

Action Research Project: Exploring Best Practices of Vocabulary Instruction Through Student
Feedback, Formative Assessment, and Teacher Reflection

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Context

I have been an English teacher for three years. All three years have been in the same, small rural school district located on the far east side of the county. The population of the town is about 1,200 people and the school district has 525 students enrolled.

A majority of the students are white with a small percentage of minority students. More than half of the K-12 student population receives free/reduced lunch and there is a grant program that provides all students with a nutritious snack at the end of the school day and throughout the summer. The student to teacher ratio is 16:1, which attracts a fair amount of out of district students who are looking for a more personalized education rather than being caught up as a number in a larger district.

The school district has two buildings - the elementary and the middle/high school - that are directly next to each other. An all-sport facility with additional updates to the outdoor track and various sport fields were built in 2006. This space is able to be utilized throughout the day by both the physical education courses and the community.

For the 2017-18 school year, I teach three courses - English 10, English 11, and English 12. Not only do I have the opportunity to teach multiple grade levels throughout the school day, I also teach two entire grade levels - 10th and 11th. The student to teacher ratio within my courses is slightly larger than the average for the district with 18:1 with my largest class having 28 students and my small class having 12.

Curiosity within My Teaching Practice

For my action research project, I wanted to challenge my current practice of vocabulary instruction. I wanted to do this by examining the previous strategies I used with students,

measuring their feelings and scores associated with each, find and try out a new strategy, and reflect on what would be the best practice for my students.

My curiosity was sparked by how my students interact with different types of texts. Currently, my students complete a weekly assignment called Article of the Week. This assignment/unit was developed by Kelly Gallagher. I have adapted the assignment/unit and implemented it from the beginning of my teaching career to now.

Similar to Gallagher's set up, students are provided with a current event article every Monday and provided a bit of class time to begin working on it. They are to annotate it and reflect on a question posed by Gallagher or a passage that resonated with them. The assignment is due at the end of the week which gives students the responsibility of completing it by then. A discussion occurs at the end of the week to unpack ideas or feelings associated with the topic(s) at hand.

In my adaptation, I provide explicit instructions on how to annotate. Five different types of annotations make up the explicit instructions, including "Circle and define unfamiliar words." Each week a handful of students will circle words they do not know. About half of these students will then take the next step to look up the word. While not all are completing the annotation expectation, there are still attempts to do so.

When my students switch from nonfiction, current event articles to literature in the form of paperback novels, students are not taking the time to look up words they do not know and/or make note of new definitions learned by looking them up as they are with Article of the Week. They are not doing this despite being taught how to annotate without writing directly on the text through the use of sticky notes.

When prompted as to why they are not making note of words they do not know, students are quick to say, “It takes too much work” or “I can’t write directly on the text.” Other times they will say that, “It’s for points with Article of the Week.”

During the 2016-17 school year, I assigned George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* to the sophomores. I encouraged students to look up words they did not know while reading and to note them on a sticky note or separate slice of paper. When each chapter was due, I selected common vocabulary words that were used across contexts and quizzed my students on them. Upon reflection, I felt that this was an unfair practice as they were mostly looking for a needle in a haystack and after the pop quizzes started many students were using their time to look up unknown words rather than reading the text.

This school year, when I assigned William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, I instructed students to look up and define on a sticky note or separate slice of paper at least five words per chapter that they were unfamiliar with. When each chapter was due, students were to show me their vocabulary notes and then rewrite them on a chart I created for them, which included the word, the page number, and the definition. Students started off strong as the task was easier than picking out needles in a haystack, but other students struggled because it was homework and they rarely do it.

For my action research project, I used my students’ logic of having a formative assessment grade attached with the process of learning words in an assigned text in order to find the best practice. I was curious as to which of the instruction strategies I used in the past, along with a new one learned through the Literature Review would provide students with both positive feelings and overall with good formative scores with vocabulary.

Justification

Through my curiosity, I hoped to find a correct way to teach vocabulary and provide students with excellent instruction to both mend their attitudes and opinions about vocabulary, boost their scores in vocabulary, and improve their comprehension both with the knowledge of words and being able to decode words in the future.

Research Question

Which vocabulary instruction strategies do students find to be the most engaging and useful in their reading comprehension, writing, and speaking skills?

Literature Review

My inquiry into finding the best practices of vocabulary instruction stemmed from working in a rural district where my students are plagued by a combination of “stress, poverty, isolation” (Lester, 2012, p. 407). My rural students are often “at risk for academic difficulties and disadvantages” than students in both suburban and urban settings. One of the reasons why is because funding for suburban and urban schools come from the taxes of their populous communities. Urban education is also often a priority for state funding due to low test scores and low graduation rates (Lester, 2012, p. 407-408). Students in all communities, especially rural ones, need to be provided with “effective and culturally relevant instruction” (Lester, 2012, p. 413).

In order to learn what a word means, the sources read for the literature review were in agreement. Students need to be exposed to a word multiple times in context before they can understand it. This literature review will elaborate on three best practices that involve students interacting with words on many occasions through vocabulary instruction:

1. Tier I, II, III Words
2. Alternative Instruction, Activities, & Assessments
3. Independent Reading

Tier I, II, III Words

The concept developed by Beck and McKeown in 1985 of Tier I, II, III words captured my attention as a formative, low stakes way to have students buy in to vocabulary instruction. These two researchers came up with categories associated with different types of vocabulary words, specific to the classroom and content context using students’ prior knowledge. The

categories also place responsibility on the teacher's professional opinion. Tier I words are basic everyday words like *bread, door, light, and street*. Students should be familiar with these words and their definitions. Tier II words are high frequency words that show up across domains that secondary students will encounter in different subject areas and contexts, such as "*coincidence, reluctance, analysis*" (Alber, 2014). Tier III words are only included with specific fields of study. If students were reading a review of their local orchestra words terms like *vibrato, conductor, and forte* would be specific to the musical performance.

In an updated blog post from 2014, Rebecca Alber suggested an excellent strategy for students to provide the teacher with words they did not know for a text. She suggests having students skim through a text (article, passage, chapter) and pick out three other different types of words - "know it", "kind of know it", and "don't know it" - and place them in a chart. These words are of the students' choice and there are no right or wrong answers. After the words are placed in the chart, Alber would then have students define words without dictionaries in the "know it" and "kind of know it" columns. These pre-reading charts would be turned in for the teacher to assess and place within Beck and McKeown's Tiers I, II, or III. Instruction would then be provided for the words in Tier II for certain, and it is up to the teacher's discretion to address words in Tier I and/or III.

Tier II words should be words that:

- "Students do not ordinarily use",
- "Students have knowledge or experience that would help them to understand the word",
- Appear frequently across subjects

- “Can be worked with in a variety of ways so that students can build rich representations” (Kucan, 2012, p. 363)

An additional article authored by McKeown, Beck, Omanson, and Pople (1985) showcased how and why successful vocabulary instruction occurs at a high frequency and allows for the students to elaborate and discuss meanings, uses, etc. Their study was completed between four classrooms - three variable instruction types, one control - in three urban public schools. The results found that students who had some type of vocabulary instruction (the 3 variable classrooms) were able to recognize words faster and have a more accurate understanding of the word than those who did not receive any vocabulary instruction (control classroom). The researchers found that more encounters yielded better results.

Alternative Instruction, Activities, & Assessments

When I was in high school, we were required to purchase vocabulary books. Each week we were assigned a unit in the book of twenty words. We participated in a chorus response with the teacher, went over the provided definitions, completed the assignments, and took a test at the end of every month. This practice of vocabulary study does not mesh well with the articles read for this literature review.

As was already stated, vocabulary words should be taught and assessed within the subject matter or context of a text (novel, chapter, article, passage, etc.) not isolated and outside of the content being taught.

Robert Marzano’s tactics for teaching vocabulary are referenced in Alber’s 2014 post on *Edutopia*. Marzano is a top researcher and educator. He suggests a six step process for vocabulary instruction:

- “Step one: The teacher explains a new word, going beyond reciting its definition (tap into prior knowledge of students, use imagery).
- Step two: Students restate or explain the new word in their own words (verbally and/or in writing).
- Step three: Ask students to create a non-linguistic representation of the word (a picture, or symbolic representation).
- Step four: Students engage in activities to deepen their knowledge of the new word (compare words, classify terms, write their own analogies and metaphors).
- Step five: Students discuss the new word (pair-share, elbow partners).
- Step six: Students periodically play games to review new vocabulary (Pyramid, Jeopardy, Telephone)” (Alber, 2014).

It is also thought of as being a good practice to break down instruction by teaching students the phonology, orthography, morphology, and purpose with syntax (Kucan, 2012, p. 362-363). This colleague of Beck and McKeown believes that this explicit focus with Tier II words is vital for students to understand the concept and usage of a word. Despite, in my opinion, re-creating a dictionary definition, Kucan believes that “dictionaries are useful, but looking up words does not help students” (2012, p. 361).

One of the resources reviewed encouraged teachers to “sneak in” vocabulary into everyday classroom routines and expectations, including creating word walls divided into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that students utilize or come across in their reading; posting a word of the day; and providing students with rich vocabulary in feedback whether it is from the teacher or in a peer workshop group (We Are Teachers Staff, 2015). This type of vocabulary

instruction is subtle and, at times, clever, but I believe it is in too much isolation from the explicit and meaningful content- and context-driven instruction outlined above.

After completing instruction and participating in various activities, different types of assessment can be incorporated to ensure student understanding, such as having students create catchy song titles with vocabulary words and explaining how/why the word is used, drawing pictures to represent the word, or having students distinguish between two sentences for the correct use of the vocabulary word (Farnsworth, 2017).

Independent Reading

Independent Reading is already a main component in my English curriculum, so I found it refreshing that literature exists to support this notion. Before I address that supportive literature, the opposing side of having students obtain vocabulary knowledge through independent reading calls it “incidental exposure” meanings it is merely a coincidence that students are being exposed to new words through the reading of texts (Zimmerman, 1997). Zimmerman believes that there is value in having students select their own texts, but also believes that teachers should choose the context carefully and pay more attention to it through instruction rather than have it be a passive activity.

Stephen Krashen (1989) begs to differ and believes that “reading is not simply a way to develop vocabulary... , it is the only way” (p. 455). In his study, one group of 2nd graders were provided with a seven month unit of Sustained Silent Reading, while another group was not. At the end of the seven months, when both groups were assessed, the group that read every day made significant gains regarding the vocabulary understanding and fluency than the group that did not read. Krashen concludes that vocabulary instruction is often boring and a chore for

English educators. He turns to reading and believes a good book trumps all of the best practices for vocabulary instruction.

Independent Reading provides students with the chance to hone in on their fluency. The National Reading Panel defines fluency as “the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and without proper expression” and that it needs to encompass more than oral reading (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510). Fluency is known to have a “reciprocal relationship” with comprehension, so giving students an opportunity to read in the classroom allows them to practice both of these components associated with vocabulary (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510).

Conclusion

After completing this literature review, I have recognized that I need to be more explicit with vocabulary instruction. In my own practice, I have moved away from teacher-selected vocabulary lists and into the student selected ones. The next step and plan is to make instruction meaningful and purposeful for students’ understanding and knowledge. I already have a strong Independent Reading priority, but that alone, despite Krashen’s (1989) opinion, cannot teach students vocabulary needed to be successful beyond my classroom.

Design and Method

Research Question

Which vocabulary instruction strategies do students find to be the most engaging and useful in their reading comprehension, writing, and speaking skills?

Participants

For my study sample, I selected twenty five students that I have had for the past two school years in English 10 and English 11. These students would be able to reflect on their experiences with the two previous vocabulary strategies and were then guinea pigs for the new strategy I planned on implementing with them after completing the Literature Review. The other students enrolled in the sections that I have not had for both years were able to participate and provide feedback, but it was not recorded in this project.

Data and Tools

Formative Assessments

Throughout the units in which vocabulary was assessed, I have several formative assessments to review in order to assess student knowledge of vocabulary.

During the *Animal Farm* unit during the 2016-17 school year, students were encouraged to look up words they did not know while they read *Animal Farm* as a class book. When chapters were due, students were required to answer prompts pertaining to the chapter, along with defining words selected by me as their teacher. I provided the page numbers, but students were given a time limit on defining the words.

For the recent class book *Lord of the Flies* unit, these same students did vocabulary a bit differently. Students were encouraged to look up and define at least five vocabulary words per chapter and note them on a slice of paper, note card, sticky note, etc. Prior to the in-class prompts on chapter due dates, students who had documentation of words were provided a slip of paper with a table on it to complete with their five words. If students used page numbers on all five words they were provided with a point of extra credit. If students did not have vocabulary words completed according to the requirements they were not provided with the slip and received a zero. If an entire class completed the homework of looking up words, I awarded the class two points of extra credit.

I reviewed the gradebook for the students selected and collect their scores for the vocabulary assessments from both units. I then compared the scores for each student.

With the Tier I, II, and III word strategy, I was able to collect formative assessment data once instruction was completed and I assessed my students.

Student Surveys

The following survey will be used to collect data regarding the three different vocabulary strategies utilized with these twenty five students. I will conduct this survey three separate times over the course of my data collection period.

Name*:

Vocabulary Strategy:

Please circle the choice that fits with your feelings about the vocabulary strategy.

1. This vocabulary strategy led me to want to know what words meant.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

2. This vocabulary strategy was engaging.

- | | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 3. This vocabulary strategy was useful. | | | | |
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 4. This vocabulary strategy improved my understanding of the text assigned. | | | | |
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 5. This vocabulary strategy gave me new words to use in my writing. | | | | |
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 6. This vocabulary strategy provided me with new words to use when I speak. | | | | |
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 7. Would you like to provide additional comments to #'s 1-6? If so, please do so here. | | | | |

8. What did you like/enjoy about this vocabulary strategy? Why?

9. What did you not like/enjoy about this vocabulary strategy? Why?

10. Additional comments:

* Names will be changed on data analysis.

Timeline

Initially, I pulled the formative assessment grades from the gradebook and narrowed down the data for the twenty five students I was going to be studying. I then asked them to reflect on the separate vocabulary strategies in class.

After getting these results, I began providing instruction for the Tier I, II, and III word strategy. I gave students a new text and asked them to read through it. While reading, students were to note which words they knew, kind of knew, and did not know. I created my own chart of these words and color coded them based on whether they were in Tier I, II, or III. I then selected ten words, created a PowerPoint presentation and presented to them the following day.

After going over the words, I reviewed the new words with students every day for the next few days. This review was done with KaHoot!. Students enjoyed playing a game and reviewing vocabulary words. Students were assessed on the words by selecting five for their quiz.

After this was completed, I analyzed all of the data and began to draft my findings and conclusions. When this draft was completed, the document was shared with peers within my TE 808 class and they provided me with some feedback. My instructor also provided me with feedback.

I then worked on a final draft to submit for a final grade for TE 808.

Role as the Researcher

I thought that becoming the researcher would allow me to remove the emotion associated as the teacher. Teachers put in a ton of thought and work into developing the best practices that will teach and reach students. By looking at the data collected, most of it student writing through

reflection, I thought it would be important to note that it was merely data and not meant to be critical. In the end the data would help improve my students' scores and my teaching.

Data and Analysis

Procedures

I divided my data analysis based on the three strategies utilized and assessed with this sample size of students - teacher-selected words with *Animal Farm*, student-selected words with *Lord of the Flies*, and Tier I, II, and III vocabulary words which were selected by the students initially and filtered through the teacher for direct instruction with Article of the Week 10. I pulled the sample students' formative assessment scores for all strategies assessed and provided them in the *Findings* section with averages per assessment and per student. The final strategy was only assessed once, so that is why there was only one data point for that strategy.

Students recalled the previous two strategies - teacher-selected words with *Animal Farm* and student-selected words with *Lord of the Flies* - individually through surveys as I projected on the front screen of my room the specific instructions and documents that they completed during the units in question.

The last vocabulary strategy was completed during the final week of data collection. I provided students with instruction, reviewed material per the strategy's suggestions, and assessed students. After completing the assessment, students completed a survey for it.

The student surveys both quantitative and qualitative answers. Quantitative answers have been provided in the *Findings* section, while the qualitative answers are coded for themes and found in the *Themes* section.

Findings

The teacher-selected word vocabulary strategy was the least effective. Students hated doing it and their grades suffered.

Each of the following vocabulary scores are shown in terms of the score I recorded in the grade book. The “Average Score for Student” is for each individual student. Averages for each assessed chapter are located in the final row titled “Assessment Average.” Not all chapters were assessed for vocabulary, but the six selections below were the six assessed selections. The box in the bottom right hand corner, is the sample sizes’ average of their average of chapter vocabulary.

Figure 1 - Formative Assessment Results for Teacher-Selected Vocabulary Strategy

Student Name	Vocab 1	Vocab 2	Vocab 3 & 4	Vocab 5	Vocab 7	Vocab 10	Average Score for Student
Brianna	100%	60%	100%	100%	100%	100%	93%
Dana	80%	100%	60%	80%	90%	40%	75%
Felicia	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	40%	87%
Felicity	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	97%
Grant	100%	80%	100%	80%	100%	80%	90%
George	100%	80%	80%	40%	100%	80%	80%
Henry	80%	100%	100%	40%	40%	80%	73%
Jerome	60%	80%	60%	80%	100%	60%	73%
Lindsey	60%	20%	40%	40%	0%	20%	30%
Lee	50%	60%	90%	20%	100%	40%	60%
Lamar	100%	100%	80%	80%	70%	60%	82%
Mary	60%	60%	80%	80%	80%	40%	67%
Mark	80%	60%	40%	20%	60%	80%	57%

Nancy	100%	100%	80%	100%	80%	100%	93%
Percy	80%	80%	100%	40%	40%	100%	73%
Paul	80%	0%	0%	70%	80%	40%	45%
Ricky	100%	80%	80%	60%	90%	40%	75%
Rachel	60%	40%	60%	40%	90%	60%	58%
Sam	100%	60%	80%	80%	80%	40%	73%
Steve	20%	40%	40%	60%	80%	80%	53%
Sage	60%	80%	80%	80%	70%	40%	68%
Tina	80%	60%	100%	80%	80%	80%	80%
Tracey	100%	80%	80%	40%	90%	80%	78%
Wayne	100%	100%	0%	60%	80%	0%	57%
Wanda	20%	100%	90%	30%	90%	60%	65%
Average per Assessment	79%	72%	73%	63%	79%	62%	71%

Lindsey, Mark, Paul, Rachel, Steve, and Wayne had average scores for this assessment below a passing grade or that of a 60%. All of these students are notorious for scoring low on reading and comprehension tests and a few of them have additional accommodations on summative assessments. Based on my observations of them over the past two years, all of these students are often resistant to strategies that require additional work on their end. When left to the word and context clues, they will usually sink instead of swim. Their counterparts who earned at least a 60% or higher either looked up words they did not know on their own or have quality comprehension skills to be able to decode enough to earn an average of a passing grade.

Each average of the chapters was a surprise to me because the sample size of students did not earn above a C+. Students did not have confidence in their abilities to take the time to look up words on their own or trust their comprehension skills. The feeling I got from the group was very negative regarding this vocabulary strategy.

I found that students' hate for the teacher-selected vocabulary strategy was high. Figure 2 showcases these feelings. For every single prompt seeking feedback for the strategy, at least half of the class was in disagreement about the positive effective the strategy had. In some cases three-quarters to almost ninety percent of the students did not feel that his strategy was important in their understand for vocabulary.

Figure 2 - Student Survey Results Regarding Teacher-Selected Vocabulary Strategy

Prompt	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This vocabulary strategy led me to want to know what words meant.	-	40%	44%	16%
This vocabulary strategy was engaging.	8%	40%	32%	20%
This vocabulary strategy was useful.	4%	44%	28%	24%
This vocabulary strategy improved my understanding of the text assigned.	12%	28%	48%	12%
This vocabulary strategy gave me new words to use in my writing.	4%	20%	60%	16%
This vocabulary strategy provided me with new words to use when I speak.	-	12%	64%	24%

The student-selected strategy with *Lord of the Flies* had mixed results. Scores went up, along with students' feelings and attitudes about it, but I still did not feel like this was a strong and effective vocabulary strategy.

By the end of the data collection of this strategy, it became obvious that students were just looking up words to get points rather than genuinely completing the assigned task.

Each of the following vocabulary scores are shown in terms of the score I recorded in the grade book. The "Average Score for Student" is for each individual student. Averages for each assessed chapter are located in the final row titled "Assessment Average." I only assessed vocabulary in the first eight chapters because I realized that the quarter was about to end and needed to wrap up the class text. The box in the bottom right hand corner, is the sample sizes' average of their average of chapter vocabulary.

Figure 3 - Formative Assessment Results for Student-Selected Vocabulary Strategy

Student Name	Vocab 1	Vocab 2	Vocab 3	Vocab 4	Vocab 5	Vocab 6	Vocab 7	Vocab 8	Avg
Brianna	110%	110%	110%	110%	130%**	110%	110%**	110%	113%
Dana	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%
Felicia	110%	110%	110%	110%	130%**	110%	110%**	110%	113%
Felicity	-*	110%	110%	110%	0%	110%	0%	0%	63%
Grant	0%	0%	90%	0%	60%	110%	0%	0%	33%
George	0%	0%	100%	0%	110%	110%	110%	0%	54%
Henry	110%	110%	0%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	96%
Jerome	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	110%	26%
Lindsey	110%	110%	100%	100%	110%	110%	110%	110%	108%
Lee	110%	110%	110%	110%	130%**	110%	110%**	110%	113%

Lamar	100%	110%	100%	35%	100%	110%	20%	110%	85%
Mary	100%	110%	110%	110%	130%**	110%	130%**	110%	114%
Mark	0%	110%	100%	105%	110%	110%	110%	110%	94%
Nancy	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%
Percy	110%	0%	0%	110%	120%**	110%	110%**	0%	70%
Paul	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ricky	110%	110%	100%	110%	45%	110%	20%	110%	89%
Rachel	110%	110%	110%	110%	130%**	110%	110%**	110%	113%
Sam	0%	0%	100%	0%	110%	110%	110%	110%	68%
Steve	0%	0%	110%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	39%
Sage	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	110%	110%	0%	53%
Tina	110%	110%	110%	110%	0%	110%	110%	0%	83%
Tracey	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%	110%
Wayne	0%	0%	100%	0%	60%	100%	110%	0%	46%
Wanda	100%	110%	0%	110%	130%**	110%	110%**	110%	98%
Average per Chapter Vocab	68%	70%	84%	75%	86%	96%	86%	75%	80%

* Felicity was excused after an extended absence and not receiving directions for vocabulary.

** Student received extra credit in because entire class had vocabulary upon check.

Instead of not earning a below passing average, Lindsey, Mark, and Rachel were able to integrate the strategy of looking up the words because they would be assessed on whatever they found. All three student earned at least a 94% and well above on their average for this assessment.

Despite multiple engaging and enthusiastic conversations, Paul, as stated before, is not one to do extra work or homework for that matter. His straight 0%'s were alarming! I also found Steve's and Wayne's average scores to be surprising because I thought the homework was an easy task to accomplish, but, then I remembered that their desire to do additional work and their comprehension levels are lower than most.

More than half of the students in the sample took advantage of the extra credit opportunity. Confidence was booming for most students, but students reluctant to complete homework saw their grades take a dive. I attempted to create a positive and supportive community with the extra credit opportunities, but a general feeling of unhappiness developed as those unwilling to complete homework let down classmates from more opportunities for a higher grade. The average for all students on the assessment only rose 9% between the teacher-selected strategy and the student-selected strategy.

Within the sample size, Brianna, Felicia, Lee, Mary, Rachel, and Wanda were awarded this extra credit because their class completed the challenge for Chapters 5 and 7.

I found that the feelings shifted a bit for the student-selected vocabulary strategy. Students were more positive about the approach with comprehension, engagement, and usefulness of the strategy. While they shifted to being more positive, students were still not in agreement about the strategy's application to their writing and speaking skills. I believe this may be due to their awareness of their word choice in these regards.

Figure 4 - Student Survey Results Regarding Student-Selected Vocabulary Strategy

Prompt	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This vocabulary strategy led me to want to know what words	20%	60%	16%	4%

meant.				
This vocabulary strategy was engaging.	20%	56%	16%	8%
This vocabulary strategy was useful.	32%	48%	16%	4%
This vocabulary strategy improved my understanding of the text assigned.	32%	52%	16%	-
This vocabulary strategy gave me new words to use in my writing.	20%	28%	40%	12%
This vocabulary strategy provided me with new words to use when I speak.	12%	20%	56%	12%

The Tier I, II, and III word vocabulary strategy was the best vocabulary strategy I used with my students based on both their formative assessment results and their feelings toward it.

After I based my direct instruction on their vocabulary charts, my students were more engaged in learning vocabulary based on the multiple access points that were provided. This strategy was time consuming, but it was a great combination of students' prior knowledge and my expertise as their teacher.

Each vocabulary score is shown in terms of the score I recorded in the grade book. Since it was my first time assessing vocabulary in this way, there is only one data set and set of averages for the class.

Figure 5 - Formative Assessment Results for Tier I, II, and III Words

Student Name	Score
Brianna	100%
Dana	100%

Felicia	100%
Felicity	100%
Grant	100%
George	80%
Henry	100%
Jerome	100%
Lindsey	80%
Lee	100%
Lamar	100%
Mary	100%
Mark	100%
Nancy	100%
Percy	100%
Paul	100%
Ricky	100%
Rachel	100%
Sam	100%
Steve	100%
Sage	100%
Tina	100%
Tracey	80%
Wayne	100%
Wanda	100%
Sample Average	98%

Throughout this strategy, I observed all students were engaged in the learning, review, and assessment processes. Those that previously failed one or more of the other strategies now passed and saw their confidence rise in their scores and awareness of vocabulary instruction. This is because they picked out the words based on the three levels of knowledge about the word, received direct instruction, and then reviewed with fun, interactive games.

Almost all of the survey prompts received fifty or more percent of an agreement to its success by the students. After completing this research, I am under the impression that my students were not aware of how to directly incorporate vocabulary into their speaking skills. This is now something that I am aware of and I have started to incorporate into my instruction on discussions and public speaking.

Figure 6 - Student Survey Results Regarding Tier I, II, and III Words

Prompt	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This vocabulary strategy led me to want to know what words meant.	8%	56%	28%	8%
This vocabulary strategy was engaging.	8%	72%	20%	-
This vocabulary strategy was useful.	12%	76%	12%	-
This vocabulary strategy improved my understanding of the text assigned.	16%	68%	8%	8%
This vocabulary strategy gave me new words to use in my writing.	16%	52%	20%	12%
This vocabulary strategy provided me with new words to use when I speak.	4%	44%	40%	12%

Themes

As stated above, I asked for students' feedback on the three vocabulary strategies in a survey. The qualitative data was coded and I found three main themes from the surveys about the strategies - word choice, comprehension skills, and assessment format. I will detail out how each theme is shown regarding each vocabulary strategy below.

Figure 7 - Themes from Vocabulary Strategies

Strategy	Theme #1: Word Choice	Theme #2: Comprehension Skills	Theme #3: Assessment Format
Teacher-Selected with <i>Animal Farm</i>	<p>Students did not like the fact that I got to select the words that they were assessed on.</p> <p>A lot of students felt tricked or that I was selecting obscure words that would not be found again in readings or used after reading it in the text assigned.</p>	<p>Some students found it easy to decode what a word meant using context clues from the book. Other students found that even though they could look in the book at the word and read around it, they were still put on the spot to provide the correct definition.</p>	<p>The format resembled a pop quiz because students learned of which words were going to be assessed that day that a chapter was due. Students reported feeling high levels of stress and anxiety, along with not being prepared.</p>
Student-Selected with <i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<p>Most students enjoyed that they could pick their own words based on their own needs. Students also found the process simple and easy to do.</p>	<p>Through this strategy, more and more students were beginning to realize the importance of looking up words while reading in order to understand what the text was trying to say.</p> <p>Some described the strategy as the best of both worlds because they were able to see</p>	<p>Similar to the "Word Choice" theme, most students were looking up words while reading the assigned chapters.</p> <p>Many students found the process of rewriting the vocabulary words in class cumbersome and a waste of time.</p>

		the word in context, attempt to decode, look it up, and reread with the definition fresh in their mind.	
Tier I, II, and III Words	Despite being a different format than before with students identifying various words based on prior knowledge, students enjoyed that the words were selected for them AND definitions were provided, as well.	<p>Most students found this strategy useful with their comprehension due to the approach of amount of times to words were taught.</p> <p>Some noted that when quizzed, they were unable to see the word in context and had to draw on their studying and memorization of the word.</p>	<p>Students felt that a quiz was stressful even though they were comfortable with the words and their definitions.</p> <p>The term “quiz” brought up some heightened concerns due to the stigma associated with the assessment.</p>

Conclusions & Discussion

Summary

The research question had me exploring the best practices of vocabulary instruction. Through the literature review, I discovered another vocabulary strategy to lead my students through when studying fiction or nonfiction. Previous vocabulary strategies were with fictional literature, but due to time constraints and pure curiosity about a new strategy’s validity, I tried one out during this study with a piece of nonfiction.

I set out to explore which of the three vocabulary instruction strategies used in my classroom over the course of two academic years did students find to be the most engaging and useful in their reading comprehension, writing, and speaking skills.

The new strategy provided to be highly successful in terms of formative assessment grades and students seemed to enjoy the instructional and review activities associated with it. This action research project has led me to utilizing this new strategy in my high school English classroom moving forward with both fiction and nonfiction assigned texts.

Connections

As stated in the conclusion of my Literature Review portion, I already have a strong Independent Reading program in my classroom. I should not rest on only this to teach my students vocabulary, despite Krashen's (1989) opinion about the importance of Independent Reading.

The literature associated to vocabulary strategies point best to combining students' prior knowledge and having the teacher select which words should be taught based on their expertise and guidance as teachers. This was read in Alber's (2014) piece on Marzano's six step process to teaching vocabulary, which ended up being the strategy I briefly implemented with students during the study.

Implications

This study led me to find a more effective vocabulary strategy to lead my students through in order to provide them with a better understanding of the words they encounter in texts. The research and reading involved has allowed me to look at what I was doing, realize the good and the bad, and reflect on what was working and what clearly wasn't.

Before the study, I have always valued my students' input through meaningful reflection. I often ask for feedback and reflection on exams and at the end of projects. This study allowed me to continue to let their voices be heard as I documented their thoughts to help me better understand what works for them as learners. Fortunately, my developed thinking about vocabulary instructional strategies matched up with their needs and thoughts as learners.

Further Study

I wonder if the Tier I, II, and III words vocabulary strategy will prove to be a better strategy over time. I was only able to try it out once for this action research project. I wonder if students performed better with because it was new and different or if it genuinely works to better their comprehension and understanding of vocabulary words. Because of the positive results, I am going to continue to teach with this strategy and collect more data over time to see if it is all that it's meant to be. It is my intention to share these findings with teachers at my school, especially those in the English department. I am also thinking about collecting more data with the Tier I, II, and III words in order to refine this project into a presentation for a conference or a paper.

My school has also implemented a new intervention series of programs at the end of the school day for a half hour. Instruction time in classes has been cut in order to provide this allotted time for interventions. My students in both 11th and 12th grade do not have a set intervention. It's mostly time for SAT prep or work completion. I'm curious as to how the instruction in my classroom will impact, work with, or work against these interventions moving forward. A lot of teachers are beginning to become frustrated with the system, so I wonder how

my specific teaching of vocabulary instruction is helping or making up for these interventions with my students.

Reflections

Before completing this action research project, my vocabulary instruction was based on what was easiest for me as an educator. I knew that I needed to find a strategy that was better for my students both for teaching them how to learn words and for their comprehension.

Once I read about a new way to teach vocabulary in the Tier I, II, and III words strategy, I wanted to see it succeed. I knew students hated the other two strategies for various reasons, but needed it to be documented to support my hypothesis.

Once the surveys for the teacher-selected vocabulary strategy came back and the formative assessment results were reviewed, my hypothesis was beginning to be correct. It continued to be correct as the surveys and formative assessment results for the student-selected vocabulary strategy rolled in. Once I taught and reviewed with the new vocabulary strategy and saw the results, I knew it would be more fruitful and beneficial for my students.

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