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**The impact of vocabulary instruction on
EFL students' reading comprehension and
vocabulary growth**

Påverkan ordförrådsundervisning har på EFL elevers läsförståelse och ordförrådstillväxt

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines how explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction impacts upper-secondary English as a foreign language (EFL) students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. To find out the impact of vocabulary instruction, I will investigate the benefits explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. This study aims to find how teachers in Sweden can improve students' reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge with the help of vocabulary instruction. The research question is "What impact does explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction have on upper-secondary EFL students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension?". Search terms for the electronic databases were vocabulary instruction, vocabulary growth, and reading comprehension. The studies used for this literature review were categorized into three common themes: The impact of explicit vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension, the impact of implicit vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension, and the impact of explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction on vocabulary growth. All studies reported different outcomes, this literature review summarized the results in one. The outcome is that both implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction are valuable in education in different ways. These findings aim to allow teachers to implement more explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction in Swedish EFL classrooms for future projects with the aim for students' vocabulary growth and improving their reading comprehension.

Key terms: EFL, L2, English as a foreign language, vocabulary instruction, explicit vocabulary instruction, implicit vocabulary instruction, reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, incidental learning, direct learning.

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the core aspect of English, which requires focused attention from EFL students. To help students succeed in their English education, teachers must teach vocabulary instruction in school (Khamesipour, 2015, p. 1620). Khamesipour (2015) clarifies that “vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings” (p.1620). Moreover, the words we communicate, write, read, and listen to are based on vocabulary knowledge. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2022) states that students must understand and interact with the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. A teacher needs to teach vocabulary for students to achieve the four language skills. Students with limited vocabulary knowledge struggle to comprehend academically written texts, which results in students being less successful in their academics and comprehension of literature. Teachers need to know what impact vocabulary instruction, explicit, implicit, or a mixture of both, is the most advantageous method to teach vocabulary in an EFL context (Khamesipour, 2015, pp.1620-1622).

The Swedish National Agency for Education (2022) expects teachers to teach students English with the aim that students will comfortably be able to adapt their language to different situations and use it outside of school in a communicative context. To produce and interact with different texts and literature, students must have a broad vocabulary knowledge since it is an important element in the English language (Skolverket, 2022). The problematic aspect concerning English teaching in Sweden is that teachers do not put effort into teaching students vocabulary since they believe that students will acquire English vocabulary during their free time implicitly. Bergström (2023) claims that learners engage in English-language activities outside of the classroom context such as reading or watching a TV show without intending to learn vocabulary implicitly (p.16). Teachers are inclined to support their pupils’ educational development through the measurement of their performance and feedback (Skolverket, 2020).

Explicit or intentional vocabulary learning is when students engage in activities that focus consciously on vocabulary learning (Mirzaii, 2012, p.2). Intentional vocabulary has a higher focus on vocabulary learning than incidental vocabulary learning (Bergström, 2023, p.21). Plenty of Swedish students feel that they have an easier time with English

than with Swedish. Morris (2022) writes about a student claiming that because of her large vocabulary in English, she has an easier time writing and reading about feelings (p.102). Furthermore, there is a connection between explicit vocabulary acquisition and reading since reading helps the student discover new words (Morris, 2022, p.110). To explicitly search for new words while reading may grow the students' vocabulary knowledge and encourage reading comprehension. Students must know how words fit together in a sentence, and for that to occur it is important that students get exposed to explicit vocabulary instruction (Bergström, 2008, p.5). Knowing more words leads to understanding the context of the literature better. Morris (2022) found that Swedish L1 students learn English the best through the improvement of their vocabulary (p.121). Al-Darayseh (2014) reaffirms that reading comprehension will be affected if students do not grow their vocabulary knowledge since there is a correlation between word knowledge and reading comprehension (p. 1109). Teenagers in Sweden do not read as much today as they did ten years ago, which has made students' reading comprehension drop (Tegmark, 2022, p.1). Therefore, this study aims to find out the impact explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth.

When teachers directly tell students words or definitions of words that they need to learn, explicit vocabulary instruction occurs (Khamesipour, 2015). Khamesipour (2015) emphasizes that "Teaching specific vocabulary before reading helps both learning words and reading comprehension" (p.1620), and it makes students understand the meaning of words while reading. In theory, explicit vocabulary instructions are an input teachers do, and the outcome of students learning target words is an output (Tahir et. al., 2020, p.161). Moreover, Tahir et. al. (2020) insist that both explicit and implicit vocabulary learning help students develop their vocabulary, but the explicit approach to vocabulary learning is superior to the implicit since the students explicitly focus on the target words, and it promotes a better understanding of unfamiliar words and promotes better retention in the long-term memory.

Krashen (1989) made a theory based on the conscious skill-building hypothesis that occurs when the student focuses and analyzes one word at a time to gain vocabulary. The output hypothesis in the skill-building theory is that individuals learn language while producing it. The output competence in the skill building theory is something that is

learned, not acquired. In the skill building theory, the student is given an explicit rule to practice, whereas in the output theory the student needs to deduce the correct explicit rule (Kraschen, 1989, p.441). The input hypothesis assumes that language is acquired by understanding messages from reading. Moreover, the input hypothesis is about how language is subconsciously acquired through input such as reading, the focus is on the message not the form, which is incidental learning (Kraschen, 1989, pp. 440-441). Upper-secondary EFL students in Sweden are expected to be able to interact, comprehend, and understand the words and content of English texts to interact with them (Skolverket, 2022; Skolverket, 2020). Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) relies on social interactions between a student and teacher in an educational context. The ZPD theory is based on the idea that language skills can be developed through social interactions (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011 p. 1550).

Implicit vocabulary instruction occurs when students acquire words subconsciously without focusing on the words, which can take place when a student is reading (Khamesipour, 2015, p. 1621). Khamesipour (2015) verifies that implicit learning occurs unintentionally when a person is not focused on growing their vocabulary. Moreover, Khamesipour insists that implicit learning transpires when an individual is reading. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2022) asserts that students should be able to produce different forms of texts, and to do that students must have a broad vocabulary to write specific texts. According to Krashen's (1989) input hypothesis theory, when a language acquisition device such as a text is involved, the reader focuses on the message and not the form, but the reader acquires knowledge, which is termed incidental learning. Vocabulary is acquired through repeated reading exposure incidentally, and incidental learning happens when a reader is trying to understand the content of the text but does not focus on learning vocabulary (Ehsanzadeh, 2012, p. 25).

Vocabulary breadth is how many words a person knows, and vocabulary depth means how much a person understands the meaning of the words and each lexical entry (Rahman & Iqbal, 2019, p. 91). Farvardin and Koosha (2011) claim that "vocabulary breadth, depth of vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension are highly correlated" (p.1576), vocabulary breadth and depth have positive effects on vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. Ehsanzadeh (2012) supports that both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge correlate with long-term memory confinement of word meanings (pp. 26-27).

2. Aim and Research Questions

Many L1 Swedish learners of EFL want to focus more on vocabulary in the classroom context since it will help them expand their vocabulary knowledge (Morris, 2022, p.120). Therefore, it is important to see the impact vocabulary instruction has on students' acquisition of vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. As previously mentioned, upper-secondary EFL students in Sweden are expected to be able to interact, comprehend, and understand the words and content of English texts to interact with them (Skolverket, 2022; Skolverket, 2020). This systematic literature review aims to find what impact explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension.

The specific research question is the following:

- What impact does explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction have on upper-secondary EFL students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension?

3.Method

This systematic literature review was conducted through a secondary research review approach, where systematic searches of primary sources were carried out (Norris & Ortega, 2006, p. 4). The following educational databases are Education Research Complete (ERC) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). The databases were found through the Malmö University library. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for both databases will be indicated below.

3.1 Search Delimitations

The systematic searches were done through the database ERIC to find relevant empirical data-driven studies for this systematic literature review to answer the research question. Most studies were found in ERIC, but apart from ERIC, a few relevant studies were found in the database ERC. The same criteria were used for both databases; the difference was in the change of words in search combinations that resulted in various search results. The relevant articles used for this literature review were peer-reviewed and published between 2000 and 2023. The boolean/phrase method was used to search for the articles in ERIC and ERC databases. Searching for “vocabulary instruction” in both ERIC and ERC resulted in 4826 search results. Therefore it was necessary to conduct a narrower search to find relevant studies.

The first searches were done in the database ERIC, and the search words used were “ESL or EFL” AND “upper secondary school or high school or upper secondary education” AND “reading literacy or reading comprehension or reading ability or reading” AND “vocabulary development or vocabulary acquisition or vocabulary learning” which resulted with 75 search results. The same search words resulted in 32 search results in the database ERC. To further find relevant articles from ERIC, I included a few words to broaden the search “esl or efl” AND “upper secondary school or high school or upper secondary education” AND “reading literacy or reading comprehension or reading ability or reading” AND “vocabulary development or vocabulary acquisition or vocabulary learning or vocabulary knowledge or vocabulary instruction”, which resulted in 77 search results. After these searches, I narrowed down the search words in ERIC to “English as a

second language or esl or English as foreign language or efl or English language learners or ell” AND “vocabulary development or vocabulary growth or vocabulary acquisition or vocabulary knowledge” AND “high school or upper secondary school” AND “intentional vocabulary learning” which resulted in 3 search results. Lastly, I searched for narrower studies in ERIC by changing the last words of the previous search term from “intentional vocabulary learning” to “explicit instruction” which resulted in 8 search results.

The search in ERIC and ERC resulted in 9 relevant peer-reviewed studies that were published between 2000 and 2023. Table 1 includes all the studies on which I based my research synthesis on. In my searches the following terms were frequent; “Reading comprehension”, “Vocabulary instruction”, “English as a second language”, “ESL”, “English as a foreign language”, “EFL”, “English as a foreign language”, “high school”, “upper secondary school”.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

The studies included in this literature review were based on high school or upper-secondary school students ages 16-18 since this study aims to find answers based on upper-secondary students in EFL and ESL. The studies focused on vocabulary instruction's impact on EFL and ESL students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. The articles included are from authors worldwide, to write a good literature review and connect it to the Swedish context. All articles used focused on students ages 15-18, which is the age of upper-secondary students in Sweden. The reason why I use ESL articles is to not limit articles and because there is an ongoing debate on English as an ESL or EFL language. Andersson (2013) states that English usage has increased significantly in recent years, this development is not common for a foreign language, which indicates that English is turning a new leaf (p.20).

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

The reasoning for excluding studies was that they did not include keywords relevant to the research question, therefore they were not used for the research synthesis. Plenty of

the excluded articles focused on younger students, which were not relevant to this literature review since children and teens learn differently. Moreover, children need to be constantly stimulated, but teenagers can engage with content on a deeper level, which is needed for them to learn more complex vocabulary and comprehend convoluted passages in English texts independently.

Table 1.

Studies included in the literature review

Search Engine	Author and publication date	Country	Age of participants	Keywords in articles
1. ERIC	Gatcho A. R., & Hajan B. H. (2019)	Philippines	High school students ages 16-18	Metacognition, reading, comprehension, vocabulary, pedagogy.
2. ERIC	Nguyen, C.-D. (2021)	Vietnam	High school students ages 15-18	L2 reading comprehension; Incidental vocabulary learning; Lexical coverage; Lexical inferencing.
3. ERIC	Hasani, A., & Pahamzah, J. (2022)	Indonesia	High school students ages 15-18	Reading strategies; learning; EFL; Metacognitive; Attitude.
4. ERIC	Moghaddam, N. N., &	Iran	High school students	Movie watching; vocabulary

		Mahmoudi, A. (2016)		around 16 years old	presentation; pre-reading summarization; EFL.
5. ERIC		Chang, A. C.-S., & Hu, H. M. (2018)	Taiwan	Senior high school students ages 16-18	Not available*
6. ERIC		Serrano, R. & Huang, H. (2023)	Taiwan	15–16 year olds	Time distribution; lag effects: distributed practice effects; input spacing; Vocabulary learning; Repeated reading.
7. ERIC		Karami, A., & Bowles, F. A. (2019)	Iran	High school students around 16 years old.	Intentional vocabulary learning; Incidental vocabulary learning; Mixed vocabulary instruction; Vocabulary retention.
8. ERC		Kang, Y., Kang H. S. & Park, J. (2012)	Korea	High school students ages 16-18	Not available*
9. ERC		Zhang, L. J., & Anual, S. B. (2008)	Singapore	Secondary School students	L2 learning and teaching; Reading

around 16
years old.

comprehension;
Secondary
school
students;
Singapore;
Vocabulary
knowledge.

*This study did not provide keywords, the descriptors provided by ERIC and ERC were; English as a foreign language, high school students, Korean EFL learners, reading comprehension, vocabulary breadth, vocabulary depth, vocabulary knowledge.

4. Results

This section aims to answer the research question: what impact does explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction have on EFL upper-secondary students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension? The following results exist in three categories: The impact of explicit vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension, the impact of explicit vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension, and lastly, what impact explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on vocabulary growth.

4.1 The Impact Explicit Vocabulary Instruction has on Reading Comprehension

Explicit vocabulary instruction focuses the students' attention on different vocabulary items. Gatcho and Hajan (2019) describe explicit vocabulary instruction as a teaching method that teaches students vocabulary in a direct manner (p. 6). Their study investigates whether explicit vocabulary instruction impacts students' reading comprehension. The participants in this study are 40 students from the Philippines, who were divided into two control groups. The method used is a quasi-experimental study that measured students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension skills before and after explicit vocabulary instruction (Gatcho & Hajan, 2019, p.8). One group underwent an intervention program, and the other group acquired vocabulary instruction. The results of Gatcho and Hajan's (2019) study found that explicit vocabulary instruction impacts students' comprehension of written texts (p.18). Additionally, explicit vocabulary instruction helps students learn complex words and concepts that are not part of a student's everyday experience (Gatcho & Hajan, 2019, p. 7).

Whereas Gatcho and Hajan (2019) researched whether explicit vocabulary instruction impacts reading comprehension with pre-tests and post-tests, Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016) investigated whether three different explicit pre-reading activities improved students' reading comprehension. Moreover, Moghaddam and Mahmoudi's (2016) study wanted to discern the effectiveness of explicit vocabulary presentation, movie watching, and pre-reading summarization on students' comprehension of texts compared to the

group that did not get treatment (pp. 240-241). The participants were 76 Iranian EFL high school students divided into four groups; movie-watching, vocabulary presentation, pre-reading summarization, and the no-treatment group (Moghaddam & Mahmoudi, 2016, p.235-236). Gatcho and Hajan (2019) found that explicit vocabulary instruction had an impact on students' vocabulary learning since they learn uncommon vocabulary, which Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016) did with the pre-reading vocabulary group. The teacher in Moghaddam and Mahmoudi's (2016) study taught students words unknown to the students explicitly before reading (p. 236). Gatcho and Hajan (2019) had similar results to Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016) regarding that explicit pre-reading vocabulary instruction had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. Lastly, the authors argue that if one group acquires explicit vocabulary presentation and pre-reading summarization the results would be even more significant (Moghaddam & Mahmoudi, 2016, p. 241).

Serrano and Huang's (2023) study wanted to discover to what extent explicit vocabulary instruction focusing on vocabulary learning and repeated reading can impact EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (p.5). Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016) and Gatcho and Hajan (2019) contrast Serrano and Huang's (2023) study in retrospect that students read repeatedly and learn vocabulary explicitly whereas in the previous studies, the focus was only on explicit vocabulary instruction. The participants were 72 Taiwanese EFL students ages fifteen to sixteen. The students were divided into two groups, the repeated reading and the spaced-out reading group. All students did a vocabulary-level pre-test to measure their vocabulary knowledge, which proved no significant difference between the students. The pre-tests included 36 target words, a vocabulary level test, and a reading session. Similarly to Gatcho and Hajan's (2019) study, Serrano and Huang (2023) had a pre-test and a post-test after students gained explicit vocabulary instruction. The post-test included the 36 target words from the pre-test to see the results of students' retention. To conclude Serrano and Huang's (2023) findings, explicit vocabulary instruction on target vocabulary words had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary retention (pp. 11-12). Gatcho and Hajan (2019), Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016), and Serrano and Huang (2023) agree that explicit vocabulary instruction has a positive impact on students' vocabulary instruction.

4.2 The Impact Implicit Vocabulary Instruction has on Reading Comprehension

Implicit vocabulary instruction occurs when unfamiliar words occur repeatedly, and incidental learning occurs if the words are important for the comprehension of the text. Nguyen's (2021) study included three relevant research questions about the importance of recurring words for students' reading comprehension (p.513). The study included 422 high school students from Vietnam. First, the students did a vocabulary level test to estimate their current vocabulary knowledge, and the vocabulary level test results showed that the students only knew 87.1% of the word families in thirty-six texts (Nguyen, 2021, pp. 513-514). He wanted to find out the benefits of reading passages focusing implicitly on four input factors such as keywords, word repetition, lexical coverage, and the quality of contextual clues for lexical inference. The students' reading comprehension was limited, and Nguyen (2021) wanted to find out if novel words reoccurred within the text and if they would be acquired implicitly. The textbooks he used for his study did not have many recurring lexical items, which resulted in having a limited chance to be implicitly learned by the students. Moreover, Nguyen (2021) encouraged teachers in his research that implicit vocabulary instruction has a positive impact on EFL students' reading comprehension with the help of glossaries of unfamiliar new words, and should be implemented in the English subject (pp.519-520).

While Nguyen (2021) did not find that implicit vocabulary instruction had an impact through reoccurring words in a text on reading comprehension, Kang et. al. (2012) had a different result. Kang et. al. (2012) wanted to find out if vocabulary knowledge has an impact on reading comprehension with the mention of vocabulary instruction. In addition, Kang et. al. (2012) wanted to find out if vocabulary breadth or depth has more impact on reading comprehension (p. 156). 98 high school students participated in Kang et. al.'s (2012) study, and all students had to do a PKSAT test to measure their language proficiency to divide students into three diverse groups based on their proficiency. Similarly to Nguyen's (2021) study, Kang et. al. (2012) acknowledge the need for implicit vocabulary instruction by exposing students to different words, such as in a glossary, since there is a lack of teaching time for explicit vocabulary instruction. To conclude the findings, vocabulary breadth, vocabulary depth, vocabulary knowledge, and implicit

vocabulary instruction have a strong correlation to students' reading comprehension (Kang et. al., 2012, pp. 164-165).

Chang and Hu's (2018) disquisition investigated to what extent frequency levels affect vocabulary learning rates with the help of extensive reading. The study consists of 63 Taiwanese senior high school students. Nguyen (2021) made students read passages from textbooks to see the impact on their vocabulary knowledge and take a vocabulary-level test to measure their vocabulary knowledge similar to Chang and Hu (2018). The students also did a pre-test on 10 target words by choosing the correct Chinese translation for each English word. The difference is that Chang and Hu (2018) put students in groups based on their vocabulary levels to read English books independently with the help of audiobooks (p.7, p.10). The words students translated were re-arranged in the post-test after extensively reading to see if implicit vocabulary instruction would impact their comprehension of the literature. The results of Chang and Hu's (2018) study were that the more frequently words occur in the text, the more likely it is that students will learn the words implicitly, which is true for both student groups (p. 13). In contrast to Chang and Hu (2018), Nguyen's (2021) study did not find many words recurring in the passages chosen, which did not result in students learning implicitly. Conclusively, Chang and Hu (2018) establish that implicit vocabulary instruction through extensive reading has an impact on students' reading comprehension (p. 14). Kang et. al (2012) have also found implicit vocabulary instruction to be beneficial for reading comprehension (pp. 164-165)

Similarly to Kang et. al. (2012), Zhang and Anual (2008) found in their study that vocabulary depth and breadth have an impact on students' reading comprehension. The participants in Zhang and Anual's (2008) study were 27 high school students who got their vocabulary knowledge measured through a vocabulary level test a week before their reading comprehension examination, which consisted of short answer and summary questions (pp. 62-63). Their study aimed to investigate to what extent students' vocabulary size correlates with their performance on reading comprehension through implicit reading of informational texts (Zhang & Anual, 2008, p. 62). Moreover, students were instructed to circle difficult words found in the expository text to find out which words the students struggled with (Zhang & Anual, 2008, p. 63). The study found that students struggling with vocabulary difficulty and lack of breadth and depth affect students' reading comprehension negatively by looking at the examination scores. In

contrast to the previous findings in this section, Zhang and Anual (2008) saw no positive effects on students' reading comprehension with the help of implicit vocabulary instruction. Chang and Hu (2018) found that extensive reading impacts students' reading comprehension, and Zhang and Anual (2008) advocated for teachers to implement extensive reading in their conclusion.

4.3 The Impact Vocabulary Instruction has on Vocabulary Growth

The words we communicate, write, read, and listen to are based on vocabulary knowledge. Hasani and Pahamzah (2022) explored the connection between metacognitive strategies, reading comprehension and vocabulary growth with the aid of instruction (p. 17). The data collection of this study was a questionnaire collected from 450 high school students about their attitude toward metacognitive strategies. Similarly to previously mentioned studies, Hasani and Phamzah (2022) had a pre-test and a post-test answered by 60 students to see the results of the experimental group that got vocabulary instruction and the group that did not. Hasani and Pahamzah (2022) found that the experimental group got better scores on the post-test in both reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge (p. 20). The results that Hasani and Phamzah (2022) found on students' vocabulary growth correlate with Serrano and Huang's (2023) results since both found a growth in their students' vocabulary knowledge through vocabulary instruction.

While Hasani and Pahamzah's (2022) research focused on how vocabulary instruction connects to vocabulary growth, Karami and Bowles (2019) wanted to investigate the impact implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction have on students' retention of vocabulary. The study conducted by Karami and Bowles (2019) consisted of 78 EFL high school students divided into three control groups and three experimental groups. Moreover, three of the control groups had no vocabulary instruction whereas the three control groups focused on either incidental, intentional or mixed vocabulary instruction (p. 32). The study consisted of a pre-test and two post-tests to see which experimental group retained the most vocabulary. The immediate post-test occurred right after the eight-week vocabulary instruction. The delayed post-test occurred 35 days after the instruction to compare the long-term retention of words. The pre-tests and post-tests contained the same 40 words that the students had to answer (Karami and Bowles, 2019, p.30, p. 34). Karami and Bowles (2019) research found that all vocabulary instruction experimental control groups impacted students' vocabulary retention positively, but the mixed vocabulary instruction group had the longest retention (p. 35). Both implicit and

explicit vocabulary instruction have an impact on students' vocabulary growth, which both Karami and Bowels (2019) and Hasani and Phamzah (2022) concluded.

5. Discussion

The Swedish National Agency for Education (2022) states that students need to know the four language skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. For students to achieve language skills, they must have a broad vocabulary knowledge. Chang and Hu (2018) acknowledge that the more students get to read with the knowledge of implicit vocabulary instruction about 10 target words, the more their language skills evolve. Khamesipour (2015) explained that implicit vocabulary instruction occurs when a student is thinking about words subconsciously without actively focusing on them, such as while reading. Whereas when students engage in an activity that has a conscious focus on vocabulary learning, explicit vocabulary instruction occurs (Mirzaii, 2012). Students need to be able to learn the language to be able to produce it and learn it while producing the language in the output theory (Kraschen, 1989). These findings in the result section are in alignment with the Swedish National Agency for Education's (2022) claim that students must know the four essential language skills in English to get a passing grade.

Bergström (2023) wrote that explicit vocabulary learning has a bigger impact on vocabulary than implicit vocabulary instruction. In agreement with Bergström (2023), Serrano and Huang's (2023) results demonstrate that students encountering unfamiliar words explicitly in the classroom exposes them to long-term vocabulary retention. Exposing students to unfamiliar words in the classroom through vocabulary instruction, such as presenting chosen vocabulary in front of the class or implicitly mentioning it, can be used by Swedish EFL teachers as a teaching method. Moghaddam and Mahmoudi's (2016) vocabulary presentation method taught students unfamiliar words explicitly in the classroom, which had a positive impact on reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. Krashen's (1989) theory on the skill-building hypothesis is about students getting an explicit rule to practice, similar to explicit vocabulary instruction. Bergström (2023) states that explicit vocabulary instruction is beneficial for students to explicitly analyze how words fit together in a sentence, which adequately impacts students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. Teaching in the classroom can measure students' vocabulary knowledge and give them feedback on what area in their vocabulary

knowledge they need to work on, which is something they learn foremost in school and throughout their lifetime (Skolverket, 2020).

Ehsanzadeh (2012) disagrees with Bergström (2023) and argues that incidental vocabulary learning has a similar impact as explicit vocabulary learning. Moreover, when the student gets implicit vocabulary instruction to read literature, the student acquires vocabulary incidentally through repeated exposure to reading. This is in alignment with Kraschen's (1989) input theory that claims language is acquired subconsciously through reading. Chang and Hu (2018) agree with Ehsanzadeh (2012) that implicit vocabulary instruction in repeated reading has a positive impact on students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. A study that partly agrees with Chang and Hu (2012) and Ehsanzadeh (2012) results is Zhang and Anual's (2008) findings, which imply that extensive reading is an impactful method to use in the classroom. The difference in Zhang and Anual's (2008) repercussion is that they did not find any beneficial effects of vocabulary instruction on students' reading comprehension.

In agreement with Zhang and Anual's (2008) results, Nguyen (2021) did not find any benefits in implicit vocabulary instruction since he argues that there were not many repeating words in the textbooks used for students to read through. In contrast to Nguyen's findings, Chang and Hu (2018) found that frequent words that occurred in the literature impacted students' vocabulary learning and reading comprehension positively. Kang et. al's (2012) results found that implicit vocabulary instruction does benefit reading comprehension similarly to Chang and Hu's (2018) study. The difference between these studies is that Kang et. al. (2012) concluded that through implicit vocabulary instruction, exposing students to unique words in text will impact their reading comprehension positively. Moreover, students' learning vocabulary breadth and depth have proven significant results on their vocabulary growth and reading comprehension.

Al-Darayseh (2014) states that having good reading comprehension correlates with having a broad vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary breadth is about how many words a person knows, and vocabulary depth means how much an individual understands the words and each lexical entry (Rahman & Iqbal, 2019). To have good vocabulary knowledge, students need to understand the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge for students having adequate reading comprehension skills and be able to retain words in

their long-term memory (Faravadin & Koosha, 2011; Ehsanzadeh, 2012). Kang et. al. (2012), and Nguyen (2021) proved that there is a strong correlation between students' vocabulary knowledge in vocabulary breadth and depth and having good reading comprehension skills and being able to retain words in the long-term confinement. Karami and Bowles (2019) study has found that both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction focusing on words do positively benefit students' vocabulary growth. Similar to Karami and Bowles (2010), Hasani and Pahamzah (2021) results discovered that the students who acquired vocabulary instruction had better reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge in the post-test than those who did not. Students' retaining vocabulary knowledge in the long term memory is following the Swedish curriculum. Teachers need to teach upper-secondary students the four language skills with the goal that the students will be able to adapt their English language to different recipients and communicative contexts (Skolverket, 2020, 2022). Students' need to have broad vocabulary knowledge contained in their long-term memory for them to be able to adapt to different scenarios, which teachers need to implement in their teaching with the help of explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction (Ehsanzadeh, 2012).

In the Swedish classroom, teachers should implement vocabulary instruction to benefit students' reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Not many students read today like they used to read ten years ago, which led to a significant drop in reading comprehension (Tegmark, 2022). Chang and Hu's (2018) study shows that highlighting target words while teaching through implicit vocabulary instruction has proved to be beneficial for students' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. Students' reading a text with highlighted words without actively focusing on them has resulted in that students learn words implicitly, especially if they occur more than once. Ehsanzadeh (2012) has found that implicit vocabulary instruction on target words integrated with repeated reading has proven to be impactful on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth.

Teachers need to know which vocabulary instruction impacts students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension, because students need to be able to use their English language comfortably and adapt their language to different recipients (Khamesipour, 2015; Skolverket, 2022). Students in Sweden claim that having a broad vocabulary knowledge helps them to understand emotions written in all texts (Morris, 2022). In

contrast to Chang and Hu (2018), Tahir et. al. (2020) believe that teachers having an explicit approach to vocabulary instruction promotes better retention in long-term memory, which is in agreement with Serrano and Huang's (2023) results that explicit vocabulary instruction that makes students focus on chosen words make students retain the words in their memory.

Teaching vocabulary helps students in Sweden achieve the four language skills that are necessary for students' writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills (Morris, 2022; Skolveket, 2022). Bergström (2023) states that many teachers find it unnecessary to teach vocabulary instruction since they believe that students will learn vocabulary implicitly outside of school in diverse media. Which Gatcho and Hajan (2019) and Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016) disagree with since they contradict Bergström's claims that students will not get exposed to complex vocabulary in their everyday life. Therefore, teachers in Sweden must teach students complex vocabulary through vocabulary instruction for their English vocabulary development since it has a strong correlation to reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Khamesipour, 2015; Skolverket, 2022). Vygotskij's theory on the zone of proximal development focuses on the social interaction between a teacher and a student. Vocabulary instruction is an interaction between a teacher and student in a classroom context, the ZPD theory is based on the fact that language skills can develop through social interaction (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011, p. 1550). The studies used in the results section are not based on Sweden, but the explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction methods can be implemented in the Swedish teaching framework by teachers connecting it to the Swedish curriculum.

6. Conclusion

My literature review aimed to investigate what impact explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on upper-secondary EFL students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. Firstly, the research done by Gatcho and Hajan (2019), Moghaddam and Mahmoudi (2016), and Serrano and Huang (2023) found that explicit vocabulary instruction has a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, Serrano and Huang (2023) have found that explicit vocabulary instruction focusing on target words impacts students' vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, Karamai and Bowles (2019) and Hasani and Phamazah (2022) have found that vocabulary instruction impacts the retention and growth of vocabulary knowledge in vocabulary breadth and depth.

Secondly, the impact of implicit vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension and vocabulary growth has not been as significant in all studies mentioned in the results section. Chang and Hu (2018), and Zhang and Anual (2008) agree that implicit vocabulary instruction such as reading while subconsciously focusing on the repeating words in the text impacts their vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Kang et. al. (2012) advocate for vocabulary instruction teaching since vocabulary knowledge is important for students' reading comprehension. Nguyen's (2021) study did not find implicit vocabulary instruction significant to students' improvement of reading comprehension and vocabulary growth, but he endorses implicit vocabulary instruction in the English classroom.

Lastly, these findings aim to encourage teachers to teach vocabulary instruction in the classroom both implicitly and explicitly. The National Agency of Education (2022) has guidelines in the curriculum for what students need to learn for each English course in Swedish upper-secondary schools. There is a significant drop in students' skill in reading comprehension, since, as previously mentioned by Tengmark (2022), students in Sweden don't read Swedish nor English books or texts as frequently today. The only time students read in English is on TV or social media (Bergström, 2023).

Nevertheless, there is a gap in the research based on the Swedish school context. Therefore, more research must be done based on L1 Swedish students in upper secondary

schools in EFL classrooms. With the help of the findings in this systematic literature review, teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools can use these vocabulary instruction methods in their EFL classrooms and investigate what impact they have on Swedish L1 students learning English in a L2 context. Students need to be able to develop their vocabulary knowledge for the four language skills because vocabulary is the core of language. Therefore, teachers in Sweden must research the impact explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction has on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary growth equivalent to the other skills such as writing and speaking.

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