

Acquisition of Vocabulary of ESL Engineering Students through a Newspaper: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Vocabulary plays a vital role for an effective communication and fluent language usage among ESL (English as Second Language) learners. Newspaper reading helps the students to develop vocabulary level beyond the classroom. The present empirical study assesses the participants' vocabulary level by using a newspaper article. Based on the aim of this empirical study, it was decided that the best method for this investigation to better understand the levels of the students is to adopt the qualitative and quantitative research design. To find out the vocabulary level of the participants this research developed a questionnaire. A total of ten open ended questions are framed in this questionnaire. Based on the collected data the findings explored that, the participants' have vocabulary gaps. The findings of this study also revealed that, the student participants' vocabulary level is not up to the expected mark. The randomly selected undergraduate engineering students (n=142) have taken the part in this study. Finally, this empirical study was concluded with recommendations to the participants to improve vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Vocabulary level, Newspaper Article, ESL learners, Questionnaire, Empirical Study.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the important features to enhance the language proficiency among the students. By reading English language newspapers ESL students may improve vocabulary and language proficiency. The printed materials such as novels, books, magazines, academic books, dictionaries, flash-cards and newspapers may help the students in learning vocabulary. In this digital era the digital media provides sources such as blogs, dictionary apps, vocabulary apps, TED talks, newspaper apps and news channels also helping

the students in the acquisition of vocabulary. Among these digital sources, the printed version of newspaper is considered as the best choice for students to learn vocabulary with a little expensive. The columns from newspapers presents the updated vocabulary from national, international, scientific & technical, sports and weather. Among these concepts newspapers provides various puzzles, riddles, tongue twisters, and Sudoku helps the learners to develop vocabulary and improve language proficiency. The updated vocabulary of newspaper articles develops the semantic knowledge such as spelling, word part, synonyms and antonyms, homonyms, grammatical structure and collocation among the learners.

In the development of vocabulary level ESL students often participate in vocabulary quizzes, comprehension test and language webinar test to enrich their vocabulary (Al-Seghayer, K. 2005). Among these efforts they also focus on academic English examinations which are playing the vital role in the development of vocabulary. Due to the insufficient word knowledge students often score low percentage of marks in academic examinations. However, the academic sources such as prose and poetry have vocabulary limitations such as out-dated word forms and collocations are become complications to enhance vocabulary level. The vast reading habit of newspapers helps the students to overcome this situation and update their vocabulary level. Along with this, the reading habit of newspapers develops the ability of analysing the semantic structure of a word. However, analysing the word meaning from standard newspapers such as Time of India, The Hindu, The Economics of Times and The Indian Express is also a challenging task for ESL students. Most of the Indian students and vocabulary learners choose listed newspapers (Table 1) to develop their vocabulary level. The information from table 1 reveals the circulation data of top four English newspapers which are read by the students and learner regularly for the development of language and knowledge.

Table 1: Circulation figure of the top 4 Newspapers of India

S. No	Title of Newspaper	Language	Circulation in Figures in Lakhs
1	The Times of India	English	1,056,000
2	The Hindu	English	1,415,792
3	The Economics of Times	English	3,59,142
4	The New Indian Express	English	5,95,618

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_India_by_circulation

The current monotonous style of learning vocabulary in classroom is required to change and need to introduction of English newspaper to update vocabulary level among ESL students. The ESL teachers and students are needed to adopt the reading habit of English newspaper not only the development of the vocabulary levels, but also to improve writing styles and tone. Ultimately, the newspapers become a source of sematic material for all age group students to develop vocabulary and language proficiency.

Related Studies in The Literature\

The presented literature has significant within vocabulary development, acquisition methods and improving vocabulary size through newspaper reading. In this connection, Sanderson (1999) explored that newspapers have a great range of texts and language techniques that are not clearly discovered in typical language studying materials. The well trained and qualified instructors may inspire various teaching events involving learners in entertaining activities employing diverse and exciting newspaper materials for readers. Mulopoulos (1985) stated that reading English newspapers gives academic language support, development of vocabulary and language proficiency among readers. Many researchers have

studied the uses of newspapers as a tool in a language classroom, because, they are up to date and provide the modest information with the linguistic data. They also provide students with an opportunity to read real life events and incidents which may bring awareness among the students.

Rosyidah and Giotto (2018) stated that vocabulary can enhance the four language skills such as listening, reading, speaking and writing among students. Meara (1995) and Milton (2009) are revealed that, learning a foreign language is one of the most cognitively challenging endeavours that most people go through for life. Many argue that learning foreign language vocabulary is perhaps the most challenging aspect to becoming proficient in mastering the target language. Cheyney (1982) noted that, students show low interest to learn vocabulary through text books and materials. Wilkins (1972) states that, without grammar very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Takeuchi (2003) points out that, vocabulary is currently one of the most popular topics in applied linguistics research, it reveals that, vocabulary learning enhance language proficiency among learners. Torki (2011) explored that, vocabulary is believed to be the cornerstone of all languages. Adolphs and Schmitt (2004) stated that, vocabulary acquisition also remains a very active area of research with significant implications to inform practice and it is assumed that growth in vocabulary takes place as a result of gains in language proficiency.

Read (1997) contends that vocabulary knowledge may need to be re-conceptualized within a broader framework of communicative lexical ability. He further contends that vocabulary knowledge is de-contextualized tests such as gap-filling, true/ false and matching will have a negative wash back effect and students will continue studying words in isolation. Alqahtani (2015) mentioned that, vocabulary accomplishment is essential for successful use of English language because without an extensive vocabulary, language learners will not be able to use the structures and functions of a word. Sokmen (1997) notes that it is impossible for students to learn complete vocabulary from the classroom which they requires, since there are so many words on which teachers cannot spend time within the classroom; thus, vocabulary expanding process requires the higher level of autonomy to learn vocabulary themselves. Chapelle (1998) argues that, vocabulary should contain four dimensions such as vocabulary size, knowledge of word characteristics, lexicon organization and processes of lexical access.

Henriksen (1999) discussed that the word nature and interrelationships among various aspects of lexical competence will enhance the production processes among learners. Hunt and Beglar (2002) put it that explicit instruction (direct vocabulary instruction) includes identifying the words learner need to know, presenting words for the first time, elaborating word knowledge, and developing fluency with known words. Baumann (2003) et.al; Heimlich and Pittleman (1986) have explored that the semantic maps can help the students to develop connections among words and increase learning level of vocabulary. Emmanuel (2002) reveals that, newspapers provide date-to-date information on local, national and world matters with analysis, criticism and decision-making topics. Paul Meara (1983) first noted the lack of an overall ‘theory of vocabulary acquisition’, and this is still true theory for today. Nation (2013) explored the nine components in vocabulary knowledge through his framework. The framework discuss the spellings, word parts, meanings, grammatical functions and collocations, the framework deliberately taught how to acquire vocabulary knowledge through academic and autonomous sources. There are numerous theories were developed which were explored vocabulary learning strategies. For example, the Revised Hierarchical Model (Kroll & Stewart, 1994) suggested that the psycholinguistic pathway to L2 meaning is initially through L1 translation equivalents. Kameli et al. (2012) examined the impact of several factors on Malaysian university EFL students’ and recommended the

vocabulary learning strategies such as vocabulary from academic platforms and digital sources.

This research was designed to investigate ESL student's vocabulary level through a newspaper article. This study was conducted to identify the vocabulary level such as word meanings, word family, synonyms and antonyms, lexical proficiency and lexical simplifications of the participants. To evaluate the student's vocabulary knowledge the researchers have used newspaper article (paragraph). A major rationale behind this study was to examine vocabulary knowledge of students to address the different assessment problems and suggest improvements accordingly. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Whether the students are interested to acquire vocabulary knowledge through newspaper reading?
2. What are the suitable methods to assess student's vocabulary knowledge rather than academic testing tools?
3. What are the least vocabulary development steps are needed to follow by the ESL engineering students?

METHOD

This empirical study aim's its investigation on ESL student's vocabulary level. This study accepted the mixed methods such as quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the data.

This analysis used vocabulary learning strategies to examine the students' vocabulary learning strategies and understanding by using the authentic materials from English newspapers. This study was conducted in an engineering college of Andhra Pradesh in South India. In this analysis 10 questions were framed based on selected paragraph. The paragraph which is selected in this research is a non-engineering concept. The questionnaire was combination of closed and open-ended questions which initially questioned participants on vocabulary learning strategies and understanding. Questionnaire was prepared in Google form and sent to the randomly selected students through WhatsApp students groups. Google form responses were collected and analysed through Excel Google sheet. The technology was played a key role in this study in the collection of data by using Google sheet. All the questions are the same for all participants. The twenty minutes time limit was fixed to answer the questions. The study was conducted beyond the classroom in the observation of authors. During the empirical study the use of dictionaries was not encouraged. Each student has response the Google form with one time to answer the given questions. The news article (paragraph) and text which were utilized in this study were obtained from the 'THE HINDU' English newspaper, which were published on 23rd Dec, 2021 and 5th Mar, 2022.

This study was selected 142 students for test their vocabulary learning, these students are belongs to II Year of engineering course. Among them 61 female and 81 male students, all the participants of the study are having same age group. Their average age was 19.68. The participants have formal educational back ground (English Medium) from schooling along with national and state level languages. This research carried out the vocabulary knowledge of the engineering students of ECE (Electronics and Communications Engineering) of the academic year 2020/2021 up to 2024/2025, IV semester.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This analysis was done in one cycle after collecting the responses from student participants. The actual number of the students were selected for this study is 160, a total of 142 students were responded finally. The raw data were analysed by using descriptive and statistics methods. In this study we authors scrutinized the 10 questions to analyse the development of vocabulary knowledge of engineering students.

Findings

Question 1

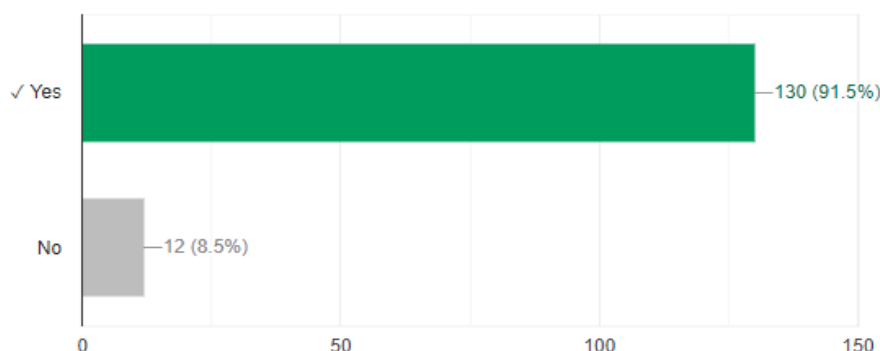


Figure 1. Acquisition % of Vocabulary knowledge through newspapers

Figure 1 indicates the results of question one which is connected to ‘acquisition of vocabulary knowledge through newspapers’. The responses of this question were interesting. The student’s participants were responded with YES and NO options. The 91.5% participants were responded with YES option. From this percentage it is clear that the participants had shown interest to acquire vocabulary knowledge through newspapers. These results are indicating that, still 8.5% of participants are showing less interest to acquire vocabulary knowledge from newspapers (these participants have another platforms to acquire vocabulary knowledge). However, the majority of the participants have considered newspapers are the best sources to improve new vocabulary knowledge.

The responses of the question 1 are indicating the ‘attitude’ and ‘interest’ of the participants towards vocabulary. The majority of the students are interested to learn updated vocabulary from newspapers. Learning vocabulary from different sessions of newspaper may enhance the syntax and language structure of the participants.

Question 2

Figure 2 explore the results of question two which is related to ‘autonomy of learning vocabulary through newspapers’ the responses of this question was quite interesting. This study received mixed responses for this question. The question is related to how newspapers become ‘autonomous source’ to participants to learn vocabulary. Among the participants according to the question 42.3% have selected ‘agreed’ option, 31% of the participants have taken neutral position, 7% of the participants are opted ‘disagree’, 3.5% of participant are opted ‘strongly disagree’, however, 16.2% participants have selected the option of ‘strongly agree’. From this data the 58.5 % participants have felt that they have autonomy to learn vocabulary, 10.5% participants are negatively opposed that newspapers are

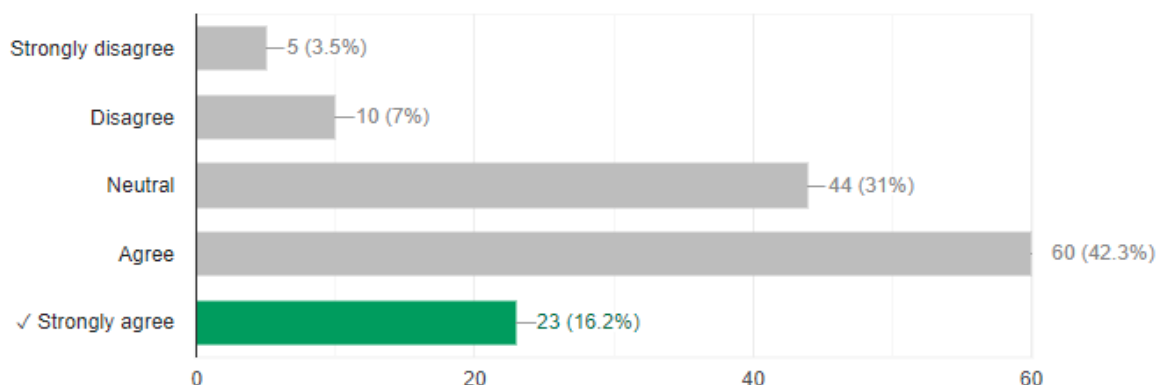


Figure 2. autonomy of learning vocabulary through newspapers providing limited autonomy in learning vocabulary. However, 44 members of the participants have taken neutral path that they are not shown any interest towards autonomous or non-autonomous state. This data was exploring that, more than 60% of the participants are accepted the 'autonomy' to learn vocabulary through newspapers.

This research discuss that the learner autonomy is link up with learner's enthusiasm, accountability, need of applicable knowledge, monitoring and evaluating his/her-self to enrich vocabulary size. Learners required autonomy to select her/his own vocabulary level for effective development of the language. However, autonomy in learning vocabulary required effective learning strategies.

Question 3

Figure 3 represents the question three data which is related to 'selection of synonym for word 'morbidity'', the question received mixed responses. From the options 41.5% of the participants are selected right synonym 'bitterness', the remaining options are incorrect. In the options 'humanity' synonym was selected by 9.9% participants, 13.4 % of participants are selected 'death', 3.5% of participants are selected 'compulsion' and finally 31.7% of participants are selected 'suffer'. The data reveals that majority of the participants have selected right synonym. Totally 58.5% of the participants are chose wrong synonyms.

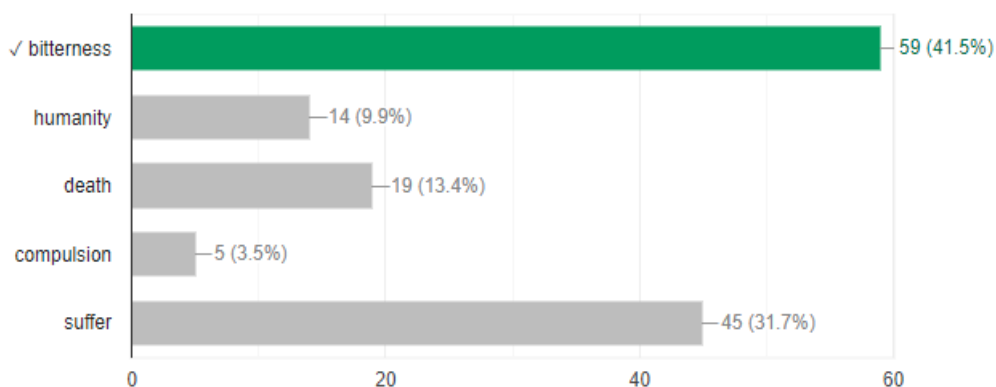


Figure 3. selection of synonym for word Morbidity

Generally synonyms are belongs to same entity, and have lexical and propositional structure within the same group, here, morbidity is a noun structure. From the results it is clear that, most of participants are failure in identifying right synonym for the given word. To

select the right meaning participants required different sessions of a word structure such as collocation, syntagmatic and paradigmatic associations, grammatical, functions and meaning. It is also important that participants are needed to understand the word which is related to which specific category.

Question 4

Figure 4 explore the results of Question 4 which is connected to opt to opposite word for 'pandemic'. The results explore that, 57% of the participants are selected 'epidemic', 43.5% of the participants opted 'specific', 5.6% participants chosen 'rampant' and finally 2.1% of the participants opted 'rife'. From the results it is clear that, more than 63.7% participants are opted right answer. These results revealing that participant are unaware of antonym.

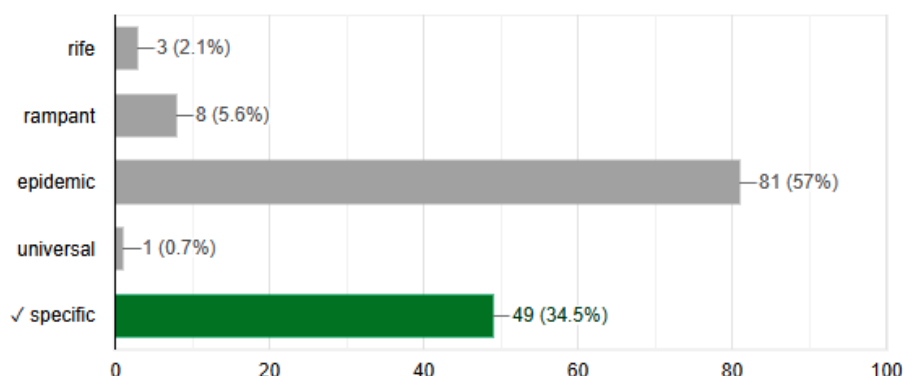


Figure 4. selection of antonym for word Epidemic

Findings of this study reveals that, most of the participants selected wrong option (opposite) for word pandemic (adjective). Selecting an antonym for a word is an entomological task, because antonyms have analogous and linguistic connections. Word situations and circumstances are needed to analyse when antonyms are selecting for a word. In the present study participants have knowledge of antonyms; however, participants are need to aware of lexicon-semantic relations of a word while selecting antonyms for a word.

Question 5

The question five is related to morphological knowledge of the students, in this evaluation the participants were asked to write word family for 'disruption' and this question received descriptive answers. The 38.7% of the participants are answered with word family such as 'disrupted', 'disrupt', and disruption. From the findings 50.5% of the participants are answered like 'disrupted is an adjective', 'disruption is a noun' 'disruptly is an adjective, and 'disrupted is a verb'. And the remaining % of the participants are answered like disrupt-ly, -lly, tion, -ed, un- and -sion.

The answer of this question is related to word family such as verb, noun and adjective (prefixes and suffixes). Most of the student participants are answered the question in descriptive form. The question is based on recognition of word and its family. In common word families are Rhyming and Morphological Word Family. This research received expected responses form the participants. However, most of the responses are not to the up to

the mark. Word family consist of all its derived and inflected forms that can be understood by students.

Question 6

Question six is related to ‘writing the sentence by using a word from the given paragraph’. This question received 96% descriptive answers from participants. The student participants are framed a sentence by selecting a word. All the participants are framed the simple, complex and compound sentences. From the received data it is difficult to analyse the incorrect sentences, because, all the sentences are correct in sense of meaning; however, few participants are framed unclear grammatical sentences for example;

Word ‘social’:

Sentence: Pandemic situation disturbed ‘social’ movements in world.

Word ‘significant’:

Sentence: Medical care is ‘significant’ situation in the COVID-19 period.

Word ‘Omicron’:

Sentence: The ‘Omicron’ is a new variant it damaging the human health.

Findings reveal that, all the student participants responded this question with descriptive answers. These findings evidently present that the received 65% of answers have grammatical errors, among them most of the participants committed errors in writing subject, predicate and object in correct form. The remaining 31% of participants are not clear with clauses, simple and complex structures. The findings reveal that the participants are not completed compound sentences.

Question 7

Question seven is related to ‘words (noun and verb) (word size) which are known by student participants before reading the given passage’. This study received descriptive answers from the participants, all the participants known the words such as ‘delta variant’ ‘omicron’ ‘pandemic’ ‘parameter’ and ‘probability’ before reading the passage. However, 57% of the participants are unknown the words such as ‘zoonotic’ ‘pathogens’ and ‘disruption’ before reading the passage and remaining participants don’t know the words such as ‘primers’ ‘probabilistic’ and ‘modeling’.

This research discuss that the received descriptive answers for the question seven is represent the word size of the student participants. The findings reveal that, participants may have vocabulary size, but passage relative word size is little before reading this passage. This was the question here to know how better student participants have word size related from the given passage. However, it is important that participants are needed to develop the vocabulary size or form.

Question 8

Question eight is related to ‘lexical simplification’ of given text. It means that, participants need to simplify the sentence and write meaning for the given text, "India abstains from vote to investigate actions of Russia". This investigation of this study received descriptive answers for this question, only 45% of the participants answered appropriately that ‘India should withdraw from voting against investigation on Russia war plans’. Among the remaining, 17% of the participants had answered that ‘Russia should stop the war’. The 38% of the student participants have presented different simplified sentences such as ‘Russia

need to stop war’, ‘investigation on Russia is compulsory’, ‘investigate voting actions on Russia’ for the given text.

Findings of the question eight reveal that, lexical simplification is the process of replacing complex words by simple and with alternative equivalent meaning. The majority of the students participants are succeed in simplifying (simple meaning) the given text with frequent synonyms. The remaining students have less simplifier approaches and complex word identification to simplify a text.

Question 9

In this empirical study question nine is refers to ‘in what way newspaper vocabulary enrich the academic language proficiency’. The student participants shared their descriptive answers for this question, among them 59% of the students accepted that newspapers are the platforms to develop words. The 33% of the participants are partially agreed that there is a low scope to enhance academic vocabulary through newspapers. The remaining 8% of the participants are not agreed that newspapers never enrich academic language vocabulary.

The obtained results explore that, the academic vocabulary list is differ from newspapers vocabulary, because newspapers publish vocabulary of business, international, political, national, scientific and sports. Those newspapers subjects have fewer opportunities to present academic vocabulary of Engineering. Commonly academic vocabulary is connected with specific subjective word list. Newspapers present many word families which are intended to help students to study advance English intensive vocabulary. However, word families can help the students to develop communicative forms such as listening, reading, spoken and written.

Question 10

Question ten is related to ‘prefix & suffix, and word family’ (noun & adjective) (Table 1 and 2). We authors directed to the students to write prefixes and suffixes with noun/adjective for words from the given passage. The finding reveals that 93.4% of the participants are rightly identified word parts such as prefix and suffix, and dived into the word family (noun & adjective). The remaining percentage of the student participants are not exactly identified prefix and suffix, and word family.

Verb + prefix = noun/ adjective

Word	Prefix	Prefix Meaning	Noun	Adjective
antivirus	anti-	against	antivirus	Antiviral
pandemic	pan-	all	pandemic	Pandemic
extensive	ex-	former	extensive	Extensive
pathogen	path-	disease	pathogen	pathogenic
international	inter-	between	international	international

Table 1. Word part and word family

Verb + suffix = noun/ adjective

Word	Suffix	Suffix Meaning	Noun	Adjective
estimate	-ation	action	estimation	estimative
improve	-ment	result	improvement	improvable
identify	-tion	condition	identification	identifiable

model	-ing	act of	modelling	Model
disrupt	-or	one who	disruptor	disruptive
extend	-ness	quality	extensiveness	Extensive
epidemic	-dem	people	epidemic	Epidemic
pathogen	-gen	produce	pathogenesis	pathogenic
community	-ity	being	community	communal

Table 2. Word part and word family**Discussion**

Participants' were given morphological division for a word and divided into different sections such as prefix, suffix, noun and adjective. Findings of the question ten disclose that student participants have morphological knowledge. Morphological structure plays a crucial role in the identification prefix and suffix with word family. Fixing prefix and suffix for a root word the word taken changes and modifies into noun, adjective and verb.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Based on the findings, some following implications can be observed:

- An advantage of this empirical study is that it will increase the student awareness on the enrichment of vocabulary level is still required among ESL students
- In the improvement of vocabulary knowledge students need to adopt the vast reading habit of different newspapers and magazines
- They have to discuss the targeted vocabulary of the newspapers with their friends and others
- Students need to practice the framing a sentence on vocabulary which they explored newly
- ESL students try to create English language environment around for language proficiency
- They have to watch the TED Talks, subtitles videos and English movies to improve vocabulary size

CONCLUSION

Findings of this study showed that the students exhibited interest to enhance the vocabulary knowledge level through newspaper articles. This practical empirical model helps the authors to check the vocabulary levels of the students beyond the classroom. The findings explored that, the students' minimum improvements in vocabulary development and revealed the vocabulary gaps. The findings also exhibited the importance of acquiring vocabulary knowledge. The most important findings of this study as follows:

- a. The current testing method reveals the qualitative and quantitative output of the semantic knowledge of ESL students participants
- b. The study recommend that the students have a choice to improve vocabulary size through online platforms
- c. The acquisition of vocabulary knowledge is important at the B. Tech level

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