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Small Group Explicit Academic Vocabulary Instruction For Kindergarten English Language Learners

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SMALL GROUP EXPLICIT ACADEMIC VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION FOR
KINDERGARTEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge is acquired implicitly through listening and reading and explicitly through instruction. Before entering school, children acquire vocabulary through their experiences at home (Barnes, Grifenhagen & Dickinson, 2016). Since students come from diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, they enter school with varying degrees of vocabulary knowledge. It is important for educators to be aware of potential differences in students’ vocabulary knowledge so that immediate and appropriate vocabulary instruction can be provided (Hart & Risley, 1995/2003). Additionally, it is important for educators to be aware of students’ home languages and experiences in order to provide appropriate instruction that builds upon students’ current knowledge. It is necessary for educators to draw from students’ experiences to expand their current vocabulary knowledge and to develop their academic language (Avineri et al., 2015).

Academic Language

In order to be successful in school, students need to understand and be able to use social and academic English. Experts differentiate between the two types of language. Cummins (as cited in Díaz-Rico, 2013) describes these two types of language as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICs, also known as social language, is the language that is used in social
contexts among peers, while CALP, commonly known as academic language, refers to the formal spoken and written language that is used in school. While students are expected to understand and use academic language to discuss concepts, it varies greatly from social English in many aspects including morphology, syntax and pragmatics (Zwiers, 2008; Barnes et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a difference in the amount of time it usually takes English learners (ELs) to acquire social and academic English. It typically takes ELs two years to acquire social language and can take ELs five or more years to reach academic English proficiency (Collier, 1987). Given these differences, it is important to explicitly teach academic English.

One reason why academic vocabulary development is so important is because there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The urgent need for academic vocabulary development in the early grades is imperative because students must understand academic language in order to access content. Furthermore, students are required to use academic language to discuss content with their peers and teachers. If students receive vocabulary instruction in the early grades, they will be better prepared for academic success in later grades when content and language demands increase in complexity (Brock, Lapp, Salas, & Townsend, 2009).

While the need for vocabulary instruction in the early grades has been acknowledged, research has shown that many schools do not emphasize explicit vocabulary instruction in elementary grades (Biemiller, 2001). Despite the lack of vocabulary instruction in elementary schools today, kindergarten teachers have a unique opportunity to lay a strong foundation for academic language.
Background of the Researcher

During my time as an EL teacher in kindergarten, I recognized the need for explicit vocabulary instruction; yet, I struggled to identify which words to teach. I provided small group instruction in several different content areas and the topics constantly changed, which made it difficult for me to decide which words were most important for students to learn. When my school recently decided to adopt a new thematic-based kindergarten model, called Discovering Our World (DOW), I saw it as an opportunity to focus on a specific set of vocabulary words, which would be used throughout different content areas.

After reading details about the new district developed curriculum, I discovered that a set of vocabulary words had already been selected for each unit. The majority of the vocabulary words are academic words that are used across content areas. In the current model, the vocabulary words are not explicitly taught; rather they are embedded in the content lessons. The vocabulary words are not formally assessed but it is expected that students use the words to talk about the content. Since the words are already selected for each unit, my challenge is not deciding which words to select, but rather how to explicitly teach the new words and how to assess students’ learning of the target words.

Topic and Role of Researcher

For this study, I will investigate explicit vocabulary instruction in small groups during Writer’s Workshop. I have decided to focus on explicitly teaching selected words in small groups, because although the curriculum includes an extensive list of vocabulary words related to each unit, it does not include specific ways to teach the vocabulary. I anticipate that the academic words included in the curriculum will be unfamiliar to many
ELs. Therefore, I will provide explicit vocabulary instruction of selected academic words to a small group of students during writing time to investigate the effectiveness of such instruction.

Guiding Questions

The purpose of this study is to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction is a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. Specifically, I want to explore the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

Summary

Vocabulary knowledge, including academic language, is critical for academic success. Students enter school with different levels of vocabulary knowledge and the linguistic demands will only continue to increase if left unaddressed. Therefore, it is critical for teachers to provide vocabulary instruction to students, particularly in the primary grades where teachers have the greatest opportunity to lay a strong foundation for vocabulary knowledge.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter One, I introduced my research topic by discussing the importance of vocabulary development in primary grades, with a particular emphasis on academic vocabulary. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature relevant to vocabulary
development, academic language, explicit instruction, questioning and assessment. In Chapter Three, I describe the research design and the methods used for data collection. Chapter Four presents the results of the study. Chapter Five includes my reflections on the data. I also discuss the limitations of the study and the implications for EL classrooms.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the study is to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction is a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. Specifically, I want to explore the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

This literature review presents an overview of research pertaining to vocabulary development, academic language, explicit instruction and assessment. Additionally, subtopics including receptive and productive vocabulary, levels of word knowledge, robust vocabulary instruction, word selection and questioning will be discussed.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development begins in childhood before a child enters school. Hart and Risley (1995/2003) discovered that early childhood is a critical period for vocabulary development because that is where language differences begin to occur. Their results showed that the amount of language that children are exposed to before entering school varies depending on a family’s socioeconomic status. Children from families with lower
socioeconomic status heard thirty million fewer words than children from families with higher socioeconomic status. Additionally, they discovered that a child’s vocabulary knowledge at age three is a strong predictor of reading comprehension in later years. Similarly, Graves (2009) indicates that the trend continues into kindergarten and first grade where vocabulary knowledge continues to be a significant predictor of reading comprehension in middle and secondary grades. It is clear that vocabulary knowledge is key to academic success (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Graves, 2009; Nisbet & Tindall, 2015).

Some English learners enter school with low vocabulary knowledge in English. Similar to students from low-income families, the vocabulary knowledge gap for ELs widens as they continue in school (Kame’enui & Baumann, 2012). Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (as cited in Kame’enui & Baumann, 2012) state that vocabulary knowledge is correlated to ELs’ English reading comprehension. Therefore, it is critical to provide vocabulary instruction. In order to decrease the vocabulary knowledge gaps that begin to appear in early education, it is important to implement opportunities for vocabulary development in primary education (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

Receptive and Productive Vocabulary

Students enter school with different levels of vocabulary knowledge, but all students bring with them some level of vocabulary whether it is in English or their home language. Although most kindergarten students are not yet reading, they enter school with some degree of receptive and productive vocabulary. Graves (2009), among others, describes the difference between these two types of vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary refers to the words that are understood through reading and listening, while productive
vocabulary refers to the words that are used either in speaking or writing. Adults and children have a larger receptive vocabulary than productive vocabulary so it is common for people to understand a word but not be able to use it when speaking or writing. Additionally, vocabulary can be classified as oral or written. In kindergarten, emphasis is placed on developing students’ oral proficiency so that they have a strong foundation for building literacy skills (Graves, 2009).

Levels of Word Knowledge

Word knowledge is complex and can vary over time. Therefore, building word knowledge is a gradual and ongoing process. When students first encounter a word, they are introduced to a part of the word’s meaning. With every additional encounter, students gain a deeper and more precise understanding of a word’s meaning (Graves, 2009). Since word knowledge changes, it is often described using levels. Dale (as cited in Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002, p. 9-10) describes levels of word knowledge using four stages.

1. Never saw it before
2. Heard it, but doesn’t know what it means
3. Recognizes it in context as having something to do with ______
4. Knows it well

Beck, McKeown & Omanson (as cited in Beck et al., 2002, p.10) further expand on the previous model. They describe the various levels of word knowledge using the continuum listed below.

- No knowledge of the term
- General sense
• Narrow but context-bound understanding

• Having knowledge of a word but not being able to recall it readily enough to use it in appropriate situations

• Rich, decontextualized knowledge of a word's meaning, its relationship to other words, and its extensions to metaphorical uses.

Academic Language

One way that teachers can prepare students for a successful educational future is by developing students’ academic language. Academic language is the register that is highly valued and emphasized in school (Baumann and Graves, 2010). Zwiers (2008) defines academic language as “the set of words, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts” (p. 20). It is comprised of academic vocabulary, complex syntax and discourse functions (Barnes, Grifenhagen, & Dickenson, 2016).

It is important for teachers to understand the differences between social language and academic language. Zwiers (2008) states that “social language tends to be less complex and abstract, and is accompanied by extralinguistic clues, such as pictures, real objects, facial expressions and gestures” (p. 20). In contrast, “academic language tends to be complex and abstract, lacking extralinguistic support” (Zwiers, 2008, p. 20). Due to the abstract nature of academic language, it is important for teachers to explicitly teach the differences between the features of conversational language and academic language.

One feature of academic language is the use of academic vocabulary, which includes elaborate and precise words that change depending on the context. Academic vocabulary can be categorized as either domain-specific academic vocabulary or general
academic vocabulary. According to Baumann and Graves (2010), “domain-specific academic vocabulary refers to the content-specific terms and expressions found in content area textbooks and other technical writing” (p. 6). Although Beck et al. (2002) use the term Tier Three words to refer to domain-specific vocabulary, the overall meaning remains consistent. An example of a domain-specific academic word that is used in kindergarten is *life cycle*. Students would encounter this word specifically in science. In contrast, “general academic vocabulary is used to refer to words that appear in texts across several disciplines or academic domains” (Baumann & Graves, 2010, p. 3). Townsend (as cited in Baumann & Graves, 2010, p. 6) adds that general academic vocabulary words “have abstract definitions and are a challenge to master.” An example of a general academic vocabulary word that kindergarteners may encounter in multiple contexts is *record* because it can be used in writing, science, math or music.

Another difference between conversational and academic language is the use of complex syntax. Syntax refers to putting words and phrases together to form sentences. Academic language differs from conversational language because it uses longer and more complex sentences that include multiple clauses (Barnes et al., 2016). Although it is likely children are not yet using complex sentences in productive language, they can be exposed to the language. Teachers can model the syntax that is used in academic language through their own speech and by reading books aloud. Additionally, teachers can provide students with sentence stems so that they have an opportunity to use more complex sentences when speaking.

Academic language differs from social language with regard to word choice. Academic language uses figurative expressions such as metaphors, analogies, idioms and
multiple-meaning words, which can be particularly challenging for ELs to comprehend (Zwiers, 2008). Academic language also uses synonyms to avoid repetition. It is important for students to identify the synonyms and recognize that they have the same meaning.

Another difference between social and academic language is the importance of writing or speaking to a distant audience. Unlike social language, where the speaker and listener interact directly, academic language requires the use of decontextualized language. Since the speaker or writer do not interact with the listener or reader, it is important to be clear. In academic discussions, for example, students need to clearly communicate their ideas using complete sentences. They also need to use a variety of sophisticated words rather than simply repeating one familiar word (Scarcella, 2015).

In addition to academic vocabulary and complex syntax, academic language is used for specific functions. According to Zwiers (2008), academic language is used to describe complex concepts; to describe higher-order thinking; and to describe abstract concepts. Academic language is complex and is used for different purposes in various contexts. Due to its complex nature, acquiring academic English requires explicit instruction and scaffolded support. Olsen (as cited in Echevarria, Frey, & Fisher, 2015) discusses the importance of explicitly teaching academic English. Without explicit instruction, ELs may stall in their academic English development and consequently risk becoming long-term English learners. Although it is clear that academic language is critical for academic success, there still remains a need for academic English instruction in schools today. Scarcella (as cited in Echevarria et al., 2010) states that academic English has not been given enough attention in elementary and secondary schools.
One effective way to foster academic language development is by reading aloud to children. Since young children are in the early stages of literacy development, reading aloud exposes children to new and rich vocabulary that they otherwise might not encounter (Beck & McKeown, 2007). By reading aloud to children, they are able to acquire vocabulary incidentally and through direct instruction when adults explain word meanings and provide opportunities for interaction through questioning (Kindle, 2009).

A recent study by Barnes et al. (2016), discussed the importance of providing academic language instruction in early education. The authors identified the instructional times when academic language was most frequently used and instructional times when it could be used more often. In the study, teachers’ use of academic language in early childhood classrooms was recorded and analyzed. The study showed that teachers’ use of academic language changed depending on the instructional setting. Teachers frequently used academic language during book reading and whole group content lessons. The least amount of academic language, however, was used during small group content lessons. Instead, teachers focused more on skill building activities. Teachers used shorter utterances and less diverse vocabulary during small group instruction. This study identified small group contexts as an area where academic language could be used more frequently in early education.

Teachers can promote academic language development in young children by exposing them to rich academic language. Students can be introduced to sophisticated words through conversations with adults. Small group, structured conversations allow teachers to model language and they also provide students with additional opportunities to practice academic language. A small group setting provides a safe, low-risk space for
ELs to practice using language in a purposeful and meaningful way. Additionally, the small group setting allows teachers to provide individualized and specific feedback to students (Kame’enui & Baumann, 2012).

Vocabulary Instruction

Explicit vocabulary instruction, which is also referred to as direct instruction, is one method that is recommended to use when teaching academic language. One commonly used model for explicit vocabulary instruction is robust vocabulary instruction (Beck et al., 2002).

Robust Vocabulary Instruction

The essential steps used to introduce a word are outlined below (Beck et al., 2002).

1. Give an example of how the word is typically used in context.
2. Provide a student-friendly definition: explain the word’s meaning in language students can understand.
3. Provide the word in a different context.
4. Provide opportunities for students to use the word in meaningful activities.
5. Provide multiple encounters to review words over time.

Selecting Words to Teach

When implementing explicit vocabulary instruction, the first step is to select the vocabulary words that will be taught. The process of selecting words can be overwhelming and challenging. Coxhead (as cited in Kame’enui & Baumann, 2012) recommends using an “Academic Word List” that includes words that frequently appear in school texts. Graves (2009) suggests using high-frequency word lists or books from the curriculum to identify words to teach while Beck et al. (2002) recommend a more
specific method. Beck et al. (2002) categorize words into three tiers. Tier One words are the most basic words that can be easily learned by English speakers without instruction. Tier Two words are “high frequency words for mature language users and are found across a variety of domains” (p. 8). Tier Three words are usually found in a specific context, such as content specific words. Beck et al. (2002) suggest teaching Tier Two words because they are frequently used in written and oral language across many contexts (see Appendix A for examples of Tier 1, 2 and 3 words).

Explicit vocabulary instruction for young learners commonly occurs during read-aloud time because children at this age typically are not yet reading. Therefore, storybooks, which are rich in language, are used as the primary method for vocabulary instruction. The studies discussed below investigated the use of explicit vocabulary instruction during read-aloud time.

Beck and McKeown (2007) examined the effectiveness of direct instruction and the amount of time spent on learning sophisticated words. The research consisted of two studies that included kindergarten and first grade English speaking participants from a low-achieving school. The first study compared the use of direct instruction versus no instruction on learning target words during read-aloud time. Selected sophisticated words were taught after the story was read aloud using their model for rich instruction. Students’ vocabulary knowledge was measured using a pretest and posttest that included receptive and expressive measures. In the receptive measure, students were shown different pictures and were asked to identify the picture that represented the target word. In the expressive measure, students responded to four yes/no questions about the target word. Two questions asked students to identify the meaning of the word and the other
two questions asked students to identify the meaning of the word in context. The results of the study indicated that students who received direct instruction learned significantly more words than those who received no instruction.

The second study by Beck and McKeown (2007) examined the effect of the amount of time spent on rich instruction. The same procedure was followed for directly teaching words, but students received more instruction for a longer period of time. The results of the second study indicated that more instruction was beneficial for increasing students’ vocabulary knowledge. Students who received more instruction learned twice as many words. This study is important because it shows that young children can increase their vocabulary knowledge through direct instruction. Additionally, it shows the importance of dedicating time to vocabulary instruction. Although vocabulary instruction is time consuming, it can have positive effects.

A study by Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp (2007) further explored vocabulary instruction by comparing the effectiveness of extended instruction with embedded instruction and incidental exposure in kindergarten. Extended instruction is similar to robust instruction. It includes explicit teaching of target words, using words in context and providing students with multiple exposures to the target words. Students also had opportunities to use words in meaningful contexts. During embedded instruction, interventionists provided students with a simple definition of the target word during the story. Then, they reread the sentence using the simple definition. Students who received incidental exposure heard the words in the story but did not receive direct teaching.

The research by Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp (2007) previously mentioned consisted of two studies. The first study compared the effectiveness of extended instruction to
incidental exposure. The study consisted of thirty-one White and Hispanic kindergarteners, 55% of which qualified for free and reduced lunch. Although some of the participants may have been ELs, they did not include that information. Therefore, it is impossible to know the impact of vocabulary instruction on ELs in this particular study. The intervention occurred during storybook reading. Six target words were selected from a story. Three words were taught using extended instruction and three words were used during incidental exposure. Target words were assessed using receptive, expressive and context measures.

The results of the pretest showed that students initially had no knowledge of target words. After the intervention, the results of the posttests showed that students who received extended instruction scored statistically significantly higher than those who received incidental exposure on the receptive, expressive and context measures. The measures used were similar to those used in the study by Beck and McKeown (2007). The receptive measure included two yes/no questions about the word’s meaning. The expressive measure asked students to define the target word. Students’ responses were recorded and they received full, partial or no points based on their response. The context measure included two yes/no questions that used the word in context.

The second study by Coyne, McCoach & Kapp (2007) compared the effectiveness of extended instruction to embedded instruction. The procedures for extended instruction were the same as in the first study. Again, the results showed that students who received extended instruction scored statistically significantly higher on the receptive, expressive and context tests than those who received embedded instruction. The results of this study provide support for the use of extended vocabulary instruction in kindergarten.
Effective Vocabulary Instruction for ELs

Effective vocabulary instruction practices for native English speakers are typically effective for English learners (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). Direct instruction is effective for English speakers and English learners (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Silverman (2007). A study by Silverman (2007) investigated the effectiveness of direct vocabulary instruction in kindergarten during read-aloud time. The participants in the study included English speakers and English learners. During the vocabulary intervention, selected words were introduced using student-friendly definitions. Additionally, words were presented in other contexts and researchers asked questions using target words. This intervention also included strategies that were particularly appropriate for ELs, such as providing visuals, allowing students to act out the meaning of words, and providing opportunities for students to practice the pronunciation of target words.

The results showed that ELs learned target words at the same rate as English speaking students. Additionally, ELs’ general vocabulary grew at a faster rate than English speakers. This article provides support for the use of direct vocabulary instruction with ELs in kindergarten.

Similarly, a study by Crevecoeur, Coyne, & McCoach (2014) indicated that both kindergarten ELs and English speakers responded positively to direct vocabulary instruction. The kindergarten participants were divided into two groups; each group consisted of ELs and English speakers. One group received direct vocabulary instruction during read-aloud time and the other group was the control group. Target words were selected from storybooks. The direct instruction intervention included providing a
student-friendly definition of the target word, using the target word in multiple contexts and providing opportunities to review the target words throughout the intervention. In contrast to Silverman’s (2007) study, English speakers made more gains than ELs. Crevecoeur et al. (2014) suggest that although ELs benefit from direct vocabulary instruction, they may require more targeted direct vocabulary instruction than their English-speaking peers in order to make similar gains at the same rate as their English-speaking peers. The authors suggest this is due to the fact that the ELs’ initial receptive vocabulary knowledge was lower than that of their English-speaking peers.

ELs face specific challenges when learning new vocabulary in English, particularly if their L1 vocabulary knowledge is limited. The ability to learn new words depends on the background knowledge and experience of students. If students have strong oral language and literacy skills in their L1, it will facilitate their L2 oral language and literacy development (Graves, 2006). Additionally, it is important to consider a student’s native language background. A Spanish-speaking student, for example, may be able to easily learn words that are cognates in English, while a Karen speaker would not be able to rely on this strategy for learning new words (Manyak, as cited in Kame’enui & Baumann, 2012).

It is also important to consider the complexity of the word-learning task. For example, ELs may already be familiar with a concept in their L1 but simply need to attach an English label to the word. In contrast, a more complex task is to learn new words that represent new concepts. Kindergarten ELs, who may be in school for the first time, are frequently learning new concepts and new words simultaneously. In this case, it
is necessary for the educator to teach the concept in addition to the new word (Graves, 2009).

While the majority of vocabulary instruction research for young children has been conducted during read aloud time, Silverman and Crandel (2010) discuss the importance of investigating the use of vocabulary instruction practices during non-read aloud time as well. Silverman and Crandel (2010) conducted an observational study over the course of a year in sixteen prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms that included 26% ELs. The authors investigated the relationship among different vocabulary instruction practices and children’s vocabulary knowledge during read-aloud and non-read aloud time. They concluded that the teachers’ use of vocabulary instruction practices during read-aloud and non-read aloud times were positively related to children’s vocabulary learning. While more research must be done during non-read aloud times, this study offers support for providing vocabulary instruction outside of read-aloud times.

While direct vocabulary instruction is effective for ELs, additional considerations may be necessary. When selecting words to teach, it is important to consider the student’s English language proficiency level. If the student is in the early stage of developing English language proficiency, Tier Two words, which are recommended for vocabulary instruction, would not be appropriate. Beginning ELs may need to be taught basic words before they can learn more complex words (August et al., 2005).

When introducing a new word, it is important to address linguistic aspects, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. For example, ELs benefit from pronouncing the target word, paying particular attention to the stress and intonation. When using the word in context, it is helpful to show how the word is used at
the sentence level. It might also be necessary to point out how the word changes with regard to verb tense. Additionally, it is important to address whether the word is used in formal or informal contexts and how the word is used in various contexts (Nisbet & Tindall, 2015).

Furthermore, using visuals, realia and video during vocabulary instruction can be effective for ELs with low oral language proficiency in order to reinforce the word’s meaning (Li & Edwards, 2010; Gersten & Baker, 2000, Nisbet & Tindall, 2015). After introducing the word, it is helpful to provide students with additional opportunities to practice using the target words (Gersten & Baker, 2000).

**Vocabulary and Questioning**

Engaging students in active discussion about new vocabulary words is an effective way to increase vocabulary learning and is essential to increase ELs’ vocabulary knowledge (Graves, 2009). One way to engage students in participation is through questioning. The use of questioning is an important part of vocabulary instruction because it gives students an opportunity to actively participate.

While the use of questioning in conjunction with vocabulary instruction is supported as a way to encourage discussion and active participation, it is not clear if a specific type of questioning style best supports vocabulary learning. Walsh and Blewitt (2006) argue that the type of question asked is not as important as children’s participation in discussion about the new words. They investigated whether the type of question has an impact on learning vocabulary during shared book reading. Three-year old participants in their study were assigned to the vocabulary-eliciting question group, the non-eliciting question group, or the control group where participants were not asked any questions.
While listening to the story, students in the vocabulary-eliciting group were asked questions that required students to use the target word in their response. For example, the participant would be asked, “What is this?” referring to a picture in the story. Students in the non-eliciting group were asked questions that contained the target word but their responses did not need to include the target word. The results indicated that asking questions about target words helped children comprehend new words more than just simply reading the story without asking questions. The type of question, however, did not have an impact on students’ vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary-eliciting questions were not more effective than non-eliciting questions for word learning. The study provides support for the use of questioning when discussing new words in the context of a story.

Blewitt, Rump, Shealy & Cook (2009) investigated how the level of questions impacted preschool students’ vocabulary learning during shared book reading. The experiment consisted of fifty native English speakers in preschool. In a pretest, students were asked to define target words. Participants were either in a low-demand question group, high-demand question group or a scaffolding group. Students participated in four reading sessions. In the scaffolding group, participants were asked low demand questions about target words in the early reading sessions. Low demand questions consisted of recalling parts of the story or describing pictures. High demand questions were asked in the final reading session and consisted of making inferences or predictions. At the end of the study, a posttest was administered and students were asked to define target words again. The authors found that scaffolding questions was more effective than only asking low or high demand questions when the goal was to learn a word’s meaning. As a result, they recommend asking low demand questions first when the new target word is
introduced. After students have been exposed to the new word, high demand questions can be used.

While the majority of research regarding vocabulary instruction and questioning has been limited to English speakers, Walsh, Sanchez and Burnham (2016) examined the impact of demand level and placement of questions on Hispanic dual language learners’ vocabulary knowledge. Participants consisted of fifty-seven preschool students who were enrolled in the Head Start program. Since students’ first language was Spanish, the study was conducted in Spanish rather than English. Pretests and posttests were used to measure students’ vocabulary knowledge. During the treatment, students participated in the reading sessions and were asked either low demand, high demand, interrupting or non-interrupting questions based on their assignment. Interrupting questions occurred during the story, while non-interrupting questions took place after the story had been read. The authors concluded that demand level rather than interrupting style attributed to differences in participants’ expressive vocabulary scores. High demand questions, whether they were interrupting or non-interrupting had a greater impact on vocabulary scores than low demand questions. The studies mentioned above offer support for the use of questioning during vocabulary instruction as a way to provide students with multiple opportunities to hear new words and to engage in discussions about new vocabulary words.

Assessment

After providing vocabulary instruction, it is important to assess students’ progress. Unfortunately, assessing vocabulary knowledge and growth is challenging. Since there are various levels of word knowledge, it is difficult to design an assessment that measures
multiple aspects of word meaning. Currently, most vocabulary assessments only test a student’s receptive vocabulary knowledge, which means that less is known about a students’ productive vocabulary knowledge (Pearson, Hiebert & Kamil, 2007). Assessing young children’s vocabulary is even more difficult because the majority of assessments are designed for older students who can read and write. Most vocabulary assessments designed for younger students are individually administered, which is time consuming and not very practical for classroom teachers. In order to address this concern, Kearns and Biemiller (2010) suggest using a two-sentence procedure that can be administered to groups. In this procedure, teachers identify the list of words they want to test. Then, they write two yes/no questions using the target word. Questions are read aloud to students and students are required to fill in a response sheet by marking a smiley face to indicate yes or a sad face to indicate no. This type of assessment is appropriate for young learners because it can be used with groups of students and is time efficient.

Since many current vocabulary assessments are not adequate, Read (2000) provides a framework that can be used by teachers to design and evaluate vocabulary assessments to ensure that the assessment matches the evaluator’s intended purpose. He describes the continua as 1.) discrete-embedded 2.) selective-comprehensive 3.) context-dependent-context independent.

1. Vocabulary assessments can range from discrete to embedded. Discrete assessments refer to an isolated set of words, while embedded assessments examine how a student uses vocabulary overall.

2. Assessments can also range from selective to comprehensive. A selective vocabulary assessment would include a small set of words from a story or unit. In
contrast, a comprehensive exam would measure a student’s vocabulary overall. An example of a comprehensive test would be a state test or an end-of-the-year exam.

3. Finally, assessments can vary from context-dependent to context-independent. Context-independent assessments require students to identify a word’s meaning in isolation, while context-dependent assessments require students to identify a word’s meaning based on the surrounding context.

Teachers can use Read’s (2000) framework to design appropriate vocabulary assessments that meet their specific requirements.

**Gap in Research**

Previous research on vocabulary described above has emphasized the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction. The majority of vocabulary research for young children has tended to focus on providing instruction during read-aloud time rather than within small group contexts. The current study will address that gap by providing explicit vocabulary instruction to kindergarten ELs within small groups.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction is a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. Specifically, I want to address the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?
Summary

This chapter discussed the importance of vocabulary development for young ELs. Additionally, areas including academic language, explicit instruction, questioning and assessment were discussed. Vocabulary knowledge is critical to students’ academic success. In order to ensure students’ academic success in the future, it is critical to provide explicit vocabulary instruction in primary grades. Teachers can focus specifically on providing academic vocabulary instruction since it is frequently used in speaking and writing across content areas. Effective vocabulary instruction for ELs is similar to that of English speakers but also includes accommodations, such as providing multiple opportunities for interaction and review, addressing specific aspects of language and incorporating visuals. Questioning is one way to engage students in active discussion about new vocabulary words. Vocabulary assessments can be designed and modified to measure students’ vocabulary knowledge. The next chapter will present the research methodology.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction is a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. In this study, I want to know if small group explicit academic vocabulary instruction increases students’ receptive and expressive vocabulary. Specifically, I want to explore the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

This study used a mixed-methods quasi-experimental approach. A mixed-methods approach employs aspects of quantitative and qualitative data. A quasi-experimental approach does not involve random assignment of participants. Data was collected through pretests and posttests. Checklists were used to observe students’ language during small group instruction. Additionally, a teacher reflection journal was used to provide additional information regarding students’ use of target words in small groups.
Overview of the Chapter

This chapter begins by describing the research design, participants, site and data collection techniques. Then, the procedure of the study is described, including the use of pretests, posttests, checklists and the teacher observation journal. Finally, verification of the data and ethics are discussed.

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach includes aspects of both quantitative and qualitative data. One advantage of using a mixed-methods approach is that it is possible to investigate a topic from various perspectives. Additionally, mixed-methods research allows for triangulation, which increases the validity of the study’s findings. The mixed-methods approach I used is best described as concurrent embedded design. In this design, quantitative data is collected before and after the intervention, while qualitative data is collected during the intervention (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Using a pretest/posttest design alone would not provide information about the students’ use of target words during small group activities. Therefore, the concurrent embedded design was a suitable choice for my study because it allowed me to collect more information about the process of the intervention.

In my study, I also incorporated a quasi-experimental approach. Quasi-experimental research differs from experimental research because it does not include random assignment of participants (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Quasi-experimental research was an appropriate choice for my study because it was not possible to randomly assign participants because I used an intact class. I did, however, randomly assign students to either the control group or the experimental group. By using this approach, I was able to
compare the effectiveness of small group explicit vocabulary instruction with embedded vocabulary instruction.

In order to assess the effectiveness of small group explicit vocabulary instruction, I implemented a pretest/posttest design. Students in the experimental group and the control group participated in the pretest and posttest. Students in the control group participated in the small group question activities but did not receive explicit vocabulary instruction. Students in the experimental group received explicit vocabulary instruction, participated in the small group question activities, and participated in the pretest and posttest.

Participants

The participants in this study included a total of eight kindergarten ELs from one mainstream kindergarten class in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. Four students were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the other four students were randomly assigned to the control group. All of the students were born in the United States. Students’ home languages include Hmong, Karen and Burmese. Ideally, I would have included students from one language level, but I was unable to do so because I used an intact class. Therefore, participants’ levels ranged from mid to high proficiency.

Standardized tests from WIDA are used to measure ELs’ language proficiency levels. WIDA is an organization that provides standards, assessment, research and professional learning for educators. ACCESS for ELLs stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. The ACCESS test is given to EL students in grades K-12 during the middle of the school year. Since EL kindergarten students are not assessed prior to entering school,
a placement test is used to determine the student’s English language proficiency level. The WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) is a screener test that is given to incoming students who list a home language other than English on the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ). The test assesses kindergarten students’ listening and speaking proficiency levels in English.

Since incoming kindergarten students are not tested in reading and writing, their listening and speaking scores are categorized as low, mid, high or exceptional. Students who score in the mid to high range on the W-APT, would typically display characteristics that correspond to levels two and three on the WIDA speaking and listening rubrics. A level two student is considered to be at the emerging level. In speaking, a level two student typically uses phrases or short sentences with fixed grammatical structures and some general content words. In listening, a level two student generally understands multiple related sentences that involve complex sentence structure and general content language. A level three student is considered to be developing. In speaking, a level three student typically uses short and some expanded sentences, relying on repetitive grammatical structures. A student at this level can use specific content language. In listening, a level three student generally understands multiple, extended compound and complex sentences that use specific content language (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2014).

Research Site

The setting of this study is an urban K-5 elementary school in the upper Midwest. The student population is 481. The EL population is currently 63%. Students at the
school come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. Students’ home languages include Hmong, Karen, Burmese, Spanish, Somali and Nepali. The school is a language academy site, which means that it provides English language services to students who are new arrivals to the country. Some of the students are refugees and have limited or interrupted formal schooling. The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch is 93% (Akyea, 2015).

Research Setting

The research took place in a co-taught kindergarten classroom during Writer’s Workshop. Writer’s Workshop is a method of writing instruction that emphasizes writing as a process. Each fifty minute block includes a ten minute mini lesson which focuses on a particular writing skill. The classroom teacher and I co-teach the mini lesson. Then, students write independently and receive small group instruction (Calkins, 2011). During independent work time, I work with small groups of ELs in the classroom. This is the first year that our school is using the Discovering Our World (DOW) kindergarten curriculum, which is theme-based and provides opportunities for active learning in different centers. In order to include all of the elements of the DOW curriculum, the Writer’s Workshop model is modified to include a differentiated hands-on activity, as well as time for active learning, such as using the dramatic play center or building with blocks.

Data Collection Techniques

A combination of pretests, posttests, checklists and a teacher observation journal were used to collect data. Pretests and posttests were administered to assess students’ receptive and expressive understanding of target words. Checklists were used to observe
students’ use of target words during small group activities. Specifically, I noted if the student used the target word independently, with a prompt or with modeling. Additionally, I recorded examples of how students used target vocabulary words in my observation journal.

Data Collection Technique One: Pretests and Posttests

A pretest/posttest design was used to measure the effectiveness of an intervention. The purpose of a pretest is to ensure that the participants are comparable before the intervention, while the posttest is used to measure the effects of the intervention. While the pretest/posttest design provides a concrete way to compare students’ vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention, it only assesses students’ learning at one point in time. It does not measure the long-term effects of the intervention (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

The pretests and posttests used in this study measured students’ receptive and expressive knowledge of ten academic words along with pictures that were selected from two different units from the DOW kindergarten curriculum. The same posttest was used to assess students’ expressive and receptive vocabulary of selected target words after receiving instruction. The tests were designed based on vocabulary assessments used in other studies that addressed vocabulary instruction (Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli, & Kapp, 2009), Beck & McKeown, 2007) and were further modified to include pictures. Pictures were included in the assessment because the kindergarten DOW curriculum presents vocabulary words with pictures (see Appendix B for complete pretest/posttest).
Data Collection Technique Two: Checklists

The purpose of the checklist is to record students’ use of the target word in small groups. The checklist provides a quick and efficient way to monitor students’ progress on a weekly basis. While the checklist allowed me to quickly assess students’ progress while teaching, it only provided information about one specific part of a student’s use of language. Students were asked an open-ended question using the target word and I recorded whether they used the word in their response. I documented whether the student used the word correctly. I also noted if the student used the target word independently, with a prompt or with modeling (see Appendix C for checklist).

Data Collection Technique Three: Teacher Observation Journal

The teacher observation journal was used to collect additional information about the process of the intervention. It allowed the researcher to gather more information that was not observable through quantitative assessments. Additionally, it was used to allow the researcher to reflect on her teaching. In this study, it was primarily used to record examples of how students used target vocabulary words. It was also used to record any challenges or interruptions, which may have affected the outcome of the study.

Procedure

Participants

Students were randomly assigned to either Group A or Group B. Group A, the experimental group, received explicit vocabulary instruction and responded to closed-ended and open-ended questions in small groups. Students in Group B, the control group, did not receive explicit vocabulary instruction but were still introduced to the same target words when they responded to closed-ended and open-ended questions.
**Pilot Study**

The pilot study tests the data collection methods on a small scale before beginning the actual study. The purpose of the pilot study is to uncover and address any problems that arise (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In my initial pilot study, I asked a student to answer three questions from the receptive measure and three questions from the productive measure. The student was able to successfully answer one question from the receptive test. She often repeated the target word rather than providing an example or mentioned what was in the picture. After conducting the pilot study, I realized that I needed to provide sample questions before administering the test. In December, I completed a pilot study with students from a different kindergarten class. After conducting the pilot study, I determined I did not need to make any changes to the data collection methods.

**Materials and Timeline**

**Pretest.**

Students in both the control and experimental groups participated in the pretest in December. The pretest was individually administered to students. The pretest measured students’ receptive and expressive knowledge of ten academic words.

**Receptive Measure.**

This test measured a student’s ability to identify a picture that represents a target word. Students were shown three pictures and were asked to identify the picture that matches the target word. Responses were given one point if correct and zero points if incorrect. Distractors were included. For example, if the target word was an action verb, other action verb pictures were included.
Example of a Receptive Question

Which picture matches the word *examine*? Students can point to the picture.

![Picture Options]

Expressive Definitions Measure in Context.

This test measured a student’s ability to define a word within the context of the picture. The pictures used were taken from the vocabulary words that were used in DOW kindergarten curriculum. Students were shown a picture and were asked to identify the meaning of the word in the picture using the question “What does ___ mean in this picture?” Students’ responses were audio recorded and given two points for a complete response, one point for a related response and zero points for an unrelated response or no response. A complete response included providing a synonym or giving a definition. A sample response is listed below.

Example of an Expressive Pretest/Posttest Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Word</th>
<th>Synonym</th>
<th>Definition/meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>Look closely</td>
<td>To look closely at someone or something to find out more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: What does *examine* mean in this picture?
Explicit Instruction.

Students in the experimental group received explicit vocabulary instruction on the first day of each week’s lesson sequence. The steps of explicit vocabulary instruction include many elements of the Model of Robust Instruction provided by Beck et al. (2002), as described below.

1. Introduce the target word(s) in its written form and in the context of an anchor picture.
2. Provide student friendly definitions.
3. Students pronounce the word.
4. Provide a sentence in another context that is different than the anchor picture.
5. Students repeat the word, its meaning and use it in a sentence.

Closed and Open-Ended Questions.

The students in the control group and the experimental group participated in the questioning activities. On the second day of instruction, students were asked closed-ended questions. The questions followed the example/non-example format (Beck et al., 2008; Coyne et. al, 2009). Students were shown pictures that illustrated examples and non-examples of target words. Students showed a ‘happy face’ card when they thought the picture was a positive example of the target word and they showed a ‘sad face’ card when they thought the picture was a negative example of the target word. After, we discussed as a group why the picture was or was not an example of the target word.

Open-ended questions varied according to the lesson topic and students’ personal interests. An example of an open-ended question using the word examine was “What can you examine in the science center?” Students took turns responding to the question with their peers using a Turn and Talk model.
Checklists.

Checklists were used on the third day of small group instruction to observe students’ productive language. Students were asked to respond to open-ended questions about the target words. Using the checklist, I recorded whether they used the word in their response. More specifically, I noted if the student used the target word independently, with a prompt or with modeling. I also noted whether the student used the word correctly.

*Example of a Checklist*

Target Word: _____________

Did student use word correctly? Did student independently use target word? If no, did student use target word after given a prompt (Can you use the word *examine* in a sentence?) or after repeating a model sentence (*I examine* the shell with a magnifying glass).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Used Correctly</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Observation Journal.

The teacher observation journal was used at the end of each small group session. I recorded my observations regarding students’ responses to closed-ended and open-ended questions. I recorded specific examples of how students used target words. Additionally, I commented on the use of the Ipad for reviewing target words. Finally, I recorded any challenges or interruptions that may have affected the results of the study.
Review.

Students need multiple encounters to understand and use a new word. Providing opportunities for review is one way to increase students’ exposure to new words (Beck et al., 2002). Every two weeks, students reviewed vocabulary words using the Bitsboard application on their Ipad. The application allows students to review target words by seeing the picture, the written word, and by listening to the word aloud.

Post-test.

After six weeks of treatment, the students in the control group and experimental group were administered the posttest. Again, the test was administered individually. The questions in the receptive and expressive measure were the same as the pretest. The same procedures that occurred in the pretest were followed when administering the posttest.

Data Analysis

Pretests and Posttests

Pretests and posttests were compared and examined for growth in both the receptive and expressive measures.

Checklists

Checklists were analyzed for students’ vocabulary growth in productive language. I examined how often students used target words in their responses to open-ended questions. Specifically, I wanted to know if students used the target word independently, after receiving a prompt or if they required modeling. I also wanted to know if students used the word correctly.
Teacher Observation Journal

The teacher observation journal was analyzed to identify patterns. The observations also provided possible explanations for students’ responses.

Verification of Data

Triangulation is the primary method used to ensure validity and reliability. Triangulation “entails the use of multiple, independent methods of obtaining data in a single investigation to arrive at the same research findings” (Mackey & Gass, 2016 p. 233). In this study, a combination of pretests, posttests, checklists and the teacher observation journal were used to obtain data.

Ethics

Participants’ rights and confidentiality are considered throughout the study. This study includes several protective measures, which are stated below.

1. A human subject research proposal was submitted to Hamline University and to the school district for approval.
2. Parents received translated letters informing them about the purpose of the study. It stated that participation was optional.
3. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.
4. Audio recordings were kept secure and were deleted after the study was completed.

Summary

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental approach was used to compare the effectiveness of a specific intervention. A combination of closed and open-ended
questions was used in the assessments and small group activities to increase students’ receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge of target words. The use of pretests, posttests, checklists, and the teacher observation journal allowed the researcher to analyze the effectiveness of the intervention from more than one perspective. The next chapter presents the results of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction is a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. This chapter presents the results of a six-week intervention that examined the impact of small group explicit academic vocabulary instruction on students’ receptive and expressive vocabulary. The data collected informs the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

I address each research question and present findings from the pretest/posttest, checklists and the teacher observation journal. I also include some sample student responses. I have used pseudonyms in order to maintain student confidentiality.

Question 1:

How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?
Pretests and posttests were administered in order to compare students’ receptive and expressive knowledge of ten selected academic vocabulary words before and after the intervention. Although I randomly selected the groups, the results of the pretest showed that the mean receptive score of students in the experimental group was 1.25 points higher than the mean score of those in the control group. The mean expressive score of students in the experimental group was .5 higher than the mean expressive score of students in the control group.

After six weeks of intervention, the posttest was administered to all students. I compared students’ scores individually before and after the intervention which is listed in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used to maintain student confidentiality. In the experimental group, all students’ expressive scores increased from the pretest to posttest. Moo Paw’s score increased eight points, Myint’s score increased eleven points, Ka La’s score increased seventeen points and Seth’s score increased six points. In the control group, three students’ expressive scores increased and one student’s score decreased by two points. In the experimental group, all students’ receptive scores increased, although the increase was slight. Two students’ scores only increased by one point. In the control group, two students’ receptive scores increased slightly while one student’s score decreased by three points and another student’s score remained the same.
Table 1

*Individual Receptive and Expressive Scores from Pretest and Posttest*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Receptive Score Pre</th>
<th>Receptive Score Post</th>
<th>Expressive Score Pre</th>
<th>Expressive Score Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>7/20</td>
<td>15/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>6/20</td>
<td>17/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>18/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>7/10</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>7/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>0/10</td>
<td>5/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>6/20</td>
<td>4/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>4/20</td>
<td>9/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>8/20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also compared the scores from the experimental group with those in the control group. I calculated the mean value for expressive and receptive scores. I subtracted the mean values of the receptive and expressive scores on the pretest from the mean values of the receptive and expressive scores on the posttest. The pre-post gain provides information about how the instruction may have affected student’s receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge. The results showed that students’ receptive and expressive scores increased in both the experimental and control groups. The increase in students’ receptive scores did not differ drastically between the experimental and control group. The difference in the expressive scores, however, was much more noticeable when comparing the experimental and control groups. The expressive mean score for students in the experimental group increased 10.5 points as compared to a 3.25 increase in the control group. Exposure to the target words helped students become familiar with the words, but explicit instruction provided the greatest increase in expressive scores. Table 2 shows this data.
Table 2

Mean Number of Words Known Receptively and Expressively by Type of Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Pre-Post Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receptive</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>Receptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Group</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>8.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Group</strong></td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although students’ receptive scores may have only increased slightly on the posttest, I noticed that students were able to understand the meaning of target words when I asked them to respond to a question in small groups. Based on information from the checklists and observations from my journal, I noticed several instances when it was evident that students understood the word receptively. For example, students responded to the questions regarding the target words *habitat*, *adapt*, *grow* and *moment* with appropriate responses. Although they did not use the target word in a response, they understood the word receptively and responded to it either with a single word, phrase or sentence.

When I compared students’ responses from the expressive measure on the pretest and posttest, I noticed that some students’ responses increased in length. For example, on the pretest, when I asked students to tell me what the target word means in the picture, some students did not respond, others said, “I don’t know” and others gave single word responses. On the posttest, three students used complete sentences and told me what the word meant. Other students responded in single words, extended phrases or complete sentences. For example, on the pretest, when Myint was prompted to define the word
examine, he said, “looking in there.” On the posttest, he said, “Examine means the doctor looking closely.” The change in response may be due to the fact that students were expected to respond to questions using the target word in a complete sentence during small group activities. If they gave a single word response, they were prompted to rephrase their response.

Question 2:

Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

On the third day of instruction, students were asked an open-ended question using the target word and I recorded whether they used the word in their response. I documented whether the student used the word correctly on the checklist. I also noted if the student used the target word independently, with a prompt or with modeling. I recorded students’ responses using an iPad. As students were speaking, I wrote down their responses and if I was unable to write down all of the responses, I listened to the recording after the lesson.

I examined the checklists and looked at each student’s response. I analyzed the data week by week and then I looked for overall patterns. The data from the checklist is presented in tables below. Additionally, I provided some sample student responses. Finally, I included any information from my teacher observation journal, which might help explain the data further.
Table 3

*Responses to Open-Ended Question using Target word “examine”*

Question: What can you examine in the science center?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I asked students the question, “What can you examine in the science center?”, two students in the experimental group used *examine* in a sentence and only one student used the target word correctly in a sentence. Moo Paw said, “I can examine a ladybug.” Myint said, “I can examine to find a ant.” Although he did use *examine* in a sentence, he inserted extra words. I am not sure if he thought *examine* meant to find. Another possible reason is that the definition stated that *examine* means to find out more about something. Seth and Ka La gave single word responses, which were appropriate answers, but they required modeling in order to use the target word in a sentence.
In the control group, one student used the word *examine* correctly and independently in a sentence. Ba Soe said, “I can examine eyes.” Arthur initially responded with a phrase “your mouth.” He required modeling in order to use the target word in a sentence. Hser Lay Paw and Catherine said, “I don’t know.” After I modeled a sentence, they repeated it.

I noticed that students in the control group were confused about the context in which the word *examine* can be used. The picture on the vocabulary card showed a doctor examining a child’s eyes. Therefore, students’ responses were limited to body parts, rather than choosing something else from the science center, such as leaves, pumpkins or rocks. These limited responses by students in the control group may be due to a misconception that originated from the vocabulary picture card. Without direct vocabulary instruction, their knowledge of this word was limited.
Table 4

*Responses to Open-Ended Question using Target Word “grow”*

**Question:** What can grow?

**Experimental Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
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<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
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<tbody>
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**Control Group**

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</tbody>
</table>

When I asked students, “What can grow?” they understood the meaning of the word *grow* in the question. All students in the experimental and control groups initially gave single word responses. With prompting, one student from the experimental group and two students from the control group were able to use the word *grow* in a sentence. The other students in both groups required modeling in order to do so. In my observation journal, I wrote that students were just getting used to the process of answering questions using the target word in their response. Since this was the first time that they participated in the open-ended question process, many students needed modeling.
Week 2

Table 5

Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “compare”

Question: What can you compare?

Experimental Group

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Control

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</table>

When I asked students “What can you compare?” All students in the experimental group used the word compare independently and correctly in a sentence. Three students in the control group used the word independently and correctly in a sentence. The other student was able to do so when prompted. In my teacher observation journal I noted that students might have been exposed to the word compare in reading lessons. I wrote, I think students were able to successfully use the word compare in a sentence because they frequently compare characters or books that they have read.
Table 6

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “community”*

Question: What do you do in your community?

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Students were asked, “What do you do in your community?” One student in the experimental group was able to use the word community in a sentence correctly and independently. The other students needed modeling in order to use the word successfully in a sentence. Many students in the experimental group responded with a single word response. The students in the control group initially did not use the word in a sentence. When I prompted them to do so, they were unable to do so correctly. The majority of the students began the sentence with “I community.” After noticing this common error, I modeled the sentence and gave them the sentence stem, “In my community I…” I also noticed that students in the control group did not completely understand the meaning of the word community. They connected its meaning to the picture on the
vocabulary card which showed a community garden. Therefore, some of the students’ responses were related to gardens and things that grow.

Week 3

Table 7

Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “research”

Question: What do you want to research?

<table>
<thead>
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I asked students, “What do you want to research?” Two students in the experimental group used the target word correctly and independently in a sentence. The other two students responded with a single word. After prompting them to use the target word in a sentence, they were able to do so. All students in the control group used the word *research* correctly and independently in a sentence.
Table 8

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “personal narrative”*

Question: What will you write a personal narrative about?

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<thead>
<tr>
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</table>

All students in the experimental and control groups required modeling in order to use the word *personal narrative* correctly in a sentence. I asked students, “What will you write a personal narrative about?” Students in the experimental group did not seem to understand the meaning of the word *personal narrative*. Myint said, “I like to personal narrative about active learning.” Moo Paw and Ka La gave single word responses that were unrelated to the topic. Seth said, “I will do something drawing.”

The majority of students in the control group did seem to understand the meaning of the word *personal narrative*, but were unable to use it in a sentence. Ba Soe said, “I’m going to write my two babies.” Arthur said, “I’m going to write my own and my mom.” Hser Lay Paw said, “I’m going to write myself.” Catherine said, “reading book.” After
students gave their responses, I modeled how to use the word in a sentence. In my teacher observation journal, I noted that the complexity and length of the sentence required to answer the question may have impacted students’ ability to answer the question correctly.

Table 9

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “moment”*

Question/Prompt: Tell me about a happy moment.

**Experimental Group**

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I asked students to tell me about a happy moment. Two students in the experimental group used the word moment in a sentence, but only one student did so correctly. The other two students responded with a phrase and needed modeling in order to use the word in a sentence.

Three students in the control group used the word moment in a sentence, but only one student used it correctly. Hser Lay Paw said, “My happy moment is my brother birthday.” Ba Soe said, “My happy moment of my baby birthday.” Arthur said, “My
happy moment spend time to my mom.” Although students required modeling in order to use the word correctly in a sentence, the errors in their original responses did not interfere with the meaning. When I looked back at the prompt, I noticed that it is not in the form of the question. Students are accustomed to rephrasing the question as a statement. They use the verb that was in the question in order to form their response. This may explain why two students omitted the verb in their answer.

Week 4

Table 10

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “adapt”*

**Question:** How do you adapt to cold weather?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
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I asked students “How do you adapt to the cold weather?” Most students in the experimental group understood the question but did not use the word in a sentence. Myint said, “I will wear winter coat.” Moo Paw said, “I will change the clothes.” Ka La said,
“wear snow pants.” Seth misunderstood the meaning of the word, and said, “Adapt means snow.” Students needed me to model using the word in a sentence.

Three students in the control group used the word *adapt* in a sentence after prompting, but they did not use it correctly. Students initially responded with responses such as, I wear jacket or I wear snow pants. When I prompted them to use the word *adapt* in a sentence, they simply replaced *wear* with *adapt*. Based on students’ answers I thought that they understood the question, but when they said “I adapt snow pants” and “I adapt jacket,” it was difficult to see if they understood the meaning of the word *adapt.* Once again, I noticed that the complexity of the sentence structure that was required to answer the question may be one reason why so many students needed modeling in order to correctly use the word *adapt* in a sentence.

Table 11

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “record”*

Question: What do you record in the math center?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>
When I asked students “What do you record in the math center?” one student in the experimental group used the word *record* in a sentence but it was incorrect. The other students gave single word responses that were not related to the question. I modeled how to correctly respond to the question. Similarly, in the control group, only one student used the word *record* in a sentence but did so incorrectly. All of the students needed me to model how to respond to the question.

Table 12

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “report”*

Question: What do you report in the drama center?

<table>
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</table>

I asked students “What do you report in the drama center?” All students in the experimental group used the target word in a sentence independently and correctly. All students’ responses included the weather. In my teacher observation journal I wrote that perhaps students are used to the language structure because they are exposed to it in the drama center. The drama center was set up as a weather center where they could pretend
to report the weather. They are familiar with the use of the phrase ‘report the weather’ which is used in that particular context.

Students in the control group responded with the target word in a sentence, but some of their responses did not make sense. Ba Soe said, “I report the food.” Hser Lay Paw said, “I report the fruit.” Arthur said, “I report the city.” His response was appropriate because the drama center was being used as a weather center and there was a map. He needed to include the word about after the word report. Catherine said, “I report the pictures.” The responses of the students in the control group may reflect the fact that they did not receive direct vocabulary instruction and therefore were unable to use the word correctly in a meaningful sentence.

Week 5

Table 13

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “character”*

Question: Who is your favorite character in The Mitten?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I asked students “Who is your favorite character in The Mitten?” because students had recently read that story during their reading lesson. All students in the experimental group used the target word correctly and independently in their responses. In my teacher observation journal I provided a possible explanation for students’ ability to use the word in a sentence. I wrote, I think students were able to successfully use the word character in a sentence because they are familiar with this particular sentence structure (My favorite [character] is…). It is frequently used in school, in conversation and in reading discussions.

One student in the control group used the word character independently and correctly in a sentence. Two students initially gave a single word response but when prompted were able to use the word character in a sentence. The other student needed modeling in order to use the word in a sentence.
I asked students, “What is the habitat of a fish?” Most of the students in the experimental group answered the question with an appropriate answer but did not use the word *habitat* in the sentence. Myint said, “The fish live under sea.” Moo Paw said, “The fish live under water.” Ka La said, “The fish eat water.” Seth did use the word in a sentence. Although it was not completely grammatically correct, his error did not impede the meaning of the sentence. He said, “The habitat about fish means live in the water.” Three students needed modeling to use the word *habitat* in a sentence even though it was evident that they understood the meaning of habitat when used in a question.

Two students in the control group used the word in a sentence after being prompted. However, only one student used the word correctly. The other two students
needed modeling in order to use the word in a sentence. Similar to the experimental group, it was evident that students understood the meaning of the word *habitat* when used receptively but they were unable to correctly use it in a sentence.

Table 15

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “conclusion”*

Question: Where is the conclusion in a book?

Experimental Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I asked students, “Where is the conclusion in a book?” Two students in the experimental group used the word *conclusion* in a sentence after a prompt. The other two students required modeling. All students in the control group required modeling in order to use the word *conclusion* in a sentence.
Week 6

Table 16
*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “proofread”*

Question: Students are given name tags with errors and told to look at it. What did you do?

**Experimental Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Control Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Independent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17

*Responses to Open-Ended Question Using Target Word “edit”*

Question: When do you edit? How can you edit this page?

**Experimental Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myint</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moo Paw</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka La</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Control Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Correct After Modeling</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Soe</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hser Lay Paw</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In week 6, I noticed that the words *edit* and *proofread* were difficult to include in a question. Therefore, I included a task and asked students a question related to that task. For example, I gave each student a nametag with their name on it, but each student’s name contained an error. I asked them to look at their name. They all noticed the errors. Some students crossed out an extra letter, while others added a letter. I asked them, “What did you do?” After prompting students to use the word in a sentence, all students in both the experimental and control groups were able to use the word *proofread* in a sentence.

In order to ask a question about the word *edit*, I showed students an example of an unfinished book that we were writing in class. I asked students, “When do you edit?” and “How can you edit this page?” All students in the experimental group used the word *edit* correctly and independently in a sentence. All of the students in the control group attempted to use the word *edit* in a sentence, but did not do so correctly. They needed modeling in order to use the word correctly in a sentence. In my teacher observation journal I wrote that some students realized that *proofread* and *edit* have a similar meaning and are used in similar contexts. We use the word *edit* in our writing lessons but we don’t explicitly define what it means.

When I evaluated the checklists overall, I noticed some patterns. All of the students in the experimental group were able to independently give a correct response to the questions using the target words *compare*, *character*, *edit*, and *report*. In the control group, all students were able to independently give a correct response to the questions using the target word *research*, while three out of four students were able to independently give a correct response to the questions using the target word *compare*. 

When comparing the experimental group with the control group, the students in the experimental group were able to independently and correctly respond to four words, while the students in the control group only responded independently and correctly to two words.

When I referred back to my teacher observation journal, I noticed that all of these words were used in other contexts (reading, writing or during active learning time). In some cases, students were exposed to the word receptively on multiple occasions. In other instances, students had opportunities to use the word productively either in a formal academic setting (ie. turn and talk) or during social interaction time with peers (ie: active learning). The fact that students in the experimental group were exposed to the definition, had multiple exposures in various contexts, and had opportunities to practice using the word may have contributed to students’ ability to independently and correctly use the target word in a sentence.

Summary

Overall, the results of this study indicated that explicit vocabulary instruction helped students increase their receptive and expressive knowledge of selected academic vocabulary. Students were more successful when they received explicit instruction and then were exposed to the word or had opportunities to use it in various contexts. In order for students to successfully use the target word in a sentence, students often needed prompting or modeling. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the major findings, their implications for the classroom and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to find out whether small group explicit vocabulary instruction was a more effective way for kindergarten EL students to acquire academic vocabulary receptively and productively rather than receiving embedded vocabulary instruction. Specifically, I attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How does small group explicit vocabulary instruction impact students' expressive and receptive academic language?

2. Do students respond to open-ended questions using the target word in a sentence during small group activities independently, with a prompt or with modeling?

This chapter examines major findings, implications for the classroom, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

Major Findings

The results from the pretest/posttest indicate that small group explicit vocabulary instruction seems to be a more effective way to increase academic word meaning knowledge rather than embedded vocabulary instruction alone. A pretest and posttest were administered to assess students’ receptive and expressive knowledge of ten selected academic vocabulary words before and after the intervention. In the experimental group, all students’ expressive scores increased from the pretest to posttest. In the control group,
three students’ expressive scores increased and one student’s score decreased by two points. In the experimental group, all students’ receptive scores increased, although the increase was slight. In the control group, two students’ receptive scores increased slightly while one student’s score decreased by three points and another student’s score remained the same.

Comparable to the findings of Coyne, McCoach and Kapp (2007), the results from this study’s posttest indicated that while exposure to the target words helped students in the control group become familiar with the vocabulary, explicit instruction provided a greater increase in expressive scores. In the experimental group, students’ expressive mean scores increased 10.5 points as compared to a 3.25 increase in the control group.

The results from the study also show that modeling and prompting were often required for students to correctly respond to the question using the target word in a sentence. Checklists and the teacher observation journal were used to document students’ responses in small groups. In some cases, students understood the meaning of the target word and gave an appropriate response but did not use the target word in a sentence. In other cases, students attempted to use the target word in a sentence but did so incorrectly due to the length and complexity of the sentence structure that was required to respond to the question. When the response required to answer the question was simple, students were more often able to correctly use the target word in a sentence. For example, when I asked students, “What can you compare?” many students were able to use the word compare in a sentence. Students said, “I can compare ____.” When the response was longer and more complex, students needed more prompting and modeling. For example,
when I asked students, “What do you do in your community?, they attempted to answer the question by saying “I community ____.” In this case, students needed modeling in order to use the word correctly in a sentence. Nisbet and Tindall’s (2015) research supports this study by suggesting that it is necessary to address various aspects of language, including how the word is used at the sentence level.

In the instances when students did not need modeling, students were more likely to successfully and independently use target words in a sentence when the following three components were combined:

1. Students received explicit vocabulary instruction in small groups.
2. Target vocabulary words were embedded in a variety of instructional areas.
3. Students had multiple opportunities to use the word in social interactions with peers.

The data from my study suggests that when explicit instruction is combined with multiple opportunities for repeated exposure and practice in both academic and social settings, students tend to use the words independently and correctly in a sentence when responding to a question. The results of my study are consistent with the research of Beck et al. (2002) and their method of robust vocabulary instruction, which includes providing a student-friendly definition, providing the word in a different context and providing opportunities for students to use the word in meaningful activities. Through the use of checklists and my teacher observation journal, I noticed that students in the experimental group were able to respond to questions independently and correctly using target words in a sentence when they were exposed to those words in other contexts. Students in the control group, however, needed more modeling and prompts to use the target words in a
sentence even when exposed to the target words in other contexts. For example, all students in the experimental group used the word *examine* independently and correctly in a sentence. They were explicitly taught the meaning of this word in small groups. In addition, they were exposed to this word during active learning when they had an opportunity to report the weather with their peers in the weather center. The students in the control group were exposed to the weather center in the classroom but were not directly taught the meaning of the word in small groups. When I asked them to use *examine* in a sentence, they attempted to do so but did not fully understand the meaning of the word.

Implications

It is important for educators to consider several factors when providing vocabulary instruction. I noticed that a student’s ability to respond to the question using the target word in a sentence independently and correctly changed depending on the student’s familiarity of the word and the complexity of the sentence structure required to answer the question. In the beginning of the study and when the question was more complex, students required modeling. In order to address this issue, sentence stems would be an appropriate and useful tool to use as a scaffold until students become familiar with the words and the sentence structure. Nisbet and Tindall (2015) suggest that teachers develop sentence stems to help students engage in meaningful interactions with new words. For example, when I asked students the question, “What do you do in your community?” the majority of students needed modeling. In the future, I would provide students with the sentence stem, “In my community, I ______.” With the additional support of sentence
stems, students would have the opportunity to use the words correctly in a sentence while still sharing their own ideas.

Additionally, the data indicates that students had some misconceptions about a word’s meaning and how it can be used in various contexts. Through small group activities, the misconceptions were identified and could then be addressed. In this particular study, pictures were used to introduce target words. In the control group, some of the misconceptions originated due to the picture associated with the word and the lack of explicit vocabulary instruction. Overall, I felt that pictures helped young students associate images with new words. However, in order to avoid misconceptions, educators may consider presenting more than one picture with a target word to show how that word can be used in different contexts.

In addition to explicit vocabulary instruction, it is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to hear and practice using target words in a variety of contexts. Although it requires planning and additional time, many researchers, including Beck et al. (2002) and Gersten & Baker (2000), encourage educators to provide students with additional opportunities to practice using the target words in a variety of contexts. In my study, I provided opportunities to review vocabulary words every two weeks by using an application on the iPad. In addition, I noticed that when students in the experimental group received direct instruction and then used the vocabulary words in various contexts in the classroom, they were able to use the words correctly and independently in a sentence more often. For example, when I introduced the words character, compare, report, and edit, students in the experimental group were able to use them in a sentence. In my teacher observation journal I noted that all of these words were also used in the
classroom either in whole group lessons or during active learning time when students interact and play with peers.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the small sample size. The study included eight participants. Therefore, due to the small number of participants, the data cannot be considered statistically valid or reliable. I have attempted to include multiple sources of data in order to address the small sample size. A larger sample size would allow researchers to confirm the data in this study and to generalize the results.

A second limitation of this study was the inability to control for outside factors. Students were exposed to some of the target vocabulary words in other content areas, which likely contributed to their increase in receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge.

Suggestions for Further Research

I researched the use of explicit vocabulary instruction within small groups. The results of the posttest indicated that explicit vocabulary instruction was an effective way for students to increase word knowledge. Since the majority of prior research on vocabulary instruction for young children has been conducted during read aloud time, additional research is needed to identify the best practices for vocabulary instruction within small groups.

In my study, I noticed that students required a lot of modeling and prompting in order to use the words correctly and independently in a sentence. Therefore, future research could further examine which activities best promote independent and accurate use of the target word in expressive language.
Another opportunity for research would be to study the use of academic language in other contexts besides a small group setting. Further studies could extend the observations to whole group classroom time, which would allow researchers to understand if students are using academic vocabulary in various contexts. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct observations during times when students have opportunities to socialize with peers to understand how and when vocabulary is being used in different settings.

Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that small group explicit vocabulary instruction is an effective way to increase students’ receptive and expressive knowledge of academic vocabulary. Although students may have a word in his or her receptive vocabulary, modeling sentences orally is often required for students to be able to use a word productively. Additionally, students benefit from repeated exposure to target words and from multiple opportunities to practice using target words in various contexts. I will share the results of this study with my kindergarten and EL colleagues in a team meeting. Additionally, I will share the results of this study with my principal and the Office of Early Learning in my district. In the future, I will continue to explicitly teach academic vocabulary to my students in small groups.
### APPENDIX A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>protect</td>
<td>rhombus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ball</td>
<td>glanced</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Words Assessed in Pretests/Posttests
Unit 3.1
1. compare
2. examine
3. grow
4. community

Unit 4
5. research
6. adapt
7. character
8. habitat
9. edit
10. conclusion

Receptive Measure

1. Which picture matches the word *compare*?

2. Which picture matches the word *examine*?
3. Which picture matches the word *grow*?

4. Which picture matches the word *community*?

5. Which picture matches the word *research*?

6. Which picture matches the word *adapt*?

7. Which picture matches the word *character*?
8. Which picture matches the word *habitat*?

9. Which picture matches the word *edit*?

10. Which picture matches the word *conclusion*?

**Expressive Definitions Measure in Context**

1. What does *compare* mean in this picture?

2. What does *examine* mean in this picture?
3. What does grow mean in this picture?

4. What does community mean in this picture?

5. What does research mean in this picture?

6. What does adapt mean in this picture?

7. What does character mean in this picture?
8. What does habitat mean in this picture?

9. What does edit mean in this picture?

10. What does conclusion mean in this picture?

Score Sheet

Receptive Measure

Responses are given one point if correct and zero points if incorrect.

1. compare /1
2. examine /1
3. grow /1
4. community /1
5. research /1
6. adapt /1
7. character /1
8. habitat /1
9. edit /1
10. conclusion /1
Expressive Measure

Students’ responses are recorded and given two points for a complete response, one point for a related response and zero points for an unrelated response or no response. A complete response includes providing a synonym or giving a definition.

1. Compare  0  1  2
2. Examine   0  1  2
3. Grow      0  1  2
4. Community 0  1  2
5. Research  0  1  2
6. Adapt     0  1  2
7. Character 0  1  2
8. Habitat   0  1  2
9. Edit      0  1  2
10. Conclusion 0  1  2

Sample Responses for Expressive Definition Measure in Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Word</th>
<th>Synonym</th>
<th>Definition/meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>compare</td>
<td>tell what is the same and different</td>
<td>To look at 2 things to see what is the same and different about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examine</td>
<td>look closely</td>
<td>To look closely at someone or something to find out more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grow</td>
<td>get bigger, taller</td>
<td>To grow in size or to become larger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>neighborhood</td>
<td>A group of people who live in the same area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research</td>
<td>explore, study</td>
<td>To find or look for new information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adapt</td>
<td>change</td>
<td>To change your behavior so its easier to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character</td>
<td>person, animal</td>
<td>A person or animal in a story, play or movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habitat</td>
<td>home</td>
<td>The place where a plant or animal lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edit</td>
<td>change, fix</td>
<td>Make a change, fix a mistake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conclusion</td>
<td>end</td>
<td>The last part of something, the end of a story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Target Word: ________________

Did student use word correctly? Did student independently use target word? If no, did student use target word after given a prompt (Can you use the word examine in a sentence?) or after repeating a model sentence (I examine the shell with a magnifying glass).

Experimental Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Used Correctly</th>
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<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #4</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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REFERENCES


National Reading Panel. (2000, April). Teaching children to read: An evidence-based
assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Bethesda, MD: Author


