

An Investigation into the Vocabulary Needs of University Students in Hong Kong

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There have been continuous complaints about the declining English standard of Hong Kong students, including those who are in schools and in the university. The main aim of this study is to investigate the vocabulary knowledge of tertiary students and to find out whether they need help with vocabulary for their academic studies. This study involved more than one thousand students newly admitted to the seven tertiary institutions of Hong Kong. The main instrument for data collection was Paul Nation's Word Levels Test (long version), copies of which were mailed to the participants. Findings of the study confirm the validity and reliability of the Test. They indicate a positive and significant correlation between language proficiency and vocabulary scores. While vocabulary will not be a major source of difficulty for many students from English medium schools, it has been found that both students in Chinese medium schools and those who score E grade in English in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination need help with vocabulary, particularly academic vocabulary. Implications of these and other findings for teaching in the Hong Kong context are also discussed.