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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCABULARY AWARENESS IN DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS
OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The current research article was basically carried out to reveal the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness in developing the writing skills of undergraduate students. The investigation began with selecting (80) students majoring in English and linguistics at the University of Kassala (Faculty of education) and splitting them equally into two groups; the first one included (40) students from the 2nd year, and the second group included also (40) students from the 3rd year. The two groups were regarded as one experimental group. The quantitative and experimental methods were used deciding on the pre and post-test as the main instrument to obtain the data which was tried out on the experimental group. The SPSS program was used in the analysis of the data which have come out with satisfying results that vocabulary awareness is an effective method and strategy that can be adopted by teachers in their pursuit of developing the writing skills of their students particularly university students.

Introduction

Students of English as a foreign Language undergo several difficulties in their learning process, particularly in writing which is one of the most difficult skills. This is because writing comprises all the aspects and devices of the Language such as Syntax, Semantics, Lexical items, Punctuation . . . etc.

Brynsildsen & Shawna (2000) remarked that the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary even more than does the ability to read. Once students have learned to decode words, they may be able to read and pronounce many words that are unfamiliar to them. They may even be able to determine accurate meanings of unfamiliar words simply by examining the context in which those words are used. During the writing process, however, a student does not have the luxury of examining the context in which a word is used; he or she is creating the context. Therefore, the writer must be able to spontaneously recall words that are known not only by sight, but that is understood well enough to use correctly.

Revealing the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness in developing undergraduate writing skills, is the main objective of the current article as well as to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To enable students to produce accurate written work.

2. To increase the students' vocabulary awareness to develop their writing skills.

Statement of the Problem

Vocabulary has a great impact on learners' writing ability. That is, most of EFL learners face difficulties in choosing the correct lexical items in any writing task which affects their written performance. Thus, this article will investigate and look for further strategies and suggestions for teaching and learning vocabulary methods of increasing students' vocabulary awareness that help them overcome these difficulties they face in writing.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main objective of the current article was to recognize the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness in developing undergraduates' writing skills. As such, to fulfil this aim the following questions need to be answered:

1. To what extent can vocabulary awareness increase students' motivation to develop their writing skills?
2. On what way does learners' vocabulary awareness contribute to producing accurate written work?

In seeking answers to the above questions, the hypotheses below were formulated as follows:

H1: Vocabulary awareness increases students' motivation to develop their writing skills.

H2: Learners' vocabulary awareness contributes to producing accurate written work.

Literature Review

According to Byrne (1999), writing in its simplest meaning is the act of forming the graphic symbols (letters) making marks on the flat surface of some kind. These graphic symbols or letters should be arranged according to certain conventions to form words, and words should be arranged to form sentences. Generally, writing is really a process of communication; it is the sense of being in contact with people who are part of the particular audience.

The Reason for Writing

According to Hedge (1988), most writing in English classroom is undertaken as an aid to learning, for example, to consolidate the learning of new structures or vocabulary, also to help students remember new items of language. In this context the role of writing is different from its role in any other subject; it allows students to see how they are progressing and to get feedback from the teacher, and it allows teachers to monitor and diagnose problems. Much of this writing is at the sentence level, but successful writing depends on more than the ability to produce clear and correct sentences. So he interested in tasks which help students to write whole pieces of communication, to link and develop information, ideas, or arguments for a particular reader or group of readers.

Therefore, writing tasks which have whole texts as their outcome relate appropriately to the ultimate goal of those learners who need to write English in their social, educational, or professional lives. Some of our students know already what they need to be able to write in English. Others may be uncertain about the nature of their future needs. So our role as teachers is to build communicative potential.

Hedge (1988) point out that many secondary students have to prove their competence in English by producing compositions for examinations. So, according to his experience, there has been substantial numbers of students who have no identifiable needs, present or future, for written English, but who enjoy writing, who are motivated to use their language resources in producing stories, reviews, essays, and even poems simply to practice and improve their English. Thus, by encouraging the production of the whole, texts in the classroom, we can provide materials for these different motivations for writing.

The Skill of Writing

Frith, J, (2009) stressed that learning English requires an integration of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. The latter is a necessary skill that has to be developed since it is a manifestation of the learner's performance in a foreign language. Therefore, teachers have been always looking for effective methods and approaches to teach writing so that Learners' written production could be improved. In this chapter, the researcher is going to introduce the skill of writing and concentrate on the most common approaches to teach it. The purpose is to gain knowledge about the best way writing could be taught on one hand, and to investigate whether collocations have gained any interest over history, on the other hand. After

that, the researcher is going to explore the concept of “miss collocations” which are widespread in learners’ writing. Overcoming this problem may help them to write appropriately if it is realized by teaching collocations explicitly. Directions to do so are explained in this chapter and followed by the materials that facilitate the process of building learners’ awareness of the most common collocations.

Finally, the roles of both teachers and learners are discussed. Writing is a difficult skill learner have to master, both native and non-native speakers may lack the competence necessary to make them good writers because learners could not express their ideas effectively without this competence. Within this scope, Tribble (as cited in Frith, J, 2009) argues that; it is through the mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in an intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs but also in the expression of ideas and arguments”. Thus, foreign language learners are struggling to write correctly since they face many obstacles toward a correct English composition. Writing necessitates, at least, a basic knowledge of grammar, lexis, and vocabulary, and the ability to express ideas in an appropriate English language unaffected by the mother Learning English requires an integration of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. The latter is a necessary skill that has to be developed since it is a manifestation of the learner's performance in a foreign language. Therefore, teachers have been always looking for effective methods and approaches to teach writing so that Learners’ written production could be improved. In this chapter, the researcher is going to introduce the skill of writing and concentrate on the most common approaches to teach it. The purpose is to gain knowledge about the best way writing could be taught on one hand, and to investigate whether collocations have gained any interest over history, on the other hand. After that, the researcher is going to explore the concept of “miss collocations” which are widespread in learners’ writing. Overcoming this problem may help them to write appropriately if it is realized by teaching collocations explicitly. Directions to do so are explained in this chapter and followed by the materials that facilitate the process of building learners’ awareness of the most common collocations. Finally, the roles of both teachers and learners are discussed. Writing is a difficult skill learner have to master, both native and non-native speakers may lack the competence necessary to make them good writers because learners could not express their ideas effectively without this competence. Within this scope, Tribble (as cited in Frith, J, 2009) argues that “It is through the mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in an intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs but also in the expression of ideas and arguments”. Thus, foreign language learners are struggling to write correctly since they face many obstacles toward a correct English composition.

Writing necessitates, at least, a basic knowledge of grammar, lexis, and vocabulary, and the ability to express ideas in an appropriate English language unaffected by the mother tongue. What the learners ought to reach in writing is proficiency, which is used by some writers to replace “competency” or what to “do with the language”. Nunan. (1988). agrees with Richards on the fact that proficiency is “the ability to perform real-world tasks with a pre-specified degree of skill”. (ibid). Lewis (2000), further considers proficiency as a term that refers to three characteristics: accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Firstly, the researcher has to consider accuracy versus fluency; under the communicative approach, accuracy is not the main interest as far as it does not hinder the communication of meaning. What is aimed at is not the form but rather the meaning? The communicative approach does favor fluency, whereas the audio-lingual and grammar translation approaches favor accuracy. Hence, considering the 'accuracy/fluency' question from the viewpoint of teaching approaches and methodologies is somewhat problematic. Thus, the teacher would better encourage the learner’s fluency first, and then accuracy would follow at the end of the writing process. Secondly, “complexity” is, according to Lewis (2000), the improvement of students' writing especially at advanced levels. It indicates “the writer’s ability to construct noun phrases which are high in informational content”. He gives the example of noun phrases joined by of, for instance, nature of time, a construction of our minds....etc. He further comments that noun phrases are neglected in contrast to verb phrases that are the focus of traditional grammar. (ibid). As a result, the accuracy/fluency dichotomy has to be replaced with an endeavor to direct our students towards the complexity of the language. This may lead to both fluency and accuracy. Hence, proficiency in foreign language

writing will increase to a degree that it could challenge natives' proficiency especially if students are taught the most common collocations that improve their writing style and make it more natural.

Vocabulary Definition

Kamil and Hiebert, (2007), broadly defined vocabulary as the knowledge of words and word meanings, however, vocabulary is more complex than this definition suggests. First, words come in two forms: oral and print. Oral vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in listening and speaking. Print vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in reading and writing. Second, word knowledge also comes in two forms, receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary includes words that we recognize when we hear or read them. Productive vocabulary includes words that we use when we speak or write. Receptive vocabulary is typically larger than productive vocabulary and may include many words to which we assign some meaning, even if we do not know their full definitions and connotations – or ever use them ourselves as we speak or write.

According to Farrell (2009) research has indicated that people store words semantically, not alphabetically like in a dictionary; that the more we use a word, the easier it is to remember; and that we will remember faster the word we have more recently used. Many times we as teachers suggest that our students read as much as they can so they can expand their vocabularies. We can hope this will happen and sometimes it does, but we have an important role to play in motivating our students to enlarge their vocabulary banks by intervening directly and teaching them how to do this. Many teachers try to accomplish this by getting their students to memorize word lists or look at synonyms and antonyms of a word and then doing fill-in-the-blank exercises connected to these memorized words. These efforts may be useful, but recent research has indicated that ELLs acquire vocabulary more effectively when they are directly involved in constructing the meaning of a word rather than memorize definitions of synonyms.

The importance of vocabulary

Ghazal (2007) reports that vocabulary awareness is very important to language learners. So, Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people can't convey the intended meaning. A prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by theorists and researchers in the field. Accordingly, numerous types of approaches, techniques, exercises, and practice have been introduced into the field to teach vocabulary. It has been suggested that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of the teaching of specific words but also aim at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

According to Baber and Bacon (1995) words serve different purposes when reading, writing and speaking. A reader needs to recognize words and assign meaning to them; a writer and speaker must choose words to convey ideas. A person with limited vocabulary will have difficulty in expressing and understanding ideas.

Shawna and Brynildssen (2000) argue that a rich vocabulary is a critical element of reading ability. Research has identified vocabulary knowledge as the most important factor in reading comprehension. They state a strong link between reading and writing. Reading and writing are two analogous and complementary processes in that both involve generating ideas or organizing ideas into logical drafting them a number of times to achieve cohesion, and revising ideas as is appropriate. The processes are so closely aligned that some researchers even advocate teaching reading and writing simultaneously rather than as two separate subjects.

Word knowledge has particular importance in literate societies. It contributes significantly to achievement in the subject of the school curriculum, as well as in the formal and the informal speaking and writing. Most people feel that there is a common sense relationship between vocabulary and comprehension, messages are composed of ideas, and ideas are expressed in words.

Vocabulary knowledge and writing

Duin and Graves (1987), state that it is well understood that words and language play a critical role in writing. Significant research has been conducted on the effects of vocabulary instruction on reading performance but studies investigating vocabulary instruction and writing are few.

Brynsildssen and Shawna (2000) report that the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary even more than the ability to read. Once the students have learned to decode words that are unfamiliar to them, they even are able to determine accurate meanings of unfamiliar words simply by examining the context in which those words are used. During the writing process, however, a student does not have the luxury of examining the context in which a word is used; he or she is creating the context. Therefore, the writer must be able to spontaneously recall words that are known not only by sight, but that is understood well enough to use correctly. They also indicate that writing is dependent upon the ability to draw upon words to describe an event. Then the breadth and depth of a students' vocabulary will have a direct influence on the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his / her writing. It is also stated that variety in selecting words to convey meanings accurately is necessary for speaking and writing.

Effect of vocabulary instruction on writing

Graves (1987) and Johnson (1999) argue that efforts to improve writing performance through instruction have been limited making a generalization about the role of vocabulary instruction unwarranted. However, a few studies have been conducted investigated the effect of vocabulary instruction on writing.

Henry (1999) and Scott (2004) in the title "the gift of word" explored ways to develop word consciousness and vocabulary knowledge for the purpose of assisting students in transferring word encountered in text into their writing. Teachers immersed students in rich literature and examined words used by authors. The notion was that such process would help students to value the power of words in writing, leading to wider vocabulary use, and improved writing by the students. Teachers were most impressed by increasing student's awareness and appreciation for words as well as a willingness to experiment with words in writing. Valuing words is critical to students learning, wide reading and direct instruction are critical components to vocabulary learning, and modelling word consciousness with a focus on language use encourage students to pay attention to words.

Duin and Graves (1987) provide some possible explanation for the effectiveness of groups receiving rich instruction: words selected were chosen for and taught around a common topic, students were encouraged to notice and use words outside of class, vocabulary instruction provided both contextual and definitional information about the word's meaning and students had multiple exposures to words that require deep and active processing.

Using vocabulary improve writing skills

Brynidssen & Shawna (2000) argue that while improved vocabulary can enhance students' writing skills, there is no guarantee that it will do so automatically. Improvement in vocabulary will result in improved writing skills only if the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously. In such a classroom, process and environment are closely intertwined and interdependent. The process does not come alive unless the environment is conducive to it. The following are techniques teachers can use to create a writing-centred classroom.

Sharing vocabulary-rich literature. Sloan (1996) explains that in her quest to help her students become better writers, she "went to the best source for teaching good writing :good books". By having students read (or reading aloud to them) books, poems, and stories that contain interesting vocabulary, teachers can both introduce new words and provide a forum for discussing them.

-Offering a variety of writing opportunities. A writer-centred classroom emphasizes using a written expression to communicate ideas. Writing is an important part of all areas of the curriculum (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, 1998). The authors go on to note that students have a greater investment in their writing when they are given choices about their assignments. Such choices may include journal or diary entries, weekly logs summarizing journal entries, book reports, outlines, poetry, autobiographies, short stories, or any number of variations on the above providing ample time for students to fully experience the writing process. The teaching of writing should be approached as a process that must be studied in depth, and substantial blocks of time should be devoted to writing.

Vocabulary's influence on successful writing

Shawna and Brynsildssen (2000) point out that the process of writing is extremely linked to the reading process, and the reading process is heavily dependent upon vocabulary. It naturally follows that writing process is likewise dependent. Brynsildssen and Shawna explore some of the ways in which vocabulary influence writing ability, and how- teachers can use vocabulary development to improve writing skills.

Vocabulary development

According to Echevarria and et al (2004) vocabulary development is critical for English learners because we know that there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge in English and academic achievement. To be most effective, vocabulary development should be closely related to the subject matter students are studying. So the teacher, who teaches vocabulary well, embedded the new words within the context of the text, providing students with a rich contextual environment in which to learn new terms and expand their English vocabulary. A research conducted on vocabulary instruction determined four main principles that should guide instruction:

- Students should be active in developing their understanding of words and ways to learn them. Such ways include the use of semantic mapping, word sorts, use of concept definition map, and developing strategies for independent word learning.
- Students should personalize word learning through such practices as vocabulary self- collocation strategy, mnemonic strategies, and personal dictionaries.
- Students should be immersed in words by providing language environments that focus on words and draw students' attention to the learning of words. Words walls, personal word study notebooks and dictionaries, and comparing/ contrasting words with the same morphemic element aid students in recognizing and using words around them.
- Students should build on multiple sources of information to learn words through repeated exposures. Letting students see and hear new words more than once and drawing on multiple sources of meaning is important for vocabulary development.

Methodology

Method and design of the study

To achieve the aim of the article, the researchers used the experimental and the quantitative methods. To collect the data of the article, one instrument was assigned namely the test as a data gathering tool. The research design was well designed to yield the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness in developing undergraduates' writing skills.

Subjects

The subjects of this article were students of English language distributed among two groups. The participants of the first group were the second year students, and the participants of the second group were the third year students of English in the Department of English language and linguistics, inside the faculty of education at the University of Kassala according to the academic year (2015-2016). Their overall number is (80) students, (40) students from the second year, and (40) students from the third year selected purposively and they study English as a foreign language.

Instrumentation

In this article, the test was used as a data collection tool. It consisted of five questions. Each question was designed carefully to assess the students' awareness of vocabulary. The first question is filling gap question, in which the students were given (20) words to fill in the blank in a passage. The second question is multiple choice question to measure the students' vocabulary size. It is a part of the test created by Nation and Beglar (2007) based on the British National Corpus (BNC). In this question, each word appears in the context of a sentence; the students choose the correct definition from four choices. They have a fairly developed idea of the meaning of the word because the correct answer and the distracters usually have elements of meaning. The third question is matching. As for the fourth question includes prefixes and suffixes. The fifth question contains two parts, synonyms, and antonyms. The pre-test was tried out on both groups of students before

teaching vocabulary. Then, the post-test was carried out to the same group of students after the teaching of vocabulary.

Procedure

The test used as a tool for data collection, where particular procedures and steps were followed to collect the data. In order to check the validity of the test, three copies of the test were handed over to three EFL teachers. The teachers wrote down their comments, suggestions, at the end of the test. According to their notes and advice, the number of the questions were reduced from eight to five. The vocabulary test consisted of (5) questions, it administered to the students during the academic year (2015-2016). It took about (90) minutes for all the subject to finish it. For the experiment, it took four weeks three hours session per week. During the experiment, forty students in two groups were taught as one experimental group. In three hours weekly class, the experimental group was given a series of lectures on vocabulary. During treatment lectures, different activities were elaborated to raise students' awareness of vocabulary. Treatment lectures were selected from English vocabulary books. The students were encouraged to explain different uses of words, providing them with topic-related to vocabulary use.

Data analysis

Certain statistical strategies were used here in the analysis of data. These tools were frequency, percentage, one sample t-test, paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) in the analysis of the data obtained by the designed tool.

The results of the both tests have been collected and counted in order to check their results that could assist the researchers to make sure of the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness that has had in developing undergraduates' writing skills.

Testing the Hypotheses via Test Results

H1: "Vocabulary awareness increases students' motivation to develop their writing skills".

One sample t-test for the first hypothesis

Expected mean	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
12	7.08	1.90	-18.27	49	0.000

The above table (1) showed that the p-value equals (0.000), is less than the significance level (0.05) which means that there is a significant statistical difference between the expected mean (12) and the actual mean (7.08). When the actual mean is less than the expected mean, these differences confirmed the first hypothesis which is "vocabulary awareness increases students' motivation to develop their writing skill".

Paired Sample T-test for Students

Skill	Test class	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
2nd class						
Q1	Pre	1.88	1.604	-10.422	39	0.000
	Post	3.53	1.935			
Q2	Pre	6.15	2.143	-10.422	39	0.000
	Post	8.63	2.361			
Q3	Pre	12.98	1.687	-6.811	39	0.000
	Post	14.83	.675			
Q4	Pre	4.13	1.202	-8.241	39	0.000
	Post	5.60	1.277			
Q5	Pre	3.15	1.748	-9.297	39	0.000
	Post	4.68	1.591			
Total	Pre	28.35	6.100	-17.541	39	0.000
	Post	37.25	5.271			
3rd class						
Q1	Pre	2.53	1.853	-7.722	39	0.000

	Post	4.70	2.574			
Q2	Pre	8.35	2.045	-7.911	39	0.000
	Post	9.88	2.151			
Q3	Pre	13.80	1.829	-2.414	39	0.021
	Post	14.45	1.867			
Q4	Pre	4.23	1.776	-5.596	39	0.000
	Post	6.00	1.754			
Q5	Pre	3.65	2.155	-6.914	39	0.000
	Post	4.88	1.786			
Total	Pre	32.18	6.968	-13.358	39	0.000
	Post	40.08	6.955			

The table (2) above clearly indicated that p-values are almost zero or 0.021 in both the pre-and post-tests regarding each skill. The pre means are less than the post means. As a result, it is noticed that there were progress and development in the students' performance in both 2nd and 3rd levels. Thus, these results strongly confirmed and strengthened the first hypothesis of the article that "vocabulary awareness increases students' motivation to develop their writing skill".

H2: "Learners' vocabulary awareness contributes to producing accurate written work".

One sample T-test for the second hypothesis

Expected mean	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
12	7.52	2.49	-12.71	49	0.000

Table (3) above showed that the p-value equal (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, this means that there is a significant difference between the expected and the actual means. When the actual mean (7.52) is less than the expected mean (12) this outcome actually verified and supported the second hypothesis that "Learners' vocabulary awareness contributes to producing accurate written work".

Paired Sample T-test for Students' Performance

Skill	Test class	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
2nd class						
Q1	Pre	1.88	1.604	-10.422	39	0.000
	Post	3.53	1.935			
Q2	Pre	6.15	2.143	-10.422	39	0.000
	Post	8.63	2.361			
Q4	Pre	4.13	1.202	-8.241	39	0.000
	Post	5.60	1.277			
3rd class						
Q1	Pre	2.53	1.853	-7.722	39	0.000
	Post	4.70	2.574			
Q2	Pre	8.35	2.045	-7.911	39	0.000
	Post	9.88	2.151			
Q4	Pre	4.23	1.776	-5.596	39	0.000
	Post	6.00	1.754			

The table (4) above clearly shows that p-values are almost zero or 0.000 in both the pre-and post-tests with regard to each question. The pre means is less than the post means. As a result, it is noticed that there are a progress and development in all students' writing performance due to the vocabulary input they received between the pre and post test duration. Thus, these results replied to the questions of the article and strongly

verified and reinforced the second hypothesis that “Learners’ vocabulary awareness contributes to producing accurate written work”.

To sum up, it is concluded that according to the above-discussed hypotheses and questions, all have come down to fulfil the main objectives of the article that vocabulary awareness effectively contributed to the development of writing skills of university students.

Discussion

As the statistics revealed the better performance of students was in the final post-test in which they outperformed their scores in the pre-test. According to this comparison between results in the pre-test and the post-test, it was obviously seen that vocabulary awareness had effective influence in developing undergraduate writing skills. All the subjects in both groups exposed to the same amount of teaching materials of vocabulary knowledge before the experiment and all of them majoring in English as the main subject. Therefore, they were almost regarded at the same level of language proficiency, however, their abilities were compared in the light of the pre and post test outcomes. They were (80) students split into two groups equally; each one included (40) students but they were all treated as one experimental group. It was summarized that vocabulary awareness is of effectiveness in developing university students’ writing skills besides widening their knowledge of vocabulary use. In addition to the above-mentioned facts, the hypotheses of the article were proved and there was a clear-cut difference between the students’ performance before and after the experiment.

Conclusion

The importance of vocabulary as for learners of English language and other foreign languages learners encouraged the researchers of this article to look for effective methods and strategies by which the standard of learners could be developed in terms of their vocabulary awareness.

This article tried to deeply identify the effectiveness of vocabulary awareness in developing undergraduates’ writing skills by demarcating the distinction between the scores of the students in the two tests where a significant progress occurred in the learner's writing skills by virtue of the vocabulary teaching materials they have received as remedy which contributed to achieving the main aims of the article.

Having discovered the effectiveness of the vocabulary awareness in students’ writing skills as shown by the statistical results, it can be assumed that giving students an adequate amount of vocabulary items, help them to achieve the following:

- The use of core vocabulary reflects learners’ high levels of writing capacities.
- EFL university learner’s awareness of vocabulary will have a direct influence on the quality and accuracy of their writing.
- The ability to write effectively depends on having adequate vocabulary items.

Finally, the article recommended that:

- English University students should be knowledgeable about using and organizing lexical items incoherent paragraphs.
- Teaching materials should focus on fostering learners to develop their vocabulary.
- Adequate practice in using new vocabulary items must be given to the learners to develop good writing skills.
- And teachers must use effective methods to integrate learners’ vocabulary with different writing tasks.

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