

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY AND EFL WRITING QUALITY

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Abstrak

Penelitian kuantitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan penguasaan kosakata siswa dengan kualitas menulis teks report informasi. Versi terbaru dari *Vocabulary Size Test* dan tugas menulis siswa adalah instrumen penelitian ini. Peneliti menggunakan rubrik *writing* yang telah diadaptasi untuk menilai dan memberikan skor untuk tugas hasil tulisan siswa. Sebanyak 54 siswa kelas 9 di sebuah sekolah menengah pertama di Sidoarjo terpilih menjadi subjek penelitian ini. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan mengadakan *vocabulary size test* dan mengumpulkan tugas menulis siswa. Teknik analisis data untuk *vocabulary size test* adalah dengan menghitung nilai yang diperoleh setiap siswa dari tes tersebut. Sementara itu, untuk hasil tugas menulis siswa dianalisis dan dinilai berdasarkan rubrik *writing*. Hasil penelitian korelasi Pearson menunjukkan bahwa $p\text{-value} = 0,562$ dan lebih tinggi dari *level of significant* ($\alpha = 0,05$). Hal ini membuktikan bahwa tidak ada korelasi antara penguasaan kosakata dan kualitas menulis dalam hal nilai. Koefisien korelasi (r) *writing* menunjukkan korelasi negatif karena $r = -1$. Hal ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa kosakata bukan satu-satunya aspek yang menentukan kualitas menulis. Aspek-aspek lain dari komponen penulisan seperti konten, organisasi, penggunaan bahasa, dan mekanika juga berperan penting. Dengan demikian, guru harus mengajarkan kosakata dan aspek bahasa lainnya secara efektif.

Kata kunci: kosakata, penguasaan kosakata, kualitas menulis, teks report.

Abstract

This quantitative study aims to find out the correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and the writing quality of information report text. The updated version of Vocabulary Size Test and the students' writing tasks were the instrument of this study. The researcher used an updated writing rubric to assess and give a score for the student's writing task. Fifty-four students of 9th-grade in a junior high school in Sidoarjo became the subject of this study. The data was collected by conducting a vocabulary size test and collecting the students' writing tasks. The data analysis technique for Vocabulary Size Test was computing the students' scores from the test. Meanwhile, the students' writing tasks were analyzed and assessed based on the writing rubric. The Pearson correlation shows that the $p\text{-value}$ is .562, and it is higher than the level of significance ($\alpha = .05$). It does prove that there is no correlation between vocabulary mastery and writing quality in terms of scores. The coefficient correlation (r) of writing shows a negative correlation since $r = -1$. It concludes that vocabulary is not the only aspect to determine the writing quality. Other aspects of writing components, such as content, organization, language use, and mechanics play an essential role as well. Thus, the teachers shall teach vocabulary and other aspects of language effectively.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Vocabulary Mastery, Writing Quality, Report Text.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery as it is referred to as understanding words can be obtained by doing communication activities. According to Mosher (2007) in Guskey & Anderman (2013), mastery is attaining a particular level in perceiving and recognizing particular knowledge. The students need to have an adequate vocabulary mastery to acquire English either in language comprehension or production (Barclay & Schmitt, 2019).

The common writing genres in English are personal letter text, narrative text, report text, descriptive text, recount text, and so forth. Among all of those, informational report text plays an essential role in curriculum, especially in school curricula. As mentioned in the national 2013 curriculum, The students need to learn how to make one. They are demanded to be able to convey their prior knowledge that they have learned from other subjects into written form.

Writing an information report text requires the students' critical thinking and literacy competence

(Hebert et al., 2018). They have to read and understand some reading passages to enrich their writing content. Moreover, an assessment is required to determine whether the writing composition meets the criteria of writing components or not. Erbeli et al. (2017); (Albzour & Albzour, 2015) conceived that writing components, such as semantic, sentence structure, vocabulary, word variety, language use, and mechanics are the parts that affect the writing quality.

Schmitt (2010) stated that the students who have a vast vocabulary mastery will be more able to engaging English. The understanding of words also becomes an essential aspect of English acquisition. The study, which investigates the correlation between vocabulary mastery towards writing quality, especially in explanation text, is still less in amount. The research problem of this study aims to find out whether the learners' vocabulary mastery affects the writing quality of information report text.

Therefore, the researcher finds numerous gaps from the previous studies as they are followed by Csomay & Prades (2018)'s study. The research that they conducted involved many college students as their subject. Junior high school students are rarely used as the subject of research that discusses the same area. Whereupon, many studies merely discuss the strategy to teach writing information report text instead of considering the factors that associated writing quality. It is still rare to look for studies that aim to find out the writing quality of information report text. Besides, studies about vocabulary and writing are scarce as well. Even a lot of studies discuss the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Hebert & Powell, 2016). Hence, the researcher conducts research that aims to find out the relationship between junior high school students' vocabulary mastery and EFL writing quality of information report text.

Research Questions

The study aims to find out whether the students' vocabulary mastery gives an impact on what they write on the writing quality of informational report text. This means that the researcher has to find out whether positive or negative would be the correlation is. Thus, the research question of this study will be:

1) Is there any significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and the writing quality of information report text?

Literary Review

Vocabulary

Every individual has their vocabulary capacity as which is called innate capacity. It eases people in the process of

using and knowing words regarded to their meaning and context. In line with the previous statement, someone needs to build up their vocabulary knowledge and communication competencies as well (Tovar, 2017).

Helms-Park & Dronjic (2016) believed that acquiring vocabulary builds an excellent knowledge for the students to learn the cross-lingual understanding between L1 and L2. The capacity of the vocabulary knowledge will automatically increase in regards to the more frequently they do the process of transferring the L1 term into L2 term to be applied in four English skills.

Vocabularies are separated based on the frequency level in a language. Following Marzano (2012)'s belief, there are three tiers of vocabulary. The one-tiered vocabulary is the basic words or high-frequency words. These words are commonly used in daily language or conversation (e.g., come, happy, see). The two-tiered is in line with the one-tiered vocabulary. However, the words from this tier are commonly used by the adults' language users. Those words are widely used in contextual written texts as well (e.g., arrange, endure, contrast). The three-tiered is categorized as low-frequency words. These words can be found in texts which have a specific subject or domain. The terms are rather academic than the first and second-tier (e.g., expansion, inflation, Nebular).

Vocabulary mastery reflects on how far the person knows and understands certain words. According to Al Qahtani (2015), vocabulary mastery refers to an ability to understand and use words. The students are required to have knowledge about words, which are knowing and understanding the meaning first before they can use the word to be applied in one of language skill.

Vocabulary mastery of a person could be different from another. It applies to the education level. Intermediate learners or middle school students are estimated to have around 1,000-3,000 word level and 3,000-4,000 word level that is needed in writing ability (Wicking, 2017). However, Wicking also stated that junior high school students have an approximately 1,200 word level of receptive vocabulary. As stated before, the vocabulary size for productive vocabulary tends to be higher than the receptive vocabulary. Despite this, the learners are required to have both receptive and productive vocabulary sizes to acquire all language skills.

Some experts stated that the word mastery capacity of EFL and ESL learners is distinct. Based on the recent study's result from Mustafa (2019), it showed that Indonesian junior high school students are expected to have vocabulary size around 1,000-5,000 word level from their reading comprehension's result. Every 1,000-word level showed its percentage of words that they at least

master. In the 1st 1,000 word level, the percentage is around 58%; the 2nd one is around 19%; the 3rd is around 8%; the 4th is around 5%; then the 5th is around 2%.

Vocabulary and the Writing Quality

Vocabulary and writing are two things that cannot be separated in the field of language. The studies from Crossley & McNamara (2012) and Gebril & Plakans (2016) revealed that high competence in writing denotes the more variety of vocabulary used in written composition. It reflects how well the words are used based on the context and content. The previous statement is in line with Tovar (2017)'s argument which shows he agreed that no matter how well a student acquires grammar and sentence structure, they will have difficulties in delivering their messages if they lack vocabulary.

Writing could become an obstacle for the students if they are unable to convey their knowledge in written form. A writer needs to read as many sources as possible and have adequate knowledge to make a high-quality writing product (Hebert et al., 2018). The quality of writing is determined by a particular component that should be met by the writer. An assessment of a text could be conducted to reveal whether the text has good or bad quality. There would be various writing assessments that are suggested by the experts. However, writing components is the basic factor that determines the quality of writing. According to Valdez (2016), the writing components that will be assessed are content and ideas, organization, vocabulary and word choice, language use, formality and objectivity, and referencing. Meanwhile, in another study from Gaviria (2012), mechanics, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion are the components of writing which determine the quality of a text.

Assessing writing based on components itself belongs to the analytic assessment. Ohta et al. (2018) revealed that there are six traits as the determination for writing quality. They are content and ideas, organization, sentence fluency, voice, vocabulary, and conventions. It is supported by Jacobs et al. (1981) in their writing rubric that concludes analytic scales. On the other hand, Ohta et al. (2018) also believed that the raters assess the writing quality depends on the idea that is organized and elaborated in writing composition, and this assessment is called holistic assessment. They agreed that what the writers meant in their writing composition is the primary concern that determines the writing quality. The comprehensible writing composition becomes attention to identifying writing quality.

Information Report Text

One kind of text that becomes a demand in higher secondary school is information report text. As we know from Gerot & Wignell (1994), information report has a social function which is to inform the readers of extent information based on the factual phenomenon and scientific sources.

Apart from the writing components, two generic structures of information report text construct the text. According to Gerot & Wignell (1994: 196), (1) General Classification should be included in the text. This part states the main discussion of the text. It tells the readers what the topic is about. Then, (2) there is Description as the part of information report text's general structure. The writer shall provide the readers with depth information about a certain topic in this section.

Every genre of text has its language features. This applies to information report text as well. The first one is using (1) Using general nouns, eg. these horses, rather than using possessive pronouns, eg. my horse; (2) It is written in simple present tense and using relating verbs to describe something that is being explained; (3) Using related verbs if the content is describing the behavior of something, eg. Bats do not sleep at night; (4) Using technical terms; (5) Write in a paragraph with a topic sentence on each of paragraphs.

The Relationship between Vocabulary Mastery and Writing Quality

The process of writing involves some significant points to make a qualified writing product. The cognitive aspect is needed in terms of having a prosperous knowledge as a provision for writing. Besides, the writer needs to be able to understand and know the meaning of the words to alleviate the process of learning the writing sources (McCutchen, 2011). Other than that, the writer may feel unbothered to convey the knowledge into written form if they have sufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Sophisticated vocabulary knowledge helps the students as well, especially in language learning. The students shall master vocabularies before they use them to acquire four English skills. Otherwise, they will have some detention in the language learning process if they have insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Vera et al., 2016). It proves that vocabulary plays a big part in the learning process. Vera et al. (2016) prove that sophisticated vocabulary knowledge determines successful learning for students.

METHOD

The objective of the study is to find out whether the 9th-grade students' vocabulary mastery is associated with the writing quality of information report text or not. A quantitative approach and correlational study were

selected as the research design. The quantitative design helps this study in revealing the students' vocabulary mastery since this kind of research design leads to gaining the data in the quantitative form. Meanwhile, the correlational study aims to find out a particular relationship between two or more variables. Based on Creswell (2012), quantitative and correlational studies have a similar research process. Using the score as the source of the data is applicable in quantitative and correlational design.

This study involved 54 EFL 9th-grade students in a junior high school in Sidoarjo. The subjects were selected by using simple random sampling. The sampling method gave an equal chance for every 9th-grade student to be selected as the research subject.

The researcher collected the data by coming to the school. The vocabulary test was put in the initial. The students were given 40 minutes to do the test. The students were expected to answer all items. However, each student must have a different knowledge of vocabulary. Thus, they were expected to answer as best as they can despite the fact that they were allowed to skip the item that they could not answer. Meanwhile, each student wrote an information report text based on the source text that the teacher gave. Then, the researcher asked for permission from the teacher to take all the students' writing tasks as the instrument for the writing quality.

Two instruments were used to collect the data. The researcher adopted The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test from Webb et al., (2017). They adapted Nation & Beglar (2007)'s Vocabulary Size Test. They aimed to make a vocabulary test that is applicable to be tested in every level of education. Moreover, the new version of the test was considered to have more excellent English vocabulary that is tested in 1,000-word levels. It was taken from Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA word lists. Then, the rest 4,000-word levels of the new version was the result of elaborating the 1,000-word levels that are used in the previous vocabulary tests. This kind of test was considered by the researcher as the tool for measuring the students' vocabulary mastery. The scoring of the test was by counting the correct answers. The correct answers in 1st-the 5th 1,000-word levels were merged as a whole score as it represents the vocabulary mastery.

The study conducted by Mustafa (2019) helps the researcher to determine an indicator for vocabulary mastery. The 1st-the 5th 1,000-word level was used as the indicator for the vocabulary size test and to measure the students' vocabulary mastery for this study. In his study, Indonesian junior high school students tend to master the

1st-the 5th 1,000-word levels. The 1st-the 5th 1,000-word levels were chosen by considering the grade level of the students. It is improbable if the 1st-14th-word levels are used as Vocabulary Size Test instrument since the participants are 9th-grade students. Hence, the researcher of this study considered and determined the word level for Vocabulary Size Test because they are expected not to transcend until the 14th-word level. Another indicator for the vocabulary size test was the students were expected to know the general words without any limitations since the researcher used Mustafa (2019)'s study as the indicator.

Assessing a writing product needs to use a particular rubric. The researcher adapted two writing rubrics from Jacobs et al. (1981) and Tucker C. (2012). The adaptation was necessary since any level of education has its indicator regarding the grade. The limitation of this study is to conduct research towards the 9th-grade students. Thus, the criteria for assessing information report text needs to be adjusted for 9th-grade. A writing rubric of information report text by Tucker C. (2012) was chosen since she provided a writing rubric of report text for the middle school level.

The students were expected to write information report text based on the same indicator as written on the K13 National Curriculum, which is basic competence number 3.9 and 4.9. The limitation of the topic was mere about the topics related to 9th-grade courses. It could be science, social, arts (music, dance, etc.), etc. Hence, the students may not feel any burden since the topic is still around what they have learned in the classroom.

The writing composition should meet writing aspects or components based on the rubric. Each element has its score range from excellent to poor to determine the level of writing. Besides, their writing composition should contain generic structures of information report text i.e. general classification and description. Then, the writing works will be given a score based on the rubric. The writing composition though needs a further process after giving it a score. It will be categorized based on the table of criterion writing scores.

Table 1. Table of Criterion Writing Score

Score	Level/Category
91-100	Excellent
81-90	Very good
71-80	Good
61-70	Fair
51-60	Poor
≤50	Very poor

The criterion was adopted from Arikunto (2013). It can be used as an indicator to prescribe whether the writing composition has good or bad quality. Many studies that discussed writing have used the table as a benchmark in prescribing the students' writing quality.

The data from Vocabulary Size Test were analyzed by counting the items that the students answered and how many correct answers there were. The updated vocabulary test consists of 1,000-5,000 word levels (30 items per word levels). It means there are 150 items in total. There are no specific and strict rules in giving a score for this test. Webb et al. (2017) suggested the researchers use any way of scoring based on the researcher's objective to use the test. Thus, the researcher computed all the correct items of the students' answers and the score is in 100 scales. Then, the researcher calculated the score in this way:

$$\text{Score: } \frac{\text{the amount of the correct items (n)}}{\text{number of items in total (150)}} \times 100$$

Furthermore, the scores of Vocabulary Size Test and writing quality are computed by using SPSS to find the correlation between them. The maximum score that the students get from each instrument is 100. The data of the computation will be shown in the table on the result and discussion chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Students' Vocabulary Mastery

The result came out after doing the computation. Based on the analysis process, almost all of the students got bad results on this test. The result of the score was listed later in table 3. The mean from the scores of Vocabulary Size Test is 49.14. It explains that the students can merely answer around 70 correct items. Besides, there are 7 out of 54 students who answered more than 100 correct items out of 150 items from the test. The result shows that the 9th-grade students in this school do not have adequate vocabulary mastery.

The Students' Writing Quality

The score of the writing tasks was diverse. From the analysis process, all of the students' writing work has all of the writing components. However, some of them were lacking in elaborating, for instance, they were unable to elaborate the content, then it made the content kind of unclear.

Their writing already has two generic structures of information report text, which are general classification and description. However, most of them did not meet the

organization and content aspects. The students were unable to construct their own words and sentences. This is what causes them to do plagiarize. They did not organize what should be written for the topic sentence for each paragraph. Thus, this makes the reader feel the writing is choppy.

Besides, the students' writing neatness makes the writing cannot meet the criteria of the mechanics component. Some of them are hard to be read. The students seem to have a little insight into the importance of punctuation. There are many of them who still did not write a full-stop (.) as a sign of the end of a sentence. Some of them encountered some problems in capitalization as well. It makes their writing got a low score in mechanics.

The students were not having that big concern about vocabulary and language use. Their word range was not that sufficient. One of the language features of information report text is it is written in the simple present tense to inform general truths. It makes them easier to write simple sentences yet still be readable and giving proper information. However, the researcher found more than 15 students out of 54 students only copying or plagiarizing from the source text. It means that those students did not know how to convey their thoughts in the form of writing by using their own words or vocabulary. For the rest of the students who got a bad score, they wrote by using their own words yet their writing did not meet the criteria of certain components.

The writing scores that the students got will be provided in table 2 below. It also provides the indicator of writing quality which was adopted from Arikunto (2013) in Azizah (2019).

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Score in Writing Information Report Text

Score	Level/Category	Frequency	Percentage
91-100	Excellent	8	14.81%
81-90	Very good	11	20.37%
71-80	Good	11	20.37%
61-70	Fair	0	0
51-60	Poor	7	12.96%
≤50	Very poor	17	31.38%
TOTAL		54	100%

The Relationship Between Students' Vocabulary Mastery And Writing Quality of Information Report Text

The researcher computed the mean and standard deviation (σ). The result of the mean and standard deviation will be used to compute the coefficient correlation. Here is the table for the descriptive statistics

between writing scores and the result of Vocabulary Size Test.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation (Std.)
Writing Scores	54	47	97	69.87	18.71
Vocabulary Size Test Score	54	26.67	93.33	49.14	15.64

The result from table 3 was computed and analyzed by using SPSS to find out the correlation between the two. The scores were analyzed by using *Pearson r*. Two-tailed was used to find out whether the two variables are in positive or negative correlation. Afterward, these statistics used a significant level (denoted as alpha or α) .05 since it is commonly used for educational studies. This is the result of the computation by using SPSS:

Table 4. The Result of The Correlation

Correlations			
		Vocabulary	Writing
Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	1	.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.562
	N	54	54
Writing	Pearson Correlation	.081	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.562	
	N	54	54

The result from table 4 shows that the p-value or p from the column Sig. (2-tailed) is .562. Then, the correlation is decided based on the Pearson Decision Rules. Pearson Decision Rules mentions that if $p >$ level of significant (α) = .05, then the two variables do not show any significant relationship. It means that the vocabulary knowledge that a student has, does not affect the writing quality. Since vocabulary is not merely one main aspect in making a good writing quality, it makes sense that the other writing components take part as well. They need to read sources as many as possible to broaden their knowledge. It is related to the development of content for their writing. EFL students are expected to

know grammar. They have to construct sentences that are communicative and understandable to the readers to avoid ambiguity.

Besides, the coefficient correlation (denoted as r) is .081. It shows that it is a negative correlation between two variables since $r = -1$. Hence, it means that the higher scores of vocabulary mastery that they get, the lower scores for writing quality are. On the other hand, the scores of the two tests will not affect each other. It is proved when the researcher has done the analysis and assessment. The result of certain students that has a high score in writing, they did not get an excellent achievement in vocabulary size test, and vice versa.

Following the previous result, the statistic result shows that vocabulary mastery and writing quality have a very low correlation or negligible for its strength of association. It is concluded from the result of the Pearson coefficient correlation $r = .081$. Based on the table of the strength of association, coefficient .00-.09 belongs to a very low correlation or negligible. Then, the Pearson correlation coefficient r is squared becomes $(.081^2) = .006561 = 0.67\%$. This percentage shows that only 0.67% of the variation of the students' writing quality can be explained by the result of vocabulary mastery.

Discussion

Vocabulary mastery affects the writing quality

The result shows that the two variables do not correlate with each other in terms of scores. However, it says otherwise in terms of the analytical assessment. Only 15 students did copying the text that they used as their writing source without any further elaboration. The researcher gave them scores as it is written on their writing without considering the plagiarism aspect. These 15 students got low scores on their Vocabulary Size Test as well. Their writing scores are in the range of 50-55. Meanwhile, their Vocabulary Size Test's scores are in the range of 30-45 which means they know solely around 45-67 items out of 150 items in total. Having proficient vocabulary mastery eases writers to write with their own words. Producing a piece of writing indeed involves an ability to arrange and connect words with their knowledge (Hasan, 2017). Those who involve both abilities can deliver an idea to make such a legitimate writing product for the readers.

Moreover, for those who got good scores on Vocabulary Size Test, it did not guarantee that they got good results on writing. Another result shows that the rest of those who got low scores on writing did not have well-organized texts. The content confused the readers since they did not focus on what they talked about according to the source text. Unclear content affects the cohesiveness

of the text. This made them writing out of the context, and it may lead to incoherency. Having a lack of vocabulary made them write offhandedly. It is because the students are unable to find proper words so that they are unable to convey their thoughts into written form (Anh, 2019). In the end, they write as is according to the word choices they are good at regardless of its content.

Some students' major mistake in language use component is articles. They did not have a clue how to use a/an/the in the sentences. They also have restrained knowledge of grammar. Vocabulary mastery is the essential part of acquiring communicative proficiency which involved syntax (Al Qahtani, 2015). Run-on sentences became a severe issue in their writing as well. Lack of mechanics takes a crucial role in writing. They tend to make mistakes in capitalization and/or punctuation. The way their handwritten style may confuse the readers since some of their writings were illegible.

One out of three students got a higher score on Vocabulary Size Test. They genuinely wrote an information report text with their own words. They were considered as having fluency in EFL writing. Analytically, they developed their word choices. They did elaborate on the organization and the content of their writing product despite they were given an example of an information report text. They wrote grammatically correctly. They even did not write any run-on sentences. They mastered the language use component as well. It seemed that there was an involvement of cognitive process in their writing process, which represents the process of deciding the main idea/topic, planning, organizing, and monitoring (Hebert et al., 2018). By doing such processes, they, at least, met all of the excellent results based on the writing rubric. Hence, they made excellent writing products.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Vocabulary is not the main aspect that affects writing quality. However, a good vocabulary capacity can help the students enhancing their fluency in aspects of writing. They will not feel any burdensome to write such well-organized writing. Their vocabulary capacity will help them to make good sentences so that they can write grammatically correctly.

Moreover, the students are demanded to have adequate cognitive resources to avoid the lack of general knowledge. The topics should be based on what the students have learned. Thus, they will not find it difficult to make a piece of writing.

The result shows that many students merely did copying and plagiarizing. They got bad writing quality regardless of the good scores of their vocabulary size test are. Nevertheless, only a few of them got higher scores on both Vocabulary Size Test and writing quality and vice versa. The number of those students is below the number of students who did plagiarism. In conclusion, the result made the two variables, which are vocabulary mastery and writing quality, were not related.

Suggestion

The teachers should not merely focus on one aspect of language, such as vocabulary, to make the students achieve the learning objective. The teacher should give an insight into how to meet all of the writing components. Moreover, the teacher should give a limitation on the topic that they will write about. This will help the students to not write what they are not capable of.

The vocabulary size test and writing topic should be adapted to align with the students' level. The level of difficulty should not exceed the limits of the student's ability. Hence, the students will not feel any difficulties in doing the test.

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