

**A STUDY ON LEARNERS` AFFINITY TOWARDS
THEIR CAREER- RELATED VOCABULARY
(PRIOR TO THEIR ENTRY INTO SPECIFIC JOB-ORIENTED EDUCATION)**

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Abstract

Vocabulary acquisition is an integral part of learning; a learner cannot profess his/her knowledge if there is no adequate bank of words. The study, at hand, is related to vocabulary acquisition by learners of English as a foreign language. On a rather different plane; here, the research explores the possibility of learners having an affinity towards words which have a bearing on their career domains, prior to their specialization education. This affinity can arise from their social, familial or academic environments. As the study focused on students` liking towards vocabulary related to their future aspirations, the participants were chosen from the Foundation Level of the college; 66 participants from 3 sessions of Foundation Programme constituted the study. Four occupations were chosen for the task, based upon the relevant scenario existing in the country and a study conducted on the careers of alumni students of the college. There were two stages to test whether an affinity towards career related vocabulary exists; words in isolation were given to the participants in Stage 1 and the same words were given in sentences in Stage 2. Results of the skeletal study indicate that learners have an affinity towards career related words, when both the treatment stages are taken into consideration and this can be further extrapolated with expanded experimental groups.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition, Affinity, Career, Incidental Learning, Intentional Learning

1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a vital cog in the language learning process of an individual. The proficiency of a learner in the language is rated heavily on the vocabulary bank possessed by him/her. The importance of vocabulary in learning is earnestly professed in the words of Wilkins (1972:111), `Without grammar, little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.` However a look into the earlier decades of research related to vocabulary acquisition in English as foreign language learning would reveal that cogent approaches as to how the process occurs in an individual haven`t been realized in a fruitful manner; in fact the domain of vocabulary takes a backseat, as mentioned by Milton (2009:1), `For much of the last half century or so , therefore , the consideration of vocabulary in the process of language learning, testing and teaching appears to have been sidelined.` Giving attention to structure and methodologies assumed prime stage as a result of which the garnering of knowledge in terms of lexis suffered. With more studies appearing in the recent past on the acquisition of vocabulary, a paradigm shift in its importance in language learning is witnessed. The skeletal research, at hand, intends to contribute to the study of lexical accumulation by a learner through a different perspective.

2.Literature Review

Vocabulary acquisition, based on research done over the last two or three decades, takes place by intentional or incidental learning. Intentional learning is a deliberate attempt to know and learn words and it takes place in the classroom mostly; the process is also tested later which deepens the knowledge acquired. Intentional vocabulary learning , according to Schmitt (2008),

`almost always leads to greater and faster gains as well as better retention.` Incidental vocabulary learning, as the term denotes, occurs perchance, devoid of the element of any conscious attempt in learning the word. Researchers, according to studies conducted, are divided on whether intentional learning or incidental vocabulary learning has more impact on learners in building vocabulary. Intentional vocabulary learning, of course, definitely has an edge over incidental learning as students would learn words with gravity because of the bearing of these words on assessments; incidental learning, on the other hand, is a gradual process, with no direct thrust on a pupil`s course assessments compared to intentional learning. Deliberate vocabulary learning, according to Nation and Meara (2002), can result in a very quick (and long-lasting) expansion of vocabulary size which then needs to be consolidated and enriched through meaning-focused input and output, and fluency development. According to Gass (1999), incidental vocabulary learning is the `side effect ` of another activity. Ahmed . J (2012) opines that incidental vocabulary learning promotes deeper mental processing and better retention. In contrast, George G. (2015) observes that incidental vocabulary learnt loses retention once the focus is shifted to intentional vocabulary learning.

The research, at hand, though in a way aligned with the above said approaches, with vocabulary acquisition as the ultimate goal, primarily focuses on whether there exists a motivational inclination, on the part of the learners to accumulate vocabulary associated with their future aspirations. Every learner might have an affinity towards a set of words from his/her childhood; it can be attributed to his/her familial, pastime or academic milieu. If so, this study aims to look into the remote possibility of whether a student exhibits an affinity towards a certain set of words that may, in a way, be related to their career dreams. It presumes to shed light , on an abstract level, whether students assimilate words in their school and college(Foundation Level) education which are related to their career domains, before their entry into career related streams. Once they venture into the intended specialisations, a conscious approach on the part of the tutors coupled with the design of the syllabi can instill a purpose in students to gain significant vocabulary, related to the subject matter. Hence, the focus here is on students, who haven`t received any exposure to career oriented education.

Laufer & Hulstijn`s (2001) three component approach in vocabulary acquisition falls in line with the proposed research remotely. In Laufer & Hulstijn`s (2001) three component approach in vocabulary acquisition , the three components are *need*, *search* and *evaluation* which will be taken together as *involvement*. The first component in this approach, *Need*, according to the authors is the motivational, non-cognitive dimension of involvement, and is concerned with the *need to achieve*. The authors identify *need* as a drive to comply with task requirements (by the learner). The study, expanding on the component, realizes *need* as a learner`s craving towards the acquisition of a word, which stems from his motivation towards a goal that can culminate in his career. Hence, this skeletal study, in fact, inquires into the remote possibility whether students have a liking towards words, which are relatively connected to their future occupations.

3. Method

3.1 Subjects

The subjects for the experiment were randomly chosen from the General Foundation Programme, a pre-requisite for entry into diploma and graduate programmes in the college, which ensured that they are not acclimatized to career connected lexical corpus. The General Foundation Programme is divided into three levels – Level 1, 2 and 3. The participants were from Level 2 (which is directly taught by the researcher), on the assumption that they were subject to a fair amount of general vocabulary in the preceding level.

Students of Level 2 from three sessions (N= 66) were picked up for the study. The sample consisted of 21 male and 45 female respondents (Table 1).

Their Level 1 final exam marks were regarded as Level 2 entry marks. For the purpose of categorizing their proficiency, two mark clusters were created – 50-70 % and 71-100% (Table 2). 58 participants fell in the 50-70% category while only 8 respondents belonged to 71-100% group. Hence, the sample population could be rated as average, which suited the study as above average students could have a definite bias towards vocabulary, aligned to their career intentions.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	No. of students
Male	21
Female	45

Table 2: Entry Level Marks to Level 2

Mark Category	No. of students
50- 70	58
71-100	8

3.2 Materials

As the research was primarily based on career choices, the four occupations selected for the purpose were *Engineering, HR Management, Banking/Accounting* and *Business*. The selection was based on two parameters – 1) Careers of alumni from college career center and 2) a general query related to careers in the respective sessions.

According to the career data bank of college alumni numbering 116, 19 % opted banking, 17 % chose engineering and 7% had their HR aspirations realised.

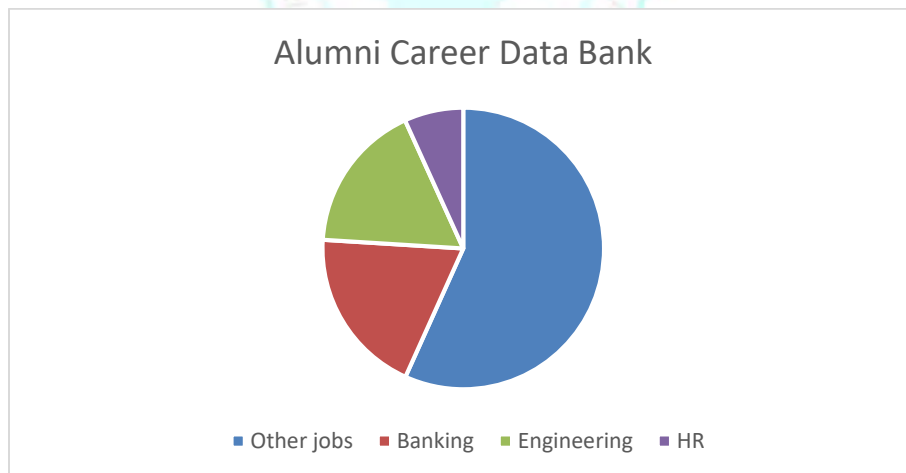


Figure 1: College Alumni Career Data Bank

Although the majority of the youth desired to work in the government sector, it could not be classified as a career pick as the study could not allocate specific word cluster to the tag `government`. The four categories were picked after a general query done in the respective sessions; a fact to be noted here is that some of the female participants opted teaching, which in turn again, cannot be associated with a specific body of vocabulary.

The selection of words for each occupation was a difficult task since the study was not on a definite period in the participant`s educational process; the affinity towards a set of words could occur at a stage or rather in a series of stages. The only criterion by the researcher was that the study should focus on candidates exposed to general education prior to their career oriented learning. The words identified, thus had to be career specific and at the same time, easily comprehensible by the participant. Hence, the words were taken from Google -10,000-English, a repository which contains a list of the 10,000 most common English words in order of frequency, as determined by n-gram frequency analysis of the Google's Trillion Word Corpus. The rankings of the words are shown in brackets, next to the words (Table III).

Table 3

<i>Engineering</i>	<i>HR Management</i>	<i>Banking/Accounting</i>	<i>Business</i>
1.Machine(1153)	1.Assessment (1371)	1.Account (361)	1. Sale(425)
2.Design(245)	2.Recruitment(3993)	2.Savings (2428)	2. Profit(2314)
3.Energy(671)	3. Promotion(2926)	3.Deposit (3816)	3. Customer(404)

Table 3 shows the words under the selected careers.

In addition, the three banking words feature in *25 most common banking terms* in www.crackaninterview.com. The three engineering words are listed in myvocabulary.com. (<https://myvocabulary.com/word-list/engineering-vocabulary/>)

4. Implementation

Stage 1

In stage 1, the twelve words mentioned under the four occupations were scattered in a circle (Fig.1.1) and the participants (N=25) were advised to circle their five favorite words. As the research did not focus on the merit of second language acquisition, the students were told to use their dictionary applications in the mobile phones to ensure their full comprehension of the target words; they were also given ample cues from the researcher to understand the words succinctly.



Figure 2-Circle your five favorite words

This was followed by the second question (Fig 1.2) to circle their career choice.

Which career would you like? Circle your choice.

1. Engineering
2. Human Resource Management
3. Banking/Accounting
4. Business

Fig 3- Career Choice

Stage 2

In stage 2, the students (N=66) were given 12 sentences (Fig 1.4) with the target words in each sentence and they had to circle five sentences which they liked. Two aspects were taken into consideration while framing the sentences-the number of words and the difficulty level in comprehension. The Flesch –Kincaid Readability Score was 73.8 and the level was akin to that of a Grade 4 text. The average length of the sentences for the target words was 5. This was done deliberately as the priority was not to check the proficiency level of the subjects in the experimental study. They were allowed to look up for the meanings as in Stage 1. Stage 2 was implemented after two weeks of implementation of Stage 1.

Circle 5 sentences that you like most.

1. The **design** of the project was innovative .
2. The **assessment** of the work will be done next week.
3. There is more **profit** in the hotel industry now.
4. A bank **account** is needed for getting a loan.
5. Solar **energy** is very important nowadays.
6. **Recruitment** of skilled staff is a must for a company.
7. The government has stopped the **sale** of imported perfumes.
8. You should have a **savings** account in the bank.
9. The **machine** had a technical problem.
10. The manager deals with the **promotion** issues.

11. **Customer** oriented attitude is necessary for good business.
12. All banks accept **deposits** in gold.

Figure 4

Parameters to analyse the results

Stage 1

Five out of twelve words denoting four occupations had to be picked up by the students. An affinity towards a certain profession was ascertained *when a student chose at least two words denoting the same and he opted the occupation which is represented by the two words as his/her career path.*

Stage 2

The same criterion applied to stage 2 as the only difference between the stages was the transition from isolated words to sentences.

5. Results

Participants (N=66)

10 students, who chose their occupations, showed their affinity in Stage 1 and Stage 2 towards their career word clusters.

28 students, who chose their occupations, indicated their affinity towards the respective word groups either in Stage 1 or Stage 2.

There was zero compatibility between career choice and word cluster selection among 28 participants.

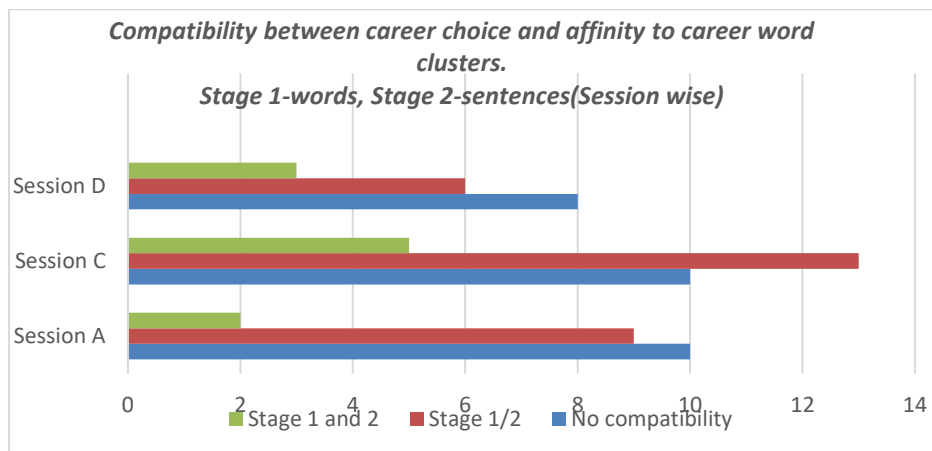


Figure 5

6. Analysis of results

In session A (N=21), where the average percentage for entry into Level 2 was 56.4, 9% students displayed a liking towards their career choice vocabulary in both stages of the research. 42% had shown affinity towards their career choice lexical groups either in Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the study.

In session C (N=28), where 61.73% was the percentage for entry into Level 2, a far greater response in favour of the possibility was perceived. 17 % of the students who chose their career indicated affinity towards it by selecting career words in Stage 1 and Stage 2. 46% of the students demonstrated an affinity towards their career choice lexical groups in Stage 1 or Stage 2.

In session D (N=17), 50.8% was the percentage for entry into Level 2. 17 % of the students, who chose their career indicated affinity towards it by selecting career words in Stage 1 and Stage 2. 35% of the students demonstrated an affinity towards their career choice lexical groups in Stage 1 or Stage 2.

The results of Session A indicate a slight prospect towards the aim of the research if the 9% group (career choice matches Stage 1 and Stage 2) and 42% group (career choice matches Stage 1 or Stage 2) are taken into account together.

The results of Session C, however, express a strong inclination towards the study's focus regarding the learner's penchant to a class of words in tune with their future occupation. This is highly evident with 46% of the session, indicating a marked interest in lexical corpus linked with their career choice in Stage 1 and Stage 2. The higher percentage with respect to affinity in Session 2 can be attributed to the proficiency level of the participants in the session, which is relatively higher when compared to Session A and D. 63 % of participants in the 70-100 Level 2 Entry mark category belong to this session.

Session D (N=17) has 17 % students with affinity towards career words in Stage 1 and Stage 2 and a 35 % with affinity towards career words either in Stage 1 or Stage 2.

7. Post –semester Study

A post-semester research was also conducted on a small experimental group in Fall of 2016 and the cohort was deliberately chosen from Level 1; it was done to gauge whether students post-school education exhibited the same affinity towards career –driven vocabulary.

The cohort (N=22) exhibited the following results:

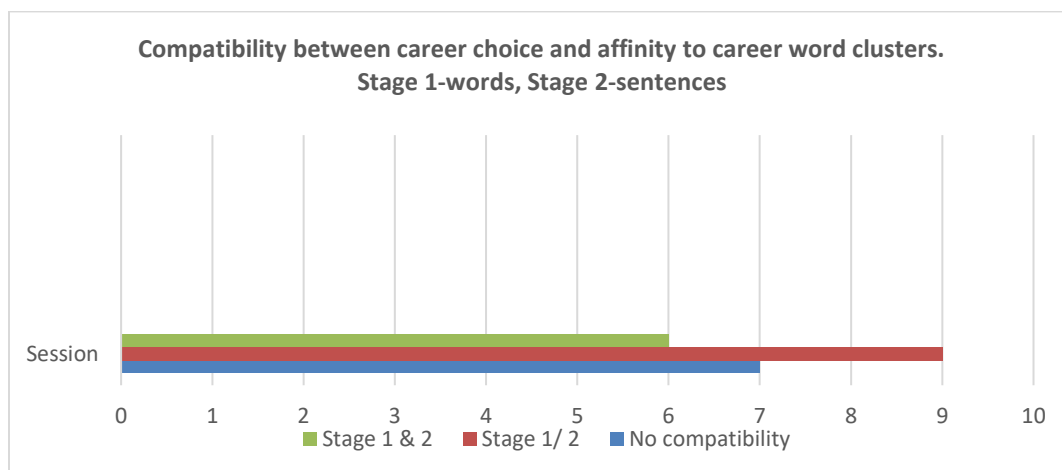


Fig 6

27% students, who chose their occupations, showed their affinity in Stage 1 and Stage 2 towards their career word clusters.

41% students, who chose their occupations, indicated their affinity towards the respective word groups either in Stage 1 or Stage 2.

There was zero compatibility between career choice and word cluster selection among 31 % participants.

The study on a Level 1 cohort further corroborates the objective of the research as almost three – quarters of the group has shown a positive approach towards career-driven words.

6.Conclusion

The research, a very skeletal one, in its preliminary stage, forays into the sphere of comprehension and assimilation of vocabulary based on affinity towards the same, on the ground that these words come under the milieu of the learner`s career choice. The findings in the paper supports the researcher`s assertion of a learner`s liking towards a set of words which are in line with his/her future aspirations. 35 % of the participants (from all sessions) have shown their affinity towards career vocabulary either in Stage 1 or Stage 2. This result, borne out of an average experimental group, bears significance when the larger dimension of relatively above average learners are taken into consideration.

As this study involves a behavioural characteristic- affinity or liking, further research into the psychological aspects which play a key role in the build-up of such a factor is called for. An insight into the cognitive, affective and conative components of Classical Behavioral Theory would definitely shed light into this pilot experiment; especially the conative element, as the variables of purpose, motivation and goal are inherent. The study, being in the budding stage, entails statistical research, on expanded experimental groups.

Future implications

If an affinity towards a class of words, which is connected to the learner`s career choice is indicated by further research, a clear cut strategy could be embedded in the General Foundation program or in schools, which could develop the learner`s verbal bank woven to his career choice. An exposure to a specific set of vocabulary in relation to a dream job would act catalytically, for the learner and eventually sets the student on a rather comfortable zone when he/she enters the career oriented programme.

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