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The Impact of Small Group Direct Instruction on the Vocabulary Development of Fourth Grade Students

Rachel Solum
rachel.solum@go.mnstate.edu

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The Impact of Small Group Direct Vocabulary Instruction on the Vocabulary Development of Fourth
Grade Students

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By
Rachel Solum

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Requirements for the Degree of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....4

CHAPTER 1.INTRODUCTION

 Introduction..... 5

 Brief Literature Review..... 5

 Statement of the Problem..... 7

 Purpose of the Study..... 7

 Research Question..... 7

 Definition of Variables..... 8

 Significance of the Study..... 8

 Research Ethics..... 8

 Permission and IRB Approval..... 8

 Informed Consent..... 8

 Limitations..... 9

 Conclusions..... 9

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

 Introduction..... 10

 Body of the Review..... 11

 Context..... 10

 Home Environment and Socioeconomic Status..... 11

 Level of Vocabulary Focus in Elementary Schools..... 12

 Small Group Instruction..... 13

 Theoretical Framework..... 13

 Research Question..... 14

 Conclusions..... 14

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

 Introduction..... 15

 Research Question..... 15

 Research Design..... 15

 Setting..... 16

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Participants..... 16

 Sampling..... 16

Instrumentation..... 17

 Data Collection..... 17

 Data Analysis..... 17

 Research Question and System Alignment..... 18

Procedures..... 18

Ethical Considerations..... 19

Conclusions..... 20

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

 Data Collection..... 21

 Results..... 21

 Data Analysis..... 23

 Recommendations for Future Research..... 24

 Conclusion..... 24

CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

 Action Plan..... 26

 Plans for Sharing..... 27

REFERENCES..... 28

APPENDIX A..... 31

APPENDIX B..... 32

ABSTRACT

This 2021 study focused on the impact that small group vocabulary instruction had on the vocabulary development of 4th grade students. I wanted to see the effect that small group instruction had on students' vocabulary growth. Students were pulled into a small group every day for four straight weeks. There was four groups of four students involved. During this small group time the teacher pulled vocabulary words from the word wall. The words on the word wall were tier two vocabulary words that had been pulled from various interactive read alouds. The teacher followed Marzano's Six Step Approach to teaching vocabulary when she planned for each small group session. Each small group session lasted 15 minutes each day. Students were assessed before the four weeks of small group instruction as well as after the four weeks are complete. The two assessments were compared in order to see if there was any growth in vocabulary over the four weeks of instruction. The assessment used for this study was the STAR assessment on the computer. The vocabulary domain score was the score that was looked at and taken into consideration. The research took place in a Minnesota school, specifically sixteen 4th graders. The results indicated that small group vocabulary instruction can have a positive impact on fourth grade students' vocabulary growth. Fifty-six percent of the fourth grade students saw growth in their vocabulary score following the four weeks of vocabulary instruction.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The number of children living in poverty in the world today is rapidly climbing. The Minnesota Report Card states that 41.9% of students at one particular northern Minnesota Elementary school qualify for free and reduced lunches (2021). After various Professional learning community meetings with her colleagues the researcher noticed that fourth grade students are beginning to struggle in the area of vocabulary, and it is these same students who are unable to read and score lower on their tests. Children who come from low-income homes lack the appropriate resources needed to grow their vocabularies (Hoff, 2006). Socioeconomic status affects children's day-to-day quality of life, including their access to resources associated with learning, the quality of local services, and their socialization by both familiar adults and larger social networks (Gomez & Beachum, 2019; Neuman & Celano, 2012). Students from low income homes are oftentimes not exposed to books or technology.

A Minnesota elementary recently implemented "WIN" time. WIN time stands for What I Need. During this time, teachers pull small groups and teach guided reading. Guided reading is a time set aside for small group reading. Guided reading is facilitated by the teacher and is completed in a small group setting. Guided reading allows for students to build fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. However, if a group of students needs something else during guided reading time, the teacher is able to bypass guided reading and work with a group on a specific skill if he or she finds it necessary. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used WIN time to conduct her experiment. All the students in the researcher's 4th grade class were split into small groups and met on a rotating basis during the scheduled WIN time. The teacher used this time to explicitly teach vocabulary instruction to her students for four straight weeks. Information was gathered by the teacher throughout this study. The teacher then analyzed the impact small group vocabulary instruction had on all of her 4th grade students.

Brief Literature Review

To understand this topic on a deeper level, the researcher looked into vocabulary development for children from low-income homes. The researcher also looked to what extent vocabulary was taught in

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

schools as well as in small group instruction. Each one of these topics was a theme the researcher came upon as she was researching her research question.

Vocabulary is an important skill that many students who come from low-income homes lack. Many children, coming largely from families of lower socioeconomic or minority status, enter school significantly delayed in a much broader range of prereading skills (Foorman & Torgeson, 2001). It is these children who are not read to as they grow up. They are not socialized with and oftentimes don't have access to resources such as technology. Students who struggle with vocabulary tend to struggle in the area of reading. If children are unable to identify the meaning of words, comprehending a book can be a tough task.

Vocabulary is a skill that teachers often find hard to teach. Vocabulary is often imbedded into curriculums and not explicitly taught as a skill (Wright & Neuman, 2013). Because of this, teachers end up not explicitly teaching it at all. Generally, school programs do not teach enough vocabulary words; the words aren't challenging enough; and not enough focus is given to make sure students understand the meaning of the words (Michigan State University, 2013) However, students who come from homes where vocabulary is not taught depend on school for this instruction. If schools aren't properly teaching vocabulary, children from low-income homes are simply not going to get vocabulary instruction at all.

While small group instruction is sometimes hard to implement, it can be very beneficial to the students it serves. Within a small group, teachers are able to reach each student. They are able to give each student within that small group what he or she needs to grow and be successful. If a student needs more time on a certain topic, a teacher can pull that student along with other students who may need more practice on that topic as well and work with them in a small group setting. Without small group time, students would fall behind and not receive the extra support that they need to be successful. This doesn't always happen when learning in a large group setting. In order to get students caught up to where they need to be, their learning needs to be accelerated (Sweeny & Mason, 2011). In order to help accelerate learning, these students need small group intense instruction in addition to the large group instruction they receive. Small group instruction is what is needed to help grow students' vocabularies.

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The problem that this action research dealt with was that fourth grade students have begun to struggle in the area of vocabulary. While the researcher has always taught vocabulary in her classroom, she has never explicitly taught it in a small group setting. Vocabulary in the past has been introduced whole group and then students work on vocabulary independently at a reading center. The researcher wanted to find out the impact of small group vocabulary instruction and find a way to help her students grow their vocabularies in both a meaningful and engaging way.

For this study, the teacher met with all of her students five days a week. The students the researcher focused on were all of the students in her homeroom classroom. The researcher pulled her students into small groups every day for four weeks. During this time, the researcher and the students worked on activities that explicitly focused on vocabulary. The researcher followed Marzano's Six Step Approach for building academic vocabulary to teach each group. At the end of the four weeks, the researcher analyzed the impact the small group instruction had on all her students' vocabulary growth. The researcher looked for trends and analyzed the data. The researcher wanted to find an efficient way to help grow all her students' vocabularies.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher conducted this study because she wanted to find a way to help her students build their vocabularies. Over the past two years, she and her colleagues noticed that students entering fourth grade have struggled in vocabulary, which in turn led them to become struggling readers. The researcher wanted to see if explicit practice of vocabulary in a small group setting would help grow the vocabulary of these students. If small group vocabulary instruction created a significant increase in these children's vocabularies, the researcher would then carve out this time in her regular schedule and make time for it in the future.

Research Questions

What impact does small group vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students?

Definition of Variables

The independent variable of this study was the change being made to benefit the students. The change that was made was having students meet with the teacher for small group vocabulary instruction during guided reading time. The students in each group remained the same throughout the four weeks of the study. The students received the same interventions throughout the entire four weeks.

The dependent variable was the scores that students scored on their STAR assessment following the four weeks of small group instruction. A variable that was dependent on this score was students being absent throughout the four weeks of instruction. If students were absent during the four weeks of instruction, they would miss that day of instruction and it was not made up.

Significance of the Study

This study is not only important to the researcher but to the students involved as well. The students involved in this study will hopefully be able to grow their vocabularies through small group instruction practice. The participants received small group instruction time every day for four straight weeks. If this study showed significant growth in students' vocabularies, the researcher would begin to implement small group time for vocabulary instruction in her classroom in the future. If this study did not show significant growth, the researcher would recognize that and would look for a different intervention moving forward.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be sought from the school district where the research project will take place (see Appendix A.)

Informed Consent

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix) that the researcher will

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's master degree program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent was sought and that parents understood and agreed, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

Limitations

There were a couple limitations when it came to conducting this study. One limitation in this study was a low sample size. The researcher's class included sixteen fourth graders. While this is not very many, it was what the researcher had in her homeroom classroom to work with.

Another limitation that came with this study was the lack of time available to conduct the study. Ideally, the researcher would have liked to continue her regular schedule of meeting with each small group two to three times a week. She also would have liked to run the study longer than four weeks. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher wanted to meet with their students enough times to be able to have data and observations to analyze. Therefore, she had to meet with them every day for four weeks.

Conclusions

Students from low-income homes lack the proper skills and resources needed to grow their vocabularies. This, in turn, leads them to be struggling readers. While low-income plays a role in vocabulary development, the level of a school's vocabulary instruction does as well. School districts often don't have a set plan or curriculum to teach vocabulary. Because of this, teachers either teach it their own way or they don't teach it at all. School is often the only place where low-income students have the ability to grow their vocabularies. If schools aren't teaching vocabulary at all, these low-income students fall further behind. The goal of this study was to see the impact small group vocabulary instruction would have fourth grade students. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the literature that has been

found regarding elementary students and their vocabulary development. The researcher will also discuss vocabulary instruction in schools as well as small group instruction.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The number of students in today's world who are living in poverty is rapidly climbing. According to the 2020 Minnesota Report Card, 41.9% of students enrolled at Roosevelt Elementary in Detroit Lakes, MN, qualify for free and reduced lunches. Oftentimes these children that receive free and reduced lunch, along with many others, are the children living in poverty. The researcher of this study observed, along with some of her fellow teachers, that a steady number of students from these backgrounds struggle to read and develop their vocabulary. These students are falling behind and a gap is forming from their affluent peers when it comes to reading vocabulary.

Roosevelt Elementary recently implemented "WIN" time. "WIN" stands for "What I need." This time is set aside for strictly small group instruction. Oftentimes this small-group time consists of guided reading and literature circles. However, the researcher was curious to see what would happen if she used this time to explicitly teach vocabulary to those students living in poverty. She and her colleagues have noticed that these students have struggled to develop a strong vocabulary in a small group setting. The researcher will pull students aside into a small group setting every day for four straight weeks and explicitly teach vocabulary.

While researching this topic, the researcher found three common themes surrounding this topic. These three themes were home environment/socioeconomic status, the extent of which vocabulary is taught in schools, and small group instruction. The researcher researched deep into these three topics to gain a deeper sense of knowledge on this topic.

Body of the Review

Context

Students' vocabularies play important roles in their lives and future possibilities (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Hoff, 2006). It is imperative that children build a strong vocabulary as they grow, learn, and plan for their future. Developing a strong vocabulary can improve reading comprehension and overall reading ability. However, a practical problem often stands in the way. This practical problem is that there are profound differences in vocabulary knowledge among learners from different abilities of socioeconomic groups (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Hoff, 2006). By the end of grade two, children in the highest quartile know twice as many words as the children in the lowest quartile (Biemiller, 2012). Children who struggle with reading are more likely to drop out of high school, to end up in the criminal justice system, and to live in poverty (Hanford, 2018). Students' vocabulary development and how much their vocabulary grows is dependent on many factors in their personal lives. Their everyday needs must be met. They must be getting enough sleep and have a comfortable place to sleep. When students' everyday needs are not met, learning does not usually happen (Ark, 2018).

Home Environment and Socioeconomic Status

At every point in development, children differ in the size of the vocabularies they command, the complexity of the structures they produce, and the skill with which they communicate (Hoff, 2006). A student's home environment and socioeconomic status has a profound effect on vocabulary development. Whether measured with a single indicator or an aggregate variable, the effects of socioeconomic status on children's language environments and language development are robust and substantial (Hoff, 2006). Children from low socioeconomic homes don't have access to many resources that children in affluent homes take for granted. Students living in poverty don't have access to technology. They often don't have someone at home to socialize with as the adults in their homes are always working.

Socioeconomic status may affect children's day-to-day quality of life, including their access to resources associated with learning, the quality of local services, and their socialization by both familiar

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

adults and larger social networks (Gomez & Beachum, 2019; Neuman & Celano 2012). Students from a low-income home do not have access to resources that would give them the opportunities to help grow their vocabularies. These resources are limited or, at times, non-existent. A student who comes from a middle-class family that has access to all of these resources is more likely to have a better developed vocabulary. Low-income children may start school with 10,000 fewer words than other students (Wright, 2013). Students from low-income homes are often struggling with vocabulary development before they even start kindergarten. A majority of studies show that predictors such as a family's socioeconomic status and the literacy activities parents engaged in with their children may be related to literacy development (Dong et al., 2018). There is great importance in this claim stating that if students come from a low socioeconomic home that places little value on reading and writing, these students are already one step behind. Many students that come from low-income homes also come from a very limited print-rich environment. They have not grown up around books or been exposed to various words. Therefore, they are a step behind. Educators play an important role in helping to bridge this gap.

Level of Vocabulary Focus in Elementary Schools

The level of focus on vocabulary in elementary schools is extremely low. Schools need to teach more vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction is one of those educational arenas in which research and best practice are elusive (Allen, 2015). Teachers have a hard time identifying vocabulary and figuring out the correct way to teach it. Some teachers teach vocabulary using worksheets and tests. Some teachers teach vocabulary using flashcards. Some teachers don't teach vocabulary at all. Studies that have examined children's vocabularies over several years of schooling have reported little evidence of vocabulary growth (Wright & Neuman, 2013). Wright and Neuman (2013) looked deeper into the vocabulary instruction being presented in a kindergarten classroom. They discovered that the instruction that was being given through the curriculum did not reflect the current research base for vocabulary development and may not be systematic enough to influence children's vocabularies. Teachers are following the curriculum like they are instructed to do; however, many studies and journals have come up with a similar theme: it's not enough. Students who are coming from low socioeconomic households are desperate for vocabulary

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

instruction. Vocabulary levels diverge greatly during the primary years, and virtually nothing effective is done about this in schools (Biemiller, 2012). School is the only place students are going to receive this instruction and be given a chance to develop their vocabulary. It is important that educators both note and realize that school is the only place some students are able to grow their vocabularies.

One potential culprit for such limited attention to vocabulary could be that commonly used reading curricula may not offer sufficient emphasis on vocabulary (Wright & Neuman, 2013). Teachers are leaving phonics out of their classrooms (Handford, 2018). Schools too often leave out this key component of teaching reading and vocabulary. Phonics is a way of teaching children how to read and write. Phonics helps children hear, identify and use different sounds that distinguish one word from another in the English language (National Literacy Trust, 2021). Quite often, phonics is left out because teachers are not trained to teach it (Handford, 2018). Many old curriculums that are still used in many schools across the country do not contain phonics instruction. This means that the teachers need to get it elsewhere, come up with it themselves, or end up not teaching phonics at all. While newly published curriculums contain phonics, not every school is lucky or wealthy enough to buy the new and most updated curriculums.

Small Group Instruction

Small group instruction is important and vital to elementary classrooms. Small group instruction allows teachers to dial in on a certain group of students and give each student what he or she needs. Findings from evidence-based research show dramatic reductions in the incidences of reading failure when explicit instruction in these components is provided by the classroom teacher (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). Effective small group reading instruction is how teachers can meet the literacy needs of all children (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). Small groups allow teachers to break apart their class based upon what each student needs.

Theoretical Framework

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

One theory that is centered around vocabulary instruction is the schema theory by Jean Piaget. Students with limited schemas, or prior knowledge, have more difficulty learning new words (Willingham & Price, 2019). Students coming from low-socioeconomic homes have limited schemas because of the resources that are limited to them. They don't have resources such as books, technology, or parent involvement. When learning new words, the lack of schema, often due to limited reading, proves a common problem for these types of students (Willingham & Price, 2019). Students' background knowledge, or schema, tremendously helps them when learning to decode words and build their vocabularies.

In the present study, the researcher used previous STAR scores of their students to help measure student growth. STAR is a Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading. This test focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. The researcher had students take a STAR test during the first week of school in order to get a baseline score. The researcher looked at the students' domain scores of language. The domain score of language covers both vocabulary acquisition and use. Students took the STAR assessment again after four weeks of intense small group vocabulary instruction. The researcher then looked at the domain score of language to determine if students showed growth.

Research Question

What impact does small group vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students?

Conclusion

One point that was made throughout many scholarly journals was that there needs to be more studies conducted regarding children living in poverty and their vocabulary. While most say poverty plays a big role in the development and educational experience of a child, and it often does, it is hard to pinpoint the mechanisms responsible for the resulting negative consequences (Lervag et al., 2019). More studies need to be developed further to help pinpoint these resulting consequences.

There is no doubt that poverty has an effect on students' vocabularies and reading achievement. Students from low socio-economic homes start kindergarten steps behind their affluent peers. They do not have the resources available to help them be successful when it comes to developing a strong vocabulary.

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Schools are oftentimes the only place where students have a chance at developing and growing their vocabularies. However, quite often schools are not teaching vocabulary enough or at all. Small group instruction is one way to help give students what they need on a more individualized basis. The researcher is curious as if small group vocabulary instruction will have an impact on fourth grade students in her classroom. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss her methodology and the method she plans to use to conduct her action-research study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

The number of students living in poverty is rapidly climbing. Oftentimes it is these students living in poverty who struggle in the area of reading and more importantly vocabulary. These students don't have access to resources such as books and technology that would help them grow in these areas. The researcher and her colleagues noticed that their students coming from poverty-stricken homes were the students who struggle to read and grow their vocabulary. Schools alone are often not doing teaching vocabulary like they should. The researcher wanted to see if explicit vocabulary small group instruction with her students would help students grow their vocabularies. It is important that students get to where they need to be when it comes to vocabulary growth. Many times, students with low vocabularies struggle to read. Reading is an essential part of life.

Research Question

What impact does small group vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students?

Research Design

This study was conducted using both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The design method used was a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design. The researcher observed her students and took detailed notes as the instruction was happening. Action research helps to give researchers a systematic and rigorous way to view this process of observation as a qualitative data collection technique (Mills,

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

2018). While the researcher also had students take a standardized test, the researcher knew that to get a true accurate picture, observations needed to be recorded. Some students may not be great test takers. This is where observations are important. The students took a STAR test assessment prior to the four weeks of instruction as well as after. The researcher looked at the vocabulary domain score of each student. This score gave a more accurate view of the students' progress as the other scores were based on percentiles that compared these students to other children.

Setting

This study took place in a fourth grade classroom. It was completed at an elementary in north central Minnesota. The elementary school housed kindergarten through fifth grade. The town's population was about 9,200 people. The town had a great deal of both wealth and poverty. The wealth often masks the poverty. This town was located near the lakes area which continues to bring in a lot of tourists in the summertime. The town had a strong sense of community with many people willing to help others who needed it.

The district in which this elementary is located has around 3,000 students enrolled. This elementary school is one of two in the district. The elementary school that this study took place at is the bigger elementary of the two and houses about 550 students. At the elementary school where this study took place, 41.9% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 64.6% of the students who attend this elementary were White, 28.5% are American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.5% are Black or African American, and 2.2% are Hispanic or Latino, 1.8% are two or more races while 0.5% are Asian. 23.2% of the students at this elementary receive special education services.

Participants

The participants in this study were fourth grade students in the researcher's homeroom class. There were 16 total students that participated in the study. All of the students were 9-10 years old. Fifty-six percent of the fourth grade students were girls and forty four percent were boys. Sixty-three percent of the participants were white, thirty-two percent American Indian, and five percent African American.

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

During the 2019-2020 school year, thirty-eight percent received free and reduced lunch. All students are currently receiving free lunch due to the COVID-19 pandemic. None of these students are receiving special education or title services.

Sampling

Students were selected if they were in the researcher's homeroom classroom during guided reading time. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants based off of who is conveniently available (Queiros et al., 2017). Students that were placed in the researcher's homeroom classroom were included in the action research.

Instrumentation

To collect data throughout the four weeks, the researcher used an observation sheet that she created. She created this observation sheet in order to have a place to note important facts. This took her minimal time to complete as she facilitated the small group as well as noted any observations on the side. The tool did not include any questions but it included space to jot down notes for each student group. The researcher took about twenty minutes after school each day to look over the observations recorded. She then placed the sheet into a binder where she stored all the observations sheets. Another instrument used in this study was the STAR. STAR stands for Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading. Students took a STAR test prior to the four weeks of instruction. They took another STAR test following the four weeks of instruction. The researcher looked into the vocabulary domain score when analyzing the results. The vocabulary domain score gave the researcher a more detailed look into the students' vocabulary scores rather than their reading score in general.

Data Collection

The researcher collected the data both by observation and a standardized STAR test. All students took a STAR test prior to the small group instruction. The researcher observed as instruction was being given throughout the four weeks. She took notes on an observation sheet and then filed that sheet into a binder. She referred to past sheets to look for trends and patterns throughout the study. At the end of the

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

four weeks, the students took the STAR test again. The researcher looked at the vocabulary domain score in both the STAR test at the beginning and the end.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed at the end of each day. At the end of each day the researcher looked at the observations from that day and added that observation sheet to her binder. This was also a time when the researcher looked for any trends with certain students. The students took a STAR test prior to the four weeks of instruction as well as at the end of the four weeks. The researcher looked into the vocabulary domain score to measure vocabulary growth. This score gave a more accurate result of vocabulary growth compared to the overall percentile score the test gave.

Research Question and System Alignment

The table below indicates the research question as well as both independent and dependent variables involved in this experiment. It also includes other important notes regarding the study such as the design and instruments used throughout the study.

Table 3.1.

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
RQ1: What impact does small group vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students?	IV: The instruction given to each student. DV: The students' STAR Scores following four weeks of instruction.	Mixed-Methods Explanatory Sequential Design	Observation and STAR Assessment	All students were given the same instruction throughout the four weeks. They were all assessed by a STAR test as well as by observations noted by the researcher.	Formative (observations) and Summative (STAR test) Assessments	4 th grade students. Sample size was 16 students.

Procedures

The procedure for this study lasted for four weeks total. To begin the study, the researcher sent home a letter of informed consent to all of her students' parents and guardians. Once the informed consent letters were returned, the researcher split her students into small groups. The small groups were not split based on ability but split randomly. Each small group consisted of four to five students. Once they were placed in small groups the students took a STAR assessment test. The students took the STAR test on the day before the first day of small group instruction began. The researcher looked at the vocabulary domain score of each student's STAR test and took note of their results.

The researcher pulled these small groups every day for four weeks straight. The small group instruction lasted for about 13-15 minutes each day. During this small group time the researcher used vocabulary words that had already been introduced in the classroom. The researcher based her instruction off of Robert Marzano's Six Step Process for building an academic vocabulary (Marzano, 2005). The first step has the teacher introduce the word. The teacher may use it in a sentence or try to tap into students' prior knowledge. The second step has the students explain the word or restate it in their own words. They may do so verbally or in writing. The third step involves the students creating a non-linguistic symbol or picture of the word. The researcher had students use their individual marker boards to illustrate. The fourth step has students engage in activities to deepen their knowledge of the word. The researcher often had them come up with a synonym or antonym for the word. The fifth step involved the students discussing the word out loud. The students would then share the synonym and antonym that they came up with with the group. Step six had students play a game to review the new vocabulary words. The researcher incorporated review games of the vocabulary words in a whole group setting as the small group time did not allow for it to happen during small group. During each small group session, the researcher had an observation sheet on hand to record any noticeable gains or setbacks. At the end of each school day, the researcher analyzed her observations from that day. She also looked at the observations she recorded from previous days and looked for any trends or patterns.

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

On the last day of the fourth week, the researcher had all students take the STAR test again. The researcher looked into each student's vocabulary domain score to see if it went down, remained the same, or increased. While the STAR score weighed heavier than the observations, the researcher also took the observations she noted throughout into consideration when analyzing the results.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was received from all participants of this study before the study was conducted. Students who did not receive permission were not placed in the study. Participants, parents, and guardians were made aware that at any time, they were able to pull their child from the study if they did not feel comfortable. They were told that confidentiality was ensured and that their children's names were not to be used. Pseudonyms were to be used in place of students' actual names. The consent form was read to students out loud prior to the beginning of the study.

Conclusions

Poverty is on the rise and it is affecting students in many forms with vocabulary growth being one of them. School is the only place where most of these students have a chance to grow their vocabularies. It is vital that educators find a tool that works to help these students who are struggling to read and grow their vocabularies. This chapter discussed the action research process of implementing small group vocabulary instruction for all students, including children that are living in poverty. The next chapter will examine the results of the action research.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to see if small group direct vocabulary instruction would help grow 4th grade students' vocabulary skills. The researcher has incorporated vocabulary in her classroom daily using a word wall. The words on this word wall come from interactive read aloud books that are read out loud to students daily. The problem that prompted the researcher to conduct this study was the lack of vocabulary growth in her 4th grade students. The researcher was implementing a word wall as well as a word work center during her daily WIN time. WIN stands for What I Need and was when the researcher originally pulled guided reading groups. When students weren't with the researcher at the guided reading table, they were at various reading centers working independently. The researcher decided to run the word work center and explicitly teach vocabulary in a small group setting for four weeks.

Data Collection

Students took a STAR Assessment both before and after the four weeks of small group instruction. The researcher used the vocabulary domain score within the STAR Assessment to see if any vocabulary growth took place. The vocabulary domain score is an estimate of the students' mastery of vocabulary at the fourth-grade level. For example, if a student had a vocabulary domain score of 60, it means that they would answer approximately 60% of the fourth-grade items at that level. The researcher also used an observation sheet to record any significant things that she observed while teaching the small group. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher looked at both the STAR vocabulary domain score as well as her observations to determine if small group vocabulary instruction had an impact on her students.

Results

RQ 1: What impact does small group direct vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students?

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Figure 4.1 illustrates each student's beginning and ending vocabulary domain score. These scores were pulled directly from STAR. The beginning score is shown in black. This was the score each student received prior to the four weeks of small group vocabulary instruction. The grey indicates each student's score after the four weeks of small group instruction concluded. Nine out of the sixteen students saw their vocabulary domain score increase. Seven out of the sixteen students had their vocabulary domain score either stay the same or decrease.

Of the nine students that saw their vocabulary score improve, three students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Of the seven students that saw their vocabulary score stay the same or decrease, three students qualified for free and reduced lunch.

Figure 4.1

Fourth Grade STAR Vocabulary Domain Scores

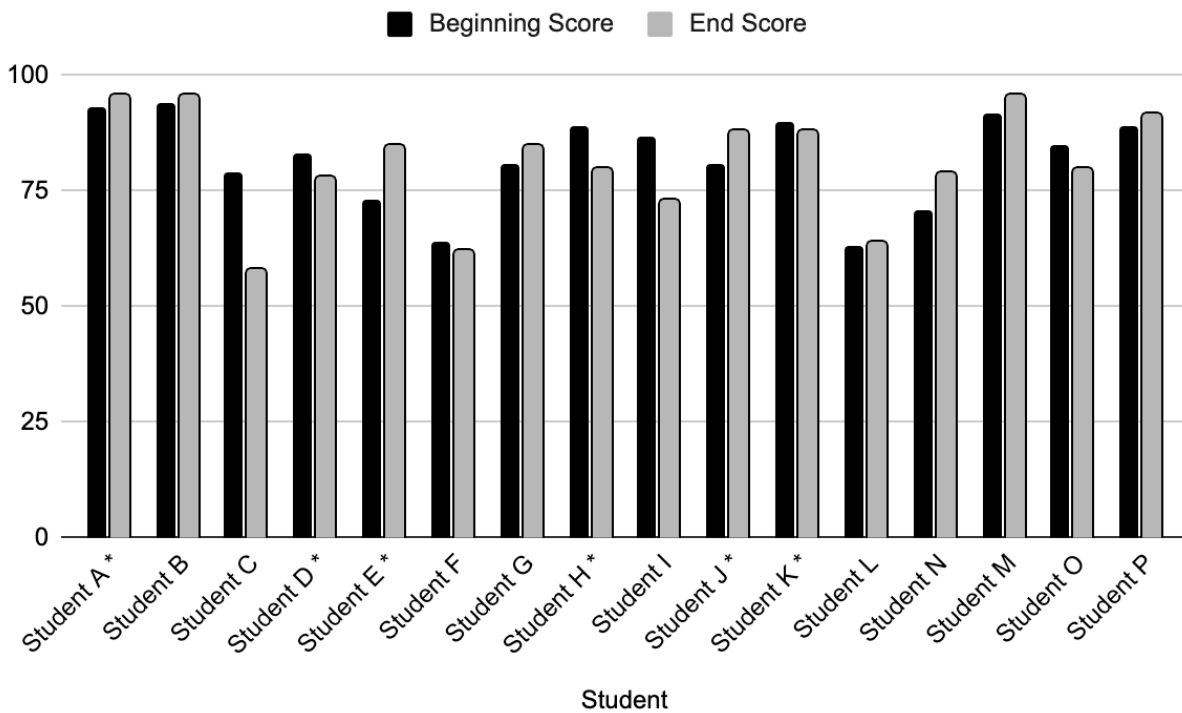


Table 4.1 indicates various notes the researcher took as the study took place. During the first week of small group instruction, many of the students were struggling to read the word on the card. Many were able to figure out what the word meant and describe it once it was read to them. During week two,

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

student 5 was able to use a word in a sentence but was unable to explain what it meant out loud. By week three, the researcher saw a huge improvement in the way the students were talking about the vocabulary words.. By the last week of small group instruction, the researcher noted that students were noticing the words from small group instruction throughout the day as they completed various other tasks.

Table 4.2

Researcher Observations

Week:	Teacher observations:
Week One	“Student 2 could put the word into a sentence once the word was read to her.” “Some students are unable to read the words but know what they mean if they are told.”
Week Two	“Student 5 could put the word into a sentence but could not say the definition.” “Students are struggling to verbally describe what their word means. They tell me they know what it means but it is ‘hard to explain.’”
Week Three	“Each group has drastically improved in the process of describing their words out loud.”
Week Four	“Students are noticing the words we discuss at our small group table during other times throughout the day.”

Data Analysis

The overall data suggested that the answer to the research question of what impact does small group vocabulary instruction have on fourth grade students, is tough to determine. While most of the students’ scores went up, seven of them did not. The results were not drastic and did not exactly coincide with the researcher’s literature review findings. Beck, McKeown, and Hoff (2007) have stated that the problem is that there are profound differences in vocabulary knowledge among learners from different abilities of socioeconomic groups. The findings in this action research don’t exactly showcase that. Of the six students that received free and reduced lunch during the 2019-2020 school year, three of their scores improved while three scores did not improve. The three students’ scores that did not improve went down by only nine or less. This showcases that there isn’t always much difference when looking at students who come from free and reduced households and those that do not. It is often thought to be this way however, while most say poverty plays a big role in the development and educational experience of a

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

child, and it often does, it is hard to pinpoint the mechanisms responsible for the resulting negative consequences (Lervag et al., 2019). This action research study proves true with what Lervag (2019) stated. There needs to be more studies conducted involving poverty and vocabulary development. There are often many factors besides poverty that may be stunting a student's vocabulary growth.

While the researcher expected more than nine students' results to improve, she was surprised by her student's vocabulary domain scores to begin with. Many of the fourth-grade students entered fourth grade with a high vocabulary domain score to begin with. The researcher knew from her research that vocabulary can be hard to teach and is oftentimes not explicitly taught in schools. However, following Marzano's six step approach to teaching vocabulary made it very easy and straight forward for the fourth grade students.

The researcher utilized an observation sheet as one of her instruments to record any important findings she observed. A problem the researcher encountered with this tool was the inability to write statements about individual students. This tool was utilized more as an observation sheet for vague or generalized observations. The researcher was busy facilitating the group and was unable to record notes on each individual student.

Recommendations for Future Research

While these my results are important, I understand that the results from this study are only relative to my setting. This is a limitation of the generalizability of the study. Fifty-six percent of my students' vocabulary domain scores improved in a four week time period. Moving forward, I hope to incorporate small group vocabulary instruction in my classroom for longer than a four week period. I saw great results in just four weeks and I am curious to see if greater results would come from implementing small group vocabulary instruction for a longer period of time.

If I could do this study over again, I would see if my colleagues would be interested in order for the sample size to be enlarged. The sample size for this study was small and that made it very difficult to look for trends in the data.

Conclusion

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Reading is an essential part of life. Vocabulary plays a vital role in a child's ability to read effectively. While it is often stated that students from low-income homes have a smaller vocabulary than their peers, this is not always the case. Students that received free and reduced lunch scored similarly if not better than their peers that do not take free and reduced lunch on a STAR reading assessment. This action research showcased the impact that small group vocabulary instruction can have on the growth of students' vocabularies. Vocabulary instruction is one of those educational arenas in which research and best practice are elusive (Allen, 2015). Oftentimes teachers are not taught the correct way to teach vocabulary. However, this action research study showcased that if vocabulary is taught explicitly and correctly, it can help grow students' vocabularies.

Chapter 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of my study was to see if small group vocabulary instruction would have an impact on the vocabulary growth of fourth-grade students. In my fourth-grade classroom, I have always had a word work center for students to work on building their vocabulary. This center was taught up front by the teacher but then was a student led center during our guided reading rotation time. Once I noticed my 4th grade student's vocabulary domain score dropping in our STAR assessment reports, I wanted to see if it would make a difference if I led the vocabulary center for four weeks. Instead of pulling guided reading groups, I pulled students and ran the word work center and explicitly taught vocabulary for four weeks. The results weren't as drastic as I had hoped they would be, however, there were many positive strategies that came from this study that I will use in my classroom in the future.

Action Plan

This action research study will directly impact how I operate as an educator moving forward. This study allowed my students to discuss vocabulary words and talk about the vocabulary words more than they ever had before. While I am not sure I can give up my guided reading time entirely, I think I will be able to modify the schedule so that I am able to run one or two vocabulary groups each week. Currently, I meet with my guided reading groups twice a week. What I do with my teacher time on Fridays varies. If I can find a way to incorporate a vocabulary center led by me on Fridays, I think my students would benefit. I want to implement this after Christmas break. If meeting with each group once a week on Fridays is not enough, I plan to incorporate vocabulary instruction in a whole group setting. I will continue to use Marzano's six step approach, but instead of teaching it in a small group I will try it whole group.

One thing I learned throughout this study is that vocabulary words need to be talked about within my classroom going forward. Prior to this study I had a word wall and a reading center that contained these words. However, by incorporating these words into our small group time that is facilitated by me,

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

students were able to have great conversations around words. They were able to think about the word, draw the word, and discuss the word with their peers. There were times throughout this study when I introduced a word and expected most if not all my students to know it and none of them knew what it meant. I was a bit surprised by this. However, because I was facilitating this center, I was able to help students figure out what the word meant and use it in the correct way. Moving forward, I will partner with my paraprofessional, and have he or she run the vocabulary center. This would allow me to still conduct guided reading at the same time. Students would benefit from having more than one teacher-led center.

Plan for Sharing

I have gained very valuable information throughout this study and moving forward my first step will be to share the information with my co-workers. My 4th grade team and I engage in a PLC each week. One major point I will share with them is how much my students noticed the vocabulary words as we were reading other books or discussing different topics. Until I sat with them and explicitly taught them how to talk about vocabulary, they never did. Because I made it a point to discuss vocabulary in small group time, my students were eager to find and notice the vocabulary words elsewhere. As a 4th grade team, we are always looking for ways to help grow our students' vocabularies.

My second step moving forward is letting my students' parents know how they can help grow their students' vocabularies. I would introduce them to Marzano's method as well as mention to them the importance of pointing out words their student may not know and helping their child figure them out. While many read at home with their students every night, I am not sure they are stopping to discuss unknown vocabulary words. I am going to find a document that illustrates Marzano's method and talk through it to parents and conferences. If I cannot find a document I like, will make one on my own. Allowing parents to learn how to help their child learn and discuss vocabulary words as they read with their children at home will only benefit their students in the long run.

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Appendix A

September, 13th 2021

510 11th Ave SE
Detroit Lakes, MN 56501

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a study to look at the effects of vocabulary instruction in a small group setting.

Your child was selected to participate because he or she is in my regular education classroom. If you decide to participate, please understand that your child will be asked to do the following, and these are typical classroom activities that involve no risk to your child.

1. Your child will be participating in small group vocabulary activities using words they have learned throughout the school year.
2. Your child will take a STAR reading assessment before and after the small group practice is given.

Although Principal Trish Mariotti has granted me permission to conduct this study, since this information is being used to complete my master's degree at Minnesota State University Moorhead, I need to have parental consent to use this information in my final paper that I am required to do as part of my degree. If I didn't need this information to complete my master's degree, I would be conducting this same type of research in my normal everyday lessons and I would not need signatures. If you sign this form, you are giving me consent to use the information I gather. All information that is used will be confidential, no names will be used. Please also note that your child can choose not to participate and any time without any consequences.

Please feel free to ask any questions you have regarding this study. You may contact me here at school at 218-847-1106 or rsolum@detlakes.k12.mn.us. You may also contact my adviser, Tiffany Bockelmann via email at tiffany.bockelmann@mnstate.edu

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep. You are making the decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B

Date: _____

Group	Vocabulary Words Introduced	Notes

