumn and vice versa.

3.2. Focusing on the AWL

Not until recently, vocabulary was not taught explicitly in the *EAS* program but within other language skills such as reading and listening. But with the recent increase of research into word frequencies and vocabulary size measurement, some teachers, but not many, started to present the academic words to students as lists and/or teach them within examples and uses. Some have encouraged learners to learn them independently as well. Publishers and material developers, on the other hand, have also made use of the AWL and presented the 570 words in contexts and usages and productive exercises. There are a number of books that have been published recently such as: Huntley (2006), Richmond and Zimmerman (2007), McCarthy and O'Dell (2008) and Schmitt and Schmitt (2005). The latter, as I mentioned earlier, has been recently added to the curriculum of the school hosting this study. It was included in the reading sessions, and was used in one of the two sessions each week. However, not all nine groups have been assigned to study this book but only the five more advanced groups. Schmitt and Schmitt have designed a textbook that seemed to have covered most of issues and techniques regarding vocabulary teaching discussed earlier. First, it combines incidental and explicit learning of the targeted words, i.e. it presents the words within their authentic academic texts and, then, they are enhanced by further exercises and learning tasks. To guarantee *the noticing* of the words (see 2.1.1.), the authors, first, present them at the beginning of the lesson (24 words each), and also write them in **bold** when they appear in texts. Furthermore, the words are produced in a variety of contexts and exercises which allow more familiarity of the words with multiple meaning, as well as collocations. There are also plenty of exercises that enhance the learning of word derivatives, which, as discussed, is very essential as the knowledge of one word does not necessary involve the knowledge of its other family members (see 2.2.1.). When developing their exercises and tasks, Schmitt and Schmitt also made sure the words appear more than once to guarantee more successful retention (see 2.1.1.).

3.3. Research tools and data sources.

Trying to answer the proposed questions, a number of tools and tests has been reviewed and trialed to be adapted for the study, and questionnaires have been designed as well. Firstly, in order to measure the development in learners' vocabulary, an initial and final vocabulary check must be conducted to highlight any changes or progress in their vocabulary size. As mentioned in 2.5.1., there are a number of tests that have been designed to measure the

vocabulary size. There is Nation's Levels Test *VLT* that is designed to estimate learners' receptive knowledge of vocabulary at increasing frequency levels. Its takers are asked to match the three synonyms from the right with their three equivalents of the six options from the left (see fig 2). Also, there is Nation and Laufer's Productive Test *PVST* which asks learners to write the missing word using the sentence context as in (fig 3). After I had reviewed studies that discussed the two, I piloted a version of each with three participants (2x3) representing three of my groups. My aim was to have an experience with the two tests first hand, measure the time needed, and hear what my participants have to say. My pilot showed that Nation's VLT is clearer, less time consuming and easier to administer, in addition to the fact that it is more useful in measuring quantity (see 2.5.1.).

Fig. (2) Version 2 of Nation's VLT by Schmitt et al (2001:85)

1. debate
2. exposure ___ plan
3. integration ___ choice
4. option ___ joining something into a whole
5. scheme
6. stability

Fig. (3) Version C of Nation and Laufer's PVST by Schmitt et al (2001:85)

1. There has been a recent tr___ among prosperous families towards a smaller number of children.
2. The ar___ of his office is 25 square meters.
3. Phil___ examines the meaning of life.
4. According to the communist doc___, workers should rule the world.
5. Spending many years together deepened their inti___.

In addition to assessing the receptive knowledge of the learners, I also included a test that checks the depth of vocabulary knowledge using a self-assessment scale. My aim was to track more aspects of knowledge than just the recognition of the prime meaning of the word and the spelling (see 2.4.). Furthermore, as Webb (2009) has suggested, receptive vocabulary size is always larger than productive vocabulary. My method, however, is less complicated than Ishii and Schmitt (2009). In their study, they have added to Nation's VLT recognition test more tasks that assess: words with multiple meaning (see fig 4), word derivatives, and lexical choice (see fig 5). They proposed a formula that shows how their test is scored.

Fig 4) from Ishii and Schmitt (2009)

Choose the best two that describe the word below:

act () ()

[1] * [2] * [3] * [4] * [5] *

([1] a thing done [2] cell [3] a division of a play [4] daughter [5] advantage)

Fig (5) from Ishii and Schmitt (2009)

Choose one word which fits better in the blank:

1) work 2) job 3) I DON'T KNOW

Speaking English is important to find a _____ these days.

However, in my study, I used the VLT for receptive knowledge, and then, I have chosen some participants for further productive assessment using the scale below. The scale is similar to (fig 1) mentioned earlier, and is adapted

from Schmitt and Schmitt (2005). It presents a number of words and learners are asked to give their responses to the words depending on four-point scale, see (fig 6).

Fig. (6) The assessment scale used in Schmitt et al (2005)originally taken from Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002)

1. I don't know this word.
2. I have seen this word before, but I'm not sure what it means.
3. I understand the word when I see or hear it in a sentence, but I don't know how to use it in my speaking or writing.
4. I know this word and can use it in my own speaking and writing.

With respect to the perceptions of learners toward their newly added textbook, and their tutors' evaluation of the course, two different questionnaires have been designed to survey the attitudes of learners and tutors. The learners' survey is divided into three parts. First, it asks the participants to give some basic information about themselves and what they study, their level of proficiency and language learning history. It then asks them to give their responses regarding their attitudes toward the course and the textbook depending on five-point scale (1 to 5), where (1) equals *Totally agree*, and (5) equals to *Totally disagree*. There are a few open-ended questions as well. The teachers have been surveyed with open-ended questions where they can evaluate the book and the course. They, also, answer some questions about their learners and what they have covered from the book.

3.4. Methodology and Data Collection.

The present study occurred during the Summer term of the EAS program, and, then, there were five advanced groups for whom *Focus on vocabulary* was included in the curriculum. Three groups (half of the participants) have been studying in the EAS for the other two terms (Autumn and Spring), and the remaining half have just started the program when the study was conducted. First, I used version 1 of Nation's VLT with all groups, and I administered the test within the first week of course beginning. Not all frequency were been tested, however, only the part that tests the academic vocabulary was covered, as test developers meant it to be flexible as long as learners are already familiar with the 2000, 3000 levels (Norbert Schmitt, personal communication²). Version 2 of the same test was used during the week before last in order to compare its results with the previous one. Only the data of 21 students have been included in the study, as I excluded some invalid data, as well as students who have taken just one of the tests instead of two.

For further productive investigation of learners' vocabulary, I used the scale mentioned earlier and tested 8 students selected randomly. Regarding the words chosen for the test, I made sure that the words are from representative frequencies within the AWL 570 words, and had been already met in lessons. Furthermore, I piloted the words and the scale with two students before I used it, to make sure that the words are neither too hard nor too easy, and had been covered.

Regarding the perceptions of learners and tutors toward the new book and the course, the school hosting this study planned a meeting with all students after the final assessment to listen to their feedback regarding the units and the program in general. I asked the coordinator of the EAS to distribute my questionnaires to the five groups during that meeting, as I believed they would give more useful feedback than in-class questionnaire. 34 learners participated in the survey. After the course finished I sent the open ended questionnaire to the tutors and received their feedback.

² Jul 2009

4. Results and Findings.

4.1. The developments of learners' vocabulary.

4.1.1. Vocabulary size test.

Soon after the programme had begun, the first Vocabulary Levels Test VLT was carried out. As mentioned, the students only completed questions on vocabulary at the AWL level. There were ten items in the test similar to those shown in fig 2, where students were provided with six options to three word synonyms. The total possible score was 30. Although the test was administered in the beginning of the term, learners showed high performance with scores reaching 29 and an average of 22. This of course, as discussed in 3.1., is due to the timing of the course (Summer term) where students are mostly advanced. However, results have also shown minimums of 7 and 10. Another version of the VLT was carried out before the term finished, in order to compare between results of the two tests and track any changes or progress. The figures in *table 2* show how much learners have progressed, and that is indicated by an increase in their minimum, maximum and mean.

Table (2) Descriptive Statistics of test results (All groups)

<i>test</i>	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>pre</i>	21	7	29	22.3333	5.87651
<i>post</i>	21	11	30	24	4.46094

The overall results do not show great significance regarding learners' progress, and that is due to: their high performance in the *Pre test*, and the short duration of the term (ten weeks). Besides, it might be assumed that the increase in learners' vocabulary might have resulted from different factors and language input within their course. Nonetheless, more detailed investigation of the results shows greater progress in learners' performance according to groups, i.e. students of some groups have increased their AWL more than others (see tables 3, 4).

Table (3) test results of all Students

	<i>group</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>post</i>	<i>progress</i>
1	green	10	18	8
2	green	16	23	7
3	purple	7	11	4
4	purple	21	25	4
5	Blue	17	21	4
6	green	21	24	3
7	Red	27	30	3
8	green	24	26	2
9	green	21	23	2
10	Blue	24	26	2
11	purple	25	27	2
12	Red	28	30	2
13	Red	27	28	1
14	orange	24	25	1
15	Red	22	22	0
16	orange	25	25	0
17	orange	27	26	-1
18	orange	29	28	-1
19	orange	27	25	-2
20	orange	19	17	-2
21	orange	28	24	-4
Total	21	21	21	

Table (4) mean results according to groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>pre</i>	<i>post</i>	<i>progress</i>
<i>Green</i>	18.4	22.8	4.3
<i>Purple</i>	17.6	21	3.4
<i>Blue</i>	20.5	23.5	3
<i>Red</i>	26	27.5	1.5
<i>Orange</i>	25.5	24.2	-1.3
<i>Total</i>	22.3	24	1.7

The overall rate of increase seemed to have been brought down by the *orange* group, where results of students mostly decreased. Students of all other groups show greater gains in the AWL. Further investigations on *the orange* group showed that learners hardly used the book in class and covered only some exercises and not even entire units, unlike other groups (see 4.2. and 4.3. and the discussion below for more details). This would suggest larger gains of vocabulary resulting from explicit teaching and focus on the words. If we exclude students of the orange group the rate of vocabulary increase would be 2.9 words for all other groups. It was assumed that it might be harder to track any changes as learners have shown high marks in the *pre-test*. However, with the exception of Orange group, all students except one showed some improvement.

4.1.2. Scale of vocabulary knowledge.

(How well they know the words).

Since the results of the VLT measure mostly receptive vocabulary knowledge, eight students were chosen for further assessment to check how well vocabulary is being taught and learned. Of the 24 words tested in this scale, students responded that they know 18.7 words, and stated that they are able to use more than half of them (12.2) in their speaking and writing. Table 5 shows how each of the eight students responded to the words given.

Table (5) results of the learners' self-assessment

1. *I don't know this word.*
2. *I have seen this word before, but I'm not sure what does it mean.*
3. *I understand the word when I see or hear it in a sentence, but I don't know how to use it in my speaking or writing.*
4. *I know this word and can use it in my own speaking and writing.*

Count of responses to words (24 words were tested)				Students
4 Know & able to use	3 Know but can't use	2 Not sure	1 Don't know	
3	9	11	1	1
11	5	6	2	2
22	2	-	-	3
17	6	-	1	4
9	11	4	-	5
9	5	10	-	6
17	4	1	2	7
10	11	3	-	8

As mentioned in my methodology regarding the above test, students were chosen randomly and they represented three of the groups: *green*, *red* and *purple*. I asked the test takers to write their names optionally on the papers if they were willing. My plan was to correlate between the answers of those eight in the above evaluation with their performances in the AWL vocabulary check (VLT) to verify the results. However, only one student wrote his name. Nonetheless, the results of the two assessments (the second VLT and the knowledge scale) suggest that the direct focus on the AWL leads to larger and faster gains of the vocabulary considering the short duration of the term and to successful production of the words learned as well.

4.2. Students' Survey.

After the students' surveys were collected, the data of both: learners' personal information (part one) and their perceptions on the book and course (part two) were processed into SPSS. Regarding the learners' perceptions, after the results were coded, each response was given a number from one to five, with *totally agree* receiving (no.1) and *totally disagree* (no.5). A new column was added to the table as some students (n = 5) had not responded to part two stating that they had not studied the book (they were from groups *blue* and *orange*). The new column was coded as no.6. The mean for each question was then calculated, and all results of part two are shown in table 6.

Table (6) results of the survey question 8-23 (total 34)

Questions	Mean	Totally agree %	Partly agree %	Neutral %	Neutral %	Partly disagree %	Totally disagree %	No answer %
8. In general, I have benefited from the text book <i>Focus On Vocabulary</i>	2.88	14.7	38.2	26.5	26.5	0	5.9	14.7
9. The vocabulary that I have learned has influenced my Reading	2.7	35.3	17.6	17.6	17.6	14.7	0	14.7
10. I have recognized the vocabulary that I have learned in my Listening	3.02	17.6	23.5	29.4	29.4	11.8	2.9	14.7
11. I have used some vocabulary that I have learned in my Writing	2.79	29.4	23.5	17.6	17.6	11.8	2.9	14.7
12. I have used some vocabulary that I have learned in my Speaking	2.88	17.6	26.5	35.3	35.3	5.9	0	14.7
13. I value the book because of the selection of the words.	3.05	17.6	29.4	23.5	23.5	2.9	11.8	14.7
14. I value the book because it gives many forms of each word.	2.79	26.5	26.5	23.5	23.5	2.9	5.9	14.7
15. I value the book as it teaches me the right use of words.	2.97	26.5	26.5	8.8	8.8	14.7	8.8	14.7
16. The vocabulary that I have learned is enough for my further studies and I do not need more.	3.73	2.9	17.6	32.4	32.4	11.8	20.6	14.7
17. I value the vocabulary that I have learned and I wished we had more	2.97	26.5	20.6	20.6	20.6	8.8	8.8	14.7
18. I did not like the book and I wished we have studied something else.	4.23	8.8	5.9	8.8	8.8	23.5	35.3	17.6
19. The book was very difficult.	3.94	8.8	14.7	11.8	11.8	17.6	32.4	14.7
20. I now realize the importance of academic vocabulary for my study.	2.82	29.4	26.5	14.7	14.7	5.9	8.8	14.7
21. I often read the book outside the class	3.2	17.6	17.6	29.4	29.4	11.8	8.8	14.7
22. I will study the book after the term finishes.	3.44	14.7	17.6	20.6	20.6	17.6	14.7	14.7
23. I recommend this book for future students.	3	26.5	20.6	17.6	17.6	14.7	5.9	14.7

The overall results show that learners responded positively to the book *Focus on Vocabulary* and the course. More than half of the students stated that they benefited from the book in general, and only two students stated the opposite. The remaining students were either undecided or did not give any answer. There is a possibility that even those two students got confused with question 8 as one of the words was mistakenly misspelled (*benefited* was written *befitted*), as the two students had underlined the word. More specifically, the students show that the vocabulary they had learned had positively influenced their receptive language skills (reading and listening) and improved their productive skills (speaking and writing). The results indicate that nearly half of the learners said that the course helped them improve their language skills (questions 9-12), and only 4 students disagreed, apart from the undecided and the unanswered sheets. The students also gave their responses why they liked the text book. 47% agreed that the reason was its selection of the words, and they responded similarly (53%) to the point that the book teaches them more forms of words and more uses. There is some duplication in questions 16 and 17, with also a

negative statement 16 and 18 to check that students were not mindlessly agreeing or disagreeing with everything. However, I only suspected responses of two students to be slightly inconsistent. Regarding the level of the book, students mostly think it was not difficult. About questions 21 and 22, learners gave very varied responses, and I suspected some factors to be responsible (see below). However, almost half of the respondents recommended the book for future students.

After the questions in part two, learners were asked two general questions about their perceptions to learning vocabulary, and one open-ended question that asks them about the importance on the AWL in the their EAS programme. All students (including the five who did not answer part two) except one stated that they focus on vocabulary in their learning. However, only 16 students said that they had read a book that focuses on vocabulary before. Only a few learners mentioned books like: *English Vocabulary in Use* and *Economics: Advanced learners*, others mentioned dictionaries and websites, however, they mostly did not give any title at all.

Regarding the open-ended question, all except six students have commented positively on the importance of academic vocabulary for their EAS study. Here are some of their quotations:

"It is very important to recognize the words that I need in my academic writing", "very important especially for writing skill", and "for all skills".

"It give[s] me how to use vocabulary and word family or synonym of vocabulary".

"It is the key for being a good reader and writer".

"It was very important, but they did not give it a good time, and I used it in the *independent study*".

Most of the rest of the students simply commented that it is "very important".

Six students, and they either did not comment at all or gave answers that did not belong (n=2).

4.2.1. Further investigation of variables.

Part one asked survey takers to answer some questions about themselves. There answers were also entered into the software to help in verifying or justifying the learners' perceptions in part two. Their answers show that there were 19 females and 15 males among the survey takers. Half of them are aged between 20 and 25, two are under 20, and the remaining are over 25. Most of students in this programme were from Saudi Arabia (21), and there were some students from China (4) and Libya (4), and the remaining 5 were from Iraq (2), Spain, Thailand and Japan. Regarding their purpose of studying the EAS, nine students stated that they will study at an undergraduate level, and the remaining 25 will join postgraduate programmes. There were two questions that asked the learners about their learning of English. First, how many years they have been studying English, and second, have they taken IELTS. 21 students show that they had studied English between 0-5 years. Options 6-7 years and 10-11 years were chosen by 3 students for each, and 7 have studied English for more than 12 years. I suspected the answers that had chosen 0-5 years as it did not seem likely especially with this large number. Therefore, I have done a further correlation and found that 17 of those students were from Saudi Arabia. However, my suggestion is that they might have got confused as their answer could not be right, because Saudi students at their age should at least have learned English for more than nine years. Regarding IELTS, half of the students said that they had taken IELTS before, and their scores were always above 5.5 and mostly 6 and 6.5. Finally, learners were asked to circle which group they were studying in during the term. They were as follows: 11 students from *red*, 5 from *blue*, 7 from *green*, 8 from *orange* and 3 from *purple*.

All of the variables above were computed and processed in the software. However, not all of them showed signs of patterns that can suggest any generalizations. Moreover, only a few students have written their names in the questionnaire and, therefore, no correlation was done between the data in the survey with the results of the Vocabulary Levels Test VLT. However, I was able to draw some information from the knowledge of their group. First, it was obviously seen that all of the respondents who did not give responses to part two were from *blue*. They mentioned that they have not used the book. Further investigation through personal communication with their tutor

showed that they were not motivated to attend most classes. More information showed that three of them had already done IELTS, and the other two are going to study in undergraduate programme where the required IELTS score is 5.5. Another point noted which is small but worth mentioning regarding question 8 (*their benefit*) is that although there were similar responses among groups, the students of the *green* group – who where the higher rate of vocabulary increase occurred in the VLT – stated *strongly agree* (differently from the other groups) and no one stated *disagree*. Additionally, although students of the *orange* group showed low performance in their VLT, they responded positively for the book and the course in most cases. Besides, they were the larger group that stated that they will study the book in the future, and one student stated that she used the book during *the independent learning*³. All groups recommended the book for future students. The other factor that had caused some variety in responses was the learners' proficiency.

Of course, we have to note that there might be some equality between those who had taken IELTS and those who had not. Nonetheless, I have done extra correlations and found that IELTS takers were mostly from the groups red and blue, and students of those two groups had been studying in the EAS four of five terms back. By all means, the link between IELTS takers (seen as advanced) and nontakers showed some remarkable variety in learners' perceptions. First, regarding language skills (questions 9-12), learners who did not take IELTS had improved more than the others. Learners who praised the book in items 13-15 were mostly those who did not take the test. They also wished that they had studied more (item 17). They were slightly more to comment that the book was difficulty, and similarly to state that they will study it in future and to recommend it for students.

I have chosen not to look at and investigate the question "how many years have they been studying" because there were some respondents who misinterpreted this question as discussed earlier. I also looked into the link between their future plans and their responses and most clearly found that postgraduates were more motivated toward the AWL than undergraduates (items 17, 21, and 22).

Other factors have been looked into, but no useful link was found.

4.3. Teachers' Survey.

The teachers of the reading unit – which involved teaching the book: *Focus on Vocabulary* – have been surveyed with a questionnaire to elicit their thoughts about the book. Items 1-4 asked the teachers to circle the responses that most closely matches with their opinions regarding: their general satisfaction with the book, whether its materials were difficult depending on their groups, what did they like mostly about the book and would they recommend it (or similar books) for future students. First, they were all satisfied with the book in general, and all except the *green* group teacher think it was not difficult. They mostly liked the book because of its developed tasks and exercises, and the teachers of *red* and *orange* recommended the book because of its selection of words, the way it presents them and its assessment. All the teachers recommended the book or similar books that focus on academic vocabulary. Items 5-7 asked them to write their thoughts regarding: their learners' motivation, how many words/text book units they think is feasible in one term, and to what extent they think their learners have benefitted from the exercises and the words learned. Their feedback revealed some connection with students' earlier data, e.g. responses of students regarding using the book of the *orange* group and their teacher were similar. They also shared interestingly a variety of views regarding the book and the course. First, as mentioned above, the *green* group teacher thinks that the book was challenging rather than difficult for her students which explains their motivation in learning the book and their comment on it afterwards. In addition, the *orange* group teacher stated that she had used some real texts for reading instead of the book and only focused on some exercises as students thought it was rather repetitive.

Regarding their learners' motivation, one teacher (*red*) thinks that her learners saw the value of learning academic vocabulary and seemed keen to learn new items. However, they were not so disciplined about regular review and practice. She agreed with the *green* group teacher whom students "tend not to return sufficiently often to new words in order to consolidate learning". The *red* group teacher thinks that the book needs supplementing to build in more

³ One of the units in the EAS.

review. The *orange* group teacher gave some interesting views about the book. She thinks that no text book is ideal, and that it would be demotivating to simply go through this book unit by unit. Better, she suggested, to select topics which interest students, as their assessment focused on paraphrase and summary and she developed tasks to practise these skills using the texts in the book. However, she adds "I realise that EAS students expect to have a text book to follow. I encouraged my group to use it as self-study as well as in class".

About how many words or units they think would be feasible in a term and what they recommended, only two teachers expressed an opinion. The green group teacher thinks that "one class per week using this book is as much as I (she) would use – possibly less would be better". She was not satisfied with the quality of the texts as "there must be time for real texts" she thinks. The *red* group teacher thinks that the earlier units of this book would have been useful in Term 1 or 2 with Upper Intermediate level students because by Term 3 the vocabulary in these was mostly known. She also thinks that one session per week plus homework is enough, if spread over several terms. I conclude quoting from the *red* group teacher about the last item (learners' benefit):

"Being aware that some words have different meanings and that the context should be used to decide on meaning has helped students interpret meaning when they encounter the words in new texts. When learnt 'AWL' vocabulary occurs in other texts students are obviously able to read with more ease and speed and to recognise the relationships between different ideas in the text. Learning collocations has also meant that when they write paraphrases of sentences or sections of a text, they can write more easily, without having to stop to translate word-for-word".

5.1. Summary of main findings.

To ensure continuous vocabulary growth, advanced learners should read incidentally to learn more vocabulary and attain higher language proficiency. However, EFL learners studying in English for Academic Purposes programmes should focus explicitly on the academic word list compiled by Coxhead (2000) to comprehend more effectively in academic contexts. A new course and book that focuses on the AWL has been added to the EAS course at the University of Southampton during the summer term that lasts for ten weeks. For this action to be evaluated and any possible outcomes to be pointed out, the study has used a number of tools. First, learners' initial academic vocabulary size was determined using the Vocabulary Levels Test and then compared with results of a similar test at the end of the course to track any progress of learners' AWL. Some words have been targeted for further assessment to find out how well learners know the vocabulary they have learned using a self-assessment vocabulary knowledge scale. Both learners and teachers involved have been surveyed to evaluate the new course and book. The overall results show how useful is explicit teaching of academic vocabulary to EAS learners. Although the book was included only in the last term (ten weeks), the analysis of the two Vocabulary Levels Tests showed an overall almost 8%, noting that the students showed high performances in their *pre-test*, and that the increase rate was larger with students in some groups (23.3% and 19.3%).

Results of the knowledge scale showed that the learners claimed that they recognized 78% of the words tested and responded of being able to use 51% of the words in their speaking and writing.

Results of the survey showed that both teachers and learners appreciated the course and the book in general, and revealed a number positive responses, comments and suggestions that support the inclusion of explicit teaching of academic vocabulary in their programme. They both recommended the book or similar books for future students of EAS courses.

5.1. Discussion and conclusions.

Beginning my investigation, I aimed to discuss the benefits of teaching academic vocabulary explicitly to EAS students. In order to provide some evidence that shows the advantages of such action, four issues were subjects for investigation in this study. Firstly and secondly, learners' receptive and productive vocabulary(ies) were examined

in order to judge whether learners have increased their AWL at the end of their course term or not, and to determine how well they know what they have gained. Students' vocabularies were measured using two versions (pre and post) of the Vocabulary Levels Tests for receptive knowledge and the self assessment knowledge scale for productive. Thirdly and fourthly, students and their teachers were surveyed at the end of the term to give their feedback about the course and the book. Students have completed a structured survey stating their opinions and what they think of the book and the academic vocabulary they have learned, and teachers have filled out an open-ended questionnaire giving some information about the book they have taught and their students, and giving their recommendation and views as well.

Although the duration of the course was relatively short (one term), the results of the Vocabulary Levels Tests were encouraging. The average student's vocabulary test score increased by approximately 8% (1.7/30), noting that the students showed high performances in their *pre-test*, and that the increase rate was larger with students in some groups (4.3 and 3.4 /30). Some individual students have gained 7 and 8 points out of 30. Further investigation of teachers' and students' surveys showed that higher rates of improvement were recorded among students of groups focusing on the book than students of other groups. As the study has revealed, students of the *orange* group – who the teacher stated focused less on the book – were the only students who either showed 0% progress or mostly decreased, adding support to the usefulness of the book (or teaching the AWL explicitly).

Again before the term ends, some students were chosen randomly for further assessment to determine how well learners know the vocabulary they have learned using a self assessment knowledge scale. The results show that learners stated that they recognized 78% of the words tested in the scale, and also said that they were able to use 51% of the words in their speaking and writing.

The results of the two assessments (the analysis of the two VLTs and the knowledge scale) suggest that the direct focus on the AWL leads to larger and faster gains of the vocabulary considering the relatively short duration of the term and to successful production of the words learned as well.

The Vocabulary Levels Test has provided clear results regarding the development of learners' vocabulary over the term time, and gave useful indications of a possible pattern of learners' performances depending on groups. To illustrate, the results of the test were able to detect the variation of the performances of learners from the *orange* group, which called for further investigation. The variation was explained by the lack of direct focus on the AWL according to the surveys.

Students also speaking for themselves supported the usefulness of including explicit teaching of academic vocabulary in their curriculum. This was shown by their positive responses in the surveys toward the book and the course, and through their useful comments and feedback as well. Although we have seen that the VLT results revealed variation in students' performances, most of the survey takers stated that they have benefited from the book in general and recommended it (or similar books) for future students.

Teachers on the other hand have also stated the usefulness of the book to their students, and they were satisfied about the book in general. As we have seen in 3.4., they have provided useful suggestions and recommendations about the book and the course (see also conclusion). The teachers' survey has provided useful insights regarding their learners' motivation to the book that could be linked to learners' performances in the VLT. To illustrate, as we have noticed in 3.4., the orange group teacher stated that her learners were not very motivated toward the book and that they hardly used it at all. She mentioned a number of reasons that may have caused their low motivation (see 3.4.). However, I mostly agree with her suggestion that her learners focus mostly on other skills in their EAS such as summary writing, taking notes and writing reports. One other explanation could be that, since this group had a relatively high level of academic vocabulary in the pretest (25.5 out of 30 compared to 18.4, 17.6, and 20), this would be a possible factor for their demotivation.

However, we have seen also that two teachers have told different opinions about the motivation of their learners toward the book. In other words, my assumption is that they might have noticed from the first chapters or two that they know the words and decided to focus elsewhere. However, we know that even students with high levels of academic vocabulary have benefited more effectively from explicit instruction of vocabulary than from only incidental learning in the EAS.

To sum up, the analysis of the two VLT tests together with results of the production knowledge of learners, and the results from surveying both teachers and students suggest the usefulness of direct focus on the academic vocabulary and including that in curricula.

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