



English Vocabulary Learning among First Year Non-English Major Students: A Cross-sectional Study at a Private University in Vietnam

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Article history

Received: 13 May, 2025

Accepted: 11 July, 2025

Published: 19 December, 2025

Keywords

Non-English major students, learning English, vocabulary learning strategies, learning challenges, language acquisition barriers

ABSTRACT

Learning a language inherently involves acquiring its vocabulary. However, developing a comprehensive vocabulary is a significant challenge for many language learners. This study aimed to assess the current situation and students' awareness of English vocabulary learning among first year non-English majors at Thanh Do University, Vietnam. A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted with 347 students from five departments (Information Technology, Automotive Engineering Technology, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology, Economics and Law, and Pharmacy) from September to November 2024. The results revealed that 89.63% of the respondents recognized the importance of vocabulary, with 53.60% viewing it as "very necessary". Despite this awareness, the students faced significant challenges in retaining and applying vocabulary in practical contexts. The primary barriers identified comprised lack of motivation (67.72%), limited study time (63.41%), and ineffective learning methods (e.g., rote memorization, used by 66.33% of students). Only 28.74% of students were motivated to improve their communication skills, with the majority (63.22%) focusing on enhancing academic performance. Additionally, 80.69% reported difficulty with long-term vocabulary retention, while 76.37% struggled with pronunciation. To address these issues, the researchers propose practical solutions such as diversifying teaching methods, incorporating modern learning tools, and creating more language practice environments both in and outside the classroom. These strategies aim to enhance vocabulary retention, application, and overall English proficiency, ultimately helping students meet academic and professional demands.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language with significant roles in academia and professional settings, especially in the current context of integration and globalization. In Vietnam, as stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training, university students are required to meet certain English proficiency standards upon graduation to fulfill academic and professional demands. As Vietnam becomes more integrated into global markets, the demand for English proficiency is growing, especially in academic and professional spheres. However, for non-English majors, particularly first-year students at Thanh Do University - a private university with an entry standard lower than the national average, learning English, especially vocabulary, presents manifold difficulties and challenges.

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Numerous studies have demonstrated that vocabulary is an essential foundation for language learning; limited lexical knowledge constrains both comprehension and communication. Although students may recognize the importance of vocabulary, they often struggle to expand their vocabulary due to ineffective learning methods, low motivation, and limited opportunities for practice. At Thanh Do University, many first-year students perform poorly on vocabulary-related items in the English entrance test, suggesting weaknesses in acquiring and using new words.

Despite increasing policy and workplace demands for English, empirical evidence on how first-year non-English majors at Vietnamese private universities learn and use vocabulary remains limited. To address this gap, the present study examines vocabulary-learning practices among first-year non-English-major students at Thanh Do University, identifies the main challenges they face in retaining and applying new words, and proposes practical recommendations to improve learning effectiveness.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on English vocabulary acquisition, Section 3 presents the research methodology, Section 4 discusses the findings, and Section 5 concludes with implications and recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary is a crucial component of foreign language acquisition, especially for English, the international language. The role of vocabulary has been emphasized across language teaching literature, as it provides the lexical resources learners need to comprehend input, express ideas accurately, and perform effectively in academic and professional settings. Many studies have affirmed the foundational importance of vocabulary. Alqahtani (2015) points out that vocabulary is a central element in language instruction, essential for sentence construction, expressing ideas, and achieving effective communication (Alqahtani, 2015). Correspondingly, Wang (2021) emphasizes that vocabulary supports the development of language skills, helping learners connect ideas, emotions, and thoughts, and is an essential factor in language learning (Wang, 2021). Additionally, research by Zhang and Annual (2008) demonstrates that vocabulary knowledge has a positive impact on learners' overall reading comprehension abilities (Zhang & Annual, 2008), while Tiansoodeenon et al. (2023) affirm that vocabulary enhances language skills and serves as an indicator of English proficiency (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023). Other studies also suggest that frequent exposure to vocabulary through activities such as extensive reading can effectively expand vocabulary knowledge (Daskalovska, 2018). Furthermore, vocabulary development serves as the foundation for improving listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are essential for success in both academic and professional environments (August et al., 2005).

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of vocabulary, non-English major students frequently encounter significant obstacles in acquiring and retaining new words, leading to passive and ineffective English language learning. This issue is prevalent across various Asian contexts. For instance, Saengpakdeejit (2014) highlights that non-English major students in Thailand face substantial challenges in vocabulary retention, necessitating scientific and effective learning methods for long-term recall. Similarly, in China, research conducted by Ju (2002) at Tsinghua University revealed that many students lack effective vocabulary learning strategies, contributing to passive and unmotivated learning that impedes vocabulary expansion (Ju, 2002). Further affirming this viewpoint, Yu-fu (2009) found that in Japan, vocabulary instruction is often insufficiently emphasized, resulting in students only grasping vocabulary at a basic level without the flexibility to apply it in academic or real-life contexts (Yu-fu, 2009). These consistent issues not only diminish learning motivation but also significantly hinder vocabulary learning effectiveness, thereby limiting the overall language proficiency of non-English major students across various Asian educational systems.

A notable systemic challenge in many Asian universities, including those in Vietnam, is the persistent neglect or reduced emphasis on vocabulary instruction within English language curricula. Although vocabulary is universally recognized as a fundamental element in language education, in practice, English programs in many Asian contexts tend to prioritize grammar rules and communicative fluency, often at the expense of comprehensive vocabulary development. This creates a discernible gap in students' ability to effectively utilize a broad range of vocabulary, which is particularly crucial for nuanced academic and professional communication. Shewangizaw et al. (2024) corroborate this, suggesting that despite a focus on grammar and communication skills in English curricula, vocabulary instruction is frequently overlooked, leading to difficulties in applying vocabulary in academic and professional contexts. Likewise, Megawati and Mandarani (2016) state that a lack of vocabulary mastery poses a

significant barrier to effective English communication for students, especially in academic and professional situations. This is further underscored by Caplan (2012), who emphasizes that mastering a robust vocabulary is critical for graduate students to succeed in academic writing, particularly in specialized and advanced academic fields. This crucial gap becomes even more pronounced at universities with lower entrance requirements, where students often arrive with pre-existing deficiencies in foundational skills, especially in vocabulary and grammar.

In Vietnam, the landscape of English vocabulary learning mirrors broader regional challenges, with specific complexities arising in private institutions like Thanh Do University. Although the Ministry of Education and Training sets high standards for English proficiency, the typical English entrance scores at private universities such as Thanh Do are often below the national average. This disparity means that students matriculating at these institutions frequently possess a weaker foundational grasp of English, which makes the acquisition of new vocabulary inherently more challenging for them.

Thanh Do University, a private institution with an application-oriented approach, integrates theory, practice, and soft skills in its training curriculum. The university's goal is to train high-quality personnel, with English proficiency being one of the graduation requirements. According to the university's regulations, non-English major students must achieve a B1 level in English, equivalent to 450 TOEIC points, 450 TOEFL PBT points, or an IELTS score of 4.5 (Thanh Do University, 2015). However, preliminary surveys conducted by the research team indicate that a significant proportion of students face difficulties with the entrance exam, with many requiring additional basic English courses despite having completed English programs in high school. Observations also show that common errors among students are related to vocabulary knowledge, indicating a deficiency in their ability to use vocabulary effectively. At Thanh Do University, English teaching primarily focuses on grammar and exam skills, with less emphasis on developing advanced vocabulary and practical communication, leading to deficiencies in applying vocabulary in academic and professional contexts.

Given Thanh Do University's specific and rigorous English proficiency requirements for graduation, coupled with the documented entry-level challenges its non-English major students face, there's a pressing need to investigate the current situation of vocabulary learning, which is the main objective of the current study. Specifically, the research aims to explore the common difficulties students encounter during vocabulary acquisition and then propose practical, evidence-based solutions designed to significantly improve their vocabulary learning outcomes and, ultimately, enhance their overall English proficiency.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Subjects: 347 first-year students enrolled in the “English Communication 1” course across five departments at Thanh Do University: Information Technology, Automotive Engineering Technology, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology, Economics and Law, and Pharmacy. This diverse sample provides a comprehensive view of vocabulary learning among non-English majors.

The research lasted for three months, from September to November 2024.

Research Design: This study employs a cross-sectional descriptive design.

The sample size for this study was determined using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 P(1-P)}{d^2}$$

As follows:

n: The sample size

$Z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2$: Confidence coefficient, where a 95% confidence level corresponds to a value of 1.96.

P=0.5 Proportion estimate (to maximize the sample size; p=0.5 was selected)

d: The allowable margin of error between the sample proportion and the true population proportion (d=0.1).

After substituting the values into the formula, the minimum sample size required to collect accurate and objective data is 96 students. This sample size ensures that the study results are accurate within the allowed margin of error.

Regarding the sampling method, the study employs a convenience sampling method. This method was chosen primarily due to its feasibility in accessing the research subjects and the time and resource limitations of the research team. Admittedly, the use of convenience sampling may affect the generalizability of the results to the entire population of non-English major students at other universities in Vietnam. Because the sample was chosen based on convenience rather than pure randomness, our study's results should be interpreted cautiously regarding their representativeness.

Research Tool and Data Collection Process: The study utilizes a survey method to collect data on the current situation and student awareness of English vocabulary learning among non-English majors. The questionnaire was developed by the research team based on a review of existing literature and consultations with experienced language instructors. The questionnaire includes multiple-choice questions focusing on four main areas: (1) Characteristics of the study subjects; (2) Students' awareness of the importance of learning English vocabulary; (3) The current situation of students' English vocabulary learning; (4) The challenges faced in learning English vocabulary. The questions were designed to collect quantitative data on study habits, motivation levels, and specific difficulties students encountered. The questionnaire was designed with a variety of response options and did not include an "Other" option or open-ended responses to ensure the consistency of the quantitative data.

Before conducting the official survey, a pilot questionnaire was sent to 20 students to evaluate the reliability and feasibility of the survey tool. The students who participated in the pilot were excluded from the official survey to ensure objectivity and the freshness of the data. The results of the pilot questionnaires allowed the research team to make necessary adjustments before finalizing the survey tool. The official survey was conducted online via Google Forms, allowing students to participate flexibly while ensuring the anonymity of data. To ensure accuracy and reliability, each response was carefully reviewed to exclude incomplete or inconsistent submissions. This rigorous process resulted in 347 valid responses, providing a comprehensive overview of the current situation of English vocabulary learning among first-year non-English major students at Thanh Do University.

Data Processing Method: The collected data were processed and analyzed using Excel 365 software. The study primarily uses descriptive statistics, calculating percentages to present the characteristics of the study subjects, their awareness, current situation, and challenges in learning vocabulary. No inferential statistics or confidence intervals were used in this analysis, as the main goal of the study was to describe the current situation.

Theoretical Framework: This study is grounded in the principles of Cognitive Learning Theory and Second Language Acquisition Theory. Cognitive Learning Theory helps explain how students process information, memorize, and apply vocabulary, particularly aspects related to learning strategies and long-term retention (Omer, 2016; Allanazarova, 2020). Meanwhile, Second Language Acquisition Theory provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of the factors affecting vocabulary learning in second language learners, including the role of the learning environment, motivation, and internal barriers (Komala & Hudiyono, 2025; Cervatiuc, 2009; Liang, 2021). By connecting the challenges in vocabulary learning (e.g., difficulties in retention, lack of motivation) to these theoretical frameworks, the study's questionnaire was systematically designed and the results explained in a more scientifically rigorous manner.

Research Ethics: This study adheres to ethical principles in scientific research. All participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation rights, including the option to withdraw from the survey at any time. Participants' consent was ensured by their voluntary completion of the online questionnaire. Data anonymity was maintained by not collecting any personally identifiable information from the students. All collected data were processed and stored securely, used exclusively for research purposes, and not shared with any third parties.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Characteristics of the Study Subjects

The study was conducted on a total of 347 first-year students aged between 18 and 21. Among them, 229 students were female, accounting for 66%, while 118 students were male, representing 34%.

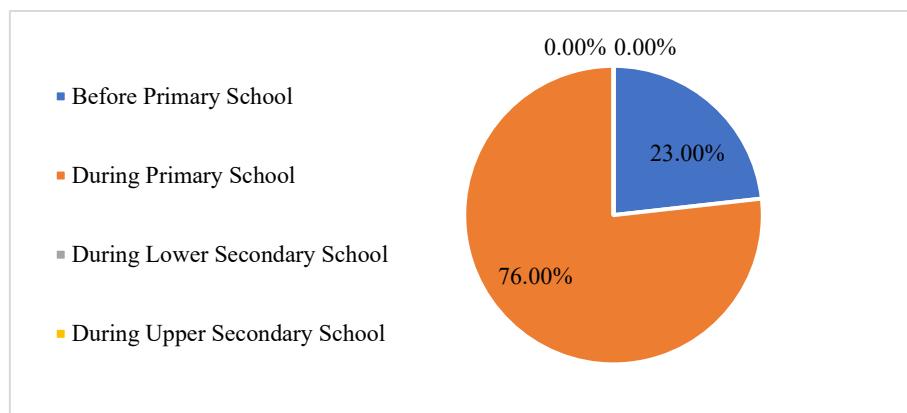


Figure 1. Time to start learning English

The findings indicate that most students (76%) began learning English in primary school, while 23% started before primary school. Notably, no students reported beginning their English studies in middle or high school (Figure 1). This reflects the current trend of introducing English education early in the Vietnamese education system.

4.1.2. Students' Awareness of the Importance of English Vocabulary Learning

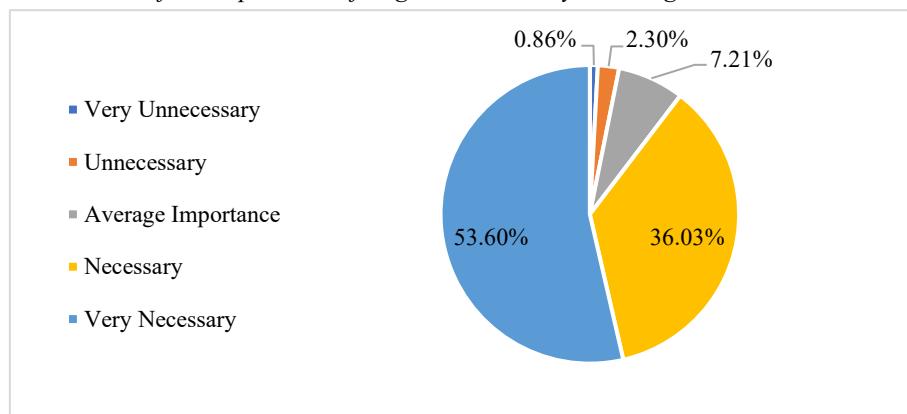


Figure 2. Students' Awareness of the Importance of English Vocabulary Learning

The findings reveal that the majority of students recognized the essential role of vocabulary learning in the English language acquisition process (Figure 2). Specifically, 89.63% of the respondents considered vocabulary learning necessary, with the highest percentage, 53.60%, stating it is “Very Necessary”, and 36.03% rating it as “Necessary”. Only a small proportion (3.16% in total) believed vocabulary learning is unnecessary, indicating that most students had an accurate understanding of vocabulary’s role in enhancing language skills.

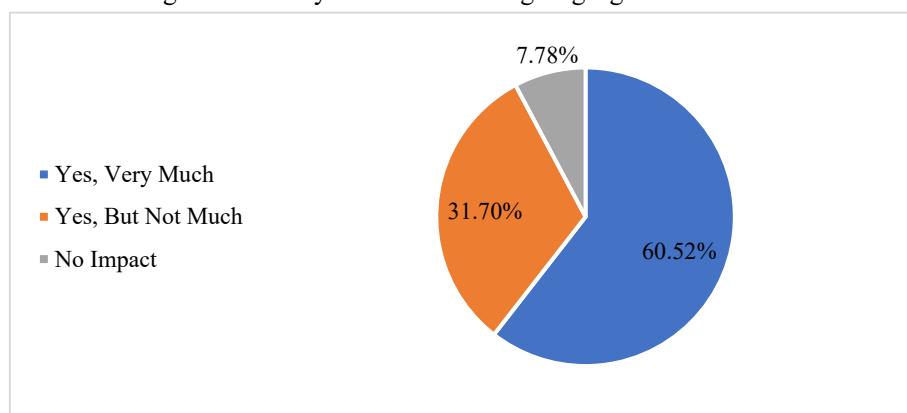


Figure 3. Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Vocabulary Learning on English Communication Skills

The findings indicate that the majority of students (60.52%) believed that vocabulary learning has a “very significant” impact on English communication skills, while 31.70% thought it “has an impact, but not a major one”. Only 7.78% believed that vocabulary “does not impact” communication (Figure 3). This suggests that the students generally viewed vocabulary as an important factor for effective communication, although some did not fully acknowledge its definite role.

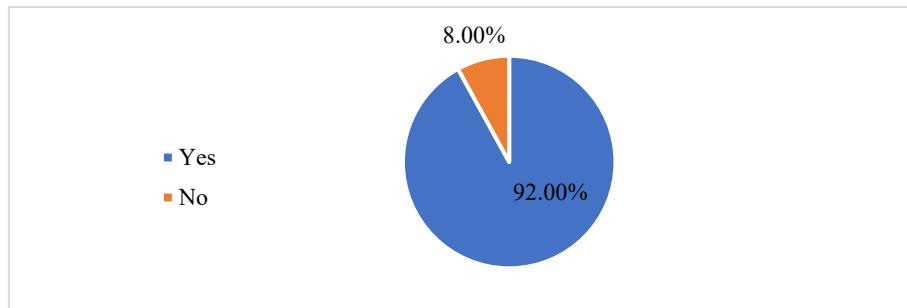


Figure 4. Students' Wishes to Improve Vocabulary Learning Skills

The findings indicate that 92% of the students wished to improve their vocabulary learning skills, reflecting a high level of awareness among students regarding the importance of enhancing vocabulary learning in the English learning process. This percentage indicates that most students were motivated and eager to develop this skill, with only a small fraction (8%) expressing no desire for improvement.

4.1.3. Current situation of English Vocabulary Learning Among Students

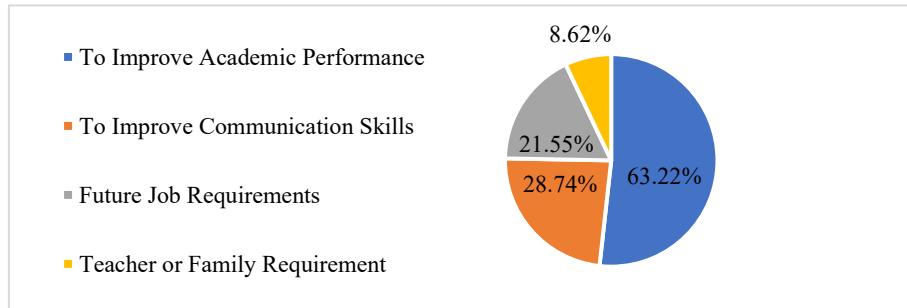


Figure 5. Students' Motivation for Learning English Vocabulary

The study findings clearly reflect students' motivations for learning English vocabulary, with the primary goal being to improve academic performance, accounting for the highest percentage at 63.22%. This indicates that most students were motivated to enhance their English vocabulary primarily to boost their academic results. Following this, 28.74% were driven by the desire to improve communication skills, indicating that a group of students also seeks to enhance their English communication abilities. Although 21.55% of students studied English to meet future job requirements, this percentage is relatively low compared to other motivating factors. Finally, only a small proportion (8.62%) of students learned English due to requirements from teachers or family, suggesting that this is not a principal motivating factor (Figure 5).

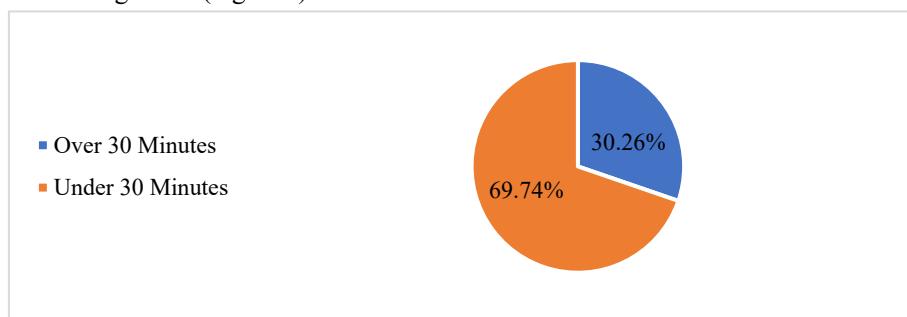


Figure 6. Average Duration of English Vocabulary Learning Among Students

The findings indicate that students' vocabulary learning was mainly conducted before exams, accounting for 68% of the total student population, while daily and weekly study occurred at significantly lower frequencies, at only around 13% and 10%, respectively. This reflects an irregular study habit, with a tendency to focus on study sessions closer to exam periods. Regarding duration of a study session, the results show that 69.74% of students spent less than 30 minutes each time they study vocabulary, indicating a lack of persistence and substantial time investment in vocabulary learning. Although study time were generally short, the focus on exam preparation is a notable factor in students' learning behaviors (Figure 6).

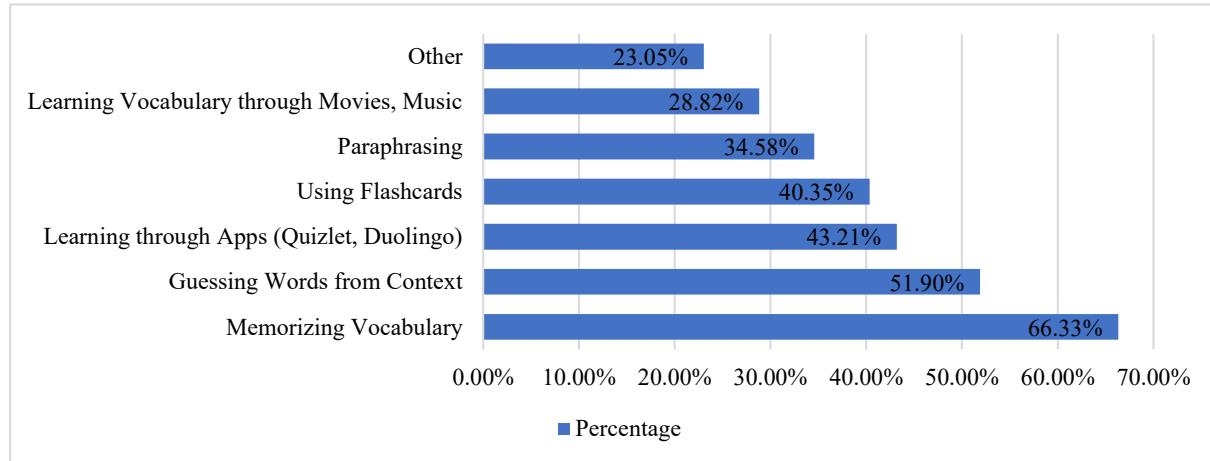


Figure 7. Students' Methods of Learning English Vocabulary

The findings indicate that rote memorization is the most popular method, reported by 66.33% of the students, indicating that traditional learning methods remain dominant. Other methods, such as guessing vocabulary through context and using applications (Quizlet, Duolingo), were also widely adopted, by 51.90% and 43.21%, respectively, reflecting a shift from traditional approaches to more up-to-date learning tools. However, methods like using flashcards (40.35%) and rephrasing (34.58%), although somewhat popular, were not as widely applied. Vocabulary learning through films, music (28.82%), and "Other" methods (23.05%) were less frequently chosen, indicating that students have not yet fully utilized diverse and engaging learning resources. Overall, students tend to use a variety of methods in vocabulary learning, but rote memorization remains predominant (Figure 7).

4.1.4. Challenges in English Vocabulary Learning

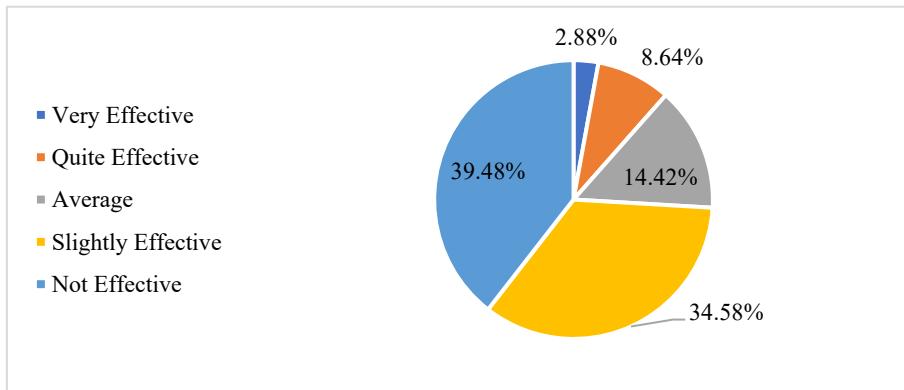


Figure 8. Students' Self-Evaluation of English Proficiency

The survey results on students' self-assessment of their English proficiency reveal a rather negative view of their abilities. Specifically, only 2.88% of the surveyed students believed they use English very effectively, and 8.64% rate their usage as fairly effective, indicating a very low percentage of students who considered themselves proficient in English. 4.42% believed they used English at an average level of effectiveness, reflecting a perceived limited language competence. Notably, a significant portion of students, 34.58% and 39.48%, respectively, rated their English usage as ineffective or very ineffective, accounting for 74.06% of the surveyed students. This suggests that

most students felt their English proficiency was not adequate or failed to meet their desired level of effectiveness (Figure 8).

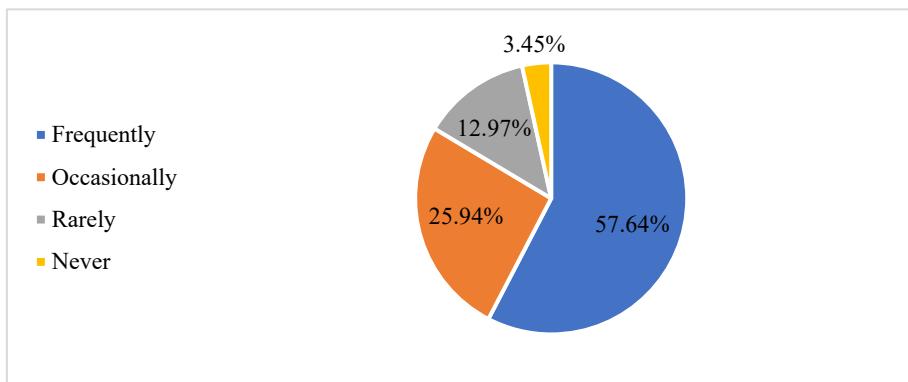


Figure 9. Students' Perceived Difficulty in Learning New Vocabulary

The findings reflect the level of difficulty students face when learning English vocabulary. A significant proportion (57.64%) of the students reported frequent challenges, indicating that the majority viewed vocabulary learning as a major obstacle in their English studies. Additionally, 25.94% admitted occasional difficulties, while 12.97% rarely experienced such challenges. Only 3.45% reported never having any difficulties with vocabulary learning, a very low percentage, suggesting that this issue was quite prevalent among the entire surveyed group (Figure 9).

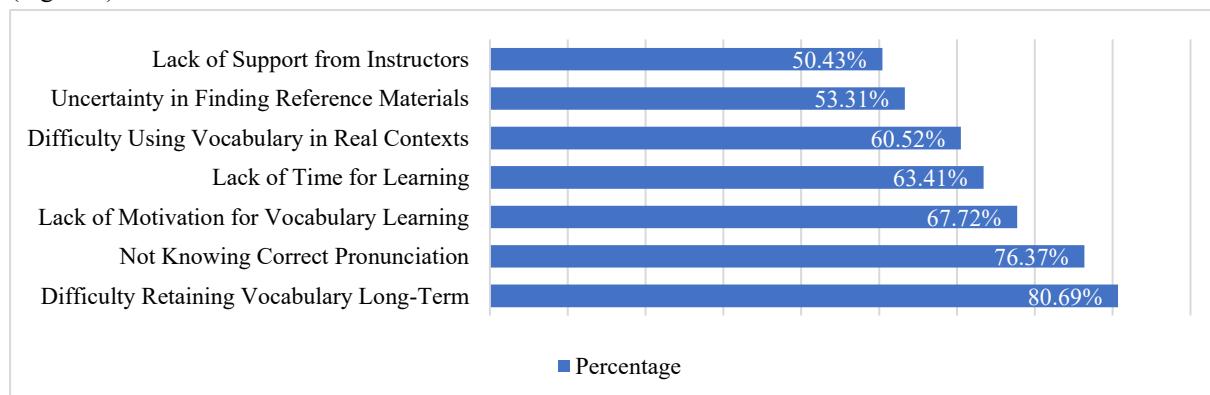


Figure 10. Challenges Faced by Students in Learning English Vocabulary

The research results reveal significant difficulties the students encountered in learning vocabulary. The most significant is the challenge of long-term vocabulary retention, claimed by 80.69% of the respondents, reflecting a common issue in retaining and applying vocabulary effectively. Additionally, 76.37% struggled with correct pronunciation, indicating a strong need to improve English pronunciation and intonation. Lack of motivation (67.72%) and limited time for studying (63.41%) were other significant factors affecting students' learning effectiveness, highlighting the need to address motivation and time management challenges (Figure 10).

Other notable issues include difficulties using vocabulary in real-world contexts (60.52%) and uncertainty in finding reference materials (53.31%), showing that students need more guidance on applying vocabulary in practical communication and finding learning resources. Lastly, a lack of support from instructors (50.43%) also stood out as a significant issue, underscoring the need for a supportive and encouraging learning environment for students.

4.2. Discussion

The research conducted on a group of 347 first-year students provides a clear picture of the characteristics, awareness, motivation, vocabulary learning habits, and challenges the students faced in learning English. Most students were exposed to English from primary school (76%), and no students reported starting to learn English in middle or high school, indicating an early foundation in English. However, this foundation seems insufficient to help them overcome the vocabulary learning challenges they face at the university level.

Regarding awareness, although 89.63% of the surveyed students recognized that learning vocabulary is “necessary” or “very necessary”, a small percentage (3.16%) still undervalued its role. This may stem from their prioritization of grammar or pronunciation over vocabulary, leading to a lack of comprehensive understanding of vocabulary’s crucial role in developing overall language skills. The majority of students recognized that vocabulary is an indispensable element in language learning, directly impacting their reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension abilities. A lack of sufficient vocabulary hinders their ability to understand and express ideas effectively. This finding aligns with previous studies by Alqahtani (2015) and Wang (2021), who emphasized that vocabulary is central to effective communication and language skill development (Alqahtani, 2015; Wang, 2021). Therefore, this study highlights that while students understand the importance of vocabulary, they still need additional support to solidify their foundation, enhance their comprehensive awareness of vocabulary’s essential role in communication, and be guided in overcoming the specific challenges of expanding and retaining vocabulary throughout their university course.

The research results show that most students were fully aware of the importance of vocabulary learning in English acquisition. Specifically, 89.63% believed that learning vocabulary is essential, with 53.60% of them considering it “very necessary”. However, despite this positive awareness, some students struggled with learning and retaining vocabulary, as reflected by the survey results, with 80.69% of students reporting difficulties in long-term vocabulary retention. This is particularly important when compared with previous studies, such as Saengpakdeejit (2014), which showed that Thai students also faced similar issues with retaining vocabulary over time (Saengpakdeejit, 2014).

Regarding vocabulary learning motivation, 92% of the students expressed a desire to improve their vocabulary, demonstrating a high level of awareness about the importance of vocabulary for their English proficiency. This motivation primarily stemmed from the desire to enhance academic performance (63.22%) and communication skills (28.74%). These findings align with Wang’s (2021) view that vocabulary supports the development of language skills to achieve learning goals (Wang, 2021). This indicates that most students studied English for academic reasons, aiming for high scores and personal goals, while a smaller group focused specifically on practical communication skills. However, the percentage of students learning English to meet future job requirements (21.55%) remains relatively low, possibly because first-year students often lack a clear career orientation. Only 8.62% of the students reported studying English due to teacher or family requirements, indicating that their motivation was mostly intrinsic rather than influenced by family or school. This intrinsic motivation is a positive sign, as it suggests that students understand the value of English for personal and academic development, although a shift toward career-oriented goals may emerge as they progress in their studies.

In terms of vocabulary learning habits, the students primarily studied vocabulary just before exams (68%), while the frequency of daily or weekly study is much lower. This reflects irregular study habits, with a focus on exam preparation rather than consistent, long-term vocabulary learning. The average duration of each study session was typically under 30 minutes (69.74%), reflecting a lack of persistence and insufficient time investment in vocabulary learning. The primary method used by students was still rote memorization (66.33%), a traditional approach still widely employed by many students. This suggests a lack of change in students’ learning methods compared to previous studies, such as Daskalovska (2018), who argued that modern methods like learning vocabulary through mobile apps (e.g., Quizlet, Duolingo) are becoming popular but have not been widely applied in vocabulary learning in Vietnam (Daskalovska, 2018). The predominance of rote memorization reduces flexibility and the ability to apply vocabulary in real-world situations. This finding aligns with Ju’s (2002) research at Tsinghua University, which showed that many students lack effective vocabulary learning methods (Ju, 2002). Li and Baldauf (2011) also pointed out that students in many Asian countries, including China, continue to rely on vocabulary learning primarily for test preparation, without long-term investment in reinforcing their vocabulary base (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Thus, students still largely depend on traditional learning methods and have yet to fully utilize more effective tools and approaches for vocabulary learning.

The challenges students face in learning English vocabulary are also noteworthy. As many as 80.69% of students identified long-term vocabulary retention as their biggest obstacle, highlighting a common problem in maintaining learned vocabulary. Additionally, factors such as pronunciation difficulties (76.37%), lack of motivation (67.72%), and limited study time (63.41%) were significant barriers. This is consistent with Saengpakdeejit’s (2014) research on vocabulary retention difficulties and the need for effective learning methods. Notably, 74.06% of students self-assessed that they do not use English effectively, reflecting the reality that, despite an early foundation in English,

students still struggled to apply the language in real-life communication and academic contexts. These findings suggest that the lack of effective learning methods and practical practice environments are key factors hindering the development of deep and sustainable vocabulary skills.

Our research findings align with many previous studies regarding the critical role of vocabulary in language learning. Wang (2021) emphasizes that vocabulary is fundamental to the development of language skills, and Alqahtani (2015) also points out that a lack of vocabulary hinders effective communication. However, our study also reveals a distinct difference in vocabulary learning habits among students at Thanh Do University compared to students in other countries. Specifically, the students here still used traditional learning methods like rote memorization, rather than employing digital learning tools and modern learning methods, as suggested by Tiansoodeenon et al. (2023) in their study.

One noteworthy point is that students at Thanh Do University show a low level of vocabulary usage in real-world communication (60.52%). This indicates a gap in the practical learning environment, something that Krashen (1981) highlights in his Second Language Acquisition Theory. According to this theory, learners need the opportunity to use the language in real communication environments to reinforce their learning (Krashen, 1981). The lack of interactive learning environments could be one of the factors making it difficult for students to use vocabulary effectively.

Based on the research findings on the characteristics and current state of English vocabulary learning among first-year students at Thanh Do University, the challenges and obstacles faced by students are identified. This issue is further exacerbated by the university's lower-than-average admission standards, suggesting that most students have weaker English foundations compared to students from other educational institutions. This weak foundation leads to consequences such as a lack of confidence in communication, difficulties in understanding lectures, and challenges in self-study. The data show that the students primarily focused on vocabulary learning right before exams (68%), with study sessions typically lasting under 30 minutes (69.74%), indicating a lack of long-term strategy and consistency in their learning habits. One reason for this could be the students' weak foundation, which leads to ineffective learning methods and the formation of "cramming" habits focused more on exam preparation than on using language in real contexts.

While the students generally had a positive awareness of the importance of vocabulary, acknowledging its essential role in communication, they lacked the skills to apply and maintain motivation for vocabulary learning. This may stem from a lack of confidence or insufficient understanding of effective learning techniques that meet their needs. With a weak English foundation, students are likely to feel pressured or discouraged when faced with complex vocabulary, as reflected by the high percentage of students struggling with long-term vocabulary retention (80.69%) and accurate pronunciation (76.37%). These are significant barriers for first-year students at Thanh Do University, hindering their ability to form consistent study habits and build strong language skills. These findings provide empirical evidence of the issues pointed out in previous studies such as Saengpakdee (2014) and Ju (2002) in other contexts, while also emphasizing the urgent need to develop intervention solutions suited to the characteristics of Vietnamese students (Ju, 2002; Saengpakdee, 2014).

4.3. Proposed Solutions for Improving Students' Vocabulary Learning Methods

Based on the research results, it is evident that although the students were aware of the importance of vocabulary learning and had a desire to improve, they still encountered numerous challenges in the learning process. Given that first-year students at Thanh Do University generally have an unsteady foundation in English, providing targeted support from faculty and the university is essential. Below are several solutions that can help students enhance their vocabulary learning methods and improve their overall English proficiency.

Diversifying Teaching Methods and Applying Technology: To make vocabulary learning more engaging and accessible, instructors can blend traditional teaching methods with modern technology. Apps like Quizlet, Duolingo, and Memrise can help students learn vocabulary through gamified activities, boosting motivation and enhancing memory retention. Additionally, encouraging students to learn vocabulary through entertainment media such as movies, music, and audiovisual materials allows them to engage with real-life contexts, making vocabulary learning more lively and memorable.

Organizing Supplementary Classes and Vocabulary Workshops: To provide suitable learning techniques for students with weaker foundations, the university and faculty can organize workshops and seminars to guide students

in effective vocabulary retention methods. Techniques like spaced repetition, mind mapping, and image association can support long-term memory retention. These sessions not only help students understand vocabulary learning better but also create an environment for students to discuss and share their learning experiences.

Creating a Rich Language Practice Environment: To encourage practical vocabulary usage, the university should support the formation of English clubs or organize regular meetups and discussions. In these settings, students can communicate, present, and participate in debates in English, allowing them to apply vocabulary in various situations. In the classroom, instructors can design interactive activities like group discussions, role-playing, and situational exercises, requiring students to use new words in communication, which naturally enhances their vocabulary skills.

Personalizing Learning and Providing Regular Feedback: Instructors should focus on the individual needs of each student and offer appropriate support. Regular feedback and personalized learning plans can help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, making them feel supported in their learning journey and motivating them to overcome challenges, especially those with weaker foundations and lower confidence.

Encouraging Positive Thinking and Confidence in Learning: To empower students to be more proactive in vocabulary learning, instructors and the university should foster a safe learning environment that encourages students to embrace mistakes and experiment with different learning methods. Recognizing efforts and progress, however small, can motivate students to maintain a daily vocabulary learning habit. Acknowledging achievements during the learning process also helps students build a positive mindset, sustaining long-term motivation.

Providing Quality and Diverse Learning Resources: To support effective self-study, the university should invest in a rich and reliable selection of vocabulary learning resources. These resources should include textbooks, digital materials, and online learning platforms suited to beginners. Instructors should also guide students on how to search for and utilize helpful resources, fostering greater independence in vocabulary learning. Additionally, vocabulary learning apps recommended by the university should be integrated into the curriculum, making modern, accessible, and effective learning tools readily available to students.

Building a Long-Term, Goal-Oriented Study Plan: Instructors should support students in creating specific vocabulary study plans, setting achievable, measurable goals. A long-term study plan helps students manage their time effectively, avoiding last-minute cramming before exams while promoting sustained retention. This approach also helps students form consistent vocabulary study habits, leading to steady language skill development.

Enhancing Continuous and Varied Assessments: To ensure consistent vocabulary learning, instructors should implement diverse and continuous assessment forms rather than focusing solely on final exams. Homework assignments, oral quizzes, and group projects not only help students regularly review vocabulary but also provide opportunities for continuous feedback from instructors. This allows students to adjust their learning methods promptly, thereby improving vocabulary retention and usage in practical contexts.

With these solutions, the university and instructors not only equip students with effective vocabulary learning tools and methods but also create a dynamic learning environment that encourages students to study and develop language skills sustainably. These recommendations aim to help students at Thanh Do University improve their English vocabulary learning abilities, overcome specific challenges, and achieve success in their studies.

Study Limitations: Although this study provides valuable insights into the current situation of vocabulary learning among first-year students at Thanh Do University, there are several limitations that should be noted. First, the use of the convenience sampling method has limited the ability to generalize the research findings to all non-English major students at other universities. While this method facilitates quick data collection, it may introduce some degree of bias due to the non-random selection of the sample. The sample primarily consists of students from a single university, meaning that the findings can only reflect the characteristics of this specific group and may not be representative of all students in the Vietnamese higher education context. Second, the study relies heavily on self-reported data from surveys. While this method is effective in gathering information about awareness and habits, it carries potential risks related to objectivity due to response bias, as participants may answer according to what they perceive as desirable or may inaccurately assess their own abilities. Third, the scope of the study is limited to a private university in Vietnam—Thanh Do University. This means that the findings and recommendations may not be fully applicable to other universities or the entire higher education system in Vietnam, especially those with different entry criteria or educational programs. Finally, this study is cross-sectional in nature, providing a snapshot of the situation at a specific point in time. As such, it cannot establish clear causal relationships between factors or track long-term

changes in students' vocabulary proficiency and learning habits. To gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding, future studies could consider applying longitudinal or experimental research methods.

5. CONCLUSION

English vocabulary learning among non-English major students at Thanh Do University, and Vietnamese universities in general, faces significant challenges. While first-year students recognize the importance of vocabulary in learning English, they struggle with retention and application, primarily due to a weak foundation in English and limited exposure outside the classroom. The study proposes several solutions, including diversifying learning methods, integrating technology and vocabulary apps, and organizing language practice activities both in and outside the classroom. These strategies aim to improve vocabulary retention, boost confidence, and enhance students' academic and language skills to meet the demands of the labor market and global integration. This research contributes to the existing literature on vocabulary learning challenges faced by non-English major students in Vietnam, and offers practical solutions to improve their English proficiency. It also serves as a valuable reference for educators and administrators in enhancing English teaching methods at universities.

Conflict of Interest: No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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