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Vocabulary knowledge Among English Majors in a Saudi Arabia University

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Abstract. One of the main challenges that learners may encounter in learning a foreign language is vocabulary. Vocabulary is defined as mandatory part of language use, because lack of vocabulary knowledge (VK) for learners has led to difficulties in the process of learning such language. This study sets out to assess the receptive and productive VK of first-year English major students. The researcher conducted the study on 65 students from Majmaah University who were made up of first-year English major students. The instruments used in the study were the Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) by Nation and Schmitt et al. (2001) and the Productive VLT by Nation & Laufer (1999) The VLTs were used to assess the participants' receptive and productive VK respectively. The findings of this study reveal that the productive VK of male students is significantly lower at the 3,000 word level compared to the 1,000 word level. This study fills the gap of knowledge regarding gender differences in acquiring receptive and productive vocabulary among Saudi EFL learners.

Keywords. vocabulary knowledge, English major students, receptive, productive, Saudi University

Introduction

Whether it is first language acquisition or second language acquisition, vocabulary is an important part of the acquisition process anyone goes through. It is the most important tool that allows of significance to human existence. Scholarly literature has considerable instances of a positive relationship between VK and language proficiency (Nation & Beglar, 2007; Schmitt, 2010). To show the importance of vocabulary in second/Foreign language acquisition, several ideas have been raised. For instance, when a language learner learns a language, he uses the dictionary more than a grammar book. It shows the importance of the fact that it is very important to know many vocabulary items to learn a foreign language (Krashen, 1989). While Nation (1998) thinks that learning vocabulary is one of the ways a language learning can learn a foreign language, Baker et al. (1998) emphasises the same fact that VK is indispensable part of learning a language.

It is believed that a language cannot be understood without knowing words either in the spoken or written form (Hall, 2000; Schmitt, 2000). However, most EFL students face problems learning and retaining new words. In fact, in the EFL learning context when they are in the classroom, there is implicit teaching of the vocabulary with other skills. They are supposed to learn and memorise individuals and groups to meaningfully communicate with one other which

makes language second to none in terms sufficient words (Woolley, 2010). Most EFL learners feel frustrated when they read a story or write information, and this is due to the lack of VK.

One of the factors that likely influences Saudi students' VK is related to gender differences. Saudi society is a conservative one, where gender segregation is practised. All schools and institutions of higher learning impose segregation between male and female students and nowhere are the two genders allowed to mingle and interact with each other. In fact, Majmaah University has separate campuses for male and female students. The campuses are located in entirely different districts, making it difficult or even impossible for male and female students to interact and exchange knowledge (Alkubaidi, 2014). This segregation might bring valuable information, as both genders are subjected to the same English materials and taught by lecturers with the same level of qualifications.

This study aims to address this gap by assessing the development in English vocabulary as a Foreign Language (EFL) context among Saudi Students.The following research question will guide the paper What are the receptive /productive VK of first-year English major students? and Are there significant differences between male and female English language students in terms of their VK?

Vocabulary as a linguistic component

Vocabulary knowledge is an important component of language learning as it enhances the learners' ability to perform all the language skills in a language effectively (Freeman, 2008). Vocabulary raises the students' confidence in using grammatical knowledge accurately while speaking (Optiz & Moses, 2009). Most EFL students face problems learning and retaining new words. Also, young students suffer from the inability to remember L2 vocabulary (Brantmeier, 2002). In fact, if we look at the formal definition of vocabulary, we will find it difficult to express in a single sentence. For instance, vocabulary is defined as "the corpus of words that the learners come across" (Samuels, 1994:12). On the other hand, Pardo (1988) defines vocabulary as a dynamic cognitive process of the words' meaning exploration in order to comprehend the text. He argues that during the writing process, the writer attempts to activate the background and linguistic knowledge in order to recall the words, and then the reader activates the same two types of knowledge to get the meaning that the writer intends to convey.

As a child learns new words, vocabulary items get stored in his or her memory. This is called vocabulary acquisition. As noted above, comprehension and vocabulary are directly related to each other and without basic knowledge of vocabulary, a student will have great difficulty in comprehending message of the text. Here, often a person takes support of incidental vocabulary acquisition for understanding a particular meaning of a context. Such acquisition of words refers to know a certain word as a consequence of an activity outside the common learning practice. (Laufer, 2003). In this way young children learn and use many new words every day. Irvin (1990) states that a two-year-old child usually acquire 10 new words everyday which grows to approximately 14,000 words until they become six years olds (Joshi, 2005). Most words acquired by them are learned in a context as part of specialised lessons that occur during middle and high school education. Thus, students can acquire more English vocabulary items in the contextual approach which for sure improves their English language as a second or foreign language.

Vocabulary Knowledge: Receptive and Productive

Most prominent researchers in this field agreed to divide, renowned VK within the scope of its use in either the skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking. Thus, they divide VK into productive and receptive vocabulary (Laufer, 1998; Laufer & Paribakht, 1998;

Henriksen, 1999; Nation, 2001; Read, 2000; Schmitt, 2014)**.** Receptive vocabulary was defined as the words employed for the purpose of comprehension and productive vocabulary was defined as the words utilised for the sake of production (Henriksen, 1999). This definition corresponds with the description of Gairns and Redman (1986) who reported that receptive vocabulary points to the words that can be realised and understood when reading a text or listening to a material and that productive vocabulary are the words that the students remember and use while they speak and write. Laufer & Goldstein (2004) stated that the receptive vocabulary is associated with reading and listening and productive vocabulary is associated with writing and speaking. According to Milton (2009), this classification looks simple, but it becomes complicated when the thought becomes "good passive skills often require the reader or the listener to actively anticipate the words that will occur". This perspective is supported by Nation (2001) who stated that the receptive aspects of VK are linked to realising the form and meaning of the words and that the productive aspect is linked to the writing and speech. Many researchers differentiate between receptive and productive vocabulary of language skills (Nation, 2001; Laufer, 1998; Schmitt, 2014). With regard to receptive VK, this kind of knowledge is important when the students read or listen to a text. In this case, the students identify the meaning of the words and comprehend the text, but they do not speak and write using these words. The learning process of the receptive knowledge of vocabulary emerges in the form of delivering the meaning of the words by instructor, utilising the words in sentences, and asking the students to only spell and pronounce the words (Webb, 2005).Students can develop receptive vocabulary also by listening to a text or material, and practise comprehending what they listen to (Zareva, Schwanenflugel and Nikolova, 2005).

On the other hand, productive VK is associated with the students' understanding the words and pronouncing the words. In this case, the students use the words while they speak and write. So, the productive VK is a positive process where students use expression that identifies their feelings and thoughts (Webb, 2005). Also, the productive vocabulary is a recovery of the words' structure and meaning or the words that come across in the student's first language (Laufer et al., 2004). In addition, Laufer (1998) classified the productive VK as free and controlled vocabulary that possesses the ability to construct words when cues are given. The opposite of this process is free vocabulary which points to the capacity to use words spontaneously in the absence of any specific cue such as free writing. In case of learning a foreign language, when students speak with others, they need to use the words they know to express their ideas and opinions. They use their repertoire of words to communicate effectively with others (Henriksen, 1999).

Measuring Receptive/Productive vocabulary knowledge

The significant insights given by previous research on the different items of the vocabulary testing is that various vocabulary items grant different dimensions of lexical knowledge (Paul et al., 1990). According to Richards (1990), VK has been recognised as having many aspects and one of the best-known kinds of vocabulary aspects is the receptive-productive distinction. Other examples of vocabulary distinctions include, for instance, collocations, associations, contextual use, and relevant meanings. So, a deep knowledge of vocabulary requires a knowledge of the different aspects of vocabulary.

The different measures of VK are important to diagnose the missing aspects of a certain course. For instance, the students may get a high score in a vocabulary test, but they may lack the ability to use vocabulary in writing. So, the students here need to be given tasks to present ideas in a written way. It is believed that a large vocabulary is required for reading of technical texts, such as in science and technology, or even newspapers where the number should be larger

than what is required in a less formal text (Chung &Nation, 2003). This implies that people need different VK for different purposes; the VK of informal writing is less than theVK of professional writing. For example, 38% and 17% in anatomy and applied linguistics texts respectively are technical words. Also, formal writings are mostly in need of more cognitive function than informal which indeed requires a higher VK for adequate coverage (Chung & Nation, 2003).

The upsurge of the role of vocabulary in foreign language acquisition went hand in hand with a growing interest in vocabulary testing in SLA research. Obtaining a sufficiently large vocabulary appears to correlate strongly with other linguistic competences in the target language. Therefore, much recent work on vocabulary testing has focused on estimating how many words learners know in their L2 (e.g. Laufer 1998). To accomplish this goal, word assessments have been developed. A number of tests are frequently used to measure knowledge of specific words. First, there are receptive word assessment s like the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation 1983,1990), and The Revised Edition of the Vocabulary Level Test (Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham 2001).

Vocabulary Knowledge and Gender Differences

Sunderland (1992) states that gender has great influence on English language learning in the Middle East. Gender differences in connection to English language acquisition can be comprehended as the preferences of female and male individuals regarding acquiring knowledge of the English language. A large number of studies have been devoted to investigating gender variances in several areas of L2 such as understanding of reading (Young & Oxford, 1997; Brantmeier, 2003) and learning strategies (Young & Oxford, 1997; Jiménez, 2003). The findings from these studies are contradictory as a result of some high predominance of males over females. Others stress that females prefer learning languages than males, and yet some others exhibit that sexual orientation is superfluous in second or external language acquisition.

Regarding the domain of VK, gender difference has been considered as playing a significant role when acquiring languages. Studies that address gender differences contrast in the way measurements are identified with lexical knowledge. Various investigations have examined productive and receptive VK of students and have come up with differing conclusions. In Edelenbos and Vinjé (2000), Lin and Wu (2003) and Lynn et al. (2005), males outpaced females in vocabulary learning in the L2. In Nyikos (1990, cited in Sunderland, 2000), females achieved better than males in a memorisation test of German words. Nevertheless, Jiménez and Terrazas (2008) exposed no substantial gender variances in a receptive word test. Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) and Jiménez and Moreno (2004) also mention that females perform better than males in productive words. Moreover, profoundly important fluctuations were found for females in the mean number of words delivered because of the 15 cues of a lexical availability test (Jiménez & Ojeda, 2009).

Many recent researches are in compliance with Jiménez's (2010) work as well. They highlight the conflict regarding gender differences. Sunderland's (2010) watchful analysis of these various results help us to understand the associations between gender and vocabulary that may not be stable, but might be setting and exam type-specific with other "third factors" such as L1, age or L2 skill in inducing them. Thus, gender is recognized as a multifarious and nuanced issue.

Methodology
Participants

The present study aimed to collect the required data related to students' VK. To do so, the researcher used a mixed method approach. A variety of tests were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data**.** The quantitative data in the study yield both descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data added breadth and depth into the quantitative data collected. The sample of this study comprised the entire population of first-year English major students which consist of 65 students and their age range was from 18 to 23, (see table 1)

Table1. Profile of Respondents according to age

Age	Respondents (N)	Percentage %
18 years old	10	15.3
19 years old	27	41.5
20 years old	10	15.3
21 years old	11	16.9
22 years old	5	7.6
23 years old	2	3.4
Total	65	100

Tests and Data Analysis
The Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test (Schmitt et al., 2001)

The Receptive VLT (Schmitt et al.'s, 2001) was a modified version of the VLT was enhanced and used for the pre-test of the semester. The test consists of five separate sections that represent the four levels of word frequency and a degree of academic understanding. It assesses the knowledge of students receiving these five distinct frequencies: 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, the AWL and 10,000 words**.**

The Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation & Laufer, 1999)

The Productive VLT (Nation & Laufer, 1999) consists of 90 items; each item is displayed in the form of a sentence with a missing word, clustered into five groups; 2000, 3000,5000, the UWL and10,000-word level where test takers compose a written text based on a prompt. The scoring in this type of tests is based on the correct use of word forms. In the present study, the purpose of analysing the quantitative data was to obtain the information required to support this study as summarized below in Table 3.

Table3. Summary of the Study Questions and Corresponding Data Analyses

S/N	Research Question	Data Sources	Analysis Technique
1	What are the receptive vocabulary knowledge of first-year English major students?	Receptive VLT	Descriptive statistics
2	What are the productive vocabulary knowledge of first-year English major students?	Productive VLT	Descriptive statistics
3	Are there significant differences between male and female English language students in terms of their vocabulary knowledge?	Receptive&Productive VLT	Paired Sample t-Test

Results and Discussion
The Receptive vocabulary knowledge of first-year English major students
The receptive VLT measured the students' receptive vocabulary levels at all different VLT including 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 word levels as well as AWL. As seen in Table 4, the mean score at the 1,000 word level was 28.8 whereas at the 2,000 word level was 20.84.

Table 4. The Receptive VK Scores of English Major Students

Word level	Mean	Percentage%
1,000	28.8	72.27%
2,000	20.84	69.48%
3,000	17.47	58.25%
5,000	14.39	47.89%
10,000	11.40	38.01%
AWL	8.83	29.44%

The students performed better at the 1,000 and 2,000, and 3,000 word levels when compared to their performance at the mid and low-frequency levels of 5,000, 10,000 and AWL. The students scored 14.39 at the 5,000 word level, 11.40 at the 10,000 word level and 8.83 at the AWL. With reference to the students' receptive vocabulary levels as shown in table above, the mean scores diminished as the word frequency got higher. The mean score at the 1,000 word level was 28.8, 20.84 at the 2,000 word level and 17.47 at the 3,000 word level. The students' mean scores became less at the 5,000 and 10,000 word levels as well as in AWL. The students' mean score was 14.39) at the 5,000 word level and 11.40 at the 10,000 word level. With regard to AWL, the results show a poor performance by students as indicated by the low mean scores. The mean score was 8.83. This mean score would give us an estimate of 167 words out of the 570 words known by the students; which indicates that 403 academic words were unfamiliar to the students. The students' overall performance at all receptive vocabulary levels was low. In light of Schmitt et al., s' (2001) scoring framework, a score that ranges from 24 -30 (80%) at every level is an indicator of mastery at that level. Based on the scores of the participants of this study, no student reached the mastery level at any of the six levels.

The Productive vocabulary knowledge of first year English major students
The students' productive VLT were arranged from 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, the UWL, and the 10,000 word levels. the students were tested only in three levels of the 2,000, 3,000, and 5,000 word levels.

Table 5. The Productive VK Scores of English Major Students

Word level	Mean	Percentage (%)
2,000	12.61	70.07%
3,000	10.57	58.77%
5,000	8.13	48.54%

It can be seen that the students' productive vocabulary levels are higher at the 2,000 and 3,000 word levels when compared to the 5,000 word level. The scores of both male and female students dropped as the vocabulary frequency levels became lower; in other words, the mean scores at the productive vocabulary levels decreased as the frequency levels decrease.

The students' mean scores fell from 12.61 at the 2,000 word level to 10.57 at the 3,000 word level and to 8.13 at the 5,000 word level. This result indicates that the 2,000 word level has the highest score for all three levels.

Based on the results in table above, the students' overall performance at all productive vocabulary levels were low. According to Schmitt et al., (2001) students have to score 83% and above to be considered as achieving mastery at a particular level of productive VLT. The students' scores were low at all three levels. They only scored 70.07% at 2,000 word level, 58.77% at 3,000 word level and 48.54% at 5,000 word level. Thus, none of them achieved mastery at those levels.

The significant Differences Between Male and Female Students in Terms of their Vocabulary Knowledge
The Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge of Male and Female Students
It is observed that at the higher frequency levels at the 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000 word levels- both male and female students achieved high scores for all levels of the vocabulary. Male students achieved an average of 68.79% at the 1,000 word level, 64.4% at the 2,000 word level and 53.14% at the 3,000 word level; whereas female students accomplished scores of 76.32% at the 1,000 word level, 75.33% at the 2,000 word level and 64.44% at the 3,000 word level. The results at the 5,000 word level for both male and female students present lower scores with 42.75% for male students and 53.88% for female students. Male and female students scored lowest at the 10,000 word level with 31.92% for male students and 45,12% for female students. With respect to AWL, both male and female students had the lowest scores. Male students accomplished an average of 23.49% while female students accomplished 36.38%.

Table 6. The Receptive VK Scores among Male and Female English Major Students.

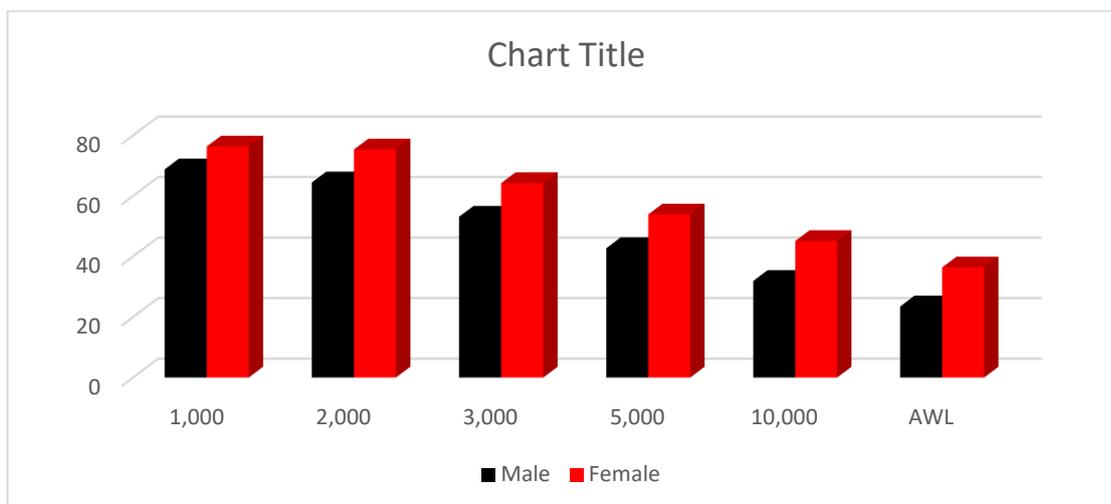| Word level	Male		Female	
	Mean %	SD	Mean %	SD
1,000	(68.79%) 26.82	11.25053	(76.32%) 29.7	10.24941
2,000	(64.46%) 19.13	14.25909	(75.33%) 22.59	14.31983
3,000	(53.14%) 15.94	12.66648	(64.22%) 19.26	11.27617
5,000	(42.75%) 12.82	12.48564	(53.88%) 16.16	10.24913
10,000	(31.92%) 9.57	11.49114	(45.12%) 13.03	10.77050
AWL	(23.49%) 7.04	9.67558	(36.38%) 10.80	15.25720

Figure 7. The Receptive VK scores among Male and Female English Major Students

Figure 7. clearly shows that the students' performance at the high-frequency-word levels, namely the 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000 word levels were better compared to the mid frequency and low-frequency word levels of 5,000 and 10,000 as well as AWL. In other words, there was a decrease in the performance of students' receptive VLT as the frequency level decreases. The above figure also highlights that the lowest score among male and female students at all levels was at the AWL, where male students achieved an average of 23.49% compared to female students who obtained 36.38% at the same level.

For the receptive VLT, Schmitt et al. s' (2001) scoring suggests that students have to score 80% or more to be considered as reaching mastery at a particular level. As shown above in Table 6, both male and female students have not reached mastery level at the 2,000 word level. Male students scored 64.46% while female students scored 75% which are regarded as below the targeted percentage. Moreover, at the 3,000 word level, 53% of the male students and 64% of the female students had likewise unsatisfactory results. Furthermore, at the 5,000

word level, 42% of the male students and 53% of the female students were not able to reach the targeted level. The scores declined at the 10,000 word level for male and female students; male students got 31% whereas female students achieved 45%. Finally, the results at the AWL show poor performance as it was found that male and female students could not reach the target percentage where male and female students achieved 23% and 36%, respectively. Overall, the results in Figure 7. indicate the female students' performance at all receptive vocabulary levels were better compared to male students. However, based on the given results in Table 6 above, it can be seen that there were no significant differences in the performance of male and female students.

The Productive Vocabulary Knowledge of Male and Female Students

In the following section, the scores of the productive VK of male and female students are presented in Table 8. The productive VLT measures the productive knowledge of male and female students at different vocabulary levels including 2,000, 3,000 and 5,000.

Table 8. The Productive VK Scores among Male and Female English Major Students

VLT	Male		Female	
	Mean %	SD	Mean %	SD
2,000	11.79 (65.55%)	14.19	13.55 (75.33%)	14.32
3,000	9.85 (54.77%)	12.75	11.41 (63.44%)	12.33
5,000	8.01 (44.52%)	12.34	9.57 (53.22%)	11.12

If we compare the productive vocabulary level of male and female students as shown in Figure 9., it can be seen that the overall performance for both male and female students declined as the frequency levels of the vocabulary increase. The scores diminished at all levels from 65.55% at the 2,000 word level to 54.77% at the 3,000 word level, and finally, 44.52% at the 5,000 word level for male students while female students obtained scores of 75.33% at the 2,000 word level 11.41% at the 3,000 word level and 9.57% at the 5,000 word level.
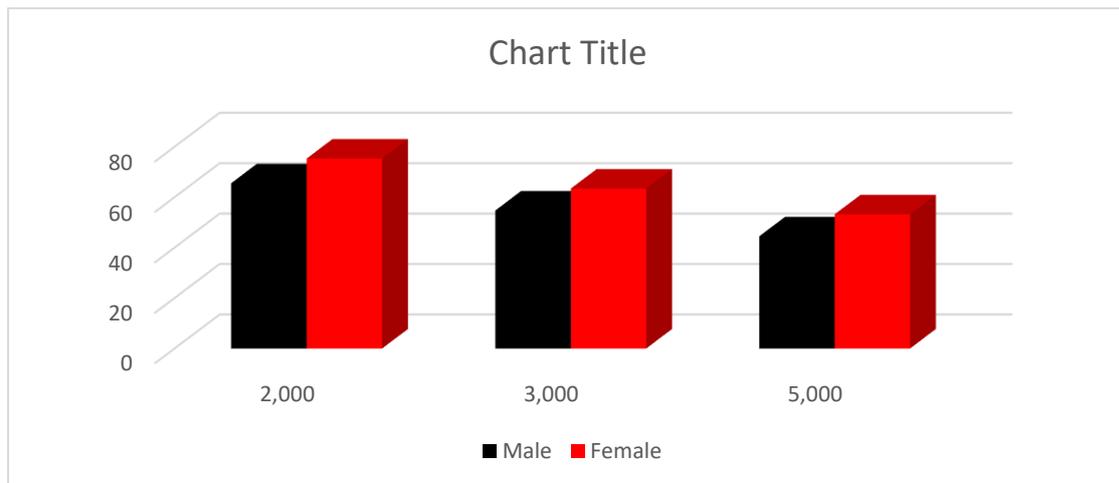
Figure 9. The productive VK Scores among Male and Female English Major Students

The productive VLT results for both male and female students indicate that female students scored at the 2,000 word level an average of 75.33% which was considered the highest percentage among all levels. The female students' percentage remained higher than the corresponding score for male students who achieved 65.55% at the same word level. The lowest score between male and female students among all levels was at the 5,000 word level where male students achieved an average of 44.52%.

Overall, the findings show that both male and female students have not reached the mastery level at any of the productive vocabulary levels. Male students scored 65.55% while female students scored 75.33% which are viewed as below the targeted percentage. For productive VLT, students need to score 83% or more to be considered as achieving mastery at a specific level (Schmitt et al., 2001).

Discussion

The Receptive vocabulary Knowledge of first-year English major students

The students scored higher at the high frequency levels at the 1,000 2,000 and 3000 word levels, compared to the mid and low frequency levels, because the first 2,000 word families are considered as high frequency words which include function words such as *the, a, some, for, etc*. It also includes many content words such as *nouns -computer, verbs-walk, adverbs- clean, and adjectives- quickly.* The list of high frequency words is Michael West's (1953) GSL which contains 2,000 word families. Nation (2001) states that almost 80% of running words in the text are high-frequency words. According to the observation by Cobb (2007: p. 41), "the first three of Nation's lists (i.e. the 3,000 most frequent word families) represent the current best estimate of the basic learner lexicon of English." which seems a reasonable standard onto which a criterion of high frequency vocabulary can be mapped. The argument in favour of including the first 3,000 word families in the high-frequency level is that the 3,000 word-family covers 95% of the running words in most texts (when proper nouns and marginal words are included), and most graded readers are based on the 3,000 word-family.

On the other hand, the students scored low, as expected, when the vocabulary level is at the levels of 5,000 and 10,000 word as well as AWL which are considered as mid- and low-frequency levels. In other words, there is an indirect relationship between 1,000, 2,000, and 3,000 word levels and students' high scores and an inverse relationship between 5,000 and

10,000 word levels, and AWL and students' low scores. This result corroborates some findings found in previous studies. For example, it was reported by Nation (1990) that the 2,000 and 3,000 word levels constitute merely high-frequency words in English while the 5,000 word level is a boundary between both the high- and low-frequency levels, and the 10,000 word level contains words of low-frequency.

Based on Nation's word levels, the first 2,000 word level contains "high frequency vocabulary" (Nation & Hwang, 1995:p. 234) and students should focus on learning these words first. In their studies, Nation and Chung (2009), and Laufer and Nation (1999), discuss the significance of vocabulary learning in accordance with its frequency and they contend that particular focus should be given to the first 2,000 word level. The reasons for their contention are that the first 2000 word level represent 80% to 90% of running words in texts. Students who have the knowledge of these words will be able to comprehend the text better. Besides, the study by Laufer and Nation (1999) has identified the 2,000 word level as the line that demarcates between vocabulary of high and low frequency.

EFL learners need to know at least 2,000 words in order to communicate effectively with at least 90-94% comprehension regardless of their contextual arrangements (Schmitt & Adolphs, 2004), whereas some researchers such as Cobb (2007), Laufer (1992, 1996) and Qian (2012) conclude that the sufficient vocabulary level for comprehension is approximately 3,000 words. These studies are confirmed by Laufer (1992) who suggests 3,000 word families is needed for a general understanding of English texts such as a novel. Hirsh and Nation (1992) have put the number as high as 5,000 words for pleasure reading. Based on the findings presented in Table 4., only a few students secured high scores at the 1,000 and 2,000 word levels with 72% and 69% of mean scores. In fact, the scores of the receptive VLT indicated that they had not reached mastery level.

The receptive VLT results show that much of the participants' vocabulary is basic and fell in the 1,000, 2,000, and 3,000 word levels which mean that the vocabulary in English materials in high school focuses on maintaining vocabulary sets that assist students to understand what students listen to and what they read. Therefore, the receptive vocabulary of students has allowed them to listen and understand simple English dialogues that involve the most frequent words at the 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000 word levels. However, students may encounter difficulties in listening to English dialogues that involve advanced vocabulary such as business news. Nation (2001) reports that, if learners want to increase their VK then extensive reading should play a vital part in any EFL programme to both help in learning and developing proficiency.

Inadequate exposure to English in everyday life and the absence of English since the start of primary education, acts as stumbling blocks for learners to be effective in both oral and written communication. According to Al-Nofae (2010), there is no adequate exposure to English as the learners begin learning English in the last year of their primary education. Indeed, the students realize the fact that if they had been introduced to English from the very start, it would have been less demanding for them to learn English. There is agreement among many researchers such as Al-Abdan, 1993; Nation, 2003; Jdetawy, 2011) on problems of a similar nature.

The Productive vocabulary Knowledge of first-year English major students
The productive aspect of VK is associated with the students' need to speak and write in the FL. When students speak with others, they need to use the words they know to express their ideas and opinions. They use their repertoire of words to communicate effectively with others (Henriksen, 1999).With regards to the students' productive vocabulary levels, findings show

that the mean score decreased as the productive vocabulary levels moved to lower frequency words. It can be observed that the students' performance at the 2,000 word level was much better than the 5,000 word level. The score of the productive VLT suggested by Schmitt et al. (2001) was 83% and above so students have to achieve this score to be considered as having achieved mastery at the particular level.

it was observed that the students' scores at the productive vocabulary levels were below the suggested percentage, they achieved 70 % at the 2,000 word level, 58% at the 3,000 word level and 48.5% at the 5,000 word level. Based on the given answers above, the productive VLT of first–year English major students were considered to be very low. The results indicate that the participants of this study had poor knowledge of productive vocabulary for those levels. This level will not enable the students to efficiently function in English language. The students' small Knowledge of vocabulary has implications on their academic performance at higher levels since English is the medium of instruction. Considering that, Nation (2001) contends that the 5,000 word level knowledge enables a reader to understand 90% of any given text; it is clear that urgent attention to vocabulary teaching and development is necessary for these learners in order for them to excel in their academic endeavor.

In spite of the expectation that Saudi students will possess a VK of about 3,000 words (MoE, 2005), this estimate of VK is unrealistic and is not achievable in reality. Results from Al-Hazemi's (1993) study reveal that the knowledge of words of post high school military cadets was in the range of 800 to 2,000 words and this corresponds to an average mean score in the region of 1,000 words. Al- Nujaidi's (2003) conclusion was also comparable and this conclusion is that the first-year Saudi university students' score on vocabulary test is very poor. The results of his study indicate that the average VK of the learners is between 500 to 700 words at both the 2,000 and 3,000 word levels and around 75 words at the academic vocabulary level.

It can be concluded that the VLT results show different students' performance at different word levels with decreasing mean scores as the frequency of word levels decreased, and even with large VK in the high frequency levels, results are generally still below the level of the desired vocabulary competency, the results reveal that the students' capacity of vocabulary on average did not reach the 80% to indicate mastery in any of the levels. Thus, it could be said that the recommendations of Nation (2006) have not been met and are in fact, in urgent need for more support and concentration in their undergraduate study with regard to their vocabulary learning.

The significant Differences Between Male and Female Students in Terms of their Vocabulary Knowledge

This study used the VLT to assess the receptive and productive VK of male and female students as it has been practised generally in EFL and in vocabulary research such as in studies by Read (1988), Schmitt and Meara (1997), Laufer and Paribakht (1998) Beglar and Hunt, (1999), and Schmitt et al. (2001). The findings show that there were slight differences in terms of VK between male and female students. Male students' receptive VK in all categories was lower than the female students as presented in Table 8. This is similar to Nyikos' (1990, cited in Sunderland, 2,000; Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Jiménez & Moreno, 2004), study who found that female students performed well compared to male students. These findings are in line with results reported in the study by Sunderland (2000) who found female students performing better than male students, particularly in memorisation. Furthermore, Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) and Jiménez and Moreno (2004) confirm that female learners perform better than males in receptive vocabulary. These are presented in tables 4 and 6. As shown in these tables, although the mean patterns of both males and females are identical, the mean scores of male students are

always lower than the mean scores of female students (i.e. at the 1,000 word level the performance of female students was better with a score of 76% which is considered the highest score among all levels that remained higher than the corresponding rate for male students who achieved a score of 68% at the same word level.

It can be concluded from this study that female outperformed male students in all levels of receptive VLT. The participants' average VK was approximately 680 and 763 words in the 1,000 word level, 644 and 753 words in the 2,000 word level, 530 and 642 words in the 3,000 word level, 427 and 538 words in the 5,000 word level, 319 and 451words in the 10,000 word level and 234 and 363 words in the AWL for males and females, respectively. The scores at the receptive vocabulary levels for both male and female decreased as the frequency levels decreases. The results in this study were in accordance with the result Alqarni (2018) which measured the receptive VK of Saudi English major students. However, both of them have vocabulary levels that are under the recommended Knowledge. The findings were also similar to the results at the 2,000 word level of this study. Regardless of the superiority of female students in terms of their VK, the findings indicate that there is still a lot of work to be done in order to master the recommended level.

The first 1,000 word level of the VLT was seen as critical to learners, as it included the high-frequency words that students should comprehend. The findings of this study reveal that the students' capacity in this level was in the range of 65-72. The students' (male and female) capacity with the receptive VLT at the 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 word levels and AWL were in the ranges of 64%-70%, 53%-62%, 42%-50%, 31%-45% and 23% - 36% respectively. As can be seen, the capacity decreases as the word frequency level decreases.

The results show that the productive VLT of male students was lower at the 3,000 word level compared to the 2,000 word level. It was obvious that the productive vocabulary of female students was better than that of male students. This result corroborates with some findings found in previous studies (i; e, Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Jiménez & Moreno, 2004). Their studies found that female learners performed better than male learners in productive vocabulary. Moreover, Jiménez and Ojeda (2009) found highly significant differences in favour of female students in the mean number of words produced in response to the 15 cues of a lexical availability test (Jiménez & Ojeda, 2009).

Conclusion

VLT have been helping teachers to understand which teaching materials and techniques may help students in developing their general language proficiency as well as academic achievements (Saville-Troike, 1948; Laufer, 1997). Moreover, according to Nation (2008), the test was "developed to find where learners' vocabulary needed attention (p. 141). The study shows by applying VLT that there was lack of sufficient knowledge of vocabulary for EFL learners even those who are majoring in English. Their shortcoming was in the required Knowledge of the vocabulary for all levels of VLT. The reason behind this would be attributed to inadequate teaching and learning of EFL prior to university level. According to Nation (2008), it is expected that a learner should know 27 out of 30 words at least at any level to be counted as a satisfactory EFL learner. The current study shows that the highest percentage by the participants is 87.6% which is less than 90%. It is an indication of the extent of difficulties faced by the EFL learners during their university studies.

To conclude, it can be stated that despite having a decent Knowledge of vocabulary at high frequency levels, it remains generally below the desired vocabulary levels as learners of EFL. As more concentration and support are required in their undergraduate studies, it is

suggested that further research should consider the coverage of the vocabulary of the overall programme and the expected VK by the end of it.

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