

Sindhu Vasu

sindhuvasu86@gmail.com

Senkamalam Periyasamy Dhanavel

dhanavelsp@iitm.ac.in

# Understanding the attitude of ESL learners to vocabulary learning

## Compreendendo a atitude dos alunos de ISL frente à aprendizagem de vocabulário

**ABSTRACT** - The study investigates the attitudes of learners towards the importance of vocabulary and their choice of sources to learn new words. It chiefly explores the differences in attitudes and choices of learners by a survey which was conducted among 730 first-year engineering students of Anna University, India. The questionnaire had two different divisions, i.e., importance given to vocabulary learning and sources of new words. The sources of new words further had four sub-divisions based on language skills. The data were collected from students and statistically analysed to answer the research questions of the study. In general, the results show that students consider vocabulary as an important aspect of language learning. Students admit the importance of vocabulary to understand a text. Interestingly, gender influences the choice of sources to learn new words. Further, the medium of education also significantly influences learners' attitudes and their choices of sources in vocabulary learning.

**Keywords:** English in India, English language teaching, English vocabulary, learners' attitude, learner differences, sources to learn vocabulary, vocabulary learning.

**RESUMO** - O estudo investiga as atitudes dos alunos com relação à importância do vocabulário e a escolha de suas fontes para aprender novas palavras. Ele principalmente explora as diferenças nas atitudes e nas escolhas dos alunos por uma pesquisa que foi realizada com 730 estudantes do primeiro ano de engenharia da Universidade de Anna, na Índia. O questionário tinha duas divisões diferentes, ou seja, a importância dada à aprendizagem de vocabulário e fontes de novas palavras. As fontes de novas palavras tiveram mais quatro subdivisões com base em competências linguísticas. Os dados coletados são de estudantes e foram analisados estatisticamente para responder às perguntas do estudo de pesquisa. Em geral, os resultados mostram que os estudantes consideram vocabulário como um aspecto importante da aprendizagem de línguas. Os estudantes admitem a importância do vocabulário para compreender um texto. Curiosamente, o gênero influencia na escolha das fontes para aprender novas palavras. Além disso, o meio de educação também influencia significativamente as atitudes dos alunos e suas escolhas de fontes na aprendizagem de vocabulário.

**Palavras-chave:** Inglês na Índia, Ensino da Língua Inglesa, vocabulário em inglês, atitude dos alunos, diferenças entre alunos, fontes para aprender vocabulário, aprendizagem de vocabulário.

### Introduction

Vocabulary learning is the fundamental step in learning a language. It is also a perennial learning aspect of any language (Gifford, 2013). "Vocabulary learning never stops even long after the grammar system is firmly in place" says Thornbury (2002, p. 160). Zimmerman (2009) also described vocabulary learning as a continuous process throughout one's life. Vocabulary helps to judge a person in interviews, personality tests and even in many competitive exams. Anderson and Freebody (1979) observed a strong correlation between vocabulary test and general intelligence. Gifford (2013, p. 18) mentioned that "a person having more breadth and depth of vocabulary has wider competence to communicate and to understand a communication, and is to be considered intelligent." In

addition, the intensity of competence and fluency in English language knowledge is divergent among the English as second language (ESL) learners in Indian classrooms (Kohli, 2012). Their level ranges from first generation learners to first-class learners. First generation learners are graduates who attend college for the first time in their family. None of the other family members are graduates. Hence, these learners belong to the first generation to become graduates. In addition, exposure to English language outside the classroom is limited for the first generation learners. In contrast, first class learners hail from educated families and are fluent in English language. Therefore, ESL teachers need to adopt strategies which would help learners to develop their vocabulary. It is necessary to investigate learners' individual variations to provide them with better language learning opportunities. Thus,

knowing ESL learners' attitude towards the importance of vocabulary learning is crucial. Moreover, the identification of the sources used by students as linguistic inputs to learn new words helps to exploit them for effective vocabulary learning.

## Literature review

### *Role of vocabulary in language skills*

Vocabulary is a key to any language. Words easily deceive listeners even with a minor difference in their pronunciation (Hedge, 2000). It is also essential in the effective use of language skills for communication. Gifford (2013) explained the relationship between vocabulary and language skills. The vocabulary which helps in understanding the reading and listening linguistic input is reading and listening vocabulary. Reading vocabulary is the largest as it helps in recognition and comprehension while reading. Listening vocabulary is supported by the situational and non-verbal clues. In addition, vocabulary and comprehension are strongly related to reading material (Curtis, 2006). The vocabulary which is used for written and spoken communication is writing and speaking vocabulary. Writing vocabulary is inspired by the verbal ideas of the users but speaking vocabulary is used incorrectly without the awareness of nuances which are compensated by non-verbal clues. Therefore, whether it is receptive (passive) or productive (active), vocabulary is important for the improvement of four language skills as well as for effective communication (Gifford, 2013).

Additionally, the problems faced by ESL learners due to insufficient vocabulary and the related word knowledge hinder their effective use of language. Evans and Morrison (2011) studied the problems of first-year Hong Kong students adapting to higher education through English-medium. English-medium refers to the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. In English-medium, all the subjects are taught in English except the language course which is probably the learners' native language. The study among the first-year Hong Kong students found the comprehension of technical vocabulary and the lectures in English as the challenges faced by the first-year students through interviews at regular intervals among 28 students from different backgrounds. Kohli (2012) also analysed the importance of vocabulary instruction in Indian classrooms as learners come from different backgrounds and with dissimilar range of language competence and fluency. Thus, these studies reinforce the crucial role of vocabulary in the improvement of learners' language competence.

### Resources to learn new words

Linguistic input plays a major role in the natural acquisition of the first language as well as the second

language (Cook, 1991). Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) emphasised Anderson and Nagy's (1991) idea of voluminous linguistic input to provide opportunities to learn the language in a variety of contexts. Teachers' use of material in classroom functions as the linguistic input to learn a language (Cook, 1991). Hedge (2000) emphasised Krashen's idea of 'comprehensible input' as an important component of language learning. The input which is slightly higher than learners' competence is a meaningful opportunity to learn the language.

Many studies used different sources as linguistic inputs to investigate the improvement in learners. Lu (2008) studied the contribution of short message service (SMS) in L2 vocabulary learning as a linguistic input. The thirty high school students who participated in the study were able to recognize more vocabulary in post-test and showed positive attitude towards mobile learning. Lin (2010) used video-based computer-assisted language learning material for incidental vocabulary learning in English to investigate the differences among learners with high and low proficiency in English reading and listening. Video-based multimedia materials were successful learning tools among learners with high reading and listening ability. The study concluded that reading helped more than listening in different cases. Hence, both reading and listening proficiency increase the vocabulary of learners through incidental vocabulary learning. These studies revealed the significant role of sources in vocabulary learning. The resources outside as well as inside the classroom motivate learners in self-learning (Hedge, 2000). Francis (2012) reported the limited use of animated films as a source for vocabulary learning in the Indian context for young learners. Further, he recommended activities based on animated films to build vocabulary. In fact, animated films as a source can be useful for students who are at the beginner level to build their vocabulary as well as to learn the second language.

Against this background, the present study chiefly identified the students' attitude to vocabulary learning and their use of resources for learning vocabulary. In the next level, it attempted to investigate the influence of independent variables on the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary and the difference in the use of sources to learn new words.

### Need for the study

Proliferation of research in second language vocabulary teaching and learning suggested suitable methods such as wordlists, lexical approach, incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, mnemonic techniques, keyword method, etc. Dhanavel (2012) suggests '5 S' approach to vocabulary building. The five S stands for 'sight, sound, source, sense and syntax'. Therefore, appearance in written form, pronunciation, etymology, meaning and

the use of words in sentence are chiefly focused in this approach for vocabulary development of the learners. Although researches have advanced several techniques to teach and learn vocabulary, it is repeatedly mentioned in Schmitt (2008), Zimmerman (2009), and Hedge (2000) that the best method to teach vocabulary is not clear yet.

The vocabulary acquisition studies conducted after the 1980s focused on the vocabulary size, vocabulary learning and reading, vocabulary and other language skills, the mental arrangement of the lexicon, vocabulary learning strategies of learners, etc. The recent studies after the integration of technology focused on vocabulary acquisition through CALL, contribution of e-dictionaries in vocabulary learning, etc. These studies investigated how learners learn vocabulary, what they learn about a new word, how the information about each word is stored, how many words learners need, etc. The results from these studies have eventually enhanced vocabulary teaching methods. However, the psycholinguistic factors affecting second language learning must be considered to improve and to successfully implement any method. Hence, it is necessary to identify the attitude of students to the importance of vocabulary in second language learning and also the resources students use to learn new words.

The present study addressed three interrelated research questions: (i) What is the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary? (ii) What sources do students use to learn new words? (iii) What differences exist in the attitude of students due to the independent variables of gender and medium of education?

## Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary.
- To examine the resources students use to learn new words.
- To identify the influence of the independent variables (gender and medium of education) on students' importance to vocabulary and their use of sources to learn new words.

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the present study are:

- Students have positive attitude towards the importance of vocabulary learning.
- Students use various sources to learn and improve their vocabulary.
- The independent variables of gender and medium of education influence the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary and the use of sources to learn new words.

## Methodology

The study used descriptive analysis and independent sample *t*-test to address the objectives of the study. It was a survey study using a structured questionnaire with a specific set of close-ended statements to collect data from the samples through survey.

The questionnaire had two sections. The first section dealt with the demography of the students. The demographic section covered the details of students such as name, degree and branch, age, gender and medium of school education. This study used gender and medium of education as independent variables to investigate the differences among students. The second section had two parts. The two parts were importance given to vocabulary and resources used to learn new words. There were seven statements to examine the importance of vocabulary (Dimension 1) and 14 statements to investigate the resources (Dimension 2) students use to learn new words on a five-point Likert scale. The 14 statements on resources were divided into four groups based on language skills. Under resources, listening had four statements, speaking had two statements, reading had four statements and writing had four statements. The statements about importance of vocabulary and sources to learn new words are given in the descriptive analysis. Likert scale is used in questionnaire and surveys to psychometrically measure participants' responses to the statements. It also helps in the statistical analysis of the data. Thus, Likert scale is used in the questionnaire to collect responses from the participants. The five-point Likert scale used for the study was 1 - Never, 2 - Rarely, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Often, and 5 - Always.

This questionnaire was administered to 730 first-year, second-semester engineering students from the three campuses of Anna University, Chennai, India. The three campuses are Madras Institute of Technology (MIT), College of Engineering, Guindy (CEG) and Alagappa Chettiar College of Technology (ACT). The participants from these campuses and from different branches of engineering took the paper survey during their English class.

The two dimensions of the questionnaire ensured reliability and validity. The reliability and validity scores were  $\alpha=0.703$  for importance of vocabulary and  $\alpha=0.782$  for sources of new words.

The results are shown in the tables. The basic descriptive analysis and statistical inference demonstrate the differences among students in vocabulary learning. The basic descriptive analysis gives an account of the demographic details of the samples and also answers the first two objectives.

The basic descriptive analysis in Table 1 provides the demographic details collected from the participants. First, out of the 730 samples, 453 (62.1%) were male and 277 (37.9%) were female participants. Second, there were 232 (31.8%) participants in the age of 17 years, 473 (64.8%)

participants in 18 years, and 25 (3.4%) participants in 19 years. Third, there were 614 (84.1%) students from English medium and 116 (15.9%) students from Tamil medium. The students from Tamil medium schools learnt all the subjects

in Tamil language except the English language course. As a consequence, they had limited exposure to English language in their schools. Next, the descriptive analysis focuses on the responses of the students.

## Results and discussion

This study presents the results in two sections. Section 1 deals with the descriptive analysis of the responses for the two dimensions of the questionnaire to answer the first and the second research question. Then, section 2 shows the independent sample *t*-test for the two dimensions of the questionnaire to answer the third research question.

### Section 1

#### *Attitude of students towards the importance given to vocabulary*

The analysis in Table 2 revealed that 47.95% students understand wrong sentences sometimes with the

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of gender and medium of school education.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	453	62.1
Female	277	37.9
Total	730	100
Medium of school Education	Frequency	Percent
English	614	84.1
Tamil	116	15.9
Total	730	100.0

**Table 2.** Percentage and mean scores of importance of vocabulary.

S.No	Importance of vocabulary	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always	Total	Weighted Mean
1	I understand even a grammatically wrong sentence.	31 (4.25%)	123 (16.85%)	350 (47.95%)	194 (26.58%)	32 (4.38%)	730	3.10
2	Most of the times what I speak is not clear to others because I do not use correct words.	98 (13.42%)	294 (40.27%)	221 (30.27%)	96 (13.15%)	21 (2.88%)	730	2.52
3	I use an incorrect word to express my idea.	160 (21.92%)	274 (37.53%)	211 (28.90%)	62 (8.49%)	23 (3.15%)	730	2.33
4	I find it difficult to speak in English because I do not know enough words in English.	145 (19.86%)	198 (27.12%)	202 (27.67%)	124 (16.99%)	61 (8.36%)	730	2.67
5	I find writing in English difficult because I do not know enough words in English.	248 (33.97%)	237 (32.47%)	130 (17.81%)	77 (10.55%)	38 (5.21%)	730	2.21
6	I do not understand what I read because the words are unknown to me.	138 (18.90%)	306 (41.92%)	208 (28.49%)	61 (8.36%)	17 (2.33%)	730	2.33
7	I do not understand what the other person speaks because the words used are unknown to me.	148 (20.27%)	353 (48.36%)	169 (23.15%)	41 (5.62%)	19 (2.60%)	730	2.22

help of the words in the sentences. In this context, wrong sentence means a sentence with some grammar mistake. The students attempt to understand such sentences with the help of the words used in the sentences. As a result, the students realise the importance of words in comprehension. A maximum of 40.27% students responded that their incorrect use of words in speech rarely hindered clarity of expression. Likewise, 37.53% students agreed that they rarely used incorrect words to express their ideas. 27.67% students responded that their lack of words sometimes caused difficulty in speaking. Along with these, 41.92% students responded that they rarely found reading to be difficult because of unknown words in the text. Further, 48.36% students answered that unknown words rarely caused difficulty in understanding the spoken language of another person. Hence, it is inferred that students realised the role of vocabulary to some extent in the comprehension of wrong sentences, reading text, spoken language and for effective speaking. Apart from all these, most students (33.97%) responded that lack of words could never affect their writing. However, these students perhaps face difficulty in writing due to other aspects of language or their lack of exposure to different types of writing. Thus, in response to the first objective, students exhibited positive attitude towards the importance of vocabulary in language learning.

### Resources used by students to learn new words

The analysis in Table 3 revealed the different sources students use to learn new words. Out of the four individual statements on listening, 32.60% students re-

sponded that they often learned words from listening to their friends. On the other hand, 29% students responded that they learned words sometimes from listening to their teacher, to lectures, to English songs and movie dialogues. Therefore, it is possible to infer that maximum students opt to learn words by listening to their friends. Further, 29.45% students sometimes preferred to learn words from their interaction with native speakers and 33.56% students rarely preferred finding easy ways to learn words from their teachers. Perhaps, students prefer to interact with native speakers to learn new words as a vocabulary learning source related to speaking. Similarly, from the response to the four individual statements on reading, 29.04% students responded that they often used all subject textbooks to learn words. Another 30.41% students always used dictionaries to learn the meaning of an unknown word while searching for the meaning of a word. 28.49% students often preferred to learn words from reading novels, newspapers, brochures, prospectuses, notices, magazines, comics, etc. as sources outside classroom. Along with these, 34.66% students responded that they always used the facilities in mobile phone, laptop and Internet as a source to learn words. Therefore, students' use of dictionaries to learn the meaning of an unknown word while searching for the meaning of a word and the facilities in electronic gadgets and the Internet is the highest of all reading inputs. In the case of writing, 30.14% students responded that they sometimes learn words when preparing to write assignments. A maximum of 25.75% students reported frequent use of SMS to learn words. 24.52% students also stated their frequent use of online chatting with friends as a source to learn words.

**Table 3.** Percentage and mean score of sources of new words.

S.No	Sources of new words	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	Weighted Mean
<b>(i) Learning words through listening</b>								
1	I note down unknown words used by my teacher to learn them later.	145 (19.86%)	191 (26.16%)	218 (29.86%)	110 (15.07%)	66 (9.04%)	730	2.67
2	I learn words when my friends use them.	23 (3.15%)	82 (11.23%)	168 (23.01%)	238 (32.60%)	219 (30.00%)	730	3.75
3	I learn words by listening to lectures in English.	73 (10.00%)	159 (21.78%)	215 (29.45%)	172 (23.56%)	111 (15.21%)	730	3.12
4	I learn words outside the classroom by listening to English news, dialogues in movies and English songs.	52 (7.12%)	151 (20.68%)	211 (28.90%)	175 (23.97%)	141 (19.32%)	730	3.28

**Table 3.** Continuation.

S.No	Sources of new words	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always	Total	Weighted Mean
<b>(ii) Learning words through speaking</b>								
5	I interact with native speakers of English to learn new words.	172 (23.56%)	208 (28.49%)	215 (29.45%)	87 (11.92%)	48 (6.58%)	730	2.49
6	I ask my teachers for easy ways to improve my vocabulary.	218 (29.86%)	245 (33.56%)	189 (25.89%)	56 (7.67%)	22 (3.01%)	730	2.20
<b>(iii) Learning words through reading</b>								
7	I learn words from textbooks of all subjects.	45 (6.16%)	138 (18.90%)	212 (29.04%)	211 (28.90%)	124 (16.99%)	730	3.32
8	If there is an unknown word in the meaning of another word, I refer to a dictionary to understand the unknown word.	42 (5.75%)	93 (12.74%)	196 (26.85%)	177 (24.25%)	222 (30.41%)	730	3.61
9	I learn words outside the classroom when I read novels, newspapers, brochures, prospectus, notices, magazines, comics, etc.	44 (6.03%)	114 (15.62%)	199 (27.26%)	208 (28.49%)	165 (22.60%)	730	3.46
10	Many facilities in the mobile phone, laptop and Internet are also my sources of new words.	28 (3.84%)	91 (12.47%)	163 (22.33%)	195 (26.71%)	253 (34.66%)	730	3.76
<b>(iv) Learning words through writing</b>								
11	I learn new words when I prepare for writing assignments.	69 (9.45%)	146 (20.00%)	220 (30.14%)	179 (24.52%)	116 (15.89%)	730	3.17
12	I learn new words when I send or receive SMS.	74 (10.14%)	110 (15.07%)	184 (25.21%)	188 (25.75%)	174 (23.84%)	730	3.38
13	I learn new words when I chat online with friends.	87 (11.92%)	121 (16.58%)	169 (23.15%)	179 (24.52%)	174 (23.84%)	730	3.32
14	I learn new words when I write or receive letters and e-mails.	56 (7.67%)	127 (17.40%)	227 (31.10%)	173 (23.70%)	147 (20.14%)	730	3.31

Further, 31.10% students responded that they sometimes use writing and receiving e-mails to learn words. Hence, students' use of SMS and online chatting with friends is higher than the other inputs through writing. Therefore, with reference to the second objective, the linguistic inputs through technology and social situations positively influence students' choice of sources to learn new words along with the other resources. In the next section, the statistical analysis concentrates on the influence of independent variables on the dependent variables.

## Section 2

### ***Impact of gender and medium on the attitude of learners to vocabulary learning***

The *t*-test results given in Table 4 of this study with reference to the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary ( $P=0.486$ ) do not show any significant difference based on the gender of students. Irrespective of their gender, students consider vocabulary as an important aspect of language learning. This result is consistent with the findings from the study by Sheorey (2006) on the studies of Indian students learning ESL.

Medium of education ( $P=0.001$ ) demonstrates high significance with the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary. Hence, medium of education influences the attitude of students towards the importance of vocabulary. The mean value of Tamil medium ( $M=22.10$ ) students is higher than English medium ( $M=16.99$ ) students. Therefore, Tamil medium students believe vocabulary to be more important in second language learning than English medium students. Perhaps the limited exposure to English language of the Tamil medium students is the reason for them to consider vocabulary as an important aspect of second language learning. The difference identified based on the medium of the students is also consistent with the findings of Sheorey (2006) on the studies of Indian students learning ESL.

### **Impact of gender and medium on resources used by learners to learn new words**

With reference to *t*-test results of this study, gender-related differences among students is highly significant with their overall use of sources to learn new words ( $P=0.001$ ). In addition, overall use of sources is higher among female students than male students. The gender-related differences are also highly significant with their use of listening ( $P=0.001$ ), reading ( $P=0.001$ ), speaking ( $P=0.008$ ) and writing ( $P=0.001$ ) materials as sources to learn words. Considering the mean value, the realization and use of these sources to learn new words is slightly higher among female students ( $M=47.56$ ) than male students ( $M=43.19$ ) but speaking as a source to learn new words is used more or less equally by both groups. As a consequence, gender-related differences influence the personal choice of linguistic input of students. The studies of Gu (2002) and Gifford (2013) provided evidence for the influence of gender on vocabulary acquisition, knowledge and use. As observed by Gifford (2013), female students show more interest in the use of various sources to learn new words than male students because of the former's limited vocabulary.

In connection with the *t*-test results of this study, medium of education ( $P=0.031$ ) is significant with overall use of sources by students to learn new words. When it comes to the individual statements on sources, medium of education is highly significant with students' use of listening ( $P=0.002$ ) and speaking ( $P=0.001$ ) materials as linguistic inputs to learn new words. In contrast, medium of education is insignificant with reading ( $P=0.983$ ) and writing ( $P=0.698$ ) aspects as linguistic inputs. The mean value shows the difference between Tamil medium ( $M=46.40$ ) and English medium ( $M=44.56$ ) students' choice of listening and speaking as linguistic inputs to learn new words. This result demonstrates more use of listening and speaking situations to learn words by students from Tamil medium than students from English medium.

**Table 4.** Results of *t*-test of the differences in the attitude of learners to the importance of vocabulary depending on their gender and medium.

Dependent variables	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	P value	
Importance of vocabulary	Male	17.70	4.882	0.697	0.486	
	Female	17.97	5.514			
	<b>Medium of school Education</b>					
	English	16.99	4.703	10.560	<0.001*	
Tamil	22.10	5.167				

Note: (\*) denotes significance at 1% level.

**Table 5.** Results of t-test for the differences in the use of sources to learn words depending on their gender and medium.

Dependent variables	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	P value
Overall Source of new words	Male	43.19	8.373	7.024	<0.001*
	Female	47.56	7.776		
	<b>Medium of school Education</b>			2.164	0.031**
	English	44.56	8.344		
	Tamil	46.40	8.671		

Notes: (\*) denotes significance at 1% level; (\*\*) denotes significance at 5% level.

Tamil medium students' limited exposure to English in their schools is perhaps one of the reasons for their more attention towards the use of listening and speaking situations as the sources to learn new words. They pay almost equal attention to reading and writing as sources to learn words. Hence, medium of education influences students' use of sources to learn vocabulary.

### Findings of the study

The descriptive and statistical analyses revealed students' attitude regarding the importance of vocabulary learning and their use of sources to learn new words. The findings from the descriptive analysis are as follows:

- Students realise the importance of vocabulary for comprehension of wrong sentences.
- Students' response ensures the vital role of vocabulary in spoken communication to express ideas clearly.
- Students give slightly less importance to vocabulary in reading and writing.
- Listening to friends, interaction with native speakers, facilities in mobile phone, laptop, Internet and SMS are highly preferred by students as sources to learn words.

These findings suggest that students' realise the importance of vocabulary learning in learning a second language. Preference to learn new words from friends by listening to them and interaction with native speakers reveal students' interest in social learning. This may be due to the sense of freedom and collegiality students have among themselves. In addition, the influence of technological advancement can be observed from students' preference to use mobile phone, laptop and Internet applications and features as sources. Technological advances are perhaps meaningful and motivating inputs with opportunities to learn new words. The students should be encouraged to understand the importance of vocabulary in reading and writing.

Besides these findings, statistical analysis also reveals students' attitudinal difference based on gender

and medium of education. Some of the major findings are as follows:

- Gender-related differences do not influence the importance of vocabulary learning but it is highly significant with students' choice of sources to learn words.
- Medium-related differences demonstrate high significance with students' attitude towards the importance of vocabulary learning and also significance with the sources to learn words.

The influence of medium on the attitude of students is clearly observed from the findings. These findings indicate the influence of each independent variable investigated on the importance of vocabulary learning and the sources of new words.

### Conclusion

This survey study among the students of Anna University in Chennai, India, helps to understand the attitude of ESL students to vocabulary learning. First, the students consider vocabulary as a major factor to comprehend and to express themselves with clarity in spoken communication. It appears that they give slightly less importance to vocabulary in reading and writing. Perhaps, students understand the text without any difficulty even if there are one or two unknown words in the text. Likewise, students may prefer to use known words more than the appropriate words to express their ideas in written communication. Second, students mainly prefer to learn vocabulary from friends and also through the use of mobile phones, laptop, Internet and SMS. This fact suggests that students' choice of sources is related to social learning and technology. It also suggests that the students should also use other sources for effective vocabulary learning. Third, female students revealed higher use of sources to learn vocabulary than male students. Finally, Tamil medium students give more importance to vocabulary and revealed higher use of sources to learn vocabulary than English medium students. Therefore, the study reveals the impact of gender and me-



dium on students' attitude to vocabulary learning. On the whole, the students realise the importance of vocabulary and the need for sources to learn vocabulary.

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### Sindhu Vasu

Ph.D Scholar  
Department of English  
Anna University  
Chennai, 600025, India

### Senkamalam Periyasamy Dhanavel

Professor of English  
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Indian Institute of Technology Madras  
Chennai, 600036, India