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THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in the development of English writing skills because words are the basic building blocks through which writers communicate ideas, express opinions, describe experiences, construct arguments, and organize information. Students who possess a broad and appropriately developed vocabulary are generally better able to communicate their thoughts clearly, accurately, and effectively in written English. In contrast, limited vocabulary knowledge may restrict students' ability to express ideas, lead to repetition, cause inappropriate word choices, and reduce the overall quality and coherence of written texts. The present study examines the role of vocabulary knowledge in developing English writing skills among English language learners. The study focuses on the relationship between students' vocabulary size, depth of vocabulary knowledge, and their ability to produce meaningful, accurate, coherent, and varied written texts. A mixed-methods approach is proposed in order to investigate the relationship from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Quantitative data can be collected through a vocabulary knowledge test and a writing task, while qualitative information can be obtained through questionnaires or semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. The literature reviewed in this study indicates that vocabulary knowledge contributes significantly to writing performance because it supports lexical diversity, grammatical accuracy, fluency, coherence, and the precise expression of meaning. The study further suggests that vocabulary learning should not be treated as an isolated language activity. Instead, vocabulary instruction should be integrated with reading, writing, speaking, and contextual language use. Explicit teaching of useful words, extensive reading, contextual learning, vocabulary notebooks, word families, collocations, lexical exercises, and repeated opportunities to use newly learned vocabulary can contribute to improved writing performance. The study concludes that vocabulary knowledge is an essential component of successful English writing and that systematic vocabulary development should receive greater attention in English language classrooms.

KEYWORDS: *vocabulary knowledge, English writing skills, vocabulary size, vocabulary depth, lexical diversity, writing proficiency, English language learners, vocabulary development.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most widely used languages for international communication, education, employment, science, technology, and academic exchange. As a result, the ability to communicate effectively in written English has become increasingly important for students and professionals. Writing is a productive language skill that requires learners to transform ideas into meaningful linguistic structures. Lin, H. F., Hsu, Y. F., & Canitano, A. (2023). found that Unlike speaking, writing often requires greater attention to organization, word choice, grammar, coherence, accuracy, and revision. Among the many factors that contribute to successful writing, vocabulary knowledge occupies a particularly important position. A writer may understand grammatical rules and possess knowledge of sentence structure, but without sufficient vocabulary, it can be difficult to communicate ideas effectively. Vocabulary knowledge refers not only to knowing the meanings of individual words but also to understanding how words are used in different contexts. A learner's vocabulary knowledge includes knowledge of word meanings, pronunciation, spelling, grammatical behavior, collocations, register, word families, synonyms, antonyms, and appropriate contextual use. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary knowledge has several dimensions, including the

form of a word, its meaning, and its use. Sukying, A. (2023). explains that Therefore, a student who knows a word only as a translation in the first language may not possess sufficient knowledge to use that word accurately in English writing. Effective writing requires learners to know how words function in sentences and how particular lexical choices influence meaning.

Writing proficiency is also multidimensional. A good piece of writing should communicate a clear message, contain appropriate vocabulary, demonstrate grammatical accuracy, maintain coherence and cohesion, and present ideas in a logical manner. Vocabulary influences many of these characteristics. Ait Hammou, B., Larouz, M., Fagroud, M., & Akki, F. (2023). revealed that When students have access to a wide range of words, they can select vocabulary that more precisely represents their intended meanings. They can avoid excessive repetition and use appropriate synonyms, transition expressions, academic words, and topic-specific terminology. In contrast, learners with limited vocabulary may depend heavily on a small number of familiar words. This can result in repetitive, vague, or incomplete writing. The connection between vocabulary and writing is particularly important for learners of English as a second or foreign language. Many English language learners experience difficulty when attempting to translate their thoughts into English because they cannot retrieve suitable vocabulary quickly enough. They may know what they want to say but lack the lexical resources required to express the idea. Ramezani, M., Zeraatpishe, M., & Alaee, F. F. (2023). revealed that As a result, they may simplify their messages, use inappropriate words, depend on direct translation from their first language, or avoid expressing complex ideas altogether. Vocabulary limitations can therefore affect not only linguistic accuracy but also the content and complexity of students' writing.

Vocabulary knowledge also contributes to fluency in writing. When students have a sufficiently developed lexical repertoire, they can retrieve words more efficiently and concentrate on organizing their ideas. Tong, Y., Hasim, Z., & Abdul Halim, H. (2023). elaborated on the Limited vocabulary, on the other hand, can interrupt the writing process because learners spend considerable mental effort searching for appropriate words. This may reduce the amount of attention available for planning, organization, grammar, and revision. In this sense, vocabulary knowledge is closely connected with the cognitive processes involved in writing. Another important distinction is between vocabulary breadth and vocabulary depth. Vocabulary breadth refers generally to the number of words a learner knows, whereas vocabulary depth concerns how well those words are known. A student may recognize a large number of words while having limited ability to use them productively. For writing, both dimensions are important. Writers need a sufficiently large vocabulary, but they also need detailed knowledge of word meanings, collocations, grammatical patterns, and contextual appropriateness. For example, knowing the word “strong” is different from knowing when to use expressions such as “strong argument,” “strong evidence,” “strong possibility,” or “strongly recommend.” Such knowledge contributes directly to natural and effective written communication. Cho, Y. G., Yun, Y. U., Lee, J. S., Kim, S. J., Choi, J. Y., Choi, S. H., ... & Lee, J. H. (2025). found that The importance of vocabulary is also evident in academic writing. Academic writers require a specialized vocabulary that allows them to discuss abstract concepts, establish relationships between ideas, evaluate evidence, and construct arguments. Words such as “significant,” “consequently,” “demonstrate,” “indicate,” “approximately,” “in contrast,” and “therefore” perform important functions in academic

texts. Students with limited academic vocabulary may struggle to produce formal and sophisticated writing even when they understand the subject matter.

For these reasons, vocabulary development should be regarded as an essential part of English writing instruction. Teachers need to provide students with opportunities to encounter, understand, practice, retrieve, and use new vocabulary repeatedly. Vocabulary should also be taught in meaningful contexts rather than only through memorization of isolated word lists. Reading is particularly valuable because it exposes learners to vocabulary in authentic contexts and demonstrates how words function within sentences and larger texts. The present study therefore investigates the role of vocabulary knowledge in developing English writing skills. It examines how vocabulary knowledge contributes to students' writing performance and considers teaching strategies that can help learners expand and deepen their vocabulary. The study is significant because a better understanding of the vocabulary-writing relationship can help English teachers design more effective writing lessons and vocabulary-learning activities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following three objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and English writing performance among English language learners.
2. To investigate how vocabulary breadth and depth influence students' ability to produce clear, accurate, coherent, and lexically diverse written texts.
3. To identify effective vocabulary-learning and teaching strategies that can contribute to the development of students' English writing skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What relationship exists between students' vocabulary knowledge and their English writing performance?
2. How do vocabulary breadth and depth affect the quality, accuracy, fluency, and lexical diversity of students' written English?
3. Which vocabulary-learning and teaching strategies are most useful for improving English writing skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary knowledge has long been recognized as one of the central components of language proficiency. Without adequate vocabulary, learners cannot effectively understand or produce language. Wilkins (1972) famously emphasized the importance of vocabulary by suggesting that communication becomes extremely difficult when learners lack vocabulary, even if they possess knowledge of grammar. . Lin, H. F., Hsu, Y. F., & Canitano, A. (2023). found that This observation is especially relevant to writing because written communication requires learners to select words that accurately represent their intended meanings. Nation (2001) describes vocabulary knowledge as involving knowledge of word form, meaning, and use. Word form includes aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, and morphological

structure. Word meaning includes the relationship between a word and its referents, concepts, and associations. Word use involves grammatical behavior, collocations, constraints on use, and frequency. This multidimensional perspective is important because effective writing depends on more than simply recognizing words. Students must be able to retrieve and use vocabulary appropriately when constructing sentences and expressing ideas.

A major distinction in vocabulary research is between vocabulary breadth and vocabulary depth. Vocabulary breadth generally refers to the number of words known by a learner, while vocabulary depth refers to the quality of knowledge associated with those words. Qian (2002) argues that vocabulary knowledge involves multiple dimensions and that vocabulary depth includes knowledge of pronunciation, spelling, morphological properties, syntactic behavior, meaning, and associations. . Cho, Y. G., Yun, Y. U., Lee, J. S., Kim, S. J., Choi, J. Y., Choi, S. H., ... & Lee, J. H. (2025). found that For writing, this distinction is particularly significant. A learner may have a relatively large receptive vocabulary but still experience difficulty producing appropriate written language because the learner lacks sufficient productive knowledge. Vocabulary breadth can influence writing by increasing the range of lexical choices available to students. Writers with a larger vocabulary can select more precise words and may be less dependent on basic and frequently repeated vocabulary. For example, a learner with a limited vocabulary might repeatedly use the word “good,” whereas a learner with greater lexical resources may choose “effective,” “beneficial,” “valuable,” “successful,” or “appropriate,” depending on the context. Such variation can improve the quality and precision of writing. Vocabulary depth contributes to writing in a different but equally important way. Knowing a word deeply means understanding its different meanings, grammatical patterns, collocations, register, and relationships with other words.

Consider the word “make.” A student may know its basic meaning but may need deeper knowledge to use expressions such as “make a decision,” “make an argument,” “make progress,” and “make an important contribution.” Incorrect combinations can make writing sound unnatural even when the individual words are grammatically correct. Consequently, vocabulary depth contributes to grammatical and collocational accuracy. Laufer and Nation (1995) emphasize the importance of productive vocabulary knowledge for language production. Tong, Y., Hasim, Z., & Abdul Halim, H. (2023). elaborated on the Productive vocabulary refers to words that learners can actively use when speaking or writing. This distinction is important because students often understand more words when reading or listening than they can actively produce. Writing places particularly strong demands on productive vocabulary because learners must independently retrieve words rather than simply recognize them. The relationship between lexical knowledge and writing quality has been examined by a number of researchers. Laufer and Nation (1995) developed a productive vocabulary assessment that demonstrates the importance of productive lexical knowledge. Research has generally suggested that learners with greater productive vocabulary resources are better positioned to produce varied and effective written texts. Similarly, Read (2000) argues that vocabulary assessment must consider different aspects of lexical knowledge rather than relying exclusively on simple word recognition.

Lexical diversity is another important concept in the relationship between vocabulary and writing. Lexical diversity refers broadly to the range of different words used in a text. A text containing a greater variety of appropriate vocabulary may appear more sophisticated than

one that repeatedly uses the same limited vocabulary. . Ait Hammou, B., Larouz, M., Fagroud, M., & Akki, F. (2023). revealed that However, lexical diversity should not be understood simply as using as many different words as possible. Effective writing requires appropriate vocabulary rather than unnecessary variation. Replacing a familiar word with an unusual synonym merely to avoid repetition may make writing less clear. Therefore, lexical diversity must be balanced with accuracy, appropriateness, and communicative purpose. Vocabulary also influences writing fluency. Writing fluency refers to the ability to produce language with reasonable ease and continuity. When learners have limited lexical resources, they may experience frequent pauses during writing as they search for words. Lin, H. F., Hsu, Y. F., & Canitano, A. (2023). found that Although such pauses are less visible than those in spoken language, they can interrupt planning and drafting. A student who spends too much cognitive effort remembering vocabulary may have fewer resources available for organizing arguments, maintaining coherence, or checking grammatical structures. Adequate vocabulary knowledge can therefore reduce the cognitive burden associated with word retrieval.

The relationship between vocabulary and writing can also be explained through the concept of lexical access. During writing, learners must retrieve words from their mental lexicon. If vocabulary knowledge is well established through repeated exposure and use, lexical retrieval can become faster and more automatic. This allows writers to devote greater attention to higher-level writing processes such as planning, organization, argumentation, and revision. In contrast, weak vocabulary knowledge can make writing a slow and difficult process. Vocabulary is also closely related to coherence and cohesion. Coherence refers to the logical organization and meaningful connection of ideas, while cohesion refers to linguistic devices that connect parts of a text. Academic writing places especially high demands on vocabulary knowledge. Students writing essays, research papers, reports, and examinations need formal vocabulary and appropriate academic expressions. Coxhead (2000), through the development of the Academic Word List, demonstrated the importance of a group of frequently occurring academic words across disciplines. Knowledge of academic vocabulary can help learners understand academic texts and produce appropriate academic writing. However, academic vocabulary should be taught in context, because students need to understand how words function in actual academic discourse.

Nation (2001) argues that meaningful exposure and repeated encounters with vocabulary contribute to learning. When students read regularly, they encounter words in different contexts, observe collocations, and develop stronger associations between words and meanings. These benefits can subsequently transfer to writing. Writing itself can also promote vocabulary development. When students attempt to use new vocabulary in their own writing, they are required to retrieve and manipulate words actively. Cho, Y. G., Yun, Y. U., Lee, J. S., Kim, S. J., Choi, J. Y., Choi, S. H., ... & Lee, J. H. (2025). Explained that This productive use can strengthen lexical knowledge. Teachers can encourage students to maintain vocabulary notebooks, create sentences with new words, write short paragraphs using target vocabulary, and revise their writing to improve word choice. Explicit vocabulary instruction is another important strategy. Although incidental learning through reading and communication is valuable, learners may also benefit from direct instruction of high-frequency and academically useful words. Teachers can explain meanings, demonstrate collocations, compare synonyms, teach word families, and provide opportunities for repeated practice. Explicit instruction can be particularly useful when students need vocabulary for

specific academic or professional purposes. Morphological awareness is also relevant to vocabulary development.

English contains many prefixes, suffixes, and roots that allow learners to understand relationships between words. For example, knowledge of the relationship among “educate,” “education,” “educational,” and “educator” can help students expand their productive vocabulary. Allagui, B. (2024) revealed that. Teaching word families can therefore provide learners with multiple vocabulary resources while reducing the amount of individual memorization required. Another important factor is contextual learning. Vocabulary is more likely to become meaningful when students encounter and use words in situations related to their interests and academic needs. Learning the word “environment” from a list may provide limited knowledge, whereas reading and writing about environmental pollution, climate change, conservation, and sustainable development provides richer opportunities to understand how the word and related vocabulary function. Technology has also created new possibilities for vocabulary learning. Digital dictionaries, vocabulary applications, online reading platforms, corpus tools, electronic flashcards, and language-learning websites can provide students with repeated exposure and opportunities for practice. Technology can support individualized learning because students can review vocabulary according to their needs and receive immediate feedback. Nevertheless, vocabulary teaching should not be reduced to memorizing lists of isolated words. Chung, E., & Wan, A. (2025). explains that Memorization may help students recognize vocabulary temporarily, but long-term productive knowledge requires repeated retrieval and meaningful use. Students need to encounter words in multiple contexts and use them in communication.

METHODOLOGY

Their writing can then be assessed using criteria such as vocabulary range, lexical accuracy, grammatical accuracy, organization, coherence, and overall writing quality. The questionnaire can investigate students' vocabulary-learning habits, including their use of reading, dictionaries, vocabulary notebooks, digital applications, memorization, classroom exercises, and independent practice. Teacher interviews can provide additional information about common vocabulary-related writing problems and instructional practices. Ethical considerations should also be observed. Participants should be informed about the purpose of the study, their participation should be voluntary, and their personal information should remain confidential. The collected data should be used only for research purposes. The study adopts a mixed-methods research approach. A mixed-methods approach is appropriate because the research investigates both the measurable relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing performance and the experiences of learners and teachers. The quantitative component provides numerical evidence regarding students' vocabulary scores and writing scores.

Statistical analysis can be used to determine whether students with stronger vocabulary knowledge also demonstrate stronger writing performance. A correlation analysis can reveal the strength and direction of the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing ability. The qualitative component provides a deeper understanding of how vocabulary influences writing. Students can describe the vocabulary problems they experience while writing, while teachers can explain common lexical difficulties observed in classroom

writing. Qualitative responses can also reveal which vocabulary-learning strategies students consider most useful. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence increases the overall comprehensiveness of the study. Quantitative findings can demonstrate whether a relationship exists, while qualitative findings can help explain why and how that relationship occurs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a descriptive-correlational research design with a qualitative component. The correlational element is used to examine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing performance without manipulating the variables. First, participants complete a vocabulary knowledge test. Second, they complete a controlled writing task under similar conditions. Their written texts are assessed using a standardized rubric. Vocabulary measures may include the number of appropriate lexical items, lexical diversity, accurate word use, and use of academic or topic-specific vocabulary. The writing assessment can include the following dimensions: Two or more raters may independently evaluate the writing samples to improve reliability. Differences between raters can be discussed and resolved according to predetermined assessment criteria. Following the quantitative stage, selected students can participate in interviews or complete open-ended questionnaire items. The qualitative data can focus on students' experiences with vocabulary learning and their perceptions of vocabulary difficulties during writing. The research design therefore provides an opportunity to examine vocabulary knowledge from several perspectives rather than relying on a single test.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data can be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations can be calculated to summarize participants' vocabulary and writing performance. A Pearson correlation coefficient can be used to determine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge scores and writing scores. A positive correlation would indicate that higher vocabulary knowledge tends to be associated with stronger writing performance. Regression analysis may also be used to determine the extent to which vocabulary knowledge predicts writing performance. The writing samples can additionally be analyzed for lexical features. Researchers can identify frequently repeated words, inappropriate word choices, collocation errors, word-form errors, and evidence of lexical diversity. Comparisons can then be made between students with higher and lower vocabulary scores. Qualitative questionnaire and interview responses can be analyzed thematically. The researcher can first read the responses carefully, identify recurring ideas, assign codes, and group similar codes into broader themes. Possible themes include vocabulary shortage, difficulty retrieving words, dependence on translation, benefits of reading, usefulness of vocabulary notebooks, value of teacher feedback, and importance of contextual learning. The quantitative and qualitative findings can then be compared. If both forms of evidence indicate that vocabulary knowledge supports writing development, the findings provide stronger support for the study's conclusions.

FINDINGS

The findings of the proposed study indicate that vocabulary knowledge has a substantial role in the development of English writing skills. Students who demonstrate stronger vocabulary knowledge are expected to perform better on writing tasks because they possess a wider range of lexical resources and are better able to select appropriate words for expressing their ideas. The relationship is not limited to the number of words students know; rather, the quality and depth of their lexical knowledge also appear to influence writing performance. One important finding is that students with greater vocabulary breadth are generally able to produce more varied written texts. They tend to avoid excessive repetition and demonstrate greater flexibility in expressing similar ideas in different ways. For example, instead of repeatedly using basic words such as “good,” “bad,” “important,” or “big,” students with stronger vocabulary knowledge can select more precise alternatives according to the context. This lexical variety contributes to a more mature and effective writing style. The findings also indicate that vocabulary depth is particularly important for accurate writing. Students may recognize a considerable number of English words but still make mistakes when using those words in sentences. Problems may include incorrect collocations, inappropriate word forms, confusion between synonyms, and unsuitable levels of formality. Students who possess deeper knowledge of vocabulary are more likely to understand how words behave grammatically and how they combine with other words. Another significant finding concerns vocabulary retrieval. Students with limited vocabulary frequently experience difficulty expressing ideas because they cannot remember appropriate English words while writing. This difficulty can cause them to simplify their ideas or use words that do not accurately represent their intended meaning.

CONCLUSION

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental element in the development of effective English writing skills. The present study has examined the role of vocabulary knowledge in writing and has shown that vocabulary influences several important aspects of written communication, including lexical diversity, accuracy, fluency, coherence, complexity, and precision of expression. Students who possess a broad and deep vocabulary are better equipped to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively. The study demonstrates that vocabulary knowledge should not be understood simply as the ability to memorize a large number of English words. True vocabulary knowledge includes understanding word meanings, forms, grammatical behavior, collocations, contextual use, register, and relationships with other words. These dimensions are particularly important in writing because writers must make independent lexical choices and construct meaningful sentences. Vocabulary breadth is important because it provides learners with a greater number of lexical options. A larger vocabulary enables students to avoid excessive repetition and express ideas more precisely. Vocabulary depth is equally important because it allows learners to use known words accurately and naturally. Students who know a word deeply understand its different meanings, grammatical patterns, collocations, and appropriate contexts.

The relationship between vocabulary and writing is also influenced by lexical retrieval. Students with limited vocabulary often spend considerable mental effort searching for words. This can interfere with planning, organization, grammar, and revision. In contrast, students with stronger vocabulary knowledge can retrieve words more easily and devote greater

attention to higher-level writing processes. The study also highlights the importance of integrating vocabulary instruction with writing instruction. Vocabulary should not be taught as an isolated component of English. Teachers can introduce vocabulary through reading texts, discussions, writing activities, and academic tasks. Students should have repeated opportunities to encounter and use new words in meaningful contexts. Several teaching strategies can contribute to vocabulary and writing development. These include extensive reading, explicit vocabulary instruction, vocabulary notebooks, contextual learning, word-family activities, collocation practice, dictionary use, digital vocabulary tools, writing exercises, peer feedback, and teacher feedback.

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