

# ENHANCING SKILL OF WRITING THROUGH “WORD LISTS” (An Action Research Carried out with Undergraduates at University of Vocational Technology)

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## Abstract

Vocabulary plays a key role in terms of English Language Teaching (ELT) and has been an area of interest of the researchers. Schmitt (1999) as quoted by Hadi (2017) emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is essential for communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (55). The current study was carried out with the undergraduates following the Bachelor of Technology in Mechatronics of University of Vocational Technology (Univotec). Through Purposive Sampling 40 undergraduates from the respective degree were selected. The study was carried out to enhance “vocabulary” of the students to improve writing skills through the incorporation of “Word Lists”. The methodology used was an action research employing a mixed method design. The whole count of words incorporated in the word list was 40, which were made familiar through remedial activities after the Pre-test. The technique was carried out for two months and the effectiveness of the technique was measured from the Post test. The remedial activities incorporated were sentence making, vocabulary conversations and story writing. The Posttest displayed a considerable improvement in the marks and also a positive feedback was obtained through questionnaires. However, the marks of the control group did not show satisfactory development. Thus the incorporation of “Word Lists” was proven to be effective especially in an English Language Teaching classroom that consists of students with mixed language proficiencies. The activity also generated a considerable amount of student–teacher relationship. It was suggested to incorporate the activity in the language classroom with further development to make the language acquisition effective.

**Keywords:** Wordlists, Vocabulary building, Vocational undergraduates,

## Introduction

Vocabulary plays a key role in English Language Teaching (ELT) and the amount of words that an individual possesses affects the effectiveness of the four skills of English and in the recent years developing of vocabulary through various means has drawn the attention of both researchers as well as language teachers. As the importance of learning vocabulary is a great deal of attention in the recent parts linguists tend to lay much pressure on variety of effective language teaching methods that engage in enhancement of vocabulary of the English as a second language learners. As per Nation (2011) the fact that “Vocabulary” plays a key role in English language learning is further highlighted as he states that vocabulary plays an important role in all four skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. , Hatch and Brown (1995) as quoted by Coşgun, (2016). The impact of using wordlists in the language classroom on students’ vocabulary acquisition. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*. (2016) further emphasizes on the introduction of many approaches, techniques, exercises and practices that have been introduced into English in order to teach vocabulary and also vocabulary acquisition of learners have been of utmost interest of the teachers. Morin and Goebel (2001) quotes Hulsjin

(1993) and highlights that teaching vocabulary should equip the learner with necessary strategies to expand their vocabulary and not restrict to teaching specific words.

Lack of vocabulary hinders the expressions of ideas in the four skills of English thus lack of sufficient vocabulary keeps the language learner challenged. This may be mainly due to the fact that teachers of English Language pay little attention on vocabulary and do not incorporate creative techniques for teaching of vocabulary.

### **Statement of the Problem and Purpose**

Having taught at the University of Vocational Technology (Univotec), which is the one and only vocational degree awarding university in Sri Lanka for considerably long time the researcher, observed that majority of the students struggle with the inability to express their ideas through writing. The key reason for the inability of good writing skills as identified was due to lack of sufficient words. Thus there is a need to help the students in exposing them to an effective strategy to learn the words for which the current research was carried out.

### **Hypothesis**

The skill of writing could be enhanced through development of vocabulary of the learners

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

The aim of the research is to explore whether the use of wordlists help students improve their writing skills. Thus, to be able to find an answer to this question, the following research questions was focused on throughout the research: Does the use of word lists enhance the writing skill of students in an ELT classroom?

Thus, aligning with the above research question the objective of the research would be as stated below:

To enhance the writing skill of students in an ELT classroom through the use of word lists

### **Methodology**

#### ***Setting***

The study was conducted at University of Vocational Technology (Univotec) which offers Bachelor of Technology degrees in various disciplines. Univotec is the one and only university that awards vocational degrees to entrants from the NVQ ladder who have diverted from the traditional education system. In the current study the researcher has selected Mechatronics degree programme as the researcher currently carries out lectures in the module titled “Communication Skills”. Thus, a class of 40 students are used for the research and the English language proficiency of the respective students vary as they come from diverse educational backgrounds which includes school dropouts from grade 8 and those who have come up to General Certificate in Ordinary Level and not completed.

## ***Sample***

The Purposive Sampling Method was used for the selection of the sample. Palys (2008) highlights Purposive Sampling as a non-probability sampling technique which highlighted as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where and how a researcher carries out a research. To be more specific the researcher incorporated **homogeneous sampling** as the respective group of people similar in terms of their educational background as they possess the National Vocational Qualification and are currently reading for a Bachelor of Technology degree in Mechatronics.

Thus being inspired by Palys(2008) the researcher selected the undergraduates following the Bachelor of technology in Mechatronics for the currents study and that too the researcher limited the selection to one batch that consist of 40 students who are currently in their second semester and as the researcher is engaged in teaching “Communication Skills” for the respective batch. The batch was divided into two consisting 20 each in a batch and one class served as the experimental group for whom the wordlist was used in the classroom while the other 20 were the control group with whom the word list was not used. Thus, with the two groups the researcher was able to get more evidence on the effectiveness of “Wordlists” by comparing the two groups. The gender of each class was balanced and the L1 of majority of the students was Sinhala for some other it was Tamil. Their ages ranged from 17 to 30 years old.

## ***Methods of Data Collection***

The study is an action research. Apart from the action research, the researcher used questionnaires to obtain views from the students on the effectiveness of the technique introduced. Thus, through the mixed method approach the researcher was able to carry out the research more effectively.

## ***Implementation of Wordlists***

The research was carried out with two groups during two months.

### **Pre Test**

A Pretest with a composition of general vocabulary and technical words were carried out before the remedial activities. The whole word count was 40. The Pretest was designed with tasks such as filling the blanks, simple reading passages and formation of sentences and the rest was in the form of a written paper.

### **Remedial Activities**

#### **Week 1**

After carrying out the Pretest in the first week 10 words were introduced to the respective group. With the introduction of words that was a mix of general vocabulary that helps in day to day usage and also technical terms many activities that included authentic activities too were carried out. Activities such as sentence formation, filling the sentences vocabulary conversations and more authentic activities such as story writing, role plays where the focus was strongly on the usage of introduced 10 words took place in the course of week 1. At the end of the week the students were evaluated with a similar test that of the Pretest for progress.

## Week 2

The same activities were repeated but with special attention on the words that students did not recall at the end of Week 1 which were again added to the words list that was introduced in week 2 (once again 10 but more with words from week 1). The week wrap up was similar to week 1

Week 3 and 4 took place in the same manner with each week having more than 10 words depending on the previous week's mini test evaluation.

Mini evaluation was carried out for more beneficial results at the end of the first month. The same procedure was used in the second month with the same set of words to make the learner thorough with the words As mentioned above the Remedial activities were incorporated in the class to enhance the awareness of the "Words" and in the activities special attention was given to the "Words" that majority of the students found difficult to understand.

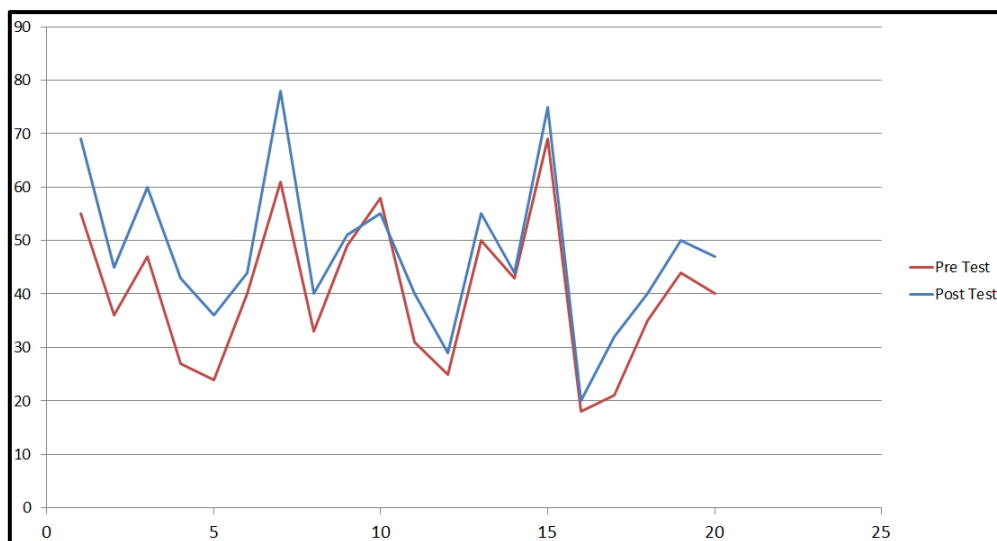
Thus according to the above procedure students were made to be familiar with 40 words on the whole during the course of two months. The remedial activities that were incorporated in the study were sentence making, vocabulary conversations and story writing and more authentic activities such as role plays, vocabulary conversations which were all done in order to make the learner more familiar with the usage of the words. Thus at the end of the two months the post test was carried out. In addition poster session was carried out to get an understanding of the acquisition level of technical related vocabulary.

## Post Test

The Posttest which was very much similar to the Pretest and the composition was the same with the inclusion of sentence forming, filling the blanks and short reading passages. The contents were somewhat different although they had to use the same vocabulary to carry out the tasks.

## Results and Discussion

Through this study I expected to find answers to the following research question: Does the use of word lists enhance the writing skill of students in an ELT classroom?

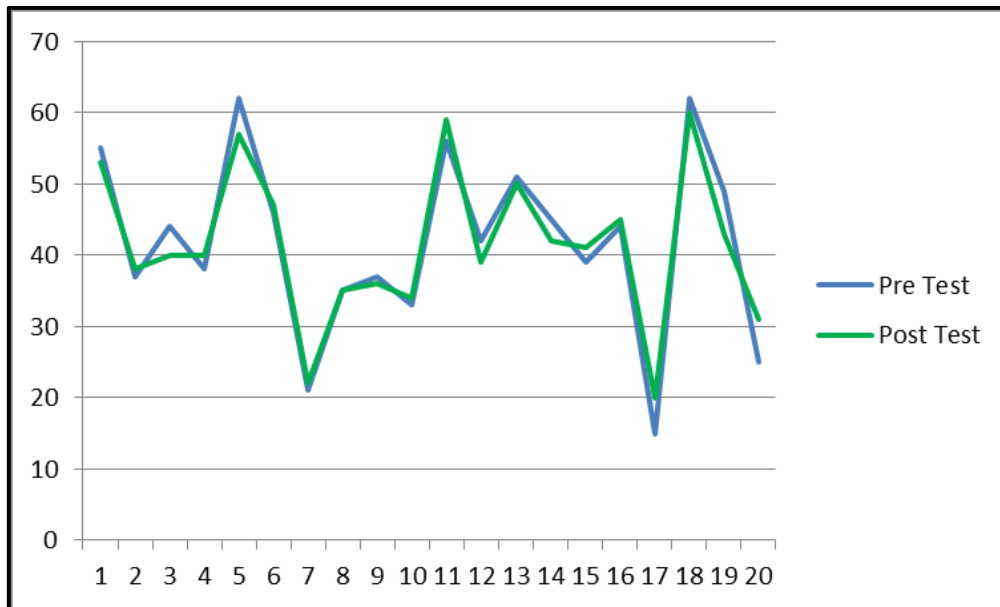


**Figure 1: Pre and Post Test Marks (Experimental Group).**

As per the marks obtained from the Pretest and the Posttest of the experimental group the statistical data analysis display that there is a significant and strong correlation in the usage of "Wordlists" in the experimental group and an improvement in vocabulary acquisition. In Figure

1.1 a considerable development of the marks of Posttest than in the Pretest after the application of the remedial activities which in the current study is “using of “Word Lists” is displayed and it further highlights that the post-test marks are higher than pre-test marks and this is no doubt is the significant impact and effectiveness of the new methodology using of “Wordlists”.

Figure 2 displays the results of the Pretest and the Posttest and highlights that there is no significant improvement of the marks of the students and the control group was introduced to the “Words” through the lessons which had been the usual classroom practice.



**Figure 2: Pre and Post Test Marks (Control Group).**

Statistically, this can be explained using paired t-test because the number of samples tested was less than 30.

$\mu_d$  : difference between sample mean values of Pre-test and Post-test marks.  $\mu_1$  and  $\mu_2$  are mean values of Pre-test and the Post-test.  $\mu_d = \mu_1 - \mu_2$ . To be valid for the paired t-test the data was confirmed to be normally distributed using the Anderson Darling Test. For the paired t-test the null hypothesis was taken as the both mean values of Pre-test and Post-test marks are equal, and alternative hypothesis as Pre-test marks are less than Post-test marks.

$$H_0: \mu_d = 0$$

$$H_A: \mu_d < 0$$

This corresponds to a left-tailed test, for which a t-test for two paired samples be used.

The significance level is  $\alpha = 0.05$  and the degrees of freedom is 19.

The T statistic calculated is = -6.244

Thus, as observed that calculated  $t = -6.244 < t\text{-critical } (t_c) = -1.729$  therefore it is seen that the the null hypothesis is rejected. From these calculations it is seen that the population mean  $\mu_1$  is less than  $\mu_2$ , at the 0.05 significance level.

Apart from the Pretest and the Post test, a questionnaire too was administered and the intention was to find the attitude of the undergraduates towards the incorporation of “Wordlists”. As per the quantitative and the qualitative data drawn from the questionnaire the students expressed the need for such activities. The students expressed that the usage of “Wordlists” are effective and was likely to have a positive impact as the words that they would acquire would be “Vocabulary” that they would be coming across in the syllabus and hence it would facilitate

their learning. The same words were used in the control group but with less attention on the acquisition which included only explaining the word after writing on the white board. The questionnaire responses explained that the new method of introducing the words was interesting as the target words were introduced through activities.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The current study was carried out to explore the effectiveness of “Word Lists” incorporated for “Communication Skills” which is an English programme carried out in order to support the vocational undergraduates of Univotec. Vocabulary was essential for the respective target group as their English language proficiency stands at a considerably unsatisfactory level. The marks of the Pre Test and the Post Test confirmed that with the incorporation of “Word Lists” a noted development in the vocabulary of the undergraduates occurred.

The study revealed the usage of “Word Lists” to be effective as prior to the application Vocabulary Building was paid little attention in the classroom. The fact that the technique was carried out with the incorporation of activities such as story writing and vocabulary conversations the techniques of using “Word Lists” , the responses obtained from the questionnaires revealed the technique to be beneficial, motivating and at the same time fun when compared with the traditional techniques.

The responses of the questionnaires revealed that undergraduates were expected to follow an English module titled “Communication Skills” in order to support them with the degree programme and this however although catered to the development of General English of the target group there was no special attention given to the “Vocabulary Building”. For this reason the introduction of “Word Lists” was highly appreciated by the students.

As the students consists of mixed language proficiencies, majority of whom are from a very low level of language this type of activity would be beneficial for teachers to help their students improve their vocabulary acquisition. This activity generated a considerable amount of student –teacher relationship which was not observed with the previous lessons. It was more or less a student centered environment thus the current technique generated in the classroom. Although there seemed to be a notable amount of development with the experimental group over the acquisition of words, yet there was a need for the method to be applied for further development.

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