

## The Effect of Using Journalistic Texts on the Development of Vocabulary of English as a Foreign Language for University Students

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of using journalistic texts on the development of vocabulary items of English as a foreign language for university students. Fifty students participated in the study and lasted for one full semester / the summer semester 2012-2013. Each student enrolled in one of two classes of English 101 course. One of the classes was assigned to an experimental group of twenty-five subjects, who were taught using selected journalistic texts, while the other class was assigned to a control group of twenty-five subjects, who were taught using the current method. The adjusted means, standard deviation and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were used for the study. The study results indicated that using journalistic texts was more effective in teaching vocabulary to Jordanian EFL university students than the conventional method (non- journalistic).*

**Keywords:** Vocabulary, Vocabulary texts, Journalistic Vocabulary

### Introduction

English Language is an international language across the world. It is crucial to know the language for the sake of communications. It is important for Jordanian students at schools and universities. Therefore, Jordanian Students have to learn it and then use it fluently (Rabab'ah, 2005).

Mastering vocabulary is very important for the students who learn English as a foreign language. That is why everybody who learns English or a certain language should know its vocabulary. Baumann and Kameenui (1991) mentioned that because vocabulary is the tools students use to access their background knowledge, express ideas, and learn about new concepts; students' vocabulary knowledge is linked strongly to academic success.

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial to reading comprehension and to understanding the texts that students read at school and in college.

In the same vein, Stahl (1999) stated that although it is true that comprehension is far more than recognizing vocabulary and remembering in their meanings, it is true that if a reader does not know the meanings of a sufficient proportion of the vocabulary in the text, comprehension is difficult. Poor readers often lack adequate vocabulary to get meaning from what they read.

Putrid (2010) proposed that the most problematic area for students of English is vocabulary. Vocabulary is a vital aspect in language, because it appears in every skill of language listening, speaking, reading and writing. So mastery of vocabulary can support students in speaking when they are communicating to people, it helps them to write and translate the meaning of vocabulary when they use English. If they do not know the meaning of vocabulary, they will not be able to speak, write and translate anything English. The students can gain progress in English, if they master its vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is one of the first steps of learning a second language such as English; yet many learners realize that their vocabulary is limited so they have difficulties in expressing their ideas.

Students often graduate from public schools with a modest repertoire of vocabulary. They are now challenged by a variety of pieces of literature to read and understand; by the English-speaking environment inside classrooms in their universities where they have to spend their four-year study. The first immediate need for them therefore is to learn and use more vocabulary.

They lack some of the required vocabulary to get their meaning across. This prevents them from keeping a continuous interaction for a long time. That's to say, some researchers and linguists noticed those problems. Stahl (1999), Aiex (2000), Chen and Lei (2009), Pang (2010), Putri (2010), Abu-Risha (2011), and Johnson (2012) admitted that vocabulary is a problematic area of language that university students find difficult to master.

Many methods can help students acquire new vocabulary. For example, memorizing and guessing the new vocabulary from the context.

Some university instructors do not teach vocabulary through context but teach them in isolation. As a result, students are obliged to learn these vocabularies by heart and forget them shortly after the exams. In addition, they become unaccustomed to notifying the meaning of these vocabulary items, so they spend a lot of time checking their meanings again and again wasting more time doing the same task. As a solution for this problem, methodologists suggest teaching vocabulary through the context as a suitable method for teaching English appropriately.

Some instructors in Jordan use Arabic to teach difficult vocabulary items and explain their meanings. Therefore, students do not grasp the appropriate definition of the taught vocabulary, and keep thinking in Arabic whenever they want to use it, which weakens the vocabulary usage and consumes a lot of time that agrees with Chen and Lei (2009).

"Another noticeable issue for English language teachers is having students fall back on their native language for conversation. It is often easier for students to communicate in their native language instead of English. It is usually frustrating for students to rethink and reword their thoughts into the new language clearly." (Chen and Lei, 2009, p22).

It is very important for university students to learn as many vocabulary items as possible, since vocabulary ease other English language skills as they are used in every phrase, clause, and sentence uttered, read or written in English.

In order to solve the problems facing Jordanian university students in mastering vocabulary in English language is using journalistic texts. For example, using well selected journalistic texts from the English newspapers can provide them with some of the latest topics that most people of the community follow up and care about besides university students. The journalistic texts can also bridge the gap between what Jordanian university students learn about writing inside the classroom activities and real life situation outside the classroom. Since what they learn inside the class might be the same topics or issues the outside world uses and reads in the same newspapers that the students use. Journalistic texts may be characterized by using forms of language related to recent events that includes photos or diagrams, which makes it easy and interesting for the university students. In other words, the students do the same activities taken from the same newspapers in their ordinary life affairs.

Aiex (2000) stated that using English newspapers at the university level can be beneficial for the students to develop their achievement in vocabulary usage as well as other English language skills. It can be useful for instructors of English language to use the journalistic texts as a new alternative in teaching vocabulary instead of the current method.

Pang (2010) confirmed that university students who have good vocabulary knowledge can read, speak and even write better. University students need to know the meaning of most individual vocabulary in a text so as to comprehend the ideas and thoughts in that text. He also added to answer the questions that follow, students need to use vocabulary in answering an oral question and writing the questions' answers down. Therefore, it is important for university students to be skilful in using the appropriate vocabulary in different situations to get as much vocabulary as they can. The use of journalistic texts such as newspapers' articles, headlines, reports and news are rich with simple and new vocabulary that university students find available and helpful. University students who are interested in news of certain issues and topics written in English newspapers, such as "The Jordan Times" and "The Star", find out that they unintentionally get and efficiently use an endless number of new vocabulary they did not know before. Journalistic texts can provide the university students with a more updated language and keep pace with most recent events. Thus, it is realistic and attractive for the students.

Al-Jarf (2004) mentioned that there are several instructors and professors who believe that implementing the use of technology and journalistic texts in their classrooms will increase the performance of the four basic skills in the study of language: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Jacobson, Deneger, and Purcell-Gates (2003) proposed that using journalistic texts in classroom may activate the university students to participate better in the outside activities. Therefore, English vocabulary items are so significant in every academic situation, inside the classroom and it is crucial in outside classroom activities and real life situation.

Hoang (2002) mentioned that students who read newspapers in foreign language can improve their skills of that language. It increases their vocabulary, as students sometimes consult the dictionary when they come across a new vocabulary through certain journalistic texts.

Students find using English newspapers more enjoyable and interesting in practicing different vocabulary activities and drills inside the classroom.

Coyne, Simmon, and Kame'enui (2004) state that university students using vocabulary and words used in an English newspaper may facilitate their realizing and comprehension of these journalistic words better, and this may reflect students' understanding of certain journalistic texts in English.

To sum up, this study attempted to investigate the effect of using journalistic texts on the development of vocabulary of English as a foreign language for university students.

The study attempted to answer the following question:

What is the effect of using journalistic texts on developing Jordanian university students' English vocabulary?  
so, the hypothesis of the study was:

There are no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the experimental group and control group due to the type of texts (journalistic or non-journalistic) on Jordanian university students' English vocabulary.

### Methods

Two sections of English 101 classes were randomly selected out of 8 sections offered by the Language Centre in Al-Hussein Bin Talal University during the summer semester 2012-2013. One class was randomly assigned to an experimental group, which consisted of twenty five students and taught the selected journalistic texts. While the other class was a control group which consisted of twenty-five students and taught the conventional method.

The researchers used two instructional programs: one developed by the researchers and based on selected journalistic texts, it consisted of seven units. It was taught to the experimental group and the other based on the current text book used by all instructors at the Language Center in Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. It was taught to the control group. Each of the seven units contained vocabulary, vocabulary through various reading passages (vocabulary through the contexts), and grammar exercises.

### Results

The adjusted means, standard deviation and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were used for the study. So, to test the hypothesis, the means and standard deviations of the students' scores in the two groups on the vocabulary pretest were computed in table (1)

**Table 1: The Adjusted Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Scores on the Vocabulary Pretest**

Group	Mean	Number	Std. Deviation
Experimental	8.04	25	3.74
Control	6.12	25	3.56

Table (1) showed that the mean of the experimental group students' scores in the vocabulary pretest was 8.04 and the standard deviation was 3.74 while the mean of the control group students' scores 6.12 and the standard deviation was 3.56.

To test the hypothesis, the means and standard deviation of the students' scores in the two groups on the vocabulary posttests were computed in table (2)

**Table 2: The Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Scores on the Vocabulary Posttest**

Group	Mean	Number	Std. Deviation
Experimental	14.76	25	3.49
Control	8.64	25	4.06

Table (2) showed that there were differences between the mean scores of the students in the experimental and control groups on the vocabulary posttest. The mean of the experimental group students' scores was 14.76 and the standard deviation was 3.49, while the mean of the control group students' scores was 8.64 and the standard deviation was 4.06.

The result showed that there was a difference of 6.12 between the means of the students' vocabulary scores in the posttest in favor of the experimental group. As a result, the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine the significant differences F of the mean scores between the experimental and control groups on the vocabulary posttest shown in table (3).

**Table 3: Results of the (ANCOVA) for Computing the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Vocabulary**

Source of Variance	Sums of Squares (SS)	DF	Means Square ( MS )	F	P
Pre Vocabulary ( covariate )	83.66	1	83.66	6.50	0.014
Group	642.92	1	642.92	49.97	.00
Error	604.66	47	12.86		
Total (Corrected)	1512.5	49			

Table (3) indicated the adjusted means of the achievement of the control and experimental groups were free from the effect of the pretest. Analysis of covariance was performed to find out whether the difference in the adjusted means was significant after eliminating the difference between the two groups on the pretest as covariate. So the results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the vocabulary posttest in favor of the experimental group. The F value was 49.97. This value was significant at ( $\alpha = .00$ ) as it was less than 0.01. Therefore, the question of the study was answered and the hypothesis was rejected at ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) level of significance. This means that using journalistic texts was so effective in improving the students' abilities in using vocabulary.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of using journalistic texts on the development of Jordanian university students' English vocabulary.

The findings of the hypothesis showed that there was a statically significant difference between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group in improving university students' achievement in English language vocabulary. The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was carried out at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The difference was in favor of the experimental group since ( $p = .000$ ). This result of the study was in line with findings of On-Lai (1994), Greidanus (1996), Joe (1999), Grabe and Stoller (1997), Jim (2004), and Rajkumar (2011). Therefore, exposing students to journalistic text, like newspapers was the core stone of most teaching texts in the experimental group, which meant that the interesting texts the students were exposed to might motivate them and improve their achievement in vocabulary. But it was not in line with the findings McDaniel and Presley (1987) who concluded that there was no significant difference due to the two methods of teaching (the journalistic texts methods or the current method) in relation to vocabulary achievement and memorization, or with Huang (2003) who stated that his study showed a forgotten pattern concerning using and understanding of vocabulary meaning among the participants.

It is worth mentioning that the high scores of the experimental group students in developing vocabulary could be attributed to the following reasons: First, exposing university students to the new journalistic method in teaching vocabulary might have facilitated students understanding and accurate usage of vocabulary. Second, reading newspapers could increase students' vocabulary and might expand their scope of using vocabulary; this was in line with Hoang Hoa (2002) who mentioned that reading and using journalistic texts like newspapers could increase the number of vocabulary students know and might expand their scope of vocabulary. The third reason of the higher scores of the experimental group students in vocabulary achievement could be that both instructors and students were looking to find the most appreciated method for teaching vocabulary. The instructors hoped to find a better alternative that meet their students requirements; at the same time the students got bored of the overused methods their instructor kept using year after year which caused them to lose their enthusiasm towards not only vocabulary but the other English language skills.

In support of this, Mathew J. Geiger (2010) admitted that the use of language skills help students expand their vocabulary. Through reading and writing, university students might widen their ability to understand new vocabulary, thus students become more likely to recall those vocabulary words and use them meaningfully.

By finding journalistic texts with certain vocabulary as part of the text or specific assignments to write little stories or memorable phrases on key words, university instructors can help expand the vocabulary of their students far more efficiently. Similarly, students also learn vocabulary by listening and speaking. Before children can read, the voices of parents and other loved ones help them experience the world of books. Consequently, helping children read books, which are above the reading level of the students, allows children to expand their vocabulary. As such, teachers can use story telling or thought provoking lessons to bring vocabulary to life. Teachers should use vocabulary words on a daily basis and encourage students to use them in their own conversations. In Jordan, the eclectic method of teaching is preferable in teaching all English language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, the researchers recommend instructors to use journalistic texts in teaching vocabulary as one of these new alternatives that both instructors and students were looking forward to using.

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