

## VOCABULARY PROFILLING OF EFL STUDENTS DESCRIPTIVE AND RECOUNT TEXTS, A FOCUS ON WORD LEVELS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

*This study examines the vocabulary profile of EFL students' written artifacts, produced as part of writing assignments during the early stage of their academic writing courses. Fourteen texts written by seven students were analyzed using the Lextutor Vocabulary Profiler. The analysis focused on frequency bands including K1, K2, the Academic Word List (AWL), and Off-list words. The findings revealed that both genres were heavily dominated by K1 words, with recount texts showing a higher percentage (79.26%) than descriptive texts (74.16%). Descriptive texts exhibited greater lexical variation, reflected in their higher proportions of AWL words (5.76% vs. 1.86%) and Off-list items (13.71% vs. 10.00%). Meanwhile, recount texts contained more K2 words (8.89%) than descriptive ones (6.37%). These findings suggest that recount texts tend to rely on basic narrative vocabulary, while descriptive texts invite more diverse lexical choices, including academic and culturally specific terms. The overall underuse of academic vocabulary across both genres points to the need for explicit, genre-sensitive vocabulary instruction. Pedagogically, the results support integrating vocabulary profiling into EFL writing instruction to guide differentiated teaching, foster morphological awareness, and promote genre-appropriate lexical development.*

**Keywords:** *academic vocabulary; descriptive text; EFL writing; recount text; text genres; vocabulary profile*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in language proficiency. It affects both the quality of language learners' oral and written text comprehension (receptive skill) and production (productive skill) (Nation, 2001; Schmidt, 2000). The knowledge of receptive vocabulary possessed by language learners enables them to recognize a word: its form, meaning, synonyms, and first language translation; whereas the productive one allows them to produce words (Zhong, 2016) and use the words correctly in a range of contexts when speaking and writing (Teng & Zhang, 2024). Successful EFL (English as a foreign language) learners need to acquire sufficient vocabulary. By knowing at least 8000-9000 word families, EFL students will be able to understand and produce academic texts effectively (Nation, 2013). Among them, there are core vocabulary for general language use (the first 2,000-3,000 high-frequency families) and the Academic Word List (AWL) (comprising 570-word families), which are fundamental for academic texts (Coxhead, 2000).

The notion that vocabulary knowledge is the most essential aspect in the quality of writing products is also evidenced by numerous previous studies, which suggests that EFL students' vocabulary use is associated with their writing performance. For instance, Yang et al (2023) found that lexical richness aspects (lexical density, sophistication, variation, and fluency) correlated with EFL expository writing quality. In Denmark's national school-leaving examination, Stæhr's (2008) research demonstrated that EFL secondary school students' receptive vocabulary knowledge was significantly correlated with their reading and writing skills. In addition, Dabbagh & Enayat's (2017) study of 67 Iranian undergraduate students found that vocabulary depth correlates with the descriptive writing performance of second language learners. Moreover, a study by Zhong (2016) of 620 EFL learners in two secondary schools in China showed that both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge contribute to controlling the production of sentence writing. On the other hand, in Indonesia, research by Fajrina et al (2021) of 135 undergraduate students of the English Education department of two universities indicated that vocabulary size has a positive correlation with writing quality.

However, much of the existing works on EFL students' writing performance primarily emphasized long texts (i.e., essays) produced by advanced students. They paid limited attention to shorter and personal texts across different types, such as descriptive and recount texts, by students of lower proficiency level. Moreover, there is a paucity of studies that specifically examine and compare the frequency of different word types (K1, K2, and AWL) in the two text genres. Therefore, this study seeks to address the gap by analyzing the vocabulary profiles of EFL learners' descriptive and recount texts by freshmen EFL students majoring in English education. Specifically, it aims to answer the questions, *How is the vocabulary profile (K1, K2, AWL, and Off-list) in both descriptive and recount texts of the first semester of EFL students?* The result of this research is expected to enrich the insight of teachers and curriculum developers for better teaching genre-based writing and vocabulary development.

### **Descriptive and recount texts**

Descriptive and Recount text genres are commonly taught to EFL students – particularly those who major in English – at the university level in the early stages of writing courses. The students are believed to be familiar with the text types since they were in Junior High School and continued to Senior High School. It is because, in Indonesia, the genre-based language teaching was officially mandated in the curriculum KTSP (Curriculum 2006), Curriculum 2013, and the curriculum Merdeka (2022 to present) (See Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Descriptive text is recommended to learn by junior and senior high school students in Indonesian formal schools. In this text genre, the text writers aim to describe an object, a person, a place, or events so that the readers can visualize it. The text generally uses present tense, infinitive verbs, relational verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. This text type is constructed by two parts: identification (introduction to person or

things to be described) and description (detailed characteristics such as appearance, qualities, etc.) (Derewianka, 1990; Emilia, 2011; Mulyani & Muman, 2024).

Meanwhile, in a recount text, the writer informs the readers about past experiences or events chronologically. The organization of the text contains orientation, events, and reorientation, respectively. In the orientation part, the writer mentions the background information of the events, including the actors or the doers, the time, and the place. On the other hand, in the events part, the writer talks about the events that happened in chronological sequence. Finally, reorientation is a closing statement, the writer comments, or conclusion. The language features used in this text genre comprise past tense, action verbs, time connectors, and personal pronouns (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Derewianka & Jones, 2012).

### Word Levels

Word items in written texts are often categorized into three main levels: K1, K2, and AWL (Academic Word List). K1 words are words that are commonly spoken or written in everyday basic communication. They are included in the first 1,000 most frequent word families in English and identified in the corpus-based frequency study. A word family includes a root/base word and its inflections and derivation words. For example, the word *help*. Its family comprises *help*, *helped*, *helped*, *helping*, *helpless*, *helpful*, and *unhelpful*. These words are generally used by several parties: native speakers in daily life dialogues, EFL/ESL students at beginner and intermediate levels, simple text writers, and speakers in casual or informal conversation. Generally, general written texts contain about 75-80% words from K1 word families (Nation, 2001; Coxhead, 2000).

The second 1,000 most frequent English word families are called K2 words. Based on corpus research, this word group appears in various general texts but with less frequency than the K1 words. For instance, the words *emotion*, *career*, and *license*. This word group is commonly used by intermediate to advanced EFL students, found in news articles, fiction, and non-fiction (Nation, 2001; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014). In other words, these words are used by EFL students with growing vocabulary knowledge and communication skills (Laufer, 1998). The use of these K2 words by EFL students tends to be associated with better quality writing compared to the K1 words (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

The highest-level word group is the *Academic* words. It consists of 570-word families that frequently exist in academic texts regardless of the subject area, including humanities, sciences, business, education, etc. (Coxhead, 2000; Hyland & Tse, 2007). Such words are like *assume*, *maintain*, and *theory*. The knowledge of this word group is commonly possessed by university-level students, needed for understanding and writing academic texts (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014).

In addition, there is also a word group named *off-list* words. These word groups comprise the words that do not belong to K1, K2, or AWL (Academic Word List) (Laufer & Nation, 1995), as well as proper nouns, specific domain words, abbreviations, misspelled or nonstandard words, and local culture terms or

loan words. For instance, *Bandung*, *photosynthesis*, UNESCO, *\*environmen*, and *lebaran* (Cobb, 2002; Dilenschneider & Horness, 2023; Kirkpatrick, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

In the present study, I analyze descriptive and recount texts written by EFL students majoring in English Language education in the first semester of a private university. To ensure ethical research practices, I obtained permission from the course lecturer before collecting data, and I anonymized students' identities.

The data were 14 written texts produced by the students enrolled in a writing course. The texts consist of 7 descriptive and 7 recount texts, which were collected as a part of a classroom assignment. The texts were treated as a learning artifact of a classroom writing assignment during the semester. To get a balanced number of each genre, I used a purposive sampling method.

To analyze the lexical composition of the texts, the Lextutor vocabulary profile software was used. Data analysis using the Lextutor vocabulary profile tool is shown in the figures below.



Figure 1. Lextutor Vocabulary Profiler

The analysis process adopted Nations' (2001, 2013) vocabulary framework, which classifies words into frequency-based levels: the first 1000 (K1), the second 1000 (K2), and off-list words. In addition, the Academic Word List (AWL) developed by Coxhead (2000) was used to identify academic words that appeared in the texts. The analysis was conducted using the Lextutor Vocabulary Profiler, which categorizes words according to these established frequency lists.

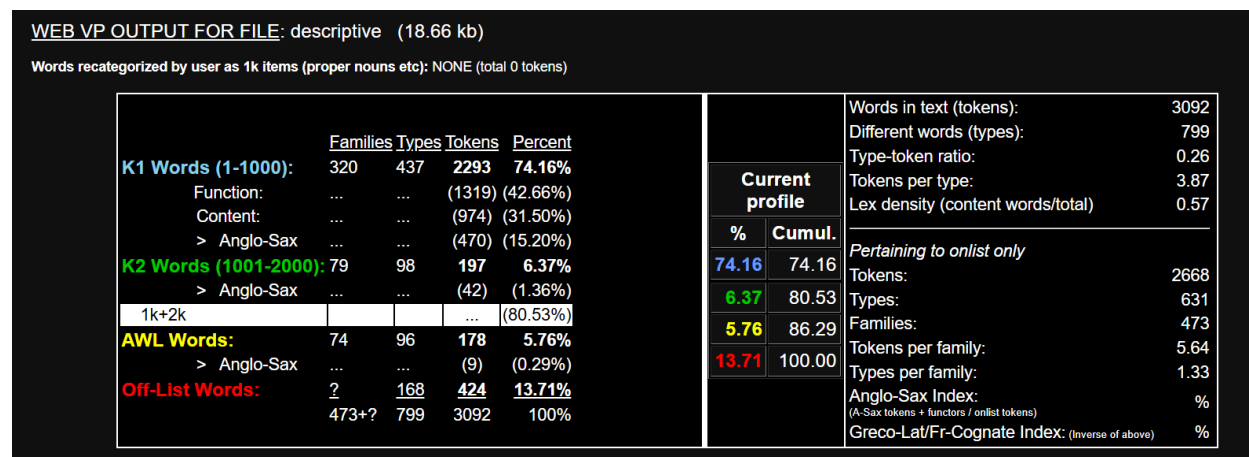


Figure 2. Sample of general results of analysis by Lextutor

Figure 2 shows a general result of the analysis by the tool that provides a lexical or vocabulary breakdown of the vocabulary used in the input text. It includes words in texts (tokens), different words (types), type-token ratio, token per type, and lexical density.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the vocabulary profile of students' writing based on four vocabulary categories: K1, K2, AWL, and Off-list words. The data are taken from fourteen texts of EFL students' learning artifacts during enrollment in a writing course at the early stage of their study at the university.

	Descriptive Text				Recount text			
	<u>Families</u>	<u>Types</u>	<u>Tokens</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Families</u>	<u>Types</u>	<u>Tokens</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b>K1 Words (1-1000):</b>	320	437	2293	74.16%	362	478	2434	79.26%
<b>K2 Words (1001-2000):</b>	79	98	197	6.37%	136	158	273	8.89%
<b>AWL Words:</b>	74	96	178	5.76%	34	37	57	1.86%
<b>Off-List Words:</b>	?	168	424	13.71%	?	196	307	10.00%
	473+?	799	3092	100%	532+?	869	3071	100%

Table 1. The comparison of the vocabulary profile of descriptive and recount texts

The K1 and K2 words

The data in the table.1 shows the vocabulary profile of the descriptive and recount texts written by the students. The total number of tokens (words) was 3092. Based on the data, I found that in the descriptive texts, 74.16% of the total tokens (words) belong to the K1 group, followed by the K2 group, which contains 6.37% and Academic words, 5.76%, respectively. The last, Off-list words accounted for 13.71% of the total words. In other words, the K1 words dominate (74.16%) all words in the descriptive text. It indicates that the students rely heavily on the most basic words, the highest frequency vocabulary. Meanwhile, in the recount text, the dominance of K1 words – the highest frequency vocabulary – is even more obvious. K1 words appeared in 79.26 % of the total words (tokens), and K2 words comprised 8.89%. in contrast, academic words only 1.86% made up the text, and Off-list words comprised 10%.

The observed coverage of approximately 80.53% K1 + K2 words in descriptive texts—and 88.15% in recount texts—is consistent with recent corpus-based research in EFL contexts. Simbuka & Naguleng (2024) report similar findings in Indonesian textbook materials, indicating 84.14 % coverage of high-frequency vocabulary, which aligns with learners' developmental stage. Furthermore, corpus studies in various EFL learning environments suggest that mastery of about 3,000 words families (including K1 & K2) is required to achieve around 95% coverage in academic text. This implies that the first 2000 words typically account for about 80-90% of learner vocabulary use (Brooks et al., 2025). These finding highlights that the heavy reliance on high-frequency words is a developmentally appropriate among first-semester EFL learners, which reflects the common standard of lexical development. In addition, Huyn Le and Ha (2023), the knowledge of the first 2000 general word families is strongly associated with comprehension (reading) and production (writing) in early EFL learners.

Students' heavy reliance on K1 and K2 words indicates they are at the beginner proficiency level, they possess limited lexical variety in their written expression. To address this issue and elevate the students' vocabulary development, several pedagogical actions can be implemented during the course. One good strategy is that teachers or lecturers encourage students to practice word-substitution and expansion by replacing overused words with synonyms or enriching phrases for a richer variety. This is in line with Schmitt and Schmitt (2020), who highlight that helping language learners to go beyond the high-frequency vocabulary to increase word diversity is valuable. Another valuable strategy is collocation training, where the teachers or lecturers guide the students to notice and observe how more advanced synonyms and collocations function in authentic contexts. This strategy is in accordance with Nation's (2013) work, which emphasizes that teaching various expressions for language fluency and vocabulary knowledge is important. Finally, to help EFL students apply more accurate and varied vocabulary during the writing process, scaffolded writing tasks can be practiced in a writing course – e.g., giving guided writing prompts and providing various contexts (Willis & Willis, 2007).

*The Academic words*

In terms of AWL (Academic Words List), it is found that in descriptive texts, there are 74 word families, 96 types, and 178 tokens. They form 5.76% of the total vocabulary in this text genre. On the other hand, recount texts include 34-word families, 37 types, and 57 tokens. AWL tokens (words) make up only 1.87% of the total vocabulary in the recount texts.

The analysis reveals that academic vocabulary is more prevalent in descriptive texts than in recount texts. This suggests that the students use more formal and academic words in the descriptive genre. This aligns with genre-based theory and prior empirical research. For example, Halliday (2004) stated that linguistic choices are affected by register: field (what is happening), tenor (who is involved), and mode (channel of communication). And, recount text involves familiar fields and concrete action that leads to the use of general vocabulary (K1 & K2 words), and therefore has limited need to use academic words. In contrast, descriptive text. In contrast, expository genres (e.g. description, explanation, or argument) involve more abstraction, elaboration, and technicality, which necessitates greater use of academic vocabulary (Martin & Rose, 2008). This is also supported by Coxhead (2000), who states that academic words are more frequently used in academic and expository texts than in narratives or personal writing.

EFL students' limited use of academic vocabulary – particularly in recount texts – is a burden that constrains their ability to produce English writing with appropriate academic nuance. This issue indicates the need for explicit teaching in academic writing, including increasing genre awareness. Therefore, explicit teaching of academic words within reading and writing tasks is a necessity. Coxhead (2000) maintained that academic word families should be taught intentionally and explicitly across different disciplines to enrich language students' academic vocabulary knowledge. The study by Wang et al (2022) showed that teaching academic vocabulary using appropriate method can help disabilities students improve as much as those without disabilities in learning academic vocabulary. Additionally, morphological awareness training—such as teaching affixes and word families—can significantly support learners in recognizing and using academic forms. Research by Nagy, Anderson, and Herman (1987), as well as Bauer and Nation (1993), shows that understanding derivational morphology enhances vocabulary acquisition and transfer.

*The Off-list words*

In terms of off-list words, the vocabulary profiler tool reveals that descriptive texts contain 13.71% (424 tokens) whereas recount texts contain only 10.0% (307 tokens). This suggests that descriptive texts produced by EFL students may include words beyond the scope of the K1, K2, and AWL. It could consist of more specialized, less common, or locally or contextually specific vocabulary, proper nouns, or spelling errors. This is supported by Nation (2000) that off-list words are typically proper nouns, technical terms, derivations, errors, or low-frequency items. Meanwhile, Laufer & Nation (1995) may beginner's text often

includes a sizable chunk of off-list words, especially if editing and dictionary support are minimal. Furthermore, more off-list words may indicate inaccurate lexical choices, misspellings, or overuse of native terms.

Off-list words – including local cultural terms, proper nouns, newly coined words (neologisms), and lexical errors become both opportunities and challenges in student writing. The use of these words requires careful evaluation to distinguish between intentional, creative expression and unintentional misuse or inaccuracy. Therefore, teaching EFL students to raise register awareness and audience sensitivity will help them understand when to use off-list words (e.g., cultural references) in academic and descriptive texts. Hyland (2009) underscores the importance of teaching students to consider audience or readers and contexts, including in academic writing, to ensure language appropriateness and clarity. Further, students will find it easier to recognize and correct misspelled words when they get feedback from both peers and teachers. It is proven by empirical evidence, such as Ferris (2011), who found that emphasized feedback on words or lexical errors significantly improves the learners' writing clarity and accuracy; and Reynolds and Teng (2021) shows that the combination of direct and indirect comments from writing teachers to Taiwanese secondary school students supports them in noticing and correcting inappropriate or misused off-list terms. Additionally, incorporating morphological awareness activities – such as exploring affixes and word families – can help students recognize more appropriate lexical alternatives to off-list forms (see Jiang & Kuo, 2019). For teaching recount text, activities can include past tense verbs (e.g., sorting regular and irregular past tense verbs from a story and matching them with the base form). On the other hand, for, teaching descriptive texts, the teaching process may focus on evaluative (e.g., breaking down or building up evaluative words such as beautiful, hopeless, dangerous; word formation tree, and matching root words with adjective forms), and sensory words (e.g. converting verbs into adjectives or noun to create sensory description like glow-glowing, fragrance-fragrant)

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study reveals that vocabulary use in EFL students' writing relates closely to text genre and proficiency level. Heavy reliance on the 2.000 high-frequency words is still attributed to EFL learners at the early stage of their study and a minimum academic writing performance. This issue raises pedagogical needs for the writing classroom: scaffolding vocabulary development systematically and genre awareness. Pedagogically, the findings of this study support the the integration of genre-based writing tasks and explicit vocabulary teaching, particularly the academic words within the EFL curriculum. Teachers can use vocabulary profiling tools not only to assess students' lexical knowledge but also to inform more responsive and differentiated teaching. Ultimately, teaching vocabulary and writing is not only increasing word count and proficiency level, but also empowering students to use language in diverse communicative contexts.



Pedagogically, these findings support the integration of genre-based writing tasks and explicit vocabulary instruction—especially of academic and mid-frequency words—within the EFL curriculum. Teachers can use vocabulary profiling tools not only to assess students' lexical range but also to inform more responsive and differentiated teaching. Ultimately, expanding students' lexical repertoire is not just about increasing word count or frequency level, but about empowering them to use language purposefully, appropriately, and confidently across diverse communicative contexts.

Finally, this study is based on a relatively small corpus of 14 texts; the limited sample constrains the generalizability of the findings, but it allows for an in-depth analysis. Future studies with larger samples are recommended to validate and explore genre-based vocabulary development among EFL learners more comprehensively.

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