

# Increasing Comprehension Levels Through Content-Specific Vocabulary

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## Can explicit teaching of content-specific vocabulary improve reading comprehension in the urban elementary classroom?

### Introduction

- By increasing the content vocabulary in daily lessons, reading comprehension can be improved and possibly, get these students that are falling behind on grade level, able to test and score at a grade-appropriate level.
- The value of increasing student comprehension is evident when Fisher and Frey (2014) point out that "there are a total of 32 English language arts standards, and four of the standards (12.5%) focus explicitly on vocabulary" (p.594).
- There is a higher probability of language barriers or concerns, occurring in the urban classroom (Fraiser-Abdur, Atwater, & Lee, 2006). These students, natives and English language learners alike, come to school with very limited academic vocabularies and struggle throughout the day when presented with content area texts (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007).
- "With a deeper understanding of words and expanded vocabulary, children are better able to understand what they read and in this way, vocabulary and comprehension have a reciprocal causal relationship" (Elleman, 2009).
- It is essential that the teacher is teaching with the intention of equipping her urban students, who struggle with reading comprehension, with skills and effective strategies for learning new words, considering their limited vocabularies (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007).
- This research project was designed to test the hypothesis that explicit teaching of content-specific vocabulary can help reading comprehension in elementary students in an urban area.

### Method

#### Participants

17 Grade 4 elementary students aged 9-10

Boys	9
Girls	8
English Language Learners	2

#### Materials

Seventeen pre/post individual exams were performed by each participant.

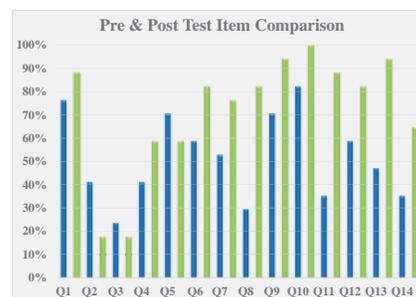
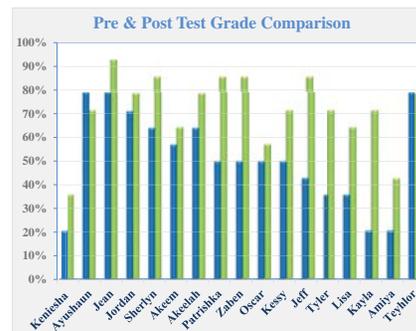
#### Procedure

- Participants completed a pre test including a reading passage, followed by 14 questions based on weathering, erosion, and deposition (SC.4.E.6.4). Eight questions tested reading comprehension and 6 tested for knowledge of the target content-specific vocabulary. Each participant was required to answer the questions to their best ability.
- After the analysis of the pre test data, students were engaged in five (30 minute) explicit vocabulary lessons that included gestures, presentations, foldables, videos, and kinesthetic activities.
- Students completed a post test including a reading passage, followed by 14 questions based on weathering, erosion, and deposition (SC.4.E.6.4). Eight questions tested reading comprehension and 6 tested for knowledge of the target content-specific vocabulary. Each participant was required to answer the questions to their best ability.



### Results

- 15 students' scores improved from the pre test
- 1 student's pre test score was maintained
- 1 student's score decreased (by less than 8%)
- 70% of students could explain the difference between weathering and erosion.** (25% of students correctly answered on pre-test)
- 75% of students could identify the definition of gravity.** (35% of students correctly answered on pre-test)
- 80% of students could identify the definition of erosion.** (45% of students correctly answered on pre-test)
- 70% of students could identify the picture that shows weathering.** (50% of students correctly answered on pre-test)



### Discussion

- The increase in scores of 88% of the students exhibited that the explicit teaching of content-specific vocabulary was impactful upon their reading comprehension. These effects align with the findings of Fisher and Frey (2014), whom studied the implications of increased content vocabulary on reading comprehension.
- It is hypothesized that explicitly teaching content-specific vocabulary using different teaching strategies does increase reading comprehension skills in urban students.

### References

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