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VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH STUDENT-GENERATED GLOSSARIES IN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated vocabulary acquisition in an EFL classroom through student-generated glossaries, asking: which parts of speech students prefer, which semantic domains dominate, and how accurately and complexly students use target words in example sentences. Using purposive sampling, a descriptive content analysis was conducted on glossaries from three first-semester undergraduates. Results showed nouns predominated (231 references), and high-frequency domains included idioms, people/relationships, technology, travel, and healthcare (390 references overall). Of 364 example sentences, simple sentences were most common (245), with complex (72), compound (38), and compound-complex (9) less frequent. Across sentences, 83 grammatical errors were identified, most often comma splices (10), missing verbs (9), and unclear meaning (9). These findings indicate learners' preference towards simple forms and struggle with clause boundary punctuation, verb form, and meaning clarity, underscoring the need for instruction that integrates form–meaning–use and sentence-level practice. These findings imply that integrating student-generated glossaries with guided sentence construction, grammar-focused feedback, and contextualized vocabulary tasks can enhance learners' lexical knowledge, sentence complexity, and overall communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: EFL classroom, student-generated glossaries, vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of second language learning, yet it has often been overshadowed by an overemphasis on grammatical instruction in traditional language teaching (Biseko, 2025; Luchini & Ferreiro, 2023; Sukying, 2023). Recent research highlights the critical role of vocabulary in developing communicative competence, showing that

limited lexical knowledge can hinder comprehension more severely than grammatical errors (Sukying, 2023; Thach, 2022). In many EFL contexts, this lexical gap also contributes to poor academic outcomes and low exam performance, as standardized tests and academic tasks increasingly demand grammatical accuracy and an extensive and contextually appropriate vocabulary. While previous studies have explored vocabulary size, depth, and retention, few have taken an integrated approach. This study provides a fresh perspective by combining the analysis of parts of speech, semantic domains, and sentence construction, offering a deeper understanding of what words learners select and how they use them in context. The study contributes new insights into the interplay between vocabulary development and overall language proficiency by linking lexical choice to grammatical accuracy, sentence complexity, and communicative relevance.

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial to language proficiency, as lexical availability supports successful second language (L2) production and overall language development. However, most vocabulary acquisition research focuses on vocabulary size and mastery rather than on how learners use words productively. For example, Enayat and Amirian (2020) found that the relationship between vocabulary size and depth weakens as learners advance, particularly for less common words. To address these gaps, innovative strategies like student-generated glossaries have gained attention for promoting active engagement and personalized learning. Aligned with the lexical approach, which views language as meaningful chunks rather than isolated rules (Luchini & Ferreiro, 2023), these glossaries encourage learners to connect form, meaning, and use. Effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) require students to understand diverse word types, including academic, specialized, and idiomatic terms, and apply vocabulary productively in real communication (Wen & Naim, 2023).

Student-generated glossaries address a key gap in vocabulary instruction, as traditional teacher-selected word lists often lead to superficial learning and rapid forgetting due to limited contextual use, learner agency, and meaningful recycling (Nation, 2013; Webb & Nation, 2017). Glossaries foster noticing by allowing students to select, record, and organize words from authentic contexts (Schmitt, 2010) and deeper semantic processing through personalization. Typically, including definitions, L1 translations, and self-created example sentences promotes multiple encounters and encourages productive vocabulary use. Figueroa & Ramírez (2023) proved that glossary creation strengthens connections between words, meanings, and pronunciation. Walters & Bozkurt (2009) also showed that enhanced long-term retention and independent learning strategies. By integrating learner autonomy, contextual application, and repeated exposure, student-generated glossaries offer a more active, personalized, and communicative approach to vocabulary learning, filling a gap left by conventional methods.

Baa (2022) argues that vocabulary teaching has shifted from rote memorization to context-driven, semantically rich approaches, recommending strategies such as frequency-based selection, lexical chunk instruction, and semantic field modelling. Integrating glossary projects into EFL instruction supports this shift, allowing teachers to observe learners' vocabulary development over time. Similarly, El-Sawy

(2019) found that combining e-dictionaries with student-created glossaries significantly improves vocabulary usage, with 90.9% of participants reporting positive effects. Analyzing glossary entries also helps teachers understand learners' word preferences, semantic understanding, and contextual usage. Consistent with this, Vaganova, Livshits, Aleshugina, Smirnova and Kutepova (2019) highlight that creating digital glossaries promotes active learning, deeper engagement, and a stronger grasp of key concepts.

Unlike traditional wordlists that provide only definitions or translations, Akhmetova, Bizhkenova, and Pittner (2023) found that lexical semantic modelling is more effective for EFL learners, leading to greater vocabulary retention, lexical competence, and contextual usage. This approach enhances memory, expands vocabulary through exposure to synonyms and antonyms, deepens understanding of word relationships, and improves active language use, especially when combined with structured exercises and regular practice.

Understanding the types of words students choose, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, reveals their communicative priorities and linguistic awareness. Nouns and verbs often dominate for functional purposes, while adjectives and adverbs are selected for expression. Riyawi (2024) emphasizes that teaching vocabulary in context and focusing on parts of speech deepens learners' understanding of how words function in sentences. Similarly, analyzing the semantic domains of chosen vocabulary provides insights into students' interests, academic needs, and cultural exposure. As Jiang (2020) notes, semantic development is essential for accurate word use, requiring learners to restructure their semantic systems, something student-generated glossaries can effectively support.

However, most previous studies view glossaries mainly as tools for vocabulary retention rather than as sources of linguistic data. Few have examined how learners actually use new words in context. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes student-generated glossaries to explore word choices, semantic patterns, and sentence construction, offering insights into learners' grammatical accuracy, sentence complexity, and communicative competence. Supporting this, Huang, Huang, Chen, & Ku (2019) found that productive tasks like sentence translation improved contextual word use and sentence accuracy, especially for higher-proficiency learners. Building on this, the study contributes a fresh perspective by systematically coding learner-generated data, revealing how vocabulary knowledge interacts with grammar, syntax, and meaningful language use.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on three dimensions: (1) the parts of speech students select, (2) the semantic domains of their chosen words, and (3) the grammatical accuracy and contextual appropriateness of the sentences they create. Through a detailed content analysis of these glossaries, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts and inform vocabulary teaching strategies responsive to students' actual language use and needs.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive content analysis to examine vocabulary acquisition through student-generated glossaries in an EFL context. Content analysis was chosen for its ability to produce replicable and valid inferences from students' texts while

considering the social and instructional context (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). Four constructs guided the coding: parts of speech, semantic domains, grammatical accuracy (error types), and sentence complexity (simple, complex, compound, compound-complex). Using NVivo, glossary entries were coded for part of speech and semantic domain, while example sentences were analyzed for accuracy and complexity.

A purposive sample of three first-semester undergraduate students from the English Education Program at Universitas Palangka Raya was selected from a class of 27 based on the completeness and consistency of their glossaries. Each participant compiled approximately 120 entries, providing rich data for in-depth qualitative analysis. This careful selection ensured that we captured stable patterns in their learning behaviors that were relevant to the research questions. Given the focus of our study, the small sample size was practical for conducting a detailed qualitative analysis. As Stake (1996) and Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that it is often more valuable to dive deeply into a few cases rather than aiming for a statistically representative sample. By concentrating on these three participants, we aimed to examine their vocabulary learning strategies and behaviors closely. It is important to note that these findings are not meant to be generalized to the entire student body. Instead, they provide insight into specific learner behaviors that can help us understand broader trends in vocabulary learning, aligning with the concept of analytic generalization as Yin (2018) discussed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Parts of Speech

The three sets of student-generated glossaries were coded using NVivo software to identify the part of speech of each glossary entry. The eight parts of speech categories, along with the corresponding number of references for each, are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Part of Speech

Parts of Speech	Number of Participants	Number of References	Examples
Noun	3	231	*(15) webcam,* *(17) fun* *(21) virtual reality*
Verb	3	62	*(1) travel* *(10) hit the sack* *(18) modify*
Adjective	3	44	*(6) digital* *(4) inseparable* *(7) efficient*
Interjection	3	20	*(3) long time no see* *(5) nu uh* *(2) help*
Adverb	3	12	*(16) last but not least* *(21) once upon a time,*
Preposition	3	5	*(14) for the first time* *(9) under the weather* *(22) in the same boat*
Conjunction	1	1	*(8) just in case*
Pronoun	1	1	*(19) y'all*

The three student-generated individual sets of glossaries' content analysis identified eight speech parts. The most prominent category was nouns, with 231 references across all three texts. For example, the words webcam, gaming console, and virtual reality indicated that the students tend to choose vocabulary of both concrete and abstract objects. Verbs came second with 62 references, including action-oriented items such as (to) rent, (to) explore, and (to) tour. Adjectives were the third most frequently used category with 44 references. On the contrary, the remaining categories appeared less often in the text. Interjections such as long time no see, speak of the devil, and nuh uh were identified in 20 references, and adverbs in phrases were presented 12 times in the texts. Even less frequently coded categories were preposition (5 references), conjunction (1 reference), and pronouns (1 reference).

Semantic Domains

Based on the NVivo data, the students most frequently used semantic domains are healthcare, idioms, people and relationships, slang, technology, and travel. These domains are further detailed in the table below, providing a quantitative breakdown of their usage and revealing the topics and concepts students are most likely to discuss or reference within each category. The data suggests that students' communication and academic interests are broadly focused on their social lives, popular culture, and modern-day concerns such as health and technology. They also demonstrate a keen awareness of idiomatic expressions and colloquial language.

Table 2. Semantic Domains

Semantic Domains	Number of Participants	Number of References	References
Healthcare	3	64	*(1) locum* *(20) doctor* *(54) nurse*
Idiom	3	66	*(5) hit the hay* *(6) ignorance is bliss* *(2) action speaks louder than words*
People and Relationship	3	66	*(6) partner* *(5) inseparable* *(4) spouse*
Slang	3	64	*(3) OMG* *(4) IRL* *(13) shook*
Technology	3	65	*(14) charger* *(3) icon* *(19) breakthrough*
Travel	3	65	*(11) destination* *(2) camping* *(18) sightseeing*
Total		390	

Based on the data above, each of these main domains is taken from 3 participants. The total number of references across all domains was 390. Specifically, *healthcare* had 64 references, including *locum, doctor, and nurse*. *Idiom* and *people*

and relationship had 66 references, with *Hit the hay, Ignorance is bliss*, and *Action speaks louder than words* for *idiom*, and *partner, inseparable,* and *spouse* for *People and Relationship*. *Slang* had 64 references, including *OMG, IRL,* and *shook.* Finally, *technology* and *travel* each had 65 references, with *charger, icon,* and *breakthrough* for *technology*, and *destination, camping,* and *sightseeing* for *travel*.

The high frequency of these specific domains reveals insights into the students' daily lives and communication patterns. The significant number of references to healthcare suggests an awareness of medical contexts, possibly stemming from personal experiences, academic studies, or media consumption. The almost equal number of references for *idiom* and *people and relationship* highlights the students' engagement with social connections and the nuanced, expressive language used to describe them. It indicates that students are not only talking about relationships but are also using rich, figurative language to do so. The inclusion of slang further supports this, showing that modern, informal communication is a core part of their vocabulary.

The strong presence of *technology* and *travel* also points to the broader interests and aspirations of the participants. The *technology* references, like a *charger* and an *icon,* show how integrated digital life is into their daily routines, while *breakthrough* hints at an interest in innovation and progress. Similarly, the *travel* references to *destination, camping,* and *sightseeing* suggest a focus on leisure, exploration, and experience-seeking. In sum, this detailed breakdown of references across these six domains paints a comprehensive picture of the students' world, encompassing their social, academic, and personal interests, all while showcasing a command of formal and informal language.

Grammatical Accuracy and Sentence Complexity

The present study examined how students employed target vocabulary words in their example sentences, with particular attention to grammatical accuracy and sentence complexity. Overall, the analysis revealed distinct patterns in sentence construction, ranging from simple to compound-complex structures. While many students demonstrated control over basic grammar rules, recurring errors, especially in verb usage and sentence agreement, highlight areas of difficulty. These findings offer insight into learners' syntactic development and their ability to integrate new vocabulary into coherent and grammatically sound expressions.

The grammatical errors found in the student-generated glossaries can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Grammatical Errors

Grammatical Errors	Number of Errors	Number of References	Sentences
Comma Splice	10	4	*I will fly this helicopter, you just sit on the back, I'll handle this.*
Missing Verb	9	1	*The blood coming out after get stab many points on his body.*
Unclear Meaning	9	3	*My television stream many kind of interest that disgustingly I'm into it.*

Incorrect Verb Form	8	4	*The dress has been modified since the client complaint about the design I made.*
Subject and Verb Agreement	7	4	*This video need to be done in my computer.*
Incorrect Preposition	7	3	*Tomorrow, I will take my kids to holiday in Disneyland.*
Unnecessary or Misplaced Word	6	4	*We'll get a trip after this with my Ferrari on.*
Incorrect Pluralization	5	4	*We'll get to the airport in a minutes so don't be late for it.*
Missing Subject	5	1	*This device is outdated now, want to change the latest device version.*
Incorrect Tenses	4	1	*Your outfit looks cute when you wore it!*
Incorrect Pronoun	3	2	*Smartphone really makes us more efficiently and practically use.*
Missing Article	3	1	*Our server connect all the user around the world as long as they have Internet.*
Incorrect Subject	2	2	*I understand that you and me has in the same boat about relationship and future.*
Incorrect Noun	2	2	*I know I've admitted wrong, I had to bite the bullet and I need your apologize for my actions.*
Incorrect Adjective	1	1	*He works very consistent to our teams.*
Incorrect Auxiliary Verb	1	1	*I have secretly having a crush on you.*
Incorrect Connector	1	1	*You're so hot that makes me burn in place as I see you.*
Total	83		

A total of 83 grammatical errors were identified across student-generated vocabulary sentences. The comma splice was the most frequent error type, occurring 10 times across four sentences. It suggests a recurring issue with coordinating independent clauses without proper punctuation. Other frequent errors included missing verbs and unclear meaning, with nine instances each, indicating challenges in forming complete, semantically coherent clauses. For example, in "*The blood coming out after get stab many points on his body*," the absence of a proper verb structure disrupts clarity and grammatical accuracy. Additional error types, such as incorrect verb forms (8 references), subject-verb agreement issues (7), and incorrect prepositions (7), were also common. These patterns highlight persistent difficulties in verb usage and prepositional phrase construction. Less frequent errors, such as incorrect pronouns, missing articles, and incorrect auxiliary verbs, still point to a wide range of grammatical challenges, even if they occurred with lower frequency. While some errors, such as "*I have secretly having a crush on you*," reflect confusion in verb tense or aspect, others like "You're so hot that makes me burn in place as I see you," reveal misuse of connectors. Overall, the data show that students struggled with both structural and lexical aspects of grammar when producing vocabulary-based sentences. The sentence types found in the student-generated glossaries can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Sentence Types

Sentence Types	Number of Participants	Number of References	Examples
Simple Sentence	3	245	*(93) He accidentally spilled the beans about the surprise party.*
Complex Sentence	3	72	*(31) Angel couldn't board because she forgot to bring her boarding pass.*
Compound Sentence	3	38	*(16) Sally is not just my best friend, but she is my soul mate and I can't live without her.*
Compound-Complex Sentence	3	9	*(2) Ali is besotted with his ex-girlfriend and cannot stop thinking about her, even though she cheated on him with another man.*
	Total	364	

A total of 364 example sentences were produced by three participants, with the majority being simple sentences. Out of the total, 245 instances were simple in structure, indicating a strong preference for straightforward sentence forms. These sentences typically consisted of a single independent clause, such as "*He takes medicine every day to manage his condition*" and "*He accidentally spilled the beans about the surprise party.*" This pattern suggests that participants relied heavily on basic sentence construction when applying vocabulary words in context.

In contrast, more syntactically complex sentence types appeared less frequently. Complex sentences accounted for 72 references, such as "*Angel couldn't board because she forgot to bring her boarding pass.*" In contrast, compound sentences were used 38 times, exemplified by "*Melly's printer is broken, so she can't print her paperwork.*" The least frequent type was the compound-complex sentence, with only nine instances, including "*Ali is besotted with his ex-girlfriend and cannot stop thinking about her, even though she cheated on him with another man.*" These results indicate that while students occasionally attempted more advanced sentence forms, most vocabulary use occurred within simple syntactic frameworks.

Discussion

The first primary aim of this study is to identify the parts of speech in the student-generated glossaries. The content analysis resulted in the identification of eight categories, with nouns (231) being the most prominent, followed by verbs (62) and adjectives (44). Other categories appeared less frequently, such as interjections (20), adverbs (12), prepositions (5), conjunctions (1), and pronouns (1). The dominance of nouns in the glossaries is consistent with Zhang & Kang (2022), who report that ESL learners rely heavily on nouns in written English because they are concrete and easier to connect to real-world referents. This finding also confirms earlier evidence by Khaisaeng and Dennis (2017), who identified nouns (40%) and verbs (17%) as the most frequently used parts of speech in student writing, with conjunctions ranking lowest. Similarly, the results align with Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), who emphasize that nouns and verbs constitute the primary meaning-bearing elements of sentence construction, which may explain

their salience in student-generated materials.

At the same time, the relatively limited use of function words (e.g., conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns) in this study mirrors trends reported in research on second language acquisition. Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) also note this developmental trajectory, who suggest that learners' vocabulary growth often reflects a bias toward high-utility lexical items, particularly nouns, in the early stages. Furthermore, the scarcity of conjunctions and pronouns echoes findings by Gilquin and Granger (2011), who demonstrate that learner writing frequently underuses cohesive devices compared to native-speaker corpora, potentially limiting textual cohesion. The prominence of interjections in this dataset (20 references), though smaller in number than nouns or verbs, extends prior findings. Previous corpus study by O'Keeffe, Clancy and Adolphs (2011) have shown that interjections tend to be marginalized in formal instruction but play a notable role in learner-generated texts when students seek expressive immediacy.

These findings offer several implications for classroom practice. Since students' glossaries are disproportionately populated by nouns, teachers could design follow-up tasks that integrate nouns with other parts of speech, such as requiring students to construct sentences or short texts using glossary entries. To address the underuse of conjunctions, prepositions, and pronouns, glossary-building activities can be expanded into sentence-combining or text-building exercises, encouraging learners to use function words to achieve cohesion (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

The second aim of this study is to explore patterns in semantic domains. Across three participants, the most frequent semantic domains were healthcare (64 references), idioms (66), people and relationships (66), slang (64), technology (65), and travel (65), totaling 390 references.

These choices reflect learners' engagement with topics connected to their social lives, popular culture, and contemporary concerns, demonstrating how glossary creation can reveal both vocabulary interests and the integration of new words into personally relevant contexts. The findings align with prior research by Figueroa and Ramírez (2023), which found that when students create their own glossaries, they learn terminology related to their interests and the topics they choose. This process promotes autonomy, engagement, and deeper vocabulary processing.

Consistent with El-Sawy (2019), who found that combining e-dictionaries and student-created dictionaries is highly effective for improving vocabulary usage, and Riyawi (2024), who emphasizes the importance of contextualized vocabulary instruction for deeper learning, the results of this study affirm that learner-selected vocabulary promotes stronger retention and more effective usage than rote memorization. It can help teachers identify their communicative priorities and linguistic awareness, for example, which parts of speech their students prioritize and why. It will also make vocabulary instruction more engaging and relevant by integrating semantic field modeling and

focusing on high-interest themes like education or technology. Teachers can assess how students apply new vocabulary by analyzing the example sentences they create. This process helps to identify correct and incorrect usage patterns, giving insight into learners' ability to apply vocabulary grammatically and contextually.

The third primary aim of this study was to examine how students utilize target vocabulary words in self-generated example sentences, focusing on grammatical accuracy and sentence complexity. A total of 83 grammatical errors were identified, with the most frequent being comma splices, missing verbs, and unclear meanings, followed by incorrect verb forms, subject–verb agreement issues, and prepositional misuse. These findings confirm Aida, Thohir, and Zamzam (2024) claim that many EFL learners struggle to accurately apply grammar rules when producing sentences, especially regarding verb usage. For example, in the sentence "The blood coming out after get stab many points on his body," the absence of an auxiliary verb, incorrect verb form, and unclear phrasing illustrate the types of challenges that Aida et al. (2024) describe. Moreover, the finding that unclear meaning was one of the most frequent errors (nine instances) extends Sukying (2023) and Thach (2022) who argue that limited lexical knowledge can hinder comprehension more severely than grammatical errors alone. While previous studies focused primarily on the receptive dimension of vocabulary, the results add a productive perspective by showing how insufficient lexical depth directly affects learners' ability to produce semantically precise and contextually appropriate sentences.

In terms of sentence complexity, the results revealed a strong preference for simple sentences (245 out of 364), with far fewer complex (72), compound (38), and compound-complex (9) constructions. This reliance on basic structures confirms Zhang and Kang (2022), who found that EFL learners often avoid complex syntactic patterns due to limited grammatical control. However, our findings extend their conclusions by showing that students' syntactic limitations are also linked to vocabulary integration, even when learners acquire new words, they tend to embed them within familiar, low-risk sentence structures. Taken together, these results highlight an interplay between vocabulary knowledge and grammatical development, suggesting that vocabulary instruction cannot be fully effective unless it is supported by guided practice in sentence construction and syntactic variation. By systematically analyzing learner-generated glossaries and sentences, this study provides empirical evidence that supports calls for integrated vocabulary and grammar pedagogy (Riyawi, 2024; Huang et al., 2019). Such integration not only addresses learners' grammatical inaccuracies but also fosters their ability to produce contextually rich and communicatively effective language.

Based on the discussion above, teachers can leverage students' glossaries as powerful diagnostic tools to pinpoint common grammatical errors, like incorrect verb forms, missing auxiliary verbs, and vague meanings. This approach allows educators to offer targeted feedback that addresses these specific challenges. Moreover, creating engaging, contextualized tasks, such as dialogues, role plays, and short writing exercises centered around glossary words, encourages learners to practice vocabulary in a way that feels meaningful and relevant.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed student-generated glossaries to identify what learners record (parts of speech, semantic domains) and how they use those words in self-written sentences (accuracy, complexity). Across three participants, nouns dominated (231 references), and the most frequent semantic domains were healthcare, idioms, relationships, slang, technology, and travel (390 total). In 364 sentences, simple structures prevailed, with fewer complex or compound types. Of 83 grammatical errors, the most common were comma splices, missing verbs, unclear meaning, recurring verb form, agreement, and preposition issues. Findings suggest learners prefer simpler syntax but face rule-governed challenges when applying new vocabulary. Instruction should extend glossary work to guided sentence construction that targets punctuation, verb forms, and clarity, while leveraging high-interest domains to sustain engagement. Limitations include the small, purposive sample, single task type, and human coding constraints. The findings of this study offer valuable implications for vocabulary-learning research and EFL classroom practice. Theoretically, the analysis extends current understanding of vocabulary acquisition by showing how student-generated glossaries foster active engagement, personalized learning, and integration of form, meaning, and use. The preference for nouns, focus on high-interest semantic domains, and challenges with sentence complexity highlight the interplay between learners' lexical choices and their communicative needs. Practically, the results emphasize the need for vocabulary instruction that goes beyond word memorization to include guided sentence construction, grammar-supported tasks, and contextualized activities. Teachers can use students' glossaries as diagnostic tools to design more personalized, engaging, and effective vocabulary teaching strategies that simultaneously enhance lexical knowledge and communicative competence. Future research could broaden participant scope, link results to proficiency and L1 background, integrate broader writing/speaking data, and test targeted interventions to improve word accuracy and sentence variety.

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