Measuring the vocabulary Size of EFL Learners in Sudanese Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims at evaluating Sudanese EFL Secondary School students' performance on Paul Nation's Standardized vocabulary level tests. It also aims at examining the vocabulary size of Sudanese Secondary School students at Shendi Locality. Paul Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT). The study sample was selected from Shendi secondary schools (i.e. Abdullah Alhassan model secondary school for boys ,Kamil Ibrahim model secondary school for girls, ShendiAhlia for boys ,Qurish secondary school for girls and others. The study came out with the following results: Sudanese Secondary school students' vocabulary size word test falls within 1,000 frequency level, indicating that students are unable to gasp an average text. Sudanese Secondary School students who obtained higher marks in 1,000-word level also obtained higher marks in 2,000 –word level and vice versa. These results confirmed the high correlation between the two tests. Moreover, in Paul Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) the more words Sudanese Secondary school students know, the better score his/her four skills. To most secondary school teachers as well as students, English grammar is the focus on their teaching and learning, not the vocabulary. The most important recommendation of this study is to use Pual Nation′s Vocabulary level test (VLT) in secondary level as a tool to assess students′ vocabulary size.
Key words; Vocabulary, Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), Testing, Paul Nation Vocabulary Level Test (VLT),

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم أداء طلاب المرحلة الثانوية السودانية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في اختبارات مستوى المفردات لبول نيشن. كما يهدف إلى فحص حجم المفردات لطلاب المدارس الثانوية السودانية في محلية شندي. تم استخدام اختبار مستويات مفردات بول نيش للطلاب. تم اختيار عينة الدراسة من مدارس شندي الثانوية. توصلت الدراسة للنتائج التالية: اختبار كلمة المفردات لطلاب المدارس الثانوية السودانية يقع ضمن 1000 مستوى تردد، مما يشير إلى أن الطلاب غير قادرين على فهم نص متوسط. طلاب المدارس الثانوية السودانية الذين حصلوا على علامات أعلى في مستوى 1000 كلمة حصلوا أيضًا على علامات أعلى في مستوى 2000 كلمة والعكس

صحيح. وأكدت هذه النتائج وجود علاقة عالية بين الاختبارين. علاوة على ذلك، في اختبار مستويات مفردات بول نيشن، كلما زادت الكلمات التي يعرفها طلاب المدارس الثانوية السودانية، كانت معرفتهم بالمهارات الأربع أفضل

المفردات المفتاحية : المفردات اللغوية، استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات اللغوية، الاختبار، اختبار بول نيشن لمستوى المفردات اللغوية.

1.0 Introduction

This section explains the concept of vocabulary, as well as the problems, objectives, questions, hypotheses, significance, and limitations of the study.

The importance of vocabulary in language learning cannot be overstated. Its size reflects how well second language (L2) learners perform academic language skills such as reading proficiency. Because vocabulary learning is important in language learning, as well as pronunciation, grammar, communication skills, and background knowledge, it is widely accepted that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental because words are the foundation of language. One of the language skills required for fluency is vocabulary knowledge (P. Nation 2001, 212).

Vocabulary is a language area that needs continued growth and developing for native speakers and EFL learners. Beyond the initial stages, the factors of motivation and intelligence become important, because, like monolingual speakers of English, advanced foreign learners will exhibit proportionately larger or smaller vocabularies even though they may share the same type and amount of instruction in the language. (Celce-Murcia 2002, 110).

To improve their English language proficiency, Sudanese EFL Secondary School Students need a solid knowledge of vocabulary. While a higher level of vocabulary will allow them - to communicate some ideas to a higher degree, better communication – whether in speaking / listening or writing / reading can be accomplished when they have acquired more vocabulary. According to (Richard 1997) Knowing vocabulary is important for getting meaning from a text. EFL learners frequently say that they need more vocabulary so that they can understand the meaning of the text.

Knowledge of around 2,000 words families is the threshold needed for tapping other language skills. Without this threshold, learners encounter problems in understanding the language they are exposed to.

One of the major problems in teaching vocabulary is finding a situation or context in which the learners can show if they can use the words properly. The general approach requires the teacher to ask open-ended questions to get the learners to use the word and the activity of teaching a text allows the students to encounter the word while reading the text and use it in the discussion, which follows. However, both of these methods depend on the teacher's skills at asking appropriate questions, which will elicit the word (I. S. Nation 2001)

1.1 Problem of the Study

Sudanese secondary school students are taught a large number of words, but some of them may be ineffective in qualifying them to perform well on vocabulary-standardized

tests like the VLT. This could lead to a serious problem that affects other English language skills such as reading, speaking, listening, and writing.

Furthermore, there are other vocabulary aspects that learners must master in order to effectively understand and use language. Polysemy, connotation, associations, and other lexical relations are among these aspects. As a result, vocabulary learning is a more complicated and problematic area of language learning than simply listing the meanings of words.

1.2 Questions of the Study

To meet the foregoing stated objectives the following research questions raised to find out:

1. What is the initial level of Sudanese secondary school Students' vocabulary size as judged and assessed by Vocabulary Level Test (VLT)?

2. What is the overall vocabulary size of Sudanese EFL school students' lower than 1, 000 words and 2,000-frequency band, as measured by the 1000 words and the 2000

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

To answer the research questions these hypotheses are postulated:

1. The initial level of Sudanese EFL secondary school Students' vocabulary size is lower than 1000 words as judged and assessed by VLT.

2. The overall vocabulary size of Sudanese EFL secondary school Students is considerably lower than the 1000 and 2000 words of the Vocabulary Level Test (VLT), as measured by the 1000 words and the 2000 frequency band of the (VLT)

1.4 Objective of the Study

This research aims at:

2. Investigating the vocabulary size of EFL Sudanese Secondary School students by using the 1,000 words test and the 2,000-frequency band of the Vocabulary Level Test (VLT).

3. Investigating reasons of unsatisfactory performance on vocabulary tests in Sudanese Secondary Schools.

4. It also aims at examining the vocabulary size of EFL Sudanese secondary school students by using the 1,000 words test and the 2,000-frequency band of the Vocabulary Level Test (VLT)

4. Showing that EFL Sudanese Students' vocabulary falls within the 1,000-word level or below 2000-word level.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. The current study is important for testers, textbooks designers and writers as it will draw their attention for choosing and selecting the most widely used words in the everyday life and avoid stuffing teaching materials with useless passive words. It also draws educator's attention to what goes around them in the world in vocabulary teaching, acquisition, learning and updating of high frequency words.

2. The study is also important for test and text designers as well as for vocabulary acquisition researchers, for the former because they are better informed to create materials and tests suitable for different levels and educational needs, and for the latter,

because empirical data from different groups of subjects can provide a baseline for comparison and help to identify patterns of vocabulary acquisition and development.

1.6 Limits of the Study

This study deals with evaluating Sudanese EFL Secondary Schools Students' Performance, on Paul Nations' Standardized Vocabulary Level Test (VLT). It is conducted at some Sudanese secondary schools, third grade in Shendi Locality, River Nile State during the academic year 2017-2018. The sample of this study is not large enough; they are students from different schools. The same results cannot be guaranteed to all Sudanese secondary schools. It needs further studies in more secondary schools in other parts of Sudan. The future study of this kind hopes to overcome the shortcomings of this study.

2.0 Literature Review and Previous Studies

Vocabulary is known as all about words in a language or a special set of words that are tried to be learned. It is described as a language user's knowledge of words, a listing of the words used in some enterprise or the system of techniques or symbols serving as a means of expression. (Alqhatani 2015)

This part displays the relevant studies involving Sudanese vocabulary problems in particular. Like the general studies related to English Learner's problems of English, many types of research were carried concerning vocabulary problems of Sudanese learners. The followings are the recent studies.

(Saleh 2010) explained that his study **Difficulties Encountered by Sudanese Secondary School Students in Learning English Vocabulary** aims to find out the difficulties encountered by Sudanese Secondary School Students while learning vocabulary, and analyzing it and trying to find solutions for it. The main question is that, why secondary school students find it difficult to learn Words' meanings and to recall them when needed. The study hypothesizes that English vocabulary itself is a difficult task for the students. Also, the students have no strategies to help them know the words' meanings, moreover visual aids and games help students much to improve their English vocabulary. To collect data for this study the researcher followed the descriptive method through which he designed a questionnaire for (40) English language teachers (male / Female) who are still working as English teachers. In addition to that, the researcher tested (56) Secondary school students. As a result, to the above, it is noticed that. - Secondary school students face difficulties while learning vocabulary especially when they are alone. - Secondary school students have no strategies to help them to learn vocabulary. - Using visual aids and games help students to - Improve their vocabulary. According to the results, the following is recommended. English language teachers must be aware that vocabulary learning is difficult for the students. Students must be taught basic strategies for learning words. Visual aids and games must be used during the teaching process. Literature is one of the great means that help students to develop their vocabulary knowledge.

Fatima, Yasin and Aladdin (2017), stated in the study "**The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Sudanese EFL Learners**" that the Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) play a crucial role in vocabulary learning. For ESL or EFL learners, the lack of vocabulary knowledge in the target language may have an effect on the four

language skills of EFL. The use of VLSs facilitates learners' vocabulary learning process and helps them to become more self-directed. However, few studies have been conducted on the use of VLSs amongst by Sudanese EFL learners. VLSs used in this pilot study are based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy, as mention by (Zahra 2017) . The main purpose of this study is to explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by Sudanese EFL learners. In addition, it attempts to Investigate which vocabulary learning strategy is the most frequently used by Sudanese EFL learners. Data collected via a questionnaire of (VLSs) were adapted from (Al-Fuhaid 2004). Findings indicated that Sudanese EFL learners used a medium range of strategies. Discovery strategies were the most frequent strategies of the three demonstrated.

Muhana (2016) examines on the study, **Explicit Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Promoting Vocabulary Knowledge,** the use of vocabulary learning strategies for knowledge. This study briefly, outlines some common vocabulary teaching strategies and discusses the effectiveness of explicit, rich vocabulary teaching and learning strategies. In addition, this study aims to develop word consciousness within our students and maintain their interest in words. The population of this study was selected from two groups consisted of 60 students. The researcher assumed testing to be the data collection tool. That is because testing is used to measure certain areas of difficulty and concern when acquiring a second language. The first group was given a test to examine the effects of neglected vocabulary learning strategies. The second group was trained to use vocabulary learning strategies such as (collocation, word mapping, infer meaning etc.). The group studied about 16 lessons. This study hypothesized that most of the Sudanese EFL Learners of Jebel Awlia fail to retain the vocabulary they learned before and unable to use vocabulary learning strategies. The study showed that vocabulary-learning strategies can help students to understand and use new words confidently. The result showed that students' performance in learning vocabulary in the English language is very low. The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the frequent problems that face learners in vocabulary knowledge

Abbes (2018) in his paper, "**Investigating Sudanese Secondary School Students' Writing Performance in English as a Foreign Language"**, investigated the written performance of the Sudanese EFL students at secondary schools. The problem of the study is that Sudanese secondary school students are generally very poor in English language writing activities. This study is significant because it identifies the reasons behind the poor performance of Sudanese secondary school students in writing English as a foreign language. The study aimed to analyze the written work produced by the students in order to identify the types of English language problems. The researchers adopted a descriptive method to analyze and discuss data. The subjects of the study consisted of (100) third-year secondary school students in the academic year (2013-2014) in Omdurman Locality. A test issued for data collection. The statistical results of the study revealed those Sudanese EFL students made four common errors; tense (395), spelling (236), articles (63), and prepositions (44) errors rates. This study arrived at some findings: There are significant grammatical and spelling errors made by Sudanese EFL students at secondary schools. The difference between the English and Arabic language s (Satti 2015) system lead to negative interference. The study suggested that the students

need to be equipped with extra materials such as reading books in order to improve writing skill. The help of native speakers should be sought to work at the Sudanese secondary schools.

Satti (2015) clarified the aim of this study, **Investigating Lexical Errors and Their Effect on University Students' Written Performance in Sudan**, is to investigate lexical errors and their effect on university students' written performance. The researcher used the descriptive analytical approach. Data has been collected through a questionnaire for university English language teachers, and a composition test for university students from different English departments. The findings showed that university students make lexical errors because of many factors chief among them is the interference of the mother tongue.

Elsadig (2015) stated that this study, **Towards a Better Fluency in English as a Foreign Language, is going to help in developing EFL students'** fluency in the English Language and to identify the reasons for their performance weakness and try to find solutions. The sample of this study consists of Sudanese students and teachers distributed in ten secondary schools in At-Tadamun Locality. As tools for data collection, the researcher uses teachers' questionnaire. Frequencies, t-test, and SPSS are used to analyze the data. The current study concluded that students' fluency is very weak in the English language even after leaving schools after eleven years of learning English. In addition, the performance of students in secondary schools is not satisfactory.

Satti (2015)in this research, **Problems of Reading Skills Encountered by Sudanese Secondary School Students,** aims to discuss the Problems of Reading Comprehension Skills which face Secondary Schools Students so as to help them overcome these problems and difficulties. The research also aims to introduce some important reading comprehension strategies to help those students who have disabilities and difficulties attempting reading. In order to achieve these aims and find out the answers to the questions of the research, the researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method by using a questionnaire and a test as a means of data collection. A questionnaire of twenty statements was introduced to fifty English language teachers at secondary schools who were chosen randomly from different schools in Kassala locality. The test which consists of three different types of comprehension question was answered by a hundred students of the third year who were chosen from two different schools a school for boys and a school for girls. Each class contains fifty students. SPSS program is used to analyze the data. The Statistical analysis of the results proved that both groups of male and female students face problems and difficulties in answering the different types of comprehension questions. Furthermore, they are not able to write the answer to the summary question. The main recommendations are, paying attention to the training and qualification of teachers, using comprehension strategies, teaching vocabulary through context and the good selection of texts. Finally, the researcher suggests some topics which are related to developing comprehension skills, for further studies.

To summarize, practicing vocabulary recognition, strategies is very important, particularly for non-native students who often complain about specialist texts because they contain unfamiliar lexical items. Using a dictionary may not be a practical way to

work out the meanings of some new words, in particular in the scientific field; most of the words introduced in the above examples are not found in English- Arabic dictionaries, which means that students should be encouraged to make a guess at the meaning of the words they do not know rather than looking them up. In addition, restricting looking up unfamiliar words is a convenient strategy for maximizing speed and clarity. Admittedly, dictionary use might be needed with some situations, but it needs to be a second alternative after processing contextual clues. Non-native language learners need much practice and training in order deploy such strategies for developing reading skills. Vocabulary recognition strategies are instinctively applied by Arab readers when dealing with L1 texts, and converting them into L2 requires raising awareness about their importance and practice under close guidance from the teacher. All the ideas and concepts of lexis identification tactics are geared to help learners improving their reading skills. Finally, previous related studies were discussed. Most of these studies investigated the Vocabulary learning problems for specific while few deals with the problems for secondary school.

3.0   Methodology
The researcher adopts both descriptive and analytical methods to evaluate secondary school student, third grade, in Shendi locality at River Nile state, on vocabulary tests, by utilizing a range of tools for data collection and analysis.

3.1   Population and Sampling:
The population is defined by (McMillan 2001) as "a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events that conform to specific criteria and to which is intended to generalize the result of the research". For this study the population is secondary school students and as a study sample, the researcher will take the students of the third grade at secondary school level in Shendi locality, River Nile state. Based on (McMillan 2001), the sample can be selected from a larger group of people, identified as the population or, it can simply refer to the group of subjects from whom data are collected. The sample of this study was100 students of the third grade of secondary school level, and 50 secondary level teachers in the academic year 2017-2018.

3.2 The Study Tools:
For the collection of the data, the researcher the researcher is going to use the following research tools: Paul Nation's standardized Vocabulary Test (VLT) to assess grade three Sudanese

 The population of the study is secondary school students and the purposive sample consisted of (100) students besides (50) English teachers at secondary level. The study sample was selected from Shendi secondary schools in the River Nile State in Sudan. It needs further studies in more secondary schools in other cities of Sudan. Finally, some assumptive for vocabulary learning and teaching are suggested.

4.0 Data Analysis, Results and Discussion
This chapter deals with analysis of the tool used in this study; the Paul Nation's Standardized Vocabulary Level Test (VLT). Third year students of secondary schools in Shendi Locality - River Nile State.

The Students' Tests

Students' Vocabulary Level Tests permission to undertake the research was first obtained from the principal of Shendi Secondary School and then the head department of English Language. The total number of test copies distributed by the volunteer teachers was 100. All the copies were returned valid. The time allowed was forty – five minutes. The researcher, as a shooter trouble, ensured that the rubric of the test was very comprehensive and clear to all. The test was marked. The maximum mark of the test was 26/30. Ethics of scientific research were closely observed throughout the different stages of this study. This included (and are not limited to) respecting students' privacy, preserving and accurately presenting their answers, and not using threatening and/or fraudulent means to force them to participate in the study. Respondents were briefed about the nature and goals of my study in order to obtain their informed consent.

TABLE (4.1): THE MEAN & STANDARD DEVIATION OF WORD KNOWLEDGE

Type of VLT	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T. value	Function (P.value)
VLT 1000 - Word level	6.98	100	4.221	7.547	0.000
VLT 2000 - Word level	4.67	100	3.385		

As it can be noticed from the table above there are statistical differences between the means scored by Shendi Secondary school students in both Tests (VLT 1,000 WORDS = 6.98), (VLT 2,000 words = 4.67). The differences are due to P. value (0.000) and T. value which hits (7.547) (see table 4.1).

These values are highly significant at the confidence interval 95%. These results confirmed the high correlation between the two tests. These values are significant at the ,01 level. The results confirmed the differences in favour of VLT 1,000-word test.

Moreover, in Paul Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), the more words Sudanese EFL Secondary school student knows, the better score his/her four skills. To most secondary school teachers as well as students, English grammar is the main focus on their teaching and learning, not the vocabulary.

5.0 Findings and Conclusion

This part provides a conclusion for the present study. It sheds light on the study problems, questions, objectives and its limits. Moreover, the methodology for collecting data and conducting this study is summed up. Then, a brief conclusion about the findings of this study is presented. Finally, recommendations that concern the study, as well as, suggestions for further research are introduced.

5.1 Summary of the Results:

This study looks into the poor performance of secondary school students on a vocabulary test: A case study of third-grade students in Shendi, River Nile State. The researcher developed three hypotheses to investigate the study questions objectively. They can be expressed as follows:

As judged and assessed by VLT, the initial level of Sudanese EFL school students' vocabulary size is within 1000 words.

Sudanese EFL School Students' overall vocabulary size is significantly lower than the 1000 and 2000 words of the VLT, as measured by the 1000 and 2000 frequency bands of the VLT.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings:

• Dealing with only a small amount of information about a word at a time in order to teach effectively

• The Ministry of Education should hold an update training program for English teachers.

• Subject teachers and curricula Designers should pay attention to the students' needs and the difficulties that even low-level students face, and take these difficulties into account in the next steps.

• The English language syllabus necessitates ongoing review and development of vocabulary in English language skills.

• Teachers should come up with new ways for their students to practice vocabulary by using a variety of exercises.

• Students should be encouraged to acquire more extra-useful vocabulary that will assist them in the future. The number of medical students in the classroom should be increased.

5.4   Suggestions for Further Studies:

• Secondary schools should take the Pual Nation′s Vocabulary test (VLT). Administration and teachers can use this tool to assess the size of students' English vocabulary. Teachers must assume responsibility for their own development because they have a positive influence on English language teaching and learning.

• More research on the most effective teaching and learning strategies for understanding English vocabulary is required.

•Many studies are required to stand on the difficulties that students face when learning vocabularies and to try to assist these difficulties with accurate solutions.

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