The Role of The English Vocabulary Level Test For ESP Learners: Assessing Students' Readiness

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Article Info	ABSTRAK
	This research aims to determine the student's readiness to learn English at the tertiary level through vocabulary tests. This research was carried out due to the low English skills at the tertiary level for English-specific purposes in accounting. Students find it difficult to use general English, which is possibly because of a lack of vocabulary. Furthermore, the researchers attempted to investigate this assumption further by using an online vocabulary test through the Oxford online vocabulary test with quantitative data analysis techniques. There were 233 tertiary students from 8 different classes who participated in this research, taking English for Accounting and English for Business as one of the courses in the first semester at Universitas Negeri Makassar. The tools for collecting data were the Oxford online vocabulary test, survey questionnaires, and observation. Quantitative data were used to collect data through questionnaires. The findings showed that the majority of respondents (38%) at the tertiary level were at A1 or the elementary English vocabulary level, which is inadequate to learn English for ESP at the university level. This research also found that the majority of respondents (50%) have learned English since elementary school which contradicts the vocabulary level test result. It can be concluded that students' English vocabulary levels are insufficient for academic demands at the university level, particularly in preparing for ESP courses. Moreover, students' vocabulary development shows inconsistent with the extended period of English learning since elementary with the increase of English vocabulary proficiency. However, integrating learning methods such as social media, online apps, website, games, movies, songs, and novels can be an effective approach for enhancing English learning in the classroom *This is an open access under the CC-BY-SA licence*

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1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a pivotal role in language education, focusing on equipping learners with the specific linguistic and communicative skills required in academic or professional contexts. Unlike General English, ESP emphasizes targeted instruction tailored to the learners' specific goals, such as mastering technical terminology or effective communication in professional settings (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010; Hyland, 2022). In this regard, assessing students' readiness becomes essential to ensure they are adequately prepared to engage with the specialized demands of ESP courses.

Readiness in the context of ESP refers to learners' preparedness to successfully navigate the linguistic and cognitive challenges of domain-specific language learning. One of the critical components of readiness is vocabulary proficiency, which serves as the foundation for developing the four core language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Research has consistently shown that learners with a robust vocabulary base are better equipped to comprehend domain-specific texts, participate in discussions, and produce coherent written or spoken output (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2010). However, many ESP learners face challenges due to insufficient vocabulary, particularly when dealing with technical or specialized terminology. "Low scores are problematic for language use and success in general, but they cause particular problems when it comes to the vocabulary needed in English in tertiary contexts" (Coxhead, 2021).

Vocabulary proficiency is a fundamental component of language learning, serving as the foundation for effective communication and comprehension. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), vocabulary plays an even more critical role, as it directly influences learners' ability to engage with specific content (Paltridge & Starfield, 2016). However, it is important to differentiate between general vocabulary and ESP-specific vocabulary to fully understand their impact on students' readiness.

There are slight differences between general vocabulary and ESP-specific vocabulary. According to (Nation, 2013), general vocabulary comprises high-frequency words and expressions commonly used in various contexts and daily conversations. ESP, on the other hand, consist of terms and expressions specific field like accounting, health, or engineering. In this context, general English serves as the foundational language for comprehending general concepts and discussion, irrespective of the specific subject matter, including ESP.

Assessing students' general vocabulary is a crucial first step in preparing them for learning ESP, particularly in fields like accounting. General vocabulary provides the linguistic scaffolding necessary for acquiring and understanding specialized terms. Without sufficient general vocabulary knowledge, learners may struggle to grasp the contextual usage of ESP-specific terms, as these often build on general vocabulary concepts (Fengyu, 2023). For example, the term *balance sheet* in accounting assumes an understanding of the general meanings of *balance* and *sheet*, along with their specific interpretation in the financial domain.

This study aims to evaluate the role of vocabulary assessments in determining the students' readiness for university-level English courses designed for specific purposes, particularly in accounting. It also examines how factors such as the respondents' age, the age at which they began learning English, and their out-of-school learning experiences influence their preparedness for these specialized courses. This research intends to provide insights that could inform curriculum development and instructional strategies in higher education. The findings could ultimately enhance the effectiveness of ESP teaching and better equip students for the demands of their future careers.

Ultimately, the findings of this study could pave the way for more tailored and effective teaching approaches in ESP, ensuring that accounting students and others in similar fields are better equipped to meet the challenges of their academic and professional journeys.

2. Research Methodology

This research used a quantitative method. Where the data was obtained from 233 students from Universitas Negeri Makassar, two study programs, an accounting degree, and a diploma in accounting. Oxford Online English is used to measure the English vocabulary level of students. There were 40 questions in this vocabulary test to measure students' levels from elementary (A1) to advanced (C1) in a random order. At the end of the test, the students received scores and levels of vocabulary. Students filled out the questionnaire, which is one of the questions to determine the individual score. Below is the range of the levels of English vocabulary in students' tests.

Table 1. The range of the levels of English vocabulary in students' tests

Score Range		Level	English Level
1	15	A1	Elementary
16	24	A2	Pre-Intermediate
25	30	B1	Intermediate
31	39	B2	Upper-Intermediate

Score Range	Level	English Level
40	C1	Advance

(Oxford online vocabulary test)

There are 233 students fill the questionnaire but only 222 students are accepted from the process of data reduction. The steps used in the process of analysing this research are data reduction, data presentation, data withdrawal and data collection (Sugiyono, 2020). From the table above, respondents' correct answers will determine the English vocabulary level by using this formula (Sudijono, 2018).

$$P = \frac{\sum F}{N} x100\%$$

Information:

P   : Answer percentage figures

$\sum F$: The number of frequencies of respondents' answers

N   : Number of respondents

The data collection techniques used in this research are questionnaires, observation, and documentation. The questionnaire used is a Google Form with six core questions, such as personal identity, age, Oxford Online Vocabulary score, when you started learning English at school, and whether you learn English other than at school. Please explain in more detail if the answer is "yes" or "maybe". The validation of the questionnaire has been checked by two experts to ensure that it measures what it is intended to, is clear, concise, and understandable for the target respondents, and avoids ambiguity or bias in the questions.

3. Findings and Discussion

This research started by examining at students' English vocabulary skills by answering 40 questions from https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/english-level-test/vocabulary. The purpose of this research is to assess the readiness of students in ESP learning in English courses for students in accounting majors in the first semester. After students answer all the questions on the website, there will be a final result with the number of correct answers and the level of English. The data on all students' abilities after being filtered are shown in the data below. Of the 233 students who filled out the questionnaire, only 222 could be accepted as data for the respondents' results for the Oxford online vocabulary test.

Table 2. The calculation of Oxford Online vocabulary scores from 222 students

Score Range		Frekwensi	Level	English Level
1	15	84	A1	Elementary
16	24	76	A2	Pre-Intermediate
25	30	30	B1	Intermediate
31	39	32	B2	Upper-Intermediate
	40	0	C1	Advance
TOTAL		222		

The following table presents the results of calculating the Oxford Online Vocabulary scores from 222 students, based on Table 2 above. Out of 40 correct questions, the range of values from 1 to 15 is correct; the elementary level has the highest frequency, with 84 students at level A1. As for the advanced level, none of the total number of respondents 222 reached this level. The English level of the entire number of respondents can be seen in the bar chart below.
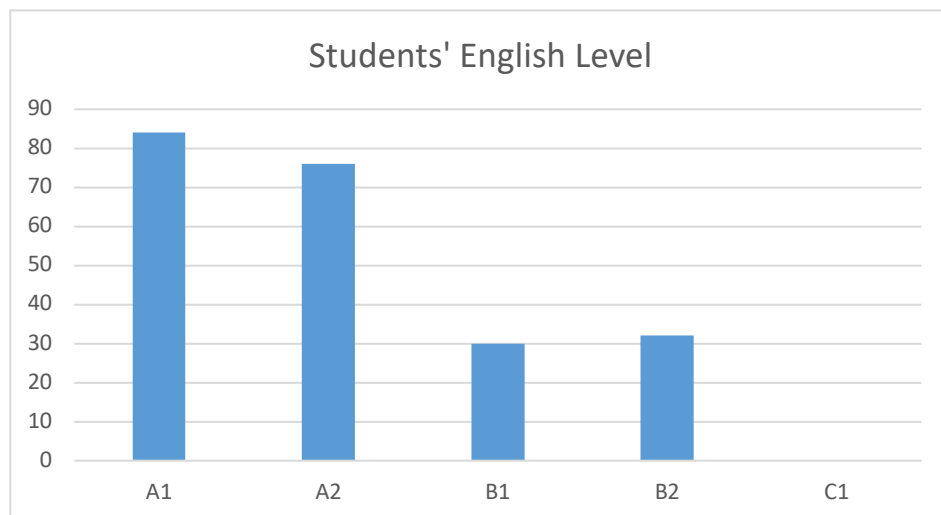
Figure 2: The English levels of all respondents

While in the level percentage shown in the pie chart down below, is 38% of the total students at the elementary level. Then followed by 34 % in the level pre-intermediate, both intermediate and upper intermediate in the same percentage which is 14% and no respondent reached the advanced level from the total of respondents.
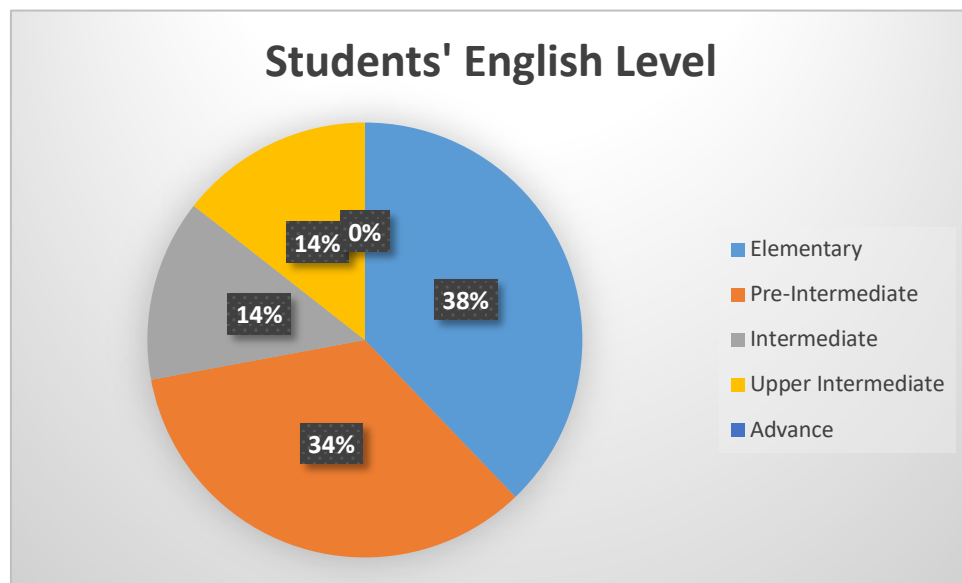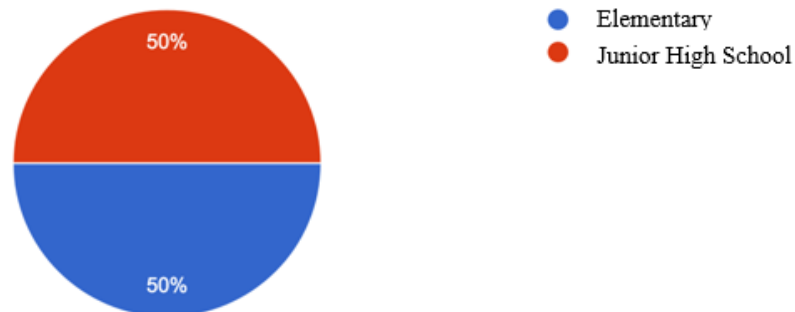
Figure 3: The Students' English Level

The diagram above shows that most respondents are at level A1 or equivalent to elementary level which demonstrates basic vocabulary knowledge such as common words and phrases. The level corresponds to understanding and using simple phrases and expressions related to every day. In line with the Common European Framework of References for Language (CEFR) categorized language learners for university students, especially those fields that require technical language use like accounting, A B1 or B2 level proficiency in general English is typically seen as the minimum threshold to navigate academic materials and specialized ESP content effectively (Council of Europe, 2001).
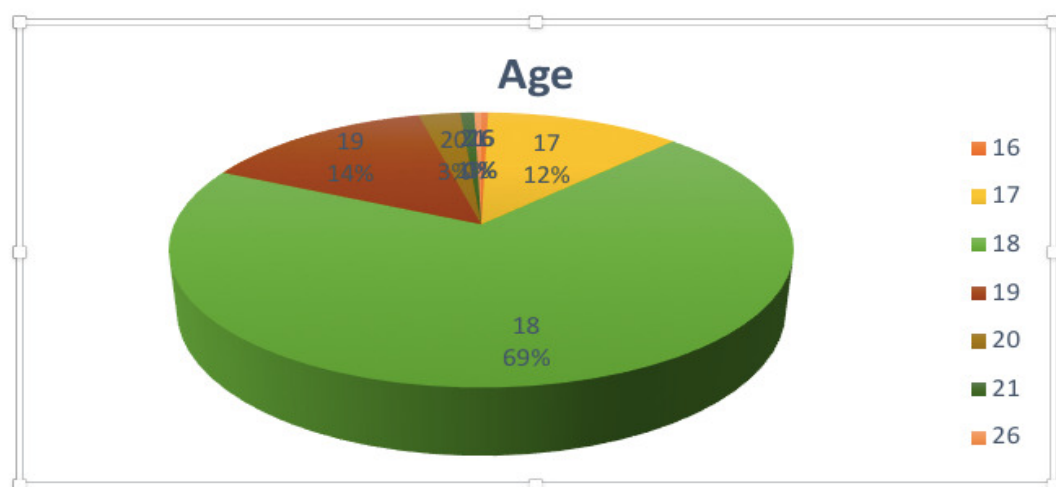
The data indicates that the proportion of respondents at levels B1 and B2 is identical, with each level representing 14% of the total respondents. Consequently, according to the aforementioned theory., the overall readiness of students to learn English for a Specific Purpose (ESP)., as outlined by. the Council of Europe is merely 28% of the total respondents. However, (Nation, 2013) contends that students require at least a B2 (Upper Intermediate) level for effective academic reading, particularly in specialized disciplines such as accounting. At this proficiency level, learners are expected to comprehend texts, including research articles, textbooks, and other resources that contain discipline-specific language, encompassing terminology associated with financial reporting, tax regulations, and business transactions. Additionally, Students should also be capable of engaging in discussions, debates, and presentations in their field of study, hereby rendering B2 proficiency a crucial benchmark for ESP readiness.

When did you start learning English at school?
232 answers

Figure 4: The students' respondents of starting English Learning

Furthermore, the fact about most University students in Elementary English level vocabulary, an interesting fact from the pie chart above is that 50% of respondents started learning English in elementary while the other half showed since junior high school. This is contradictory to the previous data showing 38% of respondents at the elementary level of English vocabulary skills. While most of the respondents started English learning at an early age, as a compulsory subject at school in elementary school. This is in line with the data of the age of the respondents which is shown below. The pie chart shows that 69% of students are 18 years old, and which majority of students in Indonesia started elementary in 7 years old. It means that many students have been learning English for 12 years and a significant portion still demonstrates elementary-level English vocabulary proficiency (A1 level, as identified earlier)


Figure 5: Age Distribution of Respondents

The data presented above indicates that early learning students do not guarantee proficiency in English. This finding aligns with the assertion made by (Munoz, 2006), who posits that early English language acquisition may lead to challenges in achieving proficiency due to inadequate meaningful and sustained engagement.

Furthermore, the pie chart illustrates the presence of extracurricular activities or informal learning environments in addition to formal schooling. The data reveals that a majority of respondents 49.6%, reported solely English language skills within a school context, with no involvement in extracurricular activities. In contrast, only 28% of respondents indicated that they had engaged in English language learning beyond the school setting. Additionally, approximately 22.4%, of respond expressed uncertainty regarding whether their English learning occurred exclusively in school or other contexts. This evidence clearly suggests that students had limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which consequently undermines their motivation for consistent engagement with the target language outside formal education aspect that is essential for vocabulary development and overall proficiency.
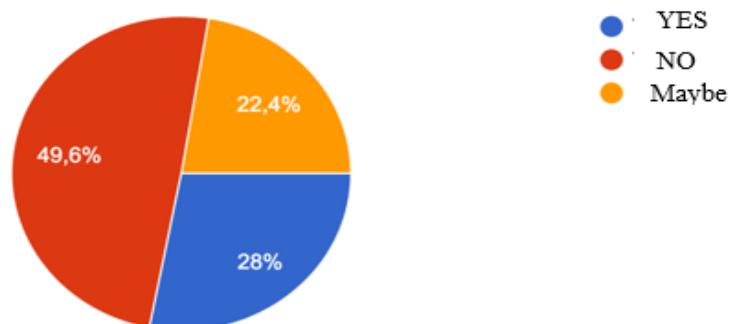
Figure 6: Distribution of English Learning outside of school

However, positive feedback was from students who were willing to exposure learning outside the classroom. They stated that they acquire English in variety of method, primarily through social media platform like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Others learn from several online applications or websites such as Duolingo, and online games or learn from movies, songs, and English novels. Other respondents also mentioned that they had joined offline or online courses before. (Deviv, Munir, Arifuddin, Nurlaeli, & Illea, 2024) revealed a similar trend in students' preference for social media learning platform like YouTube and WhatsApp. It indicated that the use of social media or online applications cannot neglected as a learning tool to support learning English in the classroom. (Fauzi, Basikin, Duisenbayeva, &

Kassymova, 2020) proposed the use of Project-Based Learning as a teaching method, particularly for the Indonesian context. Despite the low level of students' readiness, we can use all these strategies to enhance the meaningfulness, effectiveness, and efficiency of ESP learning in the classroom.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the results of the aforementioned research discussion, it can be concluded that the readiness of university-level students, as indicated by vocabulary test scores, is at a very low level. The majority of respondents demonstrated an elementary proficiency, which is significantly inadequate for English language learning at the university level, particularly in the context of English for Specific Purpose (ESP). It is noteworthy that some students began their English language education at the elementary level or during junior high school. Consequently, it can be inferred that an early start in learning English does not necessarily ensure a high level of vocabulary proficiency among students. The findings of these studies are intended to serve as a foundation for the implementation of English language instruction within the accounting department and to facilitate the development of solutions for improving English learning in the future.

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