Research Article

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# First Year Students' Vocabulary Learning Beliefs, Strategies and Vocabulary Size Outcomes: Jigjiga University in Focus

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***Abstract:*** *This study aimed at investigating the vocabulary learning beliefs (VLB), vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and vocabulary size outcomes of the first year university students who have been taking Communicative Language Skills Course. Sequential explanatory design with mixed methods approach was employed. The purpose of this two-phase explanatory mixed methods study was to obtain statistical, quantitative results from the target population and then followed up by a few participants' to probe those results with qualitative interviews.462 students in their first year program at Jigjiga University participated in the study. The students were randomly selected from three colleges and nine departments in the university. Six instructors who were involved in teaching Communicative English Language Skills to these students were also the participants. The quantitative data were collected through survey questionnaire and global vocabulary size tests, and the qualitative data was elicited using semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire and vocabulary size tests were administered to the students, while the interview data was drawn from both students and their EFL instructors. The study found out that there has been a strong correlation between vocabulary learning beliefs and vocabulary learning strategies. The empirical evidence indicates the correlation is positive and significant. Thus, learners' beliefs held govern strategy use, and strategy use in turn affects success in learning EFL vocabulary. However, first year students lack insightful beliefs towards EFL vocabulary learning. Vocabulary learning strategies were hardly employed, where bilingual dictionary and electronic bilingual dictionary have been the most favored. EFL instructors, conversely, believe and actually practice context-based strategies for guessing meanings of unknown words in the classroom. Results of the vocabulary size tests also indicate that the majority of the students have inadequate vocabulary size that affected their communicative skills.*

**Keywords:** *vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary teaching, academic communication skills*

## 1. Introduction

The basic foundation of language learning is vocabulary acquisition. Students' academic communication skills like interaction and comprehension of texts are largely determined by their levels of vocabulary knowledge. According to Lieb (2005) and Wallace (1988), individual words and phrases are the building blocks of every language and communication.

Vocabulary knowledge promotes reading fluency, improves academic achievement and enhances thinking and communication (Chung, 2012; Vermeer, 2001; Laufer & Nation, 1999). Moreover, Bennett's, (2006) research findings suggested that language learners without adequate knowledge of vocabulary are generally impeded in their academic activities. It is, therefore, evident that vocabulary is indispensable for successful communication in any language; as learning a language begins with learning or acquisition of its vocabulary.

However, many researchers, in both second and foreign language contexts, complained the efficacy of vocabulary learning is often far from satisfactory. Among others, Zimmerman (1997:17) states, "although the lexicon is arguably central to language acquisition and use, vocabulary instruction has not been a priority in second language acquisition research and methodology". Nation (2001) likewise ascertained that the key role vocabulary plays in

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language learning has not always been reflected in the amount of attention that has been given to it by language teachers and researchers in applied linguistics. Similarly, research evidences in the local context depicted that it is a rare endeavor to teach vocabulary explicitly via the help of different techniques and strategies (Abebe, 1997; Jeylan, 1999; Ayalew, 2009; Seyoum, 2009; and Mebratu, 2011). To this end,Abebe (1997) pointed out the situation succinctly:

> *In spite of students' apparent deficiencies, the place of vocabulary in the freshmen classroom is relegated to a secondary position, a greater emphasis being to the teaching of reading comprehension and grammatical structure. This situation is rather getting worse in the recent years as reflected in the examinations for the two parts of the freshmen English courses ( P:16).*

Similarly, first year students, at the present day, are offered Communicative English Language skills courses for two consecutive semesters to enhance their academic communication skills. However, they lacked the necessary capabilities to understand the courses and achieve the objectives set by the end of the semesters. The researcher believes that the insufficient attention given to EFL vocabulary learning/teaching is one major factors for students to have small vocabulary size that could eventually hinder their classroom interactions. That is, although the practice of communicative language teaching (CLT) is favored in English as foreign language (EFL) syllabus, vocabulary learning is not a priority agenda like grammar rules or writing skills. To this end, Mebratu's (2011) finding revealed that teachers' lack of interest to teach vocabulary affected the implementation of CLT in vocabulary teaching. Meanwhile, Seyoum's (2009) study showed that students' were not well aware of the broad range of language learning strategy options available to them.

Following the conscious recognition of the learner as an active participant in CLT classroom, learner variables have important roles to play in the process of language learning. Among others, language learning beliefs (LLB) and language learning strategies (LLS) have been the focus of second/foreign language research (Su li, 2010). The same author further argued that vocabulary learning beliefs (VLB) and vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) are under-researched. According to Hong (2006), the choice of language learning strategies is affected by learners' beliefs about language learning. These beliefs, as most language educators argue, affect students' success in learning the target language and directing their learning strategies in that way (Kitabevi & Shahraki, 2011).

Several researchers have suggested that learners' preconceived beliefs about language learning would likely affect the way they learn second/foreign language and the way they use their learning strategies (Abraham & Vann, 19987; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1986, cited in Su Li, 2010). Meanwhile, beliefs about language learning have also been found to be closely linked to the learners' choice of learning strategies (Wenden, 1987a; Yang, 1992, 1999; cited in Hong, 2006).

In Ethiopian context where bilingualism or multilingualism is common, learners may have different beliefs about language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particular.

Vocabulary learning strategies, therefore, help EFL learners become efficient in developing their vocabulary size that ultimately improve their academic communications. Currently, many students at tertiary level have inadequate vocabulary size (the number of words language learners know) that hugely affects their academic communications. They hardly use English language effectively to express their thoughts and feelings. It has often been observed that students' low proficiency in the target language is unlikely to match the courses' objectives designed for them at the university level.

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the language areas crucial for fluent language use. Thus, the proposed study set out to investigate first year students' VLB, VLS and vocabulary size knowledge of students at tertiary level.

The basic research questions this study determined to answer are:

1. What are the beliefs held by first year students about vocabulary learning?

2. What vocabulary learning strategies do first year students use in learning vocabulary?

3. What is the vocabulary size knowledge of first year students?

4. What is the relationship among VLB, VLS students use and their vocabulary size?

## 2. Materials and Methods

The objective of this study is to investigate the vocabulary learning beliefs (VLB), vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and vocabulary size outcomes of first year university students. In order to achieve this objective, sequential explanatory designs with mixed methods approach were employed. A sequential explanatory design is typically used to explain and interpret quantitative results by collecting and analyzing follow-up qualitative data (Creswell, 2009).

### 2.1. Data Gathering Instruments and Procedures

The total number of first year students who enrolled in 2018 academic year at Jigjiga University was 4650. They were assigned among eight colleges and two institutions of the

university. Three colleges and nine of their departments were randomly selected to draw representative samples. Similarly, 465 target participants were chosen at random to take part in the present study. For the qualitative data collection, six EFL instructors out of 27, and eight students were selected using convenient sampling techniques from the Department of English Language and Literature.

Data for this study were collected using three instruments: questionnaire, interview and Global Vocabulary Levels Tests, which were proved to be effective during the pilot testing. A closed-ended vocabulary learning beliefs (VLB) and vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) questionnaires were developed by modifying Carril's (2009) and (GU & Johnson', 1996) guide.

The VLB's section has five aspects that explore the participants' pre-conceived and actual beliefs about vocabulary learning. On the other hand, the VLS has 76 questionnaire items that explore the participants' frequency of use of strategies, awareness and practice of VLS in the process of EFL vocabulary learning.

The main frameworks of the questionnaires used in the above studies were drawn from Oxford's (1990) questionnaire known as the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Oxford's SILL has been validated across culture and languages, and is one of a few instruments measuring the frequency of language learning strategies (LLS) that currently exist (Takac, 2008). Thus, frequency Likert scale (0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always) were employed in collecting VLS use data.

In order to probe the quantitative results, follow up qualitative data through interviews were collected from eight student participants who were randomly selected from each college and six EFL instructors. Interview data is intended to elicit information that shows the consistency of the results of students' reported questionnaire.

## 3. `Results

The survey questionnaire has two parts: analyses of VLB and VLS respectively. The data consisted of closed questions that had to be answered via a 5-point Likert Scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to examine the internal consistency (reliability) for each of the two scales, and α .842 and .939 were obtained for VLB and VLS overall scales respectively, indicating that the instruments were reliable enough to measure the intended constructs.

### 3.1. Results of Vocabulary Learning Beliefs (VLB)

The total VLB score of the respondents ranged from 57 to 167, as the majority of the students fell below the 'agree' rating scale. Taking 148 (the product obtained by multiplying 4 -the rating value for 'agree'- with 37, the number of items) as a cut score, 9.7% (n=45) of the sample believed in vocabulary learning, while most of the respondents (90.3%) did not. As it is explained in the previous section, the number of items in each of the VLB subscale differs substantially. Motivational aspect (MA) has 13 items; Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning (FLVL) has 9 items, Foreign Language Vocabulary Teaching (FLVT) has 4 items and Linguistic Aspects (LA) as well as Foreign Language Vocabulary Assessment (FLVA) each has 4 items. Therefore, the mean score of each VLB subscale was computed, rather than the sum score which is affected by the number of items.

As presented in Table 1 below, the students scored higher in FLVT (M=3.37, SD=.77), followed by MA (M=3.35, SD=.58), FLVL (M=3.34, SD=.70), then FLVA (M=3.33, SD=.82) and the least mean score was that of the LA (M=3.07, SD=.83) subscale. Although standard deviation does not decrease in descending order with descending rank mean score, it is still small in relation to the mean of each subscale. Again, this indicates that the values of the subscales are close to the means.

The minimum and maximum mean scores of the subscales revealed that FLVT and LA (the highest and lowest obtained mean scores) have mean scores between (M=1.00) and (M=5.00) each, while that of the remaining subscales were between (M=1.30) and (M=4.70, 1.22 and 4.89, 1.25 and 5.00 for motivational aspects, FLVL and FLVA respectively. Likewise, the range for FLVT and linguistic aspects was 4.00 each, for motivational aspects 3.38, for FLVL 3.67 and for FLVA were 3.75. This indicates that FLVT and linguistic aspects had a wider range followed by FLVA, and then comes FLVL and motivational subscale which were the least in terms of range values. In other words, the minimum and maximum values of the motivational subscale were not as wide as the remaining subscales.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of VLB Subscales

| VLB Subscales | N | Min | Max | SD | Range | M |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivational | 462 | 1.3 | 4.7 | 0.58 | 3.38 | 3.35 |
| Linguistics | | 1 | 5 | 0.83 | 4 | 3.07 |
| FLVL | | 1.22 | 4.89 | 0.7 | 3.67 | 3.34 |
| FLVT | | 1 | 5 | 0.77 | 4 | 3.37 |
| FLVA | | 1.25 | 5 | 0.82 | 3.75 | 3.33 |

N=Sample Size; Min= minimum Value; Max= Maximum Value; SD= Standard Deviation; M= Median

Thus, the respondents believed that FLVT was more important than all the subscales of VLB, and motivational aspects are more important than the other three subscales. FLVL is more important than the remaining two subscales and FLVA is more

important than the Linguistic subscale which is less favored by the students in learning EFL vocabulary. However, if individual questionnaire item was computed, the highest score (M=3.96) could be found among motivational beliefs' category: 'I like learning the vocabulary of English.' Therefore, a subscale with the highest score, FLVT in this case, may not have high score with all individual items' scores.

As illustrated in the table above, the first categories of beliefs dealt with the issue of motivation for EFL vocabulary learning. Having 13 items, the subjects were asked different motivational questions and they claimed that they like learning EFL vocabularies and communicating with native speakers (M=3.96 and M= 3.7) respectively. On the other hand, they did not somehow worry about their lack of enough vocabularies on exams (M=2.89); and the participants ignored the unknown words if they understood what the text was about (M=3.00).

The second category of beliefs, that is, the linguistic aspects (LA) of vocabulary learning were focused on as an important features of vocabulary learning, such as the role of vocabulary in foreign language learning (FLL) (M=3.36), and the cultural background of students could affect their vocabulary learning (M=3.40), as culture is one of the learners' characteristics.

The third category required the subjects to reflect upon the best ways of EFL vocabulary learning (FLVL). They were given several statements about vocabulary learning techniques to identify those that suit them best. Thus, they responded that using vocabularies in different language skills (M=3.65) was more important than memorizing words. Furthermore, they also rated high (M=3.57) about their EFL teachers support to develop an awareness of LLS or VLS, as well as the essential role of reading on vocabulary learning (M=3.54). Guessing unknown words in context (M=3.49), and self-learning (M=3.33) were moderately acknowledged by the participants.

The fourth subscale which presented the items concerning the subjects' ideas was about how EFL vocabulary should be taught (FLVT). They reported high for the item stating 'the least a learner should know about a word is its form, its meaning, and its basic usage' (M=3.96). Similarly, they also considered the statement with a high rate (M=3.71), which says that it is essential to teach words out of context and in context. However, the participants claimed with moderate rating the items stating in FLVT, the role of a teacher consists mainly in promoting learners' autonomy by providing variety of strategies; and FLV must be taught in a systematic and clear way (M=2.89 and M=3.30) respectively.

As far as the vocabulary assessment is concerned, the respondents reported with moderate rating (M=3.33) for the items provided as displayed in Table 1 above. The statements focused on how to design vocabulary tests. For example, students' opinion about teachers' made specific vocabulary tests and the role of frequency in designing the tests. Moreover, a correlation matrix for the VLB subscales was performed which shows the subscales correlated significantly at the .01 alpha levels, which is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations of VLB Subscales

| Subscales | MT | LA | FLVL | FLVT | FLVA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MT | 1 | .305** | .518** | .473** | .320** |
| LA | .305** | 1 | .321** | .232** | .215** |
| FLVL | .518** | .321** | 1 | .534** | .385** |
| FLVT | .473** | .232** | .534** | 1 | .421** |
| FLVA | .320** | .215** | .385** | .421** | 1 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

## 3.2. Results of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs)

As previously stated, this section of the survey focuses on the VLSs students' actually had in their mind when learning EFL vocabulary. It contains 76 questionnaire items divided into five categories: **Determination** (strategies used to discover and understand the meaning of new words), **Social** (strategies involving cooperation with others), **Memory** (strategies employed to relate the new word with some previously learned knowledge), **Cognitive** (strategies referring language manipulation or transformation), and **Meta Cognitive** (strategies used to control the learning process). Based on Oxford's (1995:12) frequency of use of language learning strategies, respondents' mean scores were computed and classified as higher strategy use with average (M=3.5 to 5.0 points), medium strategy use with (M=2.5 to 3.4), and low strategy use (M=1.0 to 2.4). The next table illustrates frequency of use of VLSs.

As presented in Figure 1 below, the descriptive statistics for VLSs use shows that the majority of the respondents were medium strategy users having 63.4% (N= 293), high strategy use shared 28.6% (N=132) and low strategy use shared only 8.0% ( N=37) of the total sample.

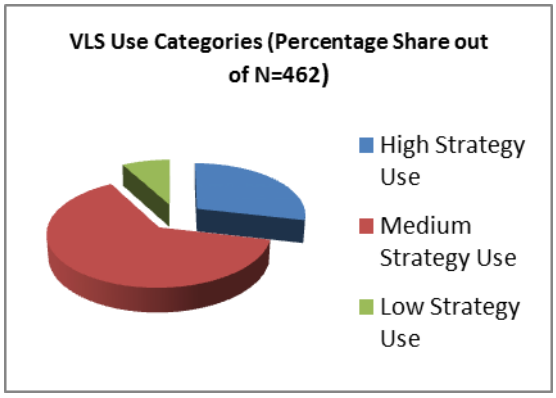


Fig. 1: Descriptive Statistics of VLSs Use

### 3.3. Students' VLS According to Categories (Subscales)

Table 3 below shows the mean scores obtained for the use of strategies made by 462 study participants at the subscale level. Thus, the mean of each subscale was calculated and then comparison was made. The result revealed that the most frequently used category was Determination (DET) (M=3.198, SD=.67), then Social (SOC) (M=3.144, SD=.80), followed by Memory (MEM) (M=3.140, SD=.66), Meta cognition (MET) (Mn3.078, SD=74) and the least frequented was the Cognitive (COG) subscale (M=2.973, SD=.72).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of VLS Subscales (N=462)

| Categories | Range | Min | Max | M[p[n | Sd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DET | 5.00 | .00 | 5.00 | 3.198 | .67 |
| SOC | 5.75 | .75 | 6.50 | 3.144 | .80 |
| MEM | 4.69 | .00 | 4.69 | 3.140 | .66 |
| COG | 5.00 | .00 | 5.00 | 2.973 | .72 |
| MET | 4.70 | .00 | 4.70 | 3.078 | .73 |

The minimum and maximum mean scores of the subscales indicates that the Subscale Social had the widest minimum and maximum value, between .75 and 6.50 with the largest range (5.75), followed by both DET and COG subscales with .00 minimum and 5.00 maximum values. Then, MET with .00 minimum and 4.70 maximum values and the least was MEM with .00 minimum and 4.69 maximum values which had the lowest range of 4.69.

One can observe from Table 4 that most students use DET strategy (3.198) more than any other strategy in their vocabulary learning. Among the remaining strategies students use more was SOC (3.144), and then the MEM strategy was the third in rank in use by the respondents (3.140). The respondents reported that MET strategy was favored less (3.078) and the least preferred strategy was that of COG (2.973). Overall, as the scores show on the five point scale, the subjects were moderate strategy users, that is, based on Oxford's standard, the analysis showed medium strategy use.

Table 4: Correlations of VLS Subscales

| Subscales | DET | SOC | MEM | COG | MET |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DET** | 1 | .537** | .508** | .516** | .412** |
| **SOC** | .537** | 1 | .573** | .434** | .352** |
| **MEM** | .508** | .573** | 1 | .618** | .509** |
| **COG** | .516** | .434** | .618** | 1 | .606** |
| **MET** | .412** | .352** | .509** | .606** | 1 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

As it is explained in VLB subscales above, all the subscales of VLSs were correlated with each other for the same reason. The subscales were correlated at <.01significant level. It was one-tailed, that the scales were expected to correlate for the same reason discussed above. In this scale, the lowest correlation value was r=.352 and the highest was r= .618, which by far exceeds that of the VLB subscales. Thus, VLS subscales are found to be more related than VLB subscales in this student sample. The direction of the correlation was also positive, which means the subscales vary together, in that either they increase or decrease together.

When we look more closely, it can be argued that within each strategy category of VLS, there were differences among the scores depending on particular strategy types. For example, the subjects rated DET strategies the highest (M= 3.198, SD=0.67), and lowest for the COG subscale (M=2.973, SD=.72).

### 3.4. Results of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

The present study employed Schmitt et.al.'s (2001) global vocabulary size test to measure the participants' estimated English vocabulary size, that is, how much vocabulary they know. As discussed in the preceding section, the vocabulary size was examined through a test using four vocabulary levels: a 2,000, 3,000, academic vocabulary and 5,000 levels. Each level has 30 items or questions; and a score of 26 was an indication of having enough word knowledge at that particular category. Table 5 illustrates the results.

The participants scored higher in the 2,000 vocabulary level (M=16.06, SD= 5.806) than the remaining ones. They scored a mean of (M=12.42, SD=6.474) in the academic vocabulary, (M=11.34, SD=5.559) in the 3,000 vocabulary level and (M= 7.55, SD=4.587) in the 5,000 vocabulary level. The overall minimum vocabulary score was zero and the maximum score was 30, whereas the lowest range was 28 and the highest

range was 29. In the sections that follow, each VLT's frequency distribution will be debriefed.

Table 5: Students' Vocabulary Size (N=462)

| | 2,000 | 3,000 | Academic Vocabulary | 5,000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | 16.06 | 11.34 | 12.42 | 7.55 |
| SD | 5.806 | 5.59 | 6.474 | 4.587 |
| Range | 28 | 28 | 29 | 29 |
| Min | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Max | 28 | 29 | 30 | 30 |
| Sum | 7419 | 5239 | 5740 | 3490 |

## 3.5. Results of the 2,000 Vocabulary Size Test

Frequency distribution of the test scores for the 2,000, 3,000, academic vocabulary and 5,000 vocabulary levels tests of the participants were shown in the following tables respectively. The students' test scores were ranked in six groups as 5 and below, 6 to 10, 11 to 15, 16 to 20, 21 to 25 and 26 to 30. 30 being the maximum score of each level and the minimum were 0.

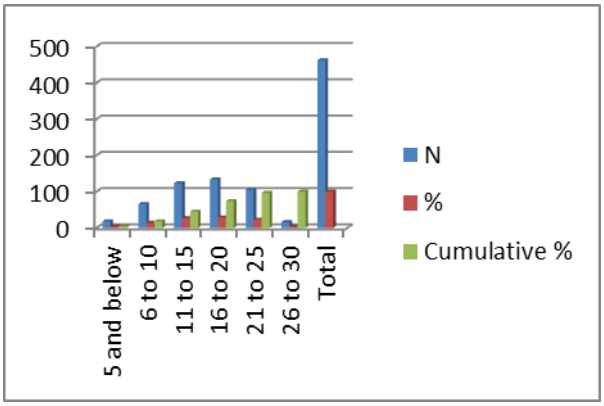


Figure 2: Results of the 2,000 VLT

In the 2,000 vocabulary level, the score with a higher proportion of the students 29.0%, (N=134) was the one between 16 and 20, while the least was that of 26 to 30, only 3.5% (N=16).

## 3.6. Results of the 3, 000 Vocabulary Size Test

Unlike the previous levels, most of the subjects, 33.5% (N=155) in the 3,000 vocabulary level test had low score (6-10), and only 5 subjects (1.1%) had scored 26 and above against the 67 students (14.5%) who scored the lowest.

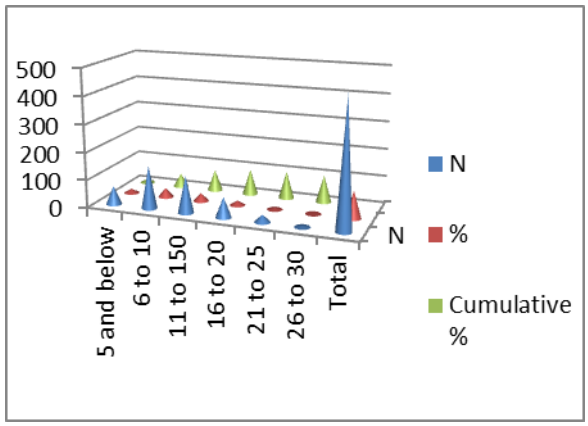


Figure 3: Results of 3,000 Vocabularies VLT

## 3.7. Results of Academic Vocabulary Size Test

As it is depicted in Table 9, 31.6% (N=146), the largest proportion scored between 6 and 10, 21.9% (N=101) had scored between 11 and 15, 18.8% (N=87) scored between 16 and 20, 10.6% (N=49) scored between 21 and 25. The highest scorers (26 to 30) were only 2.8% (N=13) against the 14.3% (N=66) low scorers (5 and below).

The results of academic university level test, compared with the 3000 level test, 13 examinees reached the standard; whereas in the case of 3000 word level, only 5 students met the standard.

Table 6: Results of Academic Vocabulary Size Test

| Score (Range) | N | % | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **5 and below** | 66 | 14.3 | 14.3 |
| **6 to 10** | 146 | 31.6 | 45.9 |
| **11 to 15** | 101 | 21.9 | 67.7 |
| **16 to 20** | 87 | 18.8 | 86.6 |
| **25 to 25** | 49 | 10.6 | 97.2 |
| **26 to 30** | 13 | 2.8 | 100 |
| **Total** | 462 | 100 | |

### 3.8. Results of the 5000 Vocabulary Size Test

In the 5000 vocabulary level test, most of the examinees scored less than 11 points. For example, 45.2% (N=209) scored between 6 and 10; 35.9% (N=166) scored 5 and below; 14.7% (N=68) scored between 11 and 15. On the other hand, 1.9% (N=9) scored between 16 and 20 while 0.9% (N=4) scored between 21 and 25 and 1.3% (N=6) scored the highest, between 26 and 30. The result is depicted in Figure 4 below.

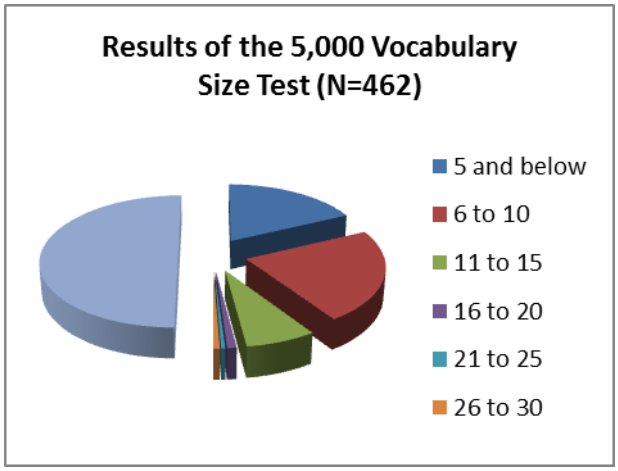


Figure 4: Results of the 5,000 Vocabulary Size Test

The overall vocabulary size knowledge of the target participants was very low at every levels described as inferred from the actual test results.

### 3.9. Relationships among Students' VLB, VLS Use and Vocabulary Size

This section presented the relationships of first year students' overall beliefs about EFL vocabulary learning/teaching, reported vocabulary learning strategy use, and their knowledge of the vocabulary size tests.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of VLB and VLS Scores

| Variables | Min. | Max. | Range | Mn | Median |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VLB | 1.54 | 4.51 | 2.97 | 3.32 | 3.35 |
| VLS | 1.31 | 4.55 | 3.24 | 3.12 | 3.09 |

VLB mean score of the students was (M= 3.32) with a standard deviation of (SD= .51), while that of the VLS mean score was (M=3.12) with a standard deviation of (SD= .56). In both cases the standard deviation is small in relation to the value of the mean itself which indicates that the values are close to the mean. The minimum mean score of VLB was (M=1.54) and the maximum was (M= 4.51) with a range of 2.97, while that of VLS was (M=1.31) and (M= 4.55) respectively with a range of 3.24 respectively. This shows that the range of VLS is wider than the range of VLB.

In order to examine the relationship between the participants' VLB and VLS, and vocabulary size tests, Pearson Product moment Correlation Coefficient was computed. One of the important findings in the present study is that there is statistically strong and positive correlation between VLB. They were found to correlate positively and significantly ($r= .609$, $p<.01$). And the correlation was strong for which the value of r.60-.79 (showing strong correlation between variables). However, the correlation between VLBs and global vocabulary size tests as well as the correlation between VLSs and the global vocabulary size test, did not indicate correlation, except associational relationship of vocabulary learning strategies with the 5000 vocabulary size test. Therefore, further study to cross check the correlation in different contexts worth further research.

### 3.10. Analyses and Findings of Interviews

The findings elicited from the semi-structured interviews with the students and their instructors were discussed in terms of the six themes described earlier.

All student interviewees were well aware of the important role vocabulary plays in the development of the English language; and they expressed their strong and positive attitude towards English language vocabulary. Two of the interviewees (ST1 & ST5) disclosed their desire to have a large stock of English words respectively:

*I have high interest to develop my English language vocabulary. Although we began learning English vocabulary from Grade 1, our vocabulary could not be adequate enough to express our thought and ideas now at university level. It is difficult for me to speak and write in English. I have to know more words to communicate with others. (ST1)*

*I like English vocabularies, because, if I have more words, I can easily communicate in English. Vocabularies are one of the basic communicative resources essentially needed to know any language. Therefore, I study vocabulary to improve the language skills needed to communicate using that language. (ST5)*

Altogether, the interviewees had strong motivational beliefs for English language vocabulary; and they claimed that words are the basic communicative resources of the target language.

The next question was about the students' preferred VLS i.e., how they figure out the meanings of new words encountered for the first time? Almost, majority of the informants were relying on the use of bilingual dictionaries, and few of the respondents tried to use guessing from context and consulting others as their vocabulary learning techniques. Among others, (ST2 & ST8) responses have been stated respectively.

> *First, I use the context to understand the unknown words. However, guessing is very difficult for me. I could not guess correctly most of the time. I did not remember the time I guessed accurately. So, I am not happy using it, as it is useless for me. I use English – Amharic dictionary. When I read, I used to refer it most of the time, because several words are difficult for me to understand the text, but looking up the dictionary now and then was somehow boring and wasting of time (ST2).*

Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the surrounding contexts appeared to be difficult for the respondents as they did not possess adequate or the necessary vocabulary that could help them to guess meaning of new words. Result of the vocabulary size tests indicated the students' insufficient vocabulary knowledge.

> *First of all, I will try to understand the context, may be from the reading, I will try to grasp the main idea of the passage. And then, I will focus on the difficult word in order to guess its meaning. Guessing depends on your knowledge of the words provided in the text. If you know many vocabularies, guessing for you may not be difficult. Otherwise, your guessing may not be correct. I use both Oxford Learners and English- Somali or Somali- English dictionaries. Moreover, I have installed cell phone dictionary (ST8).*

The interviewees used to employ dictionary strategies more often than the other techniques in order to know meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary. Bilingual dictionaries (English-Amharic or English-Somali) have been extensively used by the participants, but few applied monolingual (English-English) dictionaries installed in their phone. For example, for ST5, bilingual dictionary is his best teacher; and for ST8, learning new vocabularies with example sentences is his preferred technique. The participants claimed that the vocabulary tests were often difficult for them to manage and the results obtained were disappointing. For example, they remembered their low grade points of Grade 12 English National Examination (ST4 & ST3).

On the other hand, EFL instructors' observations of students' overall beliefs about vocabulary learning revealed that they were quite pessimistic about their students' enthusiasm and motivation for the foreign language learning. One of the instructors, TR1, explained the reason why students lack the motivation: "I think, from my experience, most students do not show any positive attitude towards English language. They assume that it is very difficult to learn. English language courses by their nature cannot be memorized like the other courses in the other field of studies."

On the contrary, TR2 observed that students' liking or disliking of EFL vocabulary was mostly dependent on the teaching approach, pointing out the techniques teachers employed that account for students' attitude development. To this end, TR6 argued that "As to my perception, it depends on teachers' methodology. Students may prefer to see different strategies, for instance, if you use games for vocabulary teaching, they may be interested. But if you simply expose them to guess meanings; they may not be motivated to engage in the tasks."

Whereas, according to TR3's view, it is difficult to understand students' interest or their feeling but he preferred to explain students' current English language deficiency:

> In my opinion, first year students have insufficient knowledge in English, especially, they do not have the necessary vocabularies to carry out activities as presented. I don't know, they may have the interest, but their background experiences had affected here to cope with the level (TR3).

Instructors' interview data about the concepts and use of LLS/VLS showed that they had inadequate conceptualization and practices of the strategies.TR5 stated his point of view:

> *I don't think we are familiar with learning strategies. It is slightly touched only in college English text books about vocabulary learning strategies. In my case, for example, I will try to use new words in funny sentences, like: "The horse climbed a tree." This is unforgettable; students may not forget the word 'climb'. Moreover, I will never forget the day I learnt the word "amorphous", by drawing a big and very fat lady on the board. She can't walk around. As I said above, if translation suits, you better use that one. I find very productive to use funny sentences. This may not work for every student, so I use other strategies. (TR5).*

On the other hand, TR2 did not come across the concepts of LLS or VLS at all. ". I myself did not come across this know-how. I do not know the theory of language acquisition- the theoretical section or methodologies. I don't think students have such concepts" (TR2).

TR4 preferred complaining about the existing Communicative English Language Skills courses' materials before forwarding his views on the preferred strategies of vocabulary learning.

> *Actually the text is not well prepared. The module is not properly organized. For example, if you see the text, there are only limited exercises on vocabulary. So, these are not enough. The concerned bodies think about this problem; and I personally discussed with some of the instructors offering the same course, and they shared the same thing (TR4).*

And then, TR4 explained two of his vocabulary teaching techniques that he employed; contextual guessing and dictionary use.

> *Actually, there may be different methods to let students develop their vocabulary power. One is to just understand the meaning of the word contextually; that is context-based meaning. I will encourage students to forward context-based meaning; because a word can have different meanings when it is used in different contexts. For example, if we are not considered in the following saying as exaggeration; the word "make" can have more than 400 meanings. Do you believe?*

Furthermore, TR4 has noted that a word can have different meanings when used in different contexts. He adds, "so, context-based meaning is a key, I personally encourage students to understand the meaning of the word in the context given." (TR4)

In sum, as explained by all instructors, the most noticeable reasons for students to have low vocabulary size are their poor English language background knowledge. TR1 expressed his observations that the big problem is students' background. For example, leave alone the students; teachers who came here for in service program (summer course), have big English language problems. Surprisingly, it is very difficult to express themselves in English although they are English language teachers.

## 4. Discussions

The general picture emerging from the sample participants' survey responses to beliefs held about English vocabulary learning was not significant, but as reflected in the belief categories listed (motivational, linguistic, vocabulary learning, vocabulary teaching, and vocabulary assessment) tended to show positive beliefs. Regarding the role of beliefs, Dweck (1999) notes that beliefs about language learning are governing factors in the students' responses to learning in the classroom. However, findings from the students' interviews seem to contradict with the teachers' interviews. Students expressed their desire to learn English vocabulary though the results from teachers' classroom observations was not supporting the students' views. Teachers were quite pessimistic about their students' motivation to learn English language in general and EFL vocabulary learning in particular.

To this end, Su Li (2010) states that in the research of VLB, classroom observation may be helpful in triangulating self-reports, and advancing ones' understanding of learners' beliefs. According to Barceló, beliefs are context specific, and they should be investigated within the context of learning behaviors; hence, classroom observation helps us "understand the complexities of contexts and students' beliefs and actions within those specific contexts" ( Barcelo, 2003:24-25).

Among the VLB categories, English vocabulary teaching, was predominately chosen by the students. The participants focused on the importance of analyzing word structure in terms of prefixes, roots and suffixes. And also they believed that vocabulary should be taught in a systematic and clear way. Regarding English vocabulary teaching, Nation (2003) states that vocabulary learning cannot be left to take care of itself. It needs to be strengthened by careful planning and well-directed teaching. During the interviews, students complained about the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching. They reported they did not learn to develop their vocabulary knowledge, or their English language ability. More importantly, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the prevailing courses-offering via modules. They did not like the top-down implementation of modular courses within very limited time.

The descriptive statistics for VLS use showed that the majority of the respondents (63.4%) were medium strategy users while 28.6% were high strategy users and 8.0% were low strategy users based on Oxford's (1990) language learning strategies (LLS) use interpretations. Moreover, the most frequently used strategy category was determination and the least frequently used one was that of cognitive. Among the VLS, analyzing word structure, monolingual dictionary use and guessing meanings from context were the students' favored or frequently used VLS. On the contrary, findings of interview data did not confirm students' use of monolingual dictionary as much as the bilingual ones.

The results in the cognitive subscale of the present study showed medium strategy use (the bottom five VLS) were

congruent with Carril's (2009) and Su Li's (2010) studies that investigated the vocabulary learning strategies of higher education students. However, in the local context, Abebe's (1997) study regarding vocabulary acquisition strategy uses at Addis Ababa University's (AAU) freshmen revealed as in the range of 'high or medium' frequency strategy uses for the whole sample population.

Findings of students' interview data disclosed that they used bilingual dictionaries most frequently; thought eachers' interview data indicated that they often assist their students to use guessing from context to infer meanings of unfamiliar English words. But, when students engaged in activities like reading, they do not want to guess the difficult words from the surrounding context; instead they prefer to use the bilingual dictionaries. Because, as the data revealed, students do not know how to use context clues. They were not taught about context and contextual clues. On the contrary, a large number of vocabulary could be acquired with the help of VLS (Nation, 2001), and the strategies prove useful for students of different language levels. To this end, Ahmed's (1989) and Oxford's (2001) studies revealed that vocabulary learning strategy use correlates with language proficiency.

There are several factors that impede the practicality of VLS. English vocabulary teaching is rarely focused on; as the majority of EFL teachers do not pay due attention to vocabulary teaching compared to other language skills. Therefore, the teaching of vocabulary is marginalized. As a result, EFL students possessed very limited vocabularies. This finding concurred with a study by Folse (2010). Vocabulary knowledge is crucial in language proficiency in all skills, and students often complain about their lack of vocabulary knowledge as well as lack of focus on vocabulary program curricula. Vocabulary is not given the same attention that grammar, composition and reading are given (Folse, 2010:153).

To explore the relationship between VLB and VLS, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed on the total VLB and VLS scores. They were found to correlate positively and significantly ($r = .609$, $p < .01$). And the correlation was strong based on Evan's (1996) suggestions for which the value of r.60-.79 (showing strong correlation between variables). However, the correlation between vocabulary learning beliefs and global vocabulary size tests as well as the correlation between vocabulary learning strategies and the global vocabulary size tests, did not indicate correlation, except associational relationship of vocabulary learning strategies with the 5000 vocabulary size tests.

Strategy use correlates with language proficiency, and VLB and VLS have strong correlation. Ellis's (2008b) study revealed that beliefs govern strategies. It is, therefore, deduced that if beliefs affect learning strategies, the correlation between VLB and VLS can facilitate the understanding of the correlation between VLB and students' language proficiency (the global vocabulary size tests). In sum, first year Jigjiga University students' poor performances in the vocabulary size tests seemed to correlate with their low VLB (9.7% out of the total sample) and their medium strategy use (63.4% of the sample). That is, VLB affects students' use of VLS, and VLS in turn influences test performance of language proficiency.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate VLB, VLS and English language vocabulary size knowledge of first year Jigjiga University students. Based on the empirical evidences, the following conclusions were drawn. Results of the study revealed that students hold innocent beliefs towards EFL vocabulary learning. The general picture emerging from the reports of the sample participants indicated that small number of students held positive beliefs towards vocabulary learning. Findings of participants' VLS use and outcomes of their vocabulary size tests were not invariably promising. The participants resorted more frequently the use of bilingual dictionary or electronic bilingual dictionary (English – L1 equivalent).

However, the study has also found out a mismatch between the VLS actually used and the strategies the participants considered useful in the survey reports. That is, what the participants opted as useful strategies but they did not actually practice them. Therefore, it may be possible to draw conclusions with very few exceptions, that VLs were not employed frequently. Many of the VLSs, however, were used seldom or not at all. This is due to the fact that students were not adequately taught the different VLSs. Similarly, instructors' interview data revealed that they lacked necessary awareness about the concepts of LLS or VLS.

On the contrary, a large amount of vocabulary could be acquired with the help of VLS (Nation, 2001), and the strategies prove useful for students of different language levels. As mentioned earlier, participants' inappropriate beliefs of English vocabulary learning affected the use of VLS available to them. The study found out that there is a strong correlation between vocabulary learning beliefs and vocabulary learning strategies. They do have statistically significant and positive correlation. Thus, students' beliefs influence their progress in acquiring a new skill or the ability to perform an activity. Horwitz (1988) argued that some preconceived beliefs are likely to restrict learners' range of strategy use. That is, beliefs could potentially govern students'

VLS use, and students' VLS use deeply affects language learning outcomes. Strategy use correlates with language proficiency (Oxford, 2001), and self-confidence (Chamot, 2005).

Thus, learner beliefs affect students' success in learning the target language and directing their learning strategies in that way (Kitabevi & Shahraki , 2011:255). Besides, results of interviews were endorsing findings of the survey reports regarding the beliefs the study participants held toward English vocabulary learning. That is, many students did not have good attitude towards English language or vocabulary learning. They assumed vocabulary learning is difficult to learn. Thus, it is possible to conclude that beliefs may have the potential to influence students' vocabulary leaning success or failure.

Hence, it is possible to infer that uninformed beliefs could arguably yield ineffective strategy use, and in turn, inappropriate strategy use would result in poor performances in language classroom activities. Overall, findings from interviews also endorsed the empirical evidences, which had been numerically computed. EFL teachers, from their classroom observations, expressed that most students were often discouraged to participate in classroom activities.

However, the correlation between vocabulary learning beliefs and global vocabulary size tests as well as the correlation between vocabulary learning strategies and the global vocabulary size tests did not indicate correlation; except associational relationship of vocabulary learning strategies with the 5000 vocabulary size tests. Results of the vocabulary size tests also indicate that the majority of the students have inadequate vocabulary size that affected their communicative skills. Finally, further study to cross check the correlation in different contexts will be worth recommending.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- It is well recognized that English language learners have limited English vocabulary size knowledge, and due to this, many of them even at tertiary level cannot read and understand texts independently. Hence, explicit focus on vocabulary learning is needed.
- Separate English vocabulary course like that of writing and grammar ought to be offered at tertiary level.
- Curricula and syllabi designers should incorporate specific vocabulary learning plans, goals and objectives which have to be deliberately controlled and monitored.
- Strategy-based instruction that could train both EFL teachers and students on VLS or LLS should be planned and implemented.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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