15 YEARS OF RESEARCH ON TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO CHILDREN: A SCOPUS-BASED REVIEW

15 AÑOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE LA ENSEÑANZA DE VOCABULARIO EN INGLÉS A NIÑOS: UNA REVISIÓN BASADA EN SCOPUS

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15 years of Research on Teaching English Vocabulary to Children: A Scopus-based Review

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ABSTRACT

Learning vocabulary at the early stages of EFL education is crucial, as it impacts students' future performance and success. As a result, educators of young learners have a significant responsibility to deliver effective vocabulary instruction. However, the syllabi of EFL pre-service programs often fail to address this aspect, leading to somewhat limited training. Furthermore, primary school teachers in many countries do not hold English-teaching degrees, which results in a lack of well-structured EFL instruction. The present literature review aimed to address this problem by analyzing sixty documents from the Scopus database dating from 2010 to 2024 and reporting the most important findings and conclusions. Key topics were identified and discussed, such as teaching vocabulary through technology, reading, music, games, and TPR, as well as explicit instruction, L1 use, and the teacher factor, among others. Additionally, the infographics summarizing the general findings were also presented. The article culminates with conclusions and suggestions for future research directions. This paper is an important source for both teachers, who can use it as a guide for their classroom practices, and researchers, who can analyze the possibilities for future research on the topic.

Keywords: vocabulary instruction, young learners, EFL, teaching methodology, education

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15 años de Investigación sobre la Enseñanza de Vocabulario en Inglés a Niños: Una Revisión Basada en Scopus

RESUMEN

El aprendizaje de vocabulario en las primeras etapas de la educación en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) es fundamental, ya que influye en el desempeño y éxito futuro de los estudiantes. Como resultado, los docentes de niños tienen una gran responsabilidad en la enseñanza efectiva del vocabulario. Sin embargo, los programas de formación inicial en EFL suelen no abordar este aspecto de manera adecuada, lo que genera una capacitación limitada. Además, en muchos países, los docentes de educación primaria no poseen títulos específicos en enseñanza del inglés, lo que conlleva una instrucción poco estructurada en EFL. La presente revisión de literatura tiene como objetivo abordar este problema mediante el análisis de sesenta documentos extraídos de la base de datos Scopus, publicados entre 2010 y 2024, y presentar los hallazgos y conclusiones más relevantes. Se identificaron y discutieron temas clave como la enseñanza del vocabulario a través de la tecnología, la lectura, la música, los juegos y el enfoque TPR, así como la instrucción explícita, el uso de la L1 y el papel del docente, entre otros. Asimismo, se presentaron infografías que resumen los hallazgos generales. El artículo concluye con reflexiones finales y sugerencias para futuras líneas de investigación. Este estudio representa una fuente valiosa tanto para los docentes, quienes pueden utilizarlo como guía en sus prácticas en el aula, como para los investigadores, quienes pueden explorar nuevas posibilidades de estudio en este ámbito.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de vocabulario, niños, EFL, metodología de enseñanza, educación

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, an impressive 99% of primary school students in several countries around the world were learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Eurostat, 2024), placing the teaching of English to children at the forefront of research in the EFL field. One of the key factors in young leaners' EFL education is the acquisition of vocabulary, as it serves as the foundation and affects their future success in many skills, for example, reading comprehension (Hessel & Murphy, 2019; Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011), and might even predict their further overall performance in school (Gillanders et al., 2014). Therefore, vocabulary development should be tackled during the early stages of education (Saidi et al., 2015), and the quality of its instruction becomes fundamental (Sylvester et al., 2014).

Despite the widely-accepted fact that pre-school and primary school teachers need to be well-equipped with knowledge and techniques regarding vocabulary instruction (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011), education systems in many countries face difficulties at this front. For example, a number of educators lack training and preparation on how to teach vocabulary to children (De Mejia, 2009; Correa & Gonzalez, 2016) because many of them hold only general vocational degrees which did not prepare them to teach English. Furthermore, for a long time in the history of the EFL teaching-learning process vocabulary instruction had been overlooked by both scholars and practitioners (Qureshi et al., 2023).

The present literature review has analyzed academic papers about teaching vocabulary to young learners that have been published in the Scopus database in the last fifteen years - from 2010 to 2024. Scopus was selected for this study as it is considered a trustworthy research database (Baas et al., 2020), while the time frame was defined due to important processes happening around the globe in 2010. For instance, the British Council published a study stating that in 2009-2011 both Europe and the rest of the world have experienced rapid changes – changes that have brought about the need to offer more support to children's language processes in order to provide them with essential tools for the future (Enever et al., 2011). In addition to that, the urge for changes at the edge of the second decade of the 21st century was also perceived in some South American countries, such as Colombia that announced 2010 as the onset of the second stage of its Bilingual Program placing the emphasis on young learner's education so as to ensure the country's L2 competence (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005). Therefore, this review chose the beginning of the second decade of the present century as its starting point.

After careful revision, sixty documents, most of which came from Asia, North America and Europe, were included in the current study. First of all, the results were analyzed for general information: annual publications, publications by author, journal, country/territory and document type. Afterwards, the documents were grouped into clusters according to their main focus, which shaped the way the present article was divided into sections. Thereafter, an analysis of the findings, conclusions and future research suggestions was conducted, and the results were reported in this paper. Overall, it was found that vocabulary can be taught to children in a variety of ways. Using technology, reading, music, games and Total Physical Response were the most recurrent classroom strategies reported in the publications that made part of this review. Apart from that, there were numerous documents that approached the topic from different perspectives, such as explicit vs implicit instruction, use of L1, teacher factor, and some stand-alone studies of specific methodologies. Finally, distinct suggestions for future research were identified and reported in this paper.

Problem Statement

The research problem that inspired the present study is rooted in several factors. First, pre-service teachers around the world often fail to receive training on how to teach vocabulary to children. Second, a number of primary school teachers often hold vocational, non-EFL degrees, which results in inadequate vocabulary instruction. Moreover, teaching vocabulary to children has been an under-researched area in the EFL field. Therefore, there is an evident need in a comprehensive study that can provide guidance to both educators and researchers.

Research Objective

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned lacunae regarding the lack of teacher training and gaps in research, the present literature review aims to provide an overview of the research on teaching EFL vocabulary to children done in the last 15 years thus ensuring that educators and researchers worldwide can find relevant information in one paper.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- What can be highlighted about the research of teaching EFL vocabulary to children in the last 15 years?

- What relevant aspects should be taken into account when teaching EFL vocabulary to children?

- What pedagogical strategies can be implemented to teach EFL vocabulary to children?

Significance of the Study

This comprehensive literature review in the field of vocabulary instruction for children is extremely relevant and useful for researchers, educators and pre-service teachers as it informs them on the advances on the topic.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the present study can be divided into two phases: the first phase included the initial bibliographic search and thorough selection of the pertinent documents, and the second phase consisted in the analysis of the clusters, or topics, found within the final list of bibliographic material. The first phase was conducted in the Scopus database and intended to look for publications related to the topic of teaching English vocabulary to young learners. The study aimed to analyze the literature in the last 15 years, and, therefore, the interval of the search was set between the years 2010 and 2024. The query field chosen was "Title, abstract, keywords" and the keywords used were primarily as follows: vocabulary, teaching, English, young learners, and their synonyms. The table below summarizes the first phase of the study.

Table 1 Bibliographic search summary

Database	Scopus
Query period	2010-2024
Document type	Article, book chapter, review, conference paper
Query field	Title, abstract, keywords
Keywords	(vocabulary OR lexicon OR words) AND (English or EFL) AND (young learners OR children OR primary) AND teaching
Preliminary results	107
Final results	61

The second phase began with analyzing the general information about the publications, such as their origin, authorship, and annual publications, among others. After that, grouping the documents according to their emphases took place. Consequently, they were analyzed for the most important findings and

conclusions, as well as for the suggestions for further research. The obtained information was then organized into sections and subsections of the présent article.

RESULTS

The present section introduces the results obtained from the first phase of the study and analyzes them in terms of annual publications, publications per country/territory, types of documents, publications per author as well as per journal. The final figure of this section shows the distribution of the clusters encountered in the publications that make part of this study and, consequently, defines the order of the following sections of this literature review.
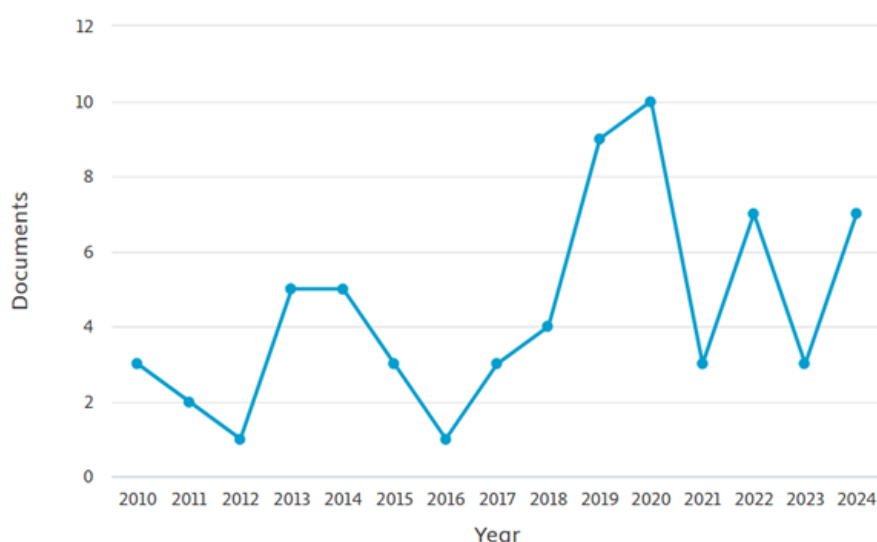
Figure 1 Annual publications

Figure 1 illustrates the temporal evolution of documents published within the last 15 years, focusing on the theme of teaching vocabulary to young learners. An overarching observation reveals significant fluctuations in the annual publication figures over this examined timeframe. During the time spans of 2010-2012, 2014-2016, 2020-2021, and 2022-2023, a notable decline in the number of papers published is evident. Conversely, the intervals spanning 2012-2014, 2016-2019, and 2021-2022 are characterized by growth in publications. Noteworthy is the fact that the year 2020 emerged as the pinnacle in terms of article production, registering ten (10) publications. In contrast, the years 2012 and 2016 are marked by only one published paper each, underscoring the fluctuating nature of scholarly contributions to this specific topic.

Figure 2 Publications per country/territory
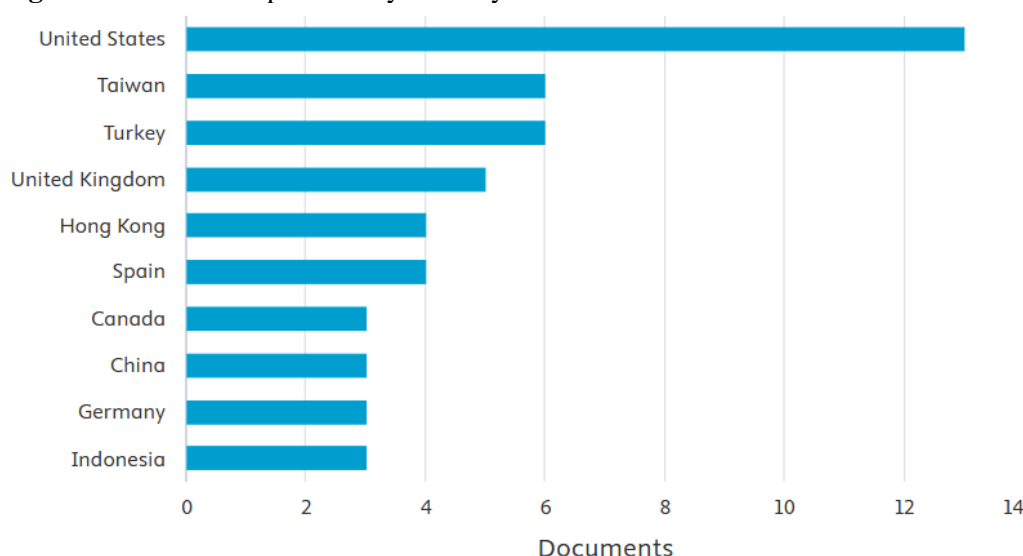
As per the data presented in Figure 2, depicting the distribution of articles published by country, the United States emerges as the foremost contributor, with thirteen (13) published documents on the subject of teaching English vocabulary to children. Taiwan and Turkey secure the second position, each offering six (6) valuable contributions to this field, followed by five (5) papers from the United Kingdom. Hong Kong and Spain occupy the fourth spot, with both countries presenting four (4) articles, thereby sharing this standing. Lastly, Canada, China, Germany, and Indonesia collectively occupy the final position with a total of three published papers per country.

Furthermore, it is evident from the data portrayed in Figure 2 that Asia leads the geographic distribution with the highest number of articles, amounting to twenty-two (22) publications. Following closely, North America holds the second position with eighteen (18) articles. Europe secures the third position in this regional distribution, accounting for a total of twelve (12) papers. This analysis underscores the prominence of North America and Asia as pivotal contributors to the scholarly discourse on the topic, with Europe following suit in the global landscape of research output.
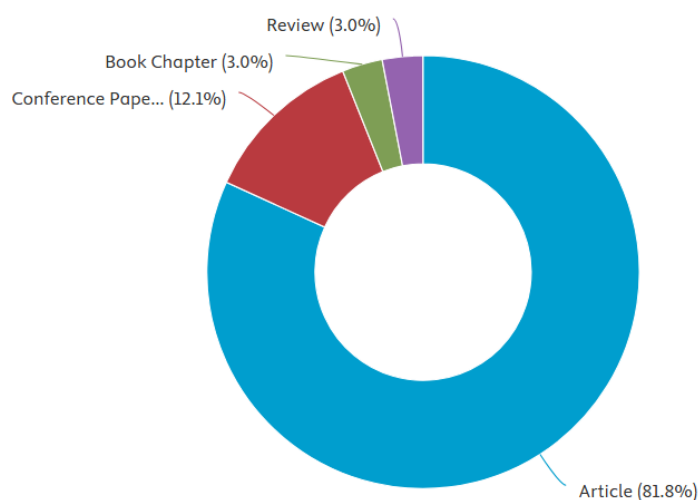
Figure 3 Publication types

Figure 3 delineates the categorization of documents that feature in the current study. It can be seen that a predominant share of the literature pertaining to the pedagogy of teaching English vocabulary to young learners is encapsulated within the realm of articles, which account for a substantial 81.8% of the document corpus. In addition, 12.1% of the titles included in this study manifest themselves as conference papers. Reviews and book chapters, albeit a smaller proportion, make up 3% the included documents each.
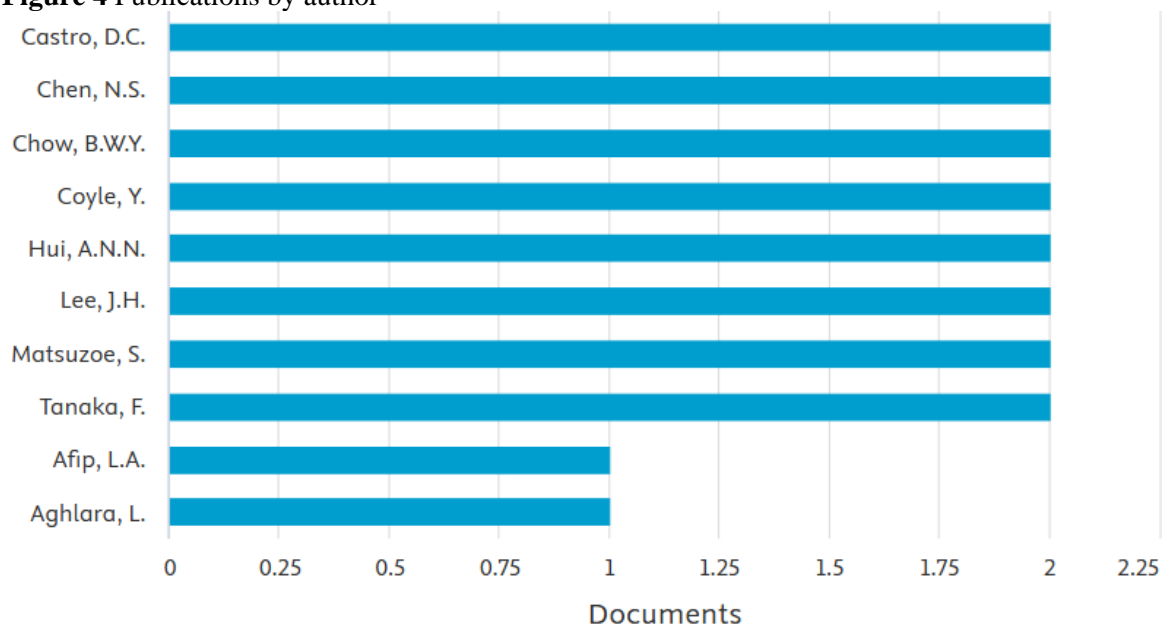
Figure 4 Publications by author

Figure 4 demonstrates the distribution of documents based on their respective authors. A discernible pattern emerges wherein seven authors, namely Castro, D.C., Chen N.S., Chow, B.W.Y., Coyle, Y.,

Hui, A.N.N., Lee, J.H., Matsuzoe, S., and Tanaka, F., have each authored and published two papers, thus occupying the forefront of this scholarly contribution. Conversely, the remaining authors featured in the chart have each contributed a single paper to the corpus of literature in question.

Figure 5 Distribution of clusters
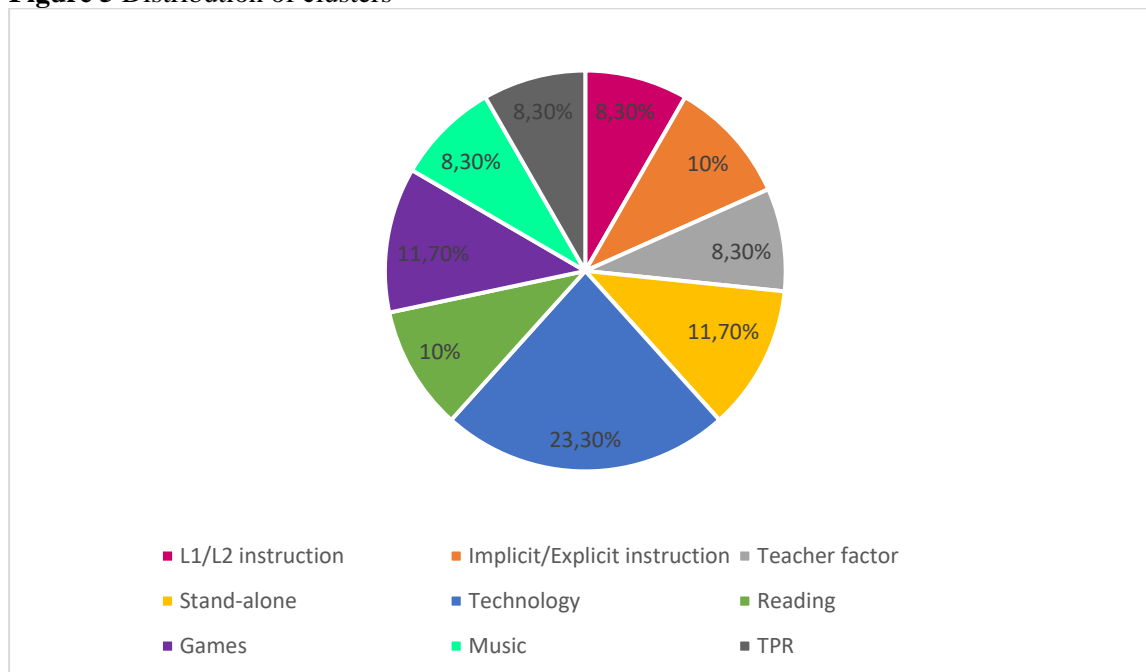
Last but not least, Figure 5 shows how the clusters were distributed in the present study. The *Technology* cluster is the most numerous as it includes 23,3% of the articles reviewed. It is followed by *Games* and *Stand-alone studies* that accounted for 11,7% of the articles each. *Implicit/explicit instruction* and *Reading* occupy the third position at 10% each. The rest of the clusters – *L1/L2 instruction, Music, Teacher factor,* and *TPR* – were represented by 8,3% of all the articles each.

DISCUSSION

The present section of the article discusses the clusters identified among all the sixty documents included in the study. First of all, the clusters were divided into General Issues and Pedagogical Strategies, the former including general perspectives on how vocabulary should be taught to children, and the latter encompassing papers that give instructions on what pedagogical strategies should be used in the classroom for an effective learning to take place.

Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners: General Issues

The *General Issues* category is represented by 38.3% of documents included in the current literature review. They report a variety of issues related to teaching vocabulary to young learners and tackle this topic from different angles.

Use of Native Language in Vocabulary Instruction for Children. One general question within the topic of vocabulary instruction for young learners is whether or not teachers should use L1 in order to facilitate understanding of the new words, and it accounted for 8,3% of all the articles. Quite often, teachers' practices regarding this issue are defined by their institutions that can have policies permitting or restricting the use of young students' first language. Nevertheless, according to multiple studies, turning to L1 proves to be beneficial for the learners. A study by Lugo-Neris et al. observed "additional benefits to using Spanish expansions in vocabulary instruction" (2010, p. 314). It was found that children could enhance both receptive knowledge of vocabulary and their use of expressive definitions as a result of Spanish bridging. Furthermore, a research report by Mendéz et al. (2015) concluded that children that received bilingual instruction had much higher results than students who received English-only instruction. The same conclusion was made in a study done in African township schools (Stoffelsma, 2019), in which it was affirmed that the use of L1 helped students establish the "form-meaning linkage" (p.8). Similarly, Song and Lee (2019) found that even if the change to L1 was brief, vocabulary acquisition was more successful two weeks after the study. And finally, an interesting conclusion was made by Lee and Macaro (2013) who studied the effect of using L1 in vocabulary instruction in different age groups and revealed that the younger the students, the more beneficial it was to provide explanations in their native language.

Implicit vs Explicit Vocabulary Teaching. Another frequent dilemma that English teachers encounter is whether to teach vocabulary to children in an implicit or explicit way, which was represented by 10% of the documents reviewed. According to several authors, the latter proves to be more beneficial for students. In different studies with primary school children, it was found that explicit and active vocabulary instruction is preferred as it enhances students' lexical competence (Gomes-Koban et al., 2017; Westgate & Hughes, 2018) as well as develops both receptive and expressive vocabulary (Yeung et al., 2020). Likewise, a research project in a primary school in England concluded that in order to

effectively promote vocabulary learning, teachers should use explicit vocabulary instruction that will allow learners to be actively engaged in class (Dixon et al., 2020). Apart from the fact that lexis instruction should be explicit, it is also important for teachers to ensure an active engaging environment (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011) in which students will have repeated opportunities to see how new words are used in varied contexts thus securing long-term retention (Stoffelsma, 2019).

Teacher Factor in Teaching Vocabulary to Children. In addition to focusing on the best methodological practices for effective vocabulary learning, some research projects also pay attention to teachers' profiles and preparation regarding this topic, totaling 8,3% of the articles. For example, a study by Chan et al. (2022), which was done with Northern California preschool teachers, revealed a connection between the multilingual backgrounds of the instructors and the lexical strategies that they implemented with dual-language learners. Several documents reported issues related to the preparation that teachers receive in terms of vocabulary instruction. For instance, a research done in South-African township schools concluded that the support that teachers received regarding strategies on teaching vocabulary to children was limited (Stoffelsma, 2019). Contrasted to that, a study conducted by Westgate and Hughes (2018) reported a project in which in-service teachers from a small group of schools worked together in order to "define relevant aims and objectives and to include a range of appropriate approaches in their teaching" (p.587) focusing specifically on vocabulary instruction. In addition, the research by Strauss and Bipath (2020) suggested that pre-service English language teachers should be equipped with vocabulary learning strategies and techniques for future practice. Remarkable, teachers' perceptions regarding the topic were not always consistent with their classroom practices, as found by Bedilu and Degefu (2023). It can be concluded that the opportunities for teachers to learn about vocabulary teaching to children vary a lot across the contexts. However, the importance of supporting educators in this topic cannot be underestimated.

Stand-Alone Studies. The present sub-section copmrises 11% of the documents and encompasses the studies that reported different approaches towards teaching vocabulary to young learners. Although each approach was represented by only one document, it was important to highlight the conclusions made in each of them. For instance, Ulbricht (2023) reported that gestures with semantic relation to word items could lead to their long-term memorization. Apart from that, dialogic teaching of first-graders facilitated

a significant increment in expressive lexical knowledge as shown in the study by Chow et al. (2021). Additionally, the definition method implemented by Gomes-Koban et al. (2017) proved to have a positive effect on teaching word meanings to third-grade students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Similarly, reciprocal teaching enabled the experimental group of first-grade children to acquire a higher number of words than the control group (Mandel et al., 2013). Park et al. (2019) confirmed the positive effect of cooking tasks on young learners' vocabulary acquisition thanks to the enjoyable environment. The same year, a similar conclusion was made by Damara et al. (2019) who affirmed that painting was an appropriate means to teach new words to very young children as it provided comfortable atmosphere. Last but not least, Hu (2012) studied the effect of fast-mapping on learning new lexicon and concluded that it enhanced the immediate retention of vocabulary but not the long-term one.

Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners: Pedagogical Strategies

The *Pedagogical Strategies* category included the clusters of articles that described how, or through what media, English vocabulary should be taught to children.

Teaching Vocabulary to Children through Technology. As compared to the other sections of this literature review, the use of technology for teaching vocabulary to children is represented by the second highest percentage of articles, namely 23,3%. This can probably be explained by the fact that technology has become an essential part of our lives and, consequently, of the classroom practices. It is also important to highlight that there is a great variety of technological tools whose effect on young learners' vocabulary has been researched. The list includes mobile applications, text-based online chats, e-books, robots, augmented reality, digital games and other technology-mediated activities.

On the whole, technology has proven to be an effective tool in helping young learners acquire new vocabulary. A study by Coyle and Prieto (2017), which explored the effect of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on children's language development, revealed that SCMC ensured longer vocabulary retention, helped students notice gaps in their lexical knowledge and encouraged them to fill those gaps. Another research, conducted by Wood et al. (2018) with kindergarten and first-grade children whose native language was Spanish, confirmed the effectiveness of using e-books to increase students' vocabulary. Furthermore, digital games (Aghlara and Tamjid, 2011; Foster et al., 2018) and

augmented reality (Demirdag et al., 2024; Topu et al., 2024) had both proved to be powerful instruments in teaching English vocabulary to children.

In addition to exploring the general effect of various technological aids on young students' vocabulary learning, several studies examined more specific topics. For instance, Jayasinghe et al. (2021) used a mobile application to teach basic lexis to children aged 8-10 in Sri Lanka and concluded that the tool was effective for participants to learn three categories of words: homophones, synonyms and antonyms. Moreover, a research by Tlili et al. (2021) showed that using collaborative educational games with learning analytics increased children's motivation towards learning vocabulary in English. Another study, which was done by Moratelli and Dejarnette (2014) in an urban elementary school, rendered the use of incorporated clicker response system technology valuable when implementing vocabulary review sessions. Furthermore, a research project conducted in Turkey by Kurt (2021) revealed that technology-mediated tasks resulted in students' "self-perceived higher ability in English, enhanced self-efficacy beliefs in technology use positive attitudes towards technology mediated tasks" (p.327). Nevertheless, the same study revealed that although the group of participants that used technology mediated tasks had higher results in vocabulary acquisition than the group using traditional assignments, the difference was not significant.

Four articles particularly stand out due to the high level of innovation as they both used robots to help children learn vocabulary. The study by Lai et al. (2021) showed that a companion robot was successful in "drilling and practicing English vocabulary in listening and speaking" after being evaluated by both "e-learning experts and experienced teachers". (abstract). Another research by Matsuzoe and Tanaka (2013) validated the use of robots for both lexis acquisition and higher motivation towards learning. In addition to that, a further study conducted by Matsuzoe et al. (2014) compared two types of robots whose task was to promote the learning of English words in a group of pre-school children and concluded that the autonomous care-receiving robot (CRR) was more successful that the expert robot. Last but not least, an R&T System (robots (R) and tangible objects (T)) utilized in an action research by Cheng et al. (2024) impacted fourth-graders' vocabulary performance in a positive way.

Teaching Vocabulary to Children through Reading. The section about the role of reading in teaching vocabulary to children is represented by the third highest percentage of sources: 10% of the papers

included in the present literature review were related to the topic. In addition to that, two of the articles included here reported studies about the effect of using drama on young learners' vocabulary development. However, due to the fact that drama originates from reading, it was decided to include them in the present section.

Generally, authors agree on the positive impact of reading on children's learning of new vocabulary. For instance, Gutierrez Arvizu (2020) conducted a study using narratives to enhance elementary students' lexical knowledge and concluded that narratives, on the whole, contributed to the enhancement of vocabulary because "stories provide a natural context for language input" (p.115). Moreover, not only did the students learn new vocabulary, but they were also able to retain it later on. Likewise, Mishra and Satpathy (2020), who did a research about folk narratives with young learners, found that the repeated occurrences of the same words made this genre highly effective for strengthening newly acquired vocabulary. Furthermore, Deacon et al. (2019) identified that "independent reading offers children opportunities to learn the spellings and meanings of words" (p.56). Authentic storybook reading was also proved to be beneficial for children to acquire new vocabulary (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2015). Finally, in regards to the use of drama, Demircioğlu (2010) determined that it had a positive impact on young learners' vocabulary development as it ensured long-term retention of the lexis as well as provided intellectual and emotional context for new words. Likewise, Ting (2013) concluded that the element of drama had a positive impact on new words acquisition by young learners.

Teaching Vocabulary to Children through Games. First of all, it is important to highlight that some studies included in the present literature review combined the use of technology and games, for instance, when using computer games. Therefore, when deciding whether those studies should be considered as part of the section Teaching vocabulary through games or Teaching vocabulary through technology, the emphases of the papers were analyzed. If the paper focused more on the game element, it was categorized as part of the present section. However, if the attention was drawn to the technological component, the article was considered part of the section dedicated to the use of technology. As a result, Teaching vocabulary to children through games is constituted by one of the lowest percentages of publications – 11,7%. One important aspect that can be traced throughout multiple studies is the fact that games increase children's engagement and interest towards English classes (Saleh & Ahmed

Althaqafi, 2022; Wei & Wang, 2022; Naderiheshi, 2022; Lucht & Heidig, 2013). A possible explanation is that games facilitate "a relaxed and stress-free atmosphere" (Naderiheshi, 2022, p.16) thus lowering the affective filter and allowing learners to "be more energetic and delighted" (p.16). Furthermore, games have the potential not only to motivate individual children, but also benefit the whole-class engagement (Lucht & Heidig, 2013) as well as foster young learners' self-confidence (Naderiheshi, 2022).

Apart from enhancing the overall atmosphere in the classroom, games are also reported to facilitate young learners' vocabulary learning. Saleh and Ahmed Althaqafi (2022) found that kindergarten students' absorption and retention of vocabulary improved when games were used. A similar conclusion was made by Wei and Wang (2022), who stated that games "enhanced the efficiency and quality of children's learning" (p.178), and by Tayeh et al. (2024) and Strauss and Bipath (2020), who concluded that play-based learning facilitated vocabulary learning. Likewise, the study done by Lucht and Heidig (2013) concluded that games resulted in "increased assimilation" (p.767) of vocabulary knowledge. All the above-mentioned phenomena can be explained by the fact that games give children a chance to learn new words in a "meaningful and useful way" (Naderiheshi, 2022, p.17) as well as to see how words are used in the real context (Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022). Moreover, vocabulary is purposefully emphasized during game dynamics (Naderiheshi, 2022, p.16) thus drawing students' attention to it. As opposed to the majority of the above-mentioned findings, only one study, which researched the impact of using a digital game called HOPSCOTCH on young learners' vocabulary, revealed that there was no difference in the number of new words that students remembered and spelled correctly when comparing the results of the experiment group and the control group which followed teacher-centered instruction (Lucht & Heidig, 2013).

Nevertheless, games also reportedly bring negative effects to children's classrooms. For instance, a noticeable problem created by the use of games is the fact that the classroom atmosphere might get chaotic and disorganized, and teachers might lose the control of time (Naderiheshi, 2022). As a consequence, students tend to switch to the first language, which reverses the initial intention of increasing the use of vocabulary in L2. In the same paper, Naderiheshi (2022) argues that teachers may also underestimate the power of games as they consider them time-fillers rather than useful teaching

tools. The author takes it further to state that games might even cause serious consequences such as anxiety and depression in children. Therefore, it can be concluded that in order to use games effectively, teachers must plan them carefully and ensure successful classroom management.

Teaching Vocabulary to Children through Music. Teaching vocabulary to children through music was another section comprised of 8.3% papers. After analyzing the articles related to the present section, it was concluded that the data could be divided into three main categories: teachers' perception towards using music to teach vocabulary to children, students' response to the strategy, and the effectiveness of songs as a tool to increase young learners' lexical knowledge. Regarding the first category, it can be stated that, overall, teachers consider that songs are effective for increasing students' lexical knowledge (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2020). First of all, Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) came to the conclusion that 68% of educators believed that songs triggered children's attention towards a topic. Moreover, the same study revealed that 98.7% of teachers believed that music helped young learners to retain previously learned words, 94.7% considered songs a beneficial tool for vocabulary revision, and 73.3% affirmed that songs allowed children to increase their lexical input (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Another advantage of using songs as perceived by teachers is allowing students to "identify word meaning in context" (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020, p.2680). Furthermore, Al-Smadi (2020) stated that songs were especially powerful in regards to children's motivation. Finally, and probably most importantly, songs have proven to enhance young learners' acquisition of new words in multiple studies. An important characteristic of songs that spoke in favor of using them in an ELT setting was their "linguistic richness" (Aras, 2024, p.29). Al-Smadi (2020) affirmed that songs provided children with contexts in which they could find uncomplicated structures that might become ingrained in their memory. Chen (2020) stated that familiar melodies facilitated vocabulary learning and highlighted " 'chanting' and 'music video with caption' methods being the most effective and lead to immediate and prolonged learning" (p.377). Furthermore, Coyle and Gomez Garcia (2014) concluded that songs promoted the growth of young learners' receptive vocabulary; however, they also argued that songs had a poor effect on productive knowledge in the majority of children.

Teaching Vocabulary to Children through Total Physical Response (TPR). Articles that reported the use of TPR in teaching vocabulary to young learners accounted for 8.3% out of the total of the

analyzed papers. Nevertheless, they reported important conclusions that will be described in this section.

First and foremost, it is agreed that TPR is effective for children to learn vocabulary. A study conducted in Iran by Yusuf et al. (2017) with very young children (or in other words, toddlers) proved TPR to be beneficial to teach them commands in English. Furthermore, Limperatou and Zorbas (2024) found that TPR was effective in increasing EFL young learners' vocabulary knowledge, and Çimen and Çeşme (2022) also proved it to show better results than the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Apart from that, TPR is well-perceived by both teachers and students of primary schools as a method to learn vocabulary in English (Liu and Chen, 2021). Hu (2000, as cited in Liu and Chen, 2021) stated that TPR encouraged students' enthusiasm towards learning the language, which could be explained by the fact that this method "not only mobilizes the students' senses, exercising their body, but also make their thinking more sensitive" (Liu and Chen, 2021, p.1256). Additionally, according to Astutik et al. (2019) children might also have a positive attitude towards TPR because they "learn through observing actions as well as by performing the actions themselves" (p.94) as well as because they feel less anxious when this method is applied (Çimen and Çeşme, 2022). Finally, Pacheco et al. (2022) concluded that dancing, being part of TPR, motivated young learners to learn new words.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study analyzed sixty documents from the Scopus database pertaining to the subject of teaching vocabulary to young learners. It was found that throughout the last 15 years there has been consistent contribution to the topic which has mainly originated in Asia, North America and Europe. This finding reveals a gap in research about vocabulary instruction to children in the countries of South America and Africa. Some prominent clusters were grouped as *Pedagogical Strategies* and included teaching vocabulary to young learners through music, reading, games, technology and TPR. Furthermore, other clusters were categorized as *General Issues* and analyzed the topic from different angles, such as explicit vs implicit instruction, use of L1 vs L2, and teacher factor. Additionally, several stand-alone papers reported different approaches towards teaching new words to children.

On the whole, teaching EFL vocabulary to children is a multi-dimensional topic that might pose a number of challenges for teachers as there is a wide range of factors to be considered. First of all, multiple researchers agree that explicit teaching of vocabulary is more effective than implicit. Second,

using L1 when introducing new words to students brings more benefits than using only L2. In addition to that, pre-service teachers must receive training on vocabulary teaching strategies. Furthermore, vocabulary instruction should take different forms in the classroom in order to approach the learning process from different perspectives; in order to do so, teachers can make use of technology, music, literature, games and TPR. Overall, it can be said that vocabulary can be taught to children through numerous ways that captivate their attention and are appropriate for their age, abilities and interests. In order to learn new words successfully, children should be actively engaged in lessons, and teachers, in turn, need to have enough preparation and training regarding the topic. Finally, more research is needed into young learners' teaching-learning of vocabulary due to its paramount importance for children's development of English as well as their future academic success.

Limitations

The present study chose to work with the Scopus database due to its trustworthiness (Baas et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the researchers consider that at the same time using only Scopus could have been a limitation as it might not have considered publications that are not included in this database.

Future Research

The following table provides possible lines for future research within the topic of teaching vocabulary to young learners. The lines are divided according to the main sections of the present literature review.

Table 2 Future Lines of Research

General issues about teaching vocabulary to children	
Ulbricht, N.J. (2023)	Further studies regarding the results of student and teacher gestures in classroom interactions.
	More research about sensorimotor experiences in the teaching-learning process.
Chan, M., Buttiler, M. B., Yang, F., Yang, J., Uchikoshi, Y., & Zhou, Q. (2022)	Research about teachers' training on the Dual Language Learners demographic.
	More studies on the effect of bilingualism on students' performance in preschool and school years.
Tribushinina, E., Dubinkina-Elgart, E., Rabkina, N. (2020)	Research about the amount of English outside of the classroom and its impact on learning by children with Developmental Language Disorder.
	Studies regarding the effect of explicit foreign language learning by children with Developmental Language Disorder.
	Future studies about EFL tests directly addressing the topics covered during the English lessons.
Dixon, C., Thomson, J., & Fricke, S. (2020)	Implement an explicit vocabulary teaching intervention with a larger sample of children.
	Compare the efficacy of explicit vocabulary teaching with EAL and non-EAL children with low-level vocabulary knowledge.

	Further studies on whether explicit vocabulary teaching can be implemented in small groups and by teaching assistants (or other paraprofessionals).
Hwang, K., & Yim, S. Y. (2019)	Further studies investigating students' preference for NESTs can produce useful implications to establish an effective localized ELT model.
Lugo-Neris, M.J., Jackson, C.W., Goldstein, H. (2010)	Explore ways of enhancing vocabulary knowledge of children with low language skills.
Using technology in teaching vocabulary to children	
Wood, C., Fitton, L., Petscher, Y., Rodriguez, E., Sunderman, G., Lim, T. (2018)	Examine teachers' perspective on young students' vocabulary learning. Evaluate young learners' initial L1 vocabulary to determine the impact of e-book vocabulary instruction on participants with different proficiency levels.
Arikan, A., Taraf, H.U. (2010)	Further research into the use of authentic animated cartoons in improving students' language skills and aspects.
Tlili, A., Hattab, S., Essalmi, F., Chen, N.-S., Huang, R., Kinshuk, Chang, M., Burgos, D. (2021)	Future research on improving the game functions and exploring options for mobile applications.
Using reading in teaching vocabulary to children	
Demircioğlu, Ş. (2010)	Further research on the theory and practical implementation of drama.
Using games in teaching vocabulary to children	
Saleh, A. M., & Ahmed Althaqafi, A. S. (2022)	Implement and evaluate educational games for a longer period of time. Explore the role of the teacher in educational games.
Naderiheshi, A. (2022)	More research about games and their usage.
Using music in teaching vocabulary to children	
Al-Smadi, M. H. (2020)	Further research on the types of activities used with songs.
Nguyen, T.C., Nguyen, H.B. (2020)	Further research regarding alternative ways to maximize young learners' vocabulary learning.
Using TPR in teaching vocabulary to children	
Liu, S., Chen, S. (2021)	Research on application of TPR in primary schools.

As it can be seen, the topic of teaching EFL vocabulary to children offers a wide range of issues to be researched that span across multiple clusters of the present study. Researchers worldwide can use this list in order to define the scope of their studies thus contributing to the field and helping educators from different countries to ensure quality EFL vocabulary instruction.

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