
Investigating the Impact of Vocabulary Shortage on EFL Learners' Writing Skills: The Case of First Year Students at Badji Mokhtar University- Annaba

Étudier l'Impact de la Pénurie de Vocabulaire sur les Compétences d'Écritures des Apprenants d'Anglais: Le Cas des Étudiants de Première Année au Département D'anglais à L'université Badji Mokhtar- Annaba

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Abstract:

The current study investigates the impact of vocabulary shortage on EFL learners' writing skills. Its main objective is to find out to what extent the lack of vocabulary affects the students' writing abilities. Therefore, we collected data via a questionnaire which was administered to 42 first year students in the department of English at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba aiming at exploring their vocabulary and writing problems and finding solutions for them. The results showed that the participants do really suffer from vocabulary competence handicaps ranging from recognizing the word's part of speech, and word usage, to word memorization. This hinders their writing achievements and complicates their writing productions. First year students are struggling to expand their vocabulary store in order to come up with good writing pieces. Based on these findings, the study recommends a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom with a diverse tasks and interesting topics, raising the learners' awareness about vocabulary learning strategies, and activating their background knowledge about the topics under discussion

through the prewriting activities for better teaching vocabulary, and thus ameliorating the students' writing productions.

Keywords: Vocabulary shortage; Writing productions; Investigate; Difficulties

Résumé :

La présente étude examine l'impact d'un vocabulaire insuffisant sur les compétences en écriture des apprenants d'anglais. Son objectif principal est de connaître les effets du manque de vocabulaire sur les écrits des apprenants. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif, nous avons collecté des données via un questionnaire qui a été remis à 42 étudiants de première année du département d'anglais de l'Université Badji Mokhtar d'Annaba dans le but d'explorer leurs problèmes de vocabulaire et d'écriture pour leur trouver des solutions. Les résultats ont confirmé que nos participants souffrent vraiment de handicaps de compétence en vocabulaire allant de la reconnaissance de la partie du discours du mot, de l'utilisation des mots à la mémorisation des mots, ce qui entrave leurs réalisations en écriture et complique leurs productions d'écriture. Les étudiants de première année ont du mal à étoffer leur réserve de vocabulaire afin de proposer de bonnes pièces d'écriture. Ces résultats recommandent une atmosphère chaleureuse et conviviale dans la classe avec une variété de tâches, la sélection de sujets d'intérêt, la sensibilisation des apprenants aux stratégies d'apprentissage du vocabulaire, et l'activation de leurs connaissances de base sur les sujets en discussion à travers les activités de pré écriture pour un meilleur enseignement du vocabulaire, et ainsi améliorer les productions écrites des étudiants.

Mots-clés : Pénurie de Vocabulaire ; Production écrite ; Enquête ; Difficultés

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language necessitates the development of four basic skills; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Vocabulary is one element that links the four

skills all together. Vocabulary encompasses single lexical items, but it also includes phrases or multi-word prefabricated chunks which convey a particular meaning, the same way individual words do. To communicate effectively in a foreign language, the students should learn an adequate number of words and know how to use them appropriately. Students face challenges in coping with the four language skills, mainly because they lack vocabulary. In fact, without sufficient vocabulary, people cannot communicate and express their feelings and thoughts effectively both in spoken and written modes, that is, the more people master vocabulary the more they can speak, write, read and listen.

The lack of vocabulary is becoming increasingly evident among EFL learners. Consequently, they face problems with both receptive and productive language skills. Based on our short experience in teaching written expression for first year students at university and frequent discussions with some colleagues, most students arriving at university lack the basic ability to write short and correct sentences, with many repeated words revealing a shortage of vocabulary store. This sparked our interest to investigate this crucial topic. Most students at the university are unable to write down their ideas; they still have poor vocabulary mastery, which becomes a barrier, as they want to express themselves in writing. Therefore, since words are the writers' most important tools, an increased emphasis on vocabulary development is crucial.

Moreover, the complexity of the writing skill leads the majority of our students to struggle in their writing assignments resulting in bad pieces of writing. Even if the learners learn grammar well and master the sounds of a foreign language, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in a foreign language is handicapped. Therefore, lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge is a serious obstacle for university students when it comes to writing, and that in order to become effective language users, learners need to accumulate a substantial mass of words.

Indeed, vocabulary is one of the most important features that determine the writing quality, and lack of vocabulary contributes to writing difficulty for foreign language learners. Yet, there is little or no attention given for teaching vocabulary in our universities. Instead of being a priority in the teaching programme, mainly for first year students since they are building the basics of the language, vocabulary teaching is seen as an auxiliary or simply as a waste of time. In fact, little sacrifice in terms of time and effort from both teachers and learners is, then, needed to shape the significant part of the language. In this regard, the main objective of this study is to get insights into the students' problems with vocabulary learning and the direct impact of the latter on their writing achievements. Accordingly, the following research questions were addressed:

- What are the difficulties that first year EFL students face in learning vocabulary?
- What is the impact of these difficulties on first year EFL students' writing achievements?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were put forward:

- Vocabulary retrieval problem is the most common hindrance that EFL students at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba suffer from.
- Lack of vocabulary greatly affects the students' written productions at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Importance of Vocabulary in EFL

In learning and using a language, two elements are crucial: vocabulary and grammar. Wilkins (1972: 111) argued: "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." The importance of grammar has been widely recognized in ELT methods, but the situation seems to be different with vocabulary. According to Deccarico (2001: 285), vocabulary has not always been recognized as a priority in language teaching (cited in Vilaça, 2009). For many years, vocabulary has been

perceived as the poor relation of language teaching and “the Cinderella of the field of second language acquisition (SLA) research” (Segler, 2002:1), where vocabulary instruction tends to take a backseat in our teaching priorities. In many instructional approaches, focus on structural signals and grammatical patterns of the language seems to override vocabulary (Croft, 1980).

Vocabulary is an important aspect of language. A person’s knowledge depends on the bulk of English vocabulary he possesses. The success of an individual is governed by his vocabulary. It develops one’s command over the language and this gives him confidence. Lack of stock of words or inability to recall the correct words makes one inefficient in expression, be it oral or written (Sundari, 2006). Thus, an EFL learner’s knowledge depends on the bulk of English vocabulary he possesses.

Harmer (1991) clearly states: “if language structures make up the skeleton of the language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh.” Stahl (2005) argues that “the knowledge of the word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. ” It means that even someone has good grammar, it will be useless if he does not know many vocabularies.

Vocabulary learning and teaching is a key issue that has always been one of the significant subjects for both teachers and learners of foreign languages. Rivers (1968) states that vocabulary cannot be taught; it can be presented, explained, included in all kinds of activities, but ultimately, it is only the individual who learns it. She urges teachers to make learners learn how to learn vocabulary, and enable them to find their own ways of expanding and organizing their word store. Hence, once we are aware of the learners’ styles our teaching would be more efficient and would help them learn more and better. Learning tells us how to teach. The question, then, is not so much, “How can I teach?” as it is, “How can I help the pupils learn?” Responding to learners’ differences and adapting

one's teaching to them is the strongest link in the teaching/learning process (Fadel, M.R. 2011).

Extensive research on the effect of insufficient vocabulary on English language learners' performance have been carried out. For example, Saengpakdeejit (2014: 148) points out that students use the English language both inside and outside the classroom settings, they still encounter problems in their learning and they generally see unknown words as the first problem to overcome. He believes that the problem above may be because vocabulary has been recognized as crucial to language use in which insufficient vocabulary knowledge of the learners leads to difficulties in L2 learning. He adds, "mastering vocabulary is one of the most challenging tasks that any learner faces while acquiring another language." (Saengpakdeejit, 2014: 148). Thus, in the case of language learning, students need to be educated with the strategies, which can help them acquire the meaning of words (Khidhir, 2015).

According to Fauziati (2005), with lack of enough vocabulary, one cannot transfer his/her message successfully or represent his/her views in both written and oral forms. One significant determinant is the amount of lexical items a person possesses and can remember. Thus, having a good knowledge of vocabulary shapes the significant part of any language (McCarthy, 1988, cited in Atasheneh & Naeimi, 2015).

2.2. Vocabulary and Writing

Some studies have revealed that vocabulary mastery has some effects and relationships with the writing ability; the students who have high level of mastery in vocabulary may learn and practise to write English well (Muslikh, 2014). Hedge (1990: 5) asserts that "effective writing requires a number of things; a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the readers."

According to Richards and Renandya (2002: 255), vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how learners speak, listen, read and write. Without an extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to the native speaker, using language in different context, reading or watching television (cited in Rohmatillah, 2014).

Nowadays, it is widely accepted that vocabulary teaching should be part of the syllabus, and taught in a well planned and regular basis. Lewis (1993) argues that vocabulary should be at the centre of language teaching. This is parallel with Nation's (2007; 2013a) principle of the four strands in designing a well-balanced language. This principle says that a well-balanced language course should involve equal amounts of (a) learning through comprehensible listening and reading input, (b) learning through pushed spoken and written output, (c) deliberate language-focused learning, and (d) learning through fluency development in each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Nation, 2007; Nation, 2013a, cited in Nation, 2015).

In some ways, 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 are understood well enough to use correctly (Cited in Brynildssen, S.2000). Mayher and Brause (1986)

have stated that writing is dependent upon the ability to draw upon words to describe an event" (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, 1989:18, Cited in Brynildssen, S.2000).

The breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his or her writing. As Ediger (1999) notes, "variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking and writing, the outgoes of the language arts". (Corona, Spangenberg, and Venet, 1998: 26) concur: "At any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is evident" (Cited in Brynildssen, S.2000).

3.1. Method

3.2. Data Collection Means, Participants, and Procedure

The data were gathered by means of a questionnaire administered to 42 first year EFL students in the department of English at Badji Makhtar University of Annaba during the academic year 2019/2020. It was handed during the written expression session.

3.2. Results

The questionnaire is headed by a brief introduction which explains its aim. It consists of 19 questions, grouped into three sections according to shared goals and common ideas. It encompasses yes/no questions, sometimes followed by justifications, multiple-choice questions, which necessitate choosing one or more options, and open-ended questions for gathering qualitative data from the students.

Section I: The Students' Profile

This opening section enquires about the background information of the respondents. It seeks to specify the students' Baccalaureate stream, the reasons for choosing English, and their perceptions of the English language study.

Q1. What is your Baccalaureate stream? a. Literary b. Scientific

The results showed that the majority of the students are from the literary stream (71.43%). This means that they have quite a good experience with English, since they

gave more importance to foreign languages. However, the students from the scientific stream represented 28.57%. Compared with students within the literary stream, those from the scientific stream have less hours of exposure to English as their focus was mainly on the scientific subjects, as student explained: 'I was scientific; I do not have many words.'

Q2. Why have you chosen to study English? (You can choose more than one option)

- a. you like it
- b. your parents want you to study it
- c. you will have more opportunities to get a job
- d. your baccalaureate average does not allow you to study the field you want

Concerning the reasons for studying English, 47.62% of the students have chosen English because they like it, and because they think they will get a job easily; 21% of them like the English language, and the rest of the students are not motivated to study English. It was just imposed on them either by their baccalaureate average or by their parents. One of the informants complained, 'I am not good at English; my father obliged me to study it, and it is so hard. I find myself fighting to master this language.' This student would have been enjoying her studies if she transferred to the field she likes. With the exception of the students who are obliged to study English, it seems that the majority of the learners hold positive attitudes towards English, and they are motivated to learn it.

Q3. How do you find the English language study? a. Easy b. Difficult c. Very difficult

Q4. Whatever your answer please say *why*.

More than half of the students (52.38%) reported that studying English is difficult. They complained that they do not have many words to speak and write correctly and that studying English at university is different from learning it in the secondary school. Also, the teachers are not helping them to enrich their vocabulary. Here are some of the problems as revealed by the respondents:

S1: 'English is not pronounced the way it is written; sometimes you find a word which has different meanings.'

S2: 'I find difficulties in understanding and remembering some words.'

S3: 'I do not have any problems to understand the lessons. Yet, I do not have vocabulary; that is why I find it somehow difficult.'

S4: 'English was not my choice and I did not study it seriously before.'

An important percentage of the informants (45.23%) found English easy. They express their attitudes towards English language that it is their favorite language and they got familiar with it since childhood through movies, cartoons, and songs. So, they are fond of it and motivated to learn it. Generally, students pointed out that English is sweet and easy to study. It just requires from students to work seriously. They explained:

S1: 'I find English easy because I learned it young, I read books, and I often write in English.'

S2: 'English is my choice, it was easy in the high school, but at university, it is different, I face some difficulties.'

S3: 'It is not very easy, but I like this language and I want to develop my skills.'

Section II: The Significance of Vocabulary Enrichment for Writing

This section is meant to cover one of the most important aspects of writing, vocabulary, and the difficulties students encounter when writing in English.

Q5: Do you find the module of "written Expression" interesting? a. Yes b. No

Q6: If "Yes", please explain why.

Q7: Do you feel relaxed when expressing your ideas and thoughts in writing?

a. Yes b. No

The majority of the students (92.85%) reported that the module of written expression is interesting, and that they feel relaxed when writing. They pointed out that this module helps them to enlarge their store of words and to ameliorate their writing, and that the

teacher made it fun and enjoyable by her motivating way. They claimed:

S1: 'We learn new expressions, phrases, punctuation, sentence structure, and texts, and this helps us to express our ideas.'

S2: 'It is the module that teaches grammar, sentence structure, spelling...We learn new words and important things every session. So, it helps to improve our language.'

S3: 'It is the basic and the most important module. It teaches us more vocabulary and how to write sentences, paragraphs,... and the teacher made it funny and interesting at the same time.'

S4: 'Since we are studying English we must know how to write in English in order to succeed in our studies and our work.'

S5: 'I enlarge my knowledge, ideas, and style through it more than any other module.'

S6: 'It helps us to improve our writing skills and to learn how to use grammar correctly.'

Surprisingly, three students (7.15%) do not see the importance of written expression, and they are not willing to study vocabulary chunks. This implies their carelessness to distinguish between the various combinations of words that make up the authentic texts, which may indicate that unmotivated students or who were obliged to study English are not enjoying it. The latter need to feel secured and be encouraged to write even if their English is not that good. Trying to convince them about the importance of writing is also helpful, especially because they are first year at university.

Q8: Do you face difficulties when writing in English?

- a. Yes b. No

Q9: If "Yes", are those difficulties due to your inadequate mastery of:

- a) Vocabulary b) Grammar c) Style d) Content
e) Coherence/cohesion f) Punctuation/spelling g) Other, please specify

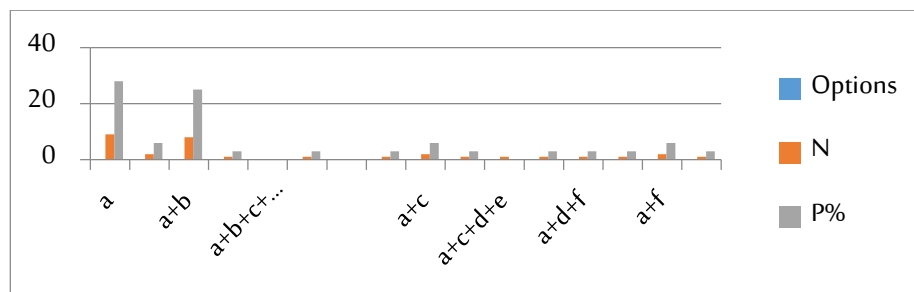
When asked whether they face difficulties in writing, 32 students (76.20%) out of 42 replied that they do, and the sources of these difficulties are exhibited in table 1 below:

Table1: Sources of Writing Difficulties as Perceived by Students

	Options	N	P%
a	vocabulary	9	28.1 2%
b	grammar	2	6.25 %
a+b	vocabulary+grammar	8	25%
a+b+c+d+e + f	vocabulary+grammar+ style+ content+coherence/cohesion +punctuation/spelling	1	3.12 %
a+b+d+e+f	vocabulary+grammar+ content+ coherence/cohesion+punctu ation/spelling	1	3.12 %
a+b+e	vocabulary+grammar+ coherence/ cohesion	1	3.12 %
a+c	vocabulary+style	2	6.25 %
a+c+d	vocabulary+style+ content	1	3.12 %
a+c+d+e	vocabulary+style+ content+ coherence/cohesion	1	3.12 %
a+d	vocabulary+content	1	3.12

			%
a+d+f	vocabulary+content+ punctuation /spelling	1	3.12 %
a+e	vocabulary+coherence/cohes ion	1	3.12 %
a+f	Vocabulary+punctuation /spelling	2	6.25 %
b+e	Grammar+coherence/ cohesion	1	3.12 %
	Total	32	100

Figure1: Sources of Writing Difficulties as Perceived by Students



As shown in table 1 above, the largest percentage of the participants (76.20%) affirmed that they encounter obstacles when writing in English, and vocabulary is the most challenging area that hinders their writing with a percentage of (90.58%). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) argued that “probably half of world’s population does not know how to write adequately and affectively “(p.87). This means that not only our students suffer from doing it correctly but maybe it is an obstacle faced by the majority of people even in their L1.

Q10: Do you read authentic materials in English? a.Yes b.No

Q11. If "Yes", have you ever noticed that authentic materials are full of phrasal verbs, collocations, ready-made expressions and idioms? a.Yes b.No

The majority of the students (73.80%) reported that they read authentic texts in English. This means that they are in direct contact with all kinds of vocabulary items. The informants avow that they notice the abundant existence of phrasal verbs, collocations, ready-made expressions and idioms. However, a percentage of 23.80% of our informants revealed that they do not read in English. This means that they miss the basic source to enlarge their vocabulary bank.

Q12: Do you use these lexical aspects in your writing? a. Yes b. No

Q13: If "Yes", how frequently do you use them in your writing?

An important percentage of our informants (61.90%) replied that they use phrasal verbs, collocations, and ready-made expressions in their writing, and when asked about the frequency of use of these vocabulary chunks in their writings, the respondents showed different rates. Only five students (19.23%) revealed that they always use these vocabulary chunks in their writing. 10 students (38.46%) affirmed that they use these words often, and an important percentage of the sample reported that they rarely use these vocabulary items in their writing. This implies that vocabulary deserves a considerable care from the teacher to boost the learners to use diversified word combinations to improve their writing style. We note that 3 students (7.15%) did not answer this question. This may indicate that those students did not understand the question or that they do not even know the names of these lexical forms.

Q14. Are you interested in learning various vocabulary items like phrasal verbs, collocations, idioms, proverbs, and every day expressions to use them in your writing?

Table 2: Students' Interest in learning Various Vocabulary Items

	Options	N	P%
A	Yes	36	85.71%
B	No	3	7.15%
	No answer	3	7.15%
	Total	42	100%

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (85.71%) are interested in learning various vocabulary items like phrasal verbs, collocations, idioms, proverbs, and every day expressions to use them in their writing.

Q15: A lot of words in English can have more than one meaning (different part of speech) (e.g. book, colour, station...). Do you easily recognize the meaning of the word when it changes its function? a. Yes b. No

Table3. Students' Recognition of the Words that Have Different Parts of Speech

	Options	N	P%
A	Yes	21	50%
B	No	21	50%
	Total	42	100%

The results in table 3 above show that half of our respondents (50%) affirmed that they can easily recognize the various functions of the words that they read in texts.

Yet, the second half of the targeted learners (50%) avowed that they encounter problems in dealing with the words that have different parts of speech.

Q16: If "No", how to overcome this difficulty?

Repetition and translation are the strategies mostly opted for by the students to overcome this difficulty. In addition to that, students declared that more efforts are required to ameliorate their level; they have to read books, watch films and movies, and listen to dialogues in English to get familiar with new lexicon and expressions.

Q17: Do you wish to learn new words grouped by topic (Travel, Holidays and Tourism, Power and Politics, Students' Life,...)

Almost all the respondents (95.23%) expressed their enthusiasm to learn new vocabulary grouped by topic. That is, a topic of interest is discussed each time, providing students with various words and expressions that are related to that topic like collocations, phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs.

Q18. If "Yes", please suggest any topic you want to learn the vocabulary related to.

The students are concerned with knowing the vocabulary related to the following topics: Tourism- travel- airport- cultures of countries- politics- shopping- sport- music- communication- feelings and emotions-history- adolescence- students' life- animal life- living in a new town- relationships- family- personality- dialogues- autism- food- medicine- health...

Section III: Further Suggestions

Q19: Please, feel free to add any comment about the problems you face in learning lexical items and the significance of learning this aspect of language in enhancing your written expression.

The concluding section of the questionnaire gives the respondents more freedom to share their thoughts concerning vocabulary and writing. The overwhelming majority of our informants are not satisfied with the word bank they possess, and since writing is heavily dependent on the amount of vocabulary one is able to use correctly, the need for vocabulary enrichment is necessary to help students cope with the difficulties they are confronted with when writing. Students revealed some issues related to both learners and teachers ranging from the learners' laziness, insufficient vocabulary, forgetting new words to the teachers' ways of teaching. These are some of the comments:

S1: 'The problem is that I am a lazy person. English is easy, it requires little efforts, and written expression is a nice and very important module. You make it funny with your good energy.'

S2: 'Some teachers explain very fast and they do not write on the board.'

S3: 'In fact, I do not have a big problem in written expression, but I forget the words.'

S4: 'The problem is that I do not revise, but still written expression is one of my favorite modules. Thank you so much teacher because I can notice you are doing your best.'

S5: 'I have difficulties to find words. I have the ideas, but I do not know how to say them. I am also not good at linking ideas.'

S6: 'I want to learn new words and expressions to avoid repetition because many words make writing richer and clearer.'

S7: 'I do not have many words to enrich my writing and I make spelling and grammatical mistakes. It is necessary to read books to learn more words.'

4. **Pedagogical Recommendations**

The results obtained from the students' questionnaire were consistent with the literature review in providing answers to the aforementioned research questions. They proved that the learners under investigation do encounter difficulties in vocabulary learning, ranging from recognizing the word's part of speech, word usage, to word memorization. This, in return, negatively affects their writing productions. Therefore, our hypotheses were confirmed; forgetting vocabulary items is a serious handicap that prevents students from expressing themselves adequately in writing, and hence, it greatly affects their written productions. However, students are fully aware of this vocabulary shortage, and they are even struggling to expand their vocabulary store in order to come up with good writing pieces, as one of them stated: 'I do not have enough words and synonyms to express myself in writing, but I like to study English and improve my level.' Here the teachers' role shows up, as explained by one of the respondents: 'I love the way

you teach. It makes us love to come to study and makes us love written expression. So I think the more positive and hard worker the teacher is, the more he will make students love learning, but most of the teachers are negative. Thank you for existing!

In fact, a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom with diverse tasks are ways to secure learners' excitement and involvement. Teachers have to select topics of interest that attract the learners' attention, activate their background knowledge about the topics under discussion through the prewriting activities like brainstorming which has a powerful effect on overcoming the state of students being blocked whenever they are given a writing task. These prewriting techniques are so crucial to equip the learners with the arms they need to get ready to compose a piece of writing in English as they generate ideas and enrich their repertoires by new vocabulary and ready-made chunks like idiomatic expressions, collocations, phrasal verbs, and proverbs related to the topic. Therefore, the students get rid of loss of words or having nothing to say, and this will only motivate them and renders the teaching /learning situation easier and more pleasant for both teachers and learners.

Vocabulary is the most essential thing students need to learn, since through their answers of the questionnaire, they reported that the lack of vocabulary represents a serious handicap for their learning: 'I have just one problem; that is vocabulary, I cannot explain what is in my mind.' 'My problem is that I forget the words and I cannot conjugate the verbs correctly. I have many ideas, but I do not have terms to express them.' Students also strive to memorize new words, as one of them bitterly expressed: 'Forgetting is a big issue that faces anyone who wants to learn a language. Vocabulary has a significant role in enhancing our writing, because any module in English needs writing, hence vocabulary. Our previous teachers did not care about giving us lexical items.' For this reason, keeping vocabulary logs is an effective tool that can be implemented in EFL classrooms for students to develop a useful vocabulary learning habit. Students get a list

of words each session, but not too many words in order not to get the learners confused , they record them on their notebooks, and regularly review them, because as Nation (2001) argued: 'Language learners need to meet a new word up to 10 times before it becomes part of their mental lexicon.'

One vocabulary teaching technique is reading. It is through reading that learners engage actively with the new language and culture. Raimes explains: "the more our students read, the more they become familiar with the vocabulary, idiom, sentence patterns, organizational flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the language" (Raimes,1994: 66). Consequently, one can improve his writing if only he reads frequently in the target language, i.e. reading is a pre-condition for writing.

5. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, no language acquisition can take place without knowledge of words of the language in question. In fact, a large vocabulary store is the key to improve all the language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This study investigated the relationship between insufficient vocabulary and the writing difficulties it breeds for first year students in the Department of English at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba. The results inferred from the students' questionnaire revealed that the students under investigation are struggling to accumulate a substantial mass of words to express themselves freely in writing which calls upon the teachers' employment of effective vocabulary teaching techniques to expand the learners' vocabulary repertoire. Consequently, vocabulary development must be an ongoing part of classroom life, and learners must no longer feel overwhelmed while learning vocabulary, but rather they have to persist, strive for their learning goals, and most importantly enjoy their knowledge growth.

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