Investigating Vocabulary Selection in Literacy Collaborative Classrooms: A Focus on Narrative vs. Informational Texts.

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Introduction

Background and Context

Vocabulary development during the years of elementary school is strongly related to subsequent literacy and academic success. There is a substantial body of evidence to support the theory that vocabulary learning in early childhood (infancy to grade school) is strongly linked with subsequent reading skill and overall academic attainment (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Marchman & Fernald, 2008). Those students who come into school with a solid vocabulary base are better-equipped to succeed in reading, as those who do not know vocabulary will lag behind the other students.

Studies consistently demonstrate a strong correlation between vocabulary and intellectual growth. Vocabulary has also been shown to be strongly correlated with intelligence tests (referred to as the knowledge hypothesis), as suggested by Anderson and Freebody (1981). Vocabulary has also been shown to correlate moderately to highly with reading comprehension, highlighting its central role in reading ability (Nagy, 2007). These relationships highlight the value of early word learning not only for reading but also for wider cognitive and academic achievement.

Vocabulary development begins much earlier than school, often rooted in children's linguistic and social experiences in home and community contexts. Early verbal interaction—particularly story-based interaction between children and caregivers—has been demonstrated to play a powerful role in vocabulary development (Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999). Furthermore, the quality of the home literacy environment, including access to books, frequency of shared reading, and the degree of conversational engagement, is positively associated with vocabulary outcomes (Froiland, Powell, & Diamond, 2014). The implication

of these findings is that the foundation for school readiness and academic success is laid in the oral language experiences children have prior to their arrival at school.

Even though these initial developments take place, school word demands far surpass general language use. By the third grade, almost all students (about 95%) can decode more words than they can really understand, exhibiting a distinction between word recognition and word understanding (Biemiller, 2012). This gap is of particular concern to students who are "at risk," whose early preschool receptive and expressive vocabulary strongly correlates with later reading comprehension and oral language functioning in the school years (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

As students progress through school and the texts, they are reading grow more complicated—both in vocabulary sophistication and variety of genre—it is critical that vocabulary instruction be explicit, systematic, and informed by research-based practice (Jeong, Gaffney, & Choi, 2010; Duke & Block, 2012). As students need to read and comprehend more and more academic texts, the deliberate instruction of vocabulary becomes increasingly vital. While the practices and strategies of vocabulary teaching have been well researched, far less is known about how teachers select the specific words that they teach. Though numerous researchers have offered suggestions for word choice—such as the tiered model of vocabulary that Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) argued for, and guidelines that have been established by Biemiller (2009) and Hiebert and Cervetti (2013)—empirical research on the actual word choice practices of elementary school teachers is significantly scarce. There remain questions about how teachers choose vocabulary words, what types of words they choose, and whether their choices fall within recommended guidelines.

Awareness of the character of teachers' word choice, their rationale for so doing, and their alignment with established vocabulary teaching models would be critical to learning about

classroom practice. It might be used to inform professional development initiatives, curriculum planning, and ultimately the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction. Also, studying whether instructors use models such as the "Three Tiers" model (Beck et al., 2013) or standards like "words worth teaching" would help to evaluate the extent to which research-based practices are affecting day-to-day teaching. Understanding the rationale for teachers' selection of specific words and the ways in which teachers' word selections influence students' vocabulary growth is essential to informing classroom instruction. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the vocabulary word selection practices of elementary school teachers and determining the extent to which they reflect research-based approaches. By investigating these practices, this research will provide practical information that can inform curriculum development, professional development initiatives, and ultimately improve the quality of vocabulary instruction in elementary schools.

Problem Statement

This study investigated how Literacy Collaborative (LC) teachers select vocabulary words to use in interactive read-alouds in several elementary school classrooms in a large urban Midwestern school district. Describing how teachers make these decisions is helpful because there is no research that directly addresses how teacher select vocabulary for instruction. In fact, it is unclear whether teachers use recommendations from current vocabulary instructional research to inform how they select words for instruction. To determine whether such research has informed their decision making to date, we conducted two rounds of interviews with the LC teachers about what vocabulary they would select and how they explain or justify those selections for two informational and two narrative texts. In the second-round interviews, it is

sought to identify whether teachers had changed the vocabulary they selected and whether the explanations and justifications they offered had changed as a result of extended implementation of the LC framework and additional professional development within this framework.

Vocabulary growth during the early elementary school years is a strong predictor of students' long-term reading and academic success. Scientifically, vocabulary is not just a language skill but also a significant building block in cognitive development, language acquisition, and reading proficiency (Nagy, 2007; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Empirical studies have established firm correlations between initial vocabulary and later reading success (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Biemiller, 2009). In particular, the depth and range of vocabulary knowledge acquired through structured learning experience play a vital role in the students' ability to read increasingly complex texts throughout their entire educational careers (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Though there is a large body of research on vocabulary instruction, a key area has not been explored in depth: the thought processes teachers engage in when they choose vocabulary words to teach during interactive read-alouds, a practice common in systems like the Literacy Collaborative (LC) model (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). While theoretical models (e.g., Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Hiebert & Cervetti, 2013) provide guidance for selecting "tiered" vocabulary words (e.g., Tier Two words—high-use words students must master to achieve academic success), empirical studies on how these recommendations are being realized in the day-to-day life of classrooms are scarce. In short, the problem is a lack of data on whether and how teachers employ research-based standards in selecting vocabulary words for instructional purposes.

This is a scientifically important issue since teaching vocabulary is very interrelated with reading comprehension and overall academic competence. If teachers are not selecting words with strategic intent—based on their usefulness, frequency, and conceptual richness—

students will most likely miss out on critical opportunities for language development. Selecting vocabulary is far from a neutral activity; it actually shapes what words students read, learn, and retain and thus affects their intellectual, linguistic, and academic progress.

The importance of examining this issue is that it can enlighten and strengthen teaching practice. Understanding the distinction between classroom behavior and research-based recommendations can provide insight into future teacher training, curriculum construction, and literacy policy. Without empirical data on how words for vocabulary are selected, professional development programs may remain disconnected from classroom practice. If this problem is not addressed, the gap between recommended best practices and practiced vocabulary instruction may persist, possibly exacerbating literacy gaps—especially in lower-resourced schools or among at-risk student populations. Students may continue to be exposed to vocabulary instruction that is random, ineffective, or unrelated to their developmental needs, thus limiting their academic potential.

Previous research in other contexts has explored other dimensions of vocabulary instruction. For instance, Biemiller (2001) emphasized the instruction of high-frequency, conceptually rich words, while Beck et al. (2013) advocated for explicit instruction of Tier Two words. Such research tends to focus on what words to instruct, and not on how teachers determine those words in real classrooms. Similarly, studies like that of Storch and Whitehurst (2002) link oral vocabulary during pre-school to later grade level comprehension, though not many have investigated the pedagogical rationale underpinning word selection on the part of teachers during interactive read-alouds, specifically in models like LC. Given these gaps, the central research issue arises:

How do elementary school teachers select and justify vocabulary words for instruction during interactive read-alouds, and do their selections align with research-based vocabulary instruction principles?

Research Questions

1. When presented with specific narrative and informational books for an interactive read-aloud, what vocabulary words do teachers select for instruction?
2. Does the nature of teachers' vocabulary selections differ for narrative and informational texts? If so, how?
3. How do teachers justify or explain their vocabulary selections for narrative and informational texts?
4. How do teachers' vocabulary selections compare to researchers' recommendations for word selection?
5. Do teachers' selections, justifications, and explanations change from the first round to the second round of interviews? If so, how?

Relevance and Importance of the Research

The importance of studying vocabulary instruction is that it plays a central role in cognitive growth, reading, and academic success. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest forecasters of reading comprehension, which has a cascading effect on overall academic performance. As revealed in large-scale studies (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Nagy, 2007), learning vocabulary during the early years lays the groundwork for academic achievement in every subject. With the very close relationship between vocabulary and reading competence, competent vocabulary teaching plays an essential role in the response to disparities in academic achievement, especially for pupils at risk of educational underachievement due to lack of sufficient vocabulary skills (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Despite the fact that vocabulary has been identified as being crucial for a long time, teachers' decision-making processes when they choose which words to teach are still not fully understood. While many theoretical models offer an explanation of good vocabulary instruction (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Biemiller, 2009), little empirical research has been documented about teachers' actual word selection practices. This research is required in order to bridge the practice-based research and instruction gap in the classroom so that vocabulary teaching aligns with proven strategies to enhance student learning and academic achievement. Through examination of how teachers select vocabulary to instruct, this research will contribute to the ongoing effort of streamlining and optimizing educational practices in order to better aid student development.

The specific necessity for this research is in investigating vocabulary selection within the context of the Literacy Collaborative (LC) model, a comprehensive elementary school framework. The research is specifically interested in determining how LC-trained teachers select vocabulary in interactive read-alouds. The LC model, with its emphasis on research-based, interactive methods of literacy instruction, provides a fruitful context to examine practices in vocabulary teaching. However, despite the extensive amount of professional development that teachers in the LC setting receive, there is a lack of research examining how teachers in this setting select vocabulary words to teach and whether their choices demonstrate adherence to suggested best practices such as those put forward in Beck et al.'s (2013) tiered vocabulary model.

This gap in knowledge is particularly relevant within big, urban school districts like Tehran, where student populations are diverse and often face extreme socio-economic difficulty. By focusing on the instructors of this district, this research will provide valuable information concerning the practical implementation of the LC framework in classrooms with high levels of student poverty and a diverse range of learning needs. Understanding how teachers select vocabulary in this specific setting will shed light on potential areas of contention between theory and practice and serve as the basis for strengthening literacy teaching in similar settings.

The real-world application of this research is that it can inform the development of better vocabulary instruction in elementary classrooms. By capturing word choice strategies of teachers and why they selected certain words, this research aims to assess how well current vocabulary instruction models are being implemented in classrooms. This awareness can be leveraged to inform future professional development programs such that teachers are provided the skills and knowledge required to make effective vocabulary decisions based on best practices.

Additionally, the findings of this study stand to influence curriculum planning and education policy directly. By providing evidence-based suggestions for word choice during interactive read-alouds, this study can benefit teachers in ensuring not only that words chosen are suitable for the age and conceptually rich, but also that words with the highest likelihood to contribute to students' reading comprehension and academic achievement are chosen.

For example, more informed vocabulary selection practices can help teachers include more research-based, authentic words within instruction and subsequently increase students' word knowledge and text comprehension capacity. Consequently, reading comprehension has been found to increase, and it has positive effects on academic performance across wide ranges of instruction. Lastly, the advantages derived from this research will narrow the gap in reading attainment, especially for poor students who otherwise would have remained excluded from meaningful vocabulary education beyond the classroom**.**

Literature review

Key Concepts, Theories and Studies

Research on vocabulary instruction enjoyed a great deal of attention in the 1980s (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000). Though it has been a topic of research for decades before the 1980s, Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) note it was not popular enough by 1984 to be included as a topic in the first volume of The Handbook of Reading Research (Pearson, Barr, Kamil, & Mosenthal, 1984). The focus of the research at this time was split between recommendations for direct instruction of word meanings to increase depth of vocabulary knowledge and recommendations for wide reading to increase breadth of vocabulary knowledge. The argument for direct instruction holds that the meanings of words students obtain from context are not

deep enough to be useful, so direct instruction must be used to ensure students have the depth of knowledge for the words they need to know (Beck et al., 2013). Conversely, the argument for wide reading holds that there are too many words that students must know, so direct instruction does not make a sufficient contribution to the breadth of students' vocabularies (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). In a sense, the literature on vocabulary instruction from this era can be divided into two categories: instruction intended to deepen or develop knowledge of specific words or instruction intended to help students learn the meanings of new words through generalization (Baumann & Kame'enui, 2003). However, the choice of words that should be used for instruction in the deepening and enriching knowledge of words' meanings approach to vocabulary development lacks descriptions of how teachers use this information.

Differing Views on Vocabulary Development in the Classroom

Wide reading

Proponents of the wide reading perspective reached their conclusion through analyzing corpora of words typically seen by students in the elementary and middle school grades. Their analysis led to an estimate that there are nearly 88,500 words in printed school English (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). This number, if divided across grade levels and days of instruction, suggests a pace of 40 words per day of instruction from first through twelfth grade. This pace is unsustainable and unrealistic (Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985). A more recent estimate puts the number of words in printed school English at 100,000 (Graves, Juel, Graves, & Dewitz, 2010), which only increases the number of words students must learn per day.

Although the number of words students must learn is daunting, it may seem useless to directly teach students the meanings of the words they need to know for reading. The number of words that can feasibly be taught directly across the course of grade one through grade 12

ranges from 3,000 to 8,640 (Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Adams, 2010). However, the knowledge of word meanings students needs to have can sometimes go beyond the immediate meaning of a word in a sentence. That is, the meanings of words may be related to conceptual knowledge the student needs for reading (e.g., a book about the water cycle will feature words such as evaporation, condensation, and precipitation that are necessary for comprehending the text). There may also be words worth teaching because they are related to the theme of the text, but do not appear in the text, yet should be included in instruction (e.g., a book about a disagreement between friends might not feature compromise, even though this word is related to the resolution of the plot). Thus, some type of background knowledge that connects these related words is necessary for vocabulary instruction (Anderson & Freebody, 1981). While building that background knowledge, teachers should focus on connecting the meanings of the words conceptually so that students understand how the words relate to each other and to the concepts in the text.

Furthermore, the use of wide reading has some drawbacks in terms of vocabulary development. There are certain categories of words that are not likely to be learned when reading: semantically opaque compound words (e.g., dashboard), multiple-meaning, or polysemous, words (e.g., bank), proper nouns (e.g., Amazon), and idioms (e.g., between a rock and a hard place) (Anderson & Nagy, 1992). Although the proportion of words in English accounted for by such words is unknown, their existence poses problems for a program of vocabulary instruction that relies only on wide reading. The case of polysemous words is especially problematic because many of the most frequent words in English have multiple meanings (Carroll, Davies, & Richman, 1971; Biemiller, 2009). Robust instruction of word meanings is thus necessary to disambiguate the meanings of polysemous words and other words that may be closely related in meaning (Beck & McKeown, 2007).

Another issue with the use of context to acquire the meanings of words is that it is insufficient in accounting for the number of words students must learn. One estimate of the percentage of new or unknown word meanings correctly inferred from context is five percent (Nagy et al., 1985). Others range as high as 15 percent (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). In either case, this is a low percentage of new words that are learned from context and it relies on the reader being skilled enough to read quickly and independently to learn the words. One explanation for this low rate of words being learned is that the contexts where the words are found are not helpful. Contexts have been described in various ways: directive, non-directive, and misdirective (Beck, McKeown, & McCaslin, 1983). In many cases, sentences are non-directive or misdirective. So, to supplement the authors who use advanced words without the consideration of their readers' ability to interpret word meanings from context, teaching word meanings as an instructional strategy is necessary.

Furthermore, the issue of instructional approaches points to a bigger issue: how we define word (Nagy, 2007). In their analysis of the number of words in English, run, ran, runs, running, and other derived forms of run are tallied as a single word (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). So, this total contains many lexical items whose meanings are morphologically transparent. This definition is consonant with later views (Biemiller, 2012; Hiebert & Cervetti, 2013; Graves et al., 2010).

Regarding wide reading as an explanation for vocabulary learning, it is necessary to note the source Nagy and Anderson (1984) used to calculate their number of words in printed school English. The Carroll, Davies, and Richman (1971) list, also known as the American Heritage Word Frequency (AHWF) list was developed based on materials used by third through ninth graders. Although this corpus likely includes words that would appear in texts used by students in grade two and below, this list's relevance for these learners is not clear. One major problem with word lists is that the order of the words by frequency does not suggest

anything about the order they should be taught in, nor does it describe how the words may be related conceptually (McKeown, Beck, & Sandora, 2012). This lack of alignment with the lower grades is significant for the suggestion that this case) in the final position of the word. These derivational morphemes give information about the part of speech, quality of, or state of the base word they are attached to. Derivational morphemes can be understood in two additional ways–as free morphemes and as bound morphemes. A free morpheme can stand on its own as a base word (e.g., care in careful or careless). A bound morpheme cannot stand on its own as a base word and needs another derivational morpheme or inflectional morpheme to connect to it (e.g., vis in vision or invisible) (Ganske, 2000).

One instructional method for developing morphological awareness in students is by using word sorts. In a word sort, the teacher selects a set of morphemes, often written on index cards or strips of paper, for the students to sort into categories based on similar features (Ganske, 2000). For example, students working on inflectional morphemes might be given a set of words to sort into categories such as present tense (e.g., run), past tense (e.g., ran), and present progressive tense (e.g., running). A student working on derivational morphemes might sort a set of words such as contestable, credible, available, and sensible into categories that reveal a relationship between the base word and the suffix of each word. (In this case, the base words that are free morphemes go with -able, and the base words that are bound morphemes go with -ible.) The goal of the word sort is for students to correctly categorize the words and to explain the logic of their sorting correctly (Ganske, 2000).

Metalinguistic awareness

Like wide reading and word sorting, metalinguistic awareness instruction does not involve the direct teaching of word meanings. Instead, it involves the teacher bringing attention to the morphology and syntax of words and sentences that students are seeing while they read

(Nagy, 2007). Teaching students about wide reading is a more effective way for students to learn vocabulary than direct instruction. This problem is especially acute for students who come from homes where oral language is not used frequently (i.e., parents making 176 utterances per hour) because these students have even more words to learn during these years than students who come from homes where oral language is used frequently (i.e., parents making 487 utterances per hour) (Hart & Risley, 2003). Students in first and second grade simply cannot read as many texts with as many words as older students can. Therefore, students in grade two and below must learn words from sources such as incidental exposure and interactive read-alouds (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Silverman, 2007; Collins, 2010). Thus, the wide reading explanation for vocabulary growth cannot explain all of the vocabulary knowledge students need to have, so using other instructional approaches such as having students complete word sorts to develop morphological awareness or metalinguistic awareness and teaching word meanings are therefore necessary.

Morphological awareness and word sorting. Morphological awareness is an appreciation of the fact that printed and spoken words are made up of units of meaning known as morphemes (Henderson, 1990; Ganske, 2000). Some morphemes are known as inflectional morphemes, or inflectional endings (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009). This class of morphemes includes -ed, -s, and -ing, each in the final position of a word. Inflectional morphemes give information about past tense, pluralization, or present progressive tense of the base word they are attached to. In contrast, derivational morphemes can be more complex (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009; Berninger, Abbott, Nagy, & Carlisle, 2012; Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006).

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Tate, 2009). This class of morphemes includes -ed, -s, and -ing, each in the final position of a word. Inflectional morphemes give information about past tense, pluralization, or present progressive tense of the base word they are attached to. In contrast, derivational morphemes can be more complex (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009; Berninger, Abbott, Nagy, & Carlisle, 2012; Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006). These are morphemes such as -tion, -ous, and -ity, each (in this case) in the final position of the word. These derivational morphemes give information about the part of speech, quality of, or state of the base word they are attached to. Derivational morphemes can be understood in two additional ways–as free morphemes and as bound morphemes. A free morpheme can stand on its own as a base word (e.g., care in careful or careless). A bound morpheme cannot stand on its own as a base word and needs another derivational morpheme or inflectional morpheme to connect to it (e.g., vis in vision or invisible) (Ganske, 2000).

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Metalinguistic awareness

Like wide reading and word sorting, metalinguistic awareness instruction does not involve the direct teaching of word meanings. Instead, it involves the teacher bringing attention to the morphology and syntax of words and sentences that students are seeing while they read (Nagy, 2007). For these students, the words that are discussed as a result of word consciousness instruction may be the only source of academic language in their lives (Scott, Miller, & Flinspach, 2012). Given the disparity in home backgrounds and the consequences of that disparity for future literacy development, there is a great need for academic language instruction.

With so many words for students to learn, developing word consciousness in students will make it easier for them to expand the breadth of their vocabularies while they are reading (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002). It is even possible that word consciousness provides an explanation for how reading from context works. Students who are thinking about an author's use of language will be more likely to notice when the author uses a word the student has not seen before. Furthermore, students who are word conscious will not only notice these new words but also, they will be motivated to determine the meanings of these words precisely because they are new. This affective aspect of word consciousness instruction is the one that sets it apart from other types of instruction (Scott et al., 2012); students who enjoy working with words will likely notice when they encounter unknown words in text or in conversation. This likelihood of noticing these words presumably makes it easier for students to add new or unknown words to their vocabularies. Teaching word meanings. In contrast to the wide reading perspective is the perspective that vocabulary development happens best through direct instruction of word meanings. A central idea in this perspective on vocabulary development is the concept of rich and robust vocabulary instruction. However, there is some disagreement about how to decide which words are worthy of extended instruction.

morphemes instead of individual words has the benefit of generalizability (Fukkink & de Glopper, 1998). The morphemes students are taught can be taught be quickly and will likely show up in other words, which makes this method of instruction quite efficient. In comparison, teaching students the meanings of individual words take more time due to the dependence of the meanings of those words on the context of the rest of the sentence. The knowledge of taught words does not easily generalize to other words either.

Yet, there are limits to the usefulness of morphological awareness instruction because not all words can be decomposed into easily understood and manipulated morphemes. This limitation may be addressed by syntactic awareness, which is another of the constructs that comprises metalinguistic awareness (Nagy, 2007). Teaching students to be aware of how the syntax of a sentence affects the meanings of the words in that sentence may be useful in how students think about the meanings of words. This approach allows students to take context into account when they are reading, and it implies that word meanings are polysemous (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Armed with this knowledge, students may see the potential for having some leeway in how they define words and will know it is not necessary to know a word-for-word definition of each word in a passage.

In later elementary grades, awakening students to the words all around them can be an instructional method in itself. A student who is word conscious inquiries about the meanings of words, appreciates the nuances of words, and morphologically analyzes words (Anderson & Nagy, 1992). As with learning from context, word consciousness increases students' ability to learn word meanings from a text as they are reading (Miller, Gage-Serio, & Scott, 2010; Graves & Watts-Taffe,٢٠١٥).

Table1

Literature Review

Gerlach	1994	Theoretical framework analysis of social interaction in learning.	Learning occurs through social interaction among learners.
Kagan & Kagan	2017	Review of collaborative learning strategies in educational settings.	Collaborative learning improves social and interactive skills among students.
Gilbert	2021	Literature review and analysis of collaborative learning strategies in classroom environments.	Collaborative strategies enhance interactive skills and provide natural environments for skill development.
Mende et al.	2021	Literature review on the impact of collaborative learning on critical thinking and subject matter.	Learners improve their understanding of subject matter and enhance critical thinking through collaboration.
Ho	2021	Survey and analysis of collaborative learning environments in classrooms.	Collaborative learning enables students to benefit from each other's strengths and insights.
Krange & Ludvigsen	2008	Literature review of the role of collaboration in learning.	Collaboration leads to better learning outcomes through shared social interaction.
Gokhale	1995	Empirical study on group work and social interaction in academic settings.	Social interaction through group work helps students develop academic skills and group collaboration abilities.
Woolfolk	1998	Review of social intelligence in collaborative learning environments.	Collaborative learning enhances students' social intelligence, improving their relationships and learning.
Alghamdy	2019	Analysis of collaborative learning's impact on social responsibility and peer respect.	Collaborative learning fosters social responsibility, respect for differing viewpoints, and positive peer relationships.
Alalimi	2020	Literature review on collaborative learning's effectiveness in classroom settings.	Collaborative learning strengthens student learning and promotes partnership among peers.
Spence	2022	Empirical study on collaborative learning	Collaborative strategies like teamwork, peer learning, and games

		strategies in English classrooms.	significantly enhance the learning experience.
Altun & Sabah	2020	Review of the impact of collaborative learning on communication and interaction.	Collaborative learning promotes enhanced communication, feedback, and real-world interaction in the classroom.
Ha et al.	2022	Study on the use of collaborative learning to reduce language anxiety.	Collaborative learning decreases foreign language fear and improves speaking competence.
Rao	2019	Study on the role of collaborative learning in English language acquisition.	Collaborative learning supports task completion and enhances student learning in English language classrooms.

Key Debates and Controversies

This study provides an in-depth discussion of how LC teachers choose words for interactive read-alouds in elementary schools, an aspect where there has been little previous research. The significance of the inquiry is derived from the primordial function of vocabulary acquisition towards long-term students' academic performance. As literature indicates, an extensive vocabulary not only is fundamental to reading ability but also for general cognitive and academic progress. Despite much research on teaching vocabulary, there has been little attention paid to consideration of decision making in word selection during read-alouds. This is troubling, since the implication may be that teachers do not necessarily employ evidence-based methods to teaching vocabulary, therefore limiting potential for language acquisition in students.

The study situates itself in the larger landscape of vocabulary development, which is at the heart of reading comprehension and academic achievement. Theoretical frameworks, such

as Beck et al.'s (2013) model of tiered vocabulary instruction, offer suggestions for selecting high-utility words, yet this theoretical framework has not been sufficiently tested in classroom settings. The investigation looks at whether the principles outlined in these frameworks are realized in LC teachers' choices of vocabulary words. A salient aspect of the investigation is whether long-term use of the LC framework and additional professional development influences teachers' vocabulary selection. This would be a worthwhile finding because it would indicate whether professional development leads to more research-based practices in teaching vocabulary.

The research also touches on opposing views on how vocabulary is best developed. The wide reading camp holds that vocabulary development is best developed through exposure to a large body of texts, while direct instruction demands the instruction of specific words to ensure depth of knowledge. The very number of words that students encounter throughout their schooling, however, renders the wide reading stance unrealistic as the sole means of vocabulary development. Furthermore, certain categories of words, such as polysemous words or idiomatic phrases, are unlikely to be learned through reading alone, stressing the need for direct vocabulary instruction.

From the research, it becomes clear that effective vocabulary instruction should not only focus on broadening students' exposure to words but also on deepening their understanding of key words through structured teaching methods. Methods like word sorting and fostering morphological awareness can play a critical role in helping students grasp the nuances of word meanings and their connections to other concepts. This is especially important in early grades, where students may not be exposed to as many words as older students. The study thus emphasizes the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction, suggesting that teachers need to select words strategically, using criteria such as word usefulness, frequency, and conceptual richness, to support students' academic growth.

The main conflict that emerges from the study is the gap between recommended best practices in vocabulary instruction and how vocabulary teaching is actually practiced in classrooms. While theoretical models provide useful guidance, there is little empirical data on how teachers apply these recommendations in real-world settings. This disconnect raises concerns about the effectiveness of professional development programs and the need for more research to bridge this gap. To resolve this, the study suggests that better alignment between research-based recommendations and actual classroom practices is needed, especially to ensure that students—particularly those in lower-resourced schools—receive the vocabulary instruction they need to succeed academically.

Gaps in Existing Knowledge

The research addresses a significant gap in the existing literature on vocabulary instruction, i.e., the decision-making process that teachers use in selecting vocabulary words in interactive read-alouds. While there is extensive research on effective methods of vocabulary instruction, much of the existing literature either focuses on theoretical models or provides general suggestions on which words to teach. However, little empirical work exists on how these theories are used by teachers in everyday classroom practice. The study will fill this gap by examining how teachers select words in practice, uncovering the complexities of this decision-making process.

Among the areas missing in the literature is the gap between research-driven suggestions on vocabulary instruction and classroom practice. For instance, though numerous studies stress the need to teach high-frequency, conceptually dense Tier Two words, it is not clear how teachers determine which of these words to present when doing a read-aloud. The research will analyze whether teachers' vocabulary selections adhere to these principles or if other factors,

such as student interests or prior knowledge, are considered by teachers in making their choices. By the close observation of teacher practice, the study will provide a detailed description of how these research principles are realized in the classroom.

Yet, another gap in the existing literature is the insufficient investigation of how teachers make the decision-making process work. While plenty of writing has focused on what words to instruct, fewer have focused on how teachers actually decide which words are most useful to instruct under specific circumstances. This research will examine this process, examining how teachers balance conflicting requirements—like frequency of a word, richness of a word conceptually, and student requirement—when deciding vocabulary words to teach. Grasping this process is key to sharpening teaching strategies and delivering actionable feedback for teacher development and curriculum planning.

Finally, the research addresses a gap in understanding the role of teacher training and professional development within frameworks like Literacy Collaborative. While many studies focus on the theoretical aspects of vocabulary instruction, the study will provide insights into how specific frameworks shape teachers' instructional the. By examining how teachers' training influences their vocabulary selections during read-alouds, the research will contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness of professional development programs in enhancing vocabulary instruction. This will help bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that teachers are better equipped to make informed decisions that support vocabulary growth for all students.

Research design and methods

This chapter describes the study's methodology in terms of its research design, the context of teacher learning, the research setting, the nature of the participants, my role as a researcher, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

This research is a case study (Barone, 2011) of teachers' vocabulary selection practices for interactive read-alouds in a LC setting. According to the case study research discussed by Barone (2011), the domains along which case studies can vary include questions, purpose, sampling, and data quality. For this study, those domains are aligned with Barone's (2011) recommendations in the following ways. The initial question that provided the genesis of this study is ―How do teachers select vocabulary for instruction? This question is refined through reflection on the context of the research to include considerations particular to interactive read-alouds, existing vocabulary research, the nature of the words selected, and changes to teachers' selections over time. As a result, the initial question will be revised to encompass the domains covered by the five research questions. The purpose of this case study is to describe teachers' vocabulary selections, justifications, and explanations in the context of an interactive read-aloud. Although a variety of these aspects have been addressed previously (cf. Watts, 1995; Kindle, 2010), the combination of analyzing vocabulary selections and explanations or justifications of those selections has not been investigated.

Merging the analysis of word choice and teachers' reasons for their selection has not yet been analyzed in depth (Kindle, 2010). Seeing teachers' thinking in early-year time, before a balanced emphasis throughout the LC framework is realized, provides insight into their focus on word study and morphology (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Building rapport before the first interview is necessary to make teachers comfortable in expressing their thoughts (Spradley,

1979). The interview sample of six LC-trained teachers is chosen on the basis of their experience and expertise in employing interactive read-alouds (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Setting

This study is conducted in the city of Tehran. The median income in the city of Tehran is between $20 and $35 (Department of Education [ODE], 2014). In the Tehran school district, there are six elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school, serving more than 4,000 students from pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade (ODE, 2014). The district is classified as urban, with high student poverty and average student population (ODE, 2013). The free and reduced lunch rate (an indirect measure of income) is over 99 percent in Tehran (ODE, 2014). The population of Tehran's school district is 47 percent male and 53 percent female (ODE, 2014). The racial and ethnic distribution of Tehran school district's population is 80 percent White, eight percent multiethnic or multiracial, seven percent Black, and six percent

Participants

The participants in this study will be six teachers in the Tehran school district. These six teachers are members of the cohort of 17 intermediate LC teachers receiving LC professional development for the 2022-2023 academic year. According to the LC framework, they will be considered intermediate teachers (i.e., they teach grades three through six). These teachers began their first year of LC training in August 2022 and completed their training in May 2023. The teachers ranged in experience from five to 32 years of teaching. All six of them had a B.A. or B.S. in Education and five of them had a M.A. or M.Ed. in Education or a specialist certificate (e.g., reading, intervention). Each teacher taught in a different school in the Tehran school district and all will be White and female. The six teachers will be selected

from the 17 because they are the largest group of teachers who are receiving LC training and are in the same district.

Data Collection

The data for this study will be collected through interviews and classwalks. In the interviews, teachers will be asked to read one of two sets of two picture books (one informational text and one narrative text) during both the first and second rounds. The sets of picture books are counterbalanced between rounds. Additionally, during the classwalks, teachers will be asked about the visibility of the LC framework in their classrooms and how they had incorporated student work into their spaces. The second-round classwalks specifically will focuse on the new content in the teachers' classrooms.

Characteristics of Interviews

All interviews will be carried out in classrooms, offices, or school bookrooms of the teachers who took part without other teachers being visible. The interviews took 35 to 75 minutes as the teachers read a book and subsequently explained their vocabulary selection for the book. Interviews are audio recorded using an analog voice recorder and transcribed using Transana software (Woods & Fassnacht, 2012). Field notes are also written following each interview to document non-verbal action and other comments.

Question Type and Rapport Building

The interview questions will be framed using Spradley's (1979) task-related grand tour questions, prompting the teachers to design an interactive read-aloud in the LC context. To get accurate responses, the teachers will be requested to respond to specific texts as this approach minimizes their likelihood of distorting their normal planning process (Leech, 2002). When the

teachers had already used a text for an interactive read-aloud, the questions will be reformulated to past-tense (e.g., "How did we use this text?") to obtain more precise responses.

The semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility as the teachers will be occasionally asked follow-up questions based on what had been discovered in earlier interviews. For instance, if a teacher had not selected a word that a prior teacher had selected, they are asked to consider that word. This is done selectively, however, to make certain there is no major vocabulary that the teacher had overlooked. This flexibility also facilitated the building of rapport, as questions are tailored to each teacher's responses, so the encounter felt less stilted and more natural (Emerson et al., 2011; Spradley, 1979).

Validity and Reliability

In the research process, ensuring that it is valid and reliable is crucial to make our findings reliable. Reliability refers to consistency and stability in the data collection process through the passage of time, and this can be ensured stronger by some of the prominent factors in our research. One of the most important factors is the use of repeated data collection. By conducting two rounds of classwalks and teacher interviews, I will be able to determine whether the vocabulary selection practices continue to be the same or differ. The first round of classwalks and interviews is done two weeks following the first professional development session, while the second round is done seven weeks following the second session. This repeated measurement also allows one to assess practices of teachers over time, and the reliability of data gets enhanced. Additionally, by inquiring at specific times and in similar kinds of locations (e.g., offices or classrooms), we ensure that our procedures are consistent, and this reduces external variability and provides we with more reliable findings.

Another way through which we give attention to reliability is by the use of various sources of information. During classwalks and interviews, we get information from diverse sources. Interviews provide insight into the word choice reflection response, explanations, and rationalizations of the teachers, whereas classwalks present firsthand evidence of teachers' instruction in the classrooms. Employment of these sources of data ensures that the outcomes are not drawn from a single viewpoint, thus promoting the consistency of the findings. Our approach to standardizing the interview process and ensuring that interviews are held at a proper time after professional development sessions also supports the consistency of the data collection process.

On the other hand, validity refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of our results from the study—whether the data actually reflect the phenomenon we are investigating. For us to have validity, we have structured our research design in a way that the data collection procedures are harmonized with the specific research objectives. For instance, the sequence of several data collections provides a means to trace the changes in the teachers' vocabulary selection processes over time so we can ascertain whether the professional development is bringing about the desired effect on their procedures. The second interview round, conducted seven weeks following the second professional development session, offers teachers adequate time to apply the new word study content within their practice, in a way that their vocabulary choice practice is informed by professional development they have received. Our longitudinal study approach increases the validity of our study by allowing to assess the impact of professional development more effectively.

Furthermore, triangulation—using more than one source of data—is another method we use to make our conclusions more valid. By collecting data through interviews and classwalks, we triangulate data, providing a richer, more nuanced picture of teachers' word

choice processes. Triangulation reduces the likelihood of bias that can arise from using a single source of data and ensures that our findings are comprehensive and valid. In addition, by selecting informative cases (trained teachers in the Literacy Collaborative (LC) model and trained to train others), we ensure that the participants' responses make sense and capture profound awareness of word choice during interactive read-alouds. This purposeful selection of participants aligns perfectly with the information-oriented sampling approach because it selects teachers who are most directly implicated in the instructional methods being examined.

Our methodological approach also increases the validity of our research by rendering the research answerable on a strong conceptual framework. The LC framework of balanced literacy and student independence in reading, writing, and word study is a established and researched pedagogy. Teachers trained in this system are to undertake certain vocabulary selection practices, like targeting tier-two words (Beck et al., 2013) most useful for the vocabulary development of students. By focusing our study on teachers educated in the LC model, we are ensuring that the vocabulary choice practices we are studying are associated with this specific pedagogical model, thus increasing the internal validity of our study.

Finally, our research design also includes rapport building with the teachers before conducting the interviews. Rapport building is a very important aspect of qualitative research because it offers an environment in which participants feel comfortable and willing to share their authentic opinions and experiences. This is especially important when investigating teachers' reflective practice because the rapport established on trust will convince the participants to provide rich, meaningful data. The fact that we invested time engaging with teachers during their professional development sessions before carrying out interviews is evidence that they would be comfortable opening up about their teaching practices, hence increasing the validity of the data collected.

In conclusion, the reliability and validity of our study are enhanced by a well-thought-out design that includes repeated data collection, the use of multiple data sources, an informative participant sample, and triangulation of data. By addressing both the consistency and accuracy of our findings, we can ensure that our study provides an insightful and trustworthy examination of how teachers select vocabulary for interactive read-alouds in a language-rich classroom setting.

Practical Considerations

In any study, particularly one involving teachers and students, there may be some limitations and challenges. One challenge may be recruitment bias because only interested teachers may have a heightened interest in teaching vocabulary, thus producing a results bias. To restrict this, there must be a representative group of teachers targeted at several schools and teaching environments so that the sample includes a broad range of instruction and levels of experience. There may also be time limitations available to include more interactive read-alouds, especially if the teachers have a full curriculum to keep up with. To achieve this, the study can aim at a reasonable number of read-aloud periods per teacher, and careful planning can be made so that these sessions will not cut into the critical instructional time.

Another shortcoming is the generalizability of the findings. As the study will be focused on particular classrooms with particular teachers and learners, the findings may not necessarily be transferable to every learning context. To address this, the study will be grounded in a particular context (for instance, primary school children's classrooms in a specific region), and outcomes can be explained within such a context with regard to the need for additional research in a more diverse range of settings in order to test effects.

Ethical issues will take precedence, namely confidentiality and consent. Explicit consent from parents will be sought because the participants are students, and confidentiality will be maintained at every level. Teachers' and students' names and identifying information will be anonymized in all products. There is also the potential for power inequality between the researchers and teachers that can affect participation. To counteract this, transparency will be paramount, and teachers will be assured that the participation is voluntary and that the study will seek to improve their teaching. Ensuring that the teachers are supported throughout the research and providing them professional development opportunities based on the findings can help overcome any ethical issues of exploitation or undue influence.

Implications and contributions to knowledge

Practical Implications

The findings from this study have the potential to significantly improve the process of vocabulary instruction in primary school classrooms, inform educational policy, and make a case for concrete changes in instructional practices. First, improving the process: The study will provide helpful information about how interactive read-alouds can be effectively used to support vocabulary instruction. If the study can confirm that certain strategies, i.e., teacher-led discussions and interactive tasks, are essential for more effective learning of vocabulary, it can improve the process of introducing read-alouds to schools. This might result in better professional growth for teachers, as they would learn evidence-based methods of incorporating vocabulary teaching into the curriculum more efficiently. Teachers can implement these measures as part of their standard course work, and this would reflect positively on the language skills of students in the long run.

Second, policy shaping: If the research shows that interactive read-alouds are highly effective in facilitating vocabulary development, the evidence could have implications for policy at the national, regional, or local level. Education policymakers could use these results to make the case for the inclusion of formal read-aloud time as a key component of early literacy instruction. This might lead to changes in curriculum that incorporate more interactive vocabulary-building exercises, especially in under-resourced schools where these methods are not prioritized due to a lack of funds. Policymakers can also use the research to allocate funds for teacher training programs in vocabulary.

Lastly, the outcomes would be in a position to make a case for real change by convincing educational decision makers and school leaders to include word study as a core focus of their overall literacy efforts. The research would provide a sound argument for

updating how schools instruct vocabulary. This could result in shifting the way education systems measure teacher effectiveness, with a focus on the use of interactive strategies such as read-alouds to facilitate vocabulary growth, particularly among disadvantaged students who have limited access to rich language environments outside of school. Ultimately, the research can help reshape how vocabulary instruction is perceived and implemented, leading to long-term improvements in students' language development, with potential ripple effects across educational practices and policies.

Theoretical Implications

The research here contemplated will help the creation of a more sophisticated version of existing vocabulary development theory and pedagogy models for practice. Namely, it will treat our understanding in the field of how teachers select words to introduce, particularly in elementary school classrooms. Through examination of the alignment (or lack thereof) of existing instructional practice to tested models, e.g., Beck, McKeown, and Kucan's Three Tiers model (2013), the research will illuminate whether or not these research-based methods are sufficiently directing teachers in word choice.

In addition, this study will test prevailing assumptions about vocabulary teaching. For example, despite much research on vocabulary teaching strategies, there is less research on teachers' practical, everyday decision-making processes. By asking how teachers actually choose words and whether these choices align with suggested guidelines, the study may test the assumption that teachers naturally employ best practices and uncover some professional development or curriculum implementation shortfalls.

Lastly, the findings could serve as a foundation for further vocabulary teaching research. Future research on how effective teacher professional development programs work, curriculum guide writing based on word choice, and the broader adoption of research-based

vocabulary models across various educational settings could be initiated by the study's findings. Ultimately, the study will assist in improving vocabulary instruction and, by extension, academic achievement, particularly in early elementary school.

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Table 2
Research Phase Objectives Deadline

Phase 1: Literature Review	Review and synthesize existing research on vocabulary development in early childhood, its impact on academic success, and current vocabulary teaching practices.	May 31, 2025
Phase 2: Research Design	Finalize research methodology, design data collection tools (e.g., surveys or interviews), and obtain necessary approvals (e.g., IRB approval).	June 30, 2025
Phase 3: Data Collection	Conduct surveys/interviews with elementary school teachers to understand their vocabulary teaching practices and word selection rationale.	August 31, 2025
Phase 4: Data Analysis	Analyze collected data, identify patterns in teachers' word selection, and compare them with established models (e.g., Beck's Three Tiers).	October 31, 2025
Phase 5: Discussion and Writing	Interpret findings, discuss implications for vocabulary instruction, and write the research report.	December 15, 2025
Phase 6: Final Review and Editing	Review and edit the research report for clarity, coherence, and accuracy.	January 15, 2026
Phase 7: Submission	Submit the final research report for academic or professional review.	February 15, 2026