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THEORETICAL BASIS AND DESIGNATION OF VOCABULARY BASED ASSESSMENTS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Vocabulary mastery is crucial to linguistic proficiency; the more words we know, the more proficient we will be. Receptive and productive vocabulary mastery are the two categories of vocabulary mastery. The ability to comprehend what other people are saying is known as receptive mastery; passive mastery is another definition of receptiveness. Assessing students due to their levels of vocabulary knowledge is essential yet one of the most fair ways of marking. This article explores the basic ways of evaluating lexical competence of middle school learners.*

Keywords: *Lexical item, phrasal verb, role-play activities, grammatical accuracy, writing fluency, vocabulary proficiency, adaptive testing.*

Lexical approach and Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we have to teach in a foreign language class. Types of vocabulary include:

- **Word** - is a unit of language that native speakers can agree upon as a separate and distinct unit of meaning.

- **Lexical item** - a **lexical item** (or **lexical unit**/ **LU**, **lexical entry**) is a single word, a part of a word, or a chain of words that forms the basic elements of a language's vocabulary.

- **Lexis** - all of the words in a language; all word forms having meaning or grammatical function.

- **Vocabulary** - a language user's knowledge of words.

- **Phrasal verb** is a phrase that indicates an action—such as *turn down or ran into*.

- **Vocabulary in mind** –mental lexicon – the smallest independent meaningful units of speech.

Vocabulary mastery is crucial to linguistic proficiency; the more words we know, the more proficient we will be. Receptive and productive vocabulary mastery are the

two categories of vocabulary mastery. The ability to comprehend what other people are saying is known as receptive mastery; passive mastery is another definition of receptiveness. The practice of using language to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings is known as productive mastery. The lexical approach, introduced by Michael Lewis in 1993[5], stresses the importance of lexical chunks and collocations for fluency in a language. In other words, this approach has an emphasis on how multiple words are used in a combination rather than how a single word is used. Vocabulary assessments in accordance with this approach would not only focus on the definitions of isolated words but also on tasks which would require learners to show comprehension of the meaning of words in phrases, sentences, and longer texts as would be the case in real life situations.

Assessment types and their limitations

The choice of assessment type significantly impacts the validity and reliability of vocabulary measurement. While multiple-choice questions offer efficiency in assessing breadth of vocabulary, they may not accurately capture depth of knowledge or productive vocabulary skills. Conversely, open-ended tasks like sentence writing or essay composition can assess productive vocabulary but may be more time-consuming to score and may be susceptible to factors beyond vocabulary knowledge (e.g., grammatical accuracy, writing fluency). A balanced approach, incorporating a variety of assessment types—including receptive tasks (e.g., matching, cloze tests, multiple-choice), productive tasks (e.g., sentence completion, short answer, essay writing), and potentially even performance-based tasks (e.g., role-playing, presentations)—provides a more holistic and accurate evaluation of vocabulary proficiency. Vocabulary knowledge is not an isolated skill; it's intricately linked to other aspects of language proficiency, particularly reading comprehension and writing fluency. Effective vocabulary assessments should consider this interconnectedness. For instance, a reading comprehension test can serve as a valuable indirect measure of vocabulary knowledge, as learners' understanding of text relies heavily on their vocabulary repertoire. Similarly, assessing writing quality can indirectly assess vocabulary use, examining the richness, accuracy, and appropriateness of vocabulary choices within a written piece. Developing effective vocabulary assessments for middle school students necessitates a thoughtful approach that transcends simple memorization, focusing instead on a deeper understanding and application of vocabulary within context. The assessments should be engaging and appropriately challenging for the age group, aligning directly with curriculum objectives. A balanced assessment will include both receptive (understanding word meanings) and productive (using words correctly in

speaking and writing) tasks, providing a comprehensive picture of students' lexical abilities. Multiple assessment formats are beneficial, including multiple-choice questions (carefully constructed to minimize guessing), matching exercises (linking words to definitions or synonyms), fill-in-the-blank sentences (requiring contextual understanding), short-answer questions demanding explanation of word meaning, and even brief writing prompts that integrate target vocabulary. The difficulty level should be tailored to the specific grade level and students' prior knowledge, ensuring the assessment is both challenging and achievable. Visual aids, real-world examples, and interactive elements can greatly enhance engagement and comprehension, reducing test anxiety and making the process more enjoyable. The assessment must directly reflect the learning objectives, ensuring tasks specifically address the skills and knowledge taught in the classroom.

In conclusion, the analysis and development of vocabulary assessment tasks for middle school highlight the importance of adopting comprehensive, balanced approaches that address both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. While traditional methods like multiple-choice and vocabulary size tests offer efficiency, their limitations in assessing depth and contextual use of vocabulary must be acknowledged. Incorporating production-based tasks, such as writing prompts or oral activities, adds richness to the evaluation, providing a fuller picture of students' lexical competence. A structured process for designing assessments ensures clarity, relevance, and alignment with learning objectives. This includes selecting appropriate vocabulary, crafting clear and purposeful task items, and integrating contextual elements to evaluate understanding. Combining traditional methods with innovative techniques, such as computer-adaptive testing and interactive elements, enhances engagement and personalization, although potential barriers like access and digital literacy must be considered.

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