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THE PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN READING LESSONS AT QASSIM UNIVERSITY, SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract: English vocabulary learning is fundamental to second language effective communication, yet English major students consider vocabulary memorization a tedious and challenging task. The current study investigates English major students' perceptions and utilization of reading as a means of vocabulary development at Qassim University. The study aims to identify learners' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences regarding the utilization of reading to enhance English vocabulary. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study employed a questionnaire survey to gather qualitative and quantitative data from 53 male English-majored students. The findings show that students have a moderate to high level of awareness (M = 3.82, SD = 0.62) regarding vocabulary learning through reading lessons. Approximately 65% of participants consider vocabulary learning key to comprehending a language, whereas 22% were skeptical about the effectiveness of reading as a fundamental vocabulary acquisition strategy. The study also revealed some challenges participants face when learning vocabulary through reading, including difficulty with technical terms, limited contextual understanding, and a lack of retention strategies. The findings emphasize the importance of considering the perceptions of learners in the development of vocabulary learning interventions in the Saudi EFL environment. By addressing these perceptions and challenges, educators can develop more effective reading-based models that enhance vocabulary learning and enable students to become proficient English professionals.

Keywords: Incidental vocabulary learning, Learning perceptions, Vocabulary challenges, Vocabulary learning strategies, Vocabulary retention

I.   Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition plays a central role in second language learning and is widely regarded as a fundamental aspect of language proficiency. Scholars consistently emphasize vocabulary as a crucial component that underpins the four core language skills (Nation, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Schmitt, 2010). Acquiring vocabulary is particularly vital in the context of foreign language learning, where understanding the meanings of new words—frequently encountered in classroom settings or reading materials—is essential. Vocabulary lies at the heart of language instruction and remains a central concern for learners. Among the various techniques employed to build vocabulary, reading serves as a particularly effective medium, offering learners repeated exposure to new words in meaningful contexts, which aids both comprehension and retention. Nevertheless, the success of vocabulary learning through reading is not merely dependent on exposure; it is also shaped by learners' attitudes, strategies, and perceptions toward the process.

For undergraduate students majoring in English Language Studies at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia— where English functions as a foreign language—understanding how vocabulary is acquired through reading becomes critical. This is especially important for educators and students alike. Gaining insight into students' perceptions allows for a deeper understanding of both cognitive and emotional dimensions of vocabulary learning, highlighting its nuanced nature. Such investigation not only broadens theoretical perspectives on language acquisition but also provides practical guidance for refining instructional strategies. By analyzing learners' beliefs, strategies, and

experiences related to vocabulary acquisition in reading tasks, this study seeks to uncover the key factors that shape their awareness and learning processes.

At Qassim University, male English majors appear to hold mixed views regarding vocabulary learning despite its essential role in supporting language development through reading. Learners must identify and focus on key vocabulary in texts, a process that directly impacts reading comprehension—a relationship well-documented in the literature (Roehrig & Guo, 2011). Based on these considerations, the present study aims to explore learners' perceptions of vocabulary learning within the framework of reading lessons. It further seeks to understand the strategies they employ and assess how different types of reading materials influence their vocabulary acquisition. As Pustika (2019) notes, providing learners with targeted vocabulary and discourse frameworks can significantly enhance their academic progress, particularly in reading-focused activities. The study intends to offer meaningful insights that support effective language teaching practices and foster vocabulary growth in EFL contexts by addressing these aspects. Ultimately, promoting positive perceptions of vocabulary learning in reading lessons is vital for educational advancement in Saudi Arabia.

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable importance for several reasons. Firstly, it addresses a notable gap in existing research on vocabulary acquisition among Saudi English majors. While much of the current literature has concentrated on Western or East Asian learners, limited attention has been paid to the Saudi higher education context. By examining how male students at Qassim University perceive vocabulary learning through reading, this study offers insights into the unique cultural and educational dynamics influencing language acquisition in Saudi Arabia.

Secondly, the study has direct pedagogical relevance. By uncovering students' perceptions, strategies, and challenges, it can inform more effective teaching practices tailored to learners' specific needs. These insights can support the development of instructional approaches that enhance vocabulary acquisition and overall language competence within Saudi universities.

Thirdly, this research contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on vocabulary learning in foreign language environments, particularly where exposure to English is largely restricted to academic settings. It offers new perspectives that may refine existing models of second language vocabulary development, especially concerning the impact of reading and learner attitudes.

Lastly, the findings have implications for curriculum design and educational policy. By highlighting students' learning experiences and difficulties, the study can guide more responsive and practical curriculum adjustments. This ensures that English language programs better equip Saudi English majors with the linguistic tools needed for their future roles as language professionals.

Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do English-majored students at Qassim University perceive their vocabulary learning through reading lessons in English language acquisition?
2. What are the main difficulties and challenges that English-majored students at Qassim University encounter when learning vocabulary through reading activities?

II.   Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary acquisition is widely regarded as a fundamental component of language learning and development. Nation (2013) asserts that vocabulary knowledge forms the core of communication, acting as the essential units that enable both expression and understanding. Similarly, Schmitt (2010) highlights the direct link between vocabulary proficiency and overall language competence. Milton (2009) further emphasizes this point, suggesting that lexical knowledge may be the most critical element in foreign language acquisition, as it allows learners to engage with and interpret linguistic input effectively.

The significance of vocabulary in achieving language proficiency is further supported by Webb and Nation (2017), who identify vocabulary size as a strong indicator of reading comprehension, writing performance, and general linguistic ability. In the same vein, Gu (2003) underscores that vocabulary learning underpins all four language skills and should not be treated as a separate or secondary aspect of language education. Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010) add a quantitative dimension to this understanding, proposing that a vocabulary base of approximately 8,000 word families is essential for independent comprehension of academic texts.

2.2 English Vocabulary Learning

English vocabulary learning has been explored through a range of theoretical perspectives. Ellis (2019) characterizes it as a multifaceted cognitive process that involves repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts. This view aligns with Hulstijn's (2001) distinction between intentional and incidental learning, the latter occurring organically through communicative activities like reading.

Empirical studies support the value of repeated exposure. Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) found that learners can develop substantial vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading, especially when words are encountered multiple times. Webb (2007) emphasized that both the depth of processing and the richness of context significantly impact vocabulary acquisition. This aligns with the Involvement Load Hypothesis proposed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001), which posits that deeper cognitive engagement with vocabulary enhances retention.

In the Saudi context, Alhaisoni (2012) observed that learners' cultural and educational backgrounds shape their vocabulary learning strategies and outcomes. Al-Seghayer (2015) further highlights the linguistic gap between Arabic and English as a major obstacle for Saudi EFL learners, reinforcing the need for tailored instructional methods.

2.3 English Vocabulary Teaching

Approaches to teaching English vocabulary have undergone significant development over time. Nation (2008) promotes a balanced methodology that integrates explicit instruction with opportunities for incidental learning through extensive reading and listening. Schmitt (2008) similarly emphasizes the importance of addressing both the breadth (quantity of vocabulary) and depth (quality of lexical knowledge) in vocabulary instruction.

In the Saudi educational context, Al-Akloby (2001) notes that traditional teaching methods have largely centered on memorization and translation, with minimal focus on contextual usage. However, more recent studies, such as Alsaif and Milton (2012), point to a gradual shift toward communicative teaching approaches, even though vocabulary instruction often remains decontextualized.

Hunt and Beglar (2005) propose a comprehensive framework that includes explicit teaching, incidental exposure, and the development of learner autonomy—an approach that has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse educational settings. Within higher education, Coxhead (2018) underscores the necessity of teaching academic vocabulary to better prepare students for discipline-specific reading and writing tasks.

Focusing on Saudi learners, Alqahtani (2015) found that multimodal teaching strategies—incorporating visuals, contextualized learning, and technology—produced more effective results than traditional methods. Faruk (2014) further highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, advocating for vocabulary instruction that aligns with the learning needs and preferences of Saudi English majors.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods design to examine how English majors at Qassim University perceive vocabulary learning through reading lessons. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches provided a more comprehensive view of the research topic, following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) assertion that mixed-methods research yields more robust results than single-method designs. Dörnyei (2007) also supports this approach, particularly in language learning contexts, where it offers complementary perspectives on complex educational dynamics.

The quantitative phase enabled the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to identify trends and relationships (Cohen et al., 2018). In contrast, the qualitative component facilitated an in-depth exploration of students' perceptions, attitudes, and personal experiences (Mackey & Gass, 2016). As Hashemi (2012) emphasizes, this approach is well-suited for studying vocabulary acquisition, which involves both measurable outcomes and subjective dimensions.

A sequential explanatory design begins with quantitative data collection through a questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This structure allowed the researchers to use qualitative insights to expand upon and clarify the initial statistical findings (Ivankova et al., 2006).

3.2. Participants

The study involved 53 male undergraduate students majoring in English at Qassim University's Department of English Language and Literature. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which, as defined by Etikan et al. (2016), involves choosing individuals based on relevant characteristics—in this case, their enrollment as English majors from the second to fourth academic year.

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 23 years (M = 21.4, SD = 1.2), and all were native Arabic speakers learning English as a foreign language. Based on self-reported proficiency, 12 students (22.6%) identified as advanced, 31 (58.5%) as intermediate, and 10 (18.9%) as lower-intermediate learners. This range reflects Al-Seghayer's (2014)

observation that Saudi university students in English programs often exhibit varied language proficiency levels despite having similar educational experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The primary instrument for quantitative data collection was a structured questionnaire developed to evaluate students' perceptions of vocabulary learning through reading. Adapted from the vocabulary learning strategy frameworks of Gu and Johnson (1996) and Schmitt (1997), the questionnaire was modified to align with the Saudi educational context, following the recommendations of Al-Masrai and Milton (2012). It comprised 35 items divided into four key sections:

1. Demographic information (5 items)
2. General perceptions of vocabulary learning through reading (10 items)
3. Challenges encountered in vocabulary learning while reading (10 items)
4. Strategies employed during vocabulary learning through reading (10 items)

Items in Sections 2 to 4 were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Consistent with Dörnyei and Taguchi's (2009) guidelines, the questionnaire underwent a rigorous validation process prior to administration. Content validity was ensured through expert review by three specialists in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. Reliability was confirmed via a pilot study involving 15 students (excluded from the main study sample), producing a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86—indicating high internal consistency as per DeVellis' (2016) reliability benchmarks.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

After the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 12 participants (22.6% of the total sample), selected based on their questionnaire responses to capture a range of perspectives. As highlighted by Mackey and Gass (2016), this interview format enables in-depth exploration of participants' views while ensuring a level of consistency across sessions. The interview protocol included 12 open-ended questions aimed at eliciting rich insights into learners' experiences, challenges, and strategies related to vocabulary acquisition through reading.

3.4 Procedures

The study was conducted during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year, following ethical approval granted by the Research Ethics Committee at Qassim University. All research activities adhered to the ethical standards set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), including participant confidentiality, informed consent, and the right to withdraw at any stage.

The data collection was organized into four phases:

1. **Preparation and Piloting Phase**: The questionnaire was piloted with 15 students who shared similar characteristics with the target sample but were excluded from the main study. Based on their feedback and a reliability check, minor revisions were made to improve clarity and relevance, in line with Dörnyei's (2010) recommendations.
2. **Quantitative Data Collection Phase**: The revised questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, a method validated by Al-Zahrani (2018) for effectiveness among Saudi university students. Participants had one week to complete the form, with a reminder issued after four days to encourage participation, as advised by Dillman et al. (2014).
3. **Participant Selection for Interviews**: Based on questionnaire responses, 12 students reflecting varying English proficiency levels and diverse perceptions of vocabulary learning were purposively selected for interviews. This approach aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidance on selecting participants to represent a range of experiences.
4. **Qualitative Data Collection Phase**: Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a quiet university setting. Following King and Horrocks' (2010) guidelines, each session began with rapport-building before transitioning to the core questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

IV.   Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Perceptions of Vocabulary Learning through Reading Lessons

4.1.1 Quantitative Findings

The first research question explored English majors' perceptions of vocabulary learning through reading lessons at Qassim University. Questionnaire results indicated that students demonstrated moderate to high levels of awareness regarding the significance of vocabulary acquisition via reading, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: General Perceptions of Vocabulary Learning through Reading

Statement	Mean	SD	Level of Perception
Reading is an effective way to learn new vocabulary	3.92	0.84	High
I enjoy learning new words through reading	3.58	0.97	Moderate
Reading helps me understand how words are used in context	4.11	0.73	High
I can remember words better when I encounter them in reading	3.64	0.88	Moderate
Reading various materials expands my vocabulary knowledge	4.02	0.76	High
Reading is more effective than memorizing word lists	3.73	1.04	High
I can guess the meaning of unknown words from context while reading	3.47	0.92	Moderate
I consciously pay attention to new words when I read	3.81	0.85	High
Learning vocabulary through reading improves my overall language skills	4.06	0.71	High
Reading extensively is necessary for vocabulary development	3.88	0.82	High
Overall Mean	**3.82**	**0.62**	**High**

Note: Mean scores were categorized as follows: 1.00-2.33 (Low); 2.34-3.67 (Moderate); 3.68-5.00 (High)

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score of 3.82 (SD = 0.62) indicates that English-major students at Qassim University generally hold a strong perception of vocabulary learning through reading. Students particularly acknowledged the contextual value of reading for vocabulary growth (M = 4.11, SD = 0.73) and its role in enhancing overall language proficiency (M = 4.06, SD = 0.71). These results support Nation's (2013) claim that learning vocabulary in context through reading fosters deeper lexical understanding than isolated approaches.

A closer examination of the data uncovered notable variations based on students' self-reported proficiency levels, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Perceptions Based on Proficiency Level

Proficiency Level	N	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Advanced	12	4.21	0.53	8.42	0.001*
Intermediate	31	3.79	0.58		
Lower-intermediate	10	3.41	0.61		

*Significant at p < 0.05

he ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions based on proficiency levels (F = 8.42, p = 0.001). Advanced learners reported more favorable perceptions (M = 4.21, SD = 0.53) compared to their intermediate (M = 3.79, SD = 0.58) and lower-intermediate peers (M = 3.41, SD = 0.61). These results support Laufer's (2010) finding that higher-proficiency learners are better positioned to benefit from contextual vocabulary learning, as they can interpret and apply contextual clues effectively.

4.1.2 Qualitative Findings

The semi-structured interviews offered valuable qualitative insights into students' perceptions of vocabulary learning through reading. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: (1) recognition of reading as an effective source for vocabulary development, (2) preferences between authentic and academic texts, (3) contrasts between intentional and incidental learning strategies, and (4) the integration of reading with other vocabulary learning methods.

Most participants explicitly affirmed the role of reading in enhancing vocabulary. They highlighted the importance of contextual exposure, noting that encountering words within meaningful text improves understanding and retention.

"When I learn a word in a story or article, I understand not just its meaning but how it's used naturally. This helps me remember it better than just memorizing words from a list." (Participant 8, Advanced)

"Reading gives me the full picture of the word—its meaning, how it connects with other words, when to use it. It's like seeing the word in its natural habitat." (Participant 2, Intermediate)

These statements echo Schmitt's (2008) contention that contextual vocabulary learning develops deeper word knowledge, including collocational patterns and usage conventions. However, some participants expressed concerns about the efficiency of this approach:

"Yes, reading is good for vocabulary, but it's slow. Sometimes I need to learn many words quickly for an exam, and reading takes too much time compared to using flashcards or apps." (Participant 11, Lower-intermediate)

This concern reflects findings by Alqahtani (2015), who noted that Saudi students often experience educational pressure to acquire vocabulary rapidly, which may conflict with the more gradual process of incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. Regarding reading materials, interviewees expressed varied preferences. Several participants favored authentic materials such as novels, newspapers, and online articles:

"I learn more useful vocabulary from reading novels and news websites than from textbooks. These words are what people actually use in real life." (Participant 5, Advanced)

Conversely, others preferred structured academic texts for vocabulary acquisition:

"Academic readings are better for learning specialized vocabulary that I need for my studies and future career. They contain more advanced words that don't appear in everyday articles." (Participant 3, Intermediate)

These divergent preferences align with Nation's (2008) recommendation for a balanced approach to reading materials, combining authentic texts for engagement and motivation with academic materials for specialized vocabulary development.

4.2 Difficulties and Challenges in Vocabulary Learning through Reading
4.2.1 Quantitative Findings

The second research question examined the challenges faced by English-major students in learning vocabulary through reading. Relevant findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Difficulties in Vocabulary Learning through Reading

Statement	Mean	SD	Level of Difficulty
I struggle to guess the meaning of new words from context	3.87	0.93	High
Technical vocabulary in academic texts is difficult to understand	4.15	0.78	High
I forget new words soon after reading them	3.94	0.89	High
I find it difficult to recognize different forms of the same word	3.56	0.97	Moderate
I'm unsure which new words are important to learn	3.79	0.91	High
Reading materials contain too many unknown words	3.83	0.95	High
I have difficulty understanding idiomatic expressions	4.08	0.82	High
I struggle with pronunciation of new words encountered in reading	3.67	1.04	Moderate
Cultural references make understanding vocabulary difficult	3.92	0.86	High
I find it hard to use newly learned words in my own speaking/writing	3.89	0.90	High
Overall Mean	**3.87**	**0.58**	**High**

Note: Mean scores were categorized as follows: 1.00-2.33 (Low); 2.34-3.67 (Moderate); 3.68-5.00 (High)

The overall mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.58) indicates that students generally experience a high level of difficulty when learning vocabulary through reading. The most significant challenges reported were understanding technical vocabulary in academic texts (M = 4.15, SD = 0.78) and comprehending idiomatic expressions (M = 4.08, SD = 0.82). These findings correspond with research by Hyland and Tse (2007), who identified discipline-specific terminology as a major obstacle for EFL learners in academic contexts.

Further analysis revealed significant differences in perceived difficulties based on students' academic year, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Difficulties Based on Academic Year

Academic Year	N	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Second year	19	4.12	0.51	5.84	0.005*
Third year	21	3.87	0.55		
Fourth year	13	3.52	0.59		

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

The ANOVA results showed a significant difference in perceived difficulties across academic years (F = 5.84, p = 0.005), with second-year students reporting greater difficulties (M = 4.12, SD = 0.51) than fourth-year students (M = 3.52, SD = 0.59). This pattern suggests that students develop more effective strategies for dealing with vocabulary challenges as they progress through their academic program.

4.2.2 Qualitative Findings

The semi-structured interviews provided more detailed insights into the specific challenges students face when learning vocabulary through reading. Five main themes emerged: (1) overwhelming lexical density, (2) difficulties with polysemy and connotation, (3) limited transfer to productive language skills, (4) insufficient exposure and repetition, and (5) challenges with technical and academic vocabulary. Many participants expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by the number of unknown words in authentic reading materials:

"Sometimes I try to read an article in English, but there are so many new words that I get frustrated and give up. It's like hitting a wall of unknown vocabulary" (Participant 11, Lower-intermediate)

Participants frequently mentioned confusion with words that have multiple meanings or subtle connotations:

"I know the basic meaning of many words, but when I see them used differently in reading, I get confused. Words like 'pick up' or 'break down' change meaning depending on context" (Participant 4, Intermediate)

A recurring theme was difficulty in transferring receptive vocabulary knowledge gained through reading to productive use in speaking and writing:

"I recognize many words when I read them, but when I try to use them in conversation, they don't come to mind. It's like they're locked in a part of my brain I can't access when speaking" (Participant 9, Intermediate)

This gap between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge is well-documented in the literature. Webb (2008) differentiates between these two aspects of vocabulary knowledge, noting that productive mastery requires more extensive knowledge and practice than receptive recognition.

Participants also highlighted the challenge of retaining vocabulary without sufficient repeated exposure:

"I look up many new words when reading, but I forget most of them because I don't see them again soon enough" (Participant 12, Lower-intermediate)

All advanced and intermediate learners mentioned specific difficulties with specialized academic vocabulary:

"General English vocabulary is manageable, but academic texts have specific technical terms that are hard to understand and remember, especially since they often don't appear in everyday language" (Participant 1, Advanced)

4.3 Discussion of Key Findings

The results indicate that English-majored students at Qassim University generally recognize the value of reading for vocabulary development, with an overall positive perception (M = 3.82, SD = 0.62). This aligns with Horst's (2005) assertion that reading provides essential contextual knowledge for vocabulary acquisition. However, the students' attitudes appear more measured compared to the strongly favorable perceptions noted in earlier studies. Qualitative data added depth to this perspective, indicating that while students value reading as a tool for learning vocabulary, they also question its efficiency and adequacy as a sole strategy. This balanced stance aligns with Schmitt's (2008) recommendation for an integrated approach that combines incidental learning through reading with intentional vocabulary study and practice.

The significant difference in perceptions based on proficiency levels, with advanced learners showing more positive attitudes than lower-proficiency learners. According to this theory, learners need a certain vocabulary size (approximately 4,000-5,000 word families) to read effectively and benefit from contextual vocabulary learning.

Regarding challenges, the high overall difficulty score (M = 3.87, SD = 0.58) indicates that students face significant obstacles when learning vocabulary through reading. The particular difficulty with technical vocabulary in academic texts (M = 4.15, SD = 0.78) aligns with Hyland and Tse's (2007) research highlighting the specialized nature of academic vocabulary as a major obstacle for EFL learners.

The significant difference in perceived difficulties based on academic year, with second-year students reporting greater challenges than fourth-year students, suggests the development of more effective strategies over time. This pattern supports Schmitt's (2010) observation that vocabulary learning strategies become more sophisticated with increased language learning experience.

The qualitative findings provided deeper insights into specific challenges, including overwhelming lexical density, difficulties with polysemy and connotation, limited transfer to productive skills, insufficient exposure and repetition, and struggles with technical vocabulary. These challenges echo those identified in previous research with similar populations. For instance, Al-Seghayer (2015) noted that Saudi EFL learners typically struggle with the polysemous nature of English vocabulary, while Alhaisoni (2012) highlighted limited exposure to English outside the classroom as a key barrier to vocabulary retention.

V.   Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of English-majored students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, toward vocabulary learning through reading lessons, focusing on their attitudes and the challenges they encounter in this process. The findings revealed that students generally recognize the value of reading for vocabulary acquisition,

with an overall high level of perception (M = 3.82, SD = 0.62). They particularly appreciated how reading provides contextual knowledge of vocabulary and contributes to overall language development.

However, the research also identified significant challenges that students face when learning vocabulary through reading. These include difficulties with technical and academic vocabulary, limited transfer from receptive to productive knowledge, insufficient exposure and repetition, and problems with polysemy and connotation. The overall high level of perceived difficulty (M = 3.87, SD = 0.58) indicates that despite recognizing reading's value for vocabulary acquisition, students encounter substantial obstacles in the process.

The study revealed notable differences in perceptions and challenges based on proficiency levels and academic year. Advanced learners and fourth-year students demonstrated more positive perceptions and fewer difficulties compared to their lower-proficiency and junior counterparts. This pattern suggests the development of more effective learning strategies with increased language proficiency and academic experience.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, several pedagogical implications can be drawn for English language instruction in Saudi universities:

1. **Differentiated vocabulary instruction**: The significant differences in perceptions and challenges based on proficiency levels highlight the need for tailored approaches that address the specific needs of learners at different stages (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). Lower-proficiency learners may benefit from more structured support and graded reading materials, while advanced learners could engage with more authentic and varied texts.

2. **Integrated vocabulary teaching approaches**: The students' recognition of reading's value alongside their acknowledgment of its limitations suggests that integrated approaches would be more effective than relying exclusively on either incidental or intentional learning methods (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). Combining extensive reading with explicit vocabulary instruction, deliberate practice, and strategic use of digital tools could provide a more comprehensive framework for vocabulary development.

3. **Focus on academic and technical vocabulary**: The particular difficulties reported with specialized vocabulary underscore the importance of discipline-specific vocabulary instruction for English majors (Coxhead, 2018). Explicit teaching of academic word lists, discipline-specific terminology, and strategies for learning technical vocabulary should be incorporated into the English language curriculum.

4. **Bridging receptive and productive knowledge**: The limited transfer to productive skills indicates a need for more opportunities for meaningful language production (Webb, 2008). Incorporating more speaking and writing activities that require the use of newly acquired vocabulary could help bridge the gap between receptive and productive knowledge.

5. **Strategy training**: The development of more effective strategies among more advanced students suggests that explicit training in vocabulary learning strategies could benefit learners at all levels (Gu, 2003). Teaching students how to effectively use context clues, maintain vocabulary notebooks, and employ digital tools for vocabulary review could enhance their autonomous learning capabilities.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into Saudi English majors' perceptions of vocabulary learning through reading, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size (N = 53) and focus on male students at a single university limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples, including female students and participants from different universities across Saudi Arabia.

Second, the cross-sectional design of this study provides a snapshot of students' perceptions at a specific point in time but does not capture how these perceptions evolve throughout their academic journey. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in vocabulary learning perceptions and strategies over time would provide more comprehensive insights into the developmental aspects of vocabulary acquisition.

Despite these limitations, this research contributes valuable insights into the complex relationship between reading and vocabulary acquisition in the Saudi EFL context. By understanding students' perceptions and challenges, educators can develop more effective approaches to vocabulary instruction that harness the benefits of reading while addressing the specific needs and challenges of Saudi English majors. This, in turn, can support students in developing the robust vocabulary knowledge necessary for academic success and professional communication in English.

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