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Lived Experiences of Learners in Developing Vocabulary Through Reading Habits

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of learning English. Vocabulary consists of several English words that are taught to students in the teaching and learning process, which goes hand in hand with all four English skills, primarily listening. By expanding vocabulary, students' ability to better understand listening, speaking, reading, and writing will likely improve. The more they hear, the more words they will add to their mastered vocabulary (Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020).

Vocabulary development depends greatly on reading, where contextual learning plays a key role in helping students understand and retain new words. When readers engage with rich and meaningful texts, they naturally encounter unfamiliar vocabulary and use context clues—such as definitions, synonyms, or examples—to understand meanings. Deep understanding is enhanced when new words connect to prior knowledge, and both incidental and intentional learning methods contribute to broader vocabulary growth. Independent reading fosters autonomy, motivation, and emotional engagement, making vocabulary learning more effective (Mitchell, 2020). Reading in L1 supports intuitive vocabulary building, while L2 reading fosters deliberate learning through exposure to new structures. Gender differences also impact vocabulary acquisition—girls often engage more with emotionally rich texts, while boys may favor factual genres and need structured support (Rahman & Mohamad, 2023). Inclusive teaching practices and diverse reading resources can help all students build a strong and meaningful vocabulary.

Reading is vital to a person's overall development. Reading affords an experience through which an individual can enlarge their knowledge, identify, spread, and deepen their awareness, and advance a deeper understanding of themselves, others, and the world. In the context of education, extensive reading is essential because all learning activities involve reading, and students' success in their studies depends mainly on their ability to read. Both reading and academic success are consistent and mutually dependent. Thus, the more students read books, the more successful they will be in learning. Additionally, reading is closely connected to overall educational development and achievement needs, making successful reading essential. A study revealed that individuals with good reading habits tend to score better on various types of tests (Bana, A., 2020).

Reading habits are regarded as a significant factor in research reading. Reading habits are defined as how often, how much, and what students read. Reading habit refers to the behavior that reflects the experience and enjoyment of reading. We will ultimately grow addicted to reading if we make it a habit. Every student's life depends on their ability to read. It is critical to cultivate a reading habit not just to gain knowledge, but also for personal growth and development. Reading habits will prepare children to be lifelong learners. Students can develop practical study skills, knowledge of various information resources, and retention skills through their reading habits. Reading habits are crucial for the growth of personalities and cognitive capacities (Abdullah & Husaini, 2022).

Socioeconomic status refers to economic, cultural, and social resources, as well as to economic and social standing, privileges, and social prestige that derive from them. It is regarded as a multifaceted structure and concept, evaluated by parents' years of education and occupational status, as well as family income (Volodina et al., 2021). Accordingly, families' economic, social, and cultural capital is associated with their children's academic achievement. Families allocate and spend resources such as income, cash, knowledge, and time that they own and control as economic, social, and cultural capital to improve and enhance their children's education, cognitive skills, and language proficiency. In compliance with the family investment model, families from higher socioeconomic statuses can provide their children with better educational materials and resources at home, especially books and magazines, thanks to their wealth (Volodina, Heppt & Weinert, 2021).

Parental involvement is the term used to describe the continuous, dynamic process by which parents or other primary caregivers participate in their child's education. They opined that parents can demonstrate their commitment to their children's education at home by reading aloud to them, helping with homework, talking about school events, attending school events such as parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering in the classroom. However, in the context of language development, parental involvement is an active role that parents or other caregivers provide for their children's language development from early childhood to adolescence, which might involve a variety of activities, like reading books, conversing and singing with their child, playing games in different languages, and giving their child the chance to connect with friends and adults in a variety of linguistic settings (Ambi et al., 2024).

Even though many studies have shown how essential reading is for boosting language skills, there is not much data on how young learners, especially those in the early grades, can improve their vocabulary. Research indicates that children who read regularly and with purpose tend to have a stronger vocabulary and exhibit improved skills in both oral and written communication.

Most current research examines vocabulary development in older children or primarily emphasizes teaching methodologies rather than learners' personal experiences. Additionally, insufficient attention has been paid to the impact of children's home environment, familial history, and regular reading practices on their vocabulary acquisition. This gap underscores the necessity to investigate the lived experiences of young learners as they acquire vocabulary through reading, both at home and in educational settings. Consequently, this study seeks to address that deficiency by elucidating and comprehending how learners experience vocabulary enhancement through their reading habits.

Methods

The study employed a descriptive narrative qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of Grade 2 learners in developing their vocabulary through reading practices in five schools in District 7, Division of Ozamiz City. Participants consisted of five Grade 2 learners, five parents, and five Grade 2 teachers selected through purposive sampling to provide relevant perspectives on learners' reading habits and vocabulary development. Data were gathered using researcher-developed semi-structured interview guides tailored to each participant group and reviewed by educators for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Prior to data collection, appropriate permissions and parental consent were secured, after which face-to-face interviews were conducted in a safe and conducive setting, transcribed verbatim, and organized for analysis. Data triangulation involving learners, parents, and teachers was employed to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, including familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting of themes. Throughout the research process, ethical principles such as informed consent and assent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw, and responsible handling of data were strictly observed to protect the participants and ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Results and Discussions

Theme 1. Consistent Reading Practice as a Foundation for Vocabulary Growth

The findings revealed that consistent and repeated engagement in reading serves as a fundamental pathway for vocabulary development among Grade 2 learners. Reading was not described as an occasional classroom activity but as a routine practiced both at school and at home. Learners reported being given opportunities to read every day, while parents indicated that reading continued after school and during weekends. Teachers likewise incorporated reading, spelling, and vocabulary activities into their regular classroom routines. These practices exposed learners repeatedly to familiar and unfamiliar words, allowing them to gradually recognize, understand, remember, and eventually use new vocabulary. The convergence of responses from learners, parents, and teachers suggests that vocabulary growth occurs progressively through repeated encounters with words rather than through a single exposure. The data further showed that learners who repeatedly practiced new vocabulary were better able to remember meanings and apply words in sentence construction. One learner emphasized the importance of practicing new words so they would not be forgotten, while a parent observed that daily practice helped the child understand more words. Teachers similarly reported using daily spelling sessions to reinforce vocabulary retention.

This finding indicates that the development of vocabulary is closely connected with habit formation and sustained exposure to written language. Regular reading provides learners with repeated opportunities to encounter words in meaningful contexts, while spelling, oral reading, re-reading, and sentence construction reinforce the connection between word form and meaning. The finding is consistent with Nation (2020), as cited in the study, who emphasizes the importance of regular exposure and repeated encounters with vocabulary for strengthening word knowledge and retention. The participants' proposed strategies likewise identified consistent school and home reading routines, re-reading, daily spelling exercises, and continuous practice as important mechanisms for improving vocabulary. Thus, the findings imply that schools should establish predictable

reading periods while encouraging parents to maintain manageable reading routines at home. For young learners, consistency may be more important than lengthy reading sessions because frequent exposure allows vocabulary knowledge to accumulate over time. When reading becomes part of learners' everyday routines, it can strengthen not only vocabulary acquisition but also reading fluency, confidence, comprehension, and long-term engagement with reading. The study itself showed that sustained and frequent reading at home and school provided learners with repeated opportunities to encounter new vocabulary within relevant contexts.

Theme 2. Meaningful, Contextualized, and Guided Vocabulary Learning

Another prominent theme is that learners understand and retain vocabulary more effectively when words are presented through meaningful, age-appropriate, contextualized, and teacher-guided reading experiences. Learners showed a preference for storybooks and simple texts, while parents provided books, comics, and other materials appropriate to their children's reading abilities. Teachers complemented these materials with sight words, pictures, stories, real objects, and contextualized learning resources. These findings suggest that the nature of the reading material significantly shapes learners' vocabulary experiences. When texts are familiar, visually supported, interesting, and appropriate for the learner's developmental level, unfamiliar words become less intimidating and easier to understand through contextual clues. The data further demonstrated that learners did not merely encounter vocabulary passively; they asked questions about unfamiliar words and attempted to use newly acquired vocabulary in sentences. This process transformed reading from simple word recognition into an active process of discovering, understanding, and applying language. The study consequently identified age-appropriate texts, active vocabulary inquiry, sentence construction, guided reading, and explicit teaching of word meanings as important practices contributing to vocabulary growth.

The findings further demonstrate the importance of instructional scaffolding in helping young learners move from encountering an unfamiliar word to understanding and independently using it. Teachers reported unlocking difficult words before reading, discussing meanings, writing unfamiliar vocabulary on the board, using pictures and real objects, and requiring learners to use new words in sentences. These strategies correspond with the literature cited in the study. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2021) support explicit vocabulary instruction, including clarifying difficult words and directly teaching their meanings, while Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2021) emphasize structured teacher-led practices such as guided reading, read-aloud activities, and differentiated instruction. The study also cites Mayer (2020) in support of multimodal resources such as pictures, videos, and real objects that connect abstract vocabulary with concrete experiences. Therefore, effective vocabulary instruction for Grade 2 learners should combine meaningful reading materials with explicit instruction and contextual application. Storybooks, illustrated texts, visuals, real-life examples, and sentence construction can work together to enable learners to move beyond memorizing isolated definitions toward understanding how words function within meaningful communication. The participants' suggested strategies strongly reflected this approach by recommending age-appropriate materials, explicit vocabulary instruction, guided reading, visual aids, and repeated practice.

Theme 3. Cognitive and Emotional Challenges in Vocabulary Development

Despite generally positive reading experiences, the findings revealed that vocabulary development is constrained by interconnected difficulties in word recognition, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, confidence, and emotional regulation. Learners reported difficulty understanding unfamiliar words and pronouncing certain vocabulary, particularly words encountered in English texts. Parents similarly observed that unfamiliar English vocabulary could prevent their children from understanding what they were reading, while teachers reported mispronunciation, difficulty producing sounds, and problems with comprehension. These difficulties demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely intertwined: when learners cannot recognize or understand important words in a text, their ability to comprehend the entire passage becomes limited. Likewise, pronunciation problems may interrupt reading fluency and make oral reading more demanding. The data therefore suggest that vocabulary difficulties should not be viewed as isolated problems involving word meanings alone. Rather, they interact with decoding, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, and learners' willingness to participate in reading activities.

The challenges were also affective and emotional, as learners described feeling worried, shy, embarrassed, or sad when they could not recognize or understand unfamiliar words. Such reactions are important because repeated experiences of difficulty may reduce learners' confidence, concentration, motivation, and willingness

to read aloud. The study further identified dependence on adults, inconsistent vocabulary reinforcement, and home-related constraints as additional challenges. Some learners depended heavily on teachers or parents to explain unfamiliar vocabulary rather than independently determining meaning, while limited parental time and competing home activities sometimes affected the consistency of reading practice. These findings underscore the importance of creating reading environments where mistakes are treated as opportunities for learning rather than sources of embarrassment. Instruction should therefore address both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of vocabulary learning by providing appropriately challenging texts, explicit pronunciation and vocabulary support, opportunities for repeated practice, and positive feedback. The study's findings also suggest gradually teaching learners strategies for determining word meanings independently so that assistance from adults functions as scaffolding rather than permanent dependence. In this way, vocabulary instruction can simultaneously strengthen comprehension, independence, motivation, and confidence.

Theme 4. Collaborative Home–School Support and Motivation as Enablers of Reading Development

The fourth theme demonstrates that vocabulary development is strengthened through a supportive network involving teachers, parents, peers, and the learners themselves. Participants consistently described reading as a socially supported activity. Learners sought assistance from teachers and parents when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, parents guided their children during home reading and explained difficult words, and teachers provided structured instruction and vocabulary support in school. Peer reading and reading-coach activities also gave learners opportunities to practice reading in a less intimidating and more collaborative environment. These findings indicate that vocabulary development does not occur exclusively within formal classroom instruction. Rather, learners' reading experiences extend across home and school environments, with adults and peers providing different forms of guidance, reinforcement, explanation, encouragement, and opportunities for practice. The study specifically found that sustained reading, teacher guidance, parental assistance, and collaborative peer activities collectively supported vocabulary acquisition through explanation, visual support, interaction, and repeated practice.

Motivation also emerged as an important component of this support system. Learners reported being encouraged by rewards, praise, food, prizes, and recognition, while teachers viewed praise as a means of increasing confidence and maintaining engagement. The finding is supported by the literature incorporated into the study: Hill and Tyson (2020) emphasize home–school collaboration in supporting children's literacy practice outside school, while Guthrie and Klauda (2022) associate motivation, positive reinforcement, and engaging reading materials with stronger participation in reading activities. However, the findings also imply that external rewards should complement rather than replace learners' developing intrinsic interest in reading. Praise may therefore be most beneficial when it recognizes effort, persistence, improvement, and successful use of new vocabulary. Ultimately, the combined involvement of teachers, parents, and peers creates a supportive literacy environment in which learners are more willing to ask questions, attempt unfamiliar words, practice repeatedly, and recover from reading difficulties. Strengthening communication between home and school, providing parents with simple strategies for guided reading, and sustaining encouraging classroom practices can therefore create continuity in vocabulary learning and help young learners gradually become more confident and independent readers.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the reading habits of Grade 2 students are very important for their vocabulary growth, as shown by their experiences at home and at school. Reading often, using simple and familiar materials, and getting a lot of help from teachers and parents all help students learn to recognize words, understand their meanings, and improve their language skills. Many students had positive feelings about reading, but there were also problems, such as not knowing how to pronounce words, feeling unsure, and not knowing how to read. These results show that vocabulary growth is affected by more than just how often you read. It is also affected by emotional support, motivation, and constant direction from both family and school. Overall, meaningful and helpful reading experiences are very important for students' vocabulary expansion and language development. Ultimately, the study determines that structured reading exercises and relevant reading materials are beneficial in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, learners require sustained encouragement, appropriate reading resources, and a conducive learning environment to develop comprehensive vocabulary skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that teachers provide regular, engaging, and age-appropriate reading activities that strengthen learners' vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, confidence, and positive attitudes toward reading. Parents are encouraged to establish consistent home reading routines, provide suitable reading materials, and guide and motivate their children during reading activities. School administrators should strengthen school-based reading programs by providing adequate learning resources, supporting teachers' professional development in reading and vocabulary instruction, and organizing literacy-related activities. Policymakers are encouraged to strengthen early literacy initiatives, particularly those that promote vocabulary development, home-school partnerships, and adequate support for reading programs. Likewise, community members and other stakeholders may contribute reading materials, resources, and support for school and community literacy activities to extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct related studies involving other grade levels, learning environments, and populations to further examine reading practices and strategies that contribute to learners' vocabulary development.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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