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A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY ON VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IN FIFTH  
GRADE CLASSROOMS

By

FARRUKH NAZIR

Bachelor of Education, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan, 2014

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

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Education

A Collective Case Study on Vocabulary Instruction in Fifth Grade Classrooms

Committee Chair: Jessica Gallo

In this qualitative research study, I investigated how vocabulary instruction takes place in two fifth-grade classrooms from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Vocabulary knowledge holds key importance in learning to read, academic success in all school subjects, and achievement in life beyond school (Graves, 2016. p.2). Due to the importance of vocabulary, Common Core State Standards (CCSS) also put an increased focus on the process of vocabulary acquisition. Recent vocabulary research has found that vocabulary instruction in classrooms is weak, thin, and not research-based (Carlisle, Kelcey & Berebitsky, 2013; Graves, 2016; Wright & Neuman, 2014). To investigate vocabulary instruction the theoretical framework for this study drew upon the situated learning theory proposed by Lave (1988) and the activity theory developed by Leontiev (1979), both of which are derived from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. These theories provide a way to understand vocabulary instruction by focusing on instructional context, vocabulary activities, collaborative peer interaction, interaction of the learner in the classroom with both teacher and students, purpose of instruction, and instructional strategies. In this collective case study, I intended to identify how teachers teach vocabulary, strategies teachers use to teach vocabulary, and students' perception of vocabulary instruction. Data were collected through classroom observations in both fifth-grade classrooms for 200 hours and interviews with both teachers and students. Teachers in both classrooms were asked to identify six students total with different reading proficiency levels, to take their views of vocabulary. Within-case and cross-case analysis was used to analyze data. Within-case analysis of observational field notes and interviews revealed teachers use a variety of instructional strategies. From analysis, it was also found that vocabulary instruction was influenced by Common Core State Standards. Student interview analysis revealed that students preferred to learn vocabulary through games and engaging activities. Analysis further revealed that difficulty in pronouncing the word was a challenge in understanding words. Cross-case analysis revealed that vocabulary instruction in both classrooms differs based on instructional procedures in the classroom and is similar in terms of using same types of activities.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The education system in Pakistan is at the worst level, and has placed Pakistan in the lowest literate nations. Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, 55%, and stands 160<sup>th</sup> among world nations (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], as cited in Rehman, Jingdong, & Hussain, 2015). According to a Global Education Monitoring report in 2016, Pakistan's education system lags 50 years behind the international standards at the elementary level (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). The majority of students do not read at grade level. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2014) indicated that 40% of third-grade public school children in Pakistan are unable to read a sentence in Urdu (the national language). Findings of the national level Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) study conducted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2013/14 to test the reading achievements of third- and fourth-grade children in Urdu, English, and Sindhi revealed terrible results, and confirmed the ASER findings (USAID, 2014). The importance of literacy in a nation's development cannot be overemphasized. Pakistan is in a state of education emergency with a poor education system and low literacy skills in its future generation.

The alarming situation of literacy skills grabbed my attention, and I developed an interest in literacy and especially literacy in the English language. After finishing my bachelor's degree in education in Pakistan, I received a USAID scholarship to pursue a Master's degree in the United States. Keeping in mind the problem of poor reading skills in Pakistan, I focused on literacy instruction in my Master's to learn how the literacy instruction takes place in schools in

the United States. My purpose was to learn effective literacy instruction practices, and contribute towards improving reading skills in Pakistan.

At the University of Montana, I studied in literacy courses that further motivated me to investigate literacy practices in classrooms. I narrowed down my research focus on vocabulary instruction because of its importance in literacy development in general and reading comprehension in particular. I decided to investigate vocabulary instruction in fifth grade because of the importance of fifth grade as a critical transition stage to middle school. In my classes, I learned about both traditional and effective instructional practices. The concept of effective vocabulary instruction was new for me, because in my educational journey I had only learned vocabulary in a traditional way. The teacher gave us a list of vocabulary words and we had to find out the words' meanings in dictionary, and use the words in sentences without knowing the context of the words. Our knowledge of vocabulary words was limited to word-meanings. There still exists a deep-rooted notion of traditional vocabulary instruction. Jamil, Majoka, and Khan (2014), in their research study on vocabulary building in English language curriculum at the primary level in Pakistan, indicated traditional vocabulary instruction in classrooms, such as word-meaning repetition and teaching the meaning of words during reading aloud. Findings further highlighted the lack of teacher competence in using effective vocabulary development techniques. Therefore, to investigate vocabulary instruction in a fifth-grade classroom, I used the lens of activity theory and situated learning theory, evolved from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research study is guided by the theories of situated learning, and activity theory, derived from the sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural

theory is a general theory of cognitive development. The major theme of Vygotsky's theory is that social interaction plays a key role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1962). For a full cognitive development, social interaction is necessary. Sociocultural theory has significant implications for learning and instructional practices. The focus of the Vygotsky's theory is to explain consciousness as the results of socialization.

A number of learning theories evolved from the Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to explain the process of learning from the social and cultural perspective. Situated learning theory, proposed by Lave, is also derived from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Situated learning theory states that meaningful learning takes place when the instruction is contextual, culturally relevant and embedded into an authentic activity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Social interaction is a critical component of situated learning — learners become involved in a “community of practice” which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) highlighted the divergence between formal classroom instruction and authentic learning activities. There exists a gap between learning activities and everyday practices. When tasks are designed in isolation, they lack meaningful learning experiences. The situated learning instructional model advocates for the creation of an effective learning environment by embedding the instruction into social and cultural contexts, hence supporting the collaborative construction of knowledge (Bransford, Vye, Kinzer, & Risko, 1990; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Young, 1993). Powerful learning takes place when students make connections between vocabulary words in contexts (Lave, 1988). In the case of vocabulary instruction, authentic, contextual, and cultural activities are important for meaningful learning. In vocabulary learning, when instructions are embedded in the contextual authentic activity, the social interaction takes place both between teachers and students, which enables learners to



develop their understanding of the vocabulary words by interacting with teacher, and other students. Learning is based on construction of knowledge through active participation in learning and engaging activities embedded in the context.

The other theory that guides this study is activity theory. Activity theory, developed by Leontiev (1979), is also a significant aspect of Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Kuutti (1996) defined activity theory as an analytical framework that can be used to study various forms of human practices as developmental processes, with both individual and social levels interconnected at the same time. Zhang (2014) also indicated the importance of activity theory by asserting that activities structured in a contextualized and interactive system are the center of human behavior. Activity theory has been applied to investigate cognitive processes in a sociocultural and sociohistorical perspective. In the field of literacy and language learning, activity theory establishes a framework to understand students' behavior in a classroom setting and their engagement in language learning tasks (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Storch, 2004). Activity theory enables the researcher to study and analyze context by taking into account the learner's interactions with the classroom as a whole, their learning goals, and the teaching behavior that provides specific direction to the learner (Sirisatit, 2010). This theory describes the linkage between classroom setting, instruction and the motive of the activity (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). In the perspective of vocabulary instruction, the objectives and goals of the instruction must take into account the learner level and engage the learner in the vocabulary acquisition process (Donato & McCormick, 1994). According to Sirisatit (2010), analysis of various aspects of instruction in the framework of activity theory can guide teachers to improve their instruction.

I drew upon situated learning theory and activity theory to understand vocabulary

instruction in the fifth-grade classrooms. Activity theory and situated learning theory both provide a theoretical lens to investigate learning and thinking in a social context. Both of these theories emphasize the notion that human activity is driven by subjects, motives, and tools, and human activity is situated in context (Arnseth, 2008). Situated learning theory and activity theory provide a way to understand vocabulary instruction by focusing on instructional context, vocabulary activities, collaborative peer interaction, interaction of the learner in classroom, purpose of instruction, and instructional strategies. Vocabulary instruction that takes place in a rich environment, accounts for students' background knowledge, provides opportunities for peer collaboration, and is embedded in authentic activities is effective vocabulary instruction. The objective of this research is to investigate how vocabulary instruction takes place in a fifth-grade classroom, keeping in view the basic tenets of situated learning theory, sociocultural theory, and activity theory.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Like Pakistan, the US also has educational challenges at hand. National reading assessment data reveals that two-thirds of U.S. fourth graders are not proficient readers (Rubiner, 2016). Gee (2004) named the inability of fourth grade students to read with deep understanding the "fourth grade slump." Although there are various factors that cause poor and below grade level reading, the importance of vocabulary should not be underestimated. Vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in an individual's process of becoming a reader (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Coyne, Simmons, Kame'enui, & Stoolmiller, 2004; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Sedita (2005) found a strong connection between vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and academic success because of the benefit that word knowledge provides in comprehending new concepts easily. Bromley (2007)

also affirmed that vocabulary is a principle contributor to reading comprehension, fluency, and achievement. The importance of vocabulary in reading can also be recognized from the Biemiller (1999) assertion that lack of vocabulary knowledge is a sign of guaranteed failure in reading. Perhaps the strongest role vocabulary plays in the reading process involves its relationship to reading comprehension.

Vocabulary instruction is a crucial component of reading instruction. According to Ouellette (2006), students need vocabulary enrichment beyond a teaching emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Vocabulary instruction is important because of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in receptive and expressive literacy. Nagy (2007) highlighted the need of effective vocabulary instruction and indicated that the complexity of vocabulary knowledge demands instruction beyond the traditional definition or synonym instruction. Sedita (2005) recognized the need for effective vocabulary instruction at all grade levels to reduce the widening gap in student vocabularies. Effectively serving the vocabulary learning needs of students is a challenging task for a teacher because of the differences in students' background knowledge and experiences. By teaching students to acquire and effectively use vocabulary, teachers can help students develop their understanding of unfamiliar words, and, as a result, increase their reading comprehension.

Ineffective vocabulary instruction is an issue occurring in schools. Traditional instruction is not sufficient to establish in-depth vocabulary knowledge. Brabham, Buskist, Henderson, Paleologos, and Baugh (2012) highlighted that current vocabulary instruction approaches are not helping students to acquire the amount of vocabulary needed to become proficient readers. Block and Mangieri (2006) indicated that the failure in years of efforts to develop students' vocabulary is due to the negligence of effective and robust vocabulary instruction in reading classrooms.

As students get older, the texts they are required to read in school become more challenging as they are required to read texts with new vocabulary and more complicated writing. The fifth grade is a critical period for successful transition to middle school. The change in the nature of text from narrative text in storybooks to informational text in textbooks becomes a challenge for students to understand and successfully comprehend (Best, Floyd & McNamara, 2004). The texts in fifth grade are usually comprised of content-specific, complex, and unfamiliar vocabulary that are not part of students' everyday conversations, creating a barrier and making it difficult for students to effectively understand the text (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). For example, in fifth grade, to prepare students for the transition into the middle school, the challenging text requires robust vocabulary instruction to understand complex and content-specific words. In an effort to improve literacy achievement, many states' departments of education, districts, schools, and teachers have focused on enhanced vocabulary teaching and learning.

My purpose in conducting this study was to spend time in classrooms with teachers to learn about vocabulary instruction practices, particularly learning arrangements and strategies that could potentially support teachers and learners in Pakistan.

To study the vocabulary instructions in the fifth grade classroom, I developed the following objectives:

1. to investigate the vocabulary instructions in a fifth grade classroom.
2. to investigate the vocabulary instruction strategies.
3. to investigate the students' perception of the vocabulary instruction.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Question**

How does vocabulary instruction take place in fifth grade classroom?

### **Sub-questions**

1. How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?
2. What vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?
3. What are students' perceptions of vocabulary instruction?

For the study conceptualizing the difference between vocabulary instruction and vocabulary instruction strategies is important. Vocabulary instruction is an umbrella term. Vocabulary instruction comprises the teacher's preparation and execution of the prepared plan. It happens in the classroom in many different ways and in different content areas such as social studies, mathematics, and science. On the other hand, vocabulary instruction strategies are the tools and techniques that a teacher uses in teaching some specific words accompanied by activities to develop learner vocabulary knowledge.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Text Complexity:** A way in which to measure the level of a text. Texts are analyzed through three dimensions: qualitative, quantitative, and considerations of the reader and task (National Governors Association Center, 2010).

**Tier 1 Words:** Vocabulary words of high frequency found in oral language which are basic and rarely require direct instruction (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).

**Tier 2 Words:** Vocabulary words of high utility and high frequency which should be the focus for instruction (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).

**Tier 3 Words:** Vocabulary words of low frequency and domain specificity that generally occur in content area learning (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).

The next chapter discusses the relevant literature on vocabulary instruction.

## CHAPTER 2

### **THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertinent to this study. The literature reviewed provides information on Common Core State Standards and vocabulary, importance of vocabulary knowledge in literacy development, traditional vocabulary instruction, foundations of vocabulary instruction, research models for vocabulary instruction, and vocabulary assessment. In this literature review, only studies published after Montana's official adoption of Common Core State Standards in 2011 are included. The adoption of the Common Core Standards in Montana and other states impacted many areas of instruction, including vocabulary instruction.

#### **Common Core State Standards and Vocabulary**

Montana adopted the Common Core Standards through a vote of the Montana Board of Public Education on November 4, 2011. The Common Core Standards have greatly influenced the teaching in grades K-12. The standards call for evidence-based learning. Jack (2015) indicated that the implementation of standards has brought a new focus to the teaching at grades K-12. The standards require integration of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language within the disciplines. The content and the instructional strategies need to be aligned to meet the standards. The focus of the English Language Arts standards is to develop student literacy skills in accordance with the needs of college and future careers. The fifth-grade English Language Arts standards are also part of K-12 literacy development. The standards put an increased focus on vocabulary acquisition. The shift in the vocabulary instruction after the Common Core Standards is one of the six "shifts" because of the Common Core Standards (Coleman, as cited in Graves, 2016). The major standards that address vocabulary acquisition are as follows:

**Reading Standard 4:** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

**Language Standard 4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

**Language Standard 5:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

**Language Standard 6:** Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Montana Common Core Standards and Assessments, n.d.)

These standards point out the significance of vocabulary in reading, and understanding complex and challenging texts. Hiebert and Cervetti (2012) indicated that the standards require students to read more complex and challenging text in social studies, sciences, and technical subjects, in addition to literature. The standards also require students to read more informational text which contains more complicated vocabulary than narrative text. In line with Hiebert and Cervetti (2012), Graves and Sales (2013) also highlighted the increased emphasis of standards on vocabulary. This increased focus on reading complex informational text and vocabulary knowledge calls for comprehensive vocabulary instruction (Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher & Taffe, 2013). Also, the implementation of standards increases the instructional responsibilities of the

teacher in terms of planning and teaching vocabulary. Although the standards are specified at each grade level, they are broad and provide very little direction on how to teach students to meet them. Therefore, teachers' work becomes more challenging as they decide how to teach students to meet the standards (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). The same is true of vocabulary instruction. There is much focus on developing vocabulary, but standards lack clear directions about its teaching (Kern, 2014; Marzano, & Simms, 2013).

### **Importance of Vocabulary Knowledge in Literacy Development**

Vocabulary knowledge is critical to literacy achievement. It possesses key importance in learning to read, academic success in all school subjects, and in achievement in life beyond school (Graves, 2016, p. 2). Research on the effects of vocabulary knowledge on reading comprehension and literacy development indicate that vocabulary knowledge is extremely important for effective reading comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 2011; Hall, Greenberg, Laures-Gore, & Pae, 2014; Quinn, Wagner, Petscher, & Lopez, 2015; Verhoeven, Leeuwe & Vermeer, 2011; Yildirim, Yildiz, & Ates, 2011). Vocabulary is a key factor in the process of becoming a good reader (Biemiller, 2012; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Moreover, reading comprehension is significantly connected to vocabulary knowledge. It is challenging for a reader to comprehend text with limited vocabulary knowledge. Readers with below-average vocabularies are at risk of poor comprehension and low achievement. Limited vocabulary knowledge also affects student grade level reading. To comprehend the text, the student needs to understand unfamiliar words. Lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders students' overall performance and makes it difficult for them to participate in classroom discussions and do well on assignments and on tests. Bergland (as cited in Graves, 2016) indicated lack of vocabulary knowledge as a crucial factor in the school failure of disadvantaged students. In the upper elementary grades, the importance of



vocabulary knowledge becomes evident with increases in text complexity and greater focus on informational text (Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher & Taffe, 2013). Vocabulary knowledge possesses significant importance in content area text and is essential for understanding the content (Fisher, & Frey, 2014). Biemiller (2012) asserts the significance of vocabulary knowledge and highlights that the vocabulary development in primary grades is the single best thing that a teacher can do to increase literacy. Findings of Ogle's (cited in Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher & Taffe, 2013) work with classroom teachers demonstrates the difficulties faced by students in reading informational text due to the presence of unfamiliar words in the text and lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge. In addition to reading, vocabulary knowledge is also significantly important for writing. Fisher and Frey (2014) described vocabulary as the key for content learning and termed vocabulary as proxy for learners' understanding of the concepts. Vocabulary knowledge affects every aspect of an individual's literacy development process such as reading comprehension, writing, speaking, and academic achievement. Despite the importance of vocabulary knowledge in literacy development and academic achievement, vocabulary is taught in ineffective ways.

### **Traditional Vocabulary Instruction**

Traditional vocabulary instruction occurs in many different forms. It takes place when students are only taught the meaning of the word or asked to look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary instead of providing a rich word learning environment. Traditional vocabulary instruction is also in action when a random list of words is given to students and they are asked to use them in sentences (Overturf, Montgomery, & Smith, 2013). Providing ready-made word lists to students results in shallow learning of words, because effective vocabulary learning cannot take place in a vacuum. Scott, Jamieson-Noel, and Asselin (2003, as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2014), in their observational study of upper elementary classrooms in Canada, indicate that

in 39% of vocabulary instructional time, instruction took place by teaching definitions from a dictionary and using worksheets. Traditional vocabulary instruction results in an ineffective learning of words because vocabulary is multidimensional, and its instruction needs to be embedded in a rich environment that includes context for the words, student experiences, multiple exposures, and engagement in order to be effective. Traditional vocabulary instruction is ineffective and disengaging and can cause students to have aversion towards learning vocabulary (McKeown & Beck, 2011). Because of the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension and in literacy development, and to meet the needs of Common Core State Standards, there is a need for effective vocabulary instruction to develop students' understanding of word knowledge. Recent vocabulary research has found that vocabulary instruction in classrooms is weak, thin, and not research-based (Carlisle, Kelcey & Berebitsky, 2013; Graves, 2016; Wright & Neuman, 2014). Graves (2016) further highlighted that powerful vocabulary instruction needs to be more common in classroom, vocabulary words need to be selected more carefully, and special attention needs to be given to students with small vocabularies.

## **Foundations of Vocabulary Instruction**

### **Effective Vocabulary Instruction**

The purpose of effective vocabulary instruction for students to know more than just the definition of the word (McKeown & Beck, 2011). There is a tremendous amount of research being conducted on what counts as effective vocabulary instruction. Literacy experts have defined various aspects of effective vocabulary instruction. Effective vocabulary instruction consists of active processing and manipulation of words and context that engage students in the learning process. Graves (2016) defines effective vocabulary instruction as providing learners with both definitional and contextual information, opportunities for active processing of word meaning, and

multiple encounters with words. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) describe three features of effective vocabulary instruction: frequent encounter with words (8-10 words per week); rich instruction (instruction beyond the definition); and extension of word use beyond the classroom. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) compare the effect of traditional, robust, and no vocabulary instruction on students' learning and find that students with robust instruction did better than other groups in a variety of measures such as word-meaning, conceptual, and interpretive understanding of the text. McKeown and Beck (2011) emphasize the importance of effective instruction and assert that good instruction will create the engaging and motivating environment for word learning and there will be no need for developing special activities. Researchers define effective vocabulary instruction in many ways by focusing on various aspects. There also exists commonality in these definitions. Hence, effective vocabulary instruction encompasses providing rich instruction with both definitional and contextual information, opportunities for engagement and active processing of word meaning, multiple exposures with words, and development of word consciousness.

### **Principles of Effective Vocabulary Instruction**

Literacy experts have designed vocabulary instruction principles that are essential for teaching vocabulary effectively. The researchers of two different studies describe four principles of vocabulary instruction and term these principles the four "Es" (experience, environment, exposure, and engagement) of effective vocabulary instruction (Manyak, Von Gunten, Autenrieth, Gillis, Mastre-O'Farrell, Irvine-McDermott, & Blachowicz, 2014; Wilcox & Morrison, 2013). The first principle of effective vocabulary instruction is devising vocabulary instruction based on students' prior *experience*, which highlights the need to move from known to unknown words and to use students' background knowledge about the word for meaningful processing (McKeown, & Beck, 2011).

The second principle of effective vocabulary instruction is to design a rich *environment* that provides context for the vocabulary words. It is important to describe the context in which the word is used, because the effective word learning cannot take place in isolation (McKeown, & Beck, 2011).

Providing learners with diverse *exposure* to words is the third principle of effective vocabulary instruction. Multiple opportunities to interact with words are necessary for students to truly understand the words (Mixan, 2013). Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, and Graves (2013) also indicate that meaningful exposure to words is essential for developing depth and breadth of word knowledge.

The fourth principle of effective vocabulary instruction is *engaging* students in the vocabulary learning process. Making vocabulary instruction student-friendly can motivate and engage students in the learning process. Lack of student involvement in the vocabulary learning process leads to boredom (Beck et al., 2013). McKeown and Beck (2011) highlight that active student engagement with the meanings of the words is necessary for word learning so that students develop a deep understanding of the words. Graves (2016) also emphasizes providing students varied learning experiences in a rich environment through reading, writing, discussion, games, activities, and other engaging activities.

### **What Is Meant by Knowing a Word?**

Effective vocabulary instruction is related to the purpose and level of word instruction. The concept of knowing a word's meaning is complex, multidimensional, and depends on a number of factors, such as the intent of the teacher, how the word is taught, how it will be assessed, and the fact that words can have multiple meanings depending on the context in which they are used (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Graves, 2016). Kucan (2012) emphasizes that

word knowledge consists of not only what a word means, but also how a word works. Deep word knowledge comprises understanding the text that contains the word and using the target word in speech and text (McKeown, Crosson, Artz, Sandora, & Beck, 2013). Nagy and Scott (as cited in Graves, 2016), describe five aspects of word knowledge: incrementality, polysemy, multidimensionality, interrelatedness, and heterogeneity. There also exist different levels of word knowledge that needs to be considered in vocabulary instruction. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), building on the work of Dale (1965), describe five levels of word knowledge:

Level 1: never saw it before, no knowledge

Level 2: general sense

Level 3: heard it but does not know what it means

Level 4: recognize it in context as having something to do with, narrow context bound knowledge

Level 5: know it well, rich decontextualized knowledge of a word's meaning (Graves, 2016, p. 13)

Words can be taught at any level. Students' understanding of the words depends upon whether they are taught in a familiar context (connection to background knowledge), and whether they are given opportunities to apply words in speech and written context (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Graves, 2016). Researchers recommend considering the multidimensionality of vocabulary words and suggest teaching multiple facets of word knowledge to develop deeper understanding of words (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Graves, 2016; Kucan, 2012). The notion of what it means to know a word is connected to what words to select for instruction. The next section describes the concept of selecting words for instruction.

## Selecting Words for Instruction

Historically, the concept of selecting words for instruction has received very little attention and researchers simply suggested selecting words for instruction that are unfamiliar to students, rather than providing a systematic procedure for selecting words (McKeown & Beck, 2011). Literacy researchers have different rationales for the selection of words for instruction (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2013). McKeown and Beck (2011) describe three tiers for selecting vocabulary word. Stahl and Nagy (as cited in Graves, 2016) categorize words into high frequency utility, and high frequency general vocabulary words. Similarly, Nation (2011) differentiates words on the basis of high-frequency, academic, technical, and low frequency words. According to Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, and Graves (2013), words selected for instruction need to be “frequent, general academic and domain-focused words, and they can include generative words, words with frequent roots and affixes that generate a host of related terms” (p.4).

**Three tiers of words.** Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) suggest criteria to select words for instruction. They advise selecting words based on their utility, instructional potential, and conceptual understanding. Utility of the words refers to the words that have higher usage in the text across different content areas. Instructional potential of the words means choosing words that can be taught in different ways to develop students’ understanding. Similarly, teachers should choose words for instruction that are essential for understanding the text content.

Beck and McKeown (2011) coin the concept of three tiers of word instruction. Tier-1 words are those words that are found in oral language; Tier-2 are words with high utility and not so common in conversation; Tier-3 comprises domain-specific words with low frequency of use. The researchers suggest devising instruction for teaching Tier-2 words. Teaching Tier-2 words

can be beneficial for student literacy development because these are the words students frequently encounter in text. There is no clear line between tiers of words, because students may have knowledge of some words and can understand their concepts (Beck et al., 2013). The Common Core vocabulary word list developed by Marzano is also based on the concept of Tier-2 and Tier-3 words (Marzano, & Simms, 2013).

**Selecting words from informational texts (SWIT).** Graves (2016) asserts that in order to select words for teaching, it is necessary to know about the words students already know and the words students need to know. Graves (2016) and colleagues developed a strategy called Selecting Words from Informational Texts, or SWIT. The SWIT approach identifies four types of words to teach, including essential words, widely useful words, more common words, and imported words. Essential words are those that are crucial for understanding the text students are reading. Widely useful words are those having general utility for students' reading and writing. More common words consist of high frequency words that are difficult for students with limited vocabularies to understand. Imported words refers to words that develop a reader's understanding and comprehension from a text but are not included in the text.

**Word lists.** Graves (2016) also suggests considering some vocabulary lists in selecting words for instruction. Marzano and his team at Marzano research laboratories identified 227 Tier-2, and 2224 Tier-3 words from the analysis of vocabulary terms in CCSS (Marzano, & Simms, 2013). They recommend teachers select words for instruction from their Tier-2, and Tier-3 vocabulary list (see part II and part III in *Vocabulary for the Common Core*) (Marzano & Simms, 2013). Their list can be used as a guideline for selecting words for instruction, but exclusively relying on their list will widen the gap between students with limited vocabularies and students with more developed vocabularies. They have standardized the selection process of

words and little choice is given to teachers. In reality, using a ready-made list cannot develop student understanding, because the needs of various classrooms differs from one another. Graves (2016) also cautions teachers in using word lists and suggests teachers use professional judgment and consider students' learning needs as they select words for teaching.

There is no acceptable criteria or steps for selecting words for instruction. Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts-Taffe (2013) emphasize the need for word selection for instruction to be teacher-directed and curriculum-focused. There exists common ground between all approaches in selecting words for instruction. Literacy experts such as Beck and McKeown, Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts-Taffe, Graves, Kucan, Nation, Stahl and Nagy all recommend teachers use their judgment in selecting words for instruction. Word selection needs to be based on utility and importance rather than a systematic procedure and steps to follow for the identification of specific words. The other agreement between these approaches for word selection is their purpose of word selection. The intention of all approaches is to identify words that are essential for learner text comprehension and students' literacy development, and the words students will frequently encounter in the text.

### **Strategies for Vocabulary Learning**

Research on vocabulary instruction has led to the development of several vocabulary learning strategies. The three widely-used, research-based word learning strategies are teaching students to use context to infer the meaning of unknown words, teaching students to use word parts, and using dictionaries (Graves, 2016; Hairrell, Rupley, & Simmons, 2011). Classroom teachers have also devised their own vocabulary instruction activities and strategies. These teacher-developed strategies evolved from research-based strategies, such as Picture Word Wall and Graffiti Wall described by Gallagher and Anderson (2016). Picture Word Wall and Graffiti



Wall derived from traditional word walls, which were designed by teachers to serve as visual scaffolds and promote word consciousness, establish efficient routines, provide ongoing review of words, address misconceptions immediately, and require universal participation (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016 p.275). Hairrell, Rupley, and Simmons (2011), in their article on the state of vocabulary research, identify many other strategies such as mnemonic strategies, multiple strategies, incidental word learning strategies. Mnemonic strategies refer to teaching the meaning of vocabulary words through keywords or memory. Multiple strategies means using a combination of different strategies such as contextual, word parts, incidental word learning. Incidental word learning strategies points out to learning words through everyday exposure in story book reading, read-alouds, and independent reading (Hairrell, Rupley, & Simmons, 2011. p. 271). Some of the well-known word learning strategies are discussed here: identifying meaning from context, using word parts, dictionaries, direct instruction, and word consciousness.

**Identifying meaning from context.** Identifying meanings of a word from context is one of the widely-used strategy in vocabulary instruction (Graves, 2016). Teaching vocabulary in isolation negatively affects students' use of language as a tool to understand the world (Fisher, & Frey, 2014). Several researchers suggest using word context to develop the students' understanding of word meanings in informal instruction (Beck et al., 2013; Graves, 2016; Kucan, 2012; Neuman & Roskos, 2012). The strategy of identifying word meaning from the context needs to be used cautiously.

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) highlight a limitation of teaching vocabulary exclusively from the context, especially in the upper elementary grades when the source of vocabulary learning shifts from oral language to written text. Written text lacks features of oral language such as intonation, body language, and physical context, hence making it difficult for

students to learn from context. Natural context of the text also lacks sufficient information for deriving the meaning of the word because the intent of the author is to either describe, persuade, inform, or tell the story, not to teach the meaning of the word. There are four different types of context in which the meaning of vocabulary words can be derived. A mis-directive context can take students to incorrect word meanings. A non-directive context provides no assistance toward a particular meaning. A general context provides enough information to lead learners to place the word in a general context, but does not provide the exact meaning. Only the directive context provides adequate information to lead students to the correct meaning of the word (Beck et al., 2013).

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) classify words from two stories and categorized the content surrounding words according to the four types of contexts to investigate students word learning from context. Their research found that the student's ability to find the meanings of the word decreased for general context and decreased further for non-directive context. They devise the following steps to teach students to identify word meaning from the context: read/paraphrase, establish meaning of the context, establish an initial identification and rationale to understand contextual meaning, consider further possibilities, and summarize. The major limitation of these instructional steps is that they are time consuming, but students can be taught to use the steps independently (Beck et al., 2013).

**Word parts.** Word parts can be used to identify meanings of words (Tong, Deacon, Kirby, Cain, & Parrila, 2011). Teaching students to use word parts to glean meaning of the words can be an effective strategy (Graves, 2016). Graves (2016) described three considerations to take into account when teaching about word parts, i.e. what elements to teach, what elements students know, and the effects of instruction on these elements. Graves recommends teaching

inflections, derivational suffixes, prefixes, and Latin and Greek roots at appropriate grade level. According to Kucan (2012), word features are intended to support the vocabulary knowledge of the learner. Rasinski, Padak, Newton, and Newton (2011) also indicate that integration of Latin and Greek roots into vocabulary instruction enhances academic vocabulary.

In teaching academic vocabulary, researchers also argue for the use of generative vocabulary instruction (Flanigan, Templeton, & Hayes, 2012; Templeton, 2011). Generating multiple different words from a root word is termed generative vocabulary instruction. According to Flanigan, Templeton, and Hayes (2012), generative vocabulary instruction can make learners independent vocabulary learners by teaching them the skills to devise the meaning of a word by using roots and base words. Developing students' abilities to identify Greek and Latin roots, base words, prefixes, and suffixes helps to generate a more extensive and deeply grounded vocabulary, and emphasizes active learning (Kieffer & Box, 2013). Teaching students to use generative vocabulary instruction in addition to other vocabulary instruction strategies can help students to independently identify the meanings of words.

**Dictionaries.** Dictionaries are also a widely-used source for learning vocabulary words. Graves (2016) indicates that dictionaries can be used to understand meanings of words, but it is very difficult to develop elementary students' vocabulary knowledge by only using dictionaries. Kucan (2012) describes that dictionaries lack sufficient information to support students' rich mental lexicons. Exclusively relying on dictionary definitions pose many challenges in understanding vocabulary words. Dictionary definitions have a weak differentiation capability and are unable to provide sufficient details to differentiate the target word from other similar words. Dictionary definitions sometimes have vague language and provide little information about words. Dictionaries also have more than one interpretation of each word and these

interpretations can be different than the one intended. Dictionaries have multiple pieces of information about a word with limited guidelines to integrate the pieces of information (Beck et al., 2013; McKeown & Beck, 2011). Graves (2016) further points out that 100% reliance on dictionary definitions is not possible even for college students. There is a need to improve the traditional entries in dictionaries.

### **Research Models for Vocabulary Instruction**

Research on vocabulary instruction has resulted in the development of various models and techniques for its instruction. Each technique focuses on a certain aspect of vocabulary instruction. One of the technique for vocabulary instruction is direct vocabulary instruction. Marzano and Simms (2013) indicate that direct vocabulary instruction has the power to develop student vocabulary required for success in school. Critics of direct vocabulary instruction argue that there are too many words to teach and it is not possible to teach all the words through direct instruction. It is true that it is impossible to teach all words, but there are certain words that can be directly taught to develop students' deep understanding of the content (Beck et al., 2013; Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher & Taffe, 2013; Graves, 2014; Neuman & Wright, 2013). Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) also indicate that the direct instruction of vocabulary words depends on the needs of students and not all the words need direct instruction. Another approach to vocabulary instruction says that vocabulary is best developed through wide reading, not direct instruction. Although it is true that wide reading helps in developing a rich vocabulary repertoire, not all learners have access to a variety of texts to successfully read widely. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) caution teachers about using wide reading exclusively as an approach to teaching vocabulary in classrooms. Wide reading enlarges the gap between struggling and proficient readers' vocabulary knowledge because of the lack of sufficient vocabulary learning

skills by students struggling with reading. Wide reading can be used once the reader possesses sufficient vocabulary learning skills (Beck et al., 2013).

McKeown and Beck (2011), in their book *Handbook of Reading Interventions*, describe the following steps for direct vocabulary instruction in kindergarten: paraphrasing of the context of the story; student-friendly explanation; phonological representation; interactive practice; prompted explanation; inclusion of both positive and negative examples related to the word.

Direct vocabulary instruction can be used in combination with FLOOD, FAST, and FOCUSED strategies developed by Graves and his colleagues. Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, and Graves (2013) describe vocabulary learning as an incremental process and its learning cannot be limited to only classrooms. Students learn vocabulary words from other contexts such as TV, advertisements, and media. They also suggest that not all words need formal instruction, but students need a rich language environment, and a FLOOD of words to surround them.

Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, and Graves (2013) categorize the vocabulary instruction into FAST, FOCUSED, and FLOOD strategies. FAST instruction is needed when students have a comprehensive and conceptual understanding of a word and understanding of a new, related word can stem from students' existing knowledge. On the other hand, FOCUSED instruction is needed when the word is abstract and difficult to teach, and the learners lack background knowledge. FLOOD strategies consist of "constructing visible word charts, mapping and charting puzzles, and other means for exposing students to a wide range of words, so they could build relational sets and personal workbook" (Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, & Graves, 2013. p.6).

Research findings indicate that teaching students word learning strategies such as using word parts to identify the meaning of the words, identifying word meanings from context, and

using dictionaries to understand word meaning are more beneficial when they are used in combination, rather than isolation (Baumann, Edwards, Boland, & Font, 2012; Gallagher, & Anderson, 2016). Stebick and Nichols (2014) studied the effect of an intentional vocabulary instructional program on seventh graders' use of vocabulary strategies. Findings indicate a significant increase in student metacognitive awareness about the use of vocabulary strategies (identification of base words, root words, and prefixes) as a result of instruction. The results of this study highlight the multidimensionality of vocabulary and support the notion of systematic vocabulary instruction in order to advance student knowledge of word etymology as a means of improving vocabulary learning. Scott, Miller, and Flinspach (2012) encourage teachers to develop word consciousness through games and other engaging activities. Similarly, direct instruction should be used carefully and in accordance with the need of the learners.

### **Rich Instruction**

Rich instruction is very important in effective vocabulary instruction. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan stipulate that rich instruction focuses on multiple characteristics of the word, which is important to develop students' understanding that a word has multiple facets to its meaning (Beck et al., 2013). Developing students' understanding about the relationship between words is an important feature of effective vocabulary instruction because "an individual's word knowledge is stored in networks of connected ideas" (Beck et al., 2013, p.86). Establishing efficient and rich routines, providing deep and ongoing review of words, and clarifying students' misconceptions of words can support student vocabulary learning (Manyak, Von Gunten, Autenrieth, Gillis, Mastre-O'Farrell, Irvine-McDermott, & Blachowicz, 2014). According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), teachers possess a key role in rich instruction and creating a rich verbal environment. A rich verbal environment is essential for developing students' word

awareness, and vocabulary knowledge also expose students to a variety of new words (Beck et al., 2013; Yildirim, K., Yildiz, M., & Ates, S. (2011). Kucan (2012) also explained that “the classrooms of teachers who support the vocabulary development of their students are energized verbal environments—environments in which words are not only noticed and appreciated, but also savored and celebrated” (p. 361).

### **Steps in Individual Word Instruction**

Research on vocabulary instruction has resulted in the development of a variety of instructional procedures and steps. Prominent literacy experts such as Beck, Graves, Kucan, and McKeown (2013) devised and recommend the following procedure for effective vocabulary instruction:

1. choose a tier-two word;
2. provide student-friendly explanation of the word in general and in familiar context;
3. present the word in multiple contexts to develop deeper understanding;
4. provide opportunities to use the word in talk and in writing;
5. create peer learning opportunities, and design opportunities for repeated practice of the word;
6. developing assessments that gauge students’ depth of knowledge about the words (Beck et al., 2013; Grave, 2016; Kucan, 2012; McKeown & Beck, 2011).

These steps incorporate the principles of effective vocabulary instruction and are essential for engaging students in the intensive investigation process to understand the meaning of new words. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) recommend explanation of the word instead of using definitions, because formal definitions are more difficult for students to understand

(Beck et al., 2013). McKeown and Beck (2011) also advocate for providing both general and contextual definitions of the word. A general definition of the word can develop a general understanding not tied to a specific context. Providing both general and contextual definitions of the word is important because if only a contextual definition is provided then there is a chance that students will mistakenly consider the contextual definition to be the actual meaning of the word. Similarly, depth of word knowledge can be developed through oral language activities by presenting words in multiple contexts, and mentally engaging students in thinking about the word (McKeown & Beck, 2011). Beck, McKeown, and Kucan also suggest using word association for deep understanding and highlight that word association helps students to deal with the word on the spot and further enforce the meaning of the word (Beck et al.,2013).

In addition to the vocabulary instruction sequence described by Beck et al., (2013), Marzano (2013) and his colleagues have also describe six steps for effective vocabulary instruction and claim that these steps can be used at any grade level. The six-step process can be used to introduce new words, develop student linguistic and nonlinguistic understanding, and help students to discuss and learn the terms. They further claim that research studies conducted by classroom teachers on the effectiveness of their six-step vocabulary instruction revealed an effect size of 0.51 and an increase of 20 percentile points in students' scores. The six steps are:

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.
3. Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the word.
4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.



6. Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms. (Marzano, & Simms, 2013, p.14)

Marzano declares these six steps to be the best instructional procedure for teaching vocabulary at any grade level (Marzano, & Simms, 2013). Despite Marzano's claim regarding the efficiency of these six steps as effective vocabulary instruction, the main criticism on his vocabulary instruction steps is that they do not address vocabulary instruction in a holistic paradigm. These steps indicate an instructional process that emphasizes vocabulary learning isolated from the context of the text. Research suggests that context is fundamental for effective vocabulary instruction (Beck et al., 2013; Fisher, & Frey, 2014; Graves, 2016; Neuman & Roskos, 2012). Details about how to create the type of environment feasible for vocabulary instruction are also missing from Marzano's steps. Another drawback of Marzano's six steps is that they limit student vocabulary learning to words only in core reading programs and do not give information about fostering word awareness or word consciousness.

One other school of thought emphasizes vocabulary instruction in the lexical perspective and focuses on teaching word knowledge by analyzing word semantics, morphology, and syntax. Vocabulary instruction to develop students' word knowledge should revolve around phonology, orthography, morphology, and syntax (Kucan, 2012; Templeton, 2011). Instruction based on high-quality lexical representation develops deeper knowledge of words and helps students use the new words in their expressive vocabulary. Kucan's (2012) instructional sequence uses the following steps:

1. Provide a context for the word (semantics);
2. Explain the meaning of the word (semantics);

3. Display the words you have selected to teach on a poster or word cards in a pocket chart and point to the specific word that you are introducing (orthography);
4. Have students pronounce the word after you (phonology);
5. Provide an additional context for the word, one that is different from the selection context (semantics);
6. Use various forms of the word, (syntax), also compare those various forms (morphology).
7. Engage students in interacting with the word through a variety of activities (semantics, phonology, orthography, morphology, and syntax) (Kucan, 2012, p.365).

Perfetti (2012) agrees that “it is in the interconnectedness of semantics, phonology, orthography, morphology, and syntax that allows readers to rapidly, and precisely determine the meaning of a word in a particular context” (as cited in Kucan, 2012, p.361).

In addition to instructional sequences, there are vocabulary programs for vocabulary instruction. These vocabulary programs provide a set of guidelines and vocabulary instruction framework in different reading curriculum. The programs that are widely used are the Four-Component Comprehensive Vocabulary Program developed by Graves and the one developed by Marzano and colleagues.

Graves (2016) describes a Four-Component Comprehensive Vocabulary Program that is designed not only to meet the vocabulary instructional needs of English language learners and students from linguistically diverse backgrounds who might need more vocabulary support, but also students who already have rich and powerful vocabularies. The four components of the comprehensive vocabulary program are “frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences; teaching individual words; teaching word-learning strategies; and fostering word consciousness” (Graves, 2016, p.5).

The essential component of Marzano's vocabulary instruction program requires teacher selection of vocabulary terms from the list to teach; assessment of students understanding of vocabulary terms; using six-step process of instruction; and assisting students to evaluate and keep track of their own vocabulary knowledge (Marzano & Simms, 2013).

In selecting an instructional program to use from the available options, teachers need to consider learner vocabulary needs, students level of understanding, and the purpose of the instruction. Marzano and Simms (2013) advise teachers to consider the situation and needs of students in using a vocabulary instruction program. While there are quite a few vocabulary options available to teachers, Hairrell, Rupley, and Simmons' (2011) analysis of vocabulary instruction programs indicates that the best program of instruction, including the type and amount, is still elusive.

### **Vocabulary Learning Beyond the Classroom: Developing Word Consciousness**

Vocabulary learning is a continuous and lifelong process and its learning cannot be limited to classrooms only. Students need to develop word learning skills beyond the classroom, termed as word consciousness. Word consciousness is defined as profound awareness of words and interest in them (Graves, 2016). Awareness of words involves appreciation and an understanding of why to use some particular words instead of others. Literacy experts (Beck et al., 2013; Blachowicz and Fisher, 2012; Graves, 2016; Scott, Miller, and Flinspach, 2012) highly support the inclusion of word consciousness in an effective vocabulary instruction program. Word consciousness is termed word awareness by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) in their studies on vocabulary instruction. They also advocate for using activities to develop word awareness and to enable students to take their word learning beyond the classroom (Beck et al., 2013; Kucan, 2012). McKeown, Crosson, Artz, Sandora, and Beck (2013) state that asking

students to look for words outside the classroom can be an effective strategy to enrich student word learning. They further claim that this strategy is highly efficient and time-saving because it does not require any classroom instructional time.

### **Vocabulary Assessment**

Teachers need to assess students' existing word knowledge to get an understanding of their vocabulary repertoire. Vocabulary assessment is tied to vocabulary instruction and depends on the teachers' instructional purposes for the words. Graves (2016) highlights the challenging task of vocabulary assessment and states that it is impossible for a teacher to assess all of the words he or she has taught because of the overwhelming number of possible words.

Like traditional vocabulary instruction, students' word knowledge has also been assessed traditionally. Vocabulary has been traditionally assessed by asking students about the definition of the word (McKeown & Beck, 2011). Graves (2016) described three major types of assessments to check students' overall vocabulary knowledge, i.e. commercially produced tests, teacher-made tests, and student self-assessments. The commercially produced tests have an advantage of wide availability but they often do not provide information about which particular words student do or do not know. Teacher-made tests, on the other hand, can be made to assess a particular set of words. In their vocabulary intervention studies, Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) use the following strategies to assess student vocabulary knowledge: student completion of sentence stems for each word; teacher-created cloze sentences and asking students to fill in the correct target word; and sentence completion (Beck et al., 2013). Marzano and Simms (2013) suggest designing a quiz or test for formal vocabulary assessment, but caution teachers to use multiple-choice and matching items tests so that the test does not contain words that students have not learned. They further suggest using assessments like asking students to explain a term

in their own words, drawing a picture or other graphic representation of the term, or writing a dialogue or creating a context in which the vocabulary word is being used. McKeown and Beck (2011) also believe that the best vocabulary assessment is asking student to create or identify the context in which the word can be used. Keeping track of student word usage in conversation, writing, and discussion can also be an effective informal vocabulary assessment (McKeown & Beck, 2011; Marzano & Simms, 2013). The third major type of vocabulary assessment is student self-assessments of their word knowledge. Graves (2016) and Marzano and Simms (2013) also suggest using students' self-assessment of their vocabulary learning because it will make students more aware of their vocabulary knowledge.

Choosing among vocabulary assessments depends on a teacher's purpose, what he or she wants to glean from assessment, whether he or she wants to test students' overall vocabulary knowledge or to check understanding of some particular words. Teachers needs to choose the right type of assessment, one that aligns with their instructional purpose.

## **Conclusion**

In the literature, there exist a variety of schools of thought about effective vocabulary instruction. The agreement between these different activities is their same goal of developing readers' deeper understanding of vocabulary beyond simple word meanings. On the other hand, the research points out that vocabulary learning is a complex phenomenon and it is affected by many other aspects such learner background knowledge, literacy skills, and more. Teachers possess a central role in developing students' vocabulary knowledge by providing effective instruction.

One of purposes of this literature review was to describe the current research on vocabulary instruction and what practices literacy experts recommend and to identify the gaps in

the current research on vocabulary instruction. In my literature review I found that the best program and practices for effective vocabulary instruction are still elusive because of the complexity of the phenomenon, pointing out to the need for further research to contribute to understanding of the phenomenon.

The purpose of my research study is to investigate vocabulary instruction in fifth-grade classrooms in the United States and learn vocabulary practices and take them to schools in my home country, Pakistan. I used activity theory and situated learning theory as theoretical framework to guide my research. In the next chapter I describe the methodology used to conduct the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I discuss the methodology for the collective case study research on vocabulary instruction in two fifth-grade classrooms. The purpose of the study is to investigate how vocabulary instruction takes place in fifth-grade classroom from both teachers and students perspectives. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is the best approach to use when it fits the research problem and when there is a need to develop a complex and deep understanding of the issue. This case study is designed on the guidelines of Merriam (2009) because of her philosophical epistemology and the coherent description of the procedures in conducting case study. Merriam is philosophically adhered to social constructivism. Merriam (1998) defines qualitative case study as, “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). In this chapter I describe the research design, context of the study, participants and setting, sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **Research Design**

In this research, I used a qualitative case study research design. Thomas (2011) characterizes case study research as an increasingly popular approach among qualitative researchers. Merriam (2009) describes that “the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 50). Merriam (2009) described three defining characteristics of case study which include particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic means focusing on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon; descriptive refers to yielding a thick description of the phenomenon under study; heuristic means it develops readers’ understanding of a

phenomenon being studied. The case study approach is an appropriate design for studying applied fields such as education. Case studies can be used to investigate educational processes, problems, and programs to develop understanding of the case and improve practice (Merriam, 2009).

Case study research is defined as a qualitative approach to study a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and to report a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) defines a collective case study as the illustration of one issue or problem through the investigation of multiple case studies. There are three different paradigms proposed by Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and Yin (2002) in conducting a qualitative case study. These paradigms differ in terms of philosophical assumptions, case study definition, research design, collecting data, analyzing data, and validating data (Yazan, 2015). In line with Merriam, I am also inclined to a constructivist paradigm. I believe in the notion of social construction of knowledge, and that people's social interactions and practices shape their knowledge (Yazan, 2015). In the constructivist perspective, the researcher develops a theory or pattern of meaning. The researcher understands the historical and cultural settings of the participants by focusing on the specific contexts in which people live and work (Creswell, 2013). The assumptions about how a researcher views the research problem are ingrained in his thinking; they affect how it is shaped and can change over time as the researcher works in different situations (Creswell, 2013).



## **Context of the Study**

The venue of this research study is an elementary school in the Belborne School District<sup>1</sup> located in the city of Belborne in Western Montana. According to the 2010 census, the city of Belborne has a population of 66,788 residents. The population is comprised of residents from different races, including 92.1% White, 2.8% Native American, 1.2% Asian, 0.5% African American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.5% from other races, 2.9% of any Hispanic or Latino race, and 2.8% from two or more races. The Belborne School District oversees nine elementary, three middle, and five high schools. The mission of the school district is to enable students to achieve their maximum potential by providing a broad, quality education (Belborne School District, 2015). The Rising Star Elementary School is a part of Belborne School District.

## **Participants and Setting**

I conducted my research study at Rising Star Elementary School. According to the building profile of Rising Star Elementary School, the school population for the year 2014-2015 consisted of 54% male and 46% female students (Belborne School District, 2015). The racial categorization was 85.2% white, 1.8% Hispanic, 10.7% American Indian, 1% Asian, 1.2% Black or African American, and 0.02% Native Hawaiian or other people. 54% of the students are from low-income families. At Rising Star Elementary School, 7% of students are classified as needing special education services and have individualized education plans (IEPs). 8% of students are identified as gifted, and 2% are English language learners (Belbourne School District, 2015).

I gained entry to the school through the principal. After getting approval from the university Institutional Review Board, I contacted the school district's Executive Director of Teaching & Learning to learn guidelines about the required procedure for working in the

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<sup>1</sup> Names of people and places are pseudonyms.

classroom. After getting approval from the school district, I contacted all the elementary schools in the Belborne County School District. I sent emails to all school principals and followed up with phone calls. I got permission from the Rising Star Elementary School principal. I scheduled a meeting with the principal and participant teachers to get an official permission letter from the principal.

### **Case 1: Miss Adrienne's classroom**

Creswell (2013) highlights that the hallmark of a good qualitative case study is to comprehensively describe the case under investigation to develop the readers' in-depth understanding of the issue. There are a total of 85 students in the fifth grade in the 2016-17 school year. Miss Adrienne's classroom has 28 students, aged between 10 and 11 years. Miss Adrienne has 11 years of teaching experience. There are 14 boys and 14 girls in the class. Of these 28 students, 2 are Native American, 1 is African American and 25 are Caucasian. The classroom is diverse in terms of student learning needs. Four students in the class have IEPs, two students are getting additional help under section 504, and three students are identified as gifted. Three students are not a part of the regular classroom reading block and get separate reading instruction. The students also differ equally across their socio-economic statuses, with 33.33% of students each from high, middle, and low socio-economic status families. The students from low socio-economic status families get free or reduced-cost lunch. The students have developed their basic literacy skills and are ready for advanced level instruction, instead of remediation.

### **Case 2: Miss Cindy's classroom**

Miss Cindy's classroom has 29 students between the ages of 10 and 11 years. Miss Cindy has total teaching experience of 25 years in elementary and middle school. There are 16 boys and 13 girls in the class. Of these 29 students, 2 are Native American, 1 is Asian/Pacific

Islander and 26 are Caucasian. The students also differ across their socio-economic statuses (SES), with 20.5% of students from high SES, 59% from middle SES, and 20.5% from low SES families. The students vary in their reading skills across a wide spectrum. There are six students in class with reading levels at second grade, which is well below their fifth-grade level. These students get additional reading support. Two students in the classroom are identified as extremely strong readers reading above their grade level. Four students have low reading skills, and the other 16 students are categorized as average readers. Overall, the students possess high reading fluency and comprehension skills and are prepared for advanced level reading instruction.

## **Sampling**

Creswell (2013) differentiates between the types of sampling used in qualitative and quantitative research. In qualitative research, the type of sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which differs from probability sampling in quantitative research. The reason for purposive sampling is to select samples that can provide the researcher rich data to understand the research problem under investigation. Creswell (2013) also advocates for purposeful selection of samples. I used a convenience sampling strategy in selection of my sample because of the time constraints, accessibility, and the willingness of the target participants to participate in the study. Convenience sampling refers to the type of sampling strategy in which the selection of the target population members is based on geographical proximity, availability at a particular time, easy accessibility, and, most importantly, their willingness to participate (Creswell, 2013; Dörnyei, 2007). My sample consisted of two fifth-grade teachers for classroom observations and interviews, as well as six students for interviews. The two teachers were selected in order to provide a comprehensive perspective of vocabulary instruction and a variety of vocabulary

instruction strategies. Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) also indicate that the intention for purposefully selecting multiple cases is to investigate the issue from various perspectives to develop an in-depth understanding of the issue. I asked teachers in both classes to identify students at different reading levels to participate in one-on-one interviews. One of the challenges in selecting more than one case is that multiple cases affect the in-depth description and analysis, diluting the description of the cases (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Collection**

I collected data through classroom observations and interviews with both teachers and students. The philosophical underpinning of qualitative research is that knowledge is known through subjective experiences of people. In accordance with the epistemological assumptions of knowledge creation, it is important in qualitative research to conduct research in the field in the natural setting to understand participants' views about a phenomenon. Angrosino (2007) defines observation as the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, often with an instrument, and recording the observations for scientific purposes. Observations are one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

The other tool that I used in data collection was interviews. Interviews are recognized as the most widely-used tool for data collection. Merriam (2009) highlights that interviews are conducted to find out what is in the interviewee's mind. Merriam (2009) indicates that good interview questions are the key to getting meaningful data.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Observations.** I observed both classrooms daily for more than two months, for approximately 200 hours total in both classroom. I started my classroom observations at the beginning of December 2016 and completed them in mid-February. I observed the reading block

in both classrooms and focused on how the teachers teach vocabulary, what strategies they use, and how the teachers assess vocabulary. The reading block consisted of reading literature, social studies, and science texts. I used the strategies recommended by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) in doing classroom observations and writing field notes. I used my five senses to look at and feel what was happening in the classroom. Similarly, I also focused on details about the physical setting, including size, space, noise, colors, equipment, and interaction. I observed the interaction between people and focused on key events related to vocabulary instruction. I wrote brief field notes in the classroom and then immediately returned home reflected on the brief field notes and wrote full field notes. My full field notes included three columns: the first for writing a complete description of what happened in the classroom, the second for writing reflections, and the third for writing any patterns identified in the description.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection. Merriam (2009) advocates that in a case study, the role of researcher as the primary tool of data collection enables the researcher to write an enriched description of the case. In this study, my role changed from that of a non-participant observer to that of a participant observer. I established a relationship both with teachers and students to collect rich data without causing any intimidation to the participants. Creswell (2013) also highlights the importance of establishing rapport at the data collection site to collect good data.

**Interviews.** I conducted semi-structured interviews with the fifth-grade teachers and three students in each classroom. The reason for conducting teacher interviews was to gather multiple forms of data in addition to field notes. The underlying reason for conducting student interviews was to understand their perspective on vocabulary instruction. I conducted semi-structured interviews, following the guidelines of Creswell (2013) for designing and conducting

interviews. I developed a research guide, and when conducting the interviews, I described my research project to the interviewees. The teacher interviews consisted of three sections (See Appendix A). The first section asked teachers about their beliefs about vocabulary instruction. The second section was comprised of questions about the use of vocabulary strategies, and the third section consisted of questions about vocabulary assessment. I audio-recorded each interview and also took notes of key details during the interview.

I used teacher insight in selecting students for the interview. I requested teachers in both classes to identify six students in total, at different reading levels, for participation in one-on-one interviews. Before conducting my interview with students, I described my research in simple language so that students could understand the purpose. I asked probing questions to glean thorough responses (See Appendix B).

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data. Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). Data analysis in case studies is carried out in two ways: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2013) describes within-case analysis as the identification of themes and thematic analysis within each case, while cross-case-analysis is defined as thematic analysis across cases. In collective case studies, the participants generally share some common characteristics, and the data is analyzed in both ways to discover converging, diverging, and novel themes (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009). The focus of this collective case study is an in-depth description and understanding of vocabulary instruction. I analyzed data using within-case analysis and cross-case-analysis techniques. In a collective case study, each case is

described in detail and themes are described within the case. I transcribed the interviews, coded the data, and conducted thematic analysis to find patterns using multiple cycles of coding. In coding data, I used the guidelines suggested by Saldaña (2016). In the first cycle, I used open coding. The goal of using open coding is to remain open to the new theoretical directions indicated by data. I also used descriptive coding for both field notes and interview transcripts. Descriptive coding leads to categorization and index of the data's contents, which provides a base for second cycle coding. In addition to descriptive coding, I also used process coding because it is suitable for all kinds of qualitative research and uses gerunds to connote action in the data. It is appropriate for coding data describing actions and routines from a particular setting. I used more than one coding method to enhance the accountability and breadth of findings. In the second cycle, I used focused coding to trace patterns, and to identify the categories from the patterns. Saldaña (2016) recommends the following questions to ask during analysis:

1. What strikes you? What surprised you (to track your assumption)?
2. What intrigued you (to track your positionality)?
3. What disturbed you (to track the tensions within your value, attitude, and belief systems)?

In this chapter I described the study's research design, the context of the study, the participants and setting, sampling, data collection, and the data analysis procedures. In the next chapter, I describe the analysis of the data in more depth.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

#### Data Analysis

To analyze data for this study, I used the within-case analysis and cross-case analysis paradigms proposed by Merriam (2009). I focused on the process of how my observed teachers teach vocabulary, the strategies the teachers use, and the students' perceptions about vocabulary learning. My data consisted of 272 pages of written field notes from observations in both classes, and 51 pages from transcribing interviews. In my first round of qualitative "open coding" (Saldaña, 2016), I used codes coming from the data itself, codes from the literature review, and codes from my theoretical framework. I coded data that was relevant to the phenomenon of vocabulary instruction. I also used descriptive coding for both field notes and interview transcripts. Descriptive coding leads to categorization and indexing of the data's contents, which provides a base for second-cycle coding. In addition to descriptive coding, I also used process coding because it is suitable for all kinds of qualitative research and uses gerunds to connote action in the data. In the second cycle, I used the focused coding and put data into categories. I combined the codes that were related to each other. For understanding vocabulary instruction, I focused on instructional context, vocabulary activities, collaborative peer interaction, interaction of the learner in the classroom, instructional purpose, and instructional strategies.

I categorized the data into those categories which evolved from the theoretical framework and from the data. For example, the codes "explicit instruction," modeling of the task by teacher, and impact of the Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction, evolved from the data. The unit of analysis is the individual fifth-grade classroom, including teacher and students. In the open coding process, I used the In Vivo codes which emerged from the data. I used data



from classroom observational field notes and from teacher and student interviews to make sense of how vocabulary instruction is taking place in both classrooms. In the second cycle of focused coding, I combined the categories at the conceptual level.

### **Validation Strategies**

Validation in qualitative research is defined as the measures to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and participants (Cresswell, 2013, p.17). Merriam asserts that “the qualitative study provides the reader with a description in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199), thereby increasing the credence of their interpretation. Applying validation strategies is necessary to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

In this study, I employed two types of validation strategies: triangulation, and rich, thick descriptions. Stake (2006) states that triangulation assures "that we have the picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases and not likely to mislead the reader greatly" (p. 77). In this research, I collected multiple forms of data, field notes from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to provide corroborating evidence and capturing a complete picture of vocabulary instruction in fifth-grade classrooms.

Creswell (2013) asserts that rich, thick descriptions allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability by providing sufficient details about the site and participants in the research study. In this study, I employed rich, thick descriptions by providing details about Rising Star Elementary School and the details about the two classrooms to portray a vivid picture of the context.

## Findings

I carried out within-case and cross-case analysis of the data from classroom observation field notes and from teacher and student interviews. The themes that emerged from the within-case analysis of both cases and from cross-case analysis are as follows:

### Findings from Within-Case Analysis

**Importance.** Teachers taught vocabulary because of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in receptive and expressive literacy development.

**Modeling.** Teachers taught vocabulary through direct explicit instruction and modeling.

**Variety.** Teachers used a variety of strategies such as using dictionaries, identifying meanings from context, explaining words during read aloud, and engaging students in activities to develop students word knowledge.

**Vocabulary Assessment.** Vocabulary instruction was continuously followed by vocabulary assessments.

**Common Core State Standards Influence.** Vocabulary instruction was influenced by Common Core State Standards.

### Student perspectives

- Students learn vocabulary because of its importance in reading comprehension.
- Students preferred to learn vocabulary through fun and engaging activities.
- Difficulty in pronouncing a word is a challenge in understanding words.

### Findings from Cross-Case Analysis

Vocabulary instruction in both classrooms differs based on instructional procedures in the classroom and is similar in terms of using same types of activities.

The unit of analysis in my case study was each individual classroom. I described the findings in each case.

### **Within-Case Analysis**

#### **Case One: Miss Adrienne's Classroom**

Case one is Miss Adrienne's classroom. She has 11 years of teaching experience in elementary and middle schools. Miss Adrienne's classroom has 28 students, aged between 10 and 11 years. There are 14 boys and 14 girls in class. Of these 28 students, 2 are Native American, 1 is African American and 25 are Caucasian. The classroom is diverse in terms of student learning needs. Four students in the class have IEPs, two students are getting additional help under section 504, and three students are identified as gifted. Three students are not a part of the regular classroom reading block and get separate reading instruction. The students also differ equally across socio-economic status, with 33.33% of students coming from each category of high, middle, or low socio-economic class. The students from families of low socio-economic status get free or reduced-cost lunch. The students in the reading block all have developed basic literacy skills and are ready for advanced level instruction.

The physical setting of the classroom is organized in a way that the front wall has an interactive white board and an overhead projector in the middle of the room. The back wall has charts and posters related to reading and writing strategies. The students' work is also displayed on the back wall (such as their drawings and book report cards). On the right side of the classroom, there are three computers and bookshelves containing books from a variety of genres for student use. On the left side of the room, there are cabinets and two tables for using in activities. There are a variety of materials available for student use, including markers, paper, colored pencils, and pens. The students' tables and chairs are set up in a group of four in the

center of the room facing towards the white board. The classroom observations were conducted at different times of the day but the majority of the observations were in the reading block time because the majority of vocabulary instruction takes place in the reading block. I describe the findings by each sub-question and then the central research question.

### **Sub-Questions**

#### **Sub-Question One: How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?**

The first sub-question was, “How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?” The analysis of interview responses yielded the teachers’ perspectives of effective vocabulary instruction. In response to the interview question about effective vocabulary instruction, Miss Adrienne described effective vocabulary instruction as:

Repetition, opportunities for students to practice the words, use the words in various ways, just like in all aspects of teaching the more dynamic you can make it the better outcome you will have, the more engaged your students and learners will be. So, it is not keeping it that memorizing level of understanding, but instead really having them use it and work with it and look at it again and find it in the text and what it means and how could we change it and what if we made this word and just all kinds of those different ways to engage kids with the vocabulary is just as effective. (Teacher Interview, TI, 01/18).

Miss Adrienne’s view about what comprises effective vocabulary instruction highlights various features that make it effective. In her perspective, effective vocabulary instruction creates opportunities for students to interact with words and develop understanding of words in multiple contexts, instead of just memorizing the meaning of the words. Miss Adrienne’s response about

effective vocabulary instruction further indicates functional usage of vocabulary words by students, and her belief in teaching vocabulary in an engaging way and enabling students to create their own learning.

Miss Adrienne's view of effective vocabulary instruction is further connected to her teaching philosophy, her classroom instructional practices, and her belief about the importance of vocabulary knowledge in literacy development. In response to the interview question about her teaching philosophy Miss Adrienne stated that

I really want to empower students, I want them to feel success and – one of those ways they feel success is in their word choice and the words they use and speak and how they put their sentences together is a very empowering skill and writing. (TI, 01/18)

This response indicates her adherence to make students successful and independent learners. It also indicates the teacher's focus on developing students' skills to successfully use vocabulary knowledge in their expressive vocabularies. Miss Adrienne's vocabulary instruction practices also demonstrate her understanding of the effective vocabulary instruction practice of engaging students in the learning process. In my classroom observations, I noticed her using different games, e.g. a "Tableau" game in which students presented the assigned vocabulary word by making a body posture or certain movements. One other aspect that is tied to Miss Adrienne's perspective about effective vocabulary instruction is the importance of vocabulary knowledge in literacy development. In her response to the interview question about the importance of vocabulary development, she described that vocabulary is a key component to literacy. "It lays the foundation for their [students'] understanding" (TI, 01/18).

Miss Adrienne's view of effective vocabulary instruction is shaped by various factors and her classroom vocabulary instruction practices depict her view about effective vocabulary instruction.

### **Sub-Question Two: What vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?**

The second sub-question was "what vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?" Analysis of classroom observational field notes data and the interview data both helped to answer this question. The analysis of the interview responses helped to clarify the rationale for using certain vocabulary strategies, and the analysis of the observational field notes helped to capture the use of vocabulary instruction strategies in the classroom.

The concept of vocabulary instruction strategies cannot be described in isolation because of its connection to the other aspects, such as instructional context, instructional purpose, interaction of the learner with the teacher in classroom vocabulary activities, and collaboration between peers. These codes are from my theoretical framework.

Use of a particular vocabulary instruction strategy is also tied to the instructional context, such as reading literature or informational text. In the interview, Miss Adrienne highlighted her use of different instructional strategies followed by appropriate activities (See Appendix C).

The instructional purpose relates to both the short term and the long-term purposes. The short-term purpose is to develop students' understanding of the text and the long-term purpose is to develop students' literacies. Miss Adrienne explained the purpose of teaching vocabulary words from the novel *Wonder*. She pointed out, "I am teaching vocabulary for understanding new words, new words that you would see in the reading of *Wonder*" (CO).

The interaction between peers during vocabulary learning is also connected to the teacher's philosophical belief of classroom as a community and students' development of their understanding of vocabulary words by interacting with one another.

The interactions between students and teacher influence the teacher's selection of an instructional strategy, or modification in the strategy to meet the needs of students with special needs.

Choosing appropriate vocabulary activities is essential for the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy. Vocabulary activities provide opportunities for students to interact with the vocabulary words and create understanding for themselves.

The frequently-used vocabulary instruction strategies in Miss Adrienne's class, identified from the analysis of both the classroom observation field notes and interviews are described below:

**Direct explicit instruction and modeling.** Miss Adrienne used direct instruction in teaching vocabulary words. Direct instruction is in line with her teaching philosophy of making students aware of what they are learning (See table 1). In my classroom observations, I observed the teacher explicitly teaching and modeling literacy skills in general and vocabulary in particular. Miss Adrienne described the activity or task before teaching, the purpose of the task, and the procedure for doing the task. For example, in the Tableau activity of teaching vocabulary through gestures, the teacher first described what a Tableau is and then gave examples and incorrect examples, followed by modeling of the activity. Explicit instruction also included rules regarding activity (for example, "use only gestures to communicate") (CO).

**Teaching words during read aloud.** In my classroom observations, I observed Miss Adrienne read aloud the text all the time in all content areas. The teacher also asked students to

read aloud. In the interview with Miss Adrienne, when I asked the question about read aloud, she responded

I also—to be perfectly honest, on the state test when the score came out last year, my students had difficulty with listening comprehension, and so I thought, “okay how do I pull this in?” So one of those ways is for me to read aloud, um, so I am also able to stop and have those discussions and bring things up. Aaa—I know I need to let them go more control and let them have opportunities, umm, I just don’t want them to miss it, (TI, 01/18).

Miss Adrienne’s response highlights the reason for using read aloud, i.e. developing students’ listening comprehension skills.

Miss Adrienne also taught vocabulary during read aloud. During read aloud of the novel, *Wonder*, Miss Adrienne identified the figurative language used in the text. She described the dramatic monologue (CO). She also pointed out vocabulary words during read aloud to further stress their importance, followed by checking students’ understanding of the words by asking their meaning and repeating the student answer, to make all students listen to the answer. Miss Adrienne also asked about keeping track of vocabulary words during read aloud. To engage students in active listening, she set forth the purpose for reading by asking students to pick one thought, quote and action from the book and give examples of why they picked what they picked (CO).

**Identifying meaning from context in fictional text.** In fictional reading, Miss Adrienne taught students about using a text clue strategy to identify meaning of the vocabulary words. The teacher also asked students to identify the implicit meaning the author wants to convey in the text from the author’s word usage and connotation (CO). The purpose of using this vocabulary



instruction strategy is to use the contextual clues in a fictional text to identify the words' contextual meaning (See Appendix C).

**Pre-teaching vocabulary words.** In my classroom observations, I noticed the pattern of teaching vocabulary words before reading the content. The purpose of this pre-teaching was to develop students' understanding of the key words that they would encounter in the text, which would facilitate students' comprehension of the text. The pre-teaching vocabulary word process consisted of the following instructional sequence:

- Checking students' background knowledge of the words by asking questions
- Defining and describing the words
- Explaining examples and incorrect examples of the words (CO).

**Using dictionaries to teach words.** During my classroom observation, I also noticed vocabulary instruction through dictionaries. Looking up vocabulary words in dictionaries was followed by a definition of the word, an explanation of the word, and examples. In Social Studies vocabulary teaching, Miss Adrienne also taught students how to select vocabulary word definitions from the dictionaries. She described, "when there is more than one definition of the word in the dictionaries, choose the definition that is more relevant to the context" (CO). This indicates the teacher strategy of using dictionaries to learn the word-meaning by taking the context into account to avoid the decontextualized meaning.

Miss Adrienne used a Vocabulary Card Making activity with the students. In this activity, the students had to make vocabulary cards to teach the vocabulary words to the whole class. Each word consisted of the following eight things:

- Word
- Image that represents the word
- Synonym
- Antonym

- Part of speech
- Formal definition from dictionary
- Definition in students' own words
- Use in a sentence.

The student creation of their own vocabulary words is in-line with the teacher purpose of vocabulary instruction, i.e. “students make vocabulary words their own” (TI, 01/18).

**Using morphology to identify meaning of the words.** Miss Adrienne also taught students to identify the meaning of a word by splitting the word into its morphemes. She gave instructions: “break the multisyllabic words into prefix and suffix and base words and figure out the meaning” (CO). This indicates another strategy of teaching vocabulary words (See Appendix C).

**Using games.** In response to an interview question about vocabulary instruction strategies, Miss Adrienne stated,

I use a lot of games, I use a lot of, I use a lot of drama, theater, gestures, games, and it is very effective in ways to engage especially with vocabulary, the gestures that teach okay, the acting that out. It just goes with my personality, it works for me; I am outgoing and I tend to be theatrical. It fits me personally. (TI, 01/18)

This response indicates the alignment of the teacher's personality with her views about teaching vocabulary in an engaging way. Student engagement and interest in vocabulary games and activities was another reason for teaching vocabulary in that way. Miss Adrienne further described:

if I am standing up there and it is not entertaining, which sounds, you know, there are a lot of teachers who will totally disagree with me, but if it is not then you have lost them and so keeping up pace fast and keeping them engaging—and I have found whole brain to be, and I use pieces of whole brain, I don't use all of them. (TI, 01/18)

This points out the teacher's philosophy and view of teaching in a fun and engaging way. When asked about whole brain, the teacher indicated that whole brain is a classroom management strategy of engaging students. In my classroom observations, I discovered the teacher using several vocabulary games and activities (See Appendix C for details).

Findings regarding the second sub-question "what vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?" reveal many different strategies that Miss Adrienne used in teaching vocabulary, and these strategies align with her views about effective vocabulary instruction.

### **Sub-Question Three: What are the students' perceptions of vocabulary instruction?**

The third sub-question was "what are the students' perceptions of vocabulary instruction?" I interviewed students to glean their views about the vocabulary knowledge. I requested Miss Adrienne to identify three students in total, with different reading levels for the student interviews. The teacher identified three students, two girls, Isabel and Megan, and one boy, Darren, for the interview. The student interview was comprised of questions about the students' understanding of vocabulary, importance of vocabulary knowledge, how they learn vocabulary, challenges in learning vocabulary words, and their preferred ways of learning vocabulary. The themes that emerged from analysis of the students' interview are described here.

**Unknown words are vocabulary words.** In response to the question about vocabulary words, the students responded that unknown words are the vocabulary words. One student, Isabel, responded that vocabulary words tell the theme of text and encapsulate the key concepts in the text. Student responses indicate their developed understanding of the vocabulary words.

**Vocabulary is important in understanding the content.** When asked about the importance of vocabulary words, the theme emerged from students' responses were the functional importance of vocabulary knowledge in understanding the text. One of the student

responded, “I think it is important because if you are reading and you don’t understand the words then it can be hard for you to understand what is going on in the book” (Student Interview, SI, 01/18). The student response indicates that the functionality of vocabulary knowledge in understanding the text is the key reason for learning the vocabulary word.

**The teacher teaches vocabulary in a variety of ways.** The question of how their teacher teaches vocabulary yielded responses about their vocabulary learning in classroom. Isabel described that “she gives us a word and she makes us find like similes, and adjectives, or like the opposite of a word and what form of the word is and like a way somebody uses it in a sentence” (Student Interview, SI, 01/20). This indicates the teacher uses a variety of activities in teaching, and makes students responsible for their own learning. This also connects to the teacher’s philosophy of empowering students.

**Students learn vocabulary on their own by using multiple different strategies.** The themes regarding students’ vocabulary learning on their own in a variety of different ways emerged from their interview responses. Students said that they figure out the meaning of a word by using dictionaries, by using context, or by asking the teacher about the meaning of the word. One of the interviewees, Megan, described wide reading as a strategy she uses to learn more words. One other theme that emerged from all the three interview responses was using online tools such as computers and iPads to look up vocabulary words. Asking the teacher about the vocabulary word was also evident from student responses. The student with dyslexia especially relied more on the teacher for learning the vocabulary words. She responded that, “either somebody helps you learn how to do them or you kind of go and you see the words you don’t know and you kind of ask somebody or you find out what the word is by yourself” (SI, 01/20). This indicates the higher need for teacher support when assisting students with disabilities.

**Challenges in learning vocabulary words.** Students response indicated the difficulty in pronouncing the word as a challenge in learning vocabulary words. Megan highlighted that, “If I don’t really know how to pronounce it and it is hard to spell, it sometimes and if look it in the dictionary and I don’t know what word it is” (SI, 01/19). This response signifies the importance of knowing how to correctly pronounce a word, and how the lack of correct pronunciation hinders the ability to correctly spell and find the meaning in the dictionary.

**Preferred way of learning vocabulary.** In response to a question about their preferred way of vocabulary learning, students indicated that they prefer to learn vocabulary by playing games and engaging in activities. As Darren pointed out, “I prefer to learn them like in a game, it is the way I prefer” (SI, 01/18). Students responses about learning vocabulary through games converges with the analysis of classroom observation field notes. Students participated in the vocabulary games actively and demonstrated enthusiasm in learning words. Students also indicated learning multiple features of the words to develop their understanding. As Isabel’s response highlights, “Like, aa, like the words that are same or words that are different and like a formal description of it, and what kind of speech it is. Or there is doing slideshow, when she [the teacher] does slide shows it’s just, I get the point” (SI, 01/20).

The students in Miss Adrienne’s classroom had a deeper understanding of the importance of the vocabulary words and the reasons for learning them. They indicated their interest in learning these words through games and fun, engaging activities. The new theme that emerged was using computers to look up the word. The student responses also highlighted the need for support from the teacher in understanding new words. The response of the student with dyslexia also indicated the higher need for teacher support. The students pointed out the difficulty in learning and understanding words when they are unable to pronounce them.

## **Central Research Question:**

### **How does vocabulary instruction take place in fifth grade classroom?**

The central research question was “how does vocabulary instruction takes place in fifth-grade classrooms?” The findings of sub-questions one, two, and three emerged from the analysis of classroom observational field notes and interviews provided a way to understand the vocabulary instruction in the fifth-grade classroom. The sub-questions helped to answer the central research question of the process of vocabulary instruction in the fifth-grade classrooms.

Belborne School District recommends using the Reading Street curriculum in fifth grade, but Miss Adrienne and the two other fifth-grade teachers at Rising Star Elementary School do not use the Reading Street curriculum. Instead, the three fifth-grade teachers have collaboratively developed their own curriculum. Miss Adrienne reflected on the reading curriculum:

so [Belborne school district] uses Reading Street. My team and I don't use the Reading Street because by the time they get to fifth grade it has just destroyed reading because they are just working out of the text book and just repetition. [The district curriculum is boring] and so we use novels to create our units as a team and then as a PLC [professional learning community] we create our unit, which standards we want to address for this novel, we want to use it. (TI, 01/18)

The development of their own reading curriculum by the three teachers at Rising Star Elementary School indicates their dedication to enhance their students' skills and prepare them for middle school.

In my observations in Miss Adrienne's classroom, I noticed her focus on enhancing fifth graders' literacy skills by modeling and explicit instruction. She focused on developing the following literacy skills in students: summarizing skills, making inferences, writing strong

purpose statements, mastering argumentative writing, learning persuasive writing, making predictions, citing textual evidence, avoiding plagiarism by giving credit to the author, identifying the theme of the story, skimming the text to answer questions, and teaching techniques to read complex texts.

In an interview question asked about the selection of words for instruction, Miss Adrienne indicated:

so in fiction I choose the words that are powerful, choose words that I like them to use in their own reading and writing. I choose words that are meaningful to the text that they will need to have a deeper understanding of the text, and choose words that I anticipate that they won't know. I am not going to give them they already know unless a word that will add to something, an, informational is of course the words to understand the content, you know. The words that are essential to understand the content, yes, yes. Well, I rely on in the informational, I am thinking of science and social study I rely on curriculum. I rely on the program I am using, and the materials that I have kind of looking through what do I see through [in the text] the words that are repeated. Um, if I look at my pre-assessment and close-assessment, what they are gonna need to know? And then those become my power words, my most important ones, and in reading and then that depends on my class, depends on which way we have taken the novel, where we are going and what I like them to get from it. So really, it's me sitting down with the book and thinking about my kids thinking about their understanding and thinking about what skill I am working on; those are the ways I pick the words. (TI, 01/18)

The teacher's detailed response about selecting vocabulary words highlights her use of a variety of strategies in selecting words.

There are two other aspects that continuously emerged in my classroom observations in Miss Adrienne's classroom, and in interview responses. These aspects are the influence of Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction, and the practices of continuous vocabulary assessment. These two aspects are significant in understanding vocabulary instruction in Miss Adrienne's classroom. These aspects are described below.

### **Influence of Common Core State Standards on Vocabulary Instruction**

In my classroom observations and in the teacher interviews, I observed a huge influence of the Common Core State Standards on Vocabulary Instruction. In my classroom observation, I observed that every time, before any activity to teach a particular skill, the teacher mentioned the requirement of the Common Core State Standards to learn that skill. For example, in teaching summarizing skills, the teacher linked it to the requirement of Fifth Grade Montana Common Core State Standards 5.1, 5.2 (CO). The teacher also mentioned Montana Common Core State Standard 5.4 when teaching figurative language in the novel, *Wonder*. The influence of Common Core State Standards on teaching vocabulary is also evident from the teacher's response to an interview question. She described:

hmmn ah, well, I am a big fan of Common Core Standards simply because it is focused instruction. Common Core is really in the news and is criticized for a lot of things, but really it is very similar to what our former Standards were. However, Common Core has made it, the rigor, a little bit more difficult; it's focused the skills we are working on instead of working on this broad umbrella. So, Common Core Standard 5.4 is students will be able to use their vocabulary and in fifth grade they even focus on more with us is working with figurative language, the similes, the metaphors, and analogies. And so if you look at the scope of that Standards which is the Fourth Standard of reading literature.



It has the student, you know, the basic level of understanding definitions of words and it scaffolds it. So, the Common Core Standards in my opinion are bringing vocabulary back because they focus the teachers instead of just this “make sure you are doing vocabulary.” Where I put that? What does that mean, giving definitions to words? What it—that looks like in my room, and Common Core has defined it for grade levels. (TI, 01/18)

The teacher’s response indicates strong adherence and perspective about the positive influence of Common Core State Standards on defining and demanding vocabulary knowledge standards in fifth-grade classrooms.

The teacher further described how the Common Core Standards have influenced her vocabulary instruction practices:

I really cannot assume that they know the definition of the word and so now I have to really make sure it is one of our Common Core Standard, Standard 5.4, to really make sure I am using the vocabulary and having them think about vocabulary. And it is not just memorizing the definition but why is the author using that, the word choice and how is the word being used. (TI, 01/18)

On the other hand, Miss Adrienne’s response to the question about changes in vocabulary instruction practices over the course of her career indicates that the pressure of Common Core Standards have pushed her back from vocabulary instruction. She responded to the question:

then I went back to fifth grade, hhhh, and to be perfectly honest with kind of the gain shifted: back to, “oh man I have to gotta teach text evidence, and I have to gotta teach inference, and I have to gotta teach difficult reading skills.” I felt overwhelmed by the amount of difficulty that again vocabulary for me went the way side and truly last year and this year as my understanding of the Common Core Standard has developed, now I

have been able to bring vocabulary back in and make sure that it is[...] important part, very important piece to my instruction, but to tell you the truth that I have kind of been on, you know up and down on my vocabulary instruction just based of my own personal understanding. (TI, 01/18).

This response highlights how the Common Core State Standards diverted her focus to teaching inference and other text skills, and not teaching vocabulary.

The Common Core State Standards caused a shift in Miss Adrienne's vocabulary instruction practices over the course of her career, from neglecting vocabulary because of the other CCSS pressures to fully embracing it and recognizing it as a rigorous guideline for vocabulary instruction.

### **Continuous Vocabulary Assessment**

I observed practices of continuously assessing students' vocabulary knowledge. These patterns were also evident in the teacher interview responses about vocabulary assessment. Miss Adrienne's response to the interview question highlights her vocabulary assessment practices:

Ahan, well there is formal and informal, so I do anecdotal notes in my agenda, my lesson plan book, there is grid with student names, and if I hear a student use the word in a sentence without prompting! Ohh, I run over and write that down, oh my God, wow they use this word. If a student makes a connection randomly during the day, they are made some thing, I jot! that down, and when I am at the end of a unit of words, I got this data to show me who really started to take on these words and really kind of deepen their understanding of the words. I also use formal assessment of course, um, with at the end, you know, the middle way, the mid-way and I kind of define who has got what, what's got what and then an end of the way one. I use a lot of with my games, like today's game

we are gonna play, how many of them stall, how many of them struggle. Those kinds of things I just keep track of and kind of watch for, so both formal and informal assessments all the time. Paying attention. (TI, 01/18)

Teacher response described the following vocabulary assessment practices:

1. Taking anecdotal notes to keep track of students' vocabulary use.
2. Assessment of students' vocabulary knowledge throughout the year, i.e. at the beginning, middle and at the end.
3. Vocabulary assessment of the pre-taught words during read aloud by asking students meaning of the taught words.
4. Vocabulary assessment through teacher-designed tests. The teacher developed a test from the book *Wonder*. The test consisted of the following items:
  - Vocabulary assessment by matching correct words with their definitions in columns.
  - Identifying correct words for the sentences.
  - Using the vocabulary words in sentences (CO).

These vocabulary assessment practices guide her in devising her instruction to meet the needs of students and to develop their vocabulary knowledge.

The findings described in the three sub-questions and the description of the influence of Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction in this section helped to describe the vocabulary instruction process in Miss Adrienne's classroom.

### **Case Two: Miss Cindy's Classroom**

Case two is Miss Cindy's classroom. Miss Cindy is a fifth-grade teacher at Rising Star Elementary School. She has teaching experience of 25 years in elementary and middle school. Miss Cindy's classroom has 29 students between the ages of 10 and 11 years. There are 16 boys

and 13 girls in the class. Of these 29 students, 2 are Native American, 1 is Asian/Pacific Islander and 26 are Caucasian. The students also differ across their socio-economic statuses (SES), with 20.5% of students from high SES, 59% from middle SES, and 20.5% from low SES families. The students vary in their reading skills across a wide spectrum. There are six students in class with reading levels at second grade, which is below their fifth-grade level. These students get additional reading support. Two students in the classroom are identified as extremely strong readers, reading above their grade level. Four students have low reading skills, and the other 16 students are categorized as average readers. Overall, the students possess high reading fluency and comprehension skills and are prepared for advanced level reading instruction.

The physical setting of the classroom is organized in such a way that the front wall has an interactive white board and there is an overhead projector in the middle of the room. The back wall has charts and posters related to reading and writing strategies. The students' work is also displayed on the back wall, such as their drawings and book report cards. On the right side of the classroom there are three computers and bookshelves containing books from a variety of genres for student use. The classroom also has a couch and several chairs for students to use during their independent reading time. On the left side of the room, there are cabinets containing classroom materials. There are a variety of materials available for student use, including markers, paper, colored pencils, and pens. The student tables and chairs are set up in a group of four in the center of the room facing towards the white board. The classroom observations were conducted at different times of the day, but the majority of the observations were in the reading block time because the majority of vocabulary instruction takes place in the reading block. Here I describe the findings of each sub-question and the central research question.

### **Sub-Questions**

**Sub-Question One: How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?**

The first sub-question was, “How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?” The analysis of interview responses unfolded the teacher’s perspective on effective vocabulary instruction. In response to the question on effective vocabulary instruction, Miss Cindy responded:

What would be an effective vocabulary instruction, um, I think of variety. If there is one way you are doing things, the kids are gonna bored with that, I am gonna bored with that. So, I kind of, we did last time, you were here when we did the Fly Spotter game, things like that, repetition for sure. (TI, 02/14)

According to Miss Cindy’s perspective, effective vocabulary instruction comprises teaching vocabulary in novel ways. Especially her pointing out the Fly Spotter game indicates her pedagogical approach of teaching vocabulary through games. Miss Cindy further pointed out that teaching vocabulary in only one way will not develop students as well as her own interest in the teaching and learning process. Her response highlights that novelty and instruction that develops students’ interest are means of effective vocabulary instruction.

Miss Cindy’s response about effective vocabulary instruction is also related to her philosophy and her perspective on the importance of vocabulary knowledge. In response to an interview question about her philosophy of vocabulary instruction she described:

Philosophy, ahan, I think that it [vocabulary] is an important piece of their comprehension, it is an important piece of their whole reading aspect. I think that if you skip the vocabulary I think you are really doing the child that disservice because what

they will hear tomorrow, new words and their meanings and how they can compete with other words and sentences. (TI, 02/14)

In Miss Cindy's view, vocabulary knowledge holds a key importance in students' reading comprehension and academic success, and the absence of vocabulary instruction in the classroom signals incomplete and ineffective teaching. Miss Cindy further described that vocabulary possesses a key role in fifth-grade reading because the students are not learning to read, but are reading to learn. She commented that "vocabulary opens up a whole new aspect to their reading. The more words they know the more they can visualize, the more connections they get. It just opens up another and keep opening doors for them" (TI, 02/14). Her response, "vocabulary opens up a whole new aspect to their reading" (TI, 02/14), demonstrates her beliefs about the importance of developing students' vocabulary knowledge.

#### **Sub-question Two: What vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?**

The second sub-question was "what vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?" Analysis of classroom observational field notes data and the interview data both helped to answer this question. The analysis of the interview responses helped to clarify the rationale for using certain vocabulary strategies, and the analysis of the observational field notes helped to capture the use of vocabulary instruction strategies in the classroom.

Vocabulary instruction strategies cannot be described in isolation because of their connection to the other aspects such as instructional purpose, instructional context, vocabulary activities, collaboration between peers, and the interaction of the learners with teacher in the classroom. These codes are from my theoretical framework.

Use of a particular vocabulary instruction strategy is also tied to the instructional context such as reading literature or informational texts. The teacher highlighted in the interview about the use of different instructional strategies followed by appropriate activities (See Appendix D).

The instructional purpose relates to both the short-term and the long-term purposes. The short-term purpose is to develop students' understanding of the text and the long-term purpose is to develop students' literacy. Miss Cindy explained the purpose of teaching vocabulary words is the development of student literacy and preparing them for middle school. Miss Cindy responded, "That's my job is turn them into a sixth-grader, a responsible sixth-grader that loves learning and that's my job" (TI, 02/14). The teacher taught a Spanish word every day, and the reason for teaching it was to prepare students for the second-language course they need to take in middle school (CO).

The interaction between peers during vocabulary learning is also connected to the teacher's philosophical beliefs of a classroom as a community and students' development of understanding of vocabulary words by interacting with one another.

The interaction between students and teacher influences the teacher's selection of an instructional strategy, or the provision of extra support to students having difficulties in learning.

Choosing appropriate vocabulary activities is essential for the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy. Vocabulary activities provide opportunities for students to interact with the vocabulary words and create understanding for themselves.

The frequently-used vocabulary instruction strategies in Miss Cindy's class, identified from the analysis of both the classroom observation field notes and interviews, are described below:

**Explicit and direct instruction and modeling.** Miss Cindy used direct instruction in teaching vocabulary words and in instructions about any activity or task. In my classroom observation, I observed her modeling the writing activities and vocabulary learning games (CO). Miss Cindy also used modeling for developing motivation in students to use learned vocabulary words in their writing. She responded about using modeling to motivate students:

Well that, yeah, it's HARD, and I encourage it definitely but then I model that for them of course and use that for them but you know, aaa, that's come on their own. Good will they are trying use that on their own, a vocabulary. But other time you can make them write a summary and use five of the vocabulary words that we have been talking about. And you can get them the word and they can hopefully put it into a context and relate to. So just trying and to encourage them. (TI, 02/14)

This response indicates the teacher's use of modeling in motivating students to use the learned vocabulary words in their writing.

**Teaching words during read aloud.** In my classroom observations, I observed Miss Cindy read the text aloud in all content areas. The teacher also randomly picked students for read aloud. The purpose of using read aloud is to develop students' listening comprehension (CO). During read aloud, the teacher identified the vocabulary words from the novel *Wonder* and also asked students about the meaning of the vocabulary words. The teacher restated and explained the meaning of the vocabulary words (CO). Identifying vocabulary words during read aloud is a way to develop students' deep understanding of the words.

**Pre-teaching vocabulary words.** I also observed Miss Cindy providing students the list of words and then describing the definition of each word (CO). The teacher indicated that the



purpose of pre-teaching vocabulary words is to develop student understanding of the difficult words that students will encounter in the text.

**Identifying meaning from context.** In an interview question about the strategies for teaching vocabulary words, Miss Cindy emphasized using context to teach meaning. She explained, “aan, I think just I said before, the context is huge. I think knowing the other, aah, the other meanings of the word are definitely beneficial but the context is huge” (TI, 02/18). In my classroom observations, I also observed the teacher using context to develop students’ understanding of the vocabulary word and connecting the word to text (CO).

**Using dictionaries to teach words.** In the interview question about the strategies for teaching vocabulary words, Miss Cindy also mentioned using dictionaries to teach the word meaning. She also indicated teaching multiple characteristics of the word in addition to the meaning of the word. She explained in the interview, “then just knowing different things about the word, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms. If there is any of that, just connecting it with different parts of it instead of just learning the meaning and being done with it” (TI, 02/18).

**Using games.** In classroom observations and also in interviews, the teacher indicated using a variety of games and activities in teaching vocabulary words. This is also in line with the teacher philosophy of vocabulary instruction of using a variety of activities to engage students in the vocabulary learning and not being bored with learning words (See Appendix D).

Findings regarding the second sub-question “what vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?” reveal many different strategies that Miss Cindy used in teaching vocabulary, and these strategies align with her view about effective vocabulary instruction.

**Sub-Question Three: What are the students’ perceptions of vocabulary instruction?**

The third sub-question was “what are the students’ perceptions of vocabulary instruction?” I conducted student interviews in Miss Cindy’s class to uncover students’ views about the vocabulary knowledge. As in Miss Adrienne’s class, I requested that Miss Cindy identify three students in total, with different reading levels, for the student interviews. The teacher identified three students: two girls, Victoria and Barbara, and one boy, Zach, for the interview. I asked the same interview questions that I asked in my interview with students in Miss Adrienne’s class. The students’ interview was comprised of questions about the students’ understanding of vocabulary, the importance of vocabulary knowledge, how they learn vocabulary, challenges in learning vocabulary words, and their preferred way of learning vocabulary. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the students’ interview are described here.

**Just regular word that you should know.** Zach responded to the question about vocabulary words and stated that vocabulary words are “Like meanings of words or just regular word that you should know, because they help you in life with stuff like people need to know like. Just regular word that you should know” (SI, 02/12). This response highlights his understanding of the vocabulary words and also depicts the importance of the vocabulary words in classroom as well as in daily life.

**It doesn’t throw you off.** When asked about the importance of vocabulary knowledge, the response “it doesn’t throw you off” (SI, 02/12) reveals the significance of vocabulary knowledge in supporting reading comprehension and making sense of the complex text. Analysis of student responses also indicated that vocabulary knowledge also helps in writing good book reports, and summaries, and also help in getting good grades. This highlights the contribution of

vocabulary knowledge in developing students' expressive vocabularies, which is significant for writing effectively and helps students in writing book reports and high academic achievement.

**Vocabulary learning in classroom.** The question about how their teacher teaches vocabulary yielded different responses about their vocabulary learning in classroom. As Barbara responded:

If we were reading the book like she would say it to us and then ask if any of us know what the word is and like oh! Yeah we did this thing for *Wonder* where there is a word and if we like knew we were all line up to introduce and to two separate groups and there were words on the white board and she would give us the definition and we had to find the word. (SI, 02/07).

Barbara's response indicates the teacher's vocabulary instruction in classroom through explaining the word during read aloud and also through games. The activity indicated by the student is the Fly Spotter game, in which the students had to identify the word from its definition. Analysis of the student responses also revealed the use of dictionaries, and activities to teach vocabulary. As Victoria described "Miss Cindy told me, I remember that look it up in the dictionary" (SI, 02/07). This response depicts the common use of dictionaries in classroom to learn meanings of words.

**Students learn vocabulary on their own by using multiple different strategies.**

Analysis of student responses to the question about vocabulary learning on their own indicated that students use many different strategies on their own to learn vocabulary words. Zach highlighted using different ways: "sounding out, I sound it out a lot and say. I also look it up on my iPad and see what is meaning of it, so I can understand. I ask my parents sometimes what the meaning is" (SI, 02/12). Zach's response indicates the importance of correct pronunciation to

figure out the meaning of the word. Other respondents also indicated the use of iPads to look up vocabulary words. A new perspective that evolved from one student response was asking parents about the vocabulary words. Other strategies that emerged from student responses were using dictionaries, using context to figure out the word's meaning, or directly asking the teacher.

**Challenges in learning vocabulary words.** Analysis of the responses to the question asked about the challenges in learning vocabulary words revealed the difficulties faced by students in learning the new vocabulary words. Barbara described:

well, just not knowing how to like pronounce it. If you know how to pronounce it that can help a lot and it feel like the kind of spelling of it can be kind of hard because like it could be like if you had test and you kind of heard the word if would be kind of hard if there is kind of different vowel. (SI, 02/07)

Other interviewees also indicated the difficulty in correctly pronouncing the word as a challenge in understanding vocabulary words. Barbara pointing out the words containing “different vowels” highlights the complexity text in fifth grade. One another theme that emerged from the analysis of student responses was the challenge of learning Tier-3 vocabulary words. Students faced challenges in understanding the content-specific words in mathematics such as quotient, dividend, and divisor. This also indicates the need for robust vocabulary instruction.

**Preferred way of learning vocabulary.** Analysis of student responses indicated their preference of learning vocabulary through games, multiple exposure to the words, and direct teaching of the words. As Zach responded:

Like help me spell them or just learn them. To go over them and over them for a little bit and then next time we read the passage in the book and we take like 20, 30 minutes on

how learning the words is, so you don't get confused or messed up. In math and science in reading in social studies. (SI, 02/12)

In line with Zach's response, other students also highlighted the need for and their preference for learning vocabulary by detailed explanation of the words and multiple opportunities to interact with the words.

Students' responses indicated the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading, writing and speaking. The students also indicated the use of dictionaries, using context, and asking the teacher when learning new words. The students also highlighted the need for vocabulary instruction, especially in specialized content areas. Especially the math vocabulary poses a challenge for students to understand the text. The students also expressed interest in learning vocabulary through games. The students also indicated the traditional vocabulary instruction of just only teaching the meaning of the words. Students demonstrated the need for a detailed vocabulary instruction.

### **Central Research Question:**

#### **How does vocabulary instruction takes place in fifth grade classroom?**

The central research question was "how does vocabulary instruction takes place in fifth grade classrooms". The findings of sub-questions one, two, and three, which emerged from the analysis of classroom observational field notes and interviews, provide a way to understand the vocabulary instruction in the fifth-grade classroom. The sub-questions help to answer the central research question of the process of vocabulary instruction in fifth grade classroom.

Belborne School District recommends using the Reading Street curriculum in fifth grade, but Miss Cindy uses the reading curriculum that she developed in collaboration with the two other fifth-grade teachers at Rising Star Elementary School. The development of their own

reading curriculum by the three teachers at Rising Star Elementary School indicates their dedication to enhance their students' skills and prepare them for middle school.

In my observations in Miss Cindy's classroom, I unfolded the teacher's focus on enhancing fifth graders literacy skills by modelling and explicit instruction. She focused on developing the following literacy skills: summarizing skills, making inferences, persuasive writing, making predictions, and how to cite textual evidence. The teacher also taught one Spanish word on a daily basis. When asked about the reason for teaching Spanish, the teacher explained that her purpose is to prepare students for second language course that they had to take in middle school. This aligns with the teacher philosophy of preparing fifth graders as responsible learners.

I asked Miss Cindy about selecting vocabulary words for instruction. She indicated: Actually, luckily the book *Wonder* have them all ready for us in our pacing guide. So, I just went with those, but otherwise I read ahead of the time and I think I know fifth graders well enough by now and I can pick out what words pretty well and I have definitely to pre-read it if there is nothing in there but usually nice teaching guides will have the vocabulary for you and it is all kind of researched and correlate with the grades fourth or fifth or sixth so. Aan, I think in literature you have to search a little bit more and be kind of cautious and kind of be in the mind of the fifth grader. Sometimes the kids can tell you to go through and you can—ah! they didn't know that so surprisingly you don't know you didn't know that you know so you go over. I think the nonfiction text is a lot easier to grab vocab from, so sometimes so abstract. I am just kind of thinking of like the explorers or the American revolution, the things like that I think the vocabulary is pretty

easy to pick out from those things. I know they are not gonna know those words because they haven't had history before so. (TI, 02/14)

Miss Cindy uses the following strategies to select words for instruction:

- Teaching vocabulary words suggested by guides
- Using insight to select words based on student needs
- Advocating for teaching words selected ready-made teaching guides

As in Miss Adrienne's classroom, the aspect of the influence of Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction and the practices of continuous vocabulary assessment frequently emerged in my classroom observation and also in my interview with Miss Cindy. These two aspects are also significant in understanding vocabulary instruction in Miss Cindy's classroom.

These aspects are described below.

### **Influence of Common Core State Standards on Vocabulary Instruction**

In my classroom observations and teacher interviews, I observed a huge influence of Common Core State Standards on Vocabulary Instruction in Miss Cindy's classroom. In my classroom observation, I observed that every time before any activity to teach a particular skill the teacher mentioned the requirement of the Common Core State Standards to learn that skill. In interview when I asked about Common Core State Standards the teacher responded:

Oh, okay, ann, I think they are pretty [...]. I think we do a nice job of pairing them. I think this year specially I have been more conscious of the Common Core Standards. That has a lot to do with [Adrienne], because she has brought that with her and we decided to take that on, even our districts are not going to the common core ah standard based grading. We decided to do that, and so I think by doing that having us focus more

on those standards that meet vocabulary criterion. So, it helps with that for sure, all ties together very nicely. (TI, 02/14).

This response explained the influence of the Common Core State Standards on devising vocabulary instruction in the classroom and indicated that Common Core State Standards drives instruction in Miss Cindy's classroom.

Miss Cindy further highlighted that, "I think by doing that having us focus more on those standards that meet vocabulary criterion" (TI, 02/18). Vocabulary is taught because it is the requirement of the Common Core State Standards to teach difficult words and develop students' understanding of complex words.

### **Continuous Vocabulary Assessment**

In Miss Cindy's classroom, like Miss Adrienne's classroom, I observed practices of continuous assessment of students' vocabulary knowledge. These patterns emerged in the analysis of classroom observation field notes and were further verified by the teacher in the interview. Miss Cindy assessed students' understanding of vocabulary words during read aloud. She also wrote anecdotal notes to keep track of student vocabulary learning. She responded about this practice in the interview:

a teacher stores so many so much information in their head about the kids and a lot of teachers know and oh—they are good at getting vocabulary. Observation is huge and so that becomes a big piece of my assessment and I have a little anecdotal notes and [Miss Adrienne] is using them too, write down things about the kids and the different learning aspect of what they are laying in it that helps note taking just observation to. (TI, 02/18)

Miss Cindy also assessed students' expressive vocabularies through a weekly classroom activity



in which every week, a student had to describe his interests, his adventures, about his family, and so on.

Miss Cindy also described her vocabulary assessment practices and revealed that she preferred to assess vocabulary by creating the context of words. She further pointed out:

For assessment, I think definitely giving them the context that it is in too might trigger the memory on what it means or a lot of these kids if you give them a sentence or if you give them the context of it, they will be able to figure out the meaning, but you know, I think having a few words here and there and on their assessments, written assessments is good but it should be no little trick words. I think the ones that you have discussed and they know pretty well and they should have been able to pick up very well. (TI, 02/18)

Miss Cindy pointed out that she only assesses the words that she had taught in the classroom.

The findings from the analysis of data from the classroom observational field notes and interviews with teachers and students described in the three sub-questions and in this section about the influence of Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction, and vocabulary assessment practices helped to describe the vocabulary instruction process in Miss Cindy's classroom.

In the next section, findings from the cross-case analysis of Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's vocabulary instruction practices are presented.

### **Cross-Case analysis**

Cross-case analysis of Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's vocabulary instruction practices in fifth-grade classrooms at Rising Star Elementary School indicated similarities and differences in their vocabulary instruction.

### **Similarities Between Case One and Case Two**

The analysis of classroom observational field notes and interviews uncovered that Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's vocabulary instruction converges in terms of their beliefs about the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension and academic achievement. There are, in total, three fifth-grade teachers at Rising Star Elementary School. These three teachers collaboratively have developed their own reading curriculum and also collaborate in selecting vocabulary activities and strategies. For example, in my classroom observations I observed that Miss Adrienne and Miss Cindy both use the same vocabulary games, journal writing activities, vocabulary assessment techniques, and explicit instructions about the strategies, and both used read aloud in their classrooms. In the interview question about vocabulary assessment, Miss Cindy pointed out that, "I have a little anecdotal notes and [Miss Adrienne] is using them too" (TI, 02/14). This indicates the point of similarity between both teachers' vocabulary practices.

One other aspect of similarity between both teachers is their perspective on the influence of Common Core State Standards. In the interview question about the influence of Common Core State Standards on vocabulary instruction both teacher favored the Common Core State Standards. Miss Cindy's response indicates the same perspective:

I think they are pretty [...]. I think we do a nice job of pairing them. I think this year especially I have been more conscious of the Common Core Standards. That has a lot to do with [Adrienne,] because she has brought that with her and we decided to take that on, even our districts are not going to the Common Core Standard based grading. (TI, 02/14)

In my classroom observation, I noticed the use of the same graphic organizers, the same worksheets, and the same activities.

## **Differences Between Case One and Case Two**

The analysis of classroom observational field notes and interviews revealed that Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's vocabulary instruction differs in terms of using instructional strategies and the use of modeling procedures. Miss Adrienne's explicit instructional patterns were clear and more elaborate than the explicit instructional patterns followed by Miss Cindy. I observed differences between two teachers' approaches in using activities. Miss Adrienne asked students about the reasons for choosing a specific character trait, but Miss Cindy only asked students to choose a character trait, not the reason for choosing the specific character trait (CO). Both teachers' classrooms also differed in terms of the students' instructional needs. Another instance of the difference between the two teachers is the way of approaching reading by the two teachers. Miss Adrienne activated the background knowledge of the students, but Miss Cindy directly started the reading without activating background knowledge (CO). I also observed differences between the two teachers in terms of the explanation of the reason for a section (Justin's part, page 187-204) in the novel *Wonder* being written without uppercase letters and without proper punctuation. Miss Adrienne told the student that it is due to the author's intention to present the character's voice, while Miss Cindy told the students that it is the author's mistake that he wrote Justin's part without uppercase letters and without proper punctuation (CO).

## **Summary**

The vocabulary instruction in both Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's classrooms is summarized as follows:

- Teachers taught vocabulary because of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in receptive and expressive literacy development.
- Teachers taught vocabulary through direct explicit instruction and modeling.

- Teachers used a variety of strategies such as using dictionaries, identifying meanings from context, explaining words during read aloud, and engaging students in activities to develop word understandings for themselves.
- Vocabulary instruction was continuously proceeded by vocabulary assessments.
- Vocabulary instruction was influenced by Common Core State Standards.
- Students learn vocabulary because of its importance in reading comprehension.
- Students preferred to learn vocabulary through fun and engaging activities.
- Difficulty in pronouncing the word is a challenge in understanding words.
- Vocabulary instruction in both classrooms differs based on instructional procedures in the classroom and is similar in terms of using same types of activities.

The next section presents the results of the study and discussion.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research study I investigated the central research question, how does vocabulary instruction take place in fifth-grade classroom? Three other sub-questions were developed to answer the central question. The three sub-questions were:

1. How do local teachers take up and define effective vocabulary instruction?
2. What vocabulary instruction strategies do teachers use?
3. What are students' perceptions of vocabulary instruction?

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the research study I conducted. I used activity theory and situated learning theory as the theoretical framework for my study. These theories provide a way to understand vocabulary instruction by focusing on instructional context, vocabulary activities, collaborative peer interaction, interaction of the learner in classroom, purpose of instruction, and instructional strategies. The results of the study can be used as a guideline to devise vocabulary instruction practices in Pakistan.

#### Results

##### **Theme 1: Importance of Vocabulary Knowledge**

I found in my analysis that teachers taught vocabulary because of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in receptive and expressive literacy development. Vocabulary instruction is a central element of both Miss Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's instructional practices and this perspective is shaped by their teaching experience and the importance of vocabulary knowledge in students' academic achievement. Miss Cindy declared vocabulary knowledge to be a "door opener" in students' reading comprehension and their academic achievements. This aligns with the Biemiller (2012) assertion about the significance of vocabulary knowledge, that the

vocabulary development in primary grades is the single best thing that a teacher can do to increase literacy.

I observed that both teachers have an established understanding of the notion of effective vocabulary instruction. Miss Adrienne's classroom vocabulary instruction practices and her views about effective vocabulary instruction such as "repetition, opportunities for students to practice the words, use the words in various ways, and making it engaging" align with the principles of effective vocabulary instruction. The four principles are described as the four "E"s (experience, environment, exposure, and engagement) of effective vocabulary instruction (Manyak, Von Gunten, Autenrieth, Gillis, Mastre-O'Farrell, Irvine-McDermott, & Blachowicz, 2014; Wilcox & Morrison, 2013). Miss Cindy's views, such as providing multiple exposure to words, repetition, and engaging students in vocabulary learning also converge with these four principles.

It was found from the analysis of data that the teachers' perspectives about the importance of vocabulary knowledge influenced their vocabulary instruction practices.

## **Theme 2: Direct Vocabulary Instruction and Modeling**

In my classroom observation and interview analysis, I found that both teachers taught vocabulary through direct explicit instruction and modeling. Marzano and Simms (2013) indicate that direct vocabulary instruction has the power to develop student vocabularies that are required for their success in school. Critics of direct vocabulary instruction argue that there are too many words to teach and it is not possible to teach all the words through direct instruction. It is true that it is impossible to teach all words, but there are certain words that can be directly taught to develop students' deep understanding of the content (Beck et al., 2013; Blachowicz, Ogle, Fisher & Taffe, 2013; Graves, 2014; Neuman & Wright, 2013). The teachers in both classes carefully

selected words and taught those words that students would encounter in the text. The instructional procedure followed by both teachers in class is in line with the procedure suggested by literacy experts. For example, in the Tableau activity for teaching vocabulary through gestures in Miss Adrienne's classroom, she first described what a Tableau is and then gave examples and incorrect examples, followed by modeling of the activity. McKeown and Beck (2011), in their book *Handbook of Reading Interventions*, describe the following steps for direct vocabulary instruction at the kindergarten level: paraphrasing of the context of the story; student-friendly explanation; phonological representation; interactive practice; prompted explanation; inclusion of both positive and negative examples related to the word.

### **Theme 3: Variety**

Nagy (2007) states that the complexity of vocabulary knowledge demands instruction beyond the traditional definition or synonym instruction. I found in both classrooms that teachers used a variety of strategies such as using dictionaries, identifying meanings from context, explaining words during read aloud, and engaging students in activities to develop students' word knowledge. Recent research by literacy experts also found that teaching students word learning strategies such as using word parts to identify the meaning of the words, identifying word meanings from context, and using dictionaries to understand word meaning are more beneficial when they are used in combination, rather than isolation (Baumann, Edwards, Boland, & Font, 2012; Gallagher, & Anderson, 2016). Miss Adrienne also used different activities in combination. For example, in the Word Card making activity, the students had to make vocabulary cards. Their vocabulary cards, instead of just definitions from the dictionary, consisted of the following eight things: the word, image that represents the word, synonym, antonym, parts of speech, the formal definition from dictionary, the definition in the student's

own words, and using the word in a sentence. Miss Cindy also emphasized using context to understand the meaning of the word in addition to looking up words in a dictionary. The teacher in both classrooms used a variety of activities and games to engage students in the vocabulary learning process.

Research suggests that coherence in vocabulary activities should be congruent with the instructional material and must be chosen carefully (Graves, 2016). In Miss Cindy's classroom, I observed an instance of divergence between instructional purpose and use of activities. For example, Miss Cindy used the Fly Spotter game to teach vocabulary words. But the students, instead of learning the words first, were guessing to identify words from their definitions. This activity can be used to review vocabulary knowledge pre- or post-teaching of vocabulary words. This activity can be used before teaching vocabulary words to check students' level of familiarity with words, and can be used after teaching vocabulary words to check students' understanding of learned words.

#### **Theme 4: Continuous Vocabulary Assessment**

Data analysis of my classroom observations and interview revealed that in both classrooms, vocabulary instruction was continuously followed by vocabulary assessments. The purpose of continuous assessment of students' vocabulary knowledge was to gather data and to use that information to devise better instruction. Miss Adrienne and Miss Cindy both used multiple forms of assessment to assess students' vocabulary knowledge. They took anecdotal notes of vocabulary word usage in classroom. Keeping track of student word usage in conversation, writing, and discussion is suggested as an effective informal vocabulary assessment (McKeown & Beck, 2011; Marzano & Simms, 2013). The teachers in both classrooms also assessed vocabulary by asking the meaning of the word. McKeown and Beck



(2011) highlight that assessing word knowledge by asking the meaning of the word is ineffective vocabulary assessment practice because it does not assess the multidimensionality of word knowledge. Miss Cindy's vocabulary assessment practices of creating context to assess vocabulary words knowledge is in line with McKeown and Beck's recommendation. McKeown and Beck (2011) also believe that the best vocabulary assessment is asking students to create or identify a context in which the word can be used.

### **Theme 5: Common Core State Standards Influence**

The impact of the Common Core State Standards on classroom instruction in general, and vocabulary instruction in particular, was evident in the analyzed data from both classroom observational field notes and interviews. I found that vocabulary instruction in both classrooms were driven by Common Core State Standards. The standards put an increased focus on vocabulary acquisition. Coleman, as cited in Graves (2016), also asserts that the emphasis on vocabulary instruction after the Common Core Standards were introduced is one of the six "shifts" the standards were trying to instigate.

### **Theme 6: Student Perspectives**

Analysis of data from student interviews revealed that students learn vocabulary because of its importance in reading comprehension. Interview responses of students from both classrooms indicated their developed understanding of the reasons for learning vocabulary words. Students' developed understanding of the reasons for learning vocabulary words aligns with Miss Adrienne's response about explicit instruction strategy: "the key instructional strategy for me is bringing the students in on the learning and making sure they are aware and it is not some mystery and they are aware what we are doing and why we are doing it for" (TI, 01/18).

Analysis of student interviews data revealed students' preferences in learning vocabulary through games and engaging activities. McKeown and Beck (2011) also highlight that active student engagement with the meanings of the word is necessary for word learning so that students develop a deep understanding of the word. Making vocabulary instruction student friendly can motivate and engage students in the learning process. Lack of student involvement in the vocabulary learning process will lead to boredom (Beck et al., 2013).

Analysis further revealed the challenges faced by students in learning vocabulary words. Difficulty in pronouncing the word was a challenge in understanding the vocabulary words. Analysis also unfolded the importance of teacher additional support for literacy development of students with special needs. Isabel, one of the interviewee in Miss Adrienne's class who is identified as having dyslexia, discussed the importance of extra support provided by the teacher and how it helps in her vocabulary development. I also observed Miss Adrienne providing her extra support in the form of one-on-one reading, and providing additional explanations of the vocabulary words to develop her understanding of the vocabulary words. This highlights the importance of devising vocabulary instruction according to student needs. Graves (2016) also recommends teachers devise vocabulary instruction according to student needs.

#### **Theme 7: Similarities and Difference Between the Two Cases:**

Cross-case analysis of classroom observational field notes and interview responses revealed that vocabulary instruction in both classrooms is similar in terms of using same types of activities because of the collaboration between teachers. For example, in my classroom observations, I observed that Miss Adrienne and Miss Cindy both used the same vocabulary games, journal writing activities, vocabulary assessment techniques, and explicit instruction about the strategies, and both also used the same read-aloud technique in their classrooms. Miss

Adrienne's and Miss Cindy's vocabulary instruction also converges in terms of their beliefs about the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension and academic achievement. Both teachers recognized the importance of vocabulary knowledge in students' literacy development and devised instructions to develop student vocabulary repertoire.

Analysis also revealed that vocabulary instruction in both classrooms differs based on instructional procedures followed by the teacher in both classrooms. Miss Adrienne's explicit instructional pattern was clearer and more elaborate than the explicit instructional patterns followed by Miss Cindy. I observed differences between two teachers' approaches in using activities. For example, Miss Adrienne asked students about the reasons for choosing a specific character trait from the novel, *Wonder*, but Miss Cindy only asked students to choose the character trait, not the reason for choosing the specific character trait (CO). The difference between both teachers' pedagogy in general and vocabulary instruction in particular was related to their philosophies and personality; these differences explain why they approached vocabulary differently.

### **Discussion**

Vocabulary instruction is a complex phenomenon. Based on the findings from both cases, as well as research by literacy experts, I argue for a balanced approach for effective vocabulary instruction. The balanced approach develops multidimensional and deeper understanding of students' word knowledge, teaches independent word learning strategies, and fosters word consciousness. The balanced approach can be achieved by carefully planning vocabulary instruction based on student needs and devising instruction based on the effective vocabulary practices suggested by experts. Graves (2016) also advocates for a balanced vocabulary instruction approach that can develop students' vocabulary knowledge and can contribute to their

literacy development. Vocabulary development is an incremental process and needs to be developed in the school and in out-of-school contexts (Beck et al., 2013; Grave, 2016). Mixan (2013), in his article “In-depth Study of Vocabulary Development,” indicated that “repeated reading, read aloud, literacy related play, incidental learning, sophisticated language, and E-Word Walls can be combined to create a comprehensive structure of vocabulary development” (p. 120). Vocabulary instruction can be made effective by using various strategies and activities. Developing student vocabulary knowledge is a continuous and life-long process and it can be achieved by effective vocabulary instruction.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

Although this study was conducted in the context of United States, there remain important lessons that can be implemented in Pakistan to improve vocabulary instruction in classrooms. According to Graves (2016), vocabulary instruction practices can be applied in a variety of contexts, especially teaching vocabulary to English language learners. Therefore, the results of the study, especially in terms of the teacher’s classroom instructional practices and using activities to teach vocabulary, can be implemented in a Pakistani context, but must be based on the needs of the students.

The current vocabulary instruction practices in the majority of Pakistani schools is teaching only the word meaning, which is totally different from what the literature suggests in terms of effective vocabulary instruction, and the practices of the teachers who participated in my study.

Warsi (2004) indicates that one of the reasons for poor English language teaching in Pakistan is the teachers. The majority of the teachers have little or no knowledge of current research-based instructional practices. This also holds true for vocabulary instruction. Teachers consider vocabulary instruction to be just teaching the meaning of the word. Moreover, teachers

do not have professional development opportunities that can equip them with current, research-based, effective instruction strategies in general and vocabulary instruction in particular. The results of this study can be used in devising training workshops for teachers to develop their capacities and develop their understanding of the vocabulary instruction practices. In addition to training in-service teachers for effective vocabulary instruction practices, the results of the study can also be used for preparing pre-service teachers for effective vocabulary instruction practices. Training teachers about the different components of the vocabulary instructional paradigms, such as instructional purpose, vocabulary instruction strategies, activities, and choosing words for instruction, can develop their understanding of the notion of effective vocabulary instruction practices.

The results of this study could be overwhelming for some teachers in Pakistan because of their deep-rooted attitude of complaining about the lack of resources and ineffective curriculum as some of the main reasons for ineffective vocabulary instruction. These teachers have idealistic views of the United States' educational system. Teachers in Pakistan will likely view these results and believe literacy instruction practices are the results of the developed education system in the U.S. However, despite the problems the teachers face, vocabulary instruction can be made effective by dedicatedly teaching vocabulary and using effective vocabulary instruction practices in the classroom. In my research, I have found that if teachers possess a positive attitude about themselves and work autonomously and whole-heartedly to teach vocabulary, they can execute effective vocabulary instruction practices. The teachers in my research used a variety of strategies in teaching vocabulary, and these strategies were tied to the students' vocabulary needs, purpose of vocabulary instruction, and use of vocabulary activities. Teachers in Pakistan should understand the vocabulary needs of students, and should devise instruction according to

the needs of students and teach vocabulary words effectively. Teachers should collaborate at a school level to plan effective vocabulary instruction. One of the important issues in teaching vocabulary in Pakistan is the lack of differentiated instruction, and the teachers should focus on this aspect. Teachers should devise instruction in multiple ways to meet the needs of students, and should provide additional support to students with special needs. In the current age of technology, with a variety of sources available, a teacher can do much more to develop students' vocabulary, but teachers need to be passionate, dedicated, and generous in teaching vocabulary.

Manyak (2012) recommends using a variety of strategies, activities, and techniques in teaching vocabulary to English language learners at upper elementary level. These strategies are in line with the classroom instructional practices followed by the participant teachers in my research when teaching vocabulary to fifth-graders. Manyak (2012) suggests some modification when teaching vocabulary to English language learners (ELLs), such as translating the complex word to the ELLs' first language to develop their deep understanding. Similarly, Manyak (2012) also emphasizes: using explicit vocabulary instruction strategies, teaching words during read aloud, using games, teaching words that students would encounter in the text, providing multiple exposure to interact with vocabulary words, and reviewing vocabulary time after time. These recommended instructional practices converge with this study's findings about vocabulary instruction practices. Hence, both support the notion that vocabulary instructional practices used to teach native speakers of English can be used to teach vocabulary to English language learners.

In Pakistan's context, teachers should take the following measures for effective vocabulary instruction. Teachers must develop their understanding of the concept of effective vocabulary instruction and change the traditional notion of vocabulary knowledge as only word meanings. Teachers should employ a variety of strategies to develop students' vocabulary

knowledge. Teachers should choose words according to the short-term and long-term needs of students and teach multidimensional knowledge of vocabulary words by using games and engaging activities. Teachers should provide multiple opportunities to interact with the words and review vocabulary time after time to develop student understanding of the vocabulary words. Teachers should also continuously assess vocabulary to get information about student vocabulary knowledge, and use that information to devise better vocabulary instruction practices.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of the study, I recommend the following for improving vocabulary instruction in classrooms:

- A balanced vocabulary instructional approach should be used to develop student vocabulary.
- Vocabulary instruction should be a part of daily classroom instructional practices.
- Vocabulary instruction should be devised according to the needs of students.
- Teachers should choose vocabulary activities/strategies carefully and there should be coherence between instructional purpose and use of activities/strategies.
- Teachers should devise instruction to develop word consciousness in students.
- Additional support should be provided to develop the vocabulary of students with special needs and English language learners.
- Common Core State Standards may be used as a guide, instead of exclusively following them as a goal.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The student sample in this study was small and probably did not capture a complete picture of students' perspectives about vocabulary instruction. A future study could be conducted

by increasing the number of students involved in the study and recording the transition in students' vocabulary throughout a year to capture a more complete picture of their vocabulary development. In addition, I observed the vocabulary instruction in the classrooms for just three months. In the future, a longer qualitative case study could be conducted over the course of an entire year to gain a more complete picture of what is happening in a particular classroom in terms of vocabulary instruction. Similarly, a study could be conducted to investigate the difference between vocabulary instruction across content areas in different classroom.



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## Appendix A

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. As a literacy instructor, what do you think is the importance of vocabulary?

**Probe:** How important is vocabulary in a fifth-grade classroom?

2. How does your view of vocabulary influence your vocabulary instruction?

3. What is your philosophy of vocabulary instruction?

4. How have your views about vocabulary instruction changed over the course of your career?

**Probe:** What is your perspective of vocabulary instruction in relation to common core state standards?

5. What do you think comprises effective vocabulary instruction?

6. What specific teaching strategies do you use for vocabulary instruction?

**Probe:** Do you use the same strategies for teaching both informational text and literature?

7. How you provide instruction to students who do not have sufficient background knowledge?

**Probe:** What measures do you take to teach struggling readers?

8. How do you select vocabulary words for instruction?

**Probe:** Narrative text, informational text?

9. What are your expectations for your students when teaching vocabulary?

10. What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom?

11. How do you motivate students for independent vocabulary learning or word consciousness?

12. Are there any English language learners (ELLs) in your classroom? If yes, do you use different strategies for them?

13. What strategies do you use for assessing vocabulary?

**Probe:** How you monitor students' vocabulary learning and use of words?

14. How do you assess word knowledge acquisition?

15. How do you know that students have fully comprehended the taught words?

**Probe:** How do students show evidence of "understanding" when interacting with the words?

16. What are the difficulties or challenges you face in vocabulary instruction?

17. What do you think are the most important factors that influence students' vocabulary learning?

**Probe:** Any particular factors that are hurdles in students' vocabulary learning?

18. How do you believe you acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds during vocabulary instruction?

## Appendix B

### Student Interview Questions

1. What are vocabulary words?
2. What do you think about the importance of vocabulary in your reading?
3. How does vocabulary knowledge help you in reading across different content areas?  
**Probe:** Have you used the new words in other content areas (math, social studies, and science)?
4. Do you use the vocabulary words you learn in class in your writing and speaking? Why or why not?
5. How many new words do you think you learn each day?
6. What strategies do you use to learn new words? Tell me some.  
**Probe:** What strategies do you use to figure out the meaning of new words?
7. What difficulties you face in reading and understanding a book if you do not know the vocabulary words?
8. What kinds of strategies have you learned to use to learn new words and understand new words?
9. What are the difficulties you face in learning new words?
10. How you keep track of your vocabulary learning?
11. How do your teachers teach new vocabulary words? How do you prefer to learn new vocabulary words in class?
12. How can your teacher help you in learning new words?

Appendix C

**Case No 1: Samples of codes from the theoretical framework across data**

<b>Codes from Theoretical Framework Across Data</b>	<b>Theme Description (In Italics) And Data Examples</b>	<b>Subsequent Analysis</b>
<b>Instructional Context</b>	<p><i>The instructional context affected the vocabulary instruction and choosing the appropriate vocabulary strategies and activities for different content areas.</i></p> <p>No: I use similar but um no the informational text is when I really rely on the gestures when I really rely on pictures aan um and just kind of having them move with the words because (.) is they are hard. It is harder to make a connection to the words so when they get a vocabulary word in reading you know a fiction book they can connect that to something personal. Well if I give them the word you know stomata CAPS (gesture showing extreme difficulty), how did they connect that to something they already know. So really using gestures, pictures and (.) different things to help them start making those connections yeah no no, I do not teach at the same way. Informational is little bit more tense, its tensive. (TI)</p>	<p>Systematically reviewed the data to find the evidence for the effect of instructional context on choosing vocabulary instruction in literature and informational text reading.</p>

<p><b>Purpose of Instruction</b></p>	<p><i>Purpose of vocabulary instruction drives instruction, e.g. teaching words that the student will encounter in the text.</i></p> <p>I really want to empower students I want them to feel success and – one of those ways they feel success is in their word choice and the words they use and speak and how they put their sentences together is a very empowering skill and writing is so important (TI).</p> <p>My philosophy of vocabulary is, that the vocabulary is very much a piece of giving them the opportunities to learn new words and to develop their writing and understanding of figurative language and vocabulary is just a way that contributes to my philosophy of helping kids feel success (TI).</p>	<p>Analyzed data in multiple cycles to find patterns of how the purpose of instruction drives instruction.</p>
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<p><b>Collaborative Peer Interaction</b></p>	<p><i>In almost all vocabulary activities, whether they were pre-teaching or vocabulary review the students worked collaboratively with peers sitting next to them or assigned by the teacher.</i></p> <p><b>Partner work in vocabulary card activity</b> Students chose partners based on the assigned vocabulary cards, whether the card was a picture representing a vocabulary word, vocabulary definition, or vocabulary card. The students had to match all the three components. Students were given instructions to find their word partners and complete the vocabulary card (CO).</p> <p><b>Tableau activity in social studies:</b> The teacher divided the students into four groups and asked them to present something in the form of a tableau that could demonstrate winter. In the same activity, the teacher asked students to critically examine their peers’ demonstration of the vocabulary words to evaluate whether they taught the definition of the words (CO).</p> <p><b>Vocabulary revision activity, Pictionary: literature</b> The teacher described the activity. In the Pictionary activity, the students work in pairs; one student will draw the gesture of the vocabulary word and the other student will have to guess the word associated with the word. The students will have 30 seconds to guess the word, and if they fail to guess the word correctly, the other pair will guess the word (CO).</p> <p><b>Journal writing: Social Studies</b> In Social Studies, the teacher asked students to exchange their written booklets about the Southern states with their peers so that they could develop their understanding of their writing about the Southern states and could also discuss (CO).</p>	<p>Reviewed classroom observation field notes to see how the students collaborate in vocabulary learning activities.</p>
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<p><b>Interaction of the Learner in Classroom (with teacher)</b></p>	<p><i>The teacher gave individualized support and instruction to students having difficulties in reading as well as in vocabulary teaching.</i></p> <p>So, he is the one (English language learner) that I work with definitely one-on-one. He is the one that I definitely use a lot of pictures get up on the internet and show him what this is what word we are talking about (TI).</p> <p>Differentiated instruction for student with writing disability: The teacher asked student to use speech to text software to dictate the summary (CO).</p> <p>In the independent reading activity, the teacher read for one student who is identified as a student with Dyslexia and had a problem with reading (CO).</p>	<p>I reviewed classroom observation field notes and interview transcripts to unfold instances of the interaction of the learners in classroom with the teacher.</p>
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<p><b>Instructional Strategies</b></p>	<p><i>The teacher used a variety of strategies to teach vocabulary words such as direct instruction, modeling, using dictionaries, using context to learn meaning, and using morphologies.</i></p> <p><b>Explicit and Direct instruction and modelling</b> Starting from direct instruction and really teaching the skills of how do we use this word and then giving it to them and letting them make it their own letting them kind of work with what you have given them and let them make like one of the ways is having them write down what you think that word means you have heard the definition you have used it you have seen in the text and now make it your own, aan again like a lot of a lot of opportunities with the vocabulary just not giving it to them and hoping them they just absorbed instead of giving them opportunity (TI).</p> <p>The key instructional strategy for me is bringing the students in on the learning and making sure they are aware and it is not some mystery and they are aware what we are doing and why we are doing it for (TI).</p> <p>When there is more than one definition of the word in the dictionaries choose the definition that is more relevant to the context (TI).</p> <p>Modeling the process of vocabulary learning on your own. Are they working to define words they don't understand teaching them that and modeling that. I mean I reads book and I don't know and I am notorious from mispronouncing words, modeling how I have to look a word up (TI).</p> <p><b>Teaching words During Read Aloud</b> The teacher did not teach the vocabulary words before teaching but developed background knowledge of the students regarding the content and taught the difficult words as they were identified during read aloud. The teacher explained the words, gave definitions and provided examples from daily life (CO).</p> <p><b>Identifying meaning from Context in Fictional text</b> so, fictional text is looking at more in the text, it is kind of using those context clues and doing things with like tone and the how is that word choice that vocabulary</p>	<p>Reviewed both forms of data to identify the instruction strategies used by teacher in teaching vocabulary.</p>
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how is that metaphor make you feel and what is that do to the story and why did the author do that. Aan, just kind of talking about more the writing piece to the vocabulary word choice (TI).

**Pre-teaching vocabulary words.**

The teacher pre-taught vocabulary words that students were supposed to encounter in the text during reading. The teacher wrote the words on the board asked students whether they have heard these words?

The sequence of pre-teaching is as follows: the teacher gave students a worksheet with vocabulary words and their definition. Teacher taught the words, gave examples vs non-examples of the words, and also connected the words to their real life (CO).

**Using dictionaries to teach words**

Used dictionaries to teach words but followed by word definition, explanation of the word and examples (CO).

**Using morphology to identify meaning of the words**

Used morphology to identify meaning of the word. e.g. separatist separator + ist.

Breaking the multisyllabic words into prefix and suffix and base words and figuring out the meaning (CO).

**Using Games, Drama, Theater**

I use a lot of games, I use a lot of, I use a lot of drama, theater, gestures (TI).

<p><b>Vocabulary Activities</b></p>	<p><i>The teacher used different vocabulary activities to develop students' understanding of the vocabulary words or to review vocabulary.</i></p> <p><b>Gesture vocabulary activity.</b> Peer groups came up with a gesture for an assigned vocabulary word (CO).</p> <p>Performing tableaus taught social studies vocabulary (CO).</p> <p><b>Using vocabulary cards:</b> In this activity, each vocabulary word was comprised of three different parts: the vocabulary word, the definition of the word, and a picture (CO).</p> <p><b>Using technology to review vocabulary</b> The teacher used Kahoot, an online program where the teacher can design their own quizzes, to review vocabulary (CO).</p> <p><b>Word choice skill activity</b> The teacher used the word choice skill activity and gave students worksheets about the word choice skills. The students had to close-read the text and identify the connotation of the text (CO).</p> <p><b>“I have, who has” vocabulary game for reviewing vocabulary</b> In this game, some students received a vocabulary card on which a word was written, and the other students had the card on which the definition was written. One student with the vocabulary word read the card and the other students with the definition card read the definition (CO).</p> <p><b>Student journal writing activity</b> Another activity used regularly by the teacher to see students' expressive vocabularies (CO).</p>	<p>Reviewed field notes and interviews to identify the vocabulary activities the teacher used to develop students' vocabulary knowledge, and to review vocabulary.</p>
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Appendix D

**Case No 2: Samples of codes from the theoretical framework across data.**

<b>Codes from Theoretical Framework Across Data</b>	<b>Theme Description (In Italics) And Data Examples</b>	<b>Subsequent Analysis</b>
<b>Instructional Context</b>	<p><i>The instructional context influenced vocabulary instruction and choosing the appropriate vocabulary strategies and activities for different content areas.</i></p> <p>Ann, it depends on, a lot of the time with informational text it might effect what they are learning a little bit more. So, may be holding on a little bit more and repetition with certain words helps them understand the whole idea because our informational text that is the main one is our social study which is the history, so we need to go over that vocabulary a lot for them to really get back in time to really make them understand the history so that helps but certain little different but a lot of the same though.</p>	<p>Systematically reviewed the data to find evidence for the effect of instructional context on choosing vocabulary instruction in literature and informational text reading.</p>
<b>Purpose of Instruction</b>	<p><i>Purpose of instruction drives instruction, such as teaching vocabulary words is important to understand the text.</i></p> <p>Fifth grade! it is pretty important just like other grades but I think the meaning of the words is very important just to understand the literature, now they are not learning to read anymore they are reading to learn (TI). I think that it is an important piece of their comprehension, ann it is an important piece of their whole reading aspect, ann I think that (.) if you skip the vocabulary I think you are really doing the child that disservice because aa what they will hear tomorrow, new words and their meanings and how they can compete with other words and sentences (TI).</p>	<p>Analyzed data in multiple cycles to find patterns of how the purpose of instruction drives instruction.</p>

<p><b>Collaborative Peer Interaction</b></p>	<p><i>In almost all vocabulary activities the students worked collaboratively with peers sitting next to them or grouped by the teacher. The teacher devised rules for including every student in collaborative activity</i></p> <p>Include every student from the group in the activity otherwise your grades will be deducted (CO). A ten-year-old point of view matches with a point of view of ten-year-old while my point of view might be a little bit different. So, peer help is huge as well (TI).</p> <p>Help the person sitting at your table to identify the word from the definition in bingo game (CO).</p> <p>students working in groups to choose and the reason for choosing the specific character trait of the character Auggie in the novel <i>Wonder</i> (CO).</p>	<p>Reviewed classroom observation field notes to see how the students collaborated in vocabulary learning activities.</p>
<p><b>Interaction of the Learner in Classroom (with teacher)</b></p>	<p><i>Teacher gave individualized support and instruction to students having difficulties in reading as well as in vocabulary teaching.</i></p> <p>Sometimes the kids can tell you to go through and you can ah! they didn't know that so surprisingly you don't know you didn't know that you know so you go over (TI).</p> <p>One on one reading with a student who needs extra support in reading (CO).</p>	<p>I reviewed classroom observation field notes and interview transcripts to unfold instances of the interaction of the learner in the classroom with the teacher.</p>

<p><b>Instructional Strategies</b></p>	<p><i>The teacher used a variety of strategies to teach vocabulary words such as direct instruction and modeling, using dictionaries, using context to learn meaning, and using games..</i></p> <p><b>Explicit and Direct Instruction and Modelling</b> When we are reading it is very important to you know stop and say I have a connection (TI)</p> <p>The teacher gave clear and explicit instruction every time about the game and the procedure for doing the activity. Modeling of the activity (CO).</p> <p><b>Teaching words During Read Aloud</b> Yeah, I think so, if they know what it is, they will use it they will gladly use the vocabulary and will know what it means and I think kids are pretty honest if they don't know what it means "I don't know what it means" hhh. You know they just say that. Yeah, I am trying to think of an example (.) oh, even when I read aloud, I read aloud every day after lunch. I will be reading and all of a sudden hand will go up and ask an abrupt and I will say yeah what were you thinking? And kids will tell some fact of something to do with vocabulary. Maybe they will come right out and ask what is that ah, so they have learned to know it is important in their reading and so that's one example I can think of (TI).</p> <p><b>Pre-teaching vocabulary words</b> Providing students' the list of words and the teacher describe the definition of each word (CO).</p> <p><b>Identifying meaning from Context</b> Context is huge so like if there is a pair and they go through those words chances are if you pair them up really well that one of kids will know what it means and help the other ones (TI).</p> <p><b>Using dictionaries to teach words</b> there is traditional looking them up (TI).</p> <p>Yes! I am more inclined to vocabulary, so before, let me think or just actually just writing, or finding it in the dictionary or dictionary.com just finding the meaning I think what I used to do (TI).</p>	<p>Reviewed both forms of data to identify the instruction strategies used by the teacher in teaching vocabulary.</p>
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**Using Games**

Aaa, computer work is you know the kids are so technologically driven these days so anything they can play iPad games anything you can plug in the vocabulary with that's helpful. Spelling city is one that you can, [spellingcity.com](http://spellingcity.com), you can plug in the vocabulary so electronic help is always needed because we have only one teacher with 29 kids. So, if you can get them on a vocabulary game on a computer is helpful (TI).

<p><b>Vocabulary Activities</b></p>	<p><i>The teacher used different vocabulary activities to develop students' understanding of the vocabulary words.</i></p> <p><b>Creating Competition in vocabulary learning</b>          competition! is very helpful. So just knowing how your kids learn ah! They love competition stuff. So how many of these you know? How many of these you can make a connection with? It is helpful too (TI).</p> <p><b>Reviewing vocabulary words</b>          The teacher reviewed the math concept and explained division, dividend, divisor, quotient (CO).</p> <p><b>Repetition with informational text vocabulary</b>          So, may be holding on a little bit more and repetition with certain words helps them understand the whole idea (TI)</p> <p>Repetition of the vocabulary bingo game Multiple times to develop students deep understanding. Multiple exposure increased student retention and helped students to identify words quicker (CO).</p> <p><b>Multiple exposures to words</b>          the key strategies, aan I think just repetition is huge (.) and just different activities going along and not being after one session with those words being done (TI).</p> <p>Ann, sometimes just holding on to the vocabulary and just because they have learned it you know or certain section doesn't mean its gonna stick. That is the key is to provide them a much information as many connection as possible, it will stick and they will remember it for month down the book down the line so (TI).</p> <p>So, they have three different for that they are reading at one time. And So just the more exposure you have to different words the better. Exposure is huge (3). So, exposure and talking it over with their peers and having o yeah because I have seen their point (TI).</p> <p><b>Student self-description activity</b>          Student self-description activity as a way to see students expressive vocabulary (CO).</p>	<p>Reviewed field notes and interviews to identify the vocabulary activities the teacher used to develop students' vocabulary knowledge, and to review vocabulary.</p>
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**Student journal writing activity**

Student journal writing activity. Another activity used regularly by the teacher to see students expressive vocabularies (CO).

**Text to life connection in words**

Using background knowledge to identify the meaning of words and giving examples of words and connecting the words to text and real life (CO).

**Using matching cards, index cards**

Also, just there are matching cards, index cards (TI).

**vocabulary activities fun to develop interest**

Making it as a fun activity is huge and making it something that they buy into but also making vocabulary fun to that they think and putting a little mindset in them (TI).

**Vocabulary Bingo game:**

Complete the word in a line sequence from the definition (CO).

**I have who has vocabulary game for teaching vocabulary**

“I have who has vocabulary game”. In this game, the students get a vocabulary card on which a word is written and the other students have the card on which the definition is written. One student with the vocabulary word reads the card and the other students with the definition card reads the definition (CO).

**Fly Spotter Game**

So, I kind of we did last time you were here when we did the fly spotter game, things like that repetition for sure



