# Gender Differences of Vocabulary Size: A Study on Bilingual Classes of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh 

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#### Abstract

This study aims to find the gender differences of vocabulary size of bilingual classroom's students in SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh. This study used quantitative approach with descriptive-comparative design. The participants of this study were 94 students of bilingual class in SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh. The samples were chosen using purposive sampling. The data were collected using New Vocabulary Levels Test to measure the students' vocabulary size. It was found that the vocabulary size of male students grade $7^{\text {th }}, 8^{\text {th }}$ and $9^{\text {th }}$ were 2518.93 words, 3371.21 words, and 3381.94 words. While female students' vocabulary size fore grade $7^{\text {th }}, 8^{\text {th }}$, and $9^{\text {th }}$ were 2468.25 words, 2898.80 words, and 3842.59 words. There were no statistical significant differences found between the mean vocabulary size of male and female students grade $7^{\text {th }}$ and $8^{\text {th }}$. The significant difference was found in vocabulary size difference of male and female students' in grade $9^{\text {th }}$. It can be concluded that the vocabulary size of male and female students' were different and increased along with their educational level. The significant difference of vocabulary size between male and female students was only found in grade $9^{\text {th }}$ where female students possessed a bigger number of vocabulary size compared male students.


## INTRODUCTION

English learners, EFL or ESL, often find vocabulary as one of the difficulties in learning English. It is troublesome because having a limited vocabulary can limit somebody's English understanding and expressions. Therefore, vocabulary is an aspect that serves the foundation of how well somebody could read, write, hear, and speak. Having a large vocabulary is important and surely beneficial in learning

English. One of the keys for having an enormous number of vocabularies is by learning more vocabulary.

Only recently has the significance of vocabulary acquisition in learning new language been recognized. Previously, grammar and structure have always been valued as the most important matter to learn a new language. It is essential for a word to be understood before being used. This includes learning how to pronounce, spell and write a word after hearing it for the first time. Furthermore, knowing a word also means knowing its use, form and meaning (Nation \& Hunston, 2013). Therefore, knowing as many words as possible is essential in learning new language.

It is significant for language learner to know 2000-3000 most frequently use words to receive information through reading and listening (Kavanoz \& Varol, 2019). Knowing 2000-3000 words is also generally important to perform effective English (Nation, 1990) Junior high school graduates in Indonesia are expected to know at least 2000 English words (Mustafa, 2019). Therefore, Indonesian junior high school graduates are expected to capable of reading simplified English texts well.

In terms of individual factors that influence how many vocabularies a learner has, gender factors received lesser attention compared to other factors. Other individual factors that influenced a learner's vocabulary size are age, educational stage, and period of learning English. The number of words a learner knows is called vocabulary size (Read, 2000). There aren't many studies that assess vocabulary while paying special attention to gender difference. Even though there aren't precise trends shown by previous studies about gender influencing vocabulary, it is granted that there are differences in vocabulary test results caused by gender difference (Catalán, 2010). Therefore, looking further for the potential of gender relation with the number of vocabulary learners know is needed.

The present study focus is on vocabulary size differences concerning gender at educational stages. There were four questions the researcher would like to answer through this study. The four questions were: (1) What are the receptive vocabulary size of grade 7, 8, and 9 bilingual male students of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh? (2) What are the receptive vocabulary size of grade 7, 8, and 9 bilingual female students of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh? (3) Is there any statistical difference of vocabulary size of male and female bilingual students in SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh? (4) How does the receptive vocabulary size differ across the level of grades concerning gender in bilingual classes of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh?

There are already some researchers (Llach, 2012; Fernandez-Fontecha, 2014; Catro-Garcia, 2017) who conduct vocabulary tests to see the vocabulary size difference concerning gender. Llach \& Gallego (2012) examined the importance of gender in receptive vocabulary size acquisition for young Spanish students of EFL. Participant receptive vocabulary knowledge was tested using Schmitt's Vocabulary Level Test. The result shows that males and females receptive vocabulary knowledge increased across grades with female students gaining higher scores in the receptive vocabulary test. Fernández-Fontecha (2014) also tested learners' receptive vocabulary size to see the effect of motivation and gender to receptive
vocabulary size. The participants were 55 Spanish-speaking EFL learners in the fifth grade of elementary school. On the contrary with Llach's study, FernandezFontecha reveals that the total estimated words known by the male students is higher than the female students due to higher intrinsic motivation. Another researcher who is also looking for receptive vocabulary size differences concerning gender is Castro-García (2017). The receptive vocabulary size of Costa Rican high school students in two distinct schools demonstrates that boys have a somewhat larger receptive vocabulary size than girls in both schools.

From the previous studies, male students tend to outperform female students in total number of words they know during high school. Female students start to acquire more vocabulary than male students during primary school. Middle school is the transition from primary school to high school. Being in the middle, not included in either primary school or high school, the vocabulary size tendencies of middle school students have not been clearly established, whether it tends to resemble those of primary school or high school students. To fill the gap, a study on gender difference of vocabulary size is needed to be held for middle school students. In addition, most of the vocabulary studies in Indonesia are taking general EFL classroom as the participants. Therefore, this research is intended to see how vocabulary sizes differ across the level of grade for middle-schoolers' concerning gender in bilingual classroom as well as checking whether bilingual program could actually make students exceeds the curriculum expectation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Bilingual Class

Bilingual class refers to a type of English class where a bilingual education takes place. Bilingual education defined as teaching through two languages as a permanent or semi-permanent feature in the classroom (Edwards, 2009). There are various types of bilingual education that takes place in bilingual classes. The most powerful bilingual program is the two-way bilingual education where the class is taught using both first and second language. This program aims bilingualism and biliteracy as the language outcome. Two-way bilingual education becomes the most common program in bilingual classes considering its affectivity.

In Indonesia, most bilingual classes are taught in a "two-way bilingual" format. Students are taught in English and Indonesian at the same time (Baker, 2006). In the implementation, this refer to teachers are delivering lessons in English and immediately translate into Indonesian. Bilingual classes can partially only implement two-way bilingual teaching to some chosen subjects besides English or to the entire subjects at school.

### 1.2 Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge

Receptive in language learning carries the idea that we receive language input from others through listening and reading (Nation \& Hunston, 2013). Therefore, receptive vocabulary is defined as vocabulary used to understand language delivered in spoken and written form (Zaim, 2016). The term passive is also used to describe receptive vocabulary. Corson (1995) states that passive vocabulary includes: words that are partly known, low frequency words not readily available to use and words that are avoided to use actively.

There is no agreed terminal stage for knowledge of a word (Ellis, 1994). Due to there is no exact number of how many English words exist, learning vocabulary is a non-stop process. Nation (2013) proposes form, meaning, and use as aspects of knowing a word. He explained that knowing a word's form means knowing its spoken and written form, and word part. Meaning aspects consist of knowing the word's form \& meaning, concept \& references, and associations. Lastly, knowing the use of a word involves grammatical function, collocation, and constraints on use. Therefore, there are a lot of things to learn in order to know a word.

### 1.3 Measuring Receptive Vocabulary Size

Vocabulary size refers to a measurement of how many words a learners knows (Coxhead et al., 2015). Typical native English speakers know between $15,000-20,000$ word families (Webb \& Nation, 2017) and add 1000 words annually to their vocabulary (Nation \& Hunston, 2013). There are plenty of ways for counting words that determine what is counted as someone's vocabulary size. Words can be counted in form of token, types, lemmas, and word families (Nation \& Hunston, 2013). There is a strong argumentation for counting words with word families because learning a new word family indicated a clear increase in lexical knowledge (Webb \& Nation, 2017). Using word families to count words implies counting 'accept', 'accepts', 'accepted', 'acceptable', and 'unacceptable' as a single item, and knowing one of the forms indicates that the learner knows all of the word family members.

In order to perform effective English, learners need to know around 2000 to 3000 word family (Nation, 1990). It is important to understand those specific amount of words because learners whose vocabulary is below a certain threshold level will struggle to decode the basic elements of a text, to the extent that they find it difficult to understand a context better (Read, 2000). Learners tend to learn words they encounter the most before those they encounter less frequent (Webb \& Nation, 2017). Therefore, words' levels can be grouped by their frequency of appearance such as the most frequent 1000 words, 2000 words level and so on. Webb \& Nation (2017) explain that knowing high frequency or most used words enable understanding in several discourse and text type. In conclusion, learners at least should know the most frequently used words in order to perform certain language skills.
There are several test formats to measure receptive vocabulary size:

1) Vocabulary Size Test

Vocabulary Size Test is a multiple choice formatted test designed to measure learners' total written receptive vocabulary size or vocabularies required for reading in English. Therefore it is not supposed to measure listening vocabulary size, or vocabularies needed for speaking and writing. There are two versions of this test: 14,000 words for English as Second Language learners and 20,000 words version for native speakers. The word family tested in Vocabulary Size test is taken from the first 14 1000-headwords of British National Corpus (Bauer \& Nation, 1993). To get a learner's overall receptive vocabulary size, their scores need to be divided by 100 for the 14,000 version and 200 for the 20,000 version.
2) Vocabulary Levels Test

The other test format, Vocabulary Level test, is more suitable for pedagogical purposes and for EFL learners. Vocabulary Level Test is a test format that measure how many words a learner know at a certain level of word frequency for reading purposes. (Nation \& Hunston, 2013) breaks vocabulary in 4 categories: highfrequency words, academic words, technical words, and low frequency words. All that is required to create a list of word frequency categories is to list every word in the corpus, count the number of times each word was discovered, and then rank the terms based on their frequency. There are five levels on Vocabulary Levels Test namely 2000 -word level, 3000 -word level, 5000 -word level, the University Word List level and 10,000 -word level. The 2000 and 3000 -word level on Vocabulary Levels Test are included to the high frequency word that extremely useful for reading. The academic and technical words refer to words for specific purposes and the 10,000 -word level contains low-frequency words which are rarely used in reading.

Tested words in Vocabulary Levels Test are sampled from West's (1953) General Service List for the 2000-word level and Thorndike and Lorge (1994) and Kucera and Francis' (1967) frequency criteria. Vocabulary Levels Test require test takers to pair the list of words on the left side.
3) New Vocabulary Levels Test

New Vocabulary Levels Test is a multiple choice vocabulary test that tests 24 items on each word's level. There are five parts of New Vocabulary Levels Test making it has 120 questions in total. Test takers are required to choose the word or phrase that most closely resembles the target term among the four answer options provided for each item. The words sampled for this test are taken from Nation's British National Corpus / Corpus of Contemporary American English (BNC/COCA). New Vocabulary Levels Test provides larger number of items for each frequency and richer detail about the number of pedagogically relevant, high frequency words compared to earlier Vocabulary Levels Test. (McLean \& Kramer, 2015).

### 1.4 Male vs Female Vocabulary

Gender refers to the social roles played by men and women and the power relations between them, it shaped by culture, natural environment and social relations (Reeves \& Baden, 2000). Social roles must be necessarily reflected on the English learners' lexical competence, which would display similarities and differences derived from common characteristics they share such as gender, age, educational and L1 background (Prados, 2010). That is why in sociolinguistics there are terms of women and men language. Male and female have different views about the purpose of using language that they use different linguistics features. According to Holmes \& Wilson (2022), men tend to employ more vernacular forms than women, whereas women prefer to use standard forms. Therefore, females stereotyped as more polite than males.

It has not been fixated about how males and females differ in terms of mastering vocabulary. Foreign language learners' performance on language test has important educational implications since test results are often to use to discriminate between good and bad language learners (Catalán, 2010). Therefore, one of the ways
to observe the vocabulary mastery difference between males and females is by doing vocabulary test.

## METHOD

### 1.5 Research Design

Quantitative approach was used in this research. Creswell (2017) defines quantitative research as testing objectives theories by examining measurable variables. According to Brown \& Coombe (2015) quantitative research in language study is a systematic approach that addresses research questions with numerical data utilizing empirical methods to assist in explaining how people learn, use and conceptualize language. This research was a descriptive-comparative study. Descriptive-comparative study refers to study that examines the differences in perceptions or behaviors without trying to interfere the cause of the difference (Lodico, M., Spaulding, D. \& Voegtle, 2010). Examining variations across groups in demographic factors like age, gender, ethnicity, grade level, or occupation is a common practice in this kind of research. Accordingly, this research used descriptive-comparative design with quantitative approach because it examines the difference of behaviors of different genders using numerical data.

### 1.6 Participants

The population of this study was students of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh. This study took the three bilingual classrooms of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah with total number of 94 students. The number of participant can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Number of Participants

| Class | Number |  | Total |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Male | Female |  |
| 7 bilingual | 11 | 21 | 32 |
| 8 bilingual | 11 | 21 | 32 |
| 9 bilingual | 12 | 18 | 30 |
| Total | 34 | 60 | 94 |

This research used purposive sampling as the sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique where the chosen individuals are considered to be the most representative of the population (Levy \& Lemeshow, 2013). Sugiyono (2013) defines purposive sampling as sampling technique with certain consideration. To sum up, purposive sampling refers to a sampling technique that uses certain consideration to choose the most representative individuals. This study took male and female bilingual students of SMP Islam Raudhatul Jannah Payakumbuh grade 7, 8 , and 9 as the sample.

### 1.7 Instruments

This research used the New Vocabulary Levels Test to measure learners' receptive vocabulary size. New Vocabulary Levels Test is developed by McLean \& Kremer (2015). This test was in form of multiple choices where students are asked to choose the most suitable meaning of the given words from the four provided options. New Vocabulary Levels Test test is currently available online on Paul Nation's personal website. There were 120 questions in total, divided into five parts with 24
questions for each part. The tested words were sampled from $1^{\text {st }}$ to $5^{\text {th }} 1000$ headwords of British National Corpus / Corpus of Contemporary American English (BNC/COCA) for each part. The first part of New Vocabulary Levels Test containing 24 questions was sampled from the first 1000 headwords of BNC/COCA and vice versa.

### 3.3 Procedure

The participants were informed about the aim of the study and they all agreed to participate. The test was administered online using google form to collect the test answers and to calculate the students' test score. The vocabulary size test consists of 120 questions where the test takers are asked to choose the most suitable meaning for the given word. The participants are given 60 minutes to do the test.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics about bilingual classes' students' vocabulary size can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Bilingual Classes Students Vocabulary Size

| Grade | Gender | N | Mean Score |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 7 | Male | 11 | 2518.93 |
|  | Female | 21 | 2468.25 |
|  | Total | 32 | 2485.67 |
| 8 | Male | 11 | 3371.21 |
|  | Female | 21 | 2898.80 |
|  | Total | 32 | 3061.19 |
| 9 | Male | 12 | 3381.94 |
|  | Female | 18 | 3842.59 |
|  | Total | 30 | 3658.33 |
|  | Male | 34 | 3090.69 |
|  | Female | 60 | 3070.02 |

The table above presented the descriptive statistics for the vocabulary size data of male and female bilingual classes' students. The mean score of grade $7^{\text {th }}$ bilingual vocabulary size was 2485.67 words. The male students of grade $7^{\text {th }}$ bilingual knew 2518.93 words on average while the female students knew 2486.25 words on average. There was just a slight difference of 32.86 words between the mean of male and female students grade $7^{\text {th }}$ bilingual. Grade $8^{\text {th }}$ bilingual vocabulary size was 3061.19 words on average. Grade $8^{\text {th }}$ bilingual male students' mean of vocabulary size was 3371.21 words while the female students' were 2898.80 words. There was 472.41 words difference between the mean vocabulary size of male and female students grade $8^{\text {th }}$ bilingual. The mean vocabulary size of grade $9^{\text {th }}$ bilingual was 3070.02 words. The male students knew 3381.94 words on average while the female students knew 3658.33 words on average. The mean difference was 276.39 words. Totally, the means of male and female students of bilingual classes' vocabulary size were 3090.69 and 3070.02 words with the mean difference about 20.67 words.

A comparative test using independent samples t-test has been conducted to compare the mean of vocabulary size between male and female students. The result was as following.

Table 3. Male and Female Students t-value for Vocabulary Size Independent
Samples t-test

| Grade | Calculated $t$ value | Critical $t$ value |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 7 | 0.206 | 2.042 |
| 8 | 1.374 | 2.042 |
| 9 | 2.439 | 2.048 |

The table above showed the calculated and critical $t$ value obtained from independent samples $t$-test for male and female students in bilingual classes. The $t$ value calculated from mean difference of male and female students vocabulary size for grade $7^{\text {th }}$ was 0.206 . Compared to the data's critical t value ( $\mathrm{df}=30$ ), the null hypothesis was accepted due to $0.206<2.042$. The same goes to the values for grade $8^{\text {th }} .1 .374<2.042$ resulting the null hypothesis was accepted. With the null hypothesis being accepted for both grade $7^{\text {th }}$ and $8^{\text {th }}$ independent samples $t$ test, it was indicated that there was no significant difference statistically for the vocabulary size difference of grade $7^{\text {th }}$ and $8^{\text {th }}$. The calculated $t$ value for grade $9^{\text {th }}$ vocabulary size difference of male and female students was 2.439 . This result was bigger than the critical $t$ value for the data with degree of freedom $28=2.048$. Therefore, the mean difference between male and female students vocabulary size of grade $9^{\text {th }}$ had a significant statistical difference.

### 4.1 The Receptive Vocabulary Size of Male Students

Based on the research findings, the vocabulary size of bilingual classes male students grade 7th, 8th and 9th were 2518.93 words, 3371.21 words and 3381.94 words. The number of words male bilingual students knew increased along with the educational level. Male students' vocabulary size didn't differ proportionally between grades but it was apparent that it increased constantly along with the educational level. They achieved the standards to perform good English by knowing 2000 to 3000 words according to Nation (1990). By knowing 2000 to 3000 words, it enabled the male bilingual classes' students to read simplified English texts and beginning to read the unsimplified ones (Nation, 1983). The male bilingual classes students also passed the expected standard vocabulary size for Indonesian students according to Mustafa (2019) because they already knew the most frequent 2000 words even at the beginning of grade 7th. Therefore, the average male bilingual students had met the required vocabulary size for junior high school graduate.

### 4.2 The Receptive Vocabulary Size of Female Students

Similar pattern can be observed in the average vocabulary size of female bilingual classes' students. The average vocabulary size of female bilingual classes' students' grade 7th, 8th, and 9th were 2468.25 words, 2898.80 and 3658.33 words. Female students vocabulary size increased constantly along with the level of education but the difference between grades weren't proportional. It can be seen from the difference of vocabulary size between grades. Average female bilingual students also accomplished the required vocabulary size for junior high school graduate. With those numbers of vocabulary size, average female bilingual classes' students were capable of reading simplified English texts and beginning to read the unsimplified ones.

### 4.3 Statistical Differences Between Male and Female Vocabulary Size

There was no observed significant statistical difference between male and female students' vocabulary size in every grade except for grade 9th students. The result that the male and female students' vocabulary size of grade 7th and 8th didn't have a significant difference statistically was parallel with previous studies by Catalan (2010), Llach (2012) and Fernandez-Fontecha (2014). From the t-test results, only grade 9 th male and female students' vocabulary size that was revealed to have a significant difference. Previous study on vocabulary size at a certain educational level usually had one gender that has a bigger vocabulary size than another through the years of education. Previous study by Llach (2012) revealed that female students had a bigger vocabulary size than male students all over the years of primary school. Therefore there was no stereotype in this study about which gender has bigger vocabulary size compared to others during middle school.

### 4.4 The Receptive Vocabulary Size Differences Across Grades Concerning Gender

There was no noticeable trend in how bilingual class students' vocabulary size differed based on grades and gender. The vocabulary size difference of grade 7th, 8th, and 9th increase constantly as the education level increased. The difference of vocabulary size grade 7 th and 8 th was 558.33 words and the difference of vocabulary size of grade 8th and 9th was 597.14 words. It can be implied that the vocabulary size difference between grades had almost 600 words difference. Based on gender, the vocabulary size difference of male students in bilingual classes was constantly increasing as well. Male students' of grade 7th and 8th's vocabulary size differed about 852.28 words while the difference of grade 8th and 9th data was 10.73 words. The difference of female students' vocabulary students was even bigger than male students. The vocabulary size difference between female students grade 7th and 8th was 430 words and the difference increased for grade 8th and 9th becoming 943.79 words.

There were several things that can be implied from this study. The first implication was that the environment of bilingual classroom positively influenced the number of words students know. Second, it was important to consider grade levels when examining vocabulary size difference. The third implication was tailoring approaches to specific grade levels may lead to effective vocabulary instruction. Lastly, future exploration for factors that caused gender differences of vocabulary size was needed.

Future studies are required to address several shortcomings noted in this study. The present study was a cross-sectional study where the data were gathered in a single instance. It would be helpful to measure vocabulary size as a part of longitudinal study to observe vocabulary learning progress particularly. Moreover, future researchers can take a closer look about factors that differentiate vocabulary size between male and female students that was not addressed in this study.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this study, it can be concluded that: (1) The receptive vocabulary size of male students in bilingual classes increased along with their educational level. (2) The receptive vocabulary size female students in bilingual
classes increased along with their educational level. (2) Male students of grade $7^{\text {th }}$ and $8^{\text {th }}$ had a bigger receptive vocabulary size compared to female students. (3) Female students of grade $9^{\text {th }}$ had a bigger receptive vocabulary size compared to male students. (4) There was no significant statistical difference found in receptive vocabulary size difference between male and female students in grade $7^{\text {th }}$ and $8^{\text {th }}$. (5) A significant statistical difference was found in receptive vocabulary difference between male and female students in grade $9^{\text {th }}$.

The researcher suggests teachers to take more consideration about the students' vocabulary size. It is important to check the students' vocabulary size before choosing the appropriate learning material. Moreover, teacher should develop and improve their learning material to balance the students' already excellent vocabulary size for junior high school.

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