

Academic Word List In Efl Sttudent's Written Registe

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ABSTRAK

Kosakata akademik sangat penting bagi siswa untuk terlibat secara efektif dalam wacana akademik. Penelitian ini menganalisis tingkat penggunaan kosakata akademik di kalangan siswa berdasarkan Daftar Kata Akademik (Academic Word List/AWL) dari Coxhead (2000). Dengan menggunakan pendekatan berbasis korpus, penelitian ini meneliti kumpulan data yang terdiri dari 902.618 token untuk menentukan cakupan kata-kata AWL dalam tulisan siswa. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa siswa menggunakan 559 dari 570 kata AWL, yang menunjukkan tingkat cakupan kosakata akademis yang tinggi. Untuk menyelidiki lebih lanjut faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi penggunaan kosakata akademis, wawancara dilakukan dengan siswa yang dikategorikan ke dalam kelompok kemahiran rendah dan tinggi. Analisis kualitatif menyoroti faktor-faktor kontekstual dan pendidikan utama yang membentuk penguasaan dan penggunaan kosakata akademik siswa. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan tentang pengembangan kosakata akademis dan menawarkan implikasi untuk strategi pedagogis yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran leksikal siswa dalam lingkungan

akademis.

ABSTRACT

Academic vocabulary is essential for students to engage effectively in academic discourse. This study analyzes the extent of academic vocabulary usage among students based on Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL). Using a corpus-based approach, the study examines a dataset comprising 902,618 tokens to determine the coverage of AWL words in student writing. The findings reveal that students used 559 out of the 570 AWL words, demonstrating a high level of academic vocabulary coverage. To further investigate the factors influencing academic vocabulary usage, interviews were conducted with students categorized into high and low proficiency groups. High-level academic vocabulary users demonstrated stronger engagement with academic texts, benefited from structured educational support, and employed active learning strategies. Conversely, low-level users exhibited limited exposure to academic texts, lacked explicit vocabulary instruction, and relied on passive learning approaches. These findings highlight the importance of targeted pedagogical interventions to enhance students' academic vocabulary acquisition and application.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of register in linguistics and writing scope are distinct yet interconnected elements of language use. Register refers to the variation in language that is used in different social contexts, characterized by factors such as formality, tone, and vocabulary. For instance, a formal register might be employed in academic writing or professional settings, while an informal register may be more suitable for casual conversations or personal communications (Biber, 1988). In contrast, writing scope pertains to the range and depth of content covered in a piece of writing. It encompasses the breadth of topics addressed and the level of detail provided, which can vary significantly depending on the purpose of the text and its intended audience (Swales, 1990). While register focuses on language style and appropriateness for specific contexts, writing scope emphasizes the comprehensiveness and focus of the content presented. Understanding both concepts is essential for effective communication, as they guide writers in choosing the appropriate language style and content depth for their audience and purpose.

Students' academic and non-academic writing serve different purposes and exhibit distinct characteristics. Academic writing is typically formal, structured, and evidence-based, often adhering to specific guidelines and conventions. For example, a research paper in a psychology course may require students to formulate a thesis statement, conduct a literature review, and present findings supported by empirical data (Graff & Birkenstein, 2018). This type of writing emphasizes clarity, objectivity, and critical analysis. In contrast, non-academic writing encompasses a broader range of informal styles, such as

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personal narratives, blog posts, or social media updates. For instance, a student might write a reflective essay about their summer experiences in a casual tone, using first-person narrative and personal anecdotes to engage the reader (Elbow, 1998). While academic writing prioritizes rigor and formality, non-academic writing allows for creativity and personal expression, reflecting the diverse ways students communicate in various contexts.

The challenges of reading and writing for students in academic fields include knowledge related to academic specialization and knowledge of the language used for academic purposes more generally. Renowned educational theorist Lev Vygotsky (1987) explained that writing is one of the most complex forms of learning for humans. Similarly, Gonzales (2015) explained the difficulties students face in navigating academic writing. He found in his research that both native English speakers and second language English speakers find academic writing to be a complex process.

Academic vocabulary refers to words used in academic contexts to convey complex concepts, provide precision in explanation, and enhance the formality and clarity of written and spoken communication in educational settings. These words are often more specific than everyday vocabulary and are more often found in academic texts such as journal articles, textbooks and research papers. Academic vocabulary can be divided into two main categories: technical vocabulary and general academic vocabulary. Technical vocabulary includes words that are very specific to a certain field of study, such as "photosynthesis" in biology or "derivative" in mathematics (Chung & Nation, 2004). On the other hand, general academic vocabulary consists of words that are widely used in various academic fields, such as "analyze," "context," and "significant" (Nation, 2001).

Mastering academic vocabulary allows students to convey complex ideas in a way that is easy to understand, thus enabling them to actively participate in academic and professional discussions. Nation (2001) added that mastery of academic vocabulary allows students to better navigate academic literature, understand research articles, and contribute to academic discussions more meaningfully. Schmitt (2005) also emphasized that the ability to use academic vocabulary effectively is crucial to academic success, as it demonstrates mastery of the content and research methods required in writing a thesis.

One of the persistent challenges in student writing, particularly in academic contexts, is the appropriate and effective use of academic vocabulary. Research has shown that students often struggle with incorporating academic words accurately, which affects the clarity, coherence, and overall quality of their writing (Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 2013). A common issue is the limited range of academic vocabulary, where students rely on a restricted set of words, leading to repetitive and less sophisticated writing. This limitation may stem from inadequate exposure to academic texts or insufficient practice in using academic vocabulary productively. Additionally, students frequently misuse academic words by applying them in incorrect contexts, failing to adhere to proper collocational patterns, or confusing word forms, such as using a noun instead of its corresponding verb or adjective (Paquot, 2010; Schmitt, 2010). Such errors can obscure meaning and reduce the effectiveness of academic communication. Without targeted instruction and feedback, students may struggle to develop the lexical precision required for academic writing.

Another notable problem is the overuse of general or informal vocabulary, which diminishes the academic tone of student writing. Academic discourse requires precision, yet many students rely on everyday language that lacks the specificity needed for scholarly work (Hyland & Tse, 2007; Flowerdew, 2015). Some students attempt to enhance the complexity of their writing by making sentences unnecessarily long and convoluted, leading to wordiness and redundancy. This tendency can make their writing harder to follow and detract from the clarity of their arguments. Furthermore, students often face difficulties in mastering academic collocations, which are essential for producing natural and fluent writing (Durrant, 2009; Paquot, 2010). Incorrect or awkward word combinations can make sentences sound unnatural, reducing their readability. Addressing these issues requires explicit instruction in collocational patterns and academic phraseology.

Maintaining a consistent academic register is another challenge for students, as they may unintentionally mix formal and informal language. Academic writing requires a formal tone, yet students sometimes incorporate colloquial expressions, contractions, or vague language, which weakens their argumentation (Biber et al., 2002; Schmitt, 2010). Additionally, spelling and typographical errors can further hinder the effectiveness of their writing, particularly when students confuse words with similar forms. These mistakes can lead to misunderstandings, particularly in academic settings where precision is essential. Another common issue is ineffective paraphrasing, which may result in awkward constructions or unintentional plagiarism (Keck, 2006; Laufer & Nation, 1995). Many students struggle to restate ideas in their own words while preserving the original meaning, leading to issues of academic integrity. Teaching students effective paraphrasing strategies and encouraging the use of academic vocabulary in context can help mitigate these challenges.

Given these difficulties, analyzing student writing through the framework of the Academic Word List (AWL) by Coxhead (2000) provides valuable insights into their academic vocabulary usage. The AWL is widely used to assess the coverage of academic vocabulary in student writing, allowing researchers to examine lexical proficiency across different proficiency levels (Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 2013). By investigating the presence and patterns of academic vocabulary usage in student-written registers, this study aims to identify specific lexical gaps and areas for pedagogical improvement. A corpus-based approach using tools such as AntConc and AntWordProfiler allows for a systematic examination of students' academic vocabulary coverage. Understanding how students incorporate AWL words in their writing can inform instructional practices aimed at improving their lexical competence. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to a more effective approach in teaching academic writing skills, particularly in guiding students toward more precise and appropriate academic vocabulary use.

METHOD

This qualitative study investigates the use of the Academic Word List (AWL) in EFL students' academic writing and explores the factors influencing its application. Combining document analysis and semi-structured interviews, the research integrates corpus linguistics and thematic analysis to uncover lexical patterns and contextual factors shaping writing practices. Data were collected from 471 academic texts (e.g., theses, essays, research proposals) produced by English Language Education students at Gorontalo State University between 2014 and 2022. Ten participants with diverse academic vocabulary proficiency were interviewed to provide in-depth insights into their strategies, challenges, and experiences with AWL usage.

Corpus analysis was conducted using AntConc software to identify AWL frequency and coverage. Data cleaning—including the removal of non-academic symbols, slang, and typographical errors—ensured analytical accuracy, resulting in a final corpus of 890,899 words. Quantitative findings were compared against Coxhead's (2000) 10% AWL coverage benchmark. Meanwhile, thematic analysis of interview transcripts, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, identified recurring themes such as reading habits, institutional support, and psychological barriers in academic vocabulary use.

Ethical measures included anonymization (e.g., unique ID codes), encrypted data storage, and deletion of audio recordings post-transcription. Integrating findings from both methods revealed a holistic understanding of AWL dynamics: while some students achieved adequate lexical coverage, factors like limited exposure to academic texts and insufficient strategic training emerged as key constraints. This study not only enriches knowledge on academic literacy but also recommends context-driven interventions to enhance EFL students' vocabulary mastery.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

AWL by Coxhead in Students' Written Registers

This section presents an analysis of the coverage of AWL in students' written register according to Coxhead's AWL. In keeping with the main objective and methodology of the study, a quantitative approach has been taken in analyzing and interpreting the data obtained from the target corpus. The findings derived from the analysis are then reported in detail in response to the research questions.

Calculating the coverage of Coxhead's Academic Word List (AWL) in students' academic writing lies in its potential to provide critical insights into the learning and use of academic vocabulary, as well as its implications for pedagogical practice. Related studies suggest that the AWL, consisting of 570-word families, covers approximately 10% of words in academic texts, making it an essential component of effective academic writing (Coxhead, 2000). Examining the coverage of AWL in students' writing can assess the extent to which students meet academic lexical expectations and identify gaps that may hinder the comprehension and production of academic texts (Paribakht & Webb, 2016). Therefore, the next section provides information on the coverage of AWL in students' written register.

AWL Coverage

Table 1. AWL Coverage

Statistic	No. of Word Families	Overall Used
Count	570	559
Percentage	100%	98.07%

The results of the data analysis (Table 1) show that students used 559 out of 570 word families from the Academic Word List (AWL) by Coxhead (2000), representing an overall coverage of 98.07%. This high percentage indicates that students demonstrate substantial mastery of academic vocabulary,

reflecting their ability to incorporate AWL words into their writing effectively. The widespread use of the Academic Word List indicates that students have had significant exposure to academic English, enabling them to incorporate a diverse range of academic vocabulary into their writing. According to Coxhead (2000), the AWL consists of words that are essential for academic success across disciplines, and achieving such a high level of coverage implies a strong familiarity with the academic register.

The data highlight students' competence in using vocabulary that is in line with academic conventions, a skill that is critical to their success in higher education. These results are consistent with previous research showing that the ability to use AWL words is correlated with students' academic literacy and writing proficiency (Chintalapalli & Tewari, 2021). Furthermore, the high percentage of AWL coverage indicates students' capacity to use vocabulary beyond general English, which is essential for engaging with academic texts and producing discipline-specific writing.

The analysis of AWL words in the ELESF corpus revealed that a total of 8.54% of the texts in the ELESF corpus were covered by AWL words. As shown below in table 5, the occurrence of 77,112 words was found across the ELESF corpus. The findings of this current analysis indicate the relative effectiveness of AWL words in the ELESF corpus according to Coxhead's (2000) analysis. It should be noted that the AWL coverage counts analyzed in this study include the occurrence of all AWL word families and forms, but they were not filtered based on the range and frequency criteria used by Coxhead (2000) for the development of AWL. Coxhead's criteria aim to create a generalizable list of academic vocabulary, while this study aims to analyze students' writing to assess individual proficiency in using academic vocabulary so as to gain a more inclusive understanding of students' vocabulary use, which may highlight gaps in academic vocabulary learning.

Table 2. AWL Frequency

Statistic	Token	Word Families
Frequency	902618	77112
Percentage	100%	8.54%

The text coverage of AWL words in the ELESF corpus distributed per sub-list (from sub-lists 1-10) is provided in table 2. The results, distributed per sub-list, show that the coverage of AWL words (included in sub-lists 3-10) is significantly less than that included in sub-lists 1 and 2. Most of AWL is covered by sub-lists 1 and 2 with 38.32% and 23.12% respectively.

Table 3. AWL Coverage by Sub-list

Sub-list	Coverage	%
1	29549	38.32
2	17826	23.12
3	5712	7.41
4	5980	7.75
5	4676	6.06
6	4615	5.98
7	3799	4.93
8	2548	3.30
9	1887	2.45
10	520	0.67
Total	77112	100.00

Vocabulary from sub-lists 1 and 2 of the Academic Word List accounts for over 50% (61.44%) of the vocabulary in the ELESF corpus. These sub-lists include words that occur with relatively high frequency in academic texts across various scientific disciplines (Coxhead 2000). Although sub-lists 3 to 5 are also sub-lists that contain vocabulary that often appears in academic texts, their occurrence is less than sub-lists 1 and 2 or differs by up to 15% coverage.

Frequency of Occurrence

Table 4. Frequency of Occurrences

Frequency of Occurrences	No. of Word Families
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0	11
1-9	88
10-19	77
20-49	137
50-99	92
100-199	62
200-299	31
300-399	25
400-499	18
500-999	21
≥1000	8
Total	570

The data in Table 4 provide the frequency distribution of occurrences for the 570 word families in the Academic Word List (AWL). The data highlight significant variation in how often these word families occur in students' academic writing. Most word families occur infrequently, with 11 word families never occurring (frequency = 0) and 88 word families occurring only 1–9 times. Overall, this group accounts for 17.4% of the total AWL. This suggests a lack of engagement with many academic vocabulary items, possibly due to limited exposure, lack of contextual knowledge, or a tendency to rely on simpler and more familiar terms (Chung et. al. 2024)

The largest concentration of word families is in the 20–49 frequency range (137 word families), followed by the 10–19 range (77 word families) and the 50–99 range (92 word families). These groups, which account for almost 54% of the AWL, represent core vocabulary that students actively use but may not yet have fully mastered. These words may reflect important academic terms that are relatively easy to understand but not yet used consistently. Word families that occur more than 100 times, particularly those with frequencies exceeding 500, are relatively few, with 8 word families having frequencies exceeding 1,000.

The frequency distribution of these word families provides a basis for a more in-depth examination of the specific academic words that students rely on in their writing. While frequency data provide a broad overview of usage patterns across the AWL (Coxhead 2000), it is equally important to analyze which individual words on the list are used most and least frequently. Understanding these trends can reveal important insights into students' lexical preferences and the specific academic vocabulary they prioritize or neglect (Pathan et. al 2018). The following section explores the analysis of the 50 most and least frequently used AWL words, explaining how these patterns reflect students' academic writing practices and their engagement with core and peripheral academic vocabulary.

The Most and Least Frequent Academic Vocabulary in Students' Written Register.

Table 5 Most Frequent Academic Vocabulary

Sub-List	Word	Freq	Sub-List	Word	Freq
1	Research	6670	7	Topic	515
1	Data	3103	2	Achieve	507
2	Text	1736	2	Appropriate	506
1	Process	1683	2	Feature	505
2	Participate	1533	1	Function	488
1	Analyse	1182	2	Chapter	485
1	Method	1135	1	Context	478
1	Theory	1000	2	Aspect	467
2	Strategy	929	4	Implement	459
1	Create	885	1	Define	450
2	Institute	864	1	Factor	446

4	Error	862	2	Element	444
1	Structure	807	2	Tradition	443
2	Focus	756	1	Formula	432
7	Media	730	6	Furthermore	429
4	Communicate	673	2	Community	426
2	Culture	664	1	Respond	423
1	Occur	642	4	Code	418
1	Indicate	633	5	Conflict	417
2	Conduct	604	2	Design	417
2	Previous	599	3	Sex	413
1	Identify	595	1	Individual	400
2	Conclude	584	9	Qualitative	399
6	Lecture	563	1	Consist	393
1	Role	532	1	Assess	392

According to the Academic Word

organized into 10 sub-lists, which are ordered by the frequency of word families in academic texts, with sub-list 1 containing the most frequent word families and sub-list 10 containing the least frequent word families. Table 9 provides information on the 50 most frequently used AWL words in the ELESF corpus. The data shows that the most frequently used AWL words come from sub-lists 1 to 5, which are the sub-lists containing the most commonly used vocabulary in academic texts from various disciplines (Coxhead 2000).

Words from sub-list 1, such as "research" (6670), "data" (3103), "process" (1683), and "method" (1135), dominate the data set, which is an important part of students' academic writing. These words are highly generalizable and form the basis of academic discourse across disciplines. Their high frequencies reflect students' reliance on commonly used vocabulary to discuss research, methodology, and concepts. Other terms from this sub-list, such as "structure" (807), "function" (488), and "context" (478), also highlight their importance in organizing arguments and structuring discussions. However, the reliance on sub-list 1 words may indicate limited exploration of more advanced vocabulary in higher sub-lists, indicating a preference for familiar terms.

Sub-list 2 words, including "text" (1736), "strategy" (929), "participate" (1533), and "feature" (505), were also used frequently. These words tend to represent concepts that support academic tasks, such as discussing strategies or analyzing features of data or theories. The high frequencies of "appropriate" (506) and "aspect" (467) suggest that students frequently engage in describing or evaluating specific components of academic topics. However, some words such as "achieve" (507) and "do" (604) show action-oriented vocabulary that supports discussions about methods and outcomes.

Words from sub-list 4 are well represented in the dataset, with "error" (862), "communicate" (673), and "code" (418) being the most frequent. These words are often context-specific, indicating their relevance to specialized fields such as engineering, linguistics, or programming. The word "apply" (459) is also notable for its action-oriented use, often associated with discussions about practical applications and outcomes. This suggests that students are using intermediate-level academic terms, but their use is still less prominent than in sub-lists 1 and 2.

Words from sub-lists 6 to 9, such as "lecture" (563), "furthermore" (429), "media" (730), "topic" (515), and "qualitative" (399), show moderate use. The frequency of "lecture" reflects its direct relationship to academic settings and tasks, while "furthermore" indicates students' attempts to build cohesion and logical flow in their writing, while "qualitative" is commonly used in social sciences or research contexts, while "media" is associated with disciplines such as communication studies. These terms may appear less frequently than sub-lists 1 and 2 but still play a role in increasing the sophistication of academic arguments.

Table 6. Least Frequent Academic Vocabulary

Sub-List	Word	Freq	Sub-List	Word	Freq
4	Principal	6	9	Intermediate	3
8	Restore	6	3	Layer	3
9	Restrain	6	5	Licence	3
9	Rigid	6	5	Margin	3

8	Thereby	6	4	Parameter	3
8	Ambiguous	5	5	Ratio	3
5	Amend	5	4	Regime	3
9	Confine	5	9	Suspend	3
8	Induce	5	9	Bulk	2
2	Invest	5	9	Cease	2
6	Overseas	5	8	Commodity	2
7	Publication	5	5	Discrete	2
9	Supplement	5	10	Integrity	2
8	Terminate	5	8	Practitioner	2
8	Uniform	5	6	Subsidy	2
10	Collapse	4	10	Albeit	1
5	Prime	4	3	Circumstance	1
7	Reverse	4	9	Erode	1
9	Route	4	1	Export	1
7	Somewhat	4	8	Fluctuate	1
7	Convert	3	7	Identical	1
6	Estate	3	8	Inspect	1
6	Exceed	3	8	Offset	1
6	Incentive	3	7	Paradigm	1
6	Inhibit	3	5	Revenue	1

Table 6 highlights the least frequently used words from the Academic Word List (AWL), which includes sub-lists 2 through 10. These words, which occur with frequencies as low as 1 to 6 times, reveal critical insights into students' limited engagement with specialized or context-specific academic vocabulary.

Words in sub-lists 2 through 4, such as "invest" (5), "principal" (6), and "regime" (3), appear less frequently. These words, although general enough to cover a range of disciplines, may require a high level of contextual understanding, which may explain their lack of use. For example, "invest" is more likely to be associated with a financial or policy context, while "regime" and "parameter" often appear in political or scientific discourse, which may be less commonly represented in student writing samples.

Sub-lists 5 and 6 contain several low-frequency words, including "prime" (4), "margin" (3), "estate" (3), and "inhibit" (3). These words are often associated with specific academic disciplines, such as economics, law, and psychology. For example, "estate" might appear in a legal or real estate context, while "inhibit" is often used in psychology or biology. The limited frequency of these words suggests that students may lack exposure to or confidence in using such specialized vocabulary, which may stem from their focus on broader, less discipline-specific academic writing tasks. Words from sub-lists 7 and 8, such as "publication" (5), "restore" (6), and "ambiguous" (5), are fairly advanced but occur infrequently. Terms such as "thereby" (6) and "uniform" (5) are frequently used in formal academic contexts to articulate nuanced arguments, but their low frequency suggests that students are not using them effectively. Additionally, contextually specialized words such as "commodity" (2), "offset" (1), and "fluctuate" (1) are discipline-specific, further contributing to their limited use. Their occurrence in sub-lists 7 and 8 reflects their less frequent occurrence in general academic texts, and therefore less familiar to students.

Sub-lists 9 and 10 contain the least frequently used AWL words in the data, such as "rigid" (6), "terminate" (5), and "integrity" (2). Words such as "bulk" (2), "albeit" (1), and "paradigm" (1) represent advanced and often abstract vocabulary used in very specific academic contexts. For example, "paradigm" appears frequently in theoretical or philosophical writing, while "integrity" is used in discussions of ethics or governance. The minimal use of these terms may reflect a perception of their complexity or a lack of familiarity with the disciplines in which they are frequently used.

Analysis of these sub-lists highlights a clear trend: students rely heavily on words from sub-lists 1 and 2, which provide basic academic vocabulary, and tend to avoid vocabulary from the higher sub-lists (7–10), indicating a lack of familiarity with more advanced or specialized terms. Although this is expected,

the lack of representation of words from the higher sub-lists (7–10) suggests limited engagement with specialized or advanced academic terms. This pattern is consistent with research showing that words that occur less frequently in the AWL are more difficult to acquire without explicit instruction or understanding (Coxhead, 2000).

Many of the low-frequency words are associated with specific disciplines, such as “commodity,” “subsidy,” and “incentive.” The limited occurrence of these terms may indicate that students are not engaging with discipline-specific academic tasks or lack the resources needed to build their vocabulary in these areas (Hajiyeva, 2015). The low frequency of these words suggests that students need more exposure to advanced and context-specific vocabulary through targeted instruction. The stark contrast between many low-frequency words and few high-frequency words suggests an imbalance in vocabulary use.

Although the Academic Word List (AWL) covered a wide range of words, with 559 of the 570 words represented, high-frequency words such as “data” and “research” were used repeatedly, reflecting students’ reliance on commonly used vocabulary. In contrast, many words from the infrequent list appeared only once or twice, indicating limited engagement with less common terms. This suggests that while students recognized a range of academic vocabulary, they struggled to consistently incorporate less common words into their writing, limiting the diversity and depth of their lexical choices (McDonough et al., 2018).

High coverage reflects surface-level familiarity with academic terms. However, the low frequency of many words highlights a lack of proficiency in using these terms effectively, which may hinder students’ ability to express nuanced or sophisticated ideas (Hajiyeva, 2015). This disparity highlights potential gaps in students’ lexical range, as their writing does not include much specialized vocabulary. This pattern may be due to several factors, including limited exposure to advanced academic texts, lack of vocabulary instruction targeting this sub-list, or lack of practice in producing academically oriented texts. In the following section, an overview of some of the factors that influence low vocabulary range in students’ writing is discussed.

Factor Influencing Students’ Academic Vocabulary Usage

This section aims to explore the factors influencing students’ academic vocabulary usage, focusing on the disparities between high and low exposure to academic vocabulary. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants: five students identified as having high academic vocabulary usage and five students with low academic vocabulary usage based on the frequency and coverage analysis of their writing. The interview questions were designed to investigate three key areas that may determine the extent of academic vocabulary exposure and usage: reading habits, educational environment, and learning strategies.

Questions on reading habits focused on the types of academic materials students frequently engage with, such as journals, textbooks, and research articles, as well as their frequency of reading. Research has shown that frequent engagement with academic texts significantly increases students’ exposure to academic vocabulary and enhances their ability to use such vocabulary effectively in writing (Coxhead, 2000).

The educational environment section explored the role of institutional support, such as the availability of academic resources, teacher feedback, and the emphasis on academic writing in their curriculum. Studies have highlighted that access to academic resources and targeted feedback play a critical role in improving students’ academic writing skills and vocabulary acquisition (Syarofi & Shobaha, 2023).

Additionally, questions on learning strategies examined students’ approaches to acquiring and integrating academic vocabulary, including the use of word lists, flashcards, or peer collaboration. Effective learning strategies, such as repeated exposure, contextualized practice, and collaborative learning, have been found to deepen students’ academic vocabulary knowledge and usage (McDonough et al., 2018).

Students’ with Low Level of Academic Vocabulary

This section contains the results of interviews with students who have low academic vocabulary. Each student is marked with the name of student 1 to student 5. The results of the analysis showed that the low use of academic vocabulary in students was caused by three main interrelated factors. Lack of reading habit academic texts that limit the role of vocabulary, ineffective learning strategies prevent students from integrating academic vocabulary into everyday practice, and an academic environment that does not provide demands or opportunities to use academic language actively. (Wani & Ismail, 2024) This can be seen from their preference for lighter types of reading, such as social media and novels.

"I don't read books intensively, usually once a month. I usually read novels" (Participant 1)

"I like reading novels and anime manga. Usually once or twice a week" (Participant 2)

"I quite like reading. As for the books that I often read so far are novels. Novels are like fictional stories or about romance" (participant 3)

The reading habit that focuses on academic material causes exposure to academic vocabulary to be very limited. Most students said they read academic texts only for the purpose of doing assignments. However, some students expressed that they found it difficult to read the text because of the complex vocabulary.

"I read academic texts only to work on my proposal and final assignment" (Participant 1)

"I once read academic texts only when asked by the lecturer to do an assignment. But I found it difficult to read them because there were some words that I didn't know. I used Google Translate to find the meaning" (Participant 2)

"I found it difficult to read academic texts because I often got confused when reading. There were so many words that I didn't know" (Participant 3)

"I used the deep-l site, it was like a Google Translate application to search for sentences directly. Or usually I translated one paragraph directly and then just read the Indonesian translation" (Participant 4)

This shows a close relationship between students' reading interest and their ability to understand and use academic vocabulary (Santi et al. 2021). Moreover, most students do not apply effective learning strategies to improve vocabulary mastery. As stated by students 3 and 5:

"I don't have a special strategy to improve vocabulary. I just read to learn English vocabulary. For listening, I just repeat the sentence" (Participant 5)

"I often write new vocabulary but I just write it and look for the meaning. I don't study it for a long time or try to use it in sentences" (Participant 3)

"I only learn vocabulary through movies. If there is vocabulary that I don't understand, I just look for the meaning using the Google application but don't find out how to use it" (Participant 4)

Several other students reported a lack of awareness of learning strategies. Many students do not know how to learn vocabulary effectively. They often memorize words without understanding the context of their use. Some students also reported a lack of academic interaction in the classroom. Students reported that discussions in the classroom rarely use formal language or use academic vocabulary. They also feel insecure about using academic vocabulary because of their lack of insight into academic vocabulary. Students 1 and 2 said:

"Discussions in the classroom rarely use formal language or use academic vocabulary. We often use everyday language" (Participant 1)

"I rarely discuss with lecturers or with friends using academic vocabulary. I feel insecure because I don't have a good command of academic vocabulary" (Participant 2)

The lack of regular practice adds to the low mastery and use of students' academic vocabulary. Several students admitted that they did not actively try to use academic vocabulary in their writing. They chose to use applications to do academic assignments so they paid less attention to the use of academic vocabulary. As conveyed by students 1, 3, and 4:

"I often use Google Translate. I write assignments using Indonesian first and then work on them using Google Translate. Usually I don't paraphrase directly, I put it in my assignment" (Participant 1)

"I often write using Indonesian first, then translate, then paraphrase. Usually using online paraphrasing. When writing assignments, I just search on Google and then paraphrase" (Participant 3)

"I mostly work on my final assignments using Indonesian first, then translate. Sometimes I just use chatgpt" (Participant 4)

Dependence on technology also causes low mastery and use of academic vocabulary (Novikov & Kiseleva, 2024). Students tend to use applications or tools to do assignments and do not pay attention to the use of academic vocabulary because they feel there is no demand for the use of academic vocabulary. Assignments given by lecturers tend not to explicitly require the use of academic vocabulary. Some students even said that they did not pay much attention to the use of academic vocabulary because there was no penalty for it.

"I feel like I didn't do my assignments well. I just did it, just searched on Google or chatgpt, then I paraphrased. Because the lecturers also didn't ask how I did my assignments. As long as I give assignments" (Participant 2)

Most students also reported that they rarely received constructive feedback from lecturers or peers regarding the use of academic vocabulary in their assignments. This makes them unaware of their mistakes or shortcomings.

"I never receive feedback from lecturers or friends" (Participant 2)

"Not all lecturers provide feedback. As far as I can remember so far there is only one lecturer who has given feedback on my assignments" (Participant 3)

"If it is feedback related to the use of academic vocabulary, I rarely receive it from lecturers. I have received feedback for assignments but only assignments that do not comply with instructions" (Participant 3)

The results of the analysis showed that the low use of academic vocabulary in students was caused by three main interrelated factors. According to Karunaratne & Navaratne (2023), lack of habit of reading academic texts that limit the role of vocabulary, ineffective learning strategies prevent students from integrating academic vocabulary into everyday practice, and an academic environment that does not provide demands or opportunities to use academic language actively.

Students' with High Level of Academic Vocabulary

This section contains the results of interviews with students who have a high academic vocabulary coverage. Each student is marked with the name of student 6 to student 10. In the previous section, the analysis related to factors that influence the low use of academic vocabulary in students' writing has been presented.

In contrast to the results of the previous analysis (students who have low vocabulary coverage), the results in this finding emphasize the interaction between personal effort, institutional support, and effective learning strategies in the development of academic vocabulary. The experiences of participants underscore the importance of creating an environment that not only provides access to resources but also encourages meaningful interactions and targeted feedback. These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting a structured approach to academic vocabulary learning, reinforcing the important role of learner agency and institutional facilitation (Zuiderwijk et al. 2023)

Participants indicated a strong preference for reading academic texts, such as journals, research articles, and reference books, over non-academic materials to increase exposure to complex and formal language. This finding supports the idea that intentional engagement with academic texts promotes specialized vocabulary acquisition. Participants stated,

"Reading academic texts every day helps me understand how words are used in context, and it significantly improves my writing and speaking skills." (Participant 10)

"I often spend 10-20 minutes reading every day. The books I read are various, such as journals and psychology books related to self-development. In addition to reading books, I also watch academic videos such as about the environment or other topics that are usually discussed by experts" (Participant 7)

"I quite often read academic texts such as textbooks, articles, or research papers outside of class. I don't always immerse myself in the reading, but I do make time to read them, especially when I need them for research purposes (Participant 8)

This practice is in line with Lee et al. (2024) assertion that frequent exposure to target vocabulary increases retention and productive use. In terms of institutional support, participants noted that access to digital libraries and tutoring sessions provided substantial opportunities to develop academic language skills.

"I have enough access to the digital library and I access it every day" (Participant 6)

"I use the academic phrase bank that my lecturer gave me to look up academic vocabulary" (Participant 7)

Assignments such as writing essays, presentations, and reports were reported to reinforce the active use of academic vocabulary, demonstrating the value of structured academic tasks in enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

"I always make sure that the vocabulary I use in my essays or final projects is academic vocabulary" (Participant 6)

"I really like writing so I try to use academic vocabulary in my writing, both essays and other academic writing assignments" (Participant 7)

"When I write academically, I do try to use precise and more sophisticated vocabulary, but not always consistently. Sometimes, I refer to the academic phrase bank that my lecturer shared to find better expressions or terms, which is very helpful. But honestly, it really depends on the assignment. For some assignments, I focus more on getting the content across clearly, while for others, I try harder to use more advanced vocabulary" (Participant 8)

Feedback from instructors and peers has been particularly influential, as participants noted:

"The feedback I get from my professors about academic vocabulary usually comes when they review our writing assignments. They will point out whether the words we use are appropriate to the context or suggest better alternatives to make the writing more formal or precise. This is really helpful because it highlights areas where my vocabulary could be stronger or more accurate" (Participant 7)

"Receiving specific feedback on how I use academic vocabulary in my essays has helped me refine my language and avoid repeating mistakes." (Participant 10)

"I work with classmates or friends to improve my academic writing, and that's been quite helpful. They usually help by reviewing my drafts, pointing out areas where I could use more clarity in my argument, or suggesting better ways to phrase things. Sometimes, they will find a small mistake that I missed, or offer an idea that I hadn't thought of" (Participant 8)

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that targeted feedback is a key component in academic language development (Vorontsova, 2023). The study also highlighted effective learning strategies used by participants, such as making note cards, writing down new words with their definitions, and applying these words in writing. These strategies are supported by Laufer and Hulstijn's (2001) engagement load hypothesis, which states that active engagement with vocabulary through writing and recall improves retention. Participants explained their approach, stating,

"When I find academic vocabulary that I don't understand in a journal, I look up how to use the academic vocabulary and then study the vocabulary before I use it in my writing" (Participant 6)

"One strategy I use to learn and apply academic vocabulary in my writing is to familiarize myself with academic texts and content. The more I read articles, research papers, or textbooks, the more I become accustomed to seeing certain words and phrases in context. Over time, I start to understand them naturally and then try to use them when writing. It's like building a mental bank of academic vocabulary that I can use whenever I need it" (Participant 8)

"I often write down new words I come across while reading, look up synonyms and antonyms, and try to use them in sentences to reinforce my understanding." (Participant 10)

Furthermore, digital tools, including online dictionaries and grammar checking software, were identified as important resources, reflecting findings from studies such as Gagic et al. (2018), which highlight the growing role of technology in language learning.

"I write directly in English but check for grammar mistakes using apps like Grammarly." (Participant 6)

"I have difficulty because there are some words that I don't understand. When I come across new terms, I prefer to learn directly from journals because there are definitely research-based references to the vocabulary. Sometimes I use AI to look up the meaning of the words including how to use them" (Participant 7)

"I write directly in English and then check for grammar mistakes. Usually the apps I use suggest more academic vocabulary than the ones I write. So I learn new vocabulary at the same time" (participant 10)

However, participants identified certain barriers to vocabulary development, particularly the lack of real-world exposure to academic vocabulary outside the classroom context. While consistent reading and writing practice boosted confidence, participants stated:

"I rarely or never discuss with my peers using academic vocabulary. Lecturers give instructions when giving assignments using academic vocabulary but most of them do not explain academic vocabulary explicitly and also when giving feedback" (Participant 6)

"Q&A sessions in class should be used to practice speaking skills using academic language. But sometimes, the classroom situation is not always supportive, usually more of us use more everyday vocabulary. Unlike when writing, I can really pay attention to the academic vocabulary that I use" (Participant 7)

Increased interaction with native speakers and greater participation in academic discussions can further improve vocabulary acquisition. These insights echo the findings of Webb and Nation (2017), who emphasized the importance of interactive contexts for vocabulary acquisition.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the scope of academic vocabulary and factors influencing academic vocabulary usage in students' written register will be discussed in depth and in more detail, obtained from the corpus analysis and interview results presented in the findings section. A comprehensive discussion of the findings is presented to explain the scope of academic vocabulary and factors influencing the low scope of academic vocabulary usage. This section provides a comparison and contrast of the findings in this study with previous studies in the field of EFL language development.

Academic Vocabulary in Students' Writing

The findings of this study reveal a high level of academic vocabulary coverage in student writing, with 559 out of 570 words from the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000) being utilized. However, despite this near-complete usage, the overall coverage of academic vocabulary in their writing is 8.59%, indicating that while students are incorporating these words, they are not using them extensively. Furthermore, the concentration of usage is predominantly in sub-lists one to five, suggesting a reliance on more common academic vocabulary rather than the less frequently occurring words in sub-lists six to ten.

These results align with and expand upon previous research on AWL usage in student writing. Studies such as those by Nation (2001) and Hyland & Tse (2007) have also highlighted that students tend to use words from the first few sub-lists more frequently than those from the later sub-lists. Nation (2001) emphasizes that the most frequent sub-lists contain words that are broadly applicable across disciplines, which may explain students' preference for them. Similarly, Hyland & Tse (2007) found that the lower sub-lists (six to ten) consist of more specialized vocabulary that students might not encounter as often in their general academic writing.

In comparison to Durrant's (2016) findings, where non-native English speakers showed a strong preference for words from sub-list one due to their exposure in academic settings and instructional materials, this study's results further confirm this pattern. Durrant (2016) argued that vocabulary acquisition is heavily influenced by textbook frequency and teacher emphasis, which may explain why students favor the more commonly occurring academic words.

However, compared to a study by Gardner and Davies (2014), which explored academic vocabulary usage across different genres, the 8.59% coverage in this study appears relatively low. Gardner and Davies (2014) found that proficient academic writers tend to achieve higher AWL coverage, often above 10%, suggesting that developing academic proficiency requires a more balanced use of the full AWL spectrum. This implies that although students in the present study are using a broad range of academic words, their depth of academic vocabulary integration remains limited.

This finding is in line with previous research highlighting the prominence of high-frequency words in students' writing. Hyland and Tse (2007) found that learners tend to use the most frequently occurring academic words, which reinforces the idea that familiarity plays a role in vocabulary use. However, compared to Gardner and Davies' (2014) study, which found a wider range of AWL in advanced learners, this study suggests that students may still require explicit instruction to incorporate broader academic competencies.

The lower percentages may be attributed to differences in students' exposure to academic texts, teaching methods, or their level of writing proficiency. These findings highlight the need for more targeted academic vocabulary instruction to help students bridge the gap and reach levels of comprehension usage comparable to established academic norms.

Factors Influencing Students' Academic Vocabulary Usage

Interviews were conducted for further understand of the factors influencing students' academic vocabulary usage. Revealing three primary influences: reading habits, educational environment, and learning strategies. These factors varied between students with high academic vocabulary usage and those with lower levels.

Students with Low Level of Academic Vocabulary

Students with lower academic vocabulary usage exhibited minimal engagement with academic texts, often preferring general reading materials such as fiction and social media content. Limited exposure to academic sources reduced their familiarity with AWL terms, mirroring the findings of Schmitt and Schmitt (2020), who emphasized the necessity of academic text engagement for vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, Coxhead et al. (2017) pointed out that learners who do not engage with academic texts regularly struggle to integrate academic vocabulary naturally into their writing, reinforcing the need for targeted reading practices.

The educational environment also played a role, as students in this category often studied in institutions where explicit vocabulary instruction was not emphasized. Compared to studies by Nation (2013), which stressed the importance of structured vocabulary teaching, these students lacked targeted interventions that could enhance their academic word use. Moreover, Gardner and Davies (2014) found that direct exposure to academic vocabulary in classroom settings significantly influences students' ability to use these words effectively. Without such exposure, students struggle to expand their academic lexicon.

Moreover, their learning strategies tended to be passive, focusing on memorization rather than application, which aligns with previous findings indicating that deep learning strategies such as paraphrasing and summarization significantly aid vocabulary retention (Anthony, 2014). Webb and Nation (2017) stressed that students who do not apply academic vocabulary in meaningful contexts are less likely to retain and use these words effectively, which explains the limited AWL coverage observed in low-level users.

Students with High Level of Academic Vocabulary

In contrast with students with low level of academic vocabulary, students who demonstrated higher academic vocabulary usage exhibited strong reading habits, frequently engaging with research

articles, textbooks, and academic essays. Their exposure to authentic academic materials helped reinforce the use of AWL terms in their writing, aligning with Hyland and Tse's (2007) study, which linked extensive reading with academic vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Krashen (2004) posited that exposure to academic texts through extensive reading significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition, supporting the notion that high-level users benefit from regular engagement with academic materials.

Additionally, students in this category benefited from educational environments that encouraged academic literacy. Institutions that integrated structured vocabulary instruction, writing workshops, and access to academic resources provided a foundation for more advanced vocabulary usage, corroborating Gardner and Davies' (2014) assertion that academic vocabulary is best acquired through formal instruction and practice. This finding is further supported by Coxhead and Byrd (2020), who noted that explicit vocabulary teaching combined with writing-focused tasks fosters better academic word retention and usage.

Furthermore, high academic vocabulary users employed effective learning strategies, such as taking notes, engaging in discussions, and utilizing academic word lists. These strategies reflect the recommendations of Nation (2013) and Schmitt and Schmitt (2020), who emphasized that vocabulary retention improves when learners actively process and apply new words in different contexts. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) suggested that vocabulary learning is most effective when learners engage in task-induced involvement, such as writing and discussion, which aligns with the practices of high-level academic vocabulary users in this study.

The findings highlight important pedagogical considerations for improving students' academic vocabulary acquisition. Educators should incorporate explicit vocabulary instruction, focusing on both high-frequency and less commonly used AWL words. Implementing corpus-based tools like AntConc and AntWordProfiler could help students identify gaps in their vocabulary and enhance their awareness of academic word usage. A corpus-informed approach, as suggested by Flowerdew (2015), allows students to explore word frequency and contextual usage, facilitating deeper academic vocabulary understanding.

Additionally, fostering an academic reading culture through extensive reading programs and access to diverse academic materials could help students develop a broader vocabulary range. Previous research by Nation (2013) suggests that providing students with structured reading materials, such as graded academic texts, can significantly enhance their exposure to and retention of academic vocabulary. Teachers should also encourage active learning strategies, such as peer discussions, writing assignments that require academic vocabulary application, and metacognitive techniques like self-monitoring and goal setting, as proposed by Zimmerman and Schunk (2011).

Furthermore, integrating academic vocabulary instruction into writing tasks is essential. Studies by Coxhead and Byrd (2020) emphasize the importance of contextualized vocabulary learning, wherein students apply new words in meaningful writing activities. Encouraging students to revise their written work using academic vocabulary checklists and peer feedback sessions can further support vocabulary development.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the coverage of academic vocabulary in students' academic written registers based on Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL). The findings indicate that students utilized 559 out of the 570 word families from the AWL, covering 8.54% of their total word use. While this demonstrates a strong incorporation of academic vocabulary, it falls slightly below the 10% coverage identified in Coxhead's original study. The reliance on high-frequency words from sub-lists 1 and 2, coupled with the absence of certain words from sub-lists 1 to 5, suggests that students may favor more commonly encountered academic vocabulary while neglecting less frequent terms.

The study further explored the factors influencing academic vocabulary usage, revealing that reading habits, educational environment, and learning strategies significantly contribute to students' ability to integrate academic vocabulary into their writing. High-level academic vocabulary users demonstrated stronger engagement with academic texts, benefited from structured educational support, and employed active learning strategies. Conversely, low-level users exhibited limited exposure to academic texts, lacked explicit vocabulary instruction, and relied on passive learning approaches. These findings highlight the importance of targeted pedagogical interventions to enhance students' academic vocabulary acquisition and application.

SUGGESTION

Academic vocabulary is a fundamental component of students' academic writing, enabling them to articulate complex ideas with clarity and precision. The findings of this study highlight both the strengths and gaps in students' academic vocabulary usage, underscoring the necessity for targeted pedagogical

interventions. This chapter outlines recommendations for further research, theoretical advancements, and practical applications to enhance academic vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, this section presents expectations for the study's impact and proposes solutions to address the identified gaps in academic vocabulary usage. These recommendations aim to provide educators, researchers, and students with effective strategies for fostering academic vocabulary development.

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