A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF DESIGNS, STRATEGIES, AND THEORIES UNDERLYING VOCABULARY RESEARCH

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Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning, with implications for reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall language fluency. This systematic review examines the diverse designs, strategies, and theories that underpin vocabulary research in the field of language education. The review synthesizes findings from a wide range of studies to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of vocabulary research. This systematic review offers valuable insights into the diverse approaches to vocabulary research and provides a foundation for future studies in the field. By synthesizing findings from a wide range of studies, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence vocabulary acquisition and highlights the importance of adopting evidence-based practices in language education.

Key words: classification of vocabulary, social constructivism, sociocultural

Аннотация

Приобретение словарного запаса является фундаментальным аспектом изучения языка, влияющим на понимание прочитанного, умение писать и общее владение языком. В этом систематическом обзоре рассматриваются разнообразные конструкции, стратегии и теории, лежащие в основе исследований лексики в области языкового образования. В обзоре синтезируются результаты широкого спектра исследований, чтобы дать всесторонний обзор текущего состояния исследований словарного запаса. Этот систематический обзор предлагает ценную информацию о различных подходах к исследованию словарного запаса и обеспечивает основу для будущих исследований в этой области. Обобщая результаты широкого спектра исследований, этот обзор способствует более глубокому пониманию факторов, влияющих на приобретение словарного запаса, и подчеркивает важность внедрения научно обоснованных практик в языковом образовании.

Ключевые слова: классификация лексики, социальный конструктивизм, социокультурный

Introduction

Knowledge consists of the words that pass between people, and comprehension's most critical component, vocabulary, acts as a vehicle for knowledge. However, a national focus on foundational skills, which identifies the primary grades as a time to learn to decode words (Cabell & Hwang, Citation2020), has relegated developing vocabulary to later grades and allowed systematic knowledge building to become fragmented and disorganized. Because U.S. public schools reflect the diverse cultural, economic, and language backgrounds of our communities, a comprehensive and integrated approach to improve both vocabulary and content knowledge (Neuman & Kaefer, Citation2018) is called for to meet the needs of all students. Academic vocabulary plays a key role in the language that children need for school success (Nagy

& Townsend, Citation2012). Many Multi-Language Learners (MLLs) or those experiencing low socioeconomic status (SES) reach school with lower levels of language skills than middle-class, monolingual children. Early differences in oral language skills can contribute to knowledge gaps (Hoff, Citation2013). Because MLLs and students of low SES are likely to have significantly smaller vocabularies than their more advantaged peers (Graves, Citation2006), their prospects for academic success depend on the richness of their school experiences (Hiebert, Citation2020).

Purpose

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to delve into recent vocabulary research. Practitioners, those who are actively teaching, need more than popular activities to make informed decisions in their classrooms. Understanding what works in vocabulary instruction and why certain strategies effectively promote vocabulary development empowers teachers and allows them to evaluate and modify recommendations to fit the needs of their diverse students (Wright, Franks, Kuo, McTigue, & Serrano, Citation2016). To address consistent achievement gaps, methods of expanding the depth and breadth of student vocabulary should be identified and components of effective vocabulary instruction must be defined. Teachers require the support of researchers who combine instructional best practices with the theoretical frameworks on which they are based.

Literature Review

The first section of this literature review establishes the contribution of vocabulary to long term achievement, addresses the urgency of academic vocabulary established by the standards, and provides descriptions of inconsistent effects of attempts to address vocabulary instruction. The next section outlines the results from previous work that provide direction and purpose for this project. The final section defines the educational theories guiding vocabulary instructional practices and the components of a comprehensive vocabulary building program, providing parameters for our investigation and coding of the literature.

Research Questions

This review explored a variety of study design, participants, grade levels, and locations, to identify common theories underlying instruction, and to describe alignment with best instructional practices in vocabulary research studies published in nine literacy journals. The systematic literature review was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do studies of vocabulary vary across design, participants, grade levels, and locations?

2. What theories underlie the recommendations for vocabulary instruction made by articles published in nine research journals?

3. How do the strategies included in studies of vocabulary align with the recommendations for best practices for instruction?

Reviews of Vocabulary Instruction and Literacy

Previous studies have investigated recommendations for vocabulary instruction in both research and practitioner journals. Wright and Cervetti (Citation2017) completed a systematic search, calling for further study of strategies including rich and varied language experiences (Graves, Ringstaff, Li, & Flynn, Citation2018), direct teaching of individual word meanings (Graves et al., Citation2014), word learning strategy instruction (Graves, Schneider, & Ringstaff, Citation2018), and supporting students' word consciousness (Graves & Watts-Taffe, Citation2008). Moody et al. (Citation2018) extended these findings in a systematic review investigating theories underlying vocabulary studies in two practitioner journals, which simultaneously aligned with the theories presented in the Wright and Cervetti (Citation2017) research journal review. They found that articles presented in practitioner-oriented literature consistently provided teachers with guidance emphasizing how to use instructional practices, but not why they are used. Moody et al. (Citation2018) recommended explicitly stating the theoretical underpinnings of instructional recommendations to increase teachers' awareness of the link between theory and practice.To identify shifts in paradigms of literacy scholars, Parsons and Gallagher (Citation2016) conducted a content analysis of the scholarship published in nine high-profile literacy journals from 2009 to 2014. Research related to vocabulary appeared in 150 articles, seventh of the 1,238 analyzed, published during that 6-year period (Parsons & Gallagher, Citation2016). More frequently published topics included comprehension, struggling readers, MLL/Bilingual learners, instruction, and writing. Interestingly, the impact of vocabulary on each of these facets of literacy has emerged in recent years.

Social Constructivism and Sociocultural Theories

Both social constructivist and sociocultural theories posit that knowledge is constructed socially through interaction with others (Moody et al., Citation2018). Sociocultural theory includes Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development which encompasses scaffolding, psychological tools, and inner speech to mediate what learners can and cannot do (Unrau & Alverman, Citation2013). Scaffolding enables learners to accelerate their mastery of language and utilize their higher order mental processes. Social constructivists suggest that scaffolded, structured interactions lead to growth in students' language, skills, thinking, and knowledge (Vygotsky, Citation1986).

Initially dependent upon more knowledgeable others, when skills and self-regulation are mastered, students become competent and independent (Wood, Bruner, & Ross). Because social constructivism and sociocultural theories consider active participation as central to meaning-making, vocabulary instruction includes tasks where students work cooperatively with teachers or more knowledgeable peers (Wright et al., Citation2016) to construct definitions and participate in discussions about new vocabulary. As students and teachers work to define the language they use, social constructivism and sociocultural theoretical foundations in vocabulary development and instruction indicate a paradigm that values the classroom community.

Schema and Psycholinguistic Theories

Psycholinguistic theory proposes that readers make predictions as they read to derive meaning. This theory suggests that a reader's background knowledge, conceptual abilities, and processing strategies interact to produce comprehension (Kim et al., Citation2021). Schema theory extends this to include the structure and representation of knowledge. Schemas allow individuals to process, encode, organize, and retrieve information. The activation of schemas, which provide a framework for explaining objects and events within a text, is necessary for comprehension.

Both psycholinguistic and schema theories emphasize the role of learners in vocabulary instruction as these strategies require students to analyze morphological features, connect new words to synonyms and antonyms, create concept maps and organizers (Moody et al., Citation2018), and access prior knowledge. Strategies that activate prior knowledge are derived from schema theory (Wright et al., Citation2016). Schema and psycholinguistic theoretical foundations in vocabulary development indicate a paradigm wherein teachers intentionally activate prior knowledge and link new learning to known concepts, emphasizing the expansion of learners' vocabulary.

Conclusion

After examining the diverse designs, strategies, and theories that underpin vocabulary research in the field of language education, it is clear that vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning with significant implications for reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall language fluency. The review highlights the strengths and limitations of various research designs, including experimental, correlational, and qualitative approaches, and discusses their implications for understanding the complexities of vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the review evaluates the effectiveness of different strategies used in vocabulary research, such as explicit instruction, context-based learning, and technology-enhanced methods, in promoting vocabulary development and retention among learners of different proficiency levels.

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