



Exploring Vocabulary Knowledge as a Strategy to Enhance English First Additional Language in the Post-COVID -19 Era

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated how vocabulary knowledge is an essential variable for academic achievement during the post-COVID-19 era in Grade 10 learners. Among many variables of poor performance in Grade 10 is inadequate vocabulary in First Additional Language. This paper is underpinned by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which advocates that language learning occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable others. The present study is quantitative, in which a vocabulary size test (VST) and a productive vocabulary test (PVLT) were administered to 84 conveniently selected participants. This paper revealed that learners have very limited vocabulary knowledge and this affects academic achievement. In addition, COVID-19 worsened the situation since social interactions were limited, thereby impeding language development. The authors argue that in order for post-COVID-19 learners to cope in the academic world, strengthening vocabulary knowledge is key to equipping these learners with the required skills to cope with virtual learning. Some of the essential skills for learners to learn online include reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. These skills would assist learners in communicating their needs, discussing solutions and expressing themselves when the need arises. This paper recommends using explicit vocabulary instruction to improve learners' academic achievement in the post-COVID-19 era. The Department of Basic Education should train teachers on how to design fun vocabulary activities online. For instance, quizzes, the Frayer model and other virtual word activities.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explored vocabulary knowledge as a strategy to enhance English First Additional Language during the post-COVID -19 era. This paper acknowledges that the body of research on the effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning of ENGFAL is continually growing. Yet, is skewed towards the availability of resources and lesson planning and not on the development of vocabulary knowledge that has been deemed essential for both English language learning and academic success. For example, Erarslam, in reviewing literature pertaining to the emergency of online teaching of English, notes that

COVID-19 thrust the teaching and learning of English into emergency online instruction.¹ According to Erarslum, online learning is lauded for assisting teachers with prior experience in teaching English online with more engaging activities for their learners. He, however, notes that there are some limitations to emergency online English education since online teaching requires access to a reliable internet connection, an efficient online platform or learning management system, and access to smartphones, computers, and desks that were reportedly lacking.²

Ying et al. also reviewed literature on the challenges faced by English Second Language students gaining speaking skills as well as instructional strategies employed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective of their paper was to explore how the pandemic influenced English-speaking skills. They argue that speaking is the most common form of communication in the world and, hence, the most important skill to develop.³ Ying et al. also suggest that incorporating social media and video conferencing tools is essential to removing learner barriers to speaking the target language (English) in an emergency. These include the use of mobile technologies like smartphones, computers, and laptops; social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Skype, and Tiktok and mass media like television and radio.⁴ However, it has been observed that there are limited studies on the importance of English vocabulary learning in the post-COVID-19 era in South Africa.

Hoadley and Galant observed that the vocabulary skills of Grade 6 learners in their papers sharply declined. They ascribe this decline in vocabulary knowledge to a lack of exposure to print material and vocabulary teaching.⁵ Soudien et al. also sought to understand the effects of the pandemic on the education sector. They acknowledge that the government introduced a multi-media learner support programme, for example, where learners had to access lessons through public television and certain radio stations, paper guides and revision material was uploaded on the DBE website, and email and WhatsApp feeds were sent to teachers.⁶ These authors acknowledge that the pandemic had a negative impact on the performance of Grade 12 learners and other grades in the country in spite of the intervention strategies made by the government. The low academic performance, they argue, could be caused by a lack of internet access, even for those who had access to mobile phones. They make an intriguing point that the majority of learners lacked support in using the English that was used in delivering most of the lessons.

Other studies looked at the learning challenges brought up by COVID-19 but not at how the pandemic affected vocabulary development and knowledge.⁷ During COVID-19, most learners were, according to Landa et al. facing challenges of not being able to engage with the content they were

¹ Ali Erarslan, "English Language Teaching and Learning during COVID-19: A Global Perspective on the First Year.," *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning* 4, no. 2 (2021): 349–67, <https://doi.org/10.31681/jetol.907757>.

² Erarslam, "English Language teaching and learning during COVID-19: A global perspective on the first year."

³ Yong Hua Ying, Winson Eng Wei Siang, and Maslawati Mohamad, "The Challenges of Learning English Skills and the Integration of Social Media and Video Conferencing Tools to Help ESL Learners Coping with the Challenges during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Literature Review," *Creative Education* 12, no. 07 (2021): 1503–16, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.127115>.

⁴ Ying, et.al. "The Challenges of Learning English Skills and the Integration of Social Media and Video Conferencing Tools."

⁵ Ursula Hoadley and Jaamia Galant, "COVID Left South African Pupils Far behind in Maths and Language Skills," *The Conversation*, June 5, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/covid-left-south-african-pupils-far-behind-in-maths-and-language-skills-183678>.

⁶ Crain Soudien, Vijay Reddy, and Jacqueline Harvey, "The Impact of COVID-19 on a Fragile Education System: The Case of South Africa," in *Primary and Secondary Education During Covid-19*, ed. Fernando M. Reimers, 1st ed. (NY, Manhattan: Springer, Charm, 2022), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354637370_The_Impact_of_COVID19_on_a_Fragile_Education_System_The_Case_of_South_Africa.

⁷ Nhlanhla Landa, Sindiso Zhou, and Newlin Marongwe, "Education in Emergencies: Lessons from COVID-19 in South Africa," *International Review of Education* 67, no. 1–2 (April 28, 2021): 167–83, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09903-z>; Mosebetsi Mokoena, "Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rural English FAL Teachers' Lesson Planning," *Arab World English Journal*, no. 2 (January 24, 2022): 479–91, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.32>.

given. They also indicated that the students and lecturers in their papers faced the challenges of not being technologically savvy.⁸

Mokoena also explored the impact of COVID-19 on English FAL teachers' lesson planning. He discovered that EFAL teachers struggled with committing to lesson plans and could not cover content. He rightly argues that the digital divide that exists between learners from urban and rural schools exacerbated the problem of online learning.⁹ The scholars cited above looked at different challenges posed by COVID-19 in terms of ENGFAL, but it should be noted that none looked at developing English vocabulary learning as a primary strategy to counter the effects of Covi-19 on ENGFAL language learning and learner performance in general. Therefore, the authors of this paper argue that lack of support in English is the major cause of academic failure since South Africa uses an Immersion system of education. Immersion is where learners study all or some of their subject matter in a language other than their own. The status quo in South Africa is that students use English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT).

Thus, effective post-pandemic teaching and learning should focus on reinventing the importance of pushing vocabulary in the curriculum as a counter-hegemonic strategy to address poor performance. This paper explored learners' vocabulary size after the COVID-19 pandemic to determine whether the pandemic negatively affected English vocabulary learning. The paper, thus, answers the following research question - how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect grade 10 learners' performance in English First Additional Language teaching and learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The outbreak of COVID -19 led to the world's largest, most unparalleled upheaval of education.¹⁰ As a result, most educational systems everywhere in the globe resorted to an abrupt online schooling system to save their education curricula. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) of South Africa first closed schools to curb the spread of the pandemic, and introduced online teaching and learning as an alternative schooling system. Teachers had to continue with online teaching by adopting innovative strategies like creating WhatsApp groups, video chats, and guiding learners to access information on YouTube as a way of disseminating information to learners. As a result, globally, mobile devices, online games and integrated learning have been found to be effective ways for learners to learn new vocabulary.¹¹ In an attempt to rescue the 2020 academic year, the Department of Basic Education resorted to trimming the curriculum across all grades except grade 12. English First Additional Language (EFAL) was no exception depriving learners of the opportunity to enhance their vocabulary, which is key to academic performance since most South African subjects use English as a medium of instruction.¹²

The use of digital devices and platforms to learn the English language and its vocabulary was, however, not a novel phenomenon in English language learning but it had been a subject of research since the beginning of the 21st century. To illustrate this, Derakhshan and Khodabakhshzadeh investigated the interplay between vocabulary learning and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). They define mobile devices as any small portable device that one can carry without obstructing one.¹³ Additionally, they provide a definition of mobile learning as any type of learning

⁸ Landa, Zhou, and Marongwe, "Education in emergencies: Lessons form COVID-19 in South Africa."

⁹ Mokoena, "Exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural English FAL teachers' lesson planning."

¹⁰ Sumitra Pokhrel and Roshan Chhetri, "A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning," *Higher Education for the Future* 8, no. 1 (January 19, 2021): 133–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>.

¹¹ Wagdi Rashad Ali Bin-Hady, "The Role of Games in Enhancing EFL Students' Vocabulary Acquisition," *Faculty of Education Scientific Journal* 17, no. 1 (2021).

¹² Department of Basic Education, "National Department of Education Annual Report 2020/2021 Financial Year." (Pretoria, 2021), https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202110/dbe-annual-report-202021.pdf.

¹³ Ali Derakhshan and Hossein Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL Why Not MALL: An In-Depth Review of Text-Message Vocabulary Learning," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 1, no. 9 (September 1, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.9.1150-1159>.

that occurs when the learner is not in fixed learning that takes place when a learner utilises the learning opportunities provided by mobile technologies or learning that takes place at a designated location (school).¹⁴ The assumption in using mobile devices is that learners are not confined to the classroom in order to learn the language. These researchers contend that one benefit of MALL is the ability to send information or activities instantly and anywhere. They think that computers and mobile learning tools expand students' opportunities to communicate with one another and the English language. Derakhshan and Khodabakhshzadeh go on to argue that mobile devices have the potential to enable learners to access information, process it, and use it in real situations, and this improves both their vocabulary knowledge and academic success.¹⁵ It is then safe to say that the use of smartphones, computers, tablets, and laptops to aid vocabulary learning pre-COVID-19 needs to be emphasised more in the post-COVID-19 era to mitigate the effects of the gap caused by the trimming of the curriculum and lack of face-to-face contact with learners.

Derakhshan and Khodabakhshzadeh assert that using digital devices like smartphones and iPads in the classroom as learning tools can enhance the vocabulary learning experience. They also note that using digital devices to learn new words is one of the techniques learners can use to increase their vocabulary.¹⁶ Smartphones, for instance, provide limitless opportunities for increased engagement, improved student comprehension and expansion of learning outside the traditional classroom, especially if a student does not have internet access at home. Along with boosting motivation, smartphones can give teachers a means to support and encourage their learners' creativity and learning. On their smartphones, students can watch short videos, and access online dictionaries to improve their vocabulary knowledge. At the same time, they can use Twitter to ask and share questions. The studies indicate that the benefits of using online or digital devices to improve vocabulary learning are evident. Nonetheless, the researchers of this paper observed that even after the COVID-19 era, when students and teachers were embarking on online learning, vocabulary knowledge remained a challenge.

As alluded to before, teaching learners how to use the virtual space to enhance their learning process should not be left at the discretion of learners, but should form part of explicit vocabulary teaching or instruction. Explicit vocabulary involves careful examination of a text by the teacher to identify the key terms that convey the meaning. After identifying such words, teachers need to devote more instructional time to those words. Shanahan adds that, explicit vocabulary instruction is the teaching of specific words and teaching vocabulary learning strategies.¹⁷ Additionally, explicit vocabulary instruction is when a teacher makes it obvious what the learners are supposed to learn as well as how the learning goals and information structures they are presenting work. As outlined by these scholars, teaching vocabulary in online learning is vital. Teachers have to ensure that the text chosen, whether it is a video or internet text, that, firstly, key terms that convey meaning in the text are given more instructional time to enable learners to grasp the meaning of a text better. Secondly, still drawing from the definition of explicit vocabulary above, teachers need to teach learners vocabulary-learning strategies they can use when encountering an unfamiliar word in a text as they paper online at home or during a lesson. Giving learners a text, for example, a movie to watch without identifying exactly what they have to learn would make the learning process futile, which is why the authors argue that explicit teaching of vocabulary in online learning would enhance learners' academic achievement.

Studies in support of explicit vocabulary learning reveal that gains in vocabulary are more likely to happen when learners get specific vocabulary teaching using different methods. For instance,

¹⁴ Derakhshan, and Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL why not MALL: An in-depth review of text-message vocabulary learning."

¹⁵ Derakhshan, and Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL why not MALL: An In-Depth Review of Text-Message Vocabulary Learning."

¹⁶ Derakhshan, and Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL why not MALL: An In-Depth Review of Text-Message Vocabulary Learning."

¹⁷ Timothy Shanahan, "The National Reading Panel Report. Practical Advice for Teachers.," *Learning Point Associates / North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)*, 2005, www.learningpt.org.

Tahir et al. investigated the effects of explicit vocabulary instruction on vocabulary learning. The paper was conducted for 22 weeks in Malaysia among form two learners. The learners were divided into two groups, the experimental and the control group. The participants were first given a pre-test to determine their initial score before the explicit vocabulary instruction was administered. Participants, in the experimental group, were subjected to explicit vocabulary sessions. The lessons were created to assist the learners in learning the target words. During the explicit vocabulary lessons, learners were exposed to different techniques of explicit vocabulary instruction, like pictorial vocabulary, crossword puzzles, the Frayer model, and making meaning, spelling, and vocabulary anchors.

Contrarily, the control group was not exposed to explicit vocabulary instruction but was exposed to ten regular English sessions, where they learnt the target words implicitly. After the 22-week period, all the participants sat for a post-test session. The post-test was intended to test knowledge of the meaning and the ability to recall the word in context. The paper's results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group with a total percentage of 89 percent. The results proved that explicit vocabulary instruction was more effective than the implicit approach.

While there is an appreciation of what other studies covered during the pandemic period, we observe that their studies are skewed toward challenges encountered during virtual learning, overlooking the role played by vocabulary knowledge, which supports the processing of information from electronic platforms. A paper conducted explored the role of digital devices in vocabulary acquisition and he notes that the learners valued the use of digital devices since it helped them learn. The students in the paper believed that relying too heavily on guesswork resulted in being frustrated with the vocabulary, and they loved the idea of being able to grasp words correctly.¹⁸ Thus, our paper is unique and contributes to knowledge in that it focuses on English FAL using explicit vocabulary instruction as a counter strategy to address vocabulary challenges worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is worth noting that in vocabulary, gains were equated to the interaction between learners, teachers and learning material, like, puzzles, pictures and others. Besides, Derakhshan and Khodabakhshzadeh point to the use and availability of digital resources to develop vocabulary.¹⁹ These researchers underscore that interaction and collaborative learning are crucial for learning a second language.

This paper explored vocabulary knowledge as a strategy to enhance EFAL during the post-COVID-19 era. It looked at how vocabulary development can be facilitated by interaction between learners and the school environment, including peers, teachers, and resources. Therefore, this paper was underpinned by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The socio-cultural theory focuses on how mentors and peers influence individual learning and how society affects development and behaviour. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian developmental psychologist, studied the development of language acquisition and it has, in recent years, been developed by Lantolf and Thorne, who pioneered this theory.²⁰ The SCT is relevant in this paper because it advocates that language is learnt through assistance and interaction with others and their environment, including the people and resources around them and the culture they live in. Others, according to SCT, can be teachers, peers, and computers.²¹ The SCT is concerned with mediation and the various forms of mediation instruments that society has embraced and values.²² This paper emphasises that for vocabulary knowledge to develop, learners need

¹⁸ Derakhshan, and Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL why not MALL: An in-depth review of text-message vocabulary learning."

¹⁹ Derakhshan, and Khodabakhshzadeh, "Why CALL why not MALL: An in-depth review of text-message vocabulary learning."

²⁰ J.P. Lantolf, and S.L. Thorne, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

²¹ Khaled Ali Mohammed Alkurtehe and Hisham Dzakiria, "An Overreview of the Sociocultural Theory and Vocabulary Development," *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)* 3, no. 1 (April 11, 2018): 41–50, <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v3i1.1227>.

²² Alkurtehe and Dzakiria, "An overview of the sociocultural theory and vocabulary development."

the assistance of knowledgeable others to cascade their way in the post-COVID-19 era. Further, learners need to develop from being part of a society to individuals who are independent and can be active participants in that society. The researchers selected the SCT framework because it would aid in examining the influence of learners' interaction with their teachers and peers and, secondly, the culture of their environment towards vocabulary learning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper employed a positivist paradigm, which follows a well-defined structure during studies and definitions. Researchers use this paradigm to paper phenomena that occur independently of them and establish that they do not interfere with the observation.²³ Phenomena are described using words and symbols in their natural state without interference. The positivist paradigm was used to explore vocabulary knowledge in English FAL during the post-COVID-19 pandemic. The research design for this paper is quantitative. According to Bhandari, a quantitative research technique is a form of data collecting and analysis method extensively utilised in natural and social sciences that uses numerical values. Quantitative research employs descriptive, correlational, and experimental research methodologies. The descriptive method aims to summarise variables in a paper.²⁴ The quantitative approach was used to understand the grade 10 learners' vocabulary threshold, where vocabulary size tests and productive vocabulary levels tests were administered. The paper comprised 84 conveniently selected participants.

Data was collected by using two tests, the vocabulary size test (VST) and the productive vocabulary levels test (PVLТ), to determine the vocabulary size and growth of the participants. Laufer and Nation contend that to get a proper idea of a learner's vocabulary knowledge, it is necessary not to use one vocabulary measure but to combine different measures since vocabulary knowledge is vast. They concur that using different vocabulary test forms where learners' recognition of meaning and form are investigated, as well as the ability to use the word when speaking and writing, is important.²⁵

The vocabulary size test (VST) is context-independent and presented in a multiple-choice format. The test was an already existing test, which had already been tested for reliability and validation. There are fourteen levels in the test; each level consists of ten items. The words in the test were taken from West's General Service List (GSL) of 1953 and The British National Corpus (BNC).²⁶ For the purpose of this paper, all the words from each level are included to give an accurate status of the vocabulary size of the participants. Nation states that the test frequency levels in the test represent word families occurring in the BNC.²⁷

The VST used a stem plus a four-choice multiple-choice format. The item stem consists of the word followed by a very simple non-defining sentence containing the word. Below is an example of a VST multiple-choice format:

Period: It was a difficult **period**

- a) Question
- b) Place
- c) Time
- d) Number

²³ Mohammed S. T. Makki, Reda M. Abdel-Rahman, and Abdulrahman S. Alharbi, "Synthetic Approach for Novel Fluorine Substituted ≪≫A≪/I≫-Aminophosphonic Acids Containing 1,2,4-Triazin-5-One Moiety as Antioxidant Agents," *International Journal of Organic Chemistry* 08, no. 01 (2018): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ijoc.2018.81001>.

²⁴ Pritha Bhandari, "What Is Quantitative Research? | Definition, Uses & Methods," June 12, 2020, <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/quantitative-research>. (Accessed: 10 September 2021).

²⁵ Batia Laufer and Paul Nation, "A Vocabulary-Size Test of Controlled Productive Ability," *Language Testing* 16, no. 1 (January 17, 1999): 33–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026553229901600103>.

²⁶ Paul Nation and David Beglar, "A Vocabulary Size Test.," *The Language Teacher* 31 (2007): 9–13.

²⁷ Paul Nation, "Teaching Language in Use: Vocabulary," in *Basic Issues in EFL Teaching and Learning* /, ed. Maria Eisenmann and Theresa Summer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), <https://www.worldcat.org/title/basic-issues-in-efl-teaching-and-learning/oclc/872673541>.

It should be noted that the test used did not have an ‘*I don’t know*’ option because, according to Nation, this option would interfere with participants guessing. Nation argues that informed guessing is essential since it assists learners in tapping into their subconscious knowledge.²⁸

The productive vocabulary levels test (PVLТ) was the second test used and deemed essential. The PVLТ measures productive vocabulary. Productive ability is defined as the ability to use a word when compelled to do so by a teacher or researcher.²⁹ Laufer and Nation present the structure of the PVLТ in the following manner: a meaningful sentence context is provided and the first letters of the target word are supplied.³⁰ Below is an example of a PVLТ question:

I’m glad we had this opp---to talk.

The PVLТ investigates the breadth of vocabulary. Breadth can be described as the number of words one has some knowledge of. The PVLТ consists of 90 items; each item is displayed in the form of a sentence with a missing word, clustered into five groups; the 2000-word level, the 3000-word level and the 5000-word level. On the issue of ethical considerations, participants were assured of anonymity and voluntary participation. They were informed that their test scores would not be used for anything else, either than for research. To ensure the reliability of test scores, the authors administered the inter-rater reliability testing technique, which suggests that to avoid bias; the same test should yield the same scores when assessed by different people. The tests were, therefore, assessed and the second author sampled for verification of the results.

Data Analysis

The assumption is that during COVID-19, learners were taught using online channels and interacted on different digital platforms with teachers, peers, parents or other resources, like YouTube, videos, television, radio and other platforms. As a result, the researchers sought to measure the students' vocabulary knowledge after COVID-19 to determine whether there was a decline or an increase in vocabulary knowledge. Hence, the authors used two data analysis tools in analysing the data: the Nations vocabulary size table and the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). According to Nation’s table, in order to say that a learner understands a novel, for example, the learner should understand 9000-word families, including proper nouns. In terms of word count, it simply means that a learner should understand 49 out of 50 running words in a text. In this paper, learners' test scores were measured on how close they were to the different word counts. It should be noted that the number of word families a learner should know changes according to text type.³¹

Table 1.1 Vocabulary size needed for 98%-word coverage, including (proper nouns) of various texts.³²

Texts	98% coverage	Proper Nouns
Novels	9,000 word families	1-2%
Newspapers	8,000 word families	5-6%
Children’s movies	6,000 word families	1.5 %
Spoken English	7,000 word families	1.3%

²⁸ Nation, Teaching Language in Use: Vocabulary.

²⁹ Laufer, and Nation, “A vocabulary-size test of controlled productive ability.”

³⁰ Laufer, and Nation, “A vocabulary-size test of controlled productive ability.”

³¹ Nation, Teaching language in use: Vocabulary.

³² Paul I. S. Nation, “How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening?,” *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, no. 1 (September 2006): 59–82.

To understand better the test scores, they were also grouped according to language proficiency levels, as shown in the CERF table below. It is tabulated as follows:

A1 – A2 levels can be grouped as the basic levels of proficiency. In relation to Nation’s table, this is knowledge of between 2000 word families and -3500.

B1 and B2 – immediate levels where a person is able to read with larger degrees of independence. The vocabulary size at this level is 4000-5500 word families.

C1 and C2 levels are known as proficiency levels and are equivalent to knowledge of between 6000-8000 word families, with a C2 rating at 8000-9000 word families.

Table 1.2 CEFR levels

Basic User		Independent User		Proficient User	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present paper’s findings were based on the different test types and learners’ test results. Table 1.3 tabulates the receptive vocabulary test scores.

Table 1.3 Receptive vocabulary test scores of Grade 10 learners

Word Families	9,000-8,000	7999-7000	6999-6000	5999-5000	4999-4000	3999-3000	2999-2000
No of students	0	3	7	23	37	14	0

The scores of the receptive vocabulary test indicated that only ten learners, which makes up 12% of the participants, were close to the 8000-word families, as suggested by Nation.³³ In the CERF levels, these learners can be categorised as bordering on the proficiency level as their test scores ranged between 6000-word families to 8000-word families. Sixty learners, which constitute a percentage of 71 percent, scored between 4000-5999 word families. Learners in this category can be said to be on the immediate proficiency level of language learning. They can read independently but may find difficulties in dealing with academic tasks.³⁴ Fourteen learners, this means 17 percent of the learners had a vocabulary size of 3999-3000 words. The vocabulary size at this level means that these learners are at the A level of English language proficiency. Learners’ scores, at this level, implied that 14 percent of the grade 10 learners had basic proficiency in English that allows them to engage in simple everyday conversations but would not be able to read for understanding and would not be able to participate in meaningful and independent reading and writing of the language. These results show that the majority of learners have immediate proficiency in English and that English language teaching and learning have deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in line with Alkhresheh, who argues that the nature of English language learning has been altered substantially, primarily due to the spread of COVID-19. The English language system, comprising reading, writing, and speaking, was widely used prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and learning has been negatively impacted by the advent of online

³³ Nation, Teaching language in use: Vocabulary.

³⁴ Sudarman Sudarman and Sumalee Chinokul, “The English Vocabulary Size and Level of English Department Students at Kartanagara University,” *ETERNAL (English, Teaching, Learning and Research Journal)* 4, no. 1 (June 30, 2018): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.24252/Eternal.V41.2018.A1>.

education.³⁵ Online learning has, thus, had a negative impact on the process of learning English language vocabulary among grade 10 learners.

Productive Vocabulary Test

The PVLТ has three levels: 2000, 3000 and 5000 levels used in this paper. Each level has 18 questions and in order to pass a level, a learner must score between 15 to 16 marks, which equates to 85 percent to 95 percent. It should be noted that each level represents 1000-word families.³⁶ In calculating proficiency, a score is converted into a percentage and the percentage is multiplied by 1000. Example of calculation: If a learner gets 10 out of 18 in a level, that would be equal to 55 percent, which will be multiplied by 1000 to get 555 out of 1000 per level. Below is a presentation of the learners’ scores according to the three levels.

Table 1.4 Level: 2000 scores

Total of scores	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Scores	18-15	14-13	12-11	10-9	8-	7-6	5-4	3-0
Percentages	100-88%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10-0%
No of students	2	1	4	7	3	17	18	32

Table 1.5 Level: 3000 scores

Total of scores	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Scores	18-15	14-13	12-11	10-9	8-	7-6	5-4	3-0
Percentages	100-88%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10-0%
No of students	0	0	0	1	0	1	8	74

Table 1.6 Level: 5000 scores

Total of scores	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Scores	18-15	14-13	12-11	10-9	8-	7-6	5-4	3-0
Percentages	100-88%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10-0%
No of students	0	0	0	1	0	2	9	72

Results of the 2000-word level show that only two learners scored between 100 and 88 percent, thereby operating on the satisfactory level. The rest of the learners, that is, 82, scored below the satisfactory mark. At both the 3000 level and the 5000 level, none of the learners scored at the satisfactory level. Basically, the test scores decrease as the levels go up, especially between 18 and 12 marks.

These findings indicate that post-COVID-19 learners could have problems understanding written and spoken English because of the low scores indicated by the productive test. This implied that learners would struggle with accessing information online or in texts after COVID-19 since the information, as alluded to in the introduction of this paper, is written in English. Secondly, the discussion revealed that English is used as a medium of instruction, and this means that post-COVID-19 learners would struggle to understand.

³⁵ Mutaz Alkhresheh, “Impact of Covid-19 on English Language Learning and Teaching Strategies at Universities in Saudi Arabia,” *Review of International Geographical Education Online* 11 (December 6, 2021): 86–102, <https://doi.org/10.48047/rigeo.11.12.10>.

³⁶ Laufer, and Nation, “A vocabulary-size test of controlled productive ability.”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of this paper facilitated in answering the research questions: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect grade 10 learners' performance in English First Additional Language teaching and learning? Although the loss in vocabulary knowledge cannot be definitely quantified, it can be assumed in general that it has occurred. Research has indicated that vocabulary learning is essential, as it would assist learners in navigating online platforms since these are written in English. Vocabulary knowledge would boost grade 10 learners' academic achievement in all subjects.

Learners' receptive vocabulary, in this paper, indicates that it would not be able to assist them during the post-COVID-19 era when confronted with reading material in both schools and when they leave high school nor assist them in achieving excellent academic achievement. These findings are in line with MacGregor (2009), who reports that first-year students entering the university were ill prepared in terms of linguistic competence. In view of these findings, the authors make the following recommendations:

- The poor results of the receptive vocabulary test reveal that teachers in the post-COVID era should engage learners more in reading activities. These can be silent reading programmes, group reading, or after-school reading programmes to assist learners in developing their vocabulary knowledge.
- To cope with the varied needs of post-COVID-19 students, both online and virtual learning are essential for the development of vocabulary knowledge. Schools should, therefore, strengthen learners' vocabulary knowledge by utilising all the possible resources and platforms that can enhance vocabulary development and ensure that this is a reality for their learners. Schools should develop resources for all learners, such as internet access, smartphones, e-books, television (in the school) and other resources that will enhance learners' interaction with the English language.
- The Department of Basic Education should train teachers in vocabulary teaching and monitor such events.
- Further, DBE should coach teachers on how to design fun vocabulary activities online, for instance, quizzes, the Frayer model and other virtual word activities.
- Teachers should employ various vocabulary-teaching strategies, including explicit vocabulary-teaching strategies. Explicit vocabulary teaching involves explaining the salient vocabulary of a text before reading and allowing learners to make use of resources like dictionaries, libraries, and the internet and peer discussions to find meanings of words.

Further research is recommended to justify the effectiveness of vocabulary knowledge and academic achievement.

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