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## What Instructional Strategies are Effective for Increasing Vocabulary for English Language Learners in a Preschool Classroom?

Nicole Carter  
*Hamline University*

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WHAT INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES ARE EFFECTIVE FOR INCREASING  
VOCABULARY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A PRESCHOOL  
CLASSROOM?

by

Nicole Carter

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2016

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## DEDICATION

I would like to thank my Capstone Committee as well as my family and friends. Your love and patience helped me to continue and complete the project. I would like to also thank my research committee who helped to shape this Capstone. I have learned a great deal from you.

## ATTITUDE

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for the day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.

- Charles Swindoll

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	11
Personal journey	11
Research question	12
Importance of vocabulary	13
Accomplishing components in my classroom	14
Chapter summary	15
Introduction to chapter two	15
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review	16
Introduction	16
Overview	16
History of vocabulary	19
Growing up bilingual in your community	20
Code switching	20
Word learning theory and ELLs	22
Summary	23
Challenges and strategies for ELL in a classroom	24
Language shock strategies	24
Belonging strategies	25
Comprehension	26
Summary	27
Teachers overcoming barriers to help ELLs in the classroom	27

Summary	30
Effective instructional strategies to help build ELLs vocabulary	31
Provide explicit instruction in vocabulary	32
Provide and encourage ongoing speaking between adults and peers	32
Present rich language input to ELLs	32
Classroom structure	33
Literacy development	33
Help ELLs make connection between their native language and English	33
Increasing vocabulary size	33
Family support for English language learners	34
Chapter summary	37
Introduction to chapter three	38
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology	39
Introduction	39
Methodology	40
Setting	40
Participants	41
Research paradigm	42
Qualitative research	42
Qualitative data collection	42
Quantitative research	43
Quantitative data collection	43
Research paradigm and data collection	43

Human subject review	44
Student, guardian and adult consent	44
Potential risk and benefits	44
Chapter summary	45
CHAPTER FOUR: Results	46
Introduction	46
Setting and participant results	47
Setting	47
Participants	48
Summary of setting and participants	48
Research paradigm and data collection results	49
Qualitative research	49
Qualitative data collection results	49
Results of questionnaires	50
Research conducted	51
Observation of research	55
Quantitative research	56
Attending data results	56
Summary of research data collection	57
Analyzing data	57
Analyzing questionnaire	57
Analyzing the reflection of my observation	58
Analyzing attending data	59

Summary of data analysis	59
Chapter summary	60
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion	61
Introduction	61
Process of reflection	62
Process of planning	62
Process of implementation	62
Process of review	63
Process of literature review	63
Process of communication of results	63
Chapter summary	64
Reference List	65
Appendix A: Attending Data	69
Appendix B: Staff Questionnaire	71
Appendix C: Student and Guardian Consent	75
Appendix D: Adult Consent Form	79
Appendix E: Consent form from Director of my School	83

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 Target scores for IGDI tests	52
Figure 2 Results for first &second IGDI tests	53

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Personal Journey

The area of focus I have chosen to study is the availability of *What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English Language Learners in a preschool classroom?* Teaching students who are limited in their understanding of the English language can be a daunting task; since students speak their native languages at home, it makes it difficult for me, as the teacher, to communicate with them. Foremost, I believe this area of focus is in my control because the face of our nation has changed rapidly in the last century, especially in our schools and classrooms. More and more children are born in other nations, speak different languages and hold different cultural traditions. Exercising more patience and trying to find effective ways to help students become more proficient in increasing vocabulary and comprehending the English language is particularly important in this time.

The topic is significant to me because I am a preschool teacher who every year tends to get a considerable number of ELL students who enter my classroom. I see and feel that my ELL students are struggling feeling isolated in the classroom and feeling like they cannot communicate with anyone, not even their peers in the classroom. Working with ELL students can be one of the most rewarding experiences in teaching, but it is also a challenge to teach a student who has recently arrived in the country and does not yet know English. Difficulties will inevitably arise during classroom instruction. When this happens, as the teacher, I keep in mind that however challenging I may find the situation,

it is certainly far more troubling for my ELL students, because they are just not learning a new language; they are adapting to a whole new culture and environment.

How I respond to my ELL students can make a great difference in how they feel about school and how their peers respond to them. I am passionate about teaching all students, regardless of their ability levels. As a teacher, my position is to differentiate between teaching approaches to accommodate each student's learning style. Providing the awareness of the reason for learning vocabulary and comprehending English to the student gives them the right motivation and focus. Every problem an ELL student faces is magnified by limitations to the student's ability to consume and produce high-quality English. As a teacher, I need to have a clear understanding of the challenges that ELLs face in and out of school, as well as the challenges I face when designing, implementing, and assessing curriculum.

### **Research Question**

*What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom?* My concern is to find effective strategies for my ELL students, so my initial action will be to understand their individual level of English language proficiency, because the academic experience among all my students can vary greatly. I believe in order to help every student improve; I must understand every student's level of language proficiency and background. Also, I must make sure my ELL students know what is going on in the classroom. Some of my students do not have sufficient knowledge of the English language to understand the instructions that they are given by the teacher. I would encourage my students to ask for clarification when they do not understand certain instructions and help my ELL students to speak

more comprehensibly, by speaking clearly, repeating words that are difficult for my students to pronounce, and helping with how the individual sounds are produced by modeling the right positions and movements of the tongue and lips. I would encourage them to speak slowly so that their pronunciation will be clear and more accurate when speaking.

### **Importance of Vocabulary**

The meaning of the word “vocabulary” is a set of words within a language that are familiar to that person. A person’s vocabulary usually develops with age, and serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. Trying to acquire an extensive vocabulary can be overwhelming when learning a second language. I believe vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without adequate vocabulary students will not be able to understand others or express their own ideas. All languages consist of words. The need to meet the challenge of ELL, is increasing urgent in preschools and other early childhood programs because ELLs, need effective instruction in language development and need explicit instruction in English vocabulary as well as opportunities to hear and speak the language throughout the day. Students come to school with greatly varying vocabularies. Some students will know many more word meanings than others students in the class. This occurs in part because of the differences in the number of new words students are exposed to in their homes and communities.

Students, who come from homes where spoken and written vocabularies are limited, or where English is not spoken, will know fewer words than students who come from homes where they are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary. I believe the early

childhood years are essential in learning vocabulary because vocabulary is the foundation for other developmental skills such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking and writing, and spelling and pronunciation, which go hand in hand with vocabulary.

As a teacher, I have an essential role in helping students expand their vocabulary knowledge through formal and informal instruction. Both approaches are important to engage student's cognitive skills and to give opportunities for students to use the words. I believe through multiple methods for teaching English as a second language, the one constant is the knowledge of how important and empowering it will be for students when they can communicate effectively in English. Many times, students are aware of the delays involved with not having adequate English language skills in school, in their communities and in future educational goals.

### **Components I Want to Accomplish in my Classroom**

When I implement this research into my classroom, I want to learn many components such as preparation, building background, strategies, interaction, practice and application, and effectiveness of lesson delivery. I believe early childhood educators need to understand the stages of second language acquisition, teaching strategies that promote success for diverse children, procedures for determining language proficiency and vocabulary in English and home language, and assessment techniques in order to provide quality early childhood experiences.

Teachers play a critical role in supporting language development. There are two key elements ELLs need in order to improve their English; time and practice. There is nothing that teachers can do to rush English acquisition, but there are many ways to

provide opportunities to practice English in the classroom. Every student yearns to be successful; therefore, teachers must provide ways to help students achieve their academic goals. I am able to facilitate students' success by incorporating a variety of teaching styles, accommodating instructional delivery, and motivating students to learn. Through this, I am better able to help English language students reach their goals of becoming competent and productive communicators in English.

### **Chapter Summary**

I plan on implementing the research to build my expertise in the area of vocabulary development acquisition, which will help me in my career of education and improve my student's education by increasing their proficiency in learning the English Language. Due to the high number of ELLs entering the classrooms each year, teachers at some point in their careers will have ELLs to educate. Learning to start off with baby steps in teaching ELLs is better than taking no steps at all.

### **Introduction to Chapter Two**

Chapter two, I will review the current literature relating to my action research topic finding effective ways to increase ELLs vocabulary. I will look deeper into the areas of vocabulary acquisition strategies for ELLs. This research will lead me down the path of continually striving to provide effective, nurturing environments and developmentally, and linguistically effective instruction for ELLs. This instruction should take into consideration the characteristics of young ELLs and their language development, the learning conditions that are most effective for these learners, and the best kinds of instruction that best meets their needs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Children who acquire large vocabularies in their early years are better prepared for literacy than those children with poor vocabularies (Coppola, 2005). It is crucial that young ELLs in preschool have opportunities to participate in high-quality early language and literacy experiences to prepare them for later success. My research question is:

*What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English Language Learners in a preschool classroom?*

Vocabulary development refers to the process in which people acquire words. Throughout children school years, children build their vocabulary. Children begin to learn abstract words beginning around the age of three to five, then word learning takes place both in conversation and through reading. Word learning often involves physical context, builds on prior knowledge, takes place in social context, and includes semantic support. Children's vocabulary size is related to the number of words heard. ELLs have vocabularies that reflect their exposure to words (Coppola, 2005.). The research explores instructional strategies aimed to increase young ELLs in a preschool classroom that is emotionally and socially supportive to non-English speaking children.

#### Overview

Chapter two is a review of literature for this research study. It is important to explore research concerning the history of vocabulary, challenges and strategies for ELLs in a classroom, educators overcoming barriers to help ELLs in a classroom and effective instructional strategies to help build ELL vocabulary in a preschool classroom.

Exploring this research can help educators fully understand the problem of vocabulary development among ELLs and what teachers can do to provide effective instruction in language development.

First, the history of vocabulary will be presented following the different topics of growing up bilingual in your community, code switching within the languages, and the theory of word learning and ELLs. Vocabulary development can help to close the achievement gap, particularly for students from low-income or non-English speaking homes. A lot of research by Hart and Risley (2008) found that children from low income backgrounds might have a more limited vocabulary bank than more affluent peers. By the time children reach the first grade, children in low-income households have gained 5,000 word vocabularies. In contrast, children from affluent households enter school with a vocabulary bank of 20,000 words (Harmon & Restrepo, 2008). An important part in learning a second language is becoming acquainted with the particular vocabulary of that language. During the beginning phase of learning a language, the critical part takes place vocabulary development, where the learner begins to build up a bank of words in the new language. As the child becomes comfortable with the language, learning synonyms (or words with equivalent meaning) gains importance (Cunningham, 2009).

Second, the challenges and strategies of ELLs will be discussed following the topics of language stock, belonging, and comprehension. Many teachers do ELLs a disservice if we think of them as one dimensional on the basis of their limited English proficiency. ELLs have diverse backgrounds, languages and education profiles. Some students are at grade level in their home language while, others may have limited schooling. Some children enter school with high expectations to learn because of family support or

wanting to succeed in life. Other has had negative experiences in school that crushed their motivation for attending school. Some may come from a family background with high literacy while others live in poverty (Echevarria & Short, 2004). All these factors affect the ease with which ELLs acquire English proficiency in the academic and conversational realms. Conversational fluency in a new language develops inside and outside the classroom.

Third, educators overcoming barriers to help ELLs in a classroom will be discussed.

Fourth, a summary of effective instructional strategies that have proven to be successful in building ELLs vocabulary in a preschool classroom will be presented. The purpose to increase vocabulary for young ELLs is that there have been numerous studies on ELLs and the impact on their learning when vocabulary has been a main focus in the curriculum. Assessing our students and finding out where they need to be and where they are in literacy is crucial in building a core of the study that revolves around vocabulary and each individual student (August, Carlo & Snow, 2005). Building vocabulary with young ELLs is important as they learn a new language, because it will make connecting what they already know easier.

Fifth, finally I will conclude by drawing connections across the literature review to support my research question: *What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom?*

## **History of Vocabulary**

In the past years, researchers have found that insufficient vocabulary knowledge is a critical problem for many young children, particular English Language Learners who are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English- only peers. Students are likely to perform poorly on their assessments and are at risk of being diagnosed as having a learning disability. Children need to know a wide range of words to understand the texts they will encounter in school. Many ELLs walk into the classroom with limited English language backgrounds and find that vocabulary is their most challenging encounter in attempting to access information from the classroom texts (August, Carlo & Snow, 2005).

Given the rapid growth of the number of ELLs in the United States' schools, research has determined effective instructional techniques to assist young children from diverse linguistic backgrounds in acquiring early vocabulary knowledge (Hines & Silverman, 2009). During the periods of infancy through high school, during which children develop both languages and reading skills, vocabulary plays a critical role in literacy development.

In early childhood and preschool, children tend to develop their oral vocabulary through social interactions with parents, family, and other adults. These early language experiences play a vital role in literacy development. During children's school years when children are learning to read, their oral language skills interact with emerging skills such as reading and writing. Phonological awareness also plays a role an important in early reading development and closely related to early oral language skills that include vocabulary development (Coppola, 2005).

Phonological awareness is a prerequisite for decoding skills, which play a role in reading. Vocabulary helps support the development of these critical early reading skills and becomes a predictor of reading comprehension in the later stages of reading development. The early language skills include phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge that are closely interrelated and change roles across time in the development of literacy skills. Children's vocabulary will increase incrementally overtime (Nelson & Vadasy, 2012).

**Growing up bilingual in your community.** Children that grow up in a multilingual or only speaking one language in their communities notice who speaks what. They choose the form of speech that they assume can be understood based on how their addresses look, where they are, or what they speak. When young children happen to say a word from the wrong language for a monolingual hearer, it fills a gap, which is occurring when they do not know a word or lack immediate access to that word (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

**Code switching.** Code switching is also identified with young children as a rhetorical and stylistic tool, which later will demonstrate their sophisticated sociolinguistic competence in their two languages. Children from an early age notice in their communities who is bilingual and they notice the switch between languages by the bilingual speakers around them. Children learn from their parents, siblings, and peers how to make use of using both languages in conversations. (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005). When children use code switching when speaking it depends on three factors: as how well the speaker knows both languages, whether the languages are grammatically similar, and relatives' language prestige. When language is very different in type, or

when an ELL does not know both languages well, a word or phrase is usually inserted. With young ELLs it is commonly found that they start speaking their second language by inserting English phrases or words such as “okay or dude” into their first language (L1) sentences (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

Code switching from children reflects what they hear between adults in a bilingual community. Code switching is grammatically constrained, such that switches between languages occur at points of syntactic concordance. ELLs have learned two grammatical systems that are quite different from each other, but they are able to locate the points where switching is possible (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

For a long period of time in the United States code switching was viewed as a deficiency rather than an important linguistic tool available for bilingual speakers. Research over the years has shown that code switching is seen as a positive and useful linguistic practice. As children become more competent in another language, they can switch languages at different levels and for different sociolinguistic functions. Finally from a pedagogical perspective, code switching can be used for teachers and the students as part of their classrooms disclosure practices (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005). Teachers in the classroom can support students learning by demonstrating code switching as part of the classroom discourse practices, to create a linguistic environment for children to feel comfortable using their native languages in the school context. When teachers become familiar with students' backgrounds, they become more effective at creating a sociocultural supportive learning environment that affirms a range of cultural and linguistic resources for all students. These practices will not only help students learn, but

it will increase the status and prestige of their heritage languages as part of classroom day-to-day discourse (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

**Word learning theory and ELLs.** There are several theories that address many aspects of word learning, such as how children may acquire words initially and how they develop the full meaning of words. One common feature of these proposals is recognition that learners must be able to efficiently identify sound sequences of words and extract lexical items from the speech stream. Researchers have also identified that children make assumptions about the meaning of new words until or unless they have the evidence that contradicts these basic assumptions; also, children assume that new words refer to previously unnamed objects and to whole objects rather than their parts (Bedore, Pena & Boerger). Many children resist learning multiple words with precisely the same meanings. A majority of the proposals focus on monolingual development but can be extended into bilingual word learning.

Bilingual and ELL children also need to develop instructional strategies that will permit them to acquire multiple words for the same concepts and transfer knowledge across their languages. Several models that have been presented address cross language transfer of knowledge. The early models of lexical organization and transfer worked on the assumptions that bilinguals had used the same words in both their language (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005). As it has become clear that each bilingual's lexicon reflects on the children's experience in that language, which this original model has been gradually modified. The current version of this model focuses on working on the developmental hypothesis that incorporates both the word association model in the L2 (second language) are mediated through the L1 to access the conceptual system and also the concept

mediation model in which words in the L2 are linked directly to the conceptual system. The developmental hypothesis suggests that ELL's shift in learning strategies as individuals increase their fluency in an L2 from word association to conceptual mediation (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

In the early stages of L2 acquisition, if a child hears a word in the L2, the meaning of the word will be accessed via the word in L1 and its connection to the concept. Over a period of children's development, children will gradually learn to transfer word knowledge between first and second languages at the lexical. As children become more proficient in their L2, they will gain the ability to acquire vocabulary via either language or the connections between the lexicon of both languages and between the lexicon; as a result, underlying semantic representations or concepts gain strength. This model identifies how children move from being able to learn vocabulary in their L1 to being able to learn vocabulary in either language (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

**Summary.** Teachers need to address the knowledge and skills mainstream teachers need to have in order to develop effective curricula that engages ELLs, develops their academic skills, and helps them negotiate their identifies as bilingual learners in the classroom. Teachers need to give the ELLs the right to maintain their native languages, help students develop English, and as support their students' bilingualism. In the United States, bilingual learners are more commonly referred to as English Language Learners and are often defined as students who know a language other than English and are learning English at the same time (Colorado, 2009).

## **Challenges and Strategies for English Language Learners in a Classroom**

In many states, the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom has grown, and this number will continue to increase over time. Educators have little history of educating the ELL population, and there may be a corresponding lack of understanding of and empathy for ELLs. A study was conducted years ago by middle school students that observed different classroom teachers interacting with their ELLs (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011). When they were asked to report their findings, the students reported that some teachers did not work differently with the ELLs, while another student said the teacher tried, but did not know any methods for working with ELLs. Only 12.5 percent of teachers have participated in eight hour training or professional development on how to work with ELLs. The question is: how do teachers work with this population of students? Some teachers are prepared to wait until they believe the student can understand the class content, while others may avoid the issue or assume it is someone else's problem (such as the English Language second teacher). Since the number of ELLs is increasing in classrooms, teachers need to make classroom time count for educating ELLs (Washburn, 2008).

**Language shock strategies.** Language shock is when a student is in the classroom doing a lesson and does not understand the lesson being taught in a language that is foreign to them. The student may feel frustrated, lost, stupid or dumb, and overwhelmed. Also, they may be bored or tune out the lesson. Confusion is a natural response to a new system when people do not know how they are supposed to act or what they are expected to do. Students may know there are no consequences for not learning or not understanding. This level of frustration is unproductive in students at any age,

leading to only self-blame, hopelessness, or boredom. These responses will not increase a student's language acquisition or content of learning and may lead students to have a negative outlook toward schooling (Washburn, 2008).

What teachers can do to make ELLs feel welcome in their classroom and avoid language shock is to steer clear from confusion, frustration, and alienation by making the student feel they belong and ensuring that students understand most of what is going on in the classroom.

**Belonging strategies.** ELLs who are often part of a minority group may feel even more isolated and alienated from their peers. For students to learn and benefit, students of all ages need to feel they belong, knowing they are in a safe place and knowing their environment. ELLs need to feel unique, being recognized as themselves, and to belong socially and have the rights as a member in a given society. Other ways of making students feel they belong is by knowing their name and being able to say it correctly, and assigning them with a classmate who can help them throughout the school day; these are good for students of any age. Teaming up with a buddy gives ELLs and their partner more to get to know each other and work collaboratively. Teachers should consider planning an exploratory lesson to give ELLs the chance to find compatible friends and to shine. Giving ELLs the opportunities through exploratory lessons will lead to them finding things they share with their classmates. Also, letting ELLs teach their classmates something simple will help ELLs feel as though they are not the only one learning a new language (Washburn, 2008).

**Comprehension.** Many ELLs feel frustrated because they do not understand what they were supposed to be learning or what the content means. Comprehension is the key to not making students feel distress. It is important to make it a priority to see what the student knows already. In some subject areas, ELLs may be more advanced than U.S. students. If teachers has students that do not want to speak or may not be ready to speak, the teacher can ask them to point to objects identified by the other students, helping as needed. Other strategy teachers can do when you speaking is to pause between phrases rather than speaking slowly. If the ELLs don not respond right away, allow time. When comprehending a foreign language, time is the best result to process what is being heard. A teacher should make sure his/her body language is visible and noticed by the ELLs as being identical to what the teachers is talking about. The teachers should say everything at least three of several ways, such as through speech, written words, drawings, and diagrams on the board, photos and real life objects (Washburn, 2008).

Teachers can check comprehension by watching the student's actions and asking them to do or say something without nodding yes or no. Teachers can listen for students' using single words or phrases to answer questions, and if need be, draw pictures or pointing to pictures or drawings or manipulating objects. Being unable to comprehend the language of instruction for ELLs in school often leads to a negative impact on the students. Language is tied to how we see ourselves and how others view us. Language is the most basic tool of learning and cannot be taken for granted. All teachers need to think effectively about how they support and enhance second language development (Washburn, 2008).

**Summary.** In order to help struggling ELLs in the classroom, teachers need to exercise having patience (because it can take some time) and making sure students receive the proper help to support their learning needs. ELLs are students who have acquired their primary listening skills in a language other than English, and require teacher support and attention to their unique needs. In addition to language acquisition, ELLs are asked to connect their cultures, backgrounds and experience with those of their new environment in order to achieve academic success (Collins & Samson, 2012).

### **Teachers Overcoming Barriers to Help ELLs in the Classroom**

Classroom teachers need to overcome barriers that hinder establishing a partnership with ELLs in the classroom. The first issue includes all general education and ESL teachers and their preconceived notions of having full control of a class. Many school districts and administrators need to support teachers in their endeavors by helping them put a collaborative plan into action. The newer teachers might feel not so confident at first to seek advice within their school district, for the fear that they might be labeled by other staff as lacking authority and lacking credulity and knowledge in providing effective instruction and academic support. When teachers ask for support to overcome challenges within their classroom, ELLs are also receiving academic support in the classroom (Sasson, 2013).

Second one, concern for teachers to overcome in the classroom is working with time and curriculum constraints. Some helpful methods for teachers is using email as a limited form of support, combined with joint lesson planning during lunch hours or having administrators create a “lunch and learn” program so other teachers can learn successful activities in other classrooms. Some teachers have also shared some success

with sending a personal email invitation to the school principal so they can be invited into the classroom to observe successful classroom activities on a co-teaching level. This way, hopefully the school administrator can implement more collaborate activities on a whole school level (Sasson, 2013).

Before ELLs enter the classroom, a teachers should do his/her homework as a teacher and learn about what he or she can about the new ELLs like if they can read or write in their home languages, if they attended school on a consistence basis, students that are literate in their home language are better at transferring concepts and vocabulary. The teacher should take time to create a map of the school and write down a list of words in English and other languages. This will be very helpful to the new students (Cipriano, 2011).

It is extremely important for teachers to remember that it is not just the task of the ESL teacher to deliver instruction to ELLs; it is for all teachers to contribute to the education of all students. There are many strategies teachers can implement to help ELLs in the classroom. The strategies can really help ELLs achieve in the classroom, both in content and English knowledge (Heining-Boynton, (n.d.). Author recommends the following to be effective for helping teachers overcome the barriers:

- Help students develop cognitive skills-Encourage the parents of ELL to use their native languages at home. Explain to the parents that cognitive growth in their native language helps their children develop English academic language.
- Develop pride in cultures- Help your students develop pride in their cultures by displaying pictures in your classroom from your student's home countries, listen to their native language music and read book in their home language.

- Cooperative learning fosters social interactions- Provide a variety of activities for newcomers. Make sure ELLs are interacting with real speakers of English. Social acceptance is a powerful motivator for learning a new language.
- Build background knowledge- When teachers are presenting new concepts to ELLs it is encouraged that teachers should make connections to the students' background experiences or to past learning.
- Comprehensible input- In order for ELLs to acquire a second language, the student must understand what is being said to them. Students should receive input that is appropriate to their age and language level.
- Beware of culture shock- New ELLs usually suffer from culture shock. Being in a strange place and losing the power to communicate can be quite painful for ELLs. By teachers creating an environment where the new students feel secure will lessen the intensity and duration of culture shock.
- Support home language- Don't discourage ELLs to not speak their native language. Encourage the parents of your students to develop literacy skills in their native language. When ELLs learn in their native language it will eventually be transferred to English.
- Be an active listener- When listening to your ELLs as they learn to speak, give them your full attention when trying to understand the communication. Demonstrate patience through body language.
- Give simple directions- Give clear and simple directions to ELLs. Break directions into simple steps. Ask students to retell what you are asking them to do before they attempt a task.

- Encourage participation- Encourage ELL to participate in class. Some students may know the answer but are afraid to voice it. Provide the question to them ahead of time of they can be prepared to give a response to the question.
- Assign a buddy- Provide student with a classmate that speaks the same language at the beginning of the school year. During the adjustment phase the classmate can explain what's going on in the class.
- Work on your language skills- Learn a few new words in your ELLs native language. When you show good humor about making mistakes and risking smiles and laughter, your ELL will be more willing to speak in English.
- Focus on the positive- the more ELLs are comfortable in the classroom the more they are able to learn. Provide lots of encourage and praise for what the student can do. Create opportunities for their success in your class and focus on the positive.

(Haynes, 2005)

**Summary.** Clearly, many teachers struggle with barriers concerning their ELLs in the classroom. Teachers need the appropriate training to be meeting their students' language and learning needs and to facilitate academic growth. Research indicates that there are promising effective teaching methods for working with ELLs, but the actual knowledge and skills that the teacher needs to support effective instruction for ELLs does not always reach them (Collins & Samson, 2012). A majority of the states have less explicit requirements for teacher preparation in regards to ELLs. If we hope for improvement in ELLs' achievement outcomes and helping teachers overcome their barriers with ELLs, then teachers need to be trained by teacher education programs, to be

certified by states, and to be evaluated by local education agencies. This will improve higher quality teachers of ELLs and more importantly, higher outcomes of ELLs.

### **Effective Instructional Strategies to Help Build English Language Learner's Vocabulary in a Preschool Classroom**

Researchers have found that insufficient vocabulary knowledge is a critical problem for many young ELLs. Children need to know a wide range of vocabulary to be able to comprehend the texts they will encounter during their school years (Hines & Silverman, 2009). Early childhood education plays an essential role in preparing young ELL children for later success in school. Children who have the opportunity to develop the basic foundational skills in language and literacy in preschool are ready to enter kindergarten to learn to read and write (Ford, 2010).

Effective vocabulary instruction emphasizes direct instruction. When teachers present key words that help ELLs understand difficult text and multiple meaning words, requiring the student to use context to figure out the meaning will be necessary. By using direct instruction with students, teachers can incorporate relevant vocabulary into the before, during and after reading stages of instruction (Sibold, 2011). To help ELLs remember new words, teachers can associate the words with things that are already familiar to the students, or the teacher can translate the words into the students' primary language. While students may learn new words by encountering them through read-aloud, it is important that teachers give ELLs the tools for acquiring vocabulary through explicit instructions. To make learning new words exciting, teachers can help students hunt for clues that unlock the meaning of words such as using synonyms, descriptions, explanations, and visual aids. It is important to connect new words with students' prior

knowledge. For younger children, actual objects or items are useful for making abstract words concrete (Sibold, 2011). Here are a variety of strategies teachers can use to increase young ELLs vocabulary.

**Provide explicit instruction in vocabulary.** Children need a variety of exposure to words in order to develop a rich understanding of their meaning and use. Teachers should introduce and incorporate many new interesting vocabulary words into the classroom activities. Presenting vocabulary thematically will help children make the connections between words and will scaffold students learning. Also, conducting read-aloud that include descriptions of specific vocabulary can support word learning (Ford, 2010).

**Provide and encourage ongoing speaking between adults and peers.** ELLs need many opportunities to engage in social interaction with peers in the classroom, but adults also need to provide support to help with the language skills to conduct their interactions (Ford, 2010). During group activities, teachers can pair ELLs up with English speaking children who have strong language skills and make sure not to group the children who speak the same language together. Teachers can self-directed activities that children can choose and have interest in matching their language abilities. Educators can encourage speaking in the classroom and provide prompts to help children express themselves when speaking and can ask children questions that have multiple answers so ELLs can have a chance expand on their sentences.

**Present rich language input to ELLs.** When young children have the opportunity to be exposed to rich language whether it's through shared book reading or teacher talk, it has been shown to enhance children's oral language development (Ford,

2010). There is one effective strategy teachers can provide an ongoing commentary on activities that are taking place in the classroom in order to expose children to language associated with the immediate context.

**Classroom Structure.** Classroom structure plays an important role in supporting ELLs. Teachers can arrange the classroom in a way that supports each type of instructional activity that will take place, and then keep changes to the physical environment to a minimum. Having predictable classroom routines can also provide scaffolding for ELLs by allowing them to anticipate what will happen each day, including the type of language they will need for each activity (Ford, 2010).

**Literacy development.** Research has shown that the alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness are early literacy skills that contribute significantly to later reading achievement. ELLs can begin to learn these foundational skills in preschool before they even develop strong English language skills (Ford, 2010).

**Help ELLs make connection between what they know in their native language and what they need to know in English.** The similarities between ELLs' native language and the English language can be used as a foundation for instruction. For example if the L1 has some of the same phonemes as English, teachers can start with those phonemes for rhyme or beginning sound activities because those are the sounds the child is familiar with. Children usually have the most difficulty when they encounter sounds that are present in English, but do not occur in their home language (Ford, 2010).

**Increasing vocabulary size.** In order for children to use vocabulary fluently, they need ongoing exposure to words to increase the size of their lexicon. This term is called breadth of vocabulary knowledge. When students learn more about the meaning of

words or the contexts, and the sentence structures in which new words can be used, students will increase vocabulary depth (Bedore, Pena & Boerger, 2005).

Bilingual students language acquisition is spread across languages because language input is spread across two languages, it can be challenging for ELLs to form an initial representation of a new word particularly before phonological representation are fully developed to facilitate the recognition of a words. Spreading word knowledge between two languages supports the development of breadth. ELLs may take longer to gain depth of knowledge because they reencounter words less often, then the native speaking students given that their linguistic experience is split across two languages. It has been shown that ELLs can benefit from instruction from teachers that provides both vocabulary breadth and depth (Bedore, Pena &Boerger, 2005).

**Family Support for English language learners.** Teachers understand from prior research that meeting the needs of students also involves meeting the needs of their families to build a strong home school connection. However, it is well known that parental involvement is essential to success in school. For many reasons, newcomer parents may not be accustomed to being actively involved in their children's education. Parental involvement may not be the norm in their home countries (Kiefer & Morrow, 2011). Parents may not feel confident enough in English to talk to teachers concerning their child's education, they may not be familiar with the school system, or the parents may be busy working and/or working on learning the English language themselves. For these reasons, establishing connections with parents of ELLs my sometimes require extra effort. When teachers plan for school involvement from ELL parents, it is essential to have a mindset from the belief that parents want to be involved in their child's education.

The teachers need to be open to seeing the parent's perspective without judging them.

School staff need to provide opportunities to ELL parents to fit their schedules and family needs. A first step in reaching out to families is to provide a personal contact and build a relationship with them (Ferguson, 2005). This can be done with a face contact, even a home visit, or a phone call assisted with an interpreter. Other ways teachers can support parent involvement for ELL are:

- Involve parents with their children in learning activities at home including homework and other curricular linked activities- English language learners' parents may feel unprepared to help their child with homework or schoolwork, especially if they have limited educational and English skills. ELLs parents can provide a place where their child can complete their homework, check that homework is completed every night, ask their child to tell them what they have learned in school and keep in contact with the teacher about their child' progress.
- Provide translation services- When providing an interpreter for ELLs parents whether it be a school employee, parent liaison, family member or community member, this person can translate for parent-teacher conferences, back to school events, PTA meetings and for regular communication. It is best to find an adult and not rely on the student as the translator, as this practice can disempower the parent.
- Investigate specific cultural practices- Teachers must respect all learners as themselves as individuals with culturally defined identifies. Families bring funds of knowledge to their learning communities and recognizing these teachers and must incorporate the knowledge and experience in the school. Teachers must be willing to

cross traditional personal and professional boundaries in pursuit of social justice and equity for ELLs and parents.

- Promote cultural sensitivity within school environment- Encourage parents to share their language and culture with their child's class. They can bring in something that represents their culture, if they wish. Also they can teach some words from their native language.
- Incorporate a parent liaison to recruit fellow parents as volunteers and audiences- If ELLs parents are willing to volunteer their time, find out what their interest and skills are. ELLs parents may be able to help with a variety of activities within their child's school.
- Offer school support to help parents' literacy and growth in their knowledge and skills- Immigrant families may be unaware of the educational opportunities available to them. A way to reach out to parents is make them aware of learning opportunities for themselves. In your community there should be English and/ or native language literacy classes, family literacy projects and parenting classes for adults.
- Develop a mentor program to empower parents-Some ELLs parents may not feel comfortable in leadership role, by giving some guidance and encouragement from school leaders can go a long way in building their confidence. It may be something small, such as soliciting ideas for school events, or something bigger such as serving on a parent advisory board.

(Breiseth, 2011)

## Chapter Summary

Teachers who work with English Language Learners know that academic language takes longer to achieve proficiency than it does in conversational language. ELLs need at least two years to achieve conversational language and five to nine years to develop academic language proficiency. Many ELLs are only exposed to English words in school, they have not yet grasped or even heard in their native language, which makes transference of knowledge impossible (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2010). The differences in the ability to use conversational versus academic language can be a hindrance to ELLs and having lasting effects on their academics and therefore, their lives.

Overall, in the research explored above the learning of vocabulary instruction is essential for all students but it is even more so for student who confront a wide variety of linguistic challenges (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2010). Vocabulary words are how we communicate, words are what we use to comprehend new information, and words are what we use to process new information and communicate our ideas. Words are our tools of thought. Without having the tools of vocabulary you are limited in our abilities. With these tools, we have no limitations to success.

There has been much attention drawn to the achievement gap between English Language Learners and their English- speaking peers. Unfortunately, by the time children arrive in kindergarten, the difference in foundational language and literacy skills have often already set the stage for disparity in achievement among students. Research has shown that high- quality early childhood education programs can have a significant impact on children's learning success (Ford, 2010). The learning of new words is not a simple issue and neither is instruction for word learning. There is still much to be earned

about vocabulary learning and instruction. Educators need to use the best practices they know and the best available research to help students build their vocabulary. Early childhood programs that implement research-based age appropriate instruction in early language and literacy skills for ELLs can ensure that when they enter school, they are equipped with the tools they need to be successful learners throughout their school experiences (Wasik, 2010).

We use language to express our intentions, describe our feelings, and understand the ideas of others. It's a skill that can be easily taken for granted. It is important for teachers to fully understand the significance of increasing vocabulary for ELLs in a preschool classroom (Ford, 2010). In the next chapter I will discuss my action research plan in order to find out what effective instructional strategies will increase ELLs vocabulary in my preschool classroom.

### **Introduction to Chapter Three**

The next chapter will explain the process for which I plan on reviewing my research question. It will also include the literature base process for action research and how that relates to the qualitative and quantitative research that will be conducted. The setting and participants of my research will be defined in the next chapter, as well as the different tools and methods that will be conducted to carry out my research plan. I will report on how the data will be analyzed once it is collected through the research question. Chapter three will give an overview and an explanation of all aspects of my action plan, exploring my research question: *What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English language Learners in a preschool classroom?*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

Excellence is a goal that educators want to achieve in early childhood education for all young children. As the population changes, that means all early childhood educators should be prepared to teach children who speak different languages. A large population of children in preschool comes from different home language backgrounds. In my preschool classroom, I serve a large population of ELLs who are struggling with vocabulary development. This happens to be a critical area of development that demands effective classroom everyday instruction for young ELLs to have success in reading. Students cannot understand what they read without understanding most of what the vocabulary words mean.

In the literature review, the focal point of this research has lead me to ask the question: *What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English Language Learners in a preschool classroom?*

In order to further explore this question, I conducted research on the topic of increasing vocabulary for ELLs in a preschool classroom. The research took place in my school and within my preschool classroom. The participants were both teachers and preschool students. I used a variety of research methods to gain knowledge relating to my research question. These research methods included both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. My methods for conducting research include using qualitative and quantitative tools in my classroom as well as collecting information from my colleagues

in other preschool classrooms throughout the school. This chapter will define the setting and participants that were involved in the research, examine the research paradigm, explore my methods and tools used in the research, and finally analyze the data collected throughout the research process.

### **Methodology**

I used action research to conduct my research project. Action research is conducted by teachers in their classrooms within their locus of control. Action research is used to make positive changes that improve educational practices, the school environment and meet the needs of students (Mills, 2011). This study took place in my classroom for a period of two months for four days a week for 20 minutes a day. I conducted the early literacy IGDIs assessment tool. I took field notes of how long the students are engaged in the vocabulary learning. I worked with each student four days a week and watch to see how much they have increased their vocabulary over two months.

**Setting.** The setting for this research project took place in a large urban setting with a diverse population that includes a majority of children of color and a high percentage of English language learners. The school is a non-profit organization that is located in the north central of the United States. The majority of the research was conducted in my classroom. The classroom setting that I teach in is an early childhood preschool classroom.

The students in my classroom are generally three to five years old and attend school four days a week, for three and a half hours day. The classroom can have up to 20 children enrolled in each morning and afternoon session. The staff members who are in the classroom on a daily basis include: two lead teachers (myself) and one bus monitor.

Twice a week a speech pathologist will come into the classroom and provide services to the children who are receiving speech.

**Participants.** The students that participated in the study are 4 and 5 year olds who are ELLs. Two of the four students in my classroom speak the East Asian language Karen, and it is the only language spoken at home. The other two children hear a language other than English at home. One of the students is Hmong and hears Hmong at home; the other student is Somali and hears Somali language at home. All of the students participating in the study have been struggling with vocabulary development in the classroom. The main area in the classroom where teaching takes place is during group time and choice time being an instructional time in the classroom that is led by a teacher with student sitting on a large square rug facing the teacher at group or during choice time when the teacher works with the student individually.

When choosing participants for this study, I focused on my preschool classroom and elicit data from staff members. Most of my observations involved students in my preschool classroom. The teachers involved in the questionnaire portion of my research are all qualified teachers who are currently working in the field of early childhood. I conducted a ten- question, teacher -developed questionnaire on teachers who have English language learners in their classrooms who struggle with the vocabulary of study. The students who are involved in my research are four and five year olds in my classroom. There are four students involved in the study. The students were observed during group and choice time, the focus of the observation will be on their engagement in vocabulary learning.

## **Research Paradigm**

The research design that I conducted is both qualitative and quantitative, or a mixed methods design (Mills, 2011). This type of mixed methods design of research is helpful for having a variety of data to get a clear representation of what is going on in my classroom. In order to best see the whole picture of how to increase vocabulary for my English language learners, I used both types of research.

**Qualitative research.** I conducted a variety of qualitative research method through my research project. Qualitative research uses narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection to understand the way things are and what research means from the participants in the study (Mills, 2011). The first example of qualitative research is a questionnaire that I distributed to my colleagues (Appendix B). This type of qualitative research gave me an idea of how other teachers are struggling to find effective teaching strategies to support ELLs in learning vocabulary knowledge.

The next piece of qualitative research that I used is observation through the lens of an active participant. When I am leading choice time, I am considered an active participant. Since it is difficult to take notes during the research process at the same time, I took field notes after the lesson was taught.

**Qualitative data collection.** Qualitative data collection techniques can be defined as a descriptive way of evaluating problems, or experienced-based research technique (Mills, 2011). This type of data falls under the three E's Experiencing, Enquiring, and Examining (Mills, 2011). The first technique that was used is enquiring technique, meaning the researcher is asking questions. This was the questionnaire form to the other teachers. The next technique was experiencing group. I used this method

when being an active participant in my classroom. The last technique I used is examining group when I reflect on my experience as an active participant in the classroom observation.

**Quantitative research.** Along with using the three E's methods, I used a piece of quantitative research to measure the engagement of my students. Quantitative research uses the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict or control phenomena of interest (Mills, 2011). I used data form to measure the engagement of my students. I used a data form to measure how long my students are engaged in learning vocabulary knowledge during choice time (Appendix A). The way this data collection method is set records the time of how long the students are engaged during a measured period.

**Quantitative data collection.** Qualitative data collection techniques can provide the researcher with data in numerical form. This type of research can provide considerable information that can analyze and interpreted by numerical (Mills, 2011).

**Research paradigm and data collection.** In my action research I used both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. By using both data methods, it will help me to triangulate the results of my research. Triangulation is a desired method researcher's use for multiple sources of data. It is generally accepted in action research circles that researchers should not rely on any single source (Mills, 2011). The use of qualitative and quantitative data while conducting research leads me to creating specific collection techniques or methods of research.

## **Human Subject Review**

A human subject review was completed once my proposal is approved. I completed a Human Subject Committee (HSC) long form and submitted it to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with a letter of consent from my school director. I provide IRB with information regarding the potential participants and description of my action research study. I provided the purpose of the study, participants, setting, and research methods in the study. I provided the potential risk and benefits of the study.

**Student, guardian and adult consent.** Students and guardians must to be participants in human research. The consent form (Appendix C & Appendix D) contained detailed information about the study, its potential risk and benefits guarantee of confidentiality and guarantee of voluntary participation. Students and their guardian and adults could opt out of the study and questionnaires by returning the opt-out form. Students and colleagues could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Potential risk and benefits.** Participants' confidentiality was not a risk. The risk was disclosed by the use of anonymous questionnaires and names were removed from the questionnaires and notes that were associated with students' progress during the study. Adults were advised not to sign their questionnaires. Potential benefits of the study were to find effective strategies to increase vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom.

## **Chapter Summary**

I conducted a mixed methods action research that relies on data from questionnaires, IGDIs assessment tool, vocabulary games, engagement and observations. I distributed questionnaires to my colleagues to get their feedback. I administered the IGDIs assessment tool, and vocabulary games each week over a period of eight weeks. I am an active participant when observing in the classroom while analyzing their engagement in the activities. Then I took field notes of what I have observed during an active participant.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Introduction

Throughout the eight weeks of this study, data was collected in two ways: teacher's questionnaires' and anecdotal notes from observations. The data was collected from four English language learners in my preschool classroom that struggle with vocabulary development. The purpose of this study is that vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that "... while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 36). This point reflects my experience as an early childhood teacher working with different languages; even without grammar, with some useful words and expressions, I can manage to communicate. Particularly as students develop greater fluency and expression in English; it is significant for them to acquire more productive vocabulary knowledge and to develop their own personal vocabulary learning strategies. Students naturally recognize the importance of vocabulary to their language learning. The purpose of my research was to better understand, "*What instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom?*"

This chapter will review the setting and participants involved in my action research and how they contributed to the results of my research. I will then explore the

research paradigm used and how it was used specifically in the process of my question exploration.

### **Setting and Participant Results**

I completed my research in my early childhood preschool classroom and with other early childhood teachers. I obtained permission to complete human subject research from my director over education at my school, Hamline University, and parents' of the children in my classroom. The people that participated in this research were myself, students in my classroom, and early childhood license teachers. The participants were an important piece of my research.

**Setting.** The setting of my research involves my classroom. I teach in a large urban setting with a diverse population that includes a majority of children of color and a high percentage of English language learners. The school I teach at approved my request to complete research in my school. In my classroom I teach a lot of English language learners that struggle with vocabulary development. This year I have 4 students in enrolled in my class, all of whose parents agree to be part of my research. Within my classroom, my research was conducted with adult directed circle time activities and vocabulary development activities during choice time and individually with the students. Circle time involves a series of songs, gross motor actions, turn-taking activities, books and games. I led this time of the day by sitting in front of my students. I would lead my students in lessons that I created and games to play, involving students in a variety of activities.

**Participants.** The students in my classroom are engaging in vocabulary development learning predominantly during circle time. For this reason, it was important that all my students would participate in this study. In my classroom this year I began with four children, all were participants in this study. The children in this study were 4 and 5 years old, 2 females and 2 males. Two of the children are Karen speaking and exclusively heard Karen at home. The other two children hear a language other than English at home. One of the students is Hmong and hears Hmong at home; the other student is Somali and hears Somali language at home.

The staff members who were participants in my questionnaire were from a variety of backgrounds and fields. The questionnaire was sent out electronically to all staff members that were early childhood educators. The final participant in this research is myself, I was a participant and facilitator of my circle time and individually activities for my students, created and analyzed the results of the questionnaire, and reflected and reviewed my instructional time during the activities with my students.

### **Summary of Setting and Participants**

The setting and the participants became the basis of my research plan that investigated ways to increase vocabulary for English language learners. The setting was a backdrop to the research. It was important to have a base understanding of the setting in which this research is taking place in order to best understand and analyze the results. The participants are important because they provide the lens under which the research question is being pursued. The participants of the research dictate the lessons being used, the level of engagement, and the type of learning experience that all participants gain

from vocabulary development. The base knowledge of the setting and participants in this study guide the research paradigm used in this project.

### **Research Paradigm and Data Collection Results**

In order to answer my research question, strategies to use to increase English language learners vocabulary development, I decided to conduct my research using both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. According to Geoffrey Mills (2011), conducting both qualitative and quantitative data, combining them in a single study is known as mixed method designs. I used this type of mixed methods design when conducting my research.

### **Qualitative Research**

The first piece of qualitative research that I conducted was a questionnaire distributed to my early childhood colleagues. I used this questionnaire as an enquiring type of research to gather information from people in similar teaching situations to myself. In gathering the data I was able to gain insight into how others feel about struggling with teaching vocabulary development to ELLs. The next piece of qualitative data that I collected through my research was an active participate observation. I was participating in the vocabulary development activities I conducted with my students and reflected on what I observed.

**Qualitative data collection results.** I used some data collection techniques that were experience-based research, or qualitative data. The techniques I used in my qualitative data collection were methods of experiencing, enquiring, and examining (Mills, 2011). I used the enquiring technique when I distributed the questionnaires to my colleagues.

**Results of questionnaires.** When conducting the questionnaires, I received some excellent feedback from my co-workers. Each of them brought a different background, perspective, and level of experience to the questions. I had eight teachers complete the questionnaire, three teachers have an Associate degree in Early Childhood and five teachers have a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood. The majority of teachers received some level of training working with ELL, most of them receiving three or more hours of training. All eight respondents reported feeling that there needs to be more professional development trainings for teachers working with ELL and modifying the assessment test to assess children of ELL because the current assessment in English is not accurate, this is not their language so they are put at a disadvantage. When asked "if you could change one thing about your school's approach to educating ELL students", one teacher suggested that the agency should hire more bus aids to provide support and assistance to the classroom teachers during classroom times to ensure and encourage children's learning and recruit volunteers that speak the different languages to help teachers with the children and have them communicate with the children's parents about how the parent can help their child learn. Another teacher suggested that paperwork should be sent home in the child's language so the parents would have a better understanding of what is going on with their child's education, and it would be better outcomes for parent involvement.

Another, question asked was "what ways do you support ELL students in your classroom with vocabulary?" Some of the respondents reported that they give short simple instructions with pictures, encouragement to repeat vocabulary words, role model, props, consistent routines, sign language, use body language, picture schedules and

learning key words, but all the respondents did agree that teaching vocabulary knowledge to ELL students can be a challenge at times even frustrating,

What they do in their classrooms is not enough, so they all suggest the agency provide professional development trainings that teach vocabulary through the use of popular culture and popular media (movie clips, tv clips, etc.). Another area that the teachers struggle with when teaching vocabulary is the lack of engagement. If more support is given then the teachers will feel they are getting through to their ELL students. The results of the questionnaire gave me a great perspective on how others feel about teaching vocabulary knowledge to ELL students in their classrooms. This led me to reflect and observe how I conducted my research in my own classroom.

### **Research Conducted**

**IGDI assessments.** I administered an early literacy Individual Growth & Development Indicators assessment tool to measure where they are at in their vocabulary development. The (IGDIs) is a research-based, preschool assessment for monitoring the growth and development of children on the pathway to kindergarten. The assessment identifies children who are experiencing difficulties acquiring fundamental skills necessary for academic success, IGDIs can also be used to measure developmental gains and inform instructional needs of individual children. Before the children can proceed to taking the test, they have to pass the four sample cards that are presented. These cards are kept separately from the rest of the set and are used at the beginning of every test administration. These sample cards are given in the same order (A, B, C, D) each time. The remaining cards (96) are shuffled before each administration so that they are presented in random order. The deck of cards is placed on the table in front of the

administrator and each card is presented one at a time to the child. For scoring purposes, after administration of each card, place correct (right) cards in the horizontal position, while incorrect cards should be placed vertically. The picture naming is a 1 min timed task (the four sample cards are not included in the 1 min).

**Week One.** I introduced the test to the four children individually and explained that we are learning ways to build vocabulary development. I proceeded to administrate the four sample cards to each child. Each child had to name the four cards correctly in English in order to continue on to the actual test. Each child names each card correctly in English, so I proceeded on to the test. I tested my Somali speaking student and she got 22 cards correct on the test. Then I tested my student who speaks Karen, and he got 9 cards correct. I tested my other Karen speaking student, and he got 3 cards correct. Last I tested my Hmong speaking student, and she got 6 cards correct on the test. Figure 1 shows where students should test at:

Above Target	On Target	Close to Target	Far from Target
27+	26	16-25	0-15

Figure 1. Target scores for IGDI tests for 3-4 Year-Old Children

As can be seen from the chart displayed, none of the children passed the test. So since that was the case I decided to retest the students at the end of the month (Figure 2) and proceeded with building their vocabulary development throughout the weeks followed.

**Week Two.** For this week, I played the English word recognition game with each child individually for 20 minutes. I had different cards the children can learn vocabulary

words from such as animals, human body, clothing and transportation. I let each child choose what set of cards they want to play with and then we begin to play. I had each student name the picture cards for 20 minutes for four days a week.

**Week Three.** For this week, during group time I had all my students participate. I had different pictures and objects placed on the rug, and then I used a vocabulary word that was placed on the rug and have the students go stand next to picture or object that they heard I said. They really enjoyed this game because I engaged them through listening, looking and moving.

**Week Four.** For this week, I retested the students using the early literacy IGDI's

Above Target	On Target	Close to Target	Far from Target
27+	26	16-25	0-15
First Test			
		Somali: 22	Hmong: 10 Karen A: 9 Karen B: 3
Second Test			
	Somali: 26		Karen A: 12 Hmong: 10 Karen B: 5

Figure 2. Results for First & Second IGDI tests.

assessment tool again. My Karen speaking student got 12 cards correct, my Hmong speaking student got 10 cards correct, my other Karen speaking student got 5 cards correct and my Somali speaking student got 26 cards correct (Figure 2). My students are still struggling with their vocabulary expect for my Somali speaking student who scored high. With the retested scores I continue to build there vocabulary knowledge for the next four weeks.

**Week Five.** For this week, I put picture cards inside a card board box, cut a hole inside the box and had each child individually pull out as many cards as they can and name what they saw on the card in 1 minute. I worked with each child for 20 minutes each.

**Week Six.** For week six, during group time I had all the children participate. I divided the children into two teams. A student from each team must stand at the front of the class back to back. Give each one a flash card that is large enough to be read from 3 or 4 feet away. Make sure the student cannot see the flashcards. The two students standing quickly turn, holding their flashcards up, and the other students must say what they see whether it's a picture or word on the student's flashcard.

**Week Seven.** For week seven, I provided a variety of ELL vocabulary books to my students. These books provide skills such as multiple activities for recurring review and practice of featured words, helps reinforce and assess students' understanding of featured words in different contexts, scaffolds vocabulary development, and supports oral and written application of vocabulary words within critical thinking context.

**Week Eight.** Week eight is the last week of my research. I retested my students' again using the IGDIs assessment tool. This time each of my students scored close to the target which is between 16-25 cards.

### **Observation of Research**

Providing vocabulary development learning to my students on a daily basis means I am closely invested in the implications of its use. Geoffrey Mills (2011) explains a type of qualitative research technique that is the experiencing method. I used this method when I was an active participant observer during my group instructional time and when working individual with each student. In order to more accurately observe my lessons, I chose to participate in the lessons and reflect upon the experience after the lesson was completed.

When reflecting upon my circle time activities I had mixed reviews and mixed levels of success with each measured week. When completing the circle time activities all the students were engaged, half of the students understood the vocabulary games and the other half did not fully understand the concepts, but all the students were still participating and having fun. I did observe the students who understood the activities, which were most of my English speaking students, did help the students that did not understand. In reflecting and observing my lessons I was able to view the success of the activities. I was also able to tweak the activities that did not seem make sense to some of my students.

## **Quantitative Research**

I used qualitative data collection techniques to explore viewpoints and observations regarding the engagement of children when completing the vocabulary lessons. Quantitative data is a type of research in which the data collected can be reduced to a numerical form.

**Attending data results.** I collected data to measure the amount of time my students are engaged during our individual lessons I had with the four participants in the research. This piece of quantitative data was in a form of an on-task behavior data sheet (Appendix A). The attending data form has an observer looking at the students' behavior during the instruction of the lessons to see if they are engaged, the length of the engagement, and what behaviors displaying while the lesson is being taught. During the data gathered throughout the research period, the majority of the students were engaged. During measured observations, the students were all in the area from 80-100% of the time.

Data on this measured form was compiled individually. Child 1 (Somali speaking student) averaged 90% of engagement and visually attended 87% of the time and participated. Child 2 (Karen speaking student) averaged 70% of engagement and visually attended 50% of the time and participated. Child 3 (Hmong speaking student) averaged 95% of engagement and visually attended 75% of the time and participated. Child 4 (Karen speaking student) averaged 80% of engagement and visually attended 60% of the time and participated. Each child participated fully in all the activities that were presented.

### **Summary of Research Data Collection**

While implementing my research to help answer my research question of how to find strategies to increase preschool ELL students' vocabulary knowledge, I used a variety of data collection techniques. By using both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques I was able to triangulate my research.

**Analyzing data.** Analyzing and synthesizing the data that I collected is important to the research method, in order for the data to be meaningful, the connections need to be made between the mixed method research information. By using both qualitative and quantitative data in my research, I was able to triangulate the information gathered.

**Analyzing questionnaire.** The first piece of data gathered in this research was the questionnaire given to my colleagues. Among their responses there were some common benefits and concerns in the eyes of my colleagues with increasing ELL students with their vocabulary development. Among all the participants, all of them have received some level of training on vocabulary knowledge, but thought it was not enough training to support ELL students in the classroom. The majority of the staff agreed that they implement their own ideas in the classroom to support their struggling ELL students, but the school should step up and provide a more in-depth professional development training to support the students learning and their families.

These viewpoints line up with some of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this Capstone. According to Jalonho & Sobolak (2011), in many states, the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom has grown and the number will continue to increase over time. Educators have little history of educating the ELL population, and there may be a corresponding lack of understanding of and empathy for

ELLs. A case study was conducted years ago by middle school students that observed different classroom teachers interacting with their ELLs (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011). When they were asked to report their findings, the students reported that some teachers did not work differently with the ELLs, while another student said the teacher tried but did not know any methods for working with ELLs. Only 12.5 percent of teachers have participated in eight hour training or professional development on how to work with ELLs. The question is: how do teachers work with this population of students? Some teachers are prepared to wait until they believe the student can understand the class content, while others may avoid the issue or assume it is someone else's problem (such as the English Language second teacher). Clearly, many teachers are still struggling with barriers concerning ELLs in the classroom. Teachers need the appropriate training to be meet their students' language and learning needs and to facilitate academic growth.

**Analyzing the reflection of my observation.** The next piece of quantitative data being analyzed is the reflection of my observation as a participant during the lessons. I was able to participant in the activities and observe what was happening. This was important for myself to be part of the lessons observing because it allows for richly detailed description, which is interpreted to mean describing behaviors, intentions, and situations that are occurring. When observing my circle time lessons I discovered the type of lessons and activities that appeared to engage the students were activities that involved movement with the body, real objects and pointing to pictures, they would tend to be more engaged, instead of myself standing in front of the classroom verbally giving the lesson. When observing the four students that are part of my research individually for

the eight weeks, all of them were fully engaged with the activities being presented each week.

Relating these observations to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, movement that involves playing active games will activate the different areas of the brain which can raise energy and improve mood to think and learn as well showing improvement in decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, discourse knowledge and metacognitive thinking with ELLs.

**Analyzing attending data.** The attending data measured the amount of engagement time for each child. Each child was observed individually and achieved individual results. At the beginning of the research, the students were engaged but lost at the same time. They did not understand what was really happening in the lessons. As time went on, their ability to understand got better because during the large group when I was conducting the lessons they started to understand more of the activities because the English speaking students would help the ELLs with the activities. So that helped the students individually with the activities. The students in my classroom were engaged and visually attending the activities during the lessons.

**Summary of data analysis.** Analyzing data from many points of research is important for connecting all the findings. The data that was collected was shown to relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The type of analysis is a way for the research and data to come together and manifest.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four of this Capstone reviewed, the result of the data collected throughout the research process. In this chapter, I reviewed the setting and participants involved in my action research and their role in the results. The process for research and the results of those processes were discussed. Overall, the data compiled seemed to show that there are effective ways to teach English language learners vocabulary development.

In chapter five, I will reflect on the capstone process and what I have learned through this experience and what teachers can do in the future to help English language learners with their vocabulary development.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

Writing this capstone has been a true labor of love for me. This capstone is not just a research project; it is the culmination of two years' worth of learning and growing as a graduate student. From my journey at the beginning, to writing my last capstone chapter, I have been challenged to think like an action researcher. This capstone is the result of a great deal of endurance over the last two years. When asked to choose a topic for my research, I knew it had to involve English language learners learning vocabulary development. This is such a topic that is in demand because the face of our nation has changed rapidly, especially in our schools and classrooms. More and more children are speaking different languages and hold different cultural traditions. As an early childhood educator, I have high number of ELL students who enter my classroom. I see and feel that my ELL's are struggling in the classroom with their vocabulary development, so I knew that had to be the subject for my research. This led me to my research question; what instructional strategies are effective for increasing vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom?

In this chapter, I will reflect upon the learning that occurred throughout this process, and how educators can move forward with this research to implement in their classrooms to better serve their English language learners with vocabulary development.

**Process of reflection**

The process of completing an action research project has encouraged me to learn and grow as an educator. I had to plan, implement, and review research on English language learners' vocabulary development. The concept of the action research did not exist to me before I began this capstone process, but now I feel that I have mastered a better understanding of the benefits this type of research serves.

**Process of planning.** Planning an action research project can be a frightening task. First I had to come up with a research topic, reflecting on my interest in regards to my teaching career, I was able to narrow down the type of research that I wanted to complete. I knew that I wanted to involve young children that are English language learners and focus on ways to increase their vocabulary development.

Once the topic was assured, the plan had to be developed. I was uneasy of creating an action research plan; because this was my first time doing this type of research like this before. Once I reviewed the readings by Mills (2011) and worked on my action research project in class, I was able to relax more and create a plan that involved triangulation of data and a step-by-step research process. Having a plan that was reviewed by my peers and instructor insured that the plan was creative and related to my research. The process of creating the plan became a true acquisition of knowledge for me.

**Process of implementation.** Once I created the plan for the research, it was time to implement. Having a layout for the research project allowed me to present the research plan with confidence. I knew which type of research I would be collecting and how I would be collecting the data. The data collection plan of action was easily implemented.

I learned that it is easier to collect data on the lessons you are teaching as a participant in the research. As being a participant of the research, after the lesson was taught, I found it to be very helpful for me when taking notes, and it helped me remember what each individual student was doing and learning during the lesson.

I also learned that people are very willing to help out and give their feedback, on your research topic. I had great response to my questionnaire. People really wanted to discuss this topic and give their opinions and experiences with working with English language learners and their vocabulary development. The people I work with were significant in my data collection.

**Process of review.** Once all the data collection was completed, it was time to be compiled and reviewed. The process was more time consuming than I thought. I knew that I had collected a lot of important data that needed to be compiled. The tough part of the process became when I had to analyze the data, connecting all the points into one. I knew that they were connected and related, but unsure how to record in my research paper. Once I figured out how to connect the analysis piece of research, I was able to write a representation of the results, as seen in Chapter Four.

### **Process of Literature Review**

The literature review in Chapter Two was beneficial in analyzing the results of my research project. I found a lot of similarities among the literature and the data I collected; relating the current findings of all people all over the world in the educational profession to the results that I found in my research was a way for me to validate my findings.

**Process of communication of results.** The best way in which to communicate my findings would be to compile them into valid data points and then share them with

staff. This information is useful for preschool teachers that work with ELL students on a limited basis; furthermore, most teachers, if not all throughout their teaching career, will and do confront a lack of vocabulary development skills. This study may provide additional insight, strategies and resources to help students increase their vocabulary development in a setting of a preschool classroom. I could share my data collection forms with my colleagues through email. I could also invite my colleagues to visit my classroom to see how I am conducting my lessons to my students. This would be a way for teachers to create opportunities for successful strategies to implement in their classrooms to increase English language learners vocabulary development.

Today, classrooms have increasingly become more linguistically diverse. It has been an exceptionally challenging and rewarding experience to work with English language learners and their vocabulary development. The development of a wide and varied vocabulary is essential. Research shows that English language learners should be taught key vocabulary, or brick words, prior to a lesson in order to assist them in their language development. If you are teaching a concept, it is recommended that you include vocabulary words that will make the content more comprehensible to the learner.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I reflected upon my journey throughout this whole capstone process, and the research process. Throughout the process, I have acquired a lot of knowledge about the steps involved in action research and the process of the research project. This capstone shows the development of a wide a varied vocabulary is essential for students, making classroom teachers to learn to adapt their teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of English language learners in their classroom.

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**APPENDIX A:****Attending Data**



APPENDIX B:  
Staff Questionnaire



5. Are you aware of the kinds of instructional and assessment modifications that should be used in order to make your lesson content comprehensible to your ELL students?

Yes

No

6. Approximately how many ELL students do you currently teach in your classroom?
7. Would you encourage training on designing alternative assessment tasks and a meaningful assessment plan that uses a diversity of assessment measures to assess ELL students with their vocabulary? If yes, please explain:
8. What are some different ways that you support your struggling ELL students in your classroom with vocabulary? Please explain:
9. If you could change one thing about your school what would it be?

10. Any other comments regarding increasing preschool ELL student's vocabulary in your classroom?

APENDIX C:

Student and Guardian Consent Form

## To Parents/Guardians Requesting Permission for Minors to take Part in Research

Dear Parents or Guardians,

I am your child's preschool teacher and a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research in my classroom from November 01-January 01, 2015. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission for your child to take part in my research. This research is public scholarship the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other ways.

I want to study instructional strategies that are effective to increase vocabulary for English language learners in my preschool classroom. I will be doing different vocabulary games and observing to see how many of the students vocabulary has increased over a period of two months. I will distribute questionnaires to my colleagues to get their feedback on the barriers they encounter with teaching vocabulary and what strategies they use to provide effective ways to increase English language learners vocabulary. I will use a data checklist to do my observations, engagement of activity, and length of time the student is engaged in the activity.

There is little to no risk for your child to participant. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record information about individual students, such as their names, nor report identifying information or characteristics in the capstone. Participation is voluntary and you may decide at any time and without negative consequences that information about your child will not be include in the capstone.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the Director of my school. The capstone will be cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. In all cases, your child's identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree that your child may participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return to me by mail or copy the form in an email. If you have any questions, please email or call me at school.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Carter

**Informed Consent to Participate in Action Research Study**

*Keep this full page for your records.*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will implementing activities that support vocabulary development for English language learners. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentially will be protected, and that I may withdraw or my child may withdraw from the project at any time.

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Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Participant copy

**Informed Consent to Participate in Action Research Study**  
*Return this portion to the researcher Nicole Carter*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be implementing activities to support vocabulary development for English language learner. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentially will be protected, and that I may withdraw or my child may withdraw from the project at any time.

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Parent/Guardian Signature

---

Date

Researcher copy

APPENDIX D:  
Adult Consent Form

## Letter of Informed Consent Requesting Permission of Adults to Take Part in Research

Dear Colleagues,

I am a graduate student working on an advance degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with my early childhood teachers in our agency from November 01-January 01, 2015. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation. This research is public scholarship. The abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository where it may be published or used in other ways.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is increasing vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom. I plan to distribute questionnaires to early childhood teachers to get their feedback and experience with working with English language learners' vocabulary development. There will be a ten- question teacher- developed questionnaire. After completing the capstone I will summarize the responses and document them in my report.

There is little to no risk if you choose to complete the questionnaire. All results will be confidential and anonymous. The questionnaire will be conducted at a place and time convenient for you.

Participation in the questionnaire is voluntary, and at any time, you may decline completing of the questionnaire or have your questionnaire content deleted from the capstone without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from our school Director to conduct this study. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential. If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me or copy the form in an email to me. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Carter

**Informed Consent to Participate in Action Research Study**  
*Keep this full page for your records.*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be distributing a ten- question teacher -developed questionnaire to receive feedback on English language learners' vocabulary development. I understand that completing the questionnaire poses little risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the questionnaire portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

---

---

Signature

Date

**Informed Consent to Participate in Action Research Study**  
*Return this portion to the Nicole Carter*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be distributing a ten -question teacher- developed questionnaire to receive feedback on English language learners' vocabulary development. I understand that completing the questionnaire poses little risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the questionnaire portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

---

---

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E:  
Consent form from Director of my School

**Increasing Vocabulary Development for English Language Learners in a Preschool Classroom**

**Consent form to Conduct Research in my School**

**INVESTIGATOR: Nicole Carter**

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research in my classroom from November 01, January 01, 2015. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission to conduct my action research study in my classroom. This research is public scholarship. The abstract and final product will be catalogued in **Hamline's Bush Library Commons**, a searchable electronic repository where it may be published or used in other ways.

I want to study instructional strategies to increase vocabulary development for English language learners in my preschool classroom. I will be doing different vocabulary games and observing to see how many of the student's vocabulary has increased over a period of two months. I will distribute questionnaires to my colleagues to get their feedback on the barriers they encounter with teaching vocabulary and what strategies they use to provide effective ways to increase English language learners vocabulary. I will use a data checklist to do my observations, engagement of activity, and length of time the student is engaged in the activity.

There is little to no risk for students or colleagues to participate in the study. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record information about individual students or colleagues, such as their names, nor report identifying information or characteristics in the capstone. Participation is voluntary and you may decide at any time and without negative consequences that information about students and colleagues will not be included in the capstone. Potential benefits of the study are to find effective strategies to increase vocabulary for English language learners in a preschool classroom. If you approve for the study to be conducted at school, please keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement for me to participate in the study on page two.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Carter

**Informed Consent for Researcher to do an Action Research Study**  
*Keep this full page for your records*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be implementing activities to support vocabulary development for English language learner and distributing a questionnaire to colleagues at your center. I understand there is little to no risk involved for the students and colleagues involved. Confidentially will be protected, and that they may withdraw from the project at any time. I am giving you informed consent to conduct your research study in your classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Education

Date