

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACADEMIC WORD LIST AND ITS IMPLICATION TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING QUALITY

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Received: 27th September 2022/Revised: 20th January 2023/Accepted: 31st January 2023

How to Cite: Syarofi, A., & Shobaha, S. (2023). The implementation of academic word list and its implication to the improvement of EFL students' academic writing quality. *Lingua Cultura*, 17(1), 17-23.
<https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v17i1.9022>

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to investigate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness in implementing an academic word list and its implication for improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' writing quality. Academic Word List (AWL) played an important role in expanding the student's academic vocabulary knowledge. Basically, an academic word list was considered one of the effective ways to reduce students' errors in writing. The research was proposed to review several related preceding studies, and the data found were described qualitatively. From the research conducted, it is found that fifteen out of eighteen studies (83,33%) confirm that the implementation of academic word lists provides a significant contribution to the improvement of students' writing quality. On the other hand, three out of eighteen studies (16,67%) confirm that implementing an academic word list does not significantly contribute to improving students' academic word knowledge. This may be attributable to the given portion of the academic word list utilized as supplementary material, and it can only be used outside the classroom without any teacher guidance. The result shows that implementing the academic word list may act as an effective/ineffective tool for improving students' academic writing quality based on the portion and utilization of this tool in the course.

Keywords: academic word list, academic writing, English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the four essential skills that are important to be mastered by students. Ridha (2012) has emphasized that writing is a complex process that requires a combination of linguistic synthesis and cognitive analysis. Besides, in order to become a skilful writer, students must have considerable time and effort to enhance their ability in writing. Moreover, Allen and Corder (1974) have also affirmed that writing is considered the most difficult ability among the four major skills in learning a language. Furthermore, in written compositions, there is no possibility to negotiate the meanings as it happens in conversation

(Allen & Corder, 1974). Therefore, if the EFL students do not master the writing skill well, there will be some problems that occur when they produce some written compositions. Many scholars found that the EFL students produced various errors in their writing, such as grammatical or lexical errors (Fridayanthi, 2017; Zewitra & Fauziah, 2020; Mubarok & Budiono, 2022; Yusuf, Mustafa, & Iqbal, 2021; Samingan, 2020; Tambunan et al., 2022). Due to the significant impact of the students' errors in their writing, some scholars have proposed several ways to reduce the production of the students' errors in their writing, such as the use of a monolingual dictionary, peer feedback, and an academic word list.

Related to the several solutions that some scholars propose in reducing the students' errors in their writing, more specifically, the research aims at reviewing the implementation of an academic word list that acts as the main tool in reducing the students' errors. The research also focuses on scrutinizing the implication of the academic word list to improve EFL students' academic writing quality.

In relation to the background of the research, the researchers are curious to formulate two research questions, which are worth valued to be scrutinized further. The research aims to answer the questions of whether the implementation of academic word lists through the face-to-face classroom is really effective in improving the quality of students' academic writing or not, and whether the implementation of academic word lists through mobile-assisted language learning is really effective in improving the quality of students' academic writing or not through the research questions that are formulated in the present research. Hence, the researchers set the research objectives to investigate the effectiveness of academic word list implementation through the face-to-face classroom in improving the quality of students' academic writing and to investigate the effectiveness of academic word list implementation through mobile-assisted language learning in improving the quality of students' academic writing. The research is expected to provide some insights into the pedagogical field, specifically for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators and learners, about the efficacy of using academic word lists to improve writing quality and reduce errors in writing. So, EFL educators and learners can consider applying academic word lists in their learning process based on their efficiency.

METHODS

The data in the research are gathered from 18 studies that have been conducted by several researchers, which concentrated on scrutinizing the use of academic word lists in improving the quality of students' academic writing. The studies that are gathered as the data in the present research have the similarity in that most of those studies utilized EFL speakers as the subject, and they attempt to seek the effectiveness of academic word lists as the tool in improving the quality of the student's academic writing.

The analysis begins by classifying the studies into two categories: face-to-face classroom and mobile-assisted language learning. Both categories are selected because they are the media that mostly engage in the learning process nowadays. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is part of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL); however, mobile is a more inseparable tool for everyone in daily life at this age. BenMoussa (2011) has said that the simplicity of mobile which can be carried and used wherever and whenever also makes the students tend

to prefer using mobile to assist their learning process compared with computers.

After classifying the studies based on the categories of face-to-face classroom and mobile-assisted language learning, the researchers further have classified the result of those research, which confirm whether the implementation of the academic word lists is effective or ineffective in improving the quality of the student's academic writing. Afterward, the discussion about the implementation of an academic word list to improve students' academic writing quality is provided by the researchers based on the two categories that are explained before. Furthermore, the discussion about some aspects that trigger the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the academic word list implementation is also provided to assist the writers in gaining some depth-knowledge about how the classroom settings should be designed to improve the quality of the student's writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through several decades, the debates on the relation between the errors that occurred in students' written composition and how students can overcome their problem by eliminating the existence of the errors in their writing have become a crucial topic discussed in applied linguistics. Several studies have been conducted by some scholars to scrutinize the occurrence of errors in the students' writing (Arifanita, Nurkamto, & Suparno, 2019; Dewi & Saputra, 2021; Humairoh, 2021; Khatter, 2019; Novariana, Sumardi, & Tarjana, 2018; Nurkamto, Djatmika, & Prihandoko, 2022), while many previous studies also specifically conducted by implementing various methods, techniques, and strategies as the solutions for students' errors in writing in order to improve their writing skill and quality (Aghajani & Adloo, 2018; Albadri & Rosyidah, 2022; Castillo-Cuesta, 2022; Hadi, Izzah, & Paulia, 2021; Imelda, Cahyono, & Astuti, 2019; Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020; Rahmi, 2021; Sakkir et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2021; Wale & Bogale, 2021; Yulianti, Nuraeni, Parmawati, 2019; Yusuf, Jusoh, & Yusuf, 2019).

Related to the practical solution that has been provided by some scholars, they are various in terms of number. Among the practical solutions, the implementation of an academic word list is valued by some scholars as a beneficial basis that can be expanded in developing the writing skill of the students (Antes & Beck, 2020; Choo et al., 2017; Khany & Kalantari, 2021; Pathan et al., 2018).

Moreover, 15 out of 18 studies (83,33%) have claimed that the implementation of an academic word list is valued as an effective implementation since it assists the students in improving their academic writing quality. At the same time, 3 out of 18 studies (16,67%) have confirmed that implementing an academic word list does not significantly improve the students' academic writing quality. Furthermore,

Table 1 provides the percentage of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the academic word list implementation in improving the quality of students' academic writing.

Table 1 Distribution of Academic Word List (AWL) Improvement to students' Academic Writing

Improvement of AWL to the Quality of Students' Academic Writing	Total Studies	Percentage (%)
Significance Improvement	15 out of 18 studies	83,33
Insignificance Improvement	3 out of 18 studies	16,67

The following discussion is divided into two sub-discussions which are further classified based on the media utilized in implementing the academic word lists. They are implementing academic word lists to improve the quality of students' academic writing through face-to-face classroom interaction and mobile-assisted language learning.

According to the data of the research, there are nine studies which are implemented the academic word list through face-to-face classroom interaction. Table 2 provides the distribution of the studies which are implemented the academic word list to investigate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the students' academic writing quality through face-to-face classroom interaction.

Table 2 Distribution of AWL Improvement to the Quality of Students' Academic Writing through Face-to-Face Classroom Interaction

Improvement of AWL to the Quality of Students' Academic Writing	Total Studies	Percentage (%)
Significance Improvement	7 out of 9 studies	77,77
Insignificance Improvement	2 out of 9 studies	22,23

Based on Table 2, seven studies (77,77%) confirm that implementing an academic word list in face-to-face classroom interaction significantly improves students' academic writing quality. Besides, this finding which confirms that there is a significant improvement from the academic word list implementation to the quality of the student's academic writing through the face-to-face classroom interaction is the reflection of five studies that are utilized as the data in the present research (Morris & Cobb, 2004; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Hyland & Tse, 2007; Lessard-Clouston, 2012; Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016).

Among those studies, Hyland and Tse (2007)

and Lessard-Clouston (2012) have claimed that explicit vocabulary instruction as the media of academic word list implementation significantly improves students' academic writing. In this case, Hyland and Tse (2007) and Lessard-Clouston (2012) have started to assess the students' vocabulary knowledge by conducting the vocabulary level test. The test evaluates vocabulary knowledge at differing levels of word frequency: 2000 words, 3000 words, 5000 words, and the University Word List (UWL). The results of those studies reveal that the student's vocabulary knowledge is weak. Therefore, to increase the student's vocabulary knowledge, Hyland and Tse (2007) and Lessard-Clouston (2012) have provided several lists of words that must be studied weekly to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

The students are also exposed to academic vocabulary in other coursework areas. Words from the UWL frequently appear in the authentic texts that they are reading in their academic subject classes, students work more directly with academic vocabulary in their writing class, and all in all, with regard to the words tested on the vocabulary levels test, the students have many opportunities for explicit learning of the words on the UWL. They have fewer chances for explicit learning with the words at the other levels.

Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016) have also suggested another way that can be utilized by EFL teachers in implementing the academic word list to improve the students' academic writing quality. They emphasize that implementing the lead technique will assist the students in gaining various vocabulary. Basically, the lead technique can be applied as a pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activity. According to Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016), the lead technique may become one of the effective ways to assist the students in gaining various vocabulary because the students will directly come into contact with the words, and they can understand the meaning of the vocabulary from the sentence that is being presented to them. Besides, Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016) have also offered several techniques that can be utilized to implement the academic word list, such as list-group-label, semantic mapping, or morphological analysis. Those techniques are designed to assist the students in understanding the new vocabulary and how it can be used in actual sentences. Essentially, those techniques elaborated above may be more applicable and useful to implement in classroom activity since it provides the actual use of the new vocabulary by combining skill activities such as reading. By doing these kinds of activities, the students will know how to use the new vocabulary in the sentences and understand the sense of that new vocabulary.

Moreover, implementing an academic word list to improve the students' academic writing quality may also not work as maximized as possible if there is no depth-understanding of the structure of the academic prose. Coxhead and Bryd (2007) have emphasized that grammar and vocabulary play an important role in the structure of academic prose, where they need

to be introduced in the classroom equally. In their research, they also emphasize the important role of the teacher as one of the vital guidance for the students to reach the goal of the lesson. In this case, Coxhead and Bryd (2007) have underlined several aspects that need to be noticed by the teachers in order to assist the students in getting the improvement of their academic writing quality, such as the effect of L1 to L2 writing, the activation of students' sense towards academic words which quite different to the general words, the acquisition of the new academic vocabularies through the collocation in order to understand their actual use in sentences, the acquisition of the new academic vocabularies by involving reading activities. Therefore, by understanding those aspects, the teachers are expected to assist the students in gaining some improvement in the quality of their academic writing.

Implementing an academic word list through the face-to-face classroom setting also needs to be assessed to evaluate the student's knowledge of acquiring new academic vocabulary and whether they can use it properly or not. Morris and Cobb (2004) have proposed a vocabulary profiler to assess the student's academic vocabulary knowledge. Further, the vocabulary profiler is also claimed to be efficient in classifying the proficiency level of non-native speakers of English, which can be divided further into several levels of language ability. Morris and Cobb (2004) have also emphasized that vocabulary profiler can also be utilized to identify students who may be at risk of encountering academic difficulties in their study program before problems arise in the classroom. Shortly, the vocabulary profiles may become effective tools in evaluating the students' study progress in acquiring the new academic vocabulary and may also act as a tool in predicting the students' language proficiency.

Despite the studies claiming the effectiveness of the academic word list implementation to improve students' academic writing quality, there are two studies (22,23%) that claim that the implementation of the academic word lists is ineffective in improving the students' academic writing quality. Brun-Mercer and Zimmerman (2015) have asserted that the implementation of an academic word list in the English for Academic Purpose (EAP) and Intensive English Program (IEP) does not provide any significant contribution to the improvement of students' academic writing quality. This may be attributable to the portion of the academic word list, which serves a minor role in the face-to-face classroom. In both studies, the academic word list only acts as supplementary material that can be accessed by the students outside the classroom. Hence, this may result in an incomprehensible knowledge of the academic words continuum from students. In this case, the participants Brun-Mercer and Zimmerman's research (2015) have failed to employ relevant vocabulary or phrases in the genre of academic writing to express their ideas through the composition. Furthermore, to minimize the students' problems, it will be better for the teachers

to design a syllabus that provides a proper portion of the academic word list to be implemented directly through classroom interaction. Expectedly, this may significantly improve the students' academic writing quality.

Based on the data of the research, there are nine studies which are implemented the academic word list through mobile-assisted language learning. Table 3 provides the distribution of the studies that implemented the academic word list to investigate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the students' academic writing quality through mobile-assisted language learning.

Table 3 Distribution of AWL Improvement to the Quality of Students' Academic Writing through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

Improvement of AWL to the Quality of Students' Academic Writing	Total Studies	Percentage (%)
Significance Improvement	8 out of 9 studies	88,88
Insignificance Improvement	1 out of 9 studies	11,12

According to Table 3, eight studies (88,88%) have confirmed that the implementation of academic word lists through mobile-assisted language learning significantly contributes to the quality of the student's academic writing. Besides, this finding which confirms that there is a significant improvement from the academic word list implementation to the quality of the student's academic writing through mobile-assisted language learning is the reflection of four studies that are utilized as the data in the present research (Lu, 2008; Hu, 2013; Choo et al., 2017; Yafei & Osman, 2016).

Lu (2008) and Choo et al. (2017) have confirmed that implementing an academic word list through SMS vocabulary learning significantly improves the quality of students' academic writing. According to those studies, they divide the participants into two different groups. One group is given several academic word lists through SMS, while the other groups are provided the printed version of the academic word lists. They have continually received the academic word lists each week within the observation periods of two to four weeks. The results of those studies indicate that the implementation of SMS vocabulary learning is valued as an effective tool in expanding the student's vocabulary knowledge and also assisting the students in improving the quality of their writing due to the ease of accessing the mobile phone outside or inside the classroom.

Widely there are also many other studies which also confirm that the use of mobile-assisted language learning provides a significant contribution not only to the improvement of students' academic writing quality

but also to the whole aspect of language teaching and learning (Darsih & Asikin, 2020; Athoillah, 2022; Nurul & Nafa, 2020; Yudhiantara & Nasir, 2017). Specifically, Hu (2013) and Yafei and Osman (2016) have utilized the mobile phone application as the tool for implementing the academic word list. The results of those studies reveal that the use of the mobile phone application also significantly contributes to improving students' vocabulary knowledge and academic writing quality. In Hu's research (2013), she utilizes Fetion as a mobile phone application to deliver several academic word lists. Basically, Fetion is free text message software that is developed by China mobile company. The experiment is conducted within four weeks, and each participant receives the academic word list that consists of 11 words which is sent every weekday within the experiment period. Further, Yafei and Osman's research (2016) has utilized Ko-Su as a mobile phone application as the tool for implementing the academic word list. Essentially, Ko-Su is a mobile phone application that covers eleven different exercises on vocabulary that are further divided into five units. In this case, the questions provided in Ko-Su cover understanding the words in terms of knowing the meaning of the words in context, understanding the use of the words, understanding the format of the words, and understanding the grammatical rules in which words are used in sentences. Generally, the use of mobile phone applications as the tool in implementing the academic word list is valued as an effective way to improve the quality of the student's academic writing since it provides the easiness of access for the users and it may only need the internet connection in order to access the mobile phone application. In this case, the students may access this application inside or outside the classroom. Therefore, it may increase the possibility for the students to access these applications more often due to their easiness.

Despite the claim of the effectiveness of the academic word list implementation in the improvement of students' academic writing quality, one study (11,12%) claims that the use of mobile-assisted language learning does not significantly contribute to improving students' academic writing quality. Alemi et al. (2012) have asserted that there is no effectiveness in the use of mobile-assisted language learning in improving the quality of students' academic writing. They utilize two different groups of participants. The participants receive word definitions and example sentences, both in Persian and English, two times a week regularly. There are 320 headwords from the academic word list are taught via SMS. The control group consists of 17 students who have to work on the same number of words by using a dictionary. Both experimental and control groups are assessed in each session by the instructor in the class. The groups administer a vocabulary test (immediate post-test) at the end of the experiment and a delayed post-test that is performed four weeks after the experiment to investigate the long-term effect of mobile vocabulary learning on the student's vocabulary retention. The

result of the research shows that there is no significant difference in the student's vocabulary knowledge between the experimental and control groups in the post-test. According to Alemi et al. (2012), even though the result does not show any significant difference compared to learning vocabulary by using a dictionary in the short term, it is expected to assist the students in enhancing their vocabulary learning in the post-test. In the long term, mobile-assisted language learning assists the students in retaining more vocabulary compared to the control group.

CONCLUSIONS

The research is conducted to investigate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of implementing an academic word list and its implication for improving EFL students' academic writing quality through the studies conducted previously in this area. From the studies reviewed in the research, 15 out of 18 studies (83,33%) confirm that the implementation of academic word lists significantly contributes to improving students' academic writing quality. The effectiveness of academic word list implementation can be conducted through face-to-face or mobile-assisted language learning. In this case, the role of an academic word list serves a great portion where it is directly included in the syllabus of the lesson. This can be done by implementing the academic word list through skill activities such as reading and writing activities or using SMS vocabulary learning and mobile phone application as the media to gain several new vocabulary. Moreover, the findings of the present research on the effectiveness of academic word lists support Coxhead and Bryd's argument, which asserts that the academic word list may become an effective tool in expanding the student's vocabulary knowledge by involving this tool throughout the course. Hence, the success of the academic word list implementation may depend on the given portion of this tool to the course itself. In this case, the teachers, as the persons who are fully responsible for the effectiveness of the course, shall provide a great space to the academic word list as the assistance tool for the students in expanding their words continuum so that they can differ in the use of general and academic words based on the context and the genre of the composition.

Interestingly, three out of 18 studies confirm that the implementation of academic word lists either through face-to-face classroom or mobile-assisted language learning does not significantly contribute to improving students' academic writing quality. This may happen due to the less involvement of an academic word list where this tool is not included directly in the course syllabus. The teachers responsible for the course's effectiveness only provide suggestions to the students so they can consult their problems related to the lexical item choice and use the academic word list outside the classroom setting. As a final point, it is suggested that the coming researchers conduct more

detailed reviews about the efficacy of using academic word lists to improve language skills. Expectantly, the more various categories of media that can be engaged in implementing academic word lists are probably involved in the discussion to enhance readers' insight.

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