

ABSTRACT

This research is carried out to study the relationship between the students' lexical richness and their scores in Malaysian University English Test (MUET) composition written by 100 ESL students of Pusat Asasi Sains University of Malaya (PASUM). The use of lexis in writing was measured by Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP), a software developed by Laufer and Nation (1995) which is effective in assessing students' lexical knowledge by categorising the words used in their writing according to four frequency bands: Band 1, Band 2, Academic Word List (AWL) and Not in the Lists (NIL). The percentages of AWL and NIL were added up and compared against the holistic scores given by their lecturers. Further, 14 item open-ended questionnaires were distributed to teachers to get feedback on their composition assessment procedures and also to find out the importance of lexis in writing. At the same time, a 21 item close-ended questionnaires to gather the students' language background and perceptions on English language were distributed to the participants. Based on the results of this study, it was found that lexical richness plays an important role in determining the holistic scores of MUET written compositions.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara kekayaan leksikal pelajar dan markah mereka dalam Malaysian University English Test (MUET) yang dihasilkan oleh 100 ESL pelajar dari Pusat Asasi Sains Universiti Malaya (PASUM). Penggunaan lexis secara bertulis diukur oleh Frequency Profil Leksikal (LFP), sebuah perisian yang dibangunkan oleh Laufer dan Nation (1995). LFP berkesan dalam menilai pengetahuan leksikal pelajar dengan mengkategorikan perkataan yang digunakan dalam penulisan mereka mengikut empat jalur frekuensi; Band 1, Band 2, Word Senarai Akademik (AWL) dan Tiada dalam Senarai (NIL). Peratusan AWL dan NIL akan ditambah dan berbanding dengan skor holistik yang diberikan oleh pensyarah mereka. Untuk terus mengesahkan keputusan kajian ini, 14 soalan dalam borang soal selidik diedarkan kepada guru-guru untuk mendapatkan maklum balas mengenai prosedur penilaian komposisi mereka dan untuk mengetahui kepentingan penggunaan lexis di kalangan pelajar secara bertulis. Pelajar akan diberi 21 soalan dalam borang soal selidik untuk mengumpul latar belakang bahasa pelajar dan persepsi mereka terhadap Bahasa Inggeris. Keputusan mendedahkan korelasi positif di mana pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai peratusan yang lebih tinggi menggunakan perkataan frekuensi rendah cenderung untuk mempunyai skor yang lebih baik yang diberikan oleh guru.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their support throughout my education. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today.

I further need to thank my supervisor Ms. Teoh Mei Lin for her advice, guidance and moral support which contributes a great deal to make this research a success. Throughout the process in completing this study, I have lost my patience and direction, yet, her continuous support and motivation helps me get through the obstacles.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the help I received from Mr. Chin Ken Nam for providing me statistical guidance and motivation when I needed it the most.

This dissertation is dedicated to all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iii
Abstrak	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Appendices	xi
Abbreviations	xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction to the Study	1
	1.1.1 Malaysian University English Test (MUET)	2
1.2	Background of the Study	4
1.3	Statement of Problem	6
1.4	Research Objectives	8
1.5	Research Questions	8
1.6	Hypothesis	9
1.7	Scope of the Study	9
1.8	Overview of the Dissertation	10

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0	Introduction	11
2.1	Writing in an Academic Context	11
2.2	The Writing Processes	16
2.3	Impact of student's Social, Cultural and Language Backgrounds on Writing Proficiency	19
2.4	Lexical Richness in Writing	24
2.5	Lexical Knowledge	26
	2.5.1 Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary	30
	2.5.2 Active and Passive Vocabulary	32
2.6	Previous Studies on Lexical Richness	33
2.7	Lexical Frequency Profile/ Range Programme	36
2.8	Conceptual Framework	45
2.9	Summary	46

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	47
3.1	Research Design	47
3.2	Data Collection Procedure	48
	3.2.1 Pilot Study	48
	3.2.2 Actual Study	49
3.3	Instruments	52
	3.3.1 Written Compositions	52
	3.3.2 Questionnaires	53

3.4	Participants	54
3.5	Statistical Analyses	55

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0	Introduction	56
4.1	The Range Program	56
4.2	Total Types for Categories of Scores	57
4.2.1	The Lexical Richness of Students in PASUM	57
4.2.2	Categorisation of AWL and NIL Words into Parts of Speech	66
4.3	The Relationship between Lexical Richness and Holistic Scores	71
4.4	Teachers' Responses on Students Written Assessment	83
4.5	Evaluation of the Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP)	89

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.0	Introduction	93
5.1	Summary of Findings	93
5.2	Limitations of the Study	96
5.3	Pedagogical Implications	97
5.4	Suggestions for Future Research	98
5.5	Conclusion	98

REFERENCES	100
-------------------	------------

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1	What Is Involved In Knowing A Word?	29
Table 2	Example of Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) Analysis	42
Table 3	Lexical Frequency Profile of Students In The Range of Scores 20 - 29	58
Table 4	Lexical Frequency Profile of Students In The Range of Scores 30 - 39	60
Table 5	Lexical Frequency Profile of Students In The Range of Scores 40 - 49	62
Table 6	Lexical Frequency Profile of Students In The Range of Scores 50 - 59	63

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 The Average of Word Frequency Levels of Text in Category 20-29	59
Figure 2 The Average of Word Frequency Levels of Text in Category 30-39	61
Figure 3 The Average of Word Frequency Levels of Text in Category 40-49	63
Figure 4 The Average of Word Frequency Levels of Text in Category 50-59	64
Figure 5 A Comparison Between Categories of Scores and Word Frequency Levels	65
Figure 6 Total of AWL Words in Sample A, B, C and D	67
Figure 7 Total of NIL Words in Sample A, B, C and D	68
Figure 8 B2000 Profile of Category A	72
Figure 9 B2000 Profile of Category B	73
Figure 10 B2000 Profile of Category C	74
Figure 11 B2000 Profile of Category D	75
Figure 12 The Language Used by Matriculation Students with Family Members	77
Figure 13 The Language Used by Matriculation Students with Friends	78
Figure 14 The Language Used by Matriculation Students with Lecturers	80
Figure 15 The Frequency of Category A Students Reading English Newspapers, Magazines, and Books	81
Figure 16 The Frequency of Category B Students Reading English Newspapers, Magazines, and Books	82
Figure 17 Importance of Vocabulary Features of a Written Work	86

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix A Specifications of Writing Component in MUET	118
Appendix B MUET Band Description	119
Appendix C Academic Words List (AWL) Found In Data	120
Appendix D Not in The Lists (NIL) Found In Data	124
Appendix E Students Questionnaire	134
Appendix F Teachers Questionnaire	140
Appendix G A Sample of Student Written Essay (Category A)	143
Appendix H A Sample of Student Written Essay (Category B)	145
Appendix I A Sample of Student Written Essay (Category C)	149
Appendix J A Sample of Student Written Essay (Category D)	152
Appendix K A Sample of Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) Analysis	155

ABBREVIATIONS

AWL	Academic Words List
NIL	Not in the List
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NNS	Non-native speaker
NS	Native speaker
PASUM	<i>Pusat Asasi Sains Universiti Malaya</i>
LFP	Lexical Frequency Profile
UWL	University Words List
MWE	Multiword Expressions
ESL	English as a Second Language