

**The Effects of Listening Previewing on Fourth Grade Students' Acquisition of Knowledge  
of Reading Vocabulary Words**

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## **Abstract**

Examining two different vocabulary instruction strategies and their effects on students' acquisition of word knowledge was the basis of this action research study. Twenty general education students were presented two vocabulary instruction strategies in a fourth grade classroom. The first study, a teacher selected strategy, focused on teaching vocabulary through the use of packet work consisting of a variety of vocabulary instruction word learning strategies. The packet included written word work on synonyms, antonyms, context clues, and dictionary skills. The second, a research based strategy, studied the effects of class-wide listening previewing on vocabulary knowledge and recall. The teacher presented the vocabulary words verbally and on a worksheet while reviewing the words prior to reading the selection. Data, comparing the vocabulary pretest to posttest scores, proved that all student's made gains on vocabulary knowledge by adding these strategies to vocabulary instruction. Individually, the listening previewing strategy produced the highest gains for students. The findings support that providing a multi-sensory approach to vocabulary instruction is successful in the elementary classroom.

*Keywords:* listening previewing, vocabulary instruction strategies, fourth grade

## **The Effects of Listening Previewing on Fourth Grade Students' Acquisition of Knowledge of Reading Vocabulary Words**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of class-wide listening previewing on both reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Past studies on the effects of listening previewing have mainly been completed with individual students or small groups of students. The current study evaluated these methods as class-wide instructional activities. The two main research questions were (a) does class-wide listening previewing lead to increased reading comprehension for targeted material as compared to silent reading? and (b) does adding vocabulary previewing to class-wide listening previewing activities result in increased reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge for targeted material as compared to class-wide listening previewing alone?

### **Review of the Literature**

Vocabulary instruction is imperative for young readers. Learning new words and understanding their meanings is crucial to reading comprehension. Without a real understanding of the words, students cannot truly comprehend what they are reading. "Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas and content together...making comprehension accessible for children." (Rupley, Logan, & Nicols, 1998/99). Students cannot rely on understanding words through context alone. Direct instruction of vocabulary words needs to happen in the classroom by the teacher. "On average, students should add 2,000 to 3,000 new words a year to their reading vocabularies." (Beck et al., 2002). This statistic proves that our young readers need vocabulary instruction as part of their school day. This not only applies to the subject of reading and language arts, but for all curriculum areas in which new words are presented.

Because vocabulary instruction is so important, educators need a wide variety of vocabulary instruction strategies to pull from and use in their classrooms. Students have different learning styles and require vocabulary words to be taught in different ways; both directly and indirectly. Students can be taught vocabulary in small groups or one-on-one, as well as whole group. "Vocabulary instruction experts all recommend a multi-component approach to developing vocabulary knowledge." (Sedita, 2005). There is no one vocabulary instruction approach that works for all students. Instead, teaching vocabulary words using a wide variety of strategies will ensure that all students are gaining an understanding of the words, which in turn leads to an understanding of the text. Of the several vocabulary strategies to choose from, one specifically was chosen for this research study; the listening preview strategy.

Listening previewing is used often in classrooms prior to reading the story. The teacher reads aloud and previews the vocabulary words, teaching the definitions. The teacher may choose to show the word in written form, in addition to giving an explanation of the words or a sentence using the vocabulary word. Hearing the words in their correct form and pronunciation is beneficial for all students in gaining an understanding of the word.

### **Word Learning Strategy**

Cohen and Byrnes (2007) investigated two different vocabulary instructional techniques in a third grade classroom to find out which instructional procedures for vocabulary acquisition support children's use of literacy. Sixteen third grade students, six girls and 10 boys participated in the study. All of the students were reading on grade level. Two approaches were used; authentic read aloud literature containing target vocabulary, as well as teaching word learning strategies. Children were taught vocabulary words connected to their everyday lives. The second method was an approach that provided the same vocabulary words with a definitional approach and daily worksheets. The results showed that students need instruction that will help them acquire new word knowledge and develop strategies to enable them to increase that knowledge.

### **Listening Previewing**

The next research study focused on the effects of two class-wide listening previewing strategies on reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Hawkins et al. (2010) conducted this study in an urban charter school in the Midwestern United States. There were 21 fourth-grade students who participated in the study. All of the students were black, and 13 were male. The researchers presented strategies of listening previewing and vocabulary previewing prior to reading the story selections to enhance reading comprehension and to promote vocabulary knowledge. The teacher would provide both listening previewing and vocabulary previewing before each story by distributing a vocabulary sheet, teaching the meanings of the words, and then reading the entire story aloud sentence by sentence. The results proved that listening previewing led to gains in comprehension as compared to silent reading. Also adding the vocabulary previewing piece, both showing the word and discussing the word, resulted in the highest gains of comprehension and vocabulary.

### **Influences of Word Meanings**

Two studies comparing the possible influences of word meaning acquisition during instruction and increasing the percentage and number of word meanings acquired were examined by Biemiller and Boote (2006). The research was conducted in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade regular education classrooms, with about fifty percent of the students being English-language learners. The researchers examined the effects of pretesting, reading books two and four times in the classroom, and word explanations through direct instruction of word meanings. Students were pretested using the procedure of explaining word meanings prior to reading the story. The story was then read two or more times with different word meanings explained during the reading. Results showed that adding word explanations and repeated readings showed gains for all students. Pretesting had no effect on gains. Thus proving that vocabulary instruction makes a difference.

### **Listening Previewing Definition**

Listening/vocabulary previewing is a strategy used prior to reading. The teacher reads aloud and previews the vocabulary words by saying the word and teaching the definition. "In listening previewing, students are asked to follow along as the teacher reads the passage." (Shapiro, 2011). This strategy is used to help enhance both reading comprehension and

vocabulary knowledge. It helps students get a better understanding of the word because the teacher is correctly pronouncing the word. "Listening previewing, one of the best-known stand-alone reading interventions, promotes fluency by providing students with an effective reading model prior to the student reading aloud" (Spielberger, 2004). "Although it is impossible to specifically teach all of the new words to students, it is useful to provide direct instruction in some words. This includes pre-teaching key vocabulary prior to reading a selection." (Sedita, 2005).

## Methodology

### Participants: Teacher-selected Strategy

This study was conducted at a suburban school in a Mid-western state. The teacher is the researcher in this study. There were 20 fourth-grade students, 10 girls and 10 boys, in this general education class. Four of the students are African American, one student is Asian, and fifteen are Caucasian. None of the students receive special education services. All but two students were reading on grade level.

### Study One: Teacher-based Vocabulary Strategy

**Procedures.** Ten vocabulary words were chosen from the first ten chapters from the novel study, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. These ten words were the challenging words from those chapters and were also identified in the teacher's guide as vocabulary to focus on. In addition, these words were 10 of their 20 spelling words to allow for extra review.

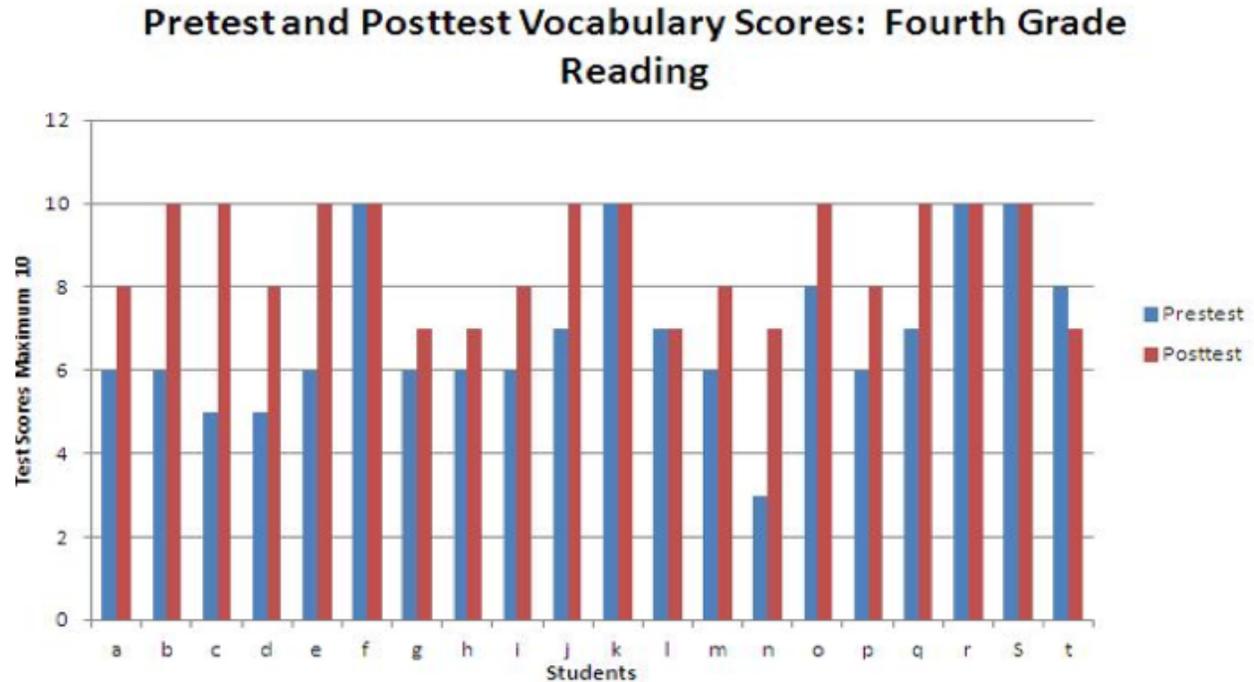
The words were taught for four days of the week. Each student had a packet with vocabulary, comprehension, and writing activities. The presentation of the words went as follows: Day one: gave the pretest, then reviewed words verbally as the students and teacher read them in the chapters, students completed a which word does not belong activity in the student packet of worksheets. Day two: Verbal review while reading, synonym match with the selected vocabulary words and fill in the missing word in their packet. Day three: Verbal review while reading, antonym match with the selected vocabulary words and fill in the missing word in packet. Day four: Verbal review while reading, context clues activity in packet (create your own definition) and dictionary work (looking up definitions in the dictionary) in packet. Day five: gave the post-test.

### Assessments.

**Pretest.** The pretest was given on Monday, which was the first day of this new novel study, before the students started reading the book. The students got out dividers and were given no other explanation other than to "do your best." The pretest was a ten word matching test in which the students had to match the correct term to its definition.

**Posttest.** The same procedure was followed as the pretest, and it was the exact same test. The posttest was given on day five.

**Results.** The students were given a pretest prior to any instruction or reading from the book. The words were taught for four days using a variety of strategies. The students were given a post-test on day five. Figure 1 shows the results of the pretest and posttest for the twenty students taking the 4th grade Reading Vocabulary test.



*Figure 1.* Results of the pretest and posttest for 20 students taking the fourth-grade reading vocabulary test. All, but one student, made gains on the posttest. Class average on the posttest was 87.5%.

Figure 2 shows the gain scores for the 20 students taking the fourth grade reading vocabulary test.

## Gain Vocabulary Scores: Fourth Grade Reading

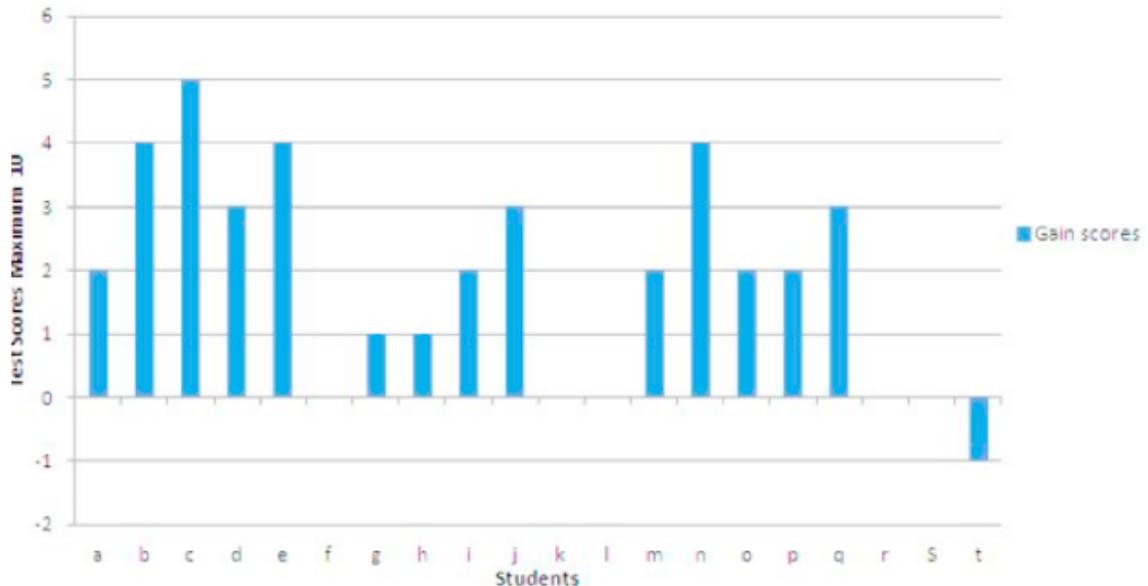


Figure 2. Gain scores of 20 students on a fourth-grade reading test. Class average gain score of 1.85.

Data in Figure 2 show that 14 students made gains. Four students scored perfectly on the pretest and those same students scored perfectly again on the posttest. Ten of the students scored 100% on the posttest. All students, except one, showed gains or their scores stayed the same. Five students scored 80%, five students scored 70%. None of the students scored below 60%. The class average test score was 87.5%.

### Study Two Research-based Strategy

**Procedures.** Ten vocabulary words were chosen from the story Tanya's Reunion written by Valerie Flournoy. This story is in the student's fourth grade basal reader. Six vocabulary words were noted in the teacher's guide as the vocabulary words to teach for this story. The researcher added four additional words from the text that were noted as more challenging words. The teacher taught these words for four days during this reading vocabulary study. (See appendix C).

Day One – Pass out the pretest worksheet to the students. Tell them to do their best work. Collect papers when finished. Now you will introduce the story; Tanya's Reunion. Have the kids get out their reading hardback book and open to page 184/185. Read aloud this selection the students. Then pass out the vocabulary worksheet with word, definition, and sentence example. Go over what the vocabulary words listed mean when you read them. Have the students point to each word. Teacher says reunion. Reunion means a meeting of group members who have been apart. Do this for all 10 words; point to the word, read the word and the definition. Next, ask the students to make predictions about what the story may be about. Call on four to five students. Now, read aloud the story to the students. When finished, ask

the comprehension questions on page 212 verbally to the students. Have a discussion about each question. Assignment - comprehension workbook page 133 and vocabulary scramble worksheet. The students are to work on this alone at their desk.

Day Two - Today students will listen the story on CD whole group. Have the students get out their reading hardback book and open to page 186. They may find a comfy spot to sit around the room with their book. When they are seated, begin the CD. Monitor/walk around the room to make sure kids are following along in their book. When the story is over, complete the vocabulary cloze paragraph in their reading workbook on page 131. Go over the answers when students are finished, allowing them to fix mistakes as needed. When finished have them turn to page 132. Teach the students about making inferences. What I know plus what the author tells me equals an inference. Complete page 132 together with the students. Then assign workbook pages 134/135 for them to read and complete on their own. Help as needed.

Day Three – Begin today’s lesson by asking students to retell what Tanya’s Reunion is about. Call on students to retell the story in order aloud using sequence words. As they retell the story, write it out on notebook paper and project on the board using the Elmo. When finished, read the retell and ask students if they agree. Add/change as needed. Then have them get out their vocabulary worksheet with words, definitions, and sentences. With their shoulder partner; have students quiz each other on the words. Partner A reads the definition, partner B tells the word. Have one partner do five words, and the other partner do the other five words. When finished, pass out the story map cards; one pack for each group. Tell each group that they will do the fan-n-pick structure in their team. There are character cards, plot cards, setting cards, and story structure cards for the kids to review together. Monitor during this time and help as needed. Remind them that tomorrow is their vocabulary and comprehension test.

Day Four – Comprehension/Vocabulary test day. Each student will need a divider and a pencil. Pass out the vocabulary matching posttest as well as the comprehension test and have the student’s complete the worksheets on their own. Collect the papers when finished. Students who finish early may read quietly. When everyone is done, have each student get a Weekly Reader from the back table and read through the articles with their shoulder partner. When finished they need to complete the back side on their own.

### **Assessment**

**Pretest.** The pretest (see appendix A) was given on Tuesday, which was the first day of this vocabulary study. Students took the pretest prior to reading the story or completing any vocabulary word work. The students got out divider folders for privacy and were told to “do your best” on the pretest. The pretest was a matching probe worksheet worth 10 points, where students had to match the correct term to the definition. Students completed the pretest in approximately ten minutes.

**Posttest.** The posttest was given on Friday, which was the fourth day of this reading vocabulary study. The strategy of class-wide listening previewing was presented on

day one of this study. (See appendix B.) On the fourth day, the students were given the exact same matching probe vocabulary test (see appendix A) as the posttest. Students completed the posttest in the same manner as the pretest; with privacy folders up. The posttest took approximately seven minutes to complete.

**Results.** The selected vocabulary words were taught for three days using the class-wide listening and vocabulary previewing strategy. Students spent time on day one listening to the words read by the teacher, definitions read aloud, and a sentence example read aloud, which was provided for them on a worksheet (see Appendix B). The students reviewed the words on days two and three and were also allowed to take the worksheet home to study/review. The posttest was given on day four. Figure 3 shows the students' results on both the vocabulary pretest and posttest, comparing the two. There were 10 words to match, making it worth 10 possible points on the test. The student's gain scores between the pretest and posttest are represented in Figure 4.

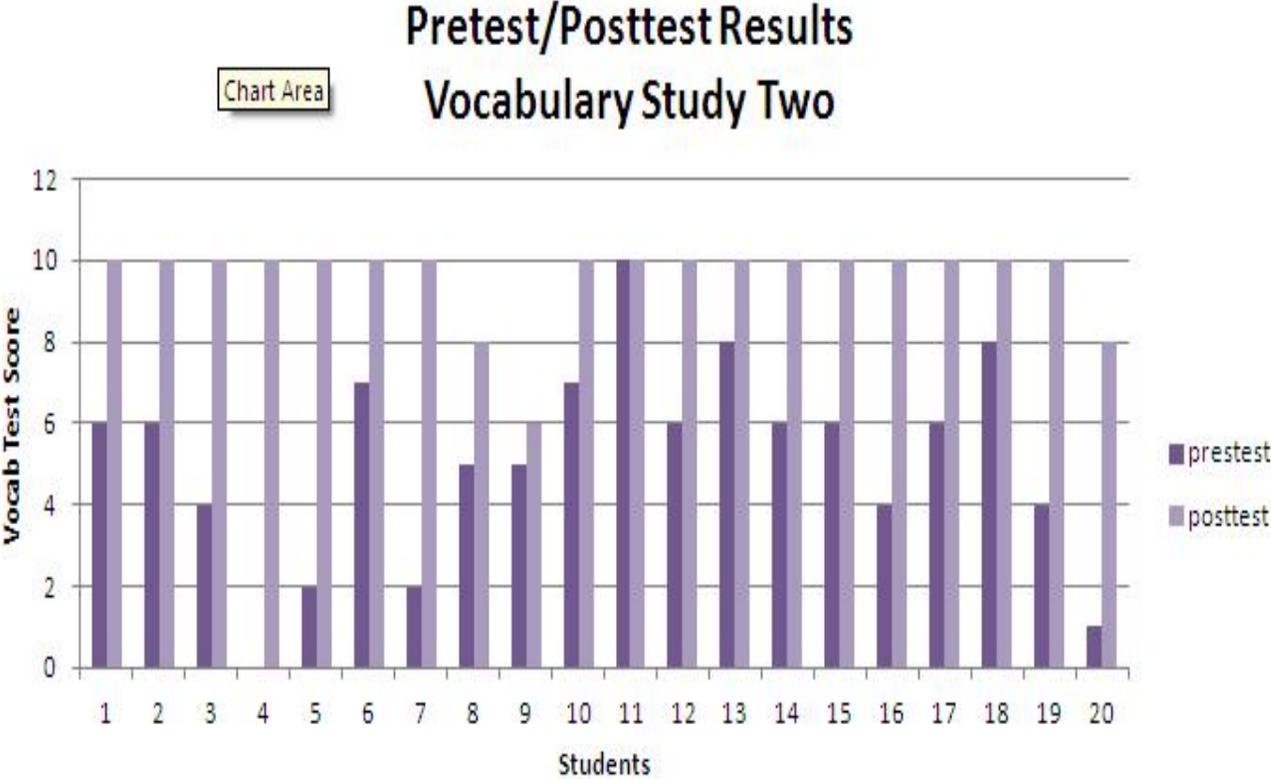


Figure 3. Results of the *Tanya's Reunion* vocabulary assessment comparing the pretest and posttest scores of twenty fourth grade students using the listening previewing strategy.

## Gain Scores Vocabulary Study Two

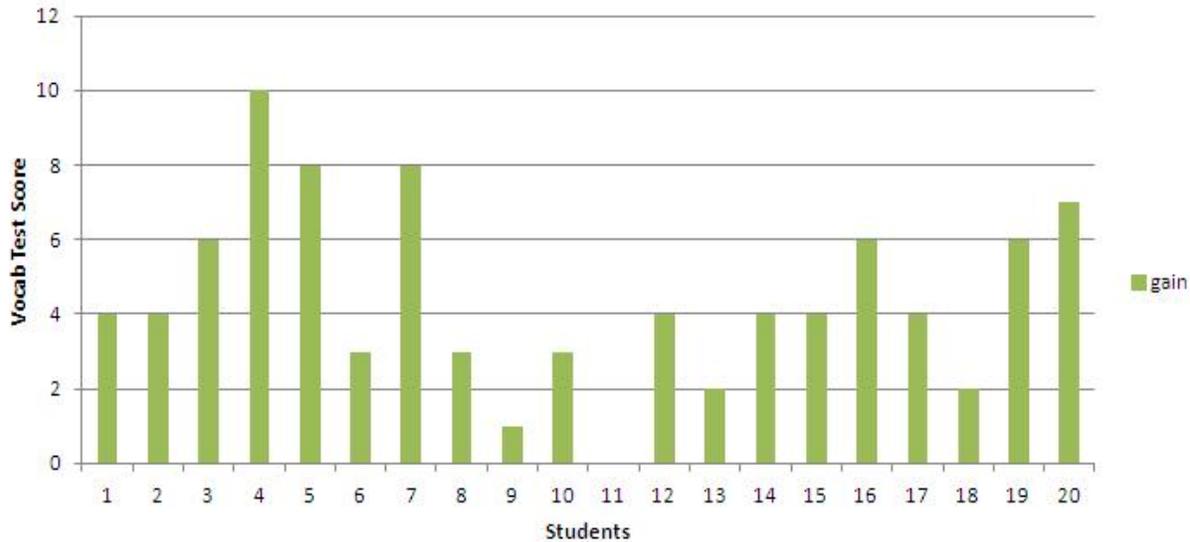


Figure 4. Gain scores of the *Tanya's Reunion* vocabulary test for each of the twenty students using the listening previewing strategy. Class average gain score of 4.45.

The data show that all of the twenty students made gains on the posttest. Seventeen students, or 85% of the class, scored 100% on the posttest. Two students scored 80% and one student scored a 60%. This is a great improvement over the pretest scores in which half of the class scored 50% or below. The students all completed the posttest rather quickly, and seemed quite confident while taking the test. The class mean on the posttest was a 96%.

## Discussion

### Teacher-based Vocabulary Strategy

Overall, this method of teaching vocabulary was successful. Presenting the words verbally and discussing the words as they were read helped the students gain knowledge of the words. In addition, having the students keep a packet with vocabulary work using context clues, synonyms, antonyms, and dictionary skills was beneficial. This provided a wide variety of written word structures and examples. Students were able to use the words in various contexts and use different meanings. This research strategy focused on many different vocabulary instruction strategies used throughout the week, which made it difficult to narrow in on the one strategy that proved best for the students. The combination, if the students had not had prior knowledge of affixes, dictionary skills, and using context clues, could have been too confusing for students and impeded on their knowledge of the vocabulary words. However, this combination, because students were familiar with all the strategies, proved beneficial and allowed the words to really be understood in context and recall knowledge.

### Research-based Vocabulary Strategy

The class-wide listening and vocabulary previewing strategy proved to be a successful method for teaching vocabulary. Because students were presented the words both verbally by the teacher, and in written form on their worksheet, they were able to basically have two strategies at once. This combination lent itself to two different learning styles; visual and auditory. In addition, reading the text aloud and discussing vocabulary words as they were read, aided in the students' understanding. Students spent time each day on vocabulary review or study which also helped in gaining understanding of the words. As noted in the research study, this strategy enhanced both the student's reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge and recall.

### **Comparison of Study One and Study Two**

Both vocabulary instruction strategies were shown to be successful in this study. The first study used a variety of vocabulary strategies and focused more on the written work of vocabulary knowledge. Students were challenged to understand the words presented in context, with antonyms and synonyms, and through dictionary meanings. This research strategy focused on many different vocabulary instruction strategies used throughout the week, which made it difficult to narrow in on the one strategy that proved best for the students. In contrast, Study Two focused mainly on listening to the vocabulary words, with very little emphasis put on the written word work. Students were able to see the words, definitions, and sentence examples, but were never asked to come up with student created word work. Basic memorization of the words and their meanings took place.

The researcher chose to focus on the second research question of Study Two: Does adding vocabulary previewing to class-wide listening previewing activities result in increased reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge for targeted material? It was hypothesized that the addition of vocabulary previewing activities would result in the highest levels of comprehension and vocabulary knowledge, when compared to silent reading. This question was presented primarily because most past research on the effects of vocabulary instruction has been done in small group or one-on-one student settings. (Hawkins, et al., 2010). Adding the class-wide approach ensures that all students are receiving the same instruction. The results of this study matched the hypothesis. Study Two proved that yes, adding vocabulary previewing to class-wide listening previewing does result in increased comprehension and vocabulary knowledge.

These two vocabulary instruction strategies both used listening and verbal discussion of the vocabulary words. The teacher read aloud the words in both studies so students could hear correct pronunciation. This provided a chance to have a short discussion of each individual vocabulary word. The results of vocabulary study two match the findings throughout the study on listening previewing. In both studies, adding explicit vocabulary instruction through listening previewing aided in student's understanding of the words. The students made gains in both studies. One difference between the two studies, was the researcher in study one had one less day of instruction than in study two. However, this did not have a negative effect on the results.

This vocabulary research study raises several questions. The first, does a matching probe provide the most valid test for assessing whether or not students have a true understanding of the vocabulary words? Another question raised was how the researcher might know whether or not the students understood the contextual meaning of the word. Did students just memorize the word, or did they really understand its meaning? Perhaps a fill in the blank test with a word bank with extra words as detractors would have been a more valid test. Or a student performance test in which students create their own sentences based on word knowledge would have been a more accurate assessment. Future research on the best-structured assessment for testing vocabulary knowledge in the primary grades would be beneficial to researchers.

In conclusion, comparing these two strategies shows that both are successful in student's acquisition of vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, it shows that reading vocabulary instruction should be presented in various ways to reach all students. Teachers should continue to find innovative, research-based vocabulary instruction strategies to implement in their classrooms.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Pretest/Posttest Research - Based Vocabulary Strategy Study Two

#### Vocabulary Test – Tanya's Reunion

Match the correct word to the definition.

- \_\_\_\_\_ arrangements
- \_\_\_\_\_ satisfaction
- \_\_\_\_\_ reunion
- \_\_\_\_\_ persisted
- \_\_\_\_\_ homestead
- \_\_\_\_\_ consent
- \_\_\_\_\_ gathering
- \_\_\_\_\_ pitches in
- \_\_\_\_\_ taper
- \_\_\_\_\_ aromas

- a. a coming together of people
- b. happiness
- c. helps others get a job done
- d. a house with land buildings belonging to it
- e. permission
- f. plans made before hand
- g. continued repeatedly
- h. a meeting of group members who have been apart
- i. pleasant smells
- j. to become slowly smaller or less

## Appendix B

**Worksheet for Research Based Vocabulary Strategy**  
**Study Two**

Tanya's Reunion

Word	Definition	Sentence
Arrangements	Plans made before-hand	She will need help with the sleeping arrangements.
Satisfaction	Happiness	I felt great satisfaction after winning the game.
Reunion	A meeting of group members who have been apart	They've invited me to the reunion.
Persisted	Continued repeatedly	"If you weren't lonely, Grandma, why did you leave?" Tanya persisted.
Homestead	A house with land and a buildings belonging to it	I go to the homestead every summer.
Consent	Permission	I got consent from my parents to go swimming.
Gathering	A coming together of people	We will have the biggest family gathering ever!
Pitches In	Helps others get a job done	If everyone pitches in we can get the room clean.
Taper	To become slowly smaller or less	The steady rain began to taper off.
Aromas	Pleasant smells	The kitchen was filled with wonderful aromas.

## Appendix C

### **Andrea Burnett's Vocabulary Lesson Plans for Tanya's Reunion Research Based Strategy Study Two**

Day 1 – Pass out the pretest worksheet to the students. Tell them to do their best work. Collect papers when finished. Now you will introduce the story; Tanya's Reunion. Have the kids get out their reading hardback book and open to page 184/185. Read aloud this selection the students. Then pass out the vocabulary worksheet. Go over what the vocabulary words listed mean when you read them. Have the students point to each word. Teacher says reunion. Reunion means a meeting of group members who have been apart. Do this for all 10 words; point to the word, read the word and the definition. Have the student's keep this worksheet , as they will refer to it during the week as needed. Next, ask the students to make predictions about what the story may be about. Call on four to five students. Now, read aloud the story to the students. When finished, ask the comprehension questions on page 212 verbally to the students. Have a discussion about each question. Assignment - comprehension workbook page 133 and vocabulary worksheet – unscrambling vocabulary words to go with the definition. The students are to work on this alone at their desk.

Day 2 - Today students will listen the story on CD whole group. Have the students get out their reading hardback book and open to page 186. They may find a comfy spot to sit around the room with their book. When they are seated, begin the CD. Monitor/walk around the room to make sure kids are following along in their book. When the story is over, complete the vocabulary cloze paragraph in their reading workbook on page 131. Go over the answers when students are finished, allowing them to fix mistakes as needed. When finished have them turn to page 132. Teach the students about making inferences. What I know plus what the author tells me equals an inference. Complete page 132 together with the students. Then assign workbook pages 134/135 for them to read and complete on their own. Help as needed.

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