



## Improving English Vocabulary for Students Through Listening to English News

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**Abstract**

The major aim of the present research is to investigate the effects of listening to English News on improving the vocabulary of English majors at a university in Vietnam. The researcher called for 60 students to volunteer to take part in the study, 30 of whom were assigned to the experimental group and the other half assigned to the control group. The two groups had to respond to the pre-questionnaire and take the pre-test on vocabulary. The experimental group then entered the experimental process and was asked to listen to English News every day to learn vocabulary. Besides, they did some exercises designed by the researcher related to the English News they heard. Data were collected within ten weeks via the pre-questionnaire, the pre-test, the post-test and the post-questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group advanced remarkably in terms of vocabulary compared to the control group. This demonstrated that listening to English News has a positive effect on English majors' vocabulary. The results of the post-questionnaire also reveal that the students' feedback on the practice of listening to English News is generally positive.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is a significant part of second or foreign language learning because without adequate vocabulary learners cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Vocabulary is also important for learning to read, write, listen and speak. Wilkins (1972) claimed that while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Nation (2001) added that if students lack vocabulary, their ability to comprehend or express themselves clearly is limited. Therefore, "vocabulary acquisition is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign." (Decarrico, 2001)

Being aware of the importance of vocabulary in learning languages, especially English, most of the Vietnamese students spend a lot of time learning it. However, a common

### **Improving English Vocabulary for Students through Listening to English News**

problem in learning vocabulary is that students have limited access to authentic materials. There are several slightly different definitions for the term “authentic materials” in the literature. For example, Krashen (1982) defined authentic materials as “the natural communication task”. Rogers (1988) described authentic materials as “appropriate and quality” in terms of goals, objectives, learners’ needs and interests and “natural” in terms of real life and meaningful communication. Jordon (1997) refers to authentic materials as “texts that are not written for language teaching purposes.” Kilikaya (2004) defined authentic materials as “exposure to real language and use in its community.” Researchers have also realized some of the advantages of using authentic materials in EFL classrooms and English news are among those materials. Authentic materials can provide learners with intensive exposure to real language, and they are related more closely to students’ needs and interests; as a result, students can be exposed to real-world intercultural discourse (Kilickaya, 2004; Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997).

It has been proven that lack of exposure to authentic materials such as English News has caused learners not to be familiar with significant aspects of vocabulary like pronunciation, collocation or part of speech. Therefore, students find it difficult to remember new words; some students even forget how to write and spell them. Therefore, in this research paper, the researcher chose the research topic “Improving English Vocabulary for Students through Listening to English News”. The researcher hopes that after listening to English News, learners can learn and develop their vocabulary. Learning vocabulary through listening is one of the effective methods for mastering the vocabulary of a language. Learners learn words as they hear from the context of sentences and based on linguistic context to figure out what they mean.

The research aims to help English majors at a university in Vietnam widen their vocabulary in various topics in an authentic manner through listening to English News. The aim of this study was investigated through the following research questions: (1). What is the current situation of learning vocabulary among English majors? and (2). To what extent has English majors’ vocabulary improved through listening to English News?

## **2. RATIONALE FOR USING ENGLISH NEWS IN IMPROVING ENGLISH VOCABULARY**

This section details the rationale for using English news to improve students’ vocabulary.

### **2.1. English News Provides the Authentic Context for Learning New Words**

Wallace (1992) defines authentic materials as real-life materials, which are originally not designed for academic purposes. Apart from official teaching materials, teachers can make good use of these authentic resources and gain huge benefits for teaching English.

Bloom (2000) stated that human beings can learn new words in the context they hear the words and based on that linguistic context they can work out what these new words mean. As a result, English news can be a good way for students to learn new vocabulary.

Pieces of English news are basically concerned about normal issues in our everyday life and students can easily access them via social media such as TV, radio, youtube, facebook and other websites. These pieces of news might have come from a local Vietnamese newspaper or an English-language television show. Therefore, when listening to English news, students are able to guess the meanings of the new English words from context and predict the main contents with this background knowledge.

## **2.2. English News Can Provide Not Only Audio But Also Visual Elements**

Several researchers have claimed that extra-linguistic information may significantly impact comprehension. Oxford (1990) declared that almost all language learners can associate new pieces of information with the previously-known concepts in their memory with the aid of meaningful visual images, which helps improve their learning efficiency. It has been demonstrated that students learn more quickly with visual clues than they would with words alone. Additionally, more brain regions are engaged when visual and verbal elements are combined, resulting in increased cognitive capacity.

In 1988, Snyder and Colon conducted a research project to examine the effect of audio-visual aids on enhancing language acquisition. For seven weeks, two groups of participants were taught under two different conditions. The control group was taught with the standard curriculum in which limited amounts of audio-visual aids were employed. Meanwhile, the curriculum for the experimental group included audio tapes, PowerPoint slides, bulletin boards, posters, pictures, and flash cards, among other audio-visual elements. Both groups were tested, and the group that received more audio-visual aids performed significantly better in terms of vocabulary retention.

## **2.3. English News Can Enhance Students' Motivation to Learn English**

According to Schmitt (2008) children need motivation to become active learners as without motivation, they cannot learn effectively. Zhang (2009) investigated the situation of learning foreign language vocabulary among 481 university students regarding their beliefs,

### **Improving English Vocabulary for Students through Listening to English News**

strategies and size of the vocabulary. The findings indicate that students preferred to learn vocabulary in real-world situations. He also said that teachers should help students choose and use learning strategies that work best for their learning styles and preferences.

#### **2.4. English News Can Provide Learners with a Rich Source of Comprehensible Input**

One of the most important theories of second language acquisition, the Input Hypothesis, as proposed by Krashen (1985), states that it is essential to provide learners with extra-linguistic information, context and knowledge of the world to help understand language that contains structures a bit beyond their current level of competence (i+1).

In 1985, Krashen proposed the Input Hypothesis, which is regarded as one of the most outstanding theories in the field of second language acquisition. The Input Hypothesis states that it is essential to provide learners with extra-linguistic information, context, and knowledge of the world in order to assist them in comprehending language that contains structures that are a little bit beyond their current level of competence (i+1).

The researcher would like to demonstrate that English news can satisfy the above-mentioned requirements. By watching or listening to English news, learners can use their background knowledge, the images and the sounds to understand the messages and learn the target language's vocabulary. The researchers believe that speaking is a process of expressing ideas in the spoken language, and it is one of the most challenging aspects of language because it requires basic skills such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. Widdowson (1985) also said that vocabulary, frequency of practice, functional grammar, relevant subjects, motivation, self-confidence, and situation are all factors that influence students' speaking ability.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

An experiment was implemented to examine the impacts of listening to English News on learners' vocabulary. The experiment was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The researcher required the experimental group to listen to English News for about 30 minutes every evening and note down some words/phrases which they hear. Then, the researcher also designed some more exercises to help the experimental group remember all the noted vocabulary and how to use these words in different contexts. The researcher created a class on Google Classroom and asked the experimental group to submit the file of English News, the words that they could hear after they listened and all the completed exercises so that the researcher could control their learning process and progress.

The experimental method was the Pretest-Posttest design, which was widely used for the purpose of comparing groups and measuring changes resulting from the experimental treatment. The researcher constructed the basic pretest-posttest experimental design in which the experimental group learned vocabulary through listening to English News, and then compared their progress to that of the control group who were taught vocabulary without listening to English News. Moreover, the pre-test and post-test were supervised by an expert to ensure the accuracy of knowledge.

### **3.2. Participants of the Study**

The participants of this research were sixty students who majored in English language teaching at a university in Vietnam. These students' ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. They were first-year students (freshmen) and their level of English proficiency was supposed to be intermediate. These sixty English-majored students were required to complete the pretest, posttest and questionnaires, which helped the researcher of the study to gather sufficient and relevant data to answer the research questions.

The sixty English-majored students were divided into 2 groups: the experimental group with 30 students and the control group with 30 students. The underlying rationale for choosing first-year English majors was that the researcher would like to help them recognize the significance of vocabulary, thence improving the other English skills such as reading and writing. Indeed, vocabulary had considerable impacts on communicating with other people. Thus, the researcher would like to provide students with valuable materials to assist them in enhancing their vocabulary.

The experimental group was composed of 30 students who volunteered to join the experiment. They were exposed to a new method of learning vocabulary. The researcher set up a class on Google Classroom and required the students to join the class. The researcher then required the experimental group to listen to English News for about 30 minutes three to four times a week and note down the words/phrases which they heard. Subsequently, the researcher designed some more exercises to help the experimental group remember all the noted words/phrases and how to use these words/phrases in different contexts. The researcher also got the students from the experimental group to submit the file of English News, the words/phrases that they could hear after they listened and all the completed exercises which the researcher designed so that the researcher could monitor and facilitate their learning process and progress. On the other hand, the control group also had 30 members. They only took the pretest, posttest and responded to the pre-questionnaire.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedure**

#### **The pre-test**

The pre-test covered almost all aspects of vocabulary, namely Spelling, Pronunciation, Meaning, Collocation and Usage. The pre-test comprised 20 multiple choices questions and 5 questions which require the students to make sentences. The students had to finish the test in 30 minutes. There were 5 parts in the pre-test which were related to the aspects of vocabulary: meaning, pronunciation, spelling, collocations and usage. Each part consisted of 5 questions. The first part was to examine the students' pronunciation, they had to choose A, B, C or D to indicate the word whose underlined part differs from the other three in pronunciation in each question. Part 2 checked some meaning of some words and phrases; students also chose A, B, C or D to indicate the word(s) closest or opposite in meaning to the underlined word(s) in each question. The third part was about spelling; students had to choose the underlined part that needs correction in each question. Based on part 4, the researcher could know about students' mastery of English collocations. In the last part, students had to make one sentence with each of the words which the researcher gave them.

#### **The pre-experiment questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the current situation of learning the vocabulary of English majors at a university in Vietnam. The researcher administered the pre-experiment questionnaire to both the control group and the experimental group at the beginning of the experimental time. The researcher reminded students to respond to the questions truthfully for about 10 minutes. When the time was up, the researcher made sure that all of the questions had been answered because this is an important stage for the researcher to get information efficiently and precisely.

#### **The experiment**

An experiment was implemented to examine the impacts of listening to English News on learners' vocabulary. The experiment was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019. The researcher required the experimental group to listen to English News for about 30 minutes three to four times a week and note down some words which they heard. Then, the researcher also designed some more exercises to help the experimental group remember all the noted words/phrases and how to use these words in different contexts. The researcher created an account on Google Classroom and asked the experimental group to submit the file of English News, the words/phrases that they could

hear after they listen and all the exercises which the researcher designed so that the researcher could control their learning process and progress.

The researcher emphasized that while listening to English News, the students must pay attention to not only the meaning but also other aspects of the new words such as pronunciation, spelling, usage and collocation.

#### **The post-test**

After the experimental time, the researcher required both groups to do a post-test for 30 minutes so as to evaluate how much their progress was and found out the differences between the two the group's results. The post-test also included 5 parts, each part consisted of 5 questions. The post-test covered almost all aspects of vocabulary included in the pre-test: meaning, pronunciation, spelling, collocations and usage. The difficulty level of the pre-test and the post-test was the same, but the questions were different.

#### **The post-questionnaire**

The aim of the post-questionnaire was to investigate students' opinions and attitudes about learning vocabulary through listening to English News and their suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of using English News to improve vocabulary. The researcher administered the post-experiment questionnaire to only the experimental group at the end of the experimental time.

## **4. RESEARCH RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. The current situation of learning vocabulary among English majors**

The pre-questionnaire for students in two groups which was delivered before the experiment consisted of ten questions. Question 1 aimed at investigating students' vocabulary. Question 2 was about difficulties students encounter when they learn vocabulary. Question 3 was about aspects of vocabulary students learned. Question 4 was designed to help the researcher know the ways students learn vocabulary. Question 5 was about the benefits listening to English News brings to students when they learn vocabulary. Question 6 was designed to investigate the frequency of listening to English News. Question 7 aimed at studying the sources students usually listen to. Question 8 and question 9 were designed to explore students' views about the necessity of listening to English News when students learn vocabulary. The last question was about difficulties students encounter when they listen to English News.



### **Improving English Vocabulary for Students through Listening to English News**

*Regarding the difficulties students encounter in learning vocabulary, 60% of the participants stated that they did not remember the meaning of the new words; 20% indicated that they do not know how to use vocabulary in some situations; 5% of the students indicated that they encounter other difficulties.*

*Regarding the aspects of vocabulary students learn, 60% of the students indicated that they can remember the meaning of words. A quarter of the participants showed that when learning vocabulary, they can remember their use. Only 15% of the participants said that they can pronounce the words correctly. Most of the students can remember the spelling of the words. Other aspects of the words were also noted by 5 of the students. The aspect that these students added is collocation.*

*Concerning the materials students use to improve their vocabulary, 60% of the participants said that they learn vocabulary on the Internet. Using dictionaries to learn vocabulary is the choice of 30% of the students. 25% of the participants indicated that they learn vocabulary by reading books. 10% of the students learn in other ways.*

*About the benefits of listening to English News to learn vocabulary, 60% of the participants indicated that listening to English News may help students remember not only the meaning of words but also their pronunciation. Half of the participants said that by listening to English News, they can know more about how to use vocabulary in many situations. 25% of the students revealed that they may learn more collocations while listening to English News.*

*Regarding the frequency of listening to English News, 15% of the students said that they often listen to English News. There are 60% of the participants indicated that they sometimes listen to English News. Only 25% of the students rarely listen to English News.*

*Regarding the sources of English News that students listen to, 25% of the students use VOA News when they listen to English. Only 10% of the participants listen to CNN News. 40% of the participants listen to other sources. In addition, most of the participants (90%) indicated that listening to English News is necessary for learning vocabulary. 60% of the participants admitted that they have ever listened to English News to learn vocabulary. 40% of the students have never listened to English News to learn vocabulary.*

*Regarding students' difficulties when listening to English News, most of the students (55%) have difficulty with the speed of English News and listening to the specific information. There are 25% of the students who said that they cannot remember some words*



that they noted. Only 15% of the participants indicated that they lack the cultural background knowledge to understand the exact meaning of the words in context.

*In summary*, from the data attained from the questionnaire, it is obvious that students encounter many difficulties in learning vocabulary. Besides, using listening to English to learn vocabulary is not applied by most of first-year English majors. Some students listened to English news with low frequency and did not have chances to practice the vocabulary they noted; therefore, their vocabulary was not improved. Therefore, it is necessary for students to adopt a useful method to help them improve their vocabulary.

#### 4.2. Impact of listening to English News on English majors' vocabulary

To measure the impact of listening to English News on English majors' vocabulary, the vocabulary pre-test and post-test were administered to the students of the experimental and control groups. Before the experiment, the pre-test was employed. The post-test was conducted after the experiment had been completed. The results of the pre-test help inform the researcher about the problems of learners in learning vocabulary and their strengths. After having collected the results of the post-test, the researcher compared them with the results of the pre-test of the two groups in order to evaluate the difference between before and after implementing the treatment. The average scores of the experimental and control group in the pre-test and post-test are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Average scores of the experimental and control group in the vocabulary pre-test and post-test**

		N	Mean	SD	t	p
Experimental group	Pre-test scores	30	59,06	14,26	-7,067	0,00
	Post-test scores	30	70,26	9,26		
Control group	Pre-test scores	30	63,55	7,09	-4,964	0,00
	Post-test scores	30	68,45	16,36		

This table shows that the mean score of the experimental group in the pre-test was 59,06 out of 100 points with a standard deviation of 7.067. The mean score of the experimental group in the post-test was 70,26 points with a standard deviation of 9,26. It can also be seen that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental

### **Improving English Vocabulary for Students through Listening to English News**

group's pre- and post-test scores as  $t=-7,067$  and  $p<0.05$ . As a result, it is reasonable to infer that the experimental group's pre- and post-test vocabulary test scores differ significantly.

Meanwhile, for the control group, the mean score of the pre-test was 63,55 points with a standard deviation of 7.09 and the mean score of the post-test was 68,45 points with a standard deviation of 16,36. It is evident that the control group's difference in pre- and post-test scores was also statistically significant with  $t=-7,067$  and  $p<0.05$ . As a result, it is reasonable to infer that the control group's pre- and post-test vocabulary test scores differ significantly.

Table 1 also reveals that there is a significant difference of 11,2 points between the average pre-test scores and post-test scores of the participants in the experimental group meanwhile, there is a less significant gap of only 4,9 points between the pre-test score and post-test score of the 30 students in the control group. This demonstrates that although the experiment was implemented in a short time of ten weeks, the vocabulary of the students in the experimental group is improved much more considerably than that of the control group.

### **4.3. Students' Feedback on Using English News to Improve Vocabulary**

A post-experiment questionnaire was given to only the experimental group at the end of the experimental time. The aim of the post-questionnaire was to investigate students' opinions and attitudes about learning vocabulary through listening to English News and their suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of using English News to improve vocabulary. In the design of the questions, the researcher combined two types of items: open-ended questions and close-ended questions. The researcher applied open-ended questions to exploit more information from the respondents.

*Regarding interest in listening to English News to enhance their vocabulary*, most of the students (87%) indicated that they found English News an interesting source for them to improve their vocabulary.

*Regarding the benefits of English News*, most of the students (77%) stated that listening to English News brings them many benefits in the process of learning vocabulary. Half of the students stated that they could learn almost all aspects of vocabulary and have more chances to learn vocabulary through many topics. Therefore, their vocabulary was improved significantly. Students also know how to use some words in certain situations; furthermore, they feel comfortable when listening to English News to learn vocabulary.

In addition, more than half of the students agreed that they will always or usually continue listening to English News to improve their vocabulary; 43% of the students indicated that sometimes they use listening to English News to improve their vocabulary. In particular, no students chose the category of “Never”.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Main Findings**

Based on the results of the pre-questionnaire and the vocabulary pre-test it can be seen that students encounter many difficulties in learning vocabulary. Besides, although English News is available on a lot of social media, many students rarely listen to English News to learn vocabulary. In addition, the results of the vocabulary pre-test and post-test show that there is a significant difference in the pre and post-test scores of the experimental group. Meanwhile, for the control group, the difference between the mean pre-test score and the mean post-test score was much smaller (11,2 as compared to 4,9). This demonstrates that although the experiment was implemented in a short time of ten weeks, the vocabulary of the students in the experimental group improved much more considerably than that of the control group. Finally, by analyzing students’ post-questionnaire responses, the researcher found out that listening to English News could raise students’ interest and impulse to learn vocabulary.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher would like to make several recommendations. First, curriculum designers should put in mind that the use of authentic materials such as English News is of great advantage to the language learning process. So, there should be a syllabus containing such materials. Second, learners should expose themselves to a great amount of English news listening or watching. Third, teachers should encourage students to listen to English News more frequently. Fourth, teachers should train their students how to use listening strategies effectively as they are very important for the listening comprehension process. Fifth, teachers should employ an approach of teaching vocabulary learning strategies techniques in alignment with the listening process. Finally, there are many sources of English News for students to listen to, but not all the sources are suitable for their level. Therefore, teachers should help students select suitable sources. Some sources of English News which can be suggested include BBC News, CNN News, VOA News, Euronews and Eurosport.

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