HOW STUDENTS USE ACADEMIC VOCABULARY COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES IN READING HISTORY

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction ……6

Purpose of the Study……6

Goals of the Study……7

Benefits of the Research……9

Vocabulary Development and ELLs……11

Research questions……12

Conclusion……12

Chapter 2: Literature Review ……14

Overview ……14

Academic English ……15

Vocabulary Comprehension Skills ……17

Student Strategies……17

Benefits of Instruction in Vocabulary Strategies……20

Gap in Research……22

Conclusion……24

Chapter 3: Methodology ……25

Research Paradigm: Qualitative Study ……25

Data Collection……26

Participants……26

Location.....27

Data Collection: Interviews.....28

Procedure.....29

Pilot Study.....30

Materials.....31

Data Analysis.....32

Verification of Data.....32

Ethics.....32

Conclusion.....32

Chapter 4: Results 34

Introduction.....34

Interviews.....34

Preferred Vocabulary Strategies.....35

Research-Based Strategies..... 36

Student-Defined Strategies.....38

Effective Vocabulary Strategies.....42

Discussion.....45

Conclusion.....47

Chapter 5: Conclusions 49

Summary of Findings.....49

Results.....49

Implications.....51

Limitations.....54

Future Studies.....55

Conclusion.....56

Appendix.....58

Appendix A: Common Research-Based Vocabulary Strategies.....51

Appendix B: Interview Questions and History Text 60

Appendix C: Parent Permission Letter.....64

Appendix D: Interview of Isha.....67

References 73

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: *Results of Interviews: Research-Based Preferred Strategies*.....*36*

Table 4.2: *Results of Interviews: Student-Defined Strategies*.....*39*

Table 4.3: *Post-Reading Comprehension of the History Text*.....*44*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

I became interested in vocabulary acquisition at the secondary level after seeing how important vocabulary comprehension strategies were for my students in my French courses. For the students in these courses, French was not their first language. I could see how important understanding the meaning of new words was for students learning a second language and I began to realize how necessary this was for students enrolled in an English as a second language (ESL) program too.

I knew that as students got older, the texts they were required to read in school got more challenging as they were required to read texts with new vocabulary and more complicated writing. In informal observations of students learning English as a second language, I noticed that some of the problems hindering comprehension were a result of not understanding the vocabulary in the texts. This may not have been the only reason students struggled, but it was a factor hindering their overall comprehension of a text. The vocabulary could be challenging for native speakers of English, too, but was even more problematic for English language learners (ELLs). Especially at the secondary level, texts were increasingly more challenging and students needed a greater vocabulary base to comprehend the readings (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). Knowing the meanings of new words as well as how they fit into the meaning of the text was challenging for ELLs.

The idea for this research was based on my interest in which strategies ELLs already use to comprehend what words mean in the context in which they occur.

The literacy skills of English language learners were lower than their same-aged peers since their second language was still developing. Knowing which strategies ELLs use to understand new vocabulary could help teachers know which methods do not need to be taught and which strategies their students prefer. This also means that teachers could encourage struggling students to use methods preferred by their peers, or, if it was clear to the teacher that the student does not have effective vocabulary comprehension strategies, a teacher would know that these strategies needed to be explicitly taught. I therefore decided that I wanted to know which strategies secondary ELLs were already using when reading academic English.

Goals of the Study

Through my experiences of teaching foreign languages and working with English language learners, I have realized that vocabulary comprehension is a significant factor for reading comprehension. Many English language learners have fallen behind their native-English speaking peers in school not because of a lack of academic ability, but often due to an inability to comprehend unknown vocabulary and to understand how it relates to the text overall. As a language teacher of both French and English, I have found it important to focus on teaching students strategies they can use to help themselves understand new vocabulary. As a teacher though, I wanted to know which strategies my students already used and which may have been new for them. This would help me to focus my lessons to teach students new strategies or ways to improve the strategies they already use.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the vocabulary comprehension strategies ELLs used when reading academic texts in English. I wanted to know which strategies students already used when trying to comprehend what they read. Both background knowledge of the material they were reading as well as being able to understand the words being read are important. I also wanted to evaluate the strategies the students used to know if they were using these strategies effectively and whether or not the students were able to correctly identify the appropriate meaning of the unknown word.

The study included secondary level ELLs in a suburban school district and used a grade-level appropriate history text in the data collection. A history text was selected since history was a course that all students needed to successfully complete in order to graduate from high school. A history text typically used for the grade level of participants was therefore selected for use in the study. The data collection included asking students open-ended questions in an interview about the ways they processed new words and how they deciphered the meaning of unknown words when reading academic texts.

Some of the strategies students may have used when encountering unknown words may have been to look at the context of the reading to find the meaning; they may have used cognates between their native language and English or they may have used strategies such as looking at how the word was used syntactically. Although students may have additionally skipped or ignored the words they did not know when reading, I was interested in knowing how they figured out the meaning

of words they did not understand yet did not skip. I was interested in knowing which strategies students preferred to use and which were more effective for them at obtaining the appropriate meaning of an unknown word.

Benefits of the Research

I believed that this research would be important because it would help ESL teachers to further develop the knowledge of the strategies students needed to succeed academically. As teachers, our main goal is to assist our students in learning the English language and becoming proficient in reading, writing, and speaking the language (Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, & White, 2004). Teaching the students different vocabulary strategies was important, but knowing which strategies they preferred to use was just as significant; as teachers we can teach many topics to our students, but what they have chosen to use can give us clues as to how to tailor our teaching. If students have overwhelmingly preferred one strategy over another, and could effectively use it, then that was something that should have been a focus of a teacher's lessons. There are a variety of reading strategies available for students, and while students will choose what strategies work for them, it was important to look at patterns. If students overwhelmingly preferred one strategy to another, teachers should have taken this into consideration when designing their lessons to either avoid teaching something the students already knew or to put even more emphasis on the teaching of this strategy. The results of this research will give us an idea of which strategies ELLs I worked with have used the most often, and which have given the most

effective results, so teachers can include the teaching of those strategies to other ELLs. The results will also give suggestions of which strategies students have already felt comfortable using and which did not need to be taught in the classroom. We can therefore teach new strategies to students that may be more effective than the strategies they already use.

My assumption was that ESL students would use the same vocabulary comprehension skills for any reading of academic English with unknown words, regardless of the topic. Many of the strategies I studied applied to vocabulary comprehension in general but were not context specific (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). Since the English used in everyday conversations was often very different from the academic language used in textbooks and class readings (Townsend & Collins, 2009), students would need strategies to understand the meaning of these academic words, which may have been more difficult and new, compared with what they would have used on an everyday basis in English conversations. This language was considered English for specific purposes; it was often typically used for academic means rather than regular communication.

This research is useful to ESL teachers, but also to mainstream teachers as well. Knowing how to understand unknown words in a reading is a valuable skill for all students, native-English speakers and ELLs alike, while recognizing which skills students preferred to use and which they used most effectively can benefit all teachers. Every course has readings of some sort with new or challenging words and teachers who know how to assist their students in comprehending these new

words are an asset; research has suggested that the teachings of a teacher are the strongest way to teach vocabulary skills (Folse, 2010).

Vocabulary Development and ELLs

Secondary ELLs often need stronger reading comprehension strategies as they get farther along in their educational studies. Secondary ELLs are often required to read the same texts and materials as their peers, but they may not have acquired English proficiency to understand everything that they read. These students need to learn the vocabulary strategies to comprehend what they are reading while at the same time learning the English language (Townsend & Collins, 2009). Vocabulary comprehension strategies are absolutely necessary for ELLs to succeed in academic classrooms in the United States. A study by Carlo, et al. (2004) focused on word recognition and comprehension skills taught to ELLs and native-English speakers. This study concluded that the students who had received the enhanced vocabulary instructional program were able to outperform a control group in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

If having a large repertoire of vocabulary strategies could result in greater reading comprehension, then we as teachers should be teaching enhanced vocabulary instruction on a regular basis. I believe it is important, though, to encourage the use of the strategies that are currently the most effective with ELLs to focus the teaching to which strategies students do not yet know how to use. This research was directed at collecting data on which strategies ELLs already used to guess at the meaning of new words when reading academic English texts and how

adequate those strategies were at developing an appropriate meaning for the word based on the context of the reading.

This study included looking at how students used strategies to comprehend the meaning of an unknown word, such as how they used morphological features, used its syntactical use, or its semantics. This study looked more at the structural aspects of vocabulary comprehension than the pragmatics of vocabulary comprehension.

Research was lacking in student-produced information on their knowledge of vocabulary skills, but chapter 2 provides information about what was known about these skills and how they were beneficial to ELLs.

Research questions

The questions that were addressed in this research were: Which strategies did secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contained unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies did the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies were the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

Conclusion

I investigated which vocabulary comprehension strategies secondary level ESL students preferred to use when reading academic English. I looked at the strategies students preferred to use, which may have included looking at the root of

the word, looking at the part of speech of the word, or using the word in context to understand meaning.

Chapter two will give information about the background of studies on ELL learner strategies regarding academic vocabulary comprehension as well as discussing the structure of academic English. This chapter will also include a description of the studies of the benefits of vocabulary instruction. Chapter three will focus on the methodology of the study, chapter four will discuss the results of the study and chapter five will have the implications and final conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The questions to be researched were: Which strategies did secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contained unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies did the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies were the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

The goals of this chapter were to provide information on why it was important for ESL students to know a variety of vocabulary comprehension strategies and how important these skills could be in resulting in the students' success in the mainstream academic course. The idea of knowing vocabulary strategies and knowing what a word means entails more than simple recognition of the word. It is even more important, though, for students to learn how to use the structure of the word to comprehend meaning. This chapter will review studies related to vocabulary instruction and vocabulary comprehension strategies, the structure of academic English, the strategies students may use and the benefits of vocabulary instruction. A chart of the vocabulary strategies mentioned in this chapter is included in Appendix A.

The main study that inspired this research was a study (Carlo, et al., 2004) in which word recognition and comprehension skills were taught to a group of English language learners and native-speaking English students. A control group was also

set up in which no specific vocabulary comprehension skills were taught. The outcome of the study showed that students who received the enhanced vocabulary instruction significantly outperformed the control group students in depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension on post-tests in these areas. Both the ELLs and the native-English speakers showed this improvement with enhanced vocabulary instruction.

If ELLs' overall reading comprehension could be improved by learning to use effective vocabulary comprehension strategies, then the next question seemed to be to identify which strategies students already knew, and knew how to use, so the gaps could be filled in with other strategies that should be taught. It would also be beneficial to know which strategies were most preferred by students so others could be taught similar strategies. If students' peers preferred one strategy, teaching the rest of the students that strategy too would mean students would be able to assist one another with reading comprehension.

Academic English

Academic English is the register of English commonly found in academic settings (Townsend & Collins, 2009). The English that ELLs were taught in school was needed for their progress with the English language since it contained new vocabulary not often used in everyday speech (Townsend & Collins, 2009). Academic vocabulary often included Tier 3 words, which are defined as discipline-specific, low-frequency words, and Tier 2 words, which are high frequency words often used in more than one discipline (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Tier 2 and

Tier 3 words could be challenging for ELLs because these words could have specific meanings in content courses that may have been different from more common, everyday meanings of the word. Tier 2 words are most commonly selected to teach to ELLs since Tier 1 words may be used on a regular basis and therefore already known and Tier 3 words may be too specific for most everyday or academic contexts. Tier 2 words were necessary to be explicitly taught to help ELLs progress with the language (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005).

Since it would be difficult to establish meaning for stand-alone vocabulary, students would need to rely on the text in which the vocabulary was integrated to comprehend the meaning. Students would need to use the word in context and keep in mind the specific purpose of the English text to comprehend meaning.

As students get older, the academic texts they are required to read get more challenging. Secondary students are required to read materials with more challenging words while often receiving less direct assistance from teachers with the material (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). Knowing strategies for figuring out the meanings of these words are important for ELLs to be successful in academic courses.

Academic English is different from everyday English and may have been more challenging for students who were learning the language since it often contained specific vocabulary that may have been different from an inferred meaning. ELLs therefore needed a set of strategies that they could use when they were reading texts in academic English. (Carlo, et al., 2004).

Vocabulary Comprehension Strategies

Student Strategies

Students who have developed effective vocabulary comprehension skills use a variety of strategies that change based on the type and context of the reading (DeLuca, 2010). Some of the strategies include breaking words into meaningful parts or morphemes, such as looking for the root of the word, or hypothesizing meaning for the larger words based on these morphemes (Kiefer & Lesaux, 2007).

Students may have a preference for one strategy to use when trying to figure out the meaning of an unknown word, but some students may use a variety of different strategies depending on the word or the context of the reading. Some of the other strategies students use for vocabulary comprehension may include looking at the word's morphosyntactic structure, looking at potential cognates, and looking at how the word is used in context (Carlo et. al, 2004). Students who use these strategies would be looking at the syntax and morphology of the words and possible similarities between words in English and words in their native language. Using the meaning of the passage to comprehend the unknown words may also be beneficial for students.

When students read a passage with unknown words, the process that each student goes through to find the meaning of those words would vary. Sometimes students would ignore the unknown words, some would use a dictionary or ask for assistance from teachers or peers (Nassaji, 2009). Students may prefer to ask for assistance rather than trying to find the meaning of the word themselves. While this

may be beneficial in knowing they will have the correct meaning of the word, this strategy is not always the most productive, especially if students were reading a passage when no one was available to ask for assistance. For this reason, among others, students needed to learn other strategies to use in different situations.

Comprehending a challenging word means understanding its literal meaning, its connotations, the morphological options available with the word, how the word is used syntactically, the semantic meaning, any synonyms and antonyms, and any possible polysemy (Carlo, et al, 2004). Many strategies, and possibly many exposures to the word, would be necessary before a student could understand all of the meanings of the word. There are, however, a variety of techniques that students can use to help them comprehend some of the aspects of the meaning of each word (Harmon, Buckelew & Wood, 2010). Other strategies include gathering information about the word based on the word's morphosyntax. This means knowing how the word is used grammatically, knowing multiple contexts in which the word could be used, knowing cognates and having the understanding of polysemy, or other meanings, of the word (Carlo et. al., 2004).

Among the vocabulary comprehension skills taught to ELLs, inferencing seemed to be the most widely used (Nassaji, 2003). Inferencing involves using any available linguistic clues, such as grammar and word syntax, along with what is known about the context of the reading to create a meaning for the unknown word (Nassaji, 2003).

Several encounters with each word are needed before a word is truly learned. Having a teacher tell students the meaning of a new word is not sufficient exposure to the word for it to be learned though, and students need other exposures to the word for it to be comprehended (Horst, 2010). Using context can be a means of providing frequent exposure to vocabulary (Nassaji, 2003).

Pre- and post- reading strategies are also beneficial (Graves & Fitzgerald, 2005), such as predicting how the words would appear in the reading and thinking of other ways the words are commonly used. Using classification of the word is beneficial as well as using semantic webs to decode the meaning of the word, sometimes in relation to the context of the reading; key-points review is another beneficial vocabulary comprehension technique (DeLuca, 2010). Knowledge of how the English language is structured and how verbs and nouns are related as well as knowledge of punctuation can give ELLs clues to the meaning of unknown words (Nassaji, 2003).

Problems arise when the student does not have sufficient background knowledge to comprehend either the passage or the unknown word (Carlo, et al., 2004). When there were too many unknown words, too, the student could not rely on context to decode meaning (Nassaji, 2003). When it was not possible to use only context to decipher the unknown word, other skills were needed to comprehend the meaning.

Students who speak a related language could be taught strategies to use the structure of cognates of their native language to help them with the structure and

cognates in the English language, although students who are less successful at reading comprehension often use their native language and English as two separate entities instead of finding similarities between the two (Jimenez, 1997). Assisting ELLs in finding comparisons between what they have read and what they already know about their native language and the structure of language in general is another important vocabulary technique students should be taught. Translation alone, though, will not result in long-term retention of a new word (Hummel, 2010) and students need to focus on these other strategies.

There are a variety of strategies that ELLs could use to comprehend how a new word is used in the context in which it occurs. The strategies may include looking at the words' monosyntactic structure or any known cognates for the word. Other strategies may include looking at how the word is used grammatically or simply having enough exposure to the word to recognize its meaning. A variety of vocabulary comprehension strategies need to be taught to ELLs since strategies such as translation of the word into their native language or asking a teacher for assistance do not lead to long-term comprehension of the word.

Benefits of Instruction in Vocabulary Strategies

The goal of the study by Carlo et al. (2004) was to evaluate if English vocabulary enrichment combined with the teaching of targeted vocabulary comprehension skills would result in a greater ability to understand unknown words and passages. Carlo et al. (2004) concluded that an improvement of reading comprehension strategies of ELL and English-only elementary students was based

on a challenging curriculum that included instruction in different vocabulary strategies such as awareness of polysemy and tools for analyzing morphological information. They concluded that the use of vocabulary comprehension strategies was what resulted in their participants' increased ability to understand unknown words in reading passages and resulted in their greater overall comprehension of the reading.

This means that students who knew vocabulary comprehension strategies and knew how to apply them while reading were more successful at reading new passages in academic English. While this study focused on elementary students, many of these assumptions about knowing vocabulary comprehension strategies should be applicable to secondary students.

A study by Nassaji (2003) of adult ESL students showed that the most successful vocabulary comprehension strategies seemed to be those that were evaluative in nature. Students who were able to monitor their reading and comprehension and the effectiveness of their own strategies were able to understand more of what was being read. Nassaji (2003) concluded that students needed direct instruction on how to use these strategies effectively, students guessing at how to use vocabulary strategies was not beneficial, but that encouraging students to look beyond the literal meaning of a word and to pay attention to other reading clues such as the meaning within the phrase, clause or sentence as well as any background knowledge they already had could be just as effective as knowing more vocabulary strategies. Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) found

that students who lacked metacognitive awareness and an adequate ability to use reading strategies struggled more with academic texts than other ELLs who possessed these abilities. They also found that these students tended to spend more time trying to figure out the meaning of individual words rather than finding the overall meaning of the text (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002).

Many of the vocabulary comprehension strategies taught and discussed in the Carlo et al. (2004) study were not age or context dependent, meaning that they could be applied to students of all ages and within all disciplines. Therefore, if knowledge of vocabulary comprehension strategies could result in more success in reading comprehension for elementary ESL students, then it could also result in more successful reading comprehension for secondary ESL students.

Students who were taught vocabulary comprehension strategies were able to outperform students who were not taught these strategies in reading comprehension, whether they were ELLs or native-English speakers. ELLs were better able to comprehend what they were reading, too, when they were able to evaluate the strategies they used and make changes during reading as needed (Nassaji, 2003).

Gap in Research

To my knowledge, there are no studies investigating the vocabulary comprehension strategy preferences of secondary ESL students. There were many studies researching how effective vocabulary instruction can be with regards to reading comprehension among ELLs (Carlo, et al., 2004), but none that researched

the question of preferred strategies. Many of the studies investigated the strategies of elementary students but I was looking at the preferred strategies among secondary level ELLs. I was looking at which strategies secondary ELLs preferred to use to comprehend unknown vocabulary words when reading academic history texts in English. I wanted to know too how effective the students' strategies were at giving them an adequate meaning of the word based on the meaning in the reading.

The goal of the study described in this paper was to evaluate which vocabulary comprehension strategies ELLs were currently using and which they found to be the most effective when reading a new passage in a history text. If a knowledge of vocabulary comprehension skills could result in more successful understanding of a reading passage for elementary students, then I wanted to know which strategies secondary ESL students were currently using and which they found to be most effective, and which were truly the most effective in finding the correct meaning of the unknown word.

The research questions for this study were: Which strategies do secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies do the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

Conclusion

Based on the research reviewed in this chapter, it is clear that teaching ELLs vocabulary comprehension strategies would help them better comprehend the academic texts they read. Academic English is more challenging than spoken, common English since, among other features, it contains more context specific words. There are a variety of different strategies that students can use to find adequate meanings for these new words, such as looking for cognates, using inferencing, or looking at how the word is used grammatically in the reading. Being evaluative of the strategies used was also important in the process of reading comprehension and allowed students to modify the strategies they were using as they read.

The following chapter will describe the rationale for the methods chosen and how they were implemented in the research study. The chapter will also describe how the data was collected based on the selected research methods.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this study, I wanted to learn which vocabulary comprehension strategies students used most often and which they felt most comfortable using. I also wanted to know which strategies were the most effective for ELLs in determining an adequate definition for the new word. The research questions for this study were: Which strategies do secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies do the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

The research included an interview of the students. Students were asked which strategies they used and were asked to read a passage on a history topic. The interview also had follow-up questions relating to the reading, asking the student to identify the meaning of specific words as they were used in the reading. Students were also asked to report their preferred strategies for understanding new words in context. The study relied on student responses and evaluations of their own vocabulary comprehension strategies.

Research Paradigm: Qualitative Study

This research used qualitative methods, a case study and interviews, to conduct the research. This paradigm was the best choice for this study because qualitative research is more process and discovery oriented (Mackey & Gass, 2005). There was no direct hypothesis to be proven in this study and a qualitative study

allowed the research to be observation-based. It was also a better choice than quantitative research because qualitative methods allowed me to work more closely with a smaller set of participants, which lead me to select a case study format. A qualitative study also allowed the research to be more focused on human behaviors and opinions and a case study allowed for descriptions of specific learners (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Using interviews allowed me to work with the participants individually and to rephrase questions as needed. Since the questions asked of students were in English, using an interview allowed me to rephrase the question if the students did not understand what I was asking. Interviews were also useful when working with participants who may not be comfortable using other modes of data collection (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Using a case study allowed me put more focus on the individual responses of the students and their thoughts on vocabulary strategies.

Data Collection

Participants

The participants for this study were secondary level ESL students. All of the students were from a secondary school in a large suburban school district and were currently enrolled in an ESL program at their school. The students were at an intermediate level proficiency as defined by the school through grade level reading tests and state standardized test scores. There were five student participants whose native languages were Somali, Arabic, Dari (a language of Afghanistan) and Oromo (a language of Ethiopia). The majority of the students have been in the United States

for three to four years, with a few students in the group who have been in the United States for their whole lives. All of the students participated in the study voluntarily and had parental permission to participate. The study took place during the summer semester of the 2010-2011 school year.

Location

The research took place in a suburban secondary school in the upper Midwest during a summer school program. The school had many resources for assisting student achievement, including a variety of different forms of technology and many books and enrichment materials. The city was large, but with a small minority population. The city was near a larger metropolitan city, which was much more diverse and had a large minority community.

Data Collection: Interviews

The data I needed to answer this question were related to the vocabulary comprehension strategies that secondary ESL students were currently using. I wanted to know which strategies the students preferred using when reading academic English. I also wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of the students' strategies; that is, did their strategies result in the appropriate meaning of the unknown words? Students were interviewed and asked questions about their preferred vocabulary strategies which was followed by a passage read in English on a historical topic with oral follow-up questions.

Students read a text for comprehension, to apply their known strategies, to show me the effectiveness of their vocabulary strategies, to be able to find an

adequate meaning to the new vocabulary words, and to explain any other strategies they may have used that they did not already describe. Judging the effectiveness of the strategies was important because knowing a vocabulary comprehension strategy may be less important if it could not adequately help the student to decode the unknown word. Following the history passage, there were basic-level comprehension questions about words in the reading. Students were asked to define specific words and describe the strategies they used to understand these words. The questions asked of the students were the same for all students, but some were rephrased if the student was having difficulty understanding the meaning of the question. Appendix B includes the reading passage given to the students as well as the set of questions that the students were asked.

The passage at the end of the interview was to evaluate whether or not the students could use these strategies effectively. I did not think the information about which strategies students used would be as beneficial if they could not use the strategies to reach a correct meaning of the word(s). Having students complete an interview gave information about their preferences and thought-processes while they read academic English since I wanted to give students the opportunity to use their own words to describe how they comprehended unknown words. This gave information about which strategies students preferred to use and which they could use most effectively.

Procedure

Students took a letter to their parents or guardians to obtain permission for them to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The participation in this study was voluntary and students were allowed to quit or stop at any time. The identities of the students were kept anonymous, as were the classes in which the student was enrolled. The name of the school district was also kept anonymous per request by the district when involved in outside research.

The data collection included interviewing the students individually, in the hallway of the school so as to keep the responses of the student secret. Students were first asked questions about the novel they were reading in class to put them at ease and help them not be nervous about answering questions. Students were then asked the interview questions (see Appendix B). The responses were audio recorded to assist me in the recall of their responses. The interview questions asked students to identify the vocabulary comprehension strategies that they used to understand unknown words. The interview took students between ten and twenty minutes to complete. Follow-up questions, as noted in the interview questions, were asked as needed.

Students were encouraged to discuss how they deciphered the meaning of unknown words in academic texts. The second part of the interview included a passage for students to read, followed by questions that asked students to identify the meaning of specific words. This part of the interview was to evaluate the

students' abilities to effectively conclude the correct meaning of some selected words.

Students completed this interview during their regularly scheduled class time. The date and time was discussed with the teacher and school administrators to create the least amount of disturbance to their regular studies.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was first conducted of a questionnaire to secondary level native speakers of English in the same district. After receiving the answers from these students, I found that the questions were too broad and the questionnaire was too long. Many of the native English speakers did not answer all of the questions and were vague in their responses, which indicated that the questions needed to be reworded to get usable results for the study. It was also discussed with my advisors that a questionnaire in English may be too challenging for some ELLs. It was therefore decided to use an interview format which would allow me to ask specific questions to the students while at the same time being able to rephrase the questions if the students did not understand the meaning. Follow-up questions would be asked as necessary if the students did not fully answer the question being asked by being off-topic or giving an answer that did not make sense.

A second pilot study of the interview format was completed with a student in the same class as the other students. His native language was Filipino and his data was not included in this study since he participated in the pilot program. I found that asking students the questions one-on-one was much better than using a survey.

The interview was more effective because many of the students were proficient in English orally, but still struggled with the written language. Answering the questions orally gave them the ability to answer the questions with more depth than if they were to write their answers. I was able to gather information from this student about his thought process when reading in English and how he tries to comprehend unknown vocabulary. Based on the success of this pilot, on the ability for me to gain information about his preferred vocabulary strategies, I decided to use the interview format and the questions (Appendix B) for this study.

Materials

For the purpose of the study, a grade level appropriate history text was selected. A reading for history was selected because it was a course that all students were required to take in order to graduate from high school. Selecting a reading from a course that all students, including ELLs, would need to pass, was important since it would give information about how effectively students could comprehend material that they would actually encounter in their process to graduate from high school. The other materials for the study included a recording device and chairs for use in the hallway.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, a chart was made of which strategies students preferred to use most often. Some possible answers included comparing the word with the context of the reading, using the root of the word to decode the meaning, sounding the word out to recognize the word orally, and looking in a dictionary to

find the meaning. The answers to the comprehension questions after the passage were also evaluated for accuracy; meaning if the definition of the word they gave was an adequate meaning for how it was used in the context of the reading. It was also necessary to encourage students to indicate if they already knew what a word meant before reading the passage and therefore did not need to use any vocabulary strategies to find the meaning.

Verification of Data

I collected data from students' spoken responses to the questions about their preferred vocabulary strategies and their definitions of words in the reading passage. Follow-up questions were asked during the interview sessions to clarify students' responses or to rephrase the questions as needed.

Ethics

Written permission was obtained from the students' parents and guardians before starting the study. Before starting the interview students were also told the objectives and purpose of the study. Student names were not included on the audio recordings; participants were given pseudonyms so responses could not be connected to specific participants. The audio recordings were transcribed so the voices of the students could not be identified. The research project was designed to keep students' personal information confidential and to protect their privacy.

Conclusion

Secondary ESL students were asked about the strategies they used to decode unknown words when reading passages in academic English. Students were also

asked to use these strategies when reading a history passage. All students participated voluntarily and approval was given by the school district and Hamline University to conduct this research. The next chapter will discuss the results of the data collection.

The results of this study will be published and will be available to other teachers. This information should be beneficial to any teacher whose course includes readings with challenging vocabulary words. Teachers should know which strategies students use most often to comprehend academic written English. Teachers could then encourage the use of other strategies to students. The results could also give information to let teachers know which strategies do not need to be taught; which gives more opportunities to teach students other strategies they may not have used before. If students report no knowledge of vocabulary comprehension skills and are unsure of how to comprehend unknown words, then this too may give information to teachers that strategies need to be taught. The next chapter will include a summary of the data collected from the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The information in this chapter will show the data collected and will give information about the student responses in the interview. The results of the interviews will be given in relation to the research questions. The research questions for this study were: Which strategies do secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies do the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

Interviews

The students were able to give good accounts of their own reading abilities. Some students spoke more than others, but overall, all students were able to self-assess their own vocabulary strategies. The students were recorded speaking their answers to the questions. Transcripts of all of the students' responses were made, but only the transcript of one of the students' responses was included in this report in Appendix D.

The students were nervous when they first began the interview, but became more relaxed after talking about the book they were reading in class, which was the first prompt for the interview. Some of the students were able to verbally state which strategies they used to try to comprehend unknown vocabulary when asked the question, "Do you understand what you read when you are reading in English?"

without any other prompts, while some needed follow-up questions to clarify the meaning of their responses. All of the students answered all of the questions with at least some response; some students said they did not know the answer, but they were able to say that verbally. All students were able to complete the second part of the interview, the reading with follow-up questions, and no students dropped out of the study.

Preferred Vocabulary Strategies

Some of the students were very talkative with regards to the vocabulary strategies that they used when reading in English, while some students did not seem able to articulate their thought process as easily. Many of the students used the same strategies, some of which were not on my original list of strategies drawn from the research literature (see Appendix A).

It was difficult to decide which categories some of the student reported strategies fit into from the list of researcher supported strategies. During the interviews though, I probed the students with questions to be sure that I was adequately representing their responses. In some cases the students reported strategies did not fit into any of the other predefined categories, even after probing them for clarification. For this reason I added new categories of vocabulary comprehension strategies that seemed to better fit their responses. This discussion is included below the next section, which discusses which research based strategies the students reported using.

Research-Based Strategies

The research-based strategies that the students reported preferring to use are included in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Results of Interviews: Research-Based Preferred Strategies

Common Vocabulary Strategies	Number of students who reported using the strategy
asking for help	4
classification	2
English noun and verb relationships	3
inferencing	4
key-point review	0
knowing literal meanings	0
knowledge of punctuation	0
morphosyntactics	0
prereading	1
semantic webs	0
skipping the word/ignoring	1
translation	0
using a dictionary	5
using cognates	0
using context	2
using known antonyms	0
using known synonyms	0
using syntactic use of word	2
using the root word	2
using morphological options	2

All of the students reported using more than one strategy. The most commonly used strategies were asking for help, inferencing, using a dictionary, and using English noun and verb relationships. Four of the students reported asking for help, which is often a common strategy for ELLs (Nassaji, 2009). Abdul replied that

when reading passages with unknown words, "I get help, like, I ask first, like, I try and later I ask, or use the internet [for a dictionary]..." Three of the students reported preferring to find English noun and verb relationships, four of the students reported preferring inferencing and all of the students reported using a dictionary. Breaking words into meaningful parts while looking at the grammar can be a useful strategy for some students (Kiefer & Lesaux, 2007). When Nadra was asked which strategies she preferred using she replied:

> ...I try knowing if it's a noun, verb, adverb, if, like, it has an "ed" or "t" ending I take that part out and look at the word and try to figure out what it is.

Another student, Mustafa, replied to the question about his being able to tell if words are nouns or verbs, "Yeah, I do, because we do this in English class." Two students reported preferring to use classification, one student reported using prereading strategies and one student reported skipping or ignoring unknown words. When Fardowsa reads words she does not understand she said, "I don't really do anything, I just keep reading." Two students reported using the context of the reading for vocabulary comprehension, two students reported using the morphological options of the word, two students reported using the syntactic use of the word and two students reported using the root of the word. When Isha was asked if she used the base of the word to assist her in finding out the meaning of unknown words she replied,

> Yeah! For example, if it was vengeful, usually it sort of reminds me of revenge, 'cause you see like vengeful/revenge, kinda like goes along, so that's how I know what it means.

None of the students reported using key-point review, knowing literal meanings of the word, knowledge of punctuation, knowing the morphosyntactic structures of the word, using semantic webs, using translation, using cognates, or using antonyms or synonyms as vocabulary comprehension strategies.

Student-Defined Strategies

There were other strategies that the students reported using that were not included in the literature review. These were strategies that I felt were separate and different from the other strategies based on the responses by the students. Even after listening to the students' answers and asking follow-up questions, I believed that these strategies were different since I could not place them with the other research-based strategies. These strategies were; sounding out the word, rereading, reading out loud and reading around the word. One student reported sounding out unknown words, two students reported using rereading strategies, one student reported preferring to read out loud, and three students reported

reading around the word. Table 4.2 shows these strategies.

Table 4.2

Results of Interviews: Student-Defined Strategies

Common Vocabulary Strategies	Number of students who reported using the strategy
reread	2
sound out word	1
reading around the word	3
reading out loud	1

The first strategy was sounding out the unknown word. When Nadra was asked if she uses any strategies to find out what unknown vocabulary words mean she replied, "Yup, I try to sound them out." She also said later in the interview that with unknown words she will often, "Sound it out and think if I've heard it before or not." This was not one of the strategies originally listed in the literature review but Nadra was very clear about her meaning and her preferred strategy.

Two students reported using rereading strategies when they read. They were clear about their meaning, which led me to believe that this needed to be a separate category. Isha began the interview by discussing the book we were reading as a class by saying:

> It's actually a really good book, even though there are some really hard words, I can understand them by reading the sentence over and over again.

When Isha was asked what strategies she uses when she reads words she does not understand she replied:

> Most of the time I re-read the sentence, sometimes it might have the answer in the sentence, like, they would say it, like, an example of what it means, and if you get it, you then understand what it means...

Isha reiterated her preference for rereading strategies later in the interview when she was asked if she had any advice for teachers on what they could do to help students learn new vocabulary. She replied:

> Yeah, I think they should, like, let students reread the sentences if they, if they're not just wanting to really look at the dictionary or stop looking through it. They should just, like, reread the sentence over and over again and maybe it will come up to them...

She tried to give an example too of what she meant by saying that if someone where reading the sentence they would know that "plagued" did not mean "ice cream" and if so, they should reread the sentence to find the clues as to the real meaning of the word. Mustafa also said he preferred rereading strategies when he said, "...if I like, read it or skim it, or read it again, then I get most answers when I read it again."

One of the other categories I added was for reading out loud. Fardowsa said that reading out loud was a strategy that helped her to understand new vocabulary words, and even after follow-up questions, she still insisted that reading out loud was a strategy that helped her to comprehend what she was reading. She said that when she reads by herself she does not understand all of what she reads. The

follow-up question asked of her was if it helped her to read with another person. Her response was, "Yeah, and if I read out loud, which I never do, but yeah..." The next question to her was a clarification question about her preference to read out loud and how that helped her. She replied, "I don't like to do [reading out loud] 'cause when I'm at home my brother and sister are around and stuff like that and it gets awkward, so yeah." She was then asked what other strategies she used when reading and her response was, "Um, pretty much that, and in the classroom is better, and reading out loud..." The responses by Fardowsa led me to include reading out loud as one of the preferred strategies.

The last strategy I included that was not a part of the original literature review was reading around the word which three students reported preferring. Based on the responses by the students I concluded that this strategy was different from the other strategies. When Mustafa was asked which strategies he preferred to figure out unknown words when reading he said:

> I like, find a clue around the word...most of the time I just look at the word before, in the sentence, that the word is used in, in the front and the back and can understand what the word is.

When Abdul was asked if he used clues in the reading to help him understand new words he replied, "Yeah, the sentence, it helps, it gives you ideas for the, yeah, like in the middle of the sentence, it can give you a lot of clues." After reading the history passage Abdul was asked if there were any other strategies he used to find the meanings for the underlined words and he responded:

> I looked for clues in the sentence or paragraph, like the words, some of the words give me clues...I've learned one way, just try to figure it out and try to use hints from the paragraph or sentence.

From this quote, I interpreted this to mean that he used context strategies, from the whole paragraph, but also used strategies of reading around the word at the sentence level to find the meaning. Isha also reported using these strategies saying that she looks at what is, "surrounding the word, so what it's based on."

I believed these strategies were different than the other strategies listed in the literature review and included them in their own categories. The information in the tables show the strategies that the students reported as preferring to use when reading passages in English that contain unknown vocabulary words.

Effective Vocabulary Strategies

The second question in this research was, "Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?" The students were asked to read the passage (Appendix B) and asked to verbally define the underlined words in the passage. Some students were able to give an adequate meaning of the word based on how it was used in the context of the reading, while other students gave incorrect definitions of the words or gave a definition of the word that was not appropriate for the context of the reading.

For the first word, 'plagued,' four of the five students were not able to give an adequate definition of the word based on how it was used in the context of the reading. One student said it meant, "a war between them, something bad" which

was closer to an adequate meaning of the word than the responses of other students. Some of the students were able to find definitions that would work well if the word 'plagued' was missing and they needed to fill in the blank with something appropriate, such as 'started' or 'happened,' but these were not adequate definitions for the word 'plagued' as it was used in this reading. None of the students were able to create an adequate meaning for the word 'bankrupting,' even with prompting. When students would come to an inadequate answer for the word, I would prompt them to look at the root of the word or to break the word into smaller pieces to see if it was more comprehensible to them. When Mustafa was prompted to break the word 'bankrupting' into pieces, he responded:

> ...rupting, like explosion, bank means, oh, so it has something to do with money, so bankrupting, maybe they like, let's see, maybe like, bankrupting, like shut down everything.

Table 4.3 shows the results of the information gathered for the second research question.

Table 4.3

Post-Reading Comprehension of the History Text

Target word in reading	Number students with an adequate definition of word	Example of adequate definition	Number of students with an imprecise definition of word or definition that did not work within context of reading	Example of imprecise definition
plagued	1	"a war between them, something bad"	4	"started," "happened"
bankrupting	0		5	"stealing," "an explosion," "take lots of money from banks"
emerged	4	"rose," "came to," "became"	1	"to do things faster"
placate	0		5	"to plan out something," "to decide," "to clean"
pitted	0		5	"fit together," "to stop," "I don't know"

When Fardowsa was prompted to look for parts of that word she recognized, she responded that the definition to 'bankrupting' meant, "Like, stealing money from the bank?" The word 'emerged' was not as difficult and most of the students, four

out of five, were able to come to an appropriate definition of the word as it was used in the reading such as “rose” or “came to” or “became.” The word ‘placate’ was also challenging for the students and none of them were able to create an adequate meaning of the word as it was used in context. Some of the students responded that they thought the word meant “to plan out something” or “to decide.” One student said they thought the word meant “to clean.” The last word of “pitted” was also challenging for the students in which some of the responses to the definition of the word were, “fit together,” “to stop,” and, “I don’t know .”

Discussion

In answering the first research question; ‘Which strategies do secondary ESL students report preferring to use when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary?’ there were fifteen strategies the students reported as strategies they used when reading, such as asking for help, inferencing, using a dictionary, and reading around the word. Some of the students were able to go in depth with their explanations of how they used the strategy as well. Based on the information gathered from the interviews, this gives data about which strategies students report using when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary. This data also gives the answer to the research question, Which strategies do the students report preferring to use? The strategies mentioned by the students are what they prefer to use when reading in English and need to comprehend an unknown word. The students did not report using as many of the strategies discussed by researchers. This means that the students in this study

either do not know about these other strategies or prefer using other strategies. Since some of the students said they preferred using the same strategy, it is possible that they were explicitly taught how to use those strategies.

The second research question was, 'Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?' The results showed that the students struggled to find an adequate definition for some of the words in the reading. Some of the students were not able to create an appropriate meaning for some of the selected vocabulary words even though they were using the vocabulary strategies they had previously mentioned. Three of the five selected vocabulary words were challenging for the students so that none of them were able to find an appropriate meaning for the word based on the context of the reading.

Despite encountering challenging words, most of the students were able to comprehend the reading as a whole and were able to give an appropriate summary of the text. When Nadra was asked if she could understand almost everything she had read in the passage, her response was:

> Yeah, it's about Europe, how they were about to go into war, and the Queen was like, trying to, like, plan out what they should do and the Catholics and the Protestants, the Protestors I think, they were kind of like (unintelligible) with her about not to start the war.

The results show that the students were able to comprehend the reading and create an appropriate summary despite not being able to adequately create a

definition for some of the selected vocabulary words. Referring back to the research questions, the results show that the students used eleven of the twenty vocabulary strategies mentioned; asking for help, classification, using English noun and verb relationships, inferencing, prereading, using a dictionary, using the context, using the syntactic use of the word, using the root of the word and using the morphological options of the word. They also used four strategies that were not previously mentioned in this study: rereading, sounding out a word, reading around the word, and reading out loud. The strategies that most students preferred using were asking for help, using the English noun and verb relationships, using inferencing, using a dictionary and reading around the word.

Research has shown that knowing vocabulary strategies can help students to better comprehend what they are reading (Carlo et al., 2004). Yet, the strategies the students in this study were using did not seem to be as productive as they could have been in finding an adequate meaning of the word since most of the students, four out of five, were able to find an appropriate definition of only one of the five words. The students were still able to understand the reading as a whole and were still able to give an appropriate summary of the reading despite not being able to find an adequate meaning for the majority of the selected vocabulary words.

Conclusion

The students interviewed were able to explain the strategies they used when reading and were able to articulate which vocabulary comprehension strategies they preferred. The majority of the students preferred using a dictionary to find the

meaning of an unknown word, reading around the word, using other inferencing strategies, asking for help, or using noun-verb relationship strategies. Many of the students struggled though to find an adequate definition, pertaining to how the word was used in context, for the selected vocabulary words. While the students could not use their strategies to help them appropriately define the selected words, they were still able to give a sufficient overall meaning for the passage.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will discuss the conclusions and implications of this study based on the research questions, which were: Which strategies do secondary ESL students use when reading passages in English that contain unfamiliar vocabulary?

- Which strategies do the students report preferring to use?
- Which of these strategies are the most effective in coming to an appropriate contextual meaning of the unknown words?

The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

Summary of the Findings

The literature review discussed the importance of teaching students vocabulary strategies with regards to overall comprehension of texts. Teaching students what to do when they encountered a new word and how to figure out the meaning of the new word was important (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) as was the learning of different strategies to comprehend these words.

Results

The results of the study show that students are comfortable using different vocabulary comprehension strategies. There were many similarities among the answers of the students, but each student had a different combination of preferences for vocabulary comprehension strategies. This means that these students were prepared to use a variety of different strategies when reading to comprehend unknown words. When reading, if one strategy did not work to find

what they believed to be an adequate meaning of the word, they then had the ability to select a different strategy to find out the meaning. The results showed, too, based on their responses from the interviews, that students had preferences on which strategies they wanted to use for vocabulary comprehension when reading.

The results showed, too, that the students were not able to find adequate definitions for the meanings of some of the selected words in the reading passage. This meant that students were either not able to apply their preferred strategies to find an adequate meaning for a vocabulary word as it was used in the context of the reading, meaning that their strategies were ineffective in this context, or they applied the strategies but the strategies did not help them in figuring out the meaning of the unknown word. This could mean that the strategies the students were using were ineffective or that the vocabulary words were more challenging than the students' abilities, that even with vocabulary strategies the students were still unable to figure out the meaning of the words.

The results show that students may have been able to identify preferred vocabulary comprehension strategies, but were unable to use those strategies to aid their comprehension of unknown words. It is also possible that the students had used the strategies incorrectly or only thought they knew how to use a strategy but did not know how to appropriately apply it to new readings. This may diminish the usefulness of using the strategies since the strategies were unable to help the students comprehend some of the selected words in the chosen reading. Teachers should therefore ensure that their students know how to adequately apply the

vocabulary strategies. Teachers should also be sure their students know how to apply these strategies in a variety of different situations and contexts so the students will be able to use the strategies to their benefit in any type of reading.

The results also showed that the students were able to comprehend the overall meaning of the passage and were able to create an effective summary of the text. This means that despite the ineffectiveness of the vocabulary strategies the students used to understand new words, they were still able to understand the general meaning of the passage. This may mean that the vocabulary comprehension strategies were not necessary and students could have simply skipped the words and would have comprehended the passage too, or that using the vocabulary strategies on different non-selected words that were new to them was the cause of their being able to comprehend the entire passage. If the students were able to skip the most challenging words but use their strategies to comprehend the other words in the reading to understand the main point of the text, this would be an effective use of their strategies even if they were not able to comprehend the most challenging words. This effect was not tested and would be suggested for further research.

Implications

The implications of the study include suggestions for teachers. The first implication is that students may not know how to adequately use and apply the vocabulary strategies that they have already been taught. Since many of the students were unable to adequately define the selected vocabulary words but still

reported using a variety of vocabulary comprehension strategies, it is important for teachers to check the accuracy of the students' strategies. It seemed that the students believed that they could use their vocabulary comprehension strategies appropriately, but the results of the study with the reading passage showed otherwise. What is needed is for teachers to assist students to be sure they are using the strategies in the right way to be able to comprehend unknown words.

The results of the study could also give suggestions to teachers as to which strategies to introduce to students. None of the students reported using antonyms or synonyms of words to comprehend how the word is used in a text, or key-point review or using knowledge of literal meanings of the words, using a knowledge of punctuation, using the morphosyntax of the word, using semantic webs, or using translation or cognates. It may be that the students did know how to use these strategies but simply did not name them in the study or it may be that these were not the preferred strategies for them to use. Or, it may be that the students did not know how to use these strategies and may benefit from learning how to use and apply these strategies to reading passages.

It seemed too, based on the results, that there were strategies that teachers did not need to teach to students, or needed to only verify that the students were using the strategy correctly. Most of the students already felt comfortable asking for help, using inferencing, using a dictionary, using English noun and verb relationships, and reading around the word. This meant that a teacher could streamline their lessons to verify that students knew how to appropriately use these

strategies, but spend more time on explicitly teaching new strategies. It seemed that students may need to use a variety of vocabulary comprehension strategies since not all strategies would help them to find an appropriate meaning of a new word.

The last implication for teachers is that despite students' ability or inability to find appropriate definitions for specific words, they still may be able to comprehend the overall meaning of a passage. This meant that even if students could not use their strategies to adequately identify every unknown word, they may still be using those strategies to understand the other words in the passage and therefore comprehend the larger meaning of the text. This meant that teachers should not be worried if their students could use some vocabulary strategies but not others or were able or not able to comprehend every word in the passage; students may still be able to comprehend the text. This meant that vocabulary comprehension strategies used to understand specific words to be able to comprehend an entire reading may not be as necessary as previously thought.

This study will be available in the library of Hamline University for teachers to use as a guide of which vocabulary comprehension strategies five ESL students report preferring to use when reading passages in English. This study may also be a good idea for a teacher workshop or in-service training to help teachers to know which strategies may be preferred by their students and how to go about finding their preferences.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of the study included the short length of the study and the small set of students who participated in the research. There were only five students who participated in the study and they were all from the same school. This meant that the vocabulary strategies the students reported as preferring may have been a result of which vocabulary strategies they were taught in school rather than truly being their preferred strategies. Another limitation is that the students were only interviewed once. This meant that if a student was having a bad day, they may not have been as descriptive as possible in their accounts of which vocabulary strategies they preferred or may not have been focusing as much on the reading passage. It also meant the opposite too, that students may have said more than they normally would have in the interview simply because they knew they were being interviewed or were thinking about vocabulary strategies in advance of the interview. Either of these situations could make the results inaccurate or not what the students would use or say in normal situations. Another limitation was time; due to the fact that the interviews were taking place during a summer school program, the amount of time available to take students out of the regular instructional setting for an interview was limited. This meant that the interviews for each student needed to be short with little disruption to their regular day.

One of the other major limitations of the study could have been the history passage that was selected for students to read. The passage was taken from a history text that may have been too challenging for the students. I do not believe

that the intelligibility of the history passage was aligned with the ability of the students. This was a challenging passage for ELLs to read and it is possible that native speakers of English would also struggle with this passage. It is therefore important to note that even the best of reading strategies cannot be adequately applied to assist the reader if the intelligibility of the reading is too far above their level. Strategies that would have been more beneficial when reading this passage would have been prereading strategies or preteaching strategies of some of the vocabulary and concepts included in the text.

Another consideration is that the topic of the reading may have been new to the students. This may have hindered the students in comprehending the selected vocabulary words. Comprehending the new words based on the context of the reading may have been more challenging, and in some cases nearly impossible, if the students were unfamiliar with the topic.

Future Studies

The direction for future studies was based on the limitations of the current study. The first suggestion for a future study would include performing the same interviews but with more students and with repetitions. Using more students in the study, and students from different locations, would allow for the researcher to make larger generalizations about the information gathered. Interviewing the students more than once and comparing the responses may also give more information about which strategies the students did prefer rather than relying on the results from only one interview. More time allotted for each interview is also suggested since the

amount of follow-up questions in the current study was reduced due to time limitations.

In future studies, using a different passage to have the students read and evaluate the effectiveness of their reported strategies is suggested. If a different passage was used, one in which the content was more familiar to the students but still contained new vocabulary words, the students may have been able to better show the effectiveness of their vocabulary comprehension strategies.

Conclusion

Research showed that using vocabulary comprehension skills could help students to comprehend what they are reading. The research also showed that knowing a variety of different strategies is better than knowing simply one strategy.

The results of this study showed that students do report knowing a variety of different strategies and do have preferences about which vocabulary comprehension strategies to use. The results also showed that they were unable to find appropriate meanings for the selected vocabulary words in the history passage. While this may mean that the students were unable to adequately apply their vocabulary strategies, it may also mean that the passage was not appropriate for this study and may have been too challenging for the students. Therefore, future research needs to be done on the effectiveness of the students' preferences of vocabulary comprehension strategies.

The study does give information about which strategies students report knowing and using. This may be beneficial in helping teachers to decide which strategies to teach, or not to teach since students already use the strategy.

Assisting ELLs in comprehending what they are reading in English can be a challenging task but helping students to help themselves, such as by teaching them a variety of vocabulary comprehension strategies they can use on their own, may help them understand more of what they are reading.

APPENDIX A

Common Research-Based Vocabulary Strategies

Appendix A: Common Research-Based Vocabulary Strategies

Common Vocabulary Strategies	Researcher
asking for help	Nassaji, 2003
classification	DeLuca, 2010
English noun and verb relationships	DeLuca, 2010
finding the root word	Nassaji, 2003
inferencing	Nassaji, 2003
key-point review	Carlo, et al., 2004
knowing literal meanings	Carlo, et al., 2004
knowledge of punctuation	DeLuca, 2010
morphosyntactic	Carlo, et al., 2004
preteaching	Graves & Fitzgerald, 2005
semantic webs	DeLuca, 2010
skipping the word/ignoring	Nassaji, 2003
translation	Hummel, 2010
using a dictionary	Nassaji, 2003
using cognates	Carlo, et al., 2004
using context	Carlo, et al., 2004
using known antonyms	Carlo, et al., 2004
using known synonyms	Carlo, et al., 2004
using syntactic use of word	Carol, et al., 2004
using morpological options	Carlo, et al., 2004

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions and History Text

Appendix B: Interview Questions and History Text

Please respond and answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability. (Remember, you are not being graded on your answers)

Do you understand what you read when you are reading in English?

- How often?
- Do you understand all of the words in your textbooks?

When you do not know a word....

- do you try to sound out the word to find out what it means?
- do you look at the parts or base of the word?
- do you look at the topic of the reading to guess the meaning?
- do you ask friends or teachers for help?
- do you look at the whole sentence?
- do you think about what other meanings the word may have?

How many new words do you think you learn each day?

How often do you use new words in your writing or in speaking?

What can your teacher do to help you learn new words?

Please read the passage below. You will then have a few questions to answer.

Europe in Crisis: The Wars of Religion

Wars between Catholics and Protestants plagued Europe in the 1500s. Economic, social, and political forces also played a role. Catholic Spain appeared to be at the height of its power. However, Philip II was bankrupting Spain with costly wars. Meanwhile, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, a heavily Protestant region of the Spanish Empire, emerged as a great power in its own right. The English monarch, Elizabeth, sought to placate both Protestants and Catholics at home while balancing the power of France and Spain. Hoping to restore Catholicism to power, Philip tried to invade England, but his Spanish Armada was defeated by the English. For over 30 years, the French Wars of Religion pitted Catholics against Protestant Huguenots. The violence finally ended in 1598 when Henry IV extended full political privileges and religious freedom to Huguenots while making Catholicism the official religion.

Glencoe World History, 2010, Chapter 14, Section 1 Overview

For each of the following words, try to give the meaning it has in the sentence in which it appears.

- You can explain what you think the meaning of the word is, or
- you can give a synonym, or
- you can rewrite the sentence so it means the same thing as the original sentence.

1. *plagued*

2. *bankrupting*

3. *emerged*

4. *placate*

5. *pitted*

1. What were you thinking while you were reading the passage above?

2. Where there any other words that you didn't know?

3. How did you figure out what those words meant?

4. Is it easy or hard to figure out what new words mean?

    - What helps you figure out the meaning of new words?

    - What makes it hard to figure out the meaning of new words?

APPENDIX C

Parent Permission Letter

Appendix C: Parent Permission Letter

Date, 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a current graduate student at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN. To finish my degree I will need to conduct research in your child's classroom. I will be studying which vocabulary strategies students prefer to use when reading a passage in English. I have permission from Hamline University to complete this research, but I need your permission to allow your child to complete the short interview.

Your child will participate in a short interview asking them about the strategies they use to understand vocabulary in English. The interview will not be a part of their grade and they will not lose any instruction time to complete the interview.

The name of your child will not be used in the research. The research will be published for public use and scholarly purposes, but no names of students will be used. Your child does not have to participate in this research; this is your choice. If they do participate, they may stop the interview at any time. All information gathered will be kept private.

There will be little risk for the students to be involved in this research. There are no right or wrong answers and any response will be accepted. The benefits of this research are that it will help teachers to focus their lessons on the vocabulary needs of the students.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this form, your students' participation in the research, or the research project. My contact information is listed below along with the contact information of my supervisor at Hamline University.

Please sign the form below and send to school with your child.

Sincerely,
Andrea Barbera
952-975-4344
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Ann Mabbott, Ph. D
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I give permission for my child to participate in the research described above:

_____
Name of Student

_____
Signature of Parent/Guardian

_____
Date

* Please sign 2 copies of this form. Send one back to school with your student and keep the other for your records. Thank you.

APPENDIX D

Interview of Isha

Appendix D: Interview of Isha

Isha: It's actually a really good book, even though there are some really hard words, I can understand them by reading the sentence over and over again....(intro warm up comments about classroom book)

Researcher: So, when you're doing things like reading, reading a book, and you come across a word you don't know, what do you do?

Isha: Most of the time I re-read the sentence, sometimes it might have the answer in the sentence, like, they would say it, like, an example of what it means, and if you get it, you then understand what it means, and sometimes if I don't get it at all I sometimes usually get the dictionary out to look at the word, look it up and see it, see what's the right definition for it in the sentence.

Researcher: Right, right, do you look at other things like the base of the word or break it into pieces?

Isha: Yeah! For example, if it was vengeful, usually it sort of reminds me of revenge, 'cause you see like vengeful/revenge, kinda like goes along, so that's how I know what it means.

Researcher: Do you ever do things like, um, look at the grammar of the word and figure out if it's a noun or a verb or any pieces like that?

Isha: Umm, sometimes I do, sometimes I do, like if they say that grumbled, or that she grumbled, I'm like, she did something, she did it, I'll know that's something she did so I'll know that's a verb.

Researcher: How often do you ask your teachers or friends for help?

Isha: Not much, unless if I really don't get it, and I don't understand the word and I looked it up in the dictionary then I'd look it up in the dictionary and it had no answer, I mean if it didn't make sense to the writing, then I would ask a teacher or a classmate.

Researcher: How many new words do you think you learn in a day?

Isha: Me? (laugh) Probably a lot, I mean, a lot, even like every time I read, I like reading, it's one of my favorite hobbies, I like reading. It's really fun, especially since it's like you're in another world and I learn, like, from reading them, and some words I've been though, and some words I've never heard of, and once I've of heard of them, I'm like, wow, cool, that's a new word.

Researcher: Do you use those new words?

Isha: Sometimes I do, yeah, I use them to make my sisters confused, I like to make them think that I'm smarter than them, I like to show off how smart I am.

Researcher: So, when you are reading in English do you think you can understand everything you are reading?

Isha: Yes, I think I can.

Researcher: That's good, that's really great that you've gotten to that point. Ok, now take a look at this, and just read it to yourself, and then I'm going to ask you a few questions.

Researcher: Alright, so for the first part, what do you think the word plagued means?

Isha: Ok, it means attacked I think, if I'm not mistaken, it means attack 'cause they were talking about wars in the beginning of the sentence.

Researcher: What do you think bankrupting means?

Isha: I think bankrupting means stealing or taking information that doesn't belong to you and you're not supposed to take. And I think in the paragraph it means that Philip II was taking special information from Spain.

Researcher: Ok, what do you see in that word, are there any words you can pull out of there?

Isha: Yeah, like bank, usually bank, bank you get money from, and rupting I think means, like, stealing.

Researcher: Ok, what's the next word, uh, right there?

Isha: Emerged?

Researcher: Yeah, emerged.

Isha: Emerged means come to power or uh, rose.

Researcher: What about placate?

Isha: Uh, placate I think means a deal or an agreement.

Researcher: What about pitted?

Isha: I think the whole war began on religious beliefs I think that the, it, the whole war, began on religious beliefs, problems with which religions. Like, it was all the problem of which religion you were in and they then they kept arguing about which religion was best, I guess.

Researcher: How easy was it for you to read this?

Isha: Um, some words I've never heard of, but it was actually kind of easy from the sentence itself I mean, some sentences might contain some information that you will not understand, I mean you can't say like, plagued Europe, at first I thought that like it meant something the black plague, but then it said something about the war, but then that can't be the black plague 'cause that's a disease and not a war thing.

Researcher: So, could you understand what this whole paragraph meant even though there were a few confusing words?

Isha: Yeah, I think I know, it's about the war and how it ended up.

Researcher: How did you figure that out?

Isha: 'Cause it said, because it says in it, without these words, you could always just say, and put words and stuff in them that you're interested in, put words and stuff in them to understand what they're really talking about. But they're talking about the wars and how religion was affecting it, 'cause I think, in the end it said something about religion.

Researcher: So, after all of this, do you have any suggestions for teachers on what teachers can do to help students learn vocabulary and passages like this?

Isha: Yeah, I think they should, like, let students reread the sentences if they, if they're not just wanting to really look at the dictionary or stop looking through it. They should just, like, reread the sentence over and over again and maybe it will come up to them and like, for example, they can't think that plagued is a piece of ice cream or something to eat, I mean like, you could think that 'cause it said that they could have something, so it's surrounding the word, so what it's based on.

Researcher: What else can teachers do to help students figure out some of those unknown words ?

Isha: Um, they could also like, like breaking the word apart, for example like bankrupting, I've heard that word many times, but in this paragraph it means something else, even though that it's, that it's the same word that I've heard many times. For example, bankrupting could be someone that's setting up something in the bank, it's not just a word that's just like, a nice word, it's a bad word, that's what I'm trying to say, that someone could bankrupt somebody.

Researcher: Great, that's it, thank you.

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