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Cultural Context and Academic Influences on Vocabulary Acquisition: Challenges among EFL Students in Jordan

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Abstract This study aimed to examine the difficulties of acquiring English vocabulary among undergraduate students and to enquire into whether gender and/or the students' academic year had a significant effect on such difficulties. To collect data, a questionnaire addressed whether answers could be found in the area of the instructor, the learner, textbooks, and/or the classroom environment. The sample comprised 115 EFL students at Al al-Bayt University, Jordan. Mean scores, standard deviations, t-test, and one-way ANOVA were utilized to see if there were statistically significant discrepancies regarding the variables of gender and academic year. The results indicated that students face difficulties in comprehending vocabulary at medium and high levels. In regard to the variables of gender and academic year, there were no statistically significant differences. The researcher recommended that effective methods should be devised for advocating the students to acquire vocabulary, and find solutions to the problems the students suffer from.

Keywords: *Vocabulary comprehension difficulties, Al al-Bayt University, Gender differences, Academic influences, Cultural context*

1. Introduction

As many professions demand fluency in speaking and writing English, there is a strong emphasis on learning English as a foreign language in several countries. In Jordan, English is taught in schools and universities where students can major in the English language to graduate as English teachers or pursue postgraduate studies in English language translation, linguistics, literature, and criticism. Accordingly, teaching and learning English vocabulary are vital parts of language education, and understanding the culture of the target language plays a great part in mastering the language. Hossain (2023) confirmed that learning a language cannot be separated from the culture to which it belongs. Culture gives language depth and meaning beyond the literal translation of words, as it reflects people's experiences and the way they think and interact. Accordingly, Byram et al. (2002) concluded that cultural context plays a pivotal role in shaping and understanding language, as words and expressions are influenced by the social

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environment, traditions, and values of societies. Yet, culture might pose a challenge in the process of vocabulary acquisition due to a lack of culturally authentic English materials and a lack of exposure to real-life contexts where learners can practice the words they learn. Besides, Eastern and Western cultures are completely different as each has its own character and unique style in various aspects of life, including dress, food, and social behaviors. Therefore, when teaching English vocabulary in an Arab country like Jordan, cultural context should not be ignored. Dankova (2023) stresses that there should be a focus on teaching both the cultures of the first and second languages in the EFL classrooms. Thus, the primary goal is mastering the language and being proficient in strong persuasive vocabulary without ignoring the cultural context. "Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 255).

Many researchers in the education field (e.g., Ababneh, 2013; Ahmed, 2018; Komalasari, 2022; Muhammad Nur & Jusoh, 2022; Rabadi, 2016; Umar & Sudipa, 2020) have confirmed that mastering linguistic vocabulary is essential for the teaching-learning process. Despite the importance of vocabulary acquisition, in a country like Jordan, where English is taught as a foreign language, students generally have limited opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom. Arab students are not exposed to much English in real-life situations, which discourages them and hinders their progress in learning English (Khan, 2011). "The problem that EFL Jordanian learners come across is that they know which vocabulary to learn, but they do not know how to learn vocabulary and recall new words" (Rabadi, 2016. p. 3). Therefore, learners need strategies to help them master linguistic words. Vocabulary learning strategies present a systematic approach to figuring out how students acquire, save, and recall new vocabulary (Schmitt, 1997). Schmitt (1997) categorized these strategies into recognition strategies (using a dictionary or inference from context), memory strategies (imaging and mnemonics), social strategies (learning from others), cognitive strategies (note-taking and repetition), and metacognitive strategies (self-consciousness and evaluation progress). These techniques are primarily important for helping learners subdue difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, particularly in an EFL context where opportunities to practice the language outside the classrooms are limited.

Previous studies have shown that different aspects of vocabulary acquisition in English as a foreign language were investigated. For example, Ababneh (2013) examined the impact of different vocabulary teaching strategies on Jordanian EFL learners and discovered that context-based and interactive methods considerably enhanced vocabulary retention. Rabadi (2016) concentrated on the problems Jordanian students experience in learning vocabulary, where she identified the shortage of efficient strategies and imperfect practice as the main barriers. Ahmed (2018) inspected the effectiveness of varied vocabulary learning strategies among EFL learners and inferred that the integration of cognitive and metacognitive strategies produced the best outcomes. Umar and Sudipa (2020) considered the role motivation plays in acquiring vocabulary, pointing out that stimulated students are more likely to operate various strategies and accomplish better results. Komalasari (2022) questioned the impact of cultural context on vocabulary acquisition, stressing that cultural relevancy and contextualization improve understanding and retention. These studies underline the significance of efficient vocabulary education and the necessity of strategies that handle the specific difficulties students confront in diverse contexts. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of research particularly addressing the difficulties of vocabulary acquisition among Jordanian university students, which this study attempts to fill.

This study is essential because its purpose is to address certain difficulties in learning vocabulary among the students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFLANG) at Al al-Bayt University (AABU). Perceiving these challenges is vital to informing educational practices and promoting interventions that can improve vocabulary learning. In addition, this research bridges a gap in the literature by concentrating on the Jordanian context, where studies related to this topic are short.

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties of comprehending English vocabulary among FFLANG students at AABU?
2. Are there any statistically significant discrepancies in the mean scores that may be ascribed to the gender variable?

3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the mean scores that may be ascribed to the academic year variable?

This study was carried out with the view of informing instructors about the difficulties students experience in learning and comprehending English vocabulary with a focus on cultural context, hoping that solutions could be found to such problems. Additionally, it aimed to encourage further research in this field, as the researcher could not find studies that addressed this topic in the Jordanian context.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of vocabulary acquisition in the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is well-established in the research on language education. The current literature review gives insight into the culture in Jordan, investigates studies on vocabulary learning strategies, and sheds light on the problems learners face.

Jordan is one of the Arab countries located in western Asia, specifically in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It is a relatively small, landlocked country with a semi-arid climate, and it is a middle-income country. According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics (2023), its population is about 11,516,000 people, which constitutes approximately 0.13% of the total world population. Jordan is characterized by the diversity of cultures that harmonize together within an environment of tolerance and respect (Al-Doghmi et al., 2023). The society is a mixture of Jordanians, Palestinians, Armenians, Circassians, and others. Jordanian people are known for being hospitable, respecting their customs and traditions, appreciating women, and granting them their freedom and various rights.

As for languages, the official language is Arabic, whereas English is the first mandatory foreign language that is taught at K-12 schools and universities. Besides, Jordanian public and private universities use English as a means of instruction to teach different majors such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, and others. English plays a critical part in Jordan as it is utilized in different life arenas, and many careers require a good command of English. (Al Musa & Smadi, 2013). Basically, studying the English language as a foreign language, including methods, strategies, and/or challenges of teaching and learning English, attracts scholars in the field.

2.1. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Studies with regard to vocabulary acquisition concerning EFL learners in Jordan and other settings have revealed various strategies and their efficiency. Ababneh (2013), for example, explained that the most preferred learning strategies were asking others and using a dictionary; at the same time, the least preferred learning strategy was skipping. In addition, Ababneh concluded that major and gender did not significantly influence strategy selection but suggested that instructors should encourage students to promote individualized strategies to learn vocabulary. Likewise, Baniabdelrahman and Al-Shumaimeri (2013) investigated vocabulary learning strategies used by Saudi university EFL students and discovered that Saudi students used repetition and bilingual dictionaries extensively. The researchers also noticed that some students applied communicative strategies, merging different methods to support vocabulary learning.

In an extended study, Goundar (2016) discussed and analyzed vocabulary learning strategies among adult EFL learners in Fiji; the strategies found were note-taking, using a dictionary, reading, translation, repetition, and guessing. His conclusion is consistent with the findings of Ababneh (2013) on the strategies of using a dictionary and repetition. Nonetheless, Goundar (2026) focused on the need to ensure that proper teaching approaches are employed to teach the vocabulary. This shows the role that teaching practices play in improving strategies used by EFL learners. Further studies were conducted on the strategies for vocabulary acquisition among EFL undergraduate learners. The researchers studied these strategies and organized them into cognitive, metacognitive, memory, determination, and social (Al-Khasawneh, 2012; Al-Sharah et al., 2021; Ghalebi et al., 2021; Rabadi, 2016). In the Jordanian context, Al-Khasawneh (2012) explored that most of the students used the determination strategies for learning vocabulary, and the least utilized strategies were metacognitive, agreeing with Rabadi (2016), who showed that the metacognitive strategies were the least applied, whilst memory strategies were the most frequently employed.

Similarly, building on the conception of vocabulary knowledge among Jordanian EFL students, Al-Sharah et al. (2021) investigated cognitive approaches and portmanteau words. According to their results, cognitive strategies were the most often used, in an analogous way to Rabadi's (2016) findings as to memory strategies. However, Al-Sharah et al. (2021) mentioned one aspect that has not been discussed in other prior studies, known as the portmanteau words. This implies that though conventional approaches are important, other approaches may enhance the growth of vocabulary. In a similar way, Ghalebi et al. (2021) explored the above-mentioned strategies but in the setting of the Iranian university EFL students who were classified into high and low vocabulary learners. The researchers displayed that there were disparities between low and high vocabulary learners; the high vocabulary learners used cognitive strategies first, and the low learners used determination strategies.

In addition, Al Musa (2022) proposed a teaching collocation-based vocabulary education technique and conducted an experiment to assess its efficiency over traditional strategies with first-year students of Petra University. His study indicated that in the use of collocation-based instruction, vocabulary usage and rate of recall were enhanced compared to normal techniques. This accords with the idea that there is a need to enhance the use of special methods in the teaching and learning processes, as postulated in the literature. However, future research should consider examining the long-term performance of collocation-based instruction in terms of learners' vocabulary knowledge as well as the performance of learners from other groups.

2.2. Problems in Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary learning is one of the most important aspects of mastering the English language. However, most English learners struggle to effectively increase their vocabulary. According to Kalajahi and Pourshahian (2012), vocabulary learning can be difficult and challenging to a large number of learners, claiming that vocabulary acquisition is a controversial question in determining how students learn vocabulary efficiently and effectively. The following are some of the common vocabulary learning difficulties experienced by EFL learners and some attempts that have been made to solve them.

Rohmatillah (2014) explored the problems encountered by Indonesian students in learning vocabulary, and some of them are spelling, pronunciation, and contextual use. As far as educational considerations were concerned, he pointed out that the discrepancies between spoken and written language, grammatical features, and number of words affect learning. Likewise, Afzal (2019) looked into the challenges the Saudi English major students at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University experience in learning vocabulary, including poor comprehension of meaning. Other challenges that he disclosed are those relating to pronunciation and spelling, which are compatible with Rohmatillah's outcomes.

Moreover, Lutfiyah et al. (2022) explored similar barriers to vocabulary acquisition, including pronunciation, spelling, and comprehension. They highlighted the importance of using diverse approaches in order to overcome these challenges and proposed strategies that included peer practice and using a dictionary, among others. Analogously, Rosyada-AS and Apoko (2023) detected problems in spelling, pronunciation, and recall that hindered acquiring vocabulary. They noted that to address the challenges, the learners used notes, technologies, and dictionaries. Furthermore, Kesmez (2021) found some similar difficulties in learning vocabulary among Turkish EFL learners. He pointed out that students struggled in pronunciation, memorization, and utilization of new words in writing or speaking. He also stated that learners had difficulties with words of similar or multiple meanings.

Similarly, continuing from the previous idea about the difficulties of vocabulary learning, Abuhabil et al. (2021) indicated that ineffective methods of teaching and deficits in communication bar the acquisition of vocabulary. There were calls for better tutorial approaches, as well as more personal contact between the students. This supports what Dakhil et al. (2022) pointed out on the various difficulties faced by EFL college students when using context-dependent and context-free vocabulary. Prospective teachers were concerned in the study of Dakhil et al. and indicated that they communicate infrequently and that teaching strategies do not facilitate practice. Both studies pointed out the significance of instructional procedures, acknowledged the necessity of improved instructions and the teaching-learning process, and highlighted the aspects of interaction and context. In Phuong (2024), the author devoted to the problem of Vietnamese non-English major students learning ESP. She found that

the barriers included but were not limited to unfamiliarity with technical terms and inadequate practice chance. These findings show a different context and other specificities in terms of vocabulary compared to the preceding research. It has to do with the fact that pedagogical tools and learning processes in technical disciplines must be diverse and require their own vocabulary-learning supports. Like previous research, Phuong's study also examined general vocabulary difficulties, but by identifying ESP as a field of focus, the author emphasized the need for context-based research.

The previous studies reviewed in this paper focused on barriers, challenges, and difficulties of vocabulary learning among EFL learners, as well as the different strategies utilized by the learners to acquire vocabulary. Empirical research deals with views into strategy application and barriers but is usually centered on particular contexts or learners' groups. Theoretical models such as Oxford's (1990) strategy classification and Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy provided valuable frameworks in order to perceive vocabulary learning. Examining the efficiency of various strategies, the effect of instructing methods, and the role of the learner's attributes could provide a more refined understanding of vocabulary learning. Although current studies contribute to aiding vocabulary acquisition, there is a demand for more detailed research that combines theoretical models with practical outputs.

The current study aimed to inspect the challenges of vocabulary learning undergraduate students experience at a Jordanian public university in the hope of bridging the gap in the literature. By studying these difficulties, the study seeks to inform curriculum developers, educators, and learners about effective strategies to advance vocabulary acquisition. This study is significant as it introduces perceptions into a specific context that has been less explored, providing a wider understanding of EFL vocabulary learning.

3. Methodology

Data were collected to answer the questions of the study. This section concerns the participants, instruments, and procedures of this study.

3.1. Participants

Students of the FFLANG at Al al-Bayt University formulated the population of the current study. One hundred and fifteen learners were selected using a convenience sampling method based on their availability for the research. The subjects were registered in the Study Skills in English Language (SSIEL) course during the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023. There were 38 males and 77 females aged 18-22 throughout four academic years: freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The participants shared nearly similar academic and cultural backgrounds, and the majority of them were English majors, while a few were majoring in a foreign language alongside English (e.g., French-English, Spanish-English, or Italian-English). Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants according to the variables of the study.

Table 1
Percentages and Frequencies of the Sample Pertinent to the Variables of the Study

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	33.0
	Female	77	67.0
Academic Year	First	69	60.0
	Second	21	18.3
	Third	15	13.0
	Fourth	10	8.7
Total		**115**	**100**

3.2. Instruments

A questionnaire of 25 statements (see Appendix) was designed to gather data, utilizing a 4-point Likert-type grading scale. Each statement was graded from one to four (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), with the relative weight distributed as follows: 4, 3, 2, 1. This gradation was used to determine the outcomes:

- **1.00 – 2.00**: Low
- **2.01 - 3.00**: Medium
- **3.01 - 4.00**: High

3.2.1. Questionnaire Design and Content

After reviewing similar instruments that were used to investigate learning issues and taking into consideration that the following domains constitute basic elements in the teaching process, a questionnaire was designed to address various aspects of vocabulary learning difficulties. It comprised multiple sections:

1. **Demographic Information**: Gathered basic information such as gender and academic year.
2. **Learner's Domain**: Included statements related to students' personal challenges in vocabulary acquisition.
3. **Instructor's Domain**: Focused on students' perceptions of their instructors' methods and support.
4. **Textbook's Domain**: Addressed issues related to the course materials.
5. **Class Environment**: Examined the impact of the learning environment on vocabulary acquisition.

3.2.2. Validity of the Instrument

To investigate the content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to experts in the field of education. Their recommendations and modifications were considered. The construct validity was substantiated using factor analyses. The results revealed four constructs: learner-related challenges, instructor-related challenges, textbook-related challenges, and class environment-related challenges. Correlation coefficients between the item score and the overall score of the questionnaire were calculated. The correlation coefficients ranged between 0.46-0.89, as demonstrated in Table 2. All correlation coefficients were statistically significant, indicating robust construct validity.

Table 2
Correlation Coefficient between the Item Score and Total Score of the Scale

Item No.	correlation coefficient	Item No.	correlation coefficient	Item No.	correlation coefficient
1	.54**	10	.87**	19	.48**
2	.53**	11	.89**	20	.74**
3	.69**	12	.62**	21	.68**
4	.87**	13	.70**	22	.79**
5	.87**	14	.79**	23	.62**
6	.69**	15	.68**	24	.74**
7	.54**	16	.73**	25	.46**
8	.71**	17	.71**		
9	.77**	18	.51**		

*statistically significant at $p < 0.05$
**statistically significant at $p < 0.01$

3.2.3. Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method was used. The questionnaire was administered to a pilot sample of 30 subjects and re-administered after two weeks. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.90, indicating high reliability. Internal consistency was measured using the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which was 0.85, which is considered appropriate for the study.

3.3. Procedure

Following the validation and reliability confirmation of the instrument, the researcher uploaded the questionnaire link to the Moodle platform of AABU's website after obtaining permission from the Faculty Dean. Moodle is the officially accredited platform for online and blended learning at the university. A total of 115 responses were received and statistically analyzed.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated to summarize the participants' responses. Inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to test the study's questions and to determine the statistical significance of differences across groups (e.g., gender and academic year). The analysis focused on understanding how gender and academic year influenced the participants' perceptions of vocabulary acquisition challenges.

4. Results

The current study aimed to answer three related questions using statistical tests such as the t-test and one-way ANOVA to analyze the data. The analysis focused on identifying the difficulties in comprehending English vocabulary among FFLANG students at AABU.

4.1. Learner-Related Challenges

To answer the first question, "What are the difficulties of comprehending English vocabulary among FFLANG students at AABU?" means and standard deviations were extracted. The results revealed that students face challenges in four areas: learner, instructor, textbook, and class environment. Table 3 demonstrates the problems in the learner's domain.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Learning Vocabulary Difficulties in the Learner's Domain

Statement	Mean	STD	Level
I do not understand when I read an English text due to a lack of vocabulary	3.03	1.270	High
I lack conversational skills due to a lack of knowledge in vocabulary	3.19	1.146	High
I lack English writing skills due to a lack of vocabulary	3.14	1.176	High
I cannot distinguish between the parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and others	2.45	1.223	Medium
I can't put the vocabulary I've learned into sentences of my own	2.83	1.249	Medium
I find it difficult to understand the vocabulary of the English language	2.81	1.235	Medium
I can't rely on myself to understand English vocabulary	2.66	1.256	Medium
My classmates do not help me understand vocabulary in English	2.83	1.206	Medium

The mean scores ranged from 2.45 to 3.19, indicating high and medium levels of difficulty. Students reported significant challenges in mastering reading, writing, and speaking skills due to limited vocabulary. They also expressed a lack of self-reliance and peer support in learning vocabulary.

4.2. Instructor-Related Challenges

Table 4 outlines the difficulties related to the instructor's domain. The mean scores ranged from 2.05 to 2.71, all at medium levels. Students noted that instructors do not diversify teaching methods, use encouragement strategies, or help students connect new vocabulary to real-life contexts.

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations of Learning Vocabulary Difficulties in the Instructor's Domain

Statement	Mean	STD	Level
The teacher does not diversify the methods of teaching vocabulary	2.61	1.240	Medium
I cannot communicate with the teacher to explain difficult vocabulary	2.62	1.254	Medium
The teacher does not use a variety of activities to teach vocabulary	2.70	1.235	Medium
The teacher does not link previous concepts with new ones	2.46	1.172	Medium
The teacher does not use methods of encouragement and reinforcement in teaching vocabulary	2.71	1.227	Medium
The instructor is unable to teach vocabulary in English	2.07	1.090	Medium
The instructor does not give me a chance to take part in a discussion	2.05	1.050	Medium

4.3. Textbook-Related Challenges

Table 5 presents the difficulties related to the textbook. Mean scores ranged from 2.63 to 3.03, revealing medium and high levels of difficulty. The highest score (3.03) was for the statement that the textbook does not present vocabulary topics interestingly.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations of Learning Vocabulary Difficulties in the Textbook's Domain

Statement	Mean	STD	Level
The topics of teaching vocabulary in English are not interrelated	2.63	1.224	Medium
The topics related to teaching vocabulary in the course are presented briefly, although they need to be explained in depth	2.81	1.191	Medium
The textbook does not present the topics related to teaching English vocabulary in an interesting way.	3.03	1.116	High
Teaching vocabulary in English focuses on the theoretical aspect and has no practical application	2.99	1.218	Medium
The activities and exercises in the book are many and make me feel bored	2.83	1.228	Medium

4.4. Class Environment-Related Challenges

Table 6 shows the difficulties related to the class environment. Mean scores ranged from 2.98 to 3.31, mostly at high levels. Large class sizes, lack of facilities, and noise were significant barriers to vocabulary learning.

Table 6
Means and Standard Deviations of Learning Vocabulary Difficulties in the Class Environment's Domain

Statement	Mean	STD	Level
The number of students in one class is large, which reduces the chances of understanding vocabulary in English	3.09	1.136	High
The classrooms do not have the necessary facilities to teach vocabulary, especially technological ones	3.31	1.071	High
The time allotted for teaching vocabulary is not adequate	2.98	1.162	Medium
I cannot understand the teacher's explanation of vocabulary due to noise from outside the classroom)	3.20	1.179	High

4.5. Gender and Academic Year Analysis

To answer the second question, "Are there any statistically significant differences in the mean scores that may be attributed to the variable of gender?" mean scores and standard deviations were analyzed using a t-test. Table 7 shows no significant differences related to gender.

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviations, and T-Test of the Effect of Gender on the Difficulties of Learning English Vocabulary

Gender	No. of participants	Mean	STD	t-value	DF	Sig.
Male	38	2.78	.793	-.232	113	.817
Female	77	2.81	.751			

To answer the third question, "Are there any statistically significant differences in the mean scores that may be attributed to the variable of academic year?" mean scores and standard deviations were analyzed using one-way ANOVA. Table 8 shows the results, indicating no significant differences.

Table 8
Means and Standard Deviations of the Difficulties of Learning English Vocabulary in accordance with the Academic Year Variable

Academic year	Number of Participants	Mean	STD
First	69	2.91	.674
Second	21	2.83	.819
Third	15	2.48	.884
Fourth	10	2.48	.914
Total	115	2.80	.762

Table 8 shows that the mean scores ranged between (2.48 and 2.91) indicating a medium level of agreement, and the mean score of the difficulties of comprehending English vocabulary among FFLANG students at ABBU as a whole was 2.80, which is a medium level. To distinguish the statistical discrepancies between the mean scores, one-way ANOVA for the effect of the university year was used, and the results were extracted as illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9
Results of One-way ANOVA of the Difficulties of Learning English Vocabulary in accordance with the Academic Year Variable

Source	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	3.333	3	1.111	1.964	.124
Within groups	62.800	111	.566		
Total	66.133	114			

There are no statistically significant differences pertinent to the academic year. This implies that the academic year does not affect the difficulties in comprehending English vocabulary among FFLANG students at AABU.

5. Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the issue of the difficulties of vocabulary learning among the FFLANG students at AABU in connection with cultural context and to explore the influence, if any, of gender and academic year variations on those difficulties. Data were collected from 115 students enrolled in the Study Skills in English Language course during the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023. The results indicated that students experienced significant difficulties in learning English vocabulary within four domains: learner, instructor, textbook, and class environment.

In the scope of learner's domain, students stated that they have difficulties with listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills due to insufficient knowledge of vocabulary. Abuhabil et al. (2021) maintained that the role of vocabulary is crucial in language mastery, emphasizing that students cannot efficiently interact without robust lexicons. Likewise, vocabulary acquisition is vital for reading comprehension as well as for promoting other language skills, namely writing, speaking, and listening (Baniabdelrahman & Al-Shumaimeri, 2013; Lotfi, 2007). In addition, students indicated that cooperation from colleagues to understand vocabulary was inadequate, contrary to Ababneh (2013), who found a reliance on classmates for vocabulary comprehension.

These difficulties may also be attributed to the cultural context. When learning a new language, learners face many challenges related to cultural differences. Customs and traditions vary from one country to another, and learners may encounter difficult situations if they are not familiar with the culture associated with the language they are learning (Karlik, 2023). For example, words or expressions used for greetings, invitations, or even refusals and apologies may be completely different from what is customary in the learners' own culture. Karlik (2023) stresses that learners should understand the cultural context of the language they are learning because culture affects the lexicons that we select when interacting with others. Moreover, Dankova (2023) confirms that the learners' own culture should

not be ignored in EFL classrooms because when learners compare and contrast their culture with the L2 culture, this could motivate them and enhance their learning.

Considering the instructor's domain, the current study uncovered that instructors generally apply traditional methods in teaching vocabularies, like antonyms, synonyms, and definitions. Nonetheless, these methods usually fail to involve learners in the empirical use of newly acquired words in real-life situations (Al Musa, 2022). Further, educators tend to keep control over the activities of the classroom, restricting the opportunities for learner-centered education (Goundar, 2015). Additionally, teachers sometimes may not be able to teach the L2 culture which could affect acquiring the vocabulary. As Tran (2010) points out, it is dangerous to assume that language educators could easily teach the culture of a foreign language. Thus, to foster vocabulary acquisition, instructors should be motivated to understand the L2 culture and adopt creative instructing strategies that support active student involvement and real-life implementation of language skills.

Regarding the textbook domain, learners reported discontent with the engagement and relevance of the activities of vocabulary learning given in the course material. In spite of including many exercises, the course book failed to link vocabulary lessons with real-life contexts, thus preventing meaningful learning. These outcomes were confirmed by Al Musa (2022) and Dakhil et al. (2022), who highlighted that it can be difficult for EFL students to comprehend and retain new words in the absence of context and significant connections to real-life conditions. Ahmed (2018) focused on the powerful role of textbooks in formulating strategies for vocabulary learning, advising that course books should be closely relevant to students' practical language demands. Further, the textbook should include activities that deal with the cultures of L1 and L2, which could encourage and motivate students to learn vocabulary by comparing and contrasting both cultures (Dankova, 2023).

With respect to the class environment domain, students revealed significant challenges such as insufficient classroom facilities, large class sizes, and exterior noise disturbances. These environmental elements negatively affect learners' concentration and impede efficient vocabulary learning (Baihaqi et al., 2019). The outcomes underline the significance of establishing a contributory learning environment that supports communicative and focused activities of language acquisition (Ahmed, 2018). EFL classrooms should also be equipped with technological means that help students, for example, watch videos on the culture of the target language, including visible components such as food, clothes, and housing or invisible components like values, beliefs, and customs that might be interesting topics for conversations (Dankova, 2023).

Statistical analysis indicated no significant disparities in the difficulties of vocabulary learning related to gender and academic year. This goes in line with previous studies (e.g., Ababneh, 2013; Muhammad Nur & Jusoh, 2022), which also found no substantial gender-related disparities in vocabulary acquisition. One possible explanation for this lack of significance is that the study sample, drawn from a relatively homogeneous educational context, may have shared similar experiences and challenges regardless of gender or academic level. The use of a single institutional context (Al al-Bayt University) may have reduced the variability that typically leads to significant differences. Additionally, the focus of the course (Study Skills in English Language) might have equalized the challenges faced by students across different demographic groups.

To sum up, the findings indicated that students face difficulties in understanding vocabulary that is relevant to the domains of the learner, the instructor, the textbook, and the classroom environment in connection with cultural context. This refers to rationales, including the fact that the learners did not obtain a well-based education in the English language in their childhood due to living conditions, including poverty. As such, many students do not have the opportunity to study in private schools and obtain an excellent education because public schools in Jordan, as well as other Arab countries, suffer from overcrowding and lack of capabilities (Ahmed, 2018). Among other causes of difficulties are the traditional methods used by teachers, which depend on explaining what is in the book without paying attention to whether the student has understood the vocabulary or not (Yassin, 2015). In addition, there are difficulties related to the classroom environment, which is not well-equipped, overcrowded, and noisy, causing distraction for the students. This coincides with the opinion of Ahmed (2018), who declared that the location, i.e., the learning environment, is the most substantial factor that affects the

students' vocabulary learning. Furthermore, cultural differences between L1 and L2 can cause difficulties in vocabulary learning if the learners are ignorant of the culture of the L2 (Karlik, 2023).

This study has several implications for practice and policy in English language teaching. Educators should strive to adopt innovative teaching approaches that promote active student engagement and real-world application of vocabulary skills. Policymakers are encouraged to invest in improving classroom infrastructure and reducing class sizes to create more conducive learning environments. Additionally, the findings underscore the need for comprehensive teacher training programs that emphasize modern pedagogical techniques tailored to enhance vocabulary acquisition with a focus on the cultural context.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The research was conducted at a single institution, limiting the generalizability of findings to other educational contexts. The reliance on self-report data through questionnaires may introduce response biases, affecting the validity of outcomes. Future research may aim to duplicate these findings using larger, more varied samples across different educational settings to foster the external validity of the study outcomes. Research specific to the influence of the academic year on vocabulary learning difficulties also remains scarce, highlighting a potential area for future investigation. Further research is suggested to be conducted focusing on the effect of using technology in acquiring vocabulary.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire aims to obtain information related to the difficulties faced by students of the Faculty of Arts who study the course "*Study Skills in English*" at Al al-Bayt University. The obtained information is for research purposes only and it will be dealt with in strict confidentiality. Please answer the questions by following the instructions in Sections One and Two.

Thank you for your kind cooperation

Section One

Gender: Male --------- Female ----------

Academic year: ----------

Section Two

Answer the following statements by writing a tick (√) in front of the appropriate answer.

No.	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	I do not understand when I read an English text due to a lack of vocabulary.				
2	I lack conversational skills due to a lack of knowledge in vocabulary.				
3	I lack English writing skills due to a lack of vocabulary.				
4	I cannot distinguish between the parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and others.				
5	I can't put the vocabulary I've learned into sentences of my own.				
6	I find it difficult to understand the vocabulary of the English language.				
7	I can't rely on myself to understand English vocabulary.				
8	My classmates do not help me understand vocabulary in English.				
9	The teacher does not diversify the methods of teaching vocabulary.				
10	I cannot communicate with the teacher to explain difficult vocabulary.				

11	The teacher does not use a variety of activities to teach vocabulary.				
12	The teacher does not link previous concepts with new ones.				
13	The teacher does not use methods of encouragement and reinforcement in teaching vocabulary.				
14	The instructor is unable to teach vocabulary in English.				
15	The instructor does not give me a chance to take part in a discussion.				
16	The teacher does not diversify the methods of teaching vocabulary.				
17	The topics of teaching vocabulary in English are not interrelated.				
18	The topics related to teaching vocabulary in the course are presented briefly, although they need to be explained in depth.				
19	The textbook does not present the topics related to teaching English vocabulary in an interesting way.				
20	Teaching vocabulary in English focuses on the theoretical aspect and has no practical application.				
21	The activities and exercises in the book are many and make me feel bored.				
22	The number of students in one class is large, which reduces the chances of understanding vocabulary in English.				
23	The classrooms do not have the necessary facilities to teach vocabulary, especially technological ones.				
24	The time allotted for teaching vocabulary is not adequate.				
25	I cannot understand the teacher's explanation of vocabulary due to noise from outside the classroom).				