

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD VOCABULARY MASTERY

Mutaat¹, Radik Darmawan²

^{1,2}STBA Technocrat Tangerang

Corresponding email: sastrainggristechocrat@gmail.com

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mencoba untuk mengidentifikasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penguasaan kosa kata mahasiswa jurusan sastra. Ada 40 mahasiswa yang direkrut secara sukarela untuk mengikuti penelitian. Para siswa adalah siswa aktif di perguruan tinggi. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kuesioner. Penggunaan kuesioner untuk memperoleh persepsi siswa tentang penguasaan kosakata dan faktor-faktor lain yang relevan yang mempengaruhi penguasaan kosakata. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pada dasarnya, siswa memiliki persepsi yang bervariasi tentang kosakata yang diajarkan kepada mereka. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa siswa lebih suka belajar kosa kata dalam konteks, misalnya, siswa dapat belajar kosa kata sambil membaca novel, cerita pendek, atau bahan bacaan lainnya, dan bukan dari percakapan, atau bahan mendengarkan. Para siswa juga ditemukan lebih suka mempelajari kosakata, yang terkait dengan bisnis, kesehatan, pariwisata, dan teknologi. Terakhir, mereka juga lebih suka mempelajari kosa kata, yang berkaitan erat dengan latar belakang pekerjaan mereka.

Kata Kunci: siswa, persepsi, kosakata, penguasaan

Abstract

The present study tries to identify the students' perceptions toward vocabulary mastery of the literature students departments. There are 40 students who are recruited voluntarily to participate in the study. The students are actively learning students in the college. The instrument used in the present study is questionnaire. The use of questionnaire is to elicit the students' perception on the vocabulary mastery and the other relevant factors affecting vocabulary mastery. The findings indicate that basically, the students have varied perceptions on the vocabulary taught to them. The finding also shows that the students prefer to learn vocabulary in context, for instance, the students can learn vocabulary while reading novel, short story, or the other reading materials, and not from the conversation, or listening material. The students are also found that they prefer to learn vocabulary, which are related to business, health, tourism, and technology. Lastly, they also prefer to learn vocabulary, which are closely related to their occupational background.

Keywords: students, perceptions, vocabulary, mastery

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INTRODUCTION

Admittedly, with the growing concern of communicative language approach, most of the teaching activities are mostly focused on the four skills, namely, reading, writing, listening and speaking. In fact, there are other factors, which are inseparable in supporting the students' communication ability, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Of the three aspects, vocabulary is considered as the most important one (Rasouli, & Jafari, 2016). In fact, Thornbury (as citing Wilkin) perceive that vocabulary important since it can build communication practice (2002, p. 13). Specifically, Thornbury (as citing Wilkins) confirms that with vocabulary the learners can gradually build their speaking skill while without vocabulary the students cannot produce the words at all (2002, p. 13).

Vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words that convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do. Vocabulary addresses single lexical items—words with specific meaning(s)—but it also includes lexical phrases and multiword expressions (Lessard-Clouston, 2013, p. 2). In addition, Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 255), vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how learners speak, listen, read and write.

Some scholars consider vocabulary is a group of words that someone knows (See e.g., Caroline, 2005). Scholars consider that it is important to help the students acquire some important vocabulary without which their communication practice will never be realized (Lewis, & Hill, 1990; Zimmerman, 1997).

Vocabulary is the important part of learning a language and as a meaning of a new word is emphasized in books and classrooms (Hussain, 2018). Apart from its importance, mastering vocabulary may also pose some challenges to the students, this is because vocabulary which can possibly consist of more than one word (see e.g., Ur, 1991, p. 60). For instance, some multi- word idioms such as “call it a day” are certainly quite hard to be deduced from an analysis of the component words (Ur, 1991, p. 60).

Besides, it is also important to note that the vocabulary delivered during the class might not be useful if the students could not make use these words effectively. Cook (2008), alike, confirmed that while the students are definitely in need of a large number of words to enable them to speak a language, however, to teach the students how to use vocabulary is far more important (p. 46). Especially, with the emergence of different specializations in the world nowadays, specific terms continuously grow and develop. For instance, with the emergence of ICT, there are more terms that the English learners have to acquire (Johnson, 27 January 2021).

Several studies related to the field have been conducted. Daryanti (2015) conducted her study to identify the relationship between the students’ vocabulary mastery and their academic reading. The students are of the 8th grade of SMPN 4 Wates academic year 2013/2014. She found that that there was a correlation between students’ vocabulary mastery and students’ reading comprehension. Quantitatively, the correlation was considered positive and significant. The result of the hypotheses test showed that the coefficient of correlation is 0.600 and the total effective contribution of vocabulary mastery is 36%, thus indicating a positive correlation between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension. Andriani, and Sriwahyuningsih (2019) conducted their study about the students’ vocabulary mastery at Putra Indonesia University Padang. The study indicates that there are some problems faced by the students when learning vocabulary. In other word, some of the students’ difficulties are caused by the grammar. Specifically, some students have difficulties in comparison

and past tense. Lastly, the students are also found to face some students when learning the meaning of certain words.

In sum, there are some studies related to vocabulary research. However, the studies, which closely identify the vocabulary and the potentially relevant usage of the vocabulary, are still pretty scarce. In fact, with the emergence of the new fields, take for example, ICT and other technology-related fields, the use of English vocabulary should also be able to specifically cater the needs of these fields

The present study aims to identify the students' perceptions: (1) on the role of vocabulary in their foreign language learning; (2) toward the specific fields of vocabulary that need to be learned by the students; (3) on the learning material preferred when learning vocabulary; and lastly, (4) toward the problems faced when learning vocabulary.

METHOD

Since the present study focused on the students' perceptions, the method used in the present study was related to the identification on their perceptions. Scholars confirm that identifying perceptions, despite being abstract, may be measured from their comments on several aspects. For instance, the people who comment or indicate their favorable opinion on certain aspects may represent their positive perception toward these aspects. Despite providing limited choices for the participants, the survey research can possibly indicate the participants' perceptions as well as become a strong basis for further study.

The participants recruited for the present study was 40 students of the foreign language college located in Tangerang. The students were recruited voluntarily. Prior to the administration of the survey research, the would-be participants were given sufficient (See e.g. Widdowson, 1978), it considered important as it may affect someone's understanding toward the message of communication. The relation between vocabulary and communication in supporting effective communication generally depends on vocabulary mastery, which is one of the most critical aspects of language (Oxford & Scarella, 1994 as cited in Zarfaz, & Yeganehpour, 2021, p. 25). The criteria for being selected in the present study were the ones who were able to participate in the already set research. Secondly, the term purposive was related to the researcher's consideration that the participants recruited could provide more relevant information for the researcher.

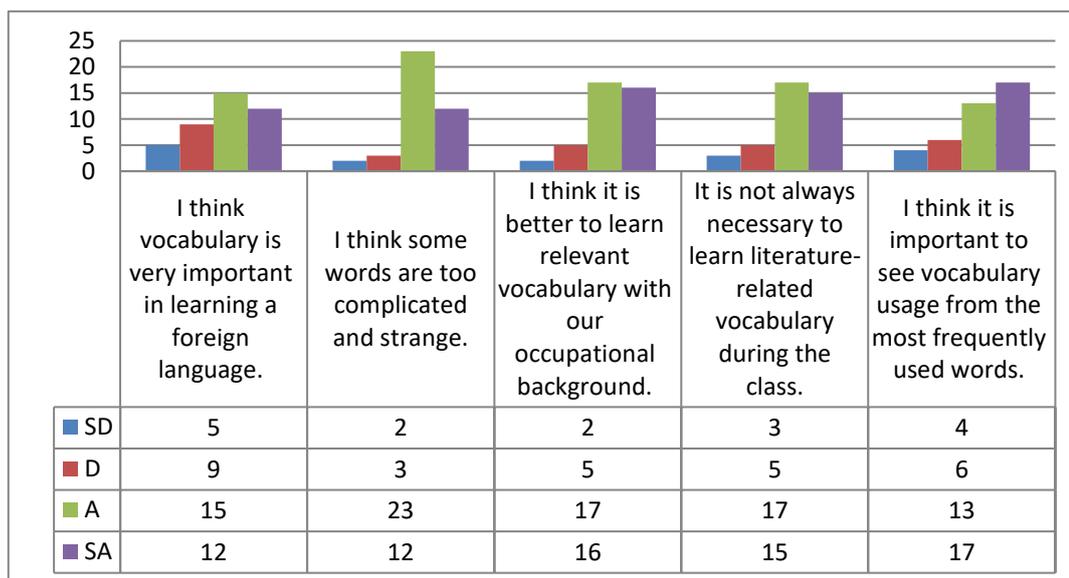
The instrument used in the present study is questionnaire. The use of questionnaire is considered very simple and easy to capture the participants' perceptions or things inside someone's mind. Despite the fact that the expression or verbal responses that the questionnaires elicit are relatively short, the data taken from the participants are considered valid.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study merely attempted to identify and interpret the students' perceptions regarding their speaking activities conducted during the class, their opinion about the learning process conducted by the teachers, during the class. Specifically, this study will answer the students' perceptions: (1) on the role of vocabulary in their foreign language learning; (2) toward the specific fields of vocabulary that need to be learned by the students; (3) on the learning material preferred when learning vocabulary; (4) toward the problems faced when learning vocabulary.

Students' perceptions on the role of vocabulary on their foreign language learning

Tabel 1. Students' Perceptions on the role of vocabulary

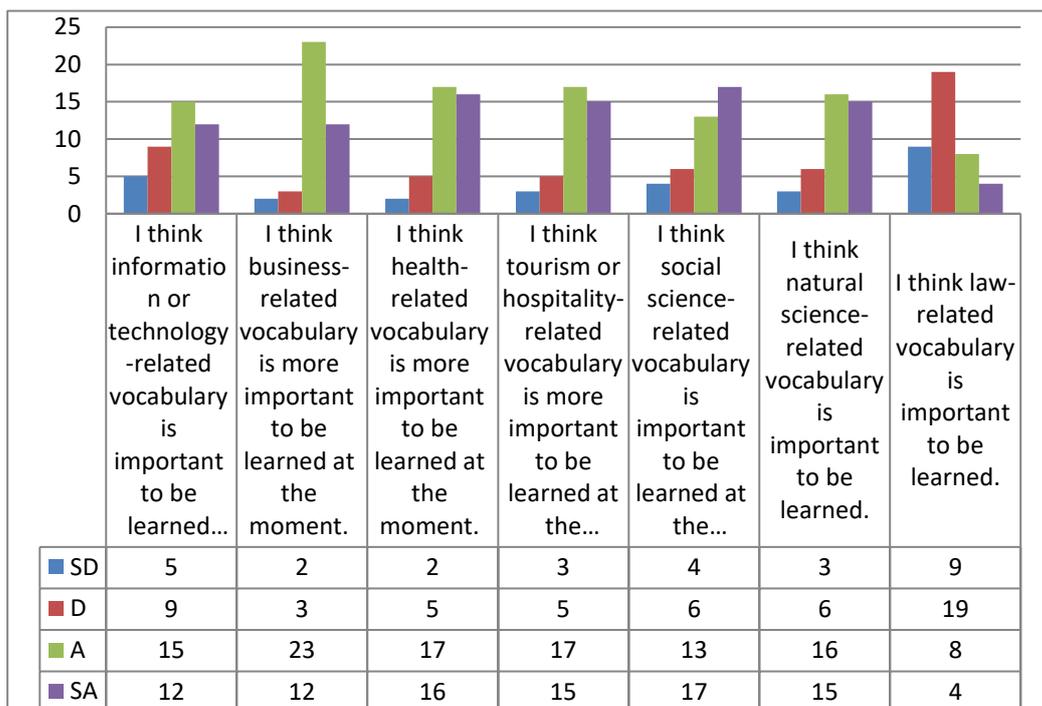


Based on the above data, it can be interpreted that the students tend to see the role of vocabulary variedly. In fact, the highest number of the students indicates that the students tend to consider that vocabulary is difficult to learn. Although the students generally think that vocabulary is important for them to learn, they prefer to learn vocabulary, which is more relevant to their occupational background.

Based on the table, it can be interpreted that vocabulary constitutes an important part of language skill. Although vocabulary is not directly considered as the four skills postulated by linguists (See e.g. Widdowson, 1978), it considered important as it may affect someone's understanding toward the message of communication. The relation between vocabulary and communication in supporting effective communication generally depends on vocabulary mastery, which is one of the most critical aspects of language (Oxford & Scarella, 1994 as cited in Zarfaz, & Yeganehpour, 2021, p. 25).

Students' perceptions on the specific fields of vocabulary that they should learn

Tabel 2. Specific vocabulary to be learned

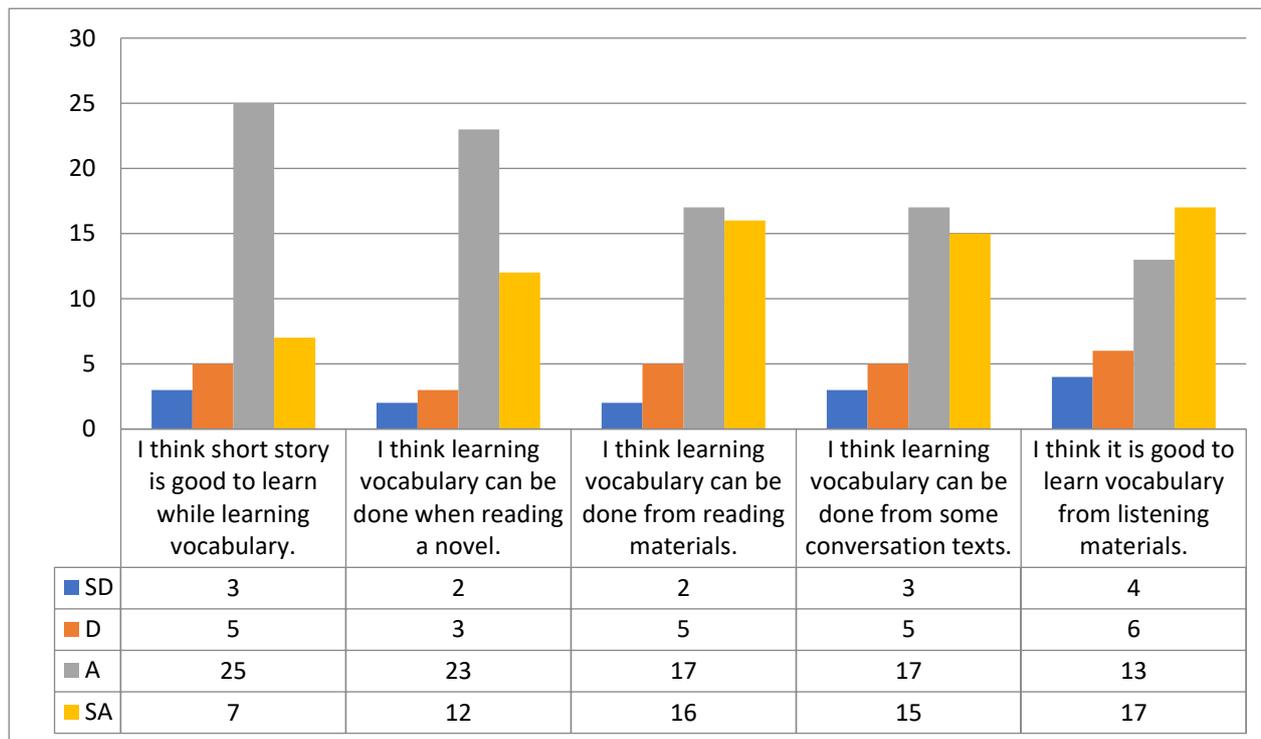


In terms of specific vocabulary, it is found that the students prefer to learn business-related vocabulary. This preference is indicated in the highest number of data. Further, it is followed with health-related vocabulary, tourism-related vocabulary, and information technology-related vocabulary respectively. The finding should be further analyzed whether this tendency is related to the students' backgrounds who are mostly working students.

The emergence of certain fields requiring newly related vocabulary is definitely timely. It is therefore very important for the language learners to continuously sharpen their language mastery by improving the relevance of their vocabulary mastery toward the possibility of the needs of certain skills in the future job market. Abdullah (2005, p. 2) argues that the importance of English Language Teaching or ELT is important due to the fact that it becomes the language of instruction of the new technology and science of the modern world. Tardy (2004) confirms that the growth of scientific exploration in information age has probably encouraged the use of a common language (p. 247). He further elaborates that English has also increasingly dominated international communication and information access (Tardy, 2004, p. 248). It is certainly important for those involved in college English language teaching to be more prepared to anticipate the potential development of specificities of vocabulary needed by their students.

Students' perceptions on the learning material preferred in teaching vocabulary

Table 3. Learning material preferred in teaching vocabulary



It is also found that the student perceive that learning vocabulary can be done in context, for instance, through novel reading activities, short story, or the other reading materials. In fact, the students indicate their highest preference to the novel and followed with the other reading materials, including short story in which they can possibly learn vocabulary. However, they also indicate that listening is the least option for them to learn vocabulary.

In terms of learning process the findings indicate that the students prefer to learn vocabulary in their context. The use of vocabulary related context has also been suggested by lots of scholars. Carreira (2013), for instance, confirms that learning specific vocabulary, particularly for ESP, is better learned in context. The most current research on vocabulary also indicates that basically teaching vocabulary in context is more advantageous than non-context teaching. Zarfaz and Yeganehpour (2021) found that the teaching vocabulary in context is more effective.

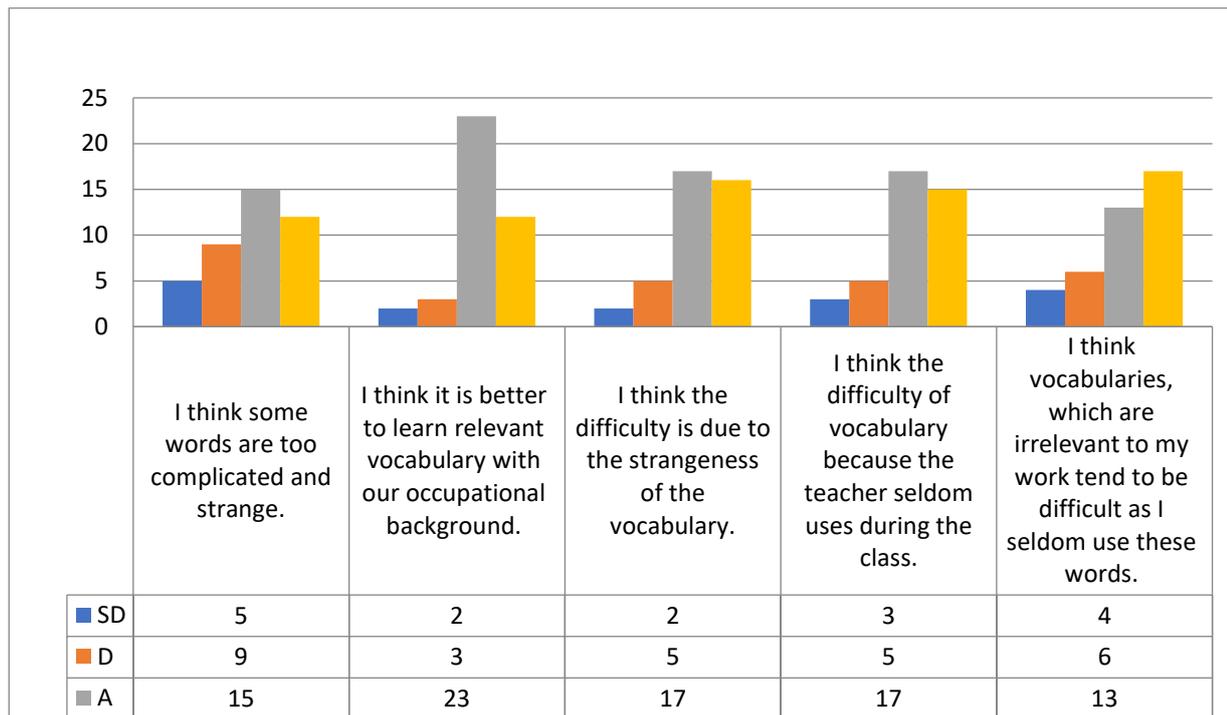
Specifically, they research the Turkish upper-intermediate English learners, who were taught using contexts. They found that that teaching vocabulary in contexts (zero, decreased, and high) had a substantial impact on upper-intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning and retention. In both the post-test and delayed post-tests, learners in high and reduced contexts performed slightly better than those in zero context. In sum, it was found that contextual teaching/learning in vocabulary can



significantly improve the performance of Turkish EFL learners at the upper-intermediate level as opposed to when the students are not given context at all (Zarfaz, & Yeganehpour, 2021, p. 32).

Students’ perceptions on the problems they face when learning vocabulary

Table 4. Students’ problem when learning vocabulary



Lastly, the students also assert their perception on the more specific and more relevant vocabulary training, particularly which is related to their own occupational backgrounds. This finding is also supported with the other claim indicating the difficulty of vocabulary due to the less frequent exposure to the students. The students also confirm that some of the words are strange and complicated.

The above findings and arguments are particularly relevant to what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have asserted that learning vocabulary, particularly in ESP, should lie on the learners’ reasons for learning. The learners’ problems faced in learning vocabulary as indicated in the present study should also be considered as an indication that learning vocabulary should be more relevant to the students’ occupational background. Despite the fact that they are literature students who must learn various words, considering the students’ job can also be an alternative so that the students will find it easier to learn vocabulary, thus resulting in easier and more motivating learning process.

Based on the students’ preference, it can also be interpreted that the context that the students wish may involve some reading material including novel, or short stories. In terms of short stories, Alamsyah (2016) considers that the use of local short stories may help students to read easier as they



may be relevant to the students' schemata, thus allowing the students to read faster as well as enjoying the newly learned vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Basically, the use of vocabulary is important as it can help the students to get more information specifically. Besides, these terms are important to master as they constitute important terms to support someone's professional world as well as to help understand new concept in science. It is certainly true that the future possible employment is not always an English-teaching job so the knowledge of some technical terms may provide a great help for those graduating from English literature to be employed in automotive industry. The present study is conducted in a quantitative research using questionnaire as the main instrument. Further study can be conducted in mixed method to provide more varied result and findings.

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