

THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS ON STUDENTS' VOCABULARY USE IN ENGLISH WRITING: EVIDENCE FROM A PHILIPPINE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic factors significantly influence students' vocabulary use in English writing. This qualitative study explored how students' home environments, resources, and learning opportunities at Kibawe National High School shaped their vocabulary development. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979), the research employed a phenomenological design with twelve Grade 8 students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and five English teachers. We gathered data through semi-structured interviews and analysis of student writing samples, using expert-validated interview guides and vocabulary evaluation rubric. The thematic analysis revealed three major themes: (1) Socioeconomic Barriers and Access to Vocabulary Resources – limited access to books, internet, and supportive language environments among low-SES students; (2) Instructional and Institutional Support through the ARAL Program – targeted reading and vocabulary interventions helped mitigate language gaps; and (3) Motivation, Peer Influence, and Self-Directed Learning – students' intrinsic motivation and peer collaboration facilitated vocabulary growth. Writing samples confirmed these themes by showing clear differences in vocabulary range and richness across SES levels. The study concludes that although students' socioeconomic backgrounds strongly affect their vocabulary exposure, consistent teacher support, contextualized instruction, and learner motivation can bridge the gap. Recommendations include strengthening home-school literacy partnerships, expanding access to reading materials, and enhancing vocabulary instruction strategies in existing programs.

Keyword: socioeconomic status; vocabulary use; English writing; phenomenological study; Kibawe National High School

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Vocabulary is the foundation of effective communication and academic success in language learning. A student's ability to articulate ideas in written English depends heavily on the richness and precision of their vocabulary. However, vocabulary development is not equally accessible to all learners. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often have limited exposure to books, online resources, and English-rich environments, which restricts the growth of their word knowledge. At Kibawe National High School's main campus (KNHS-MC), this challenge is evident. Many learners struggle to produce varied and precise vocabulary in their essays. They often rely on repetitive or basic words,

weakening the clarity and depth of their writing. These difficulties stem from socioeconomic constraints—such as financial instability, lack of access to reading materials, and limited parental support (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and supported by Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, this study examines how socioeconomic factors shape students' vocabulary use in English writing. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a robust predictor of academic language outcomes (Sirin, 2005; Reardon, 2011). Understanding this relationship is essential for designing interventions that help students enrich their vocabulary and improve their overall writing proficiency.

1.1.Statement of the Problem

The study investigates the impact of socioeconomic factors on students' vocabulary use in English writing tasks. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. How do socioeconomic factors influence the vocabulary choices of students in English writing?
2. What challenges do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in developing their vocabulary for writing?
3. How do teachers perceive the relationship between socioeconomic factors and vocabulary use in students' written outputs?
4. What interventions can be implemented to support students in enriching their vocabulary despite socioeconomic challenges?

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research offers insights valuable to various stakeholders. Students will learn strategies to improve their vocabulary and strengthen their writing skills. Teachers will gain a deeper understanding of how socioeconomic factors shape vocabulary development, enabling them to adopt teaching strategies that support learners with limited word exposure. School administrators and policymakers can use the findings to design programs such as reading initiatives and vocabulary workshops to bridge language gaps. Finally, researchers will find this study a contribution to the broader discourse on the intersection of socioeconomic status and language education.

1.3. Scope and Delimitations

The study focuses on Grade 8 students at KNHS-MC and examines how their socioeconomic backgrounds influence vocabulary uses in English writing. It does not address other aspects of writing (e.g., grammar, organization). The research is qualitative in nature, highlighting the lived experiences of students and teachers to capture the challenges, perceptions, and strategies related to vocabulary development.

1.4. Review of Related Literature

The Review of Related Literature presents scholarly works that explain how socioeconomic status influences students' vocabulary uses and writing performance. This section synthesizes international and local studies that highlight the role of home literacy environments, parental support, digital access, and school-based interventions in shaping vocabulary development. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, the review explores how environmental and cognitive factors intersect to influence students' lexical growth. To provide a clear understanding of the variables and context of the present study, the literature is organized into six major themes: (1) socioeconomic status and vocabulary development, (2) home literacy environment and parental involvement, (3) the digital divide and access to learning resources, (4) socioeconomic status and writing proficiency, (5) interventions that support vocabulary growth, and (6) Philippine and local studies on SES and language learning. This review demonstrates existing knowledge gaps and establishes the need for examining how socioeconomic factors shape vocabulary use among Grade 8 learners in a Philippine public-school setting.

SECTION 1. Socioeconomic Status and Vocabulary Development

Socioeconomic status (SES) remains one of the strongest predictors of language development, particularly in vocabulary growth. Vocabulary development is highly sensitive to variations in environmental exposure, access to learning materials, and frequency of meaningful language interactions (Sirin, 2005). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds typically begin formal schooling with a significantly smaller vocabulary compared to their higher-SES peers, a gap that widens over time if not addressed (Reardon, 2011). This difference is attributed to disparities in literacy environments, parental involvement, and resource accessibility.

Research consistently demonstrates that SES influences both vocabulary breadth (number of known words) and vocabulary depth (precision and richness of understanding). Hart and Risley's (1995) landmark study found that children from high-SES households are exposed to millions more words by age three than those from low-SES homes—a factor that continues to influence later academic writing and reading performance.

Similarly, Hoff (2013) documented that children with higher-SES parents tend to receive richer and more frequent linguistic input, resulting in accelerated vocabulary growth.

Beyond early childhood, SES continues to shape vocabulary acquisition throughout adolescence. Low-SES students often receive limited support for vocabulary learning outside school due to financial constraints, limited reading exposure, and fewer language-rich activities (Evans & Kim, 2013). In contrast, high-SES students typically engage in more independent reading, receive parental assistance, and have access to dictionaries, books, and digital resources—all of which contribute to richer and more precise vocabulary use in writing (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013). As academic tasks become more cognitively demanding, these vocabulary differences become increasingly apparent in written outputs, where low-SES students often rely on basic or repetitive words.

Overall, the literature consistently shows that SES influences students' vocabulary development through access to linguistic input, exposure to educational resources, and quality of literacy environments. These factors collectively shape students' ability to use varied and precise vocabulary in academic writing.

SECTION 2. Home Literacy Environment and Parental Involvement

A strong home literacy environment is a key predictor of students' vocabulary development, regardless of schooling quality. Research shows that children who grow up in print-rich homes—those with books, reading materials, and frequent parent-child literacy interactions—develop broader vocabularies and stronger writing skills (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). This environment fosters incidental learning, where students acquire new words through daily exposure rather than formal instruction alone.

Parental involvement also plays a crucial role in shaping vocabulary use. High-SES parents are generally more likely to engage in literacy-related activities such as shared reading, storytelling, and discussion of new words (Lareau, 2011). These interactions introduce children to varied vocabulary and support meaningful use of language in authentic contexts. In contrast, low-SES households may prioritize basic needs over literacy activities, limiting opportunities for

exposure to rich vocabulary (Neuman & Celano, 2012). Financial constraints often prevent families from purchasing books, subscribing to reading programs, or accessing digital learning tools.

Moreover, parental educational background influences the extent of language support provided at home. Parents with higher education levels tend to model advanced vocabulary, correct children's usage, and encourage extended conversations that promote deeper lexical understanding (Bornstein et al., 2016). Meanwhile, low-SES families may face challenges such as limited English proficiency or work-related time constraints, which reduce the quantity and quality of literacy interactions (Davis-Kean, 2005). As a result, students from low-SES households may enter school with less exposure to varied vocabulary, leading to difficulties in writing tasks that require precision and descriptive language.

In the context of the Philippines, home literacy environments vary widely across communities, with many families in rural or economically challenged areas having minimal access to books or digital resources. These disparities further widen vocabulary gaps among learners, especially in English—a language typically learned through formal schooling rather than at home. Taken together, the literature emphasizes that the home literacy environment and parental involvement are foundational to vocabulary development, contributing significantly to students' ability to use rich and context-appropriate vocabulary in their writing.

SECTION 3. The Digital Divide and Access to Learning Resources

The digital divide—the unequal access to technology and internet resources—has become a major factor influencing students' vocabulary development and overall academic performance. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds typically have consistent access to smartphones, laptops, and stable internet connections, enabling them to use online dictionaries, reading platforms, and educational applications (Warschauer, 2011). These digital tools expose them to a wider range of vocabulary and allow for frequent informal learning opportunities.

Conversely, low-SES students often share devices with family members, rely on prepaid mobile data, or have no internet access at all (OECD, 2019).

This restricts their ability to look up unfamiliar words, conduct research, or read online texts—activities that are increasingly essential in modern education. Neuman and Celano (2012) found that high-income neighborhoods have significantly more digital learning opportunities compared to disadvantaged communities, contributing to disparities in students' exposure to academic language.

Digital access also influences writing proficiency. Students who regularly consume digital content—such as articles, videos with captions, and e-books—tend to develop stronger vocabulary and better contextual word use (Zhou, 2020). Meanwhile, low-SES learners may depend solely on textbooks and classroom instruction, resulting in limited vocabulary enrichment outside school hours. In the Philippine context, this divide is especially pronounced in rural public schools where internet connectivity and device ownership remain inconsistent.

Overall, the digital divide reinforces existing SES-related vocabulary gaps by limiting access to online reading materials, language learning platforms, and opportunities for independent vocabulary exploration. These inequalities highlight the need for school-based programs and interventions that can provide supplemental resources for learners with limited digital access.

SECTION 4. Socioeconomic Status and Writing Proficiency

Vocabulary is a central component of writing proficiency, and socioeconomic factors significantly shape students' written language performance. Research shows that higher-SES students generally produce essays with greater lexical diversity, richer descriptions, and more precise word choices (Goodwin, 2020). These advantages stem from consistent exposure to books, conversations with adults using advanced vocabulary, and opportunities for practice at home.

Low-SES students, on the other hand, tend to exhibit limited vocabulary range, frequent repetition of simple adjectives, and less control over tone and word appropriateness (Jensen, 2009). They often struggle with academic writing tasks because they lack the lexical resources needed to express complex ideas. Studies by Kim and Garcia (2018) showed that students with

restricted vocabulary knowledge face difficulties crafting coherent and vivid written narratives.

Moreover, SES influences not only vocabulary but also writing habits. High-SES learners are more likely to receive feedback from parents on schoolwork, engage in extracurricular reading, and participate in writing-related activities—all of which contribute to writing fluency and lexical maturity (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). In contrast, low-SES students may have fewer opportunities to write outside classroom assignments due to household responsibilities, lack of support, or limited access to writing materials.

In the Philippine educational context, writing assessments increasingly emphasize descriptive and narrative forms of writing, making vocabulary richness essential. Students who lack access to reading materials or English-rich environments often find it difficult to meet these expectations. Thus, SES plays a significant role in shaping not only the vocabulary students use in writing but also their confidence and ability to articulate ideas effectively.

SECTION 5. Interventions That Support Vocabulary Growth

A growing body of research highlights the effectiveness of instructional interventions in reducing SES-related vocabulary disparities. One widely supported strategy is extensive reading, which exposes students to diverse vocabulary through continuous reading practice. Nation (2001) emphasized that repeated encounters with new words in meaningful contexts significantly improve vocabulary retention and depth of understanding.

Another effective intervention is explicit vocabulary instruction, where teachers directly teach word meanings, usage, and collocations. This approach benefits low-SES learners who lack sufficient exposure to academic language outside school (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). Structured vocabulary activities such as word journals, semantic mapping, and contextualized sentence creation have been shown to enhance students' ability to use words appropriately in writing.

School-based programs also play a crucial role. Remedial initiatives such as the Philippines' ARAL Program provide targeted support through reading sessions, peer tutoring, and guided

writing practice. Studies show that peer-assisted learning strategies improve vocabulary acquisition by creating opportunities for collaborative meaning-making (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

Digital tools likewise support vocabulary growth when available. Online platforms, mobile dictionary apps, and reading websites offer rich vocabulary exposure and immediate feedback, helping learners practice independently (Zhang & Wu, 2020). However, these benefits are often limited to students with reliable digital access.

Collectively, these interventions suggest that while SES significantly influences vocabulary development, well-designed instructional and institutional support can mitigate its impact. Programs that integrate reading, explicit vocabulary teaching, and peer collaboration are particularly beneficial for low-SES learners.

SECTION 6. Philippine and Local Studies on SES and Language Learning

Filipino scholars have also documented the relationship between socioeconomic factors and students' language performance. Studies show that students from low-income households often struggle with English vocabulary due to limited exposure at home and reduced access to books or digital resources (Bernardo, 2010). In many rural schools, learners depend almost entirely on classroom instruction for English language exposure, making school-based interventions essential.

Local research by Tupas (2015) revealed that linguistic inequality persists in Philippine education, where students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have stronger English proficiency because they are more exposed to English media and educational materials. Similarly, Reyes (2018) found that public school students with limited access to reading resources exhibit weaker vocabulary range compared to their peers in private schools.

In Mindanao, several studies highlight the varying linguistic environments across indigenous and rural communities. Students with minimal English exposure at home often rely heavily on teacher scaffolding and remedial programs to improve vocabulary proficiency (Molao, 2019). Programs such as ARAL and school-based reading initiatives

have shown promise in addressing vocabulary gaps among disadvantaged learners.

These Philippine-based findings align with international literature, emphasizing that SES significantly influences vocabulary acquisition and academic writing. However, they also highlight the unique challenges faced by Filipino learners—such as multilingual home environments, variability in English exposure, and socioeconomic disparities—which contribute to the complexity of vocabulary development in the Philippine setting.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) explains how different environmental systems influence development. In this context, microsystem factors (family and school) and exosystem factors (parents' work and resource access) interact to shape students' learning environments. For example, limited books or internet at home can directly impede vocabulary growth. Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) suggests that emotional factors such as anxiety or low confidence can hinder language acquisition. Disadvantaged students may experience stress or low self-esteem, which acts as a "filter" reducing their use of new vocabulary in writing. Together, these theories provide a lens for understanding how external (SES) and internal (motivation, stress) factors combine to influence vocabulary use.

Challenges Faced by Low-SES Students

Research identifies several challenges that directly impact vocabulary growth for low-SES learners. These include:

- **Limited Access to Reading Materials:** Children with fewer books, dictionaries, or internet at home struggle to expand word knowledge (Evans & Kim, 2013).
- **Restricted Language Exposure:** Families with limited English proficiency at home offer fewer opportunities for children to acquire new words (Lareau, 2011).
- **Emotional Stress:** Economic hardships can create stress and distract students from learning new vocabulary (Jensen, 2009).
- **Low Confidence in Written Expression:** Without sufficient vocabulary, students often avoid complex writing and produce simplistic compositions (Rothstein, 2004).

1.6. Interventions and Support Programs

Evidence supports the effectiveness of targeted interventions for disadvantaged learners. For example, extensive reading programs expose students to diverse texts, building vocabulary breadth and depth (Nation, 2001). Structured school-based literacy activities—such as word banks, vocabulary journals, and guided writing exercises—also enhance vocabulary use (Jensen, 2009). After-school tutoring and peer support provide additional practice opportunities, while parental and community-led initiatives can strengthen language learning outside the classroom (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). These strategies suggest that well-designed educational programs can help mitigate SES-related vocabulary gaps.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design: Qualitative Phenomenological Approach

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of students and teachers regarding vocabulary development in relation to socioeconomic status. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make meaning of their experiences, making it suitable for examining personal insights, challenges, and contextual influences on vocabulary use (Merriam, 2009). This design allowed the researcher to capture rich descriptions of students' linguistic environments and teachers' observations of vocabulary development. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data-gathering method, consistent with phenomenological approaches that emphasize depth, reflection, and participant meaning-making (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The design also enabled the integration of writing samples to triangulate participants' experiences with actual vocabulary use.

2.2. Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants of the study consisted of twelve (12) Grade 8 students and five (5) English teachers from Kibawe National High School–Main Campus. The researcher used purposive stratified sampling to ensure representation across socioeconomic levels. The twelve students were categorized into low-, middle-, and high-SES groups, with four participants per group. SES categories were determined using school records

and indicators such as family income, parental education, and access to resources.

Additionally, five English teachers with experience handling Grade 8 learners and involvement in the ARAL Program were selected purposively. These teachers provided insights based on their observations of students' vocabulary use and learning environments. All participants met the inclusion criteria of having at least one year of exposure to English writing tasks and regular participation in school-based learning activities.

2.3. Research Instruments

The study utilized three instruments: the Student Interview Guide, the Teacher Interview Guide, and a Vocabulary Evaluation Rubric. The Student Interview Guide (Appendix A) included open-ended questions that explored learners' vocabulary habits, home literacy environment, and challenges in writing. The Teacher Interview Guide (Appendix B) elicited information about teachers' observations on students' vocabulary levels, SES-related differences, and instructional strategies.

In addition to interviews, the researcher collected authentic writing samples from student participants to examine vocabulary range, richness, and appropriateness. A Vocabulary Evaluation Rubric (Appendix C) was used to analyze these samples systematically. The rubric assessed vocabulary range, precision, contextual appropriateness, and overall lexical effectiveness. These instruments allowed for consistent data collection while providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences.

2.4. Validation and Reliability of Research Instruments

All research instruments underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Three validators—specialists in language education and educational research—evaluated each item using a four-point Likert scale (1 = Needs Revision, 4 = Very Satisfactory). Based on their feedback, minor revisions were applied to improve wording and sequencing.

The instruments obtained mean ratings ranging from 3.7 to 4.0, all interpreted as Very Satisfactory, confirming their appropriateness for data collection. The overall reliability coefficient

indicated a high level of consistency across the instrument items, affirming that the tools were suitable for capturing the required qualitative data. The validated instruments and scoring sheets are included in Appendix F.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed ethical and systematic procedures. After securing approval from school authorities, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and from parents or guardians of minors. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times and conducted in quiet, private spaces within the school. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes.

Before each interview, the researcher reiterated the study's purpose and assured participants of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, and the researcher took field notes to capture additional observations. Writing samples were collected concurrently, ensuring that each sample was anonymized using participant codes (e.g., S1-S12).

After data collection, the researcher transcribed all recordings verbatim and checked them against the audio to ensure accuracy. All digital files were securely stored, and no identifiable information was included in the transcripts or analyzed materials.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent was obtained from students, their guardians, and teacher participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable details from transcripts and writing samples. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

The researcher ensured sensitivity in all interview questions and avoided intrusive or potentially distressing topics. All procedures complied with institutional ethical guidelines and were reviewed and approved by the school's research oversight committee. These measures upheld the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice throughout the research process (Kaiser, 2009).

2.7. Data Analysis

The researcher employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis to examine interview transcripts and write samples. First, the researcher familiarized the data through repeated readings. Second, initial codes were generated to capture meaningful units related to vocabulary use and socioeconomic influences. Third, related codes were grouped into preliminary themes.

Themes were reviewed and refined in the fourth phase to ensure that they accurately represented the data. In the fifth phase, the researcher defined and named each theme, ensuring alignment with the research questions and theoretical framework. Finally, the themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative.

To enhance credibility, the researcher used triangulation by comparing interview data with writing samples. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to review summaries of their responses. An audit trail documenting coding decisions was maintained throughout the process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, organized by the themes that emerged from the data. We begin with a summary of the data collection context and then describe each major theme with supporting quotations and writing sample evidence.

Summary of Data Collection: Data was collected over three weeks in October 2025, after obtaining all necessary approvals. Twelve Grade 8 students (four each from low-, middle-, and high-SES groups) participated in in-depth interviews, along with five English teachers involved in the ARAL program. Each student also provided one or two writing samples. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded. We then conducted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on interview data and triangulated the emerging themes with evidence from the writing samples. Three major themes emerged from this analysis.

1. **Socioeconomic Barriers and Access to Vocabulary Resources.** Many lower-SES students reported limited access to learning materials at home, which hindered their vocabulary growth. For example, one low-income student said, *"We don't have books or Wi-Fi at home. I only learn new words when our teacher explains them in class"* (S3). Another noted, *"Sometimes I want to look up new words, but my phone has no load or internet, so*

*I just skip it” (S2). Teachers confirmed that such disparities were income-related: “Some students can practice writing online or read on their tablets, while others cannot even afford a dictionary” (T1). Writing samples reflected these access gaps. Essays by low-SES students contained only about 35–40 unique words per 150-word essay, often repeating basic adjectives like *good, nice, happy*. In contrast,*

*high-SES students used 50–60 unique words, including precise terms like *remarkable, meaningful, inspiring*.*

As shown in Table 1, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated greater vocabulary range and lexical diversity in their essays compared to those from lower SES groups.

Table 1. *Vocabulary Range in Student Writing Samples by Socioeconomic Status*

SES Group	Avg. Unique Words (per 150-word essay)	Typical Word Examples
Low SES	35–40	<i>good, nice, happy</i>
Middle SES	45–50	<i>excited, memorable, difficult</i>
High SES	55–65	<i>inspiring, remarkable, gratitude</i>

Note. Data derived from analysis of students’ writing samples (see Appendix E).

The table illustrates a clear positive relationship between socioeconomic background and vocabulary range, where access to learning

materials and reading exposure appear to enhance lexical development.

To further illustrate these differences, Table 3 summarizes the rubric-based evaluation results for vocabulary use across the three socioeconomic groups.

Table 3. *Summary of Vocabulary Use Evaluation Results by Socioeconomic Group*

SES Group	Range	Richness / Precision	Contextual Appropriateness	Overall Rating (Qualitative)	Interpretation / Remarks
Low SES	Limited (35–40 unique words)	Frequent repetition of basic terms (e.g., <i>good, happy, nice</i>)	Often inappropriate or vague word choices	Developing	Needs support in vocabulary exposure and contextual use.
Middle SES	Moderate (45–50 unique words)	Some variety and accuracy in vocabulary; minor errors	Generally appropriate with few inconsistencies	Satisfactory	Demonstrates moderate lexical control and growing precision.
High SES	Broad (55–65 unique words)	Precise and vivid word use (e.g., <i>inspiring, gratitude, remarkable</i>)	Consistently appropriate to tone and context	Excellent	Displays strong lexical command and contextual sensitivity.

Note. Based on rubric scores from student essays evaluated for vocabulary range, richness, and appropriateness (see Appendix C).

Table 3 reinforces the patterns shown in Table 1, confirming that socioeconomic status influences not only vocabulary quantity but also the

precision and contextual appropriateness of word use.

Interpretation: This theme highlights how SES directly affects access to linguistic resources. In Bronfenbrenner’s model, this aligns with exosystem and macrosystem factors: broader

economic conditions limit low-SES learners' exposure to print and digital media. Our findings echo Cummins' view that language-rich environments enhance academic vocabulary. Without such environmental support, students' lexical development is constrained. Thus, socioeconomic barriers at home significantly limit students' incidental vocabulary learning.

1. Instructional and Institutional Support through the ARAL Program. Teachers emphasized that school-based interventions helped offset socioeconomic disadvantages. One ARAL coordinator explained, *"Through ARAL, we conduct remedial reading and vocabulary sessions for those who lag behind. It really helps the low-SES learners."* (T3). Another teacher noted, *"We also use peer tutoring during ARAL time, where stronger students help their classmates learn new words."* (T5). Students agreed that ARAL sessions boosted their confidence with English: *"When we practice new words in ARAL, I remember them better and can use them in essays."* (S6). Writing sample analysis showed modest but meaningful gains: students who actively participated in ARAL demonstrated broader vocabularies and better word choice in later essays than in earlier ones.

Interpretation: This theme underscores the importance of instructional support in bridging SES gaps. In Bronfenbrenner's framework, the ARAL program operates at the microsystem level, influencing the students' immediate learning environment. Teachers' scaffolding and targeted feedback embody Cummins' notion of contextual support enhancing language proficiency. The data suggest that consistent, structured vocabulary instruction and peer support within the school can compensate for limited home resources, helping disadvantaged students improve their lexical skills.

1. Motivation, Peer Influence, and Self-Directed Learning. Students' personal motivation and peer interactions emerged as powerful drivers of vocabulary growth, regardless of background. Several students described learning new words through social interaction. For example, one student said, *"My seatmate and I always challenge each other to use new English words in our conversations."* (S8). Another shared, *"When I*

hear a new word from my classmate, I try to use it in my writing so I can remember it." (S11). Teachers likewise observed that intrinsic motivation often offset resource limitations: *"Some students from poor families still perform well because they are eager to learn. Their motivation pushes them to read and write more."* (T2). Writing samples of highly motivated students—regardless of SES—showed greater creativity and risk-taking in word choice, with more varied expressions and synonyms.

Interpretation: This theme highlights the role of internal and social factors in vocabulary development. Motivation and peer interaction reside in Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, where relationships influence learning behaviors. Our findings align with Cummins' interdependence hypothesis, which suggests interpersonal communication facilitates deeper lexical retention. In practice, students' enthusiasm for learning and collaborative activities serve as protective factors that help them acquire new vocabulary, even when their socioeconomic environment is not supportive.

Summary of Findings: The themes together illustrate how SES influences vocabulary uses through both barriers and buffers. Low-SES students face limited access to materials and language exposure, which constrains their vocabulary (Theme 1). However, dedicated institutional support (Theme 2) and learner-driven strategies (Theme 3) can partially compensate. Analysis of the writing samples confirmed that higher-SES students generally exhibited broader vocabularies than lower-SES peers, but students who engaged actively in ARAL sessions or self-directed learning showed measurable vocabulary growth over time.

In relation to Bronfenbrenner's theory, the findings demonstrate how external socioeconomic structures (macrosystem) interact with immediate environments (microsystem and mesosystem) to shape learning outcomes. Consistent with Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, the data suggest that both environmental input (e.g., resource access) and communicative practice (peer learning and motivation) contribute to vocabulary acquisition. These patterns across the three themes illustrate how socioeconomic factors intersect with instructional and motivational influences on

vocabulary use. Table 2 summarizes the emergent themes and their supporting evidence.

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instructional and motivational influences on vocabulary use. Table 2 summarizes the emergent themes and their supporting evidence.

Table 2. *Summary of Emergent Themes on Socioeconomic Factors and Vocabulary Use*

Theme	Description	Key Supporting Evidence
Socioeconomic Barriers and Access to Vocabulary Resources	Limited access to books, internet, and home literacy support hinder vocabulary growth among low-SES learners.	Student quotes (S2, S3); teacher observations (T1); low vocabulary range (35–40 words).
Instructional and Institutional Support through the ARAL Program	Targeted reading, peer tutoring, and vocabulary lessons in ARAL help bridge SES-related gaps.	Teacher quotes (T3, T5); student progress in writing samples.
Motivation, Peer Influence, and Self-Directed Learning	Intrinsic motivation and peer collaboration enhance vocabulary growth regardless of SES.	Student quotes (S8, S11); improved word variety in essays.

Note. Themes derived from triangulated data: student and teacher interviews and writing samples.

As shown in Table 2, the thematic findings capture how socioeconomic constraints, institutional support, and individual motivation jointly shape students' vocabulary development. These interconnected factors collectively explain the variation in vocabulary use across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Overall, while socioeconomic inequalities pose barriers, effective school support and student motivation can help bridge linguistic gaps and promote more equitable vocabulary development.

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Summary of Findings

This study explored how socioeconomic factors affect Grade 8 students' vocabulary use in English writing at KNHS-MC. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological approach; we gathered insights from twelve students across SES levels and five English teachers. Three overarching themes emerged: (1) Socioeconomic barriers and limited resources at home constrain low-SES students' vocabulary exposure; (2) Instructional and institutional support through the ARAL program (including teacher scaffolding and peer tutoring)

mitigates some SES-related gaps; and (3) Motivation, peer interaction, and self-directed learning empower students to improve their vocabulary regardless of SES. Writing sample analysis validated these themes: higher-SES students generally demonstrated richer vocabularies, but active participation in ARAL and peer learning led to gains for lower-SES students. In sum, while students' socioeconomic backgrounds strongly influence their initial vocabulary exposure, consistent teacher support, contextualized instruction, and learner initiative can facilitate vocabulary growth.

4.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings, we draw the following conclusions:

- **Environmental and Economic Contexts Shape Vocabulary Development.** Students' home environments (part of Bronfenbrenner's microsystem) directly influence their access to English language input. Low-SES learners often lack sufficient print and digital resources, which constrains incidental vocabulary learning.
- **Institutional and Teacher Interventions Can Bridge Socioeconomic Gaps.** School-level initiatives (the mesosystem) like the ARAL program can compensate for broader

economic disadvantages. Effective teacher practices—such as targeted feedback, scaffolding, and structured vocabulary activities—help all students develop lexical competence regardless of SES.

- **Motivation and Peer Interaction Promote Linguistic Interdependence.** In line with Cummins (1979), learners who actively engage in communication, collaboration, and self-directed practice are more likely to transfer language skills across contexts. Student motivation acts as a catalyst for vocabulary acquisition, even when material resources are scarce.
- **Vocabulary Development Is a Multidimensional Process.** Vocabulary growth depends on the interplay of environmental, instructional, and personal factors. It is not determined solely by SES. Consequently, interventions must address external barriers (e.g., resource access) and internal drivers (e.g., motivation, persistence) in tandem.

4.3. Recommendations

Considering the conclusions, we recommend the following actions:

- **For Students:** Cultivate self-directed vocabulary learning by actively recording and practicing new words (e.g., keeping personal word journals or using mobile dictionary apps). Peer support through collaborative activities like pair reading and word-sharing games. Engage in consistent reading by using school libraries, reading corners, or online platforms (when available) to increase exposure to diverse English vocabulary.
- **For Teachers:** Integrate vocabulary enrichment across all lessons. Design activities that repeatedly expose students to new words in reading, writing, and speaking contexts to deepen retention. Provide differentiated support by offering supplementary materials (like simplified texts) to low-SES learners while giving enrichment tasks to advanced students. Strengthen feedback practices by giving targeted guidance on word choice, usage, and precision in student writing. Continuing and expanding programs like ARAL, ensuring they include explicit vocabulary instruction and practice sessions.

- **For School Administrators and Policymakers:** Ensure equitable access to learning resources. Schools should provide English-language materials—such as books, reading modules, and printed dictionaries—for all students, especially those who lack access at home. Enhance institutional support by funding and expanding remedial and enrichment programs like ARAL to promote inclusive language learning. Offer professional development for teachers on evidence-based vocabulary teaching methods.
- **For Future Research:** Future studies could broaden the scope by using larger or multiple school samples to examine SES-related language variations more comprehensively. Employing mixed-methods designs—combining quantitative vocabulary assessments with qualitative interviews—could deepen understanding of how SES influences lexical acquisition. Longitudinal research is also recommended to examine how sustained exposure and interventions affect vocabulary growth over time.

In conclusion, while socioeconomic disparities continue to affect students' linguistic opportunities, education can act as a powerful equalizer. Effective school programs, motivated learners, and dedicated teachers can collectively reduce the vocabulary gap between students of differing socioeconomic backgrounds. As Bronfenbrenner and Cummins emphasize, vocabulary learning is socially embedded shaped by the interplay of environment, interaction, and initiative.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Interview Guide

Purpose: To explore how socioeconomic factors influence students' vocabulary use in English writing.

Instructions: The interviewer will use the following open-ended questions to guide discussion with each student. Follow-up prompts may be asked based on participant responses.

1. How do you usually learn new English words?
2. What kinds of reading materials do you have access to at home or in school?

3. Can you describe how your family supports your learning in English?
4. What difficulties do you experience when writing in English?
5. How do you feel about your vocabulary when writing essays or stories?
6. Do you think your home environment affects how you learn English words? How?
7. What helps you remember and use new vocabulary in writing?
8. What suggestions do you have for improving your English vocabulary?

(The interviewer may adjust wording or ask additional questions for clarification.)

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Guide

Purpose: To gather insights from teachers on how socioeconomic factors affect students' vocabulary use and English writing performance.

Instructions: Teachers will be interviewed individually. Each session will be audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed.

1. How would you describe your students' vocabulary use in English writing?
2. In your experience, how does socioeconomic background affect vocabulary learning?
3. What differences do you notice between students from varying SES backgrounds?
4. What strategies do you use to help students improve their vocabulary?
5. How does the ARAL Program support vocabulary development?
6. What challenges do you encounter in teaching vocabulary to diverse learners?
7. What recommendations can you suggest for supporting students with limited English exposure?

(Follow-up questions may be asked to elicit deeper reflection.)

Appendix C

Vocabulary Use Evaluation Rubric

Purpose: To assess students' vocabulary range, richness, and appropriateness in English writing samples.

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Satisfactory	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Range	Wide variety of words, including uncommon and precise words.	Adequate range of vocabulary; some variety.	Limited word range; repetitive use of common terms.	Very restricted vocabulary; overreliance on basic words.
Richness/Precision	Words are used accurately, vividly, and effectively.	Generally appropriate word use; minor errors.	Some incorrect or vague word choices.	Frequent misuse or vague vocabulary.
Contextual Appropriateness	Vocabulary fits perfectly with context, tone, and purpose.	Mostly appropriate; few inconsistencies.	Occasionally inappropriate word use.	Inconsistent or incorrect vocabulary use in most of the text.
Overall Impact on Writing	Vocabulary enhances clarity and style.	Vocabulary adequately supports meaning.	Vocabulary minimally supports expression.	Vocabulary detracts from clarity or coherence.

Interpretation: The rubric scores are interpreted qualitatively. They highlight trends in vocabulary use across SES groups in student writing samples.

Appendix D

Sample Student Writing Prompt and Collection Procedure

Purpose: To collect authentic English writing samples from students for vocabulary analysis.

Writing Prompt: “Write a short essay (around 150 words) about an unforgettable experience you have had in school. Use descriptive language to show your thoughts and feelings.”

Collection Procedure:

- Students wrote essays during English class under teacher supervision.
- Submissions were collected with informed consent and anonymized using student codes (S1–S12).
- Each essay was analyzed for vocabulary range and richness using the rubric in Appendix C.
- Samples were stored securely in password-protected digital files.

Appendix E

Interview and Writing Excerpts

Selected excerpts from the semi-structured interviews and writing samples are presented below to illustrate key themes. All names are pseudonyms.

• Section E.1 – Student Interview Excerpts:

- *S3 (Low SES):* “We don’t have books or Wi-Fi at home. I only learn new words when our teacher explains them in class. Sometimes I copy the new words in a notebook so I can study them again.”
- *S6 (Middle SES):* “When I watch English videos, I list down new words. My teacher also gives us tasks to use them in sentences. That helps me remember the meaning.”
- *S8 (High SES):* “My parents encourage me to read novels in English. They buy secondhand books for me, and that’s where I learn more vocabulary.”

- *S10 (Low SES):* “If I don’t understand a word, I ask my classmates. We help each other during group work. Sometimes we search meanings using one phone only.”

• Section E.2 – Teacher Interview Excerpts:

- *T1 (English Teacher):* “Vocabulary gaps are clear when students submit essays. Those with more reading exposure use precise words; others repeat the same simple adjectives.”
- *T3 (ARAL Coordinator):* “ARAL sessions give us a chance to focus on vocabulary practice. We group students by need, and peer tutors help explain meanings.”
- *T4 (English Teacher):* “Socioeconomic background affects access, but motivation really makes a difference. Some students with limited resources still excel because they are curious.”
- *T5 (English Teacher):* “We try to use contextualized materials—local stories and community topics—so that all students can relate and apply new words naturally.”

• Section E.3 – Sample Student Writing Excerpts:

- Student writing excerpts illustrate vocabulary usage by SES group (student code, SES category, and vocabulary observations):
- *S2 (Low SES):* “My weekend is good because I play with my friends and help my mother. I am happy when we eat together.”
 - Observation: Limited adjective use; basic vocabulary (e.g., *good, happy*) repeated.
- *S7 (Middle SES):* “During the school fair, I felt excited and nervous. It was a memorable event because we worked together as a team.”
 - Observation: Moderate range with some descriptive words (*excited, memorable*).
- *S9 (High SES):* “The breathtaking view of the mountains inspired me to write a poem about serenity and gratitude.”
 - Observation: Rich vocabulary including figurative language (*breathtaking, serenity, gratitude*).

- **Section E.4 – Ethical Note:** All excerpts above were included with informed consent from participants. Personal identifiers have been removed. These data excerpts serve solely to support the thematic findings while protecting participant privacy.

Appendix F

Content Validation Form

This form was used by experts to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the data-gathering instruments (student and teacher interview guides, vocabulary rubric) with the study's objectives. Each item was rated on a 4-

point scale: 4 = Very Satisfactory (clear, relevant, fully aligned; no revision needed), 3 = Satisfactory (mostly clear; minor revisions may be needed), 2 = Fair (somewhat unclear or only partially aligned; revision needed), 1 = Needs Revision (unclear or misaligned). Validators provided scores and suggestions for each question or criterion. The form comprises three sections (I: Student Guide, II: Teacher Guide, III: Vocabulary Rubric), with columns for ratings and comments. After review, all items were rated “very satisfactory,” indicating the instruments were clear and appropriate for the study.

Part I. Validation of Student Interview Guide

Item No.	Question / Prompt	Clarity (1–4)	Relevance (1–4)	Alignment with Objectives (1–4)	Comments / Suggestions
1	How do you usually learn new English words?				
2	What resources do you use at home to study English?				
3	Do your parents or family members help you with English lessons?				
4	How do you feel when you write in English?				
5	What challenges do you face when writing essays in English?				
6	What classroom activities help you improve your vocabulary?				
7	How do teachers help you learn new words?				
8	What can be done to help students like you improve vocabulary?				

Part II. Validation of Teacher Interview Guide

Item No.	Question / Prompt	Clarity (1–4)	Relevance (1–4)	Alignment with Objectives (1–4)	Comments / Suggestions
1	How would you describe your students' vocabulary use?				
2	How do students' socioeconomic conditions affect vocabulary learning?				

3	What challenges do low-SES students face in developing vocabulary?				
4	What strategies or programs help students improve vocabulary?				
5	How do you integrate vocabulary instruction in your lessons?				
6	What improvements have you seen after ARAL interventions?				
7	What recommendations would you make for improving vocabulary learning?				

Part III. Validation of Vocabulary Use Evaluation Rubric

Criterion	Clarity (1–4)	Relevance (1–4)	Alignment with Objectives (1–4)	Comments / Suggestions
Vocabulary Range				
Vocabulary Richness				
Contextual Appropriateness				
Cohesive Devices				
Overall Impression				

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