

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Vocabulary in ESL has been the main attention that keeps developing in both education and research. It is caused by awareness that if the vocabulary is weak, students will have difficulty in using English. There is no more argument that vocabulary is very important for the students in particular. Vocabulary mastery is very important since it is related to the students' interest to be able to deepening the source of knowledge (books, e-books, journals, e-journals, documents, etc.), expressing and communicating ideas effectively, and studying the new concepts. However vocabulary represents “adhesive” among story, ideas, and context mutually so that they can be understood appropriately by our readers or audience. In other words, vocabulary plays vital role in the usage of daily language of our social life, academic, career and business interests. (Anderson and Freebody (1981), Nation (1990), Sutarsyah (1994), Laufer (2010), Schmitt (2001) and Wei (2007))

The level of vocabulary mastery affects the fulfillment of students' need of studying at university. Anderson and Freebody (1981) said that the level of vocabulary of the US students in universities of United States is between 15.000 to 200.000 words. Research on non-native English international

students saw the minimum limit of vocabulary mastery to be able to fulfill their need in studying at universities with English as communication language. Sutarsyah, et al (1994) posed that the level of vocabulary mastery between 4.000-5.000 words is prerequisite to understand an undergraduate economic textbook. Read (2000) concluded that non-native speakers needs 95% vocabulary mastery on the text they are reading. Meanwhile, Nation (1990) and Laufer (1992, 1997) said that university students shall master at least 3.000 words to be able to comprehend English textbook. As comparison, as being expressed by Hazenberg and Hulstijin (1996) in Netherland, first-year students shall master minimum 10,000 words to be able to follow lectures in universities of the state.

There are number of prior research regarding the level of vocabulary mastery. One of them was undertaken by Xing and Fulcher in 2007. As being expressed by Xing and Fulcher (2007), the research was undertaken on 46 China-originated students that have just arrived at England to study there. Demographic characteristics of the students show that they were 20-36-year of age (or 23.31 year average). Their English studying period ranged between 7 to 24 year (or 10.55 year in average). The research instrument used level test 5.000 word Version A (Schmitt, 2000, pp. 196-197) which was combined with Version B (Nation, 2001, pp 419-421). The result was: (1) The data analysis showed that Version A and Version B at 5.000 word level were highly correlated and highly reliable, but (2) The item analysis showed that

Version B contained a number of harder items, that mean the two versions of the test cannot be treated as parallel for research purposes.

Meanwhile, in 2010 Batia Laufer and Geke C. Ravenhorst-Kalovski wanted to undertake research that aimed at finding correlation between vocabulary size, lexical text coverage, and reading comprehension. The research was undertaken on 745 students, which majority of them (735) were Israeli students studying at various departments and were taking English Course for Academic Purpose. The 495 respondents' mother tongues are Hebrew, 167 respondents are Arabic, 73 respondents are Russian. The research used three variables, they are: (1) Reading comprehension which was measured by a standardized test of English reading, (2) Lexical coverage that was measured by a vocabulary profiler, and (3) Vocabulary size that was measured by Vocabulary Levels Test. The Vocabulary Test Level used specifically instrument level test of 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 words from Nation. According to Laufer and Kalovski (2010), the research revealed in parallel with the result of Hu and Nation (2000) and Nation (2006) research, that was 95% coverage can be achieved by 5.000 word families with proper nouns: 78% (1K) + 8% (2K) + 3% (3K) + 3% (4K-5K) + 3% proper nouns. The first thousand words can also cover 81%.

Other research was undertaken by Yuka (Maruyama) Yamamoto in 2011. The study involved 67 students from one co-educational class at a private university in Tokyo, Japan. Participant Students' vocabulary levels were checked by three announced vocabulary-level tests which were administrated

twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the semester. The first test was the Vocabulary Test which measured by five sections in this test (the 2,000-word level, the 3,000-word level, the university-word level, the 5,000-word level, and the 10,000-word level), but only three sections (the 2,000-, the 3,000- and 5,000-word level) were used in the study. The result from the pre-test receptive-vocabulary level test showed that students have a receptive vocabulary size of 3,411- to 3,680-word families, indicating that they were typical intermediate-level Japanese university students.

The three studies revealed that they were averagely using quantitative method by relating inter-variable, using several instruments, even tended to be more than one test. The three studies have not showed yet that there are specific comparison undertaken between 3,000 word-level and 5,000 word-level. The research was undertaken in America, Japan, and Israel. There is a number of research-gap in the three studies. One of them was research with Indonesian student respondents, and by comparing students' scores of 3,000 word-level and 5,000 word-level. The both word-levels were assumed to be more realistic with average students' word-level capacity in Indonesia.

Foreign language teaching has for many years worked to a three tier hierarchy of level and achievement: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. The Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) takes that hierarchy and extends and renames the element within it. The three tiers are renamed Basic, Independent, and Proficient. The CEFR is also widely used in curriculum planning, preparing textbooks, and many other contexts.

The CEFR level of vocabulary can be used to describe test takers vocabulary level. The CEFR provides a 'Descriptive Scheme' (2001a:21). Further CEFR divided the three tiers into six levels A1 to C2 with Can Do Statements.

What the researcher could do by taking into attention the research-gap is that the researcher wants to undertake simpler research, that is only one research and with the same respondents. However, it is expected that from the result, we can find out respondents' word-level, how far they have reached 2,000 word-level, 3,000 word-level and 5,000 word-level. Researcher can make a frequency description for each word-level, their vocabulary can indicate what level in the CEFR, and then researcher can compare with a comparison test.

It is important to know the students' Level of Vocabulary mastery as evaluation material and input for education implementer as consideration material in decision making. It is needed for the education implementer to take correct steps in improving education quality, in this sense, English subject.

Reminding that this kind of study has not been undertaken yet, at least in the last five years in Department of English (ED), State University of Jakarta (is well known as UNJ), Jakarta, so researcher is interesting to undertake the study on the students of Department of English, in particular, on senior students, so that it has evaluative value which is more needed to measure the success or failure in English education at ED, UNJ, Jakarta.

## 1.2 Research Questions

According to the background above, there are one main research question and three sub-research questions:

How is the profile of vocabulary level of senior English Department Students at the State Univesity of Jakarta?

- a. Do senior English Department Students master the first 2,000 vocabulary level?
- b. Do senior English Department Students master the first 3,000 vocabulary level?
- c. Do senior English Department Students master the first 5,000 vocabulary level?

## 1.3 The Purposes of the Study

Based on the research questions above, basically this study has aims:

To find out profile of vocabulary level of senior Department Students at the State University of Jakarta?

- a. To measure the first 2,000 vocabulary level of senior Department Students at the State University of Jakarta.
- b. To measure the first 3,000 vocabulary level of senior Department Students at the State University of Jakarta.
- c. To measure the first 5,000 vocabulary level of senior Department Students at the State University of Jakarta.

#### **1.4 Scope of Research**

The aspect of vocabulary size is the focus of this research. This research is striving to assess the level of vocabulary size of the senior students (year 4 and year 5) in Department of English in UNJ in vocabulary mastery in 2014. In this sense, vocabulary mastery level is 2.000, 3.000 and 5.000 words.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to give significant contribution in the field of vocabulary recognition or vocabulary knowledge:

Firstly, this study reveals information about the difficulty in vocabulary faced by English Department Students. This situation gives the teachers the important information to conduct to the best strategy in helping their students to understand English text.

Secondly, this study reveals information about the level of English Department Students' Academic Vocabulary. This current information is important for the teachers, and English Department.

Finally, for the students themselves, this study reveals the real level of English Department students' vocabulary. The result of the study is expected to give a challenge for the students to improve their vocabulary knowledge systematically, and continually, because vocabulary knowledge vocabulary plays a vital role in language use, and academic and career advancement.