

THE BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS, AND STRATEGIES OF VOCABULARY
INSTRUCTION IN MIDDLE GRADES SOCIAL STUDIES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Lisa-Renée Gilford

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

David Nelson, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Jessica Talada, Ed.D., Committee Member

Dawn White, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

ABSTRACT

Content specific vocabulary instruction at the secondary level is an area that had a minimal research focus. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of 8 middle school social studies teachers in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym), a middle school located in a major city in the southeastern United States. Data was collected from interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts from participants. The theoretical framework providing a foundation for this study centered on Vygotsky's (1978) work on social interaction playing an integral role in cognitive development. The research questions that guided the study examined the following: instructional experiences that the participants described as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students; experiences teachers perceived as valuable to teaching vocabulary in social studies; and participants' descriptions of the vocabulary instructional practices used in their social studies classes. The opinions of the participants obtained from the responses from the interviews regarding the significance of using graphic organizers and other instructional strategies aided in identifying common themes derived from the responses. The results of the study contributed to developing best practices for teachers teaching vocabulary within the social studies, a concepts-based content area. These findings suggested that the participants perceived that specific vocabulary instruction and effective instructional strategies must be engaging and implemented on a daily basis.

Keywords: vocabulary, instructional strategies, social studies, middle school

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two sons who have been patient with me throughout this process and endured a part-time mom, though I still never missed a sporting event or a school sponsored activity. It is also dedicated to Christ, our Father and Savior, for providing me the mental, physical, and emotional fortitude to complete this process. Though the road was very difficult at times and it appeared I would not be able to cross it, He provided the strength, courage, determination and ability to achieve the tasks. For this, Father, I thank You, for without You this would not have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Cornerstone Middle School (CMS) -pseudonym

Direct Instruction (DI)

English Language Learners (ELL)

English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEERA)

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

National Reading Panel (NRP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Professional Development (PD)

Research and Development Corporation (RAND)

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Georgia Accrediting Commission (SACS)

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Research related to vocabulary instruction and vocabulary knowledge has been a topic of interest since 1967. The significance and benefits of vocabulary research has not significantly impacted classroom instruction (Flanigan & Greenwood, 2007). Vocabulary is an integral segment to every facet of life and is linked with verbal intelligence. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) conducted research that shows that vocabulary word usage directly aligns with and relates to intelligence, the ability to grasp new concepts, and earning potential. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, an emphasis is being placed on increasing the yearly academic achievement of all students. NCLB requires that schools continually progress and demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), with criteria established by each state. The academic success of students affects individual knowledge as it relates to vocabulary (Baumann & Graves, 2010). Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer and Faller (2010) discovered a direct relationship between vocabulary and the academic success of students. Vocabulary is an integral part of the learning process (National Reading Panel, 2000; Southerland, 2011; Thanh & Huan, 2013).

Dr. Dan Mulligan, owner of Flexible Creativity, Inc., provides private instructional resource and assessment consulting, utilizing specific vocabulary strategies, to many schools across the United States. Mulligan presents educators with various research-based vocabulary instructional strategies and methodologies, which in turn, offer ways in which to improve academic success. These approaches are effective in the teaching and learning process of vocabulary instruction. According to the Flexible Creativity website (2014), Mulligan has over 30 years of experience in education in New York and Virginia and serves as the Director of

Assessment and Accountability, Director of Instructional Accountability for Hampton, Virginia and serves as the lead supervisor for curriculum and instruction in Chesapeake, Virginia.

Mulligan speaks at conferences and conducts workshops throughout the United States.

According to the Flexible Creativity, Inc. website (2014), Mulligan has received national recognition and has earned several state awards for the work he has done regarding instructional and assessment resources.

Limited research is being conducted on effective vocabulary instruction in concepts-based content areas, specifically relating to middle school social studies. The majority of existing research related to vocabulary centers on English Language Learners (ELLs), elementary level students, and language arts students. Hairrell, Rupley, and Simmons (2011) performed a meta-analysis of research on vocabulary instruction and found that although the research and findings are considered trustworthy and extraordinarily rigorous, existing research is still deficient in information relating to content area vocabulary. The authors noted, “Although the research base to confirm specific vocabulary instruction is insufficient, the importance of vocabulary to comprehension and academic achievement is well documented” (pp. 253-254).

Vocabulary research conducted during the 1980s centered on effective vocabulary instruction and generally focused on three themes. The first theme is the idea that the middle school years present a significant increase in vocabulary exposure to new terms for students. By the time a student completed middle school and began the ninth grade, “These students will have encountered 88,500-word families in printed school materials” (Fisher & Frey, 2011; Nagy & Anderson, 1984). The second theme in the literature during the 1980s addressed the compounded influence of increased content-specific vocabulary that impacts the student’s ability to speak and read in that discipline. The final category encompassed the complexity of word knowledge and

the associated instruction that bonds the concepts and words (Fisher & Frey, 2011).

In recent years, interest has increased in streamlining and aligning effective vocabulary instructional strategies for content-specific middle and high school classroom teachers. In the 2000 report from the National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), several professional organizations identified the need for increased vocabulary research. Specifically research is recommended that concentrates on the need for a standard for vocabulary instruction.

Background

Sweeney and Mason (2011) conducted research and advocated vocabulary should be taught beyond the elementary level, for students other than English Language Learners, and was essential for all secondary level students. The majority of the professional literature focused on elementary age children. Kucan (2007) noted, “At the middle school and high school levels there were far fewer available resources, and those that did exist often focus on English class as the primary context for vocabulary instruction” (p. 176). The majority of the research focused on vocabulary instruction at the elementary level and for English Language Learners. This study sought to examine the need to continue vocabulary instruction in content-based classrooms at the middle school level.

This study examined the beliefs and perceptions of eight middle school social studies teachers regarding the use of research-based vocabulary instructional strategies and the influence on student academic achievement at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). The participants’ perspectives on the influence that vocabulary instructional strategies had on building students’ vocabulary was investigated. This research served to develop a greater understanding concerning whether additional support may be warranted for the eight teachers utilizing and incorporating

various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School. Vocabulary terms are content specific and vary with each grade level. Vocabulary-centered instruction played an integral role in improving academic performance, expanding vocabulary and increasing comprehension (White & Kim, 2009). Most vocabulary instruction was reinforced at the elementary level in language arts and reading curricula and for English Language Learners. Leseaux et al. (2010) found in an examination of vocabulary intervention of linguistically diverse students in middle schools that the prevailing research related to vocabulary instruction centered on elementary level students. These authors advocated for continued research focused on effective practices that encouraged vocabulary development, specifically “to comprehend and analyze texts in the middle and high school years, and simultaneously document the ways in which these practices as implemented differ from standard teaching practices in the English language arts classroom” (p. 198).

Marzano, Kendall, and Paynter (2005) reviewed the existing body of research and identified a huge disparity between vocabulary and student academic success. These authors discovered the connection between vocabulary size and reading ability. Snow, Lawrence, and White (2009) found that the size of a child’s oral vocabulary added to the child’s ability to comprehend newly introduced content and information. These findings reaffirmed the fact that children with limited vocabularies do not have the same opportunities as those students with a vast or more extensive vocabulary base. Paynter, Bodrova, and Doty (2005) pointed out:

Children who have poor vocabularies are at a great disadvantage in school and in the rest of life. It is more difficult for students with fewer concepts to construct meaning from what they hear or read because they have limited background knowledge. (p. 7)

Marzano et al. (2005) agreed that while children are attending school, students with weak

vocabularies who were presented with vocabulary-rich experiences did broaden their vocabulary. Marzano et al. (2005) also believed that when this exposure to rich vocabulary occurred, the foundations of background knowledge of students were strengthened and reading comprehension improved, which in turn led to improved academic success.

Literature and studies reviewed related to vocabulary instruction at the time of this study in a synthesis compiled by the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (NRTAC) (Butler, Urrutia, Buenger, & Hunt, 2010), which focused on vocabulary instruction for elementary age students and for English Language Learners. Few studies reviewed by the National Reading Technical Assistance Center targeted effective instructional strategies for content specific teachers at the middle school level. Butler et al. (2010) referenced several studies that established that vocabulary instruction was directly related to the improvement of reading comprehension. In 2000, The National Reading Panel reviewed 50 studies centering on vocabulary instruction focusing on monolingual English speakers. Of these studies, 39 were conducted with elementary age students. The majority of the studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel were short in duration, facilitated in small groups, conducted with elementary age and adolescents, and focused on only one strategy of word learning or concentrated on one aspect of vocabulary instruction.

As stated by Larson and Dixon (2013), research related to effective instructional vocabulary strategies identified the timing of the introduction of new concepts in daily instruction impacted the learning process. Larson and Dixon identified the concerns of teachers regarding when and how to implement new vocabulary terms and concepts into daily instruction. Integrating vocabulary instruction varied greatly by classroom, whether before or during the instruction of new content.

According to a report from the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum written by Hall, Strangman and Meyer (2014), educators understood the significance of vocabulary and the positive impact that direct instruction had on improving student reading and comprehension of textbooks. The National Institute for Direct Instruction (2014), in the publication titled *Achieving Success for Every Student with Direct Instruction*, identified Direct Instruction (DI), developed by Engelmann in the 1960s, as an effective and explicit instructional model directed by the teacher. Donlevy (2010) expressed, “Direct instruction programs follow highly detailed lesson plans constructed to help students learn increasingly more complex material” (p.225). Moore (n.d.) emphasized the importance of direct instruction and furthered that direct instruction assisted students in developing a thorough understanding of concepts and cited, “Instruction that includes rich and varied language experiences leads to vocabulary growth for many students” (p. 2). Marzano et al. (2001) determined several researched-based strategies for increasing student achievement that were integral to student learning.

Situation to Self

The lack of instructional time built into curricula devoted to teaching vocabulary has been a personal concern for many years. Vocabulary instructional methods have provided a professional area of interest in teaching for many years. In my 10 years of teaching language arts and social studies, the concept of vocabulary instruction has proven to be difficult in incorporating into instruction. While the language arts curricula allowed for and stressed vocabulary instruction, there was a significantly less amount of time allotted for social studies content-specific vocabulary in the curricula. A personal interest emerged to understand how and why some teachers placed an emphasis on vocabulary instruction and why others chose not to focus on vocabulary instruction. Additionally, an interest developed as to how both groups were

incorporating vocabulary into daily instruction.

The uncertainty about effective vocabulary instruction held by many teachers was a concern. The notion that many teachers wanted to incorporate additional vocabulary lessons into daily instruction interested me. Many of these teachers were unfamiliar with vocabulary instructional strategies or were uncertain about exactly when and how to introduce new vocabulary into daily instruction. As an educator, my most effective classroom instructional techniques for delivering social studies content involved direct and differentiated instruction, graphic organizers, and group and individual activities. Classroom instruction had focused on ensuring that my students fully understood three aspects: content specific vocabulary; noteworthy dates; and important individuals, places and events. A professional goal emerged to generate research concerning incorporating an additional emphasis on vocabulary in concepts-based content areas, specifically social studies, ensuring that educators are equipped with the resources that both allow a level of comfort for teaching vocabulary and generate an interest in modifying current concepts-based curricula.

Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of daily classroom instruction dedicated to vocabulary instruction in secondary level concepts-based classrooms, which has a negative impact on student academic achievement. Wiley (2014) affirmed researchers agree that deficits in vocabulary serve as a significant factor contributing to the achievement gap. Many educators were misled to believe that vocabulary portrays an insignificant part in student academic success. Sparks (2013) advocated that vocabulary was an integral literacy skill that researchers and educators agreed was critical to student academic success. Vocabulary continues to serve as the groundwork upon which all new learning occurs (Feldman, Kinsella, & Stump, 2002) and plays an integral role in

all content areas, specifically in the concepts-based content areas. Kosanovich, Reed and Miller (2010) noted, “Content-area teachers who use instructional routines that support students’ understanding of content-area vocabulary, concepts, and facts will greatly improve students’ ability to independently comprehend the reading material” (p.12). This study identified the instructional strategies and described the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of eight middle school teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction.

McCarten (2007) noted the ability to define newly introduced vocabulary words led to increased and enhanced comprehension and allowed for relationships to be formed between the words and the content. Cunningham and Stanovich (2001) linked the disparity between developing the varied skills of children and their reading proficiencies to future cognitive development and reading. Cunningham and Stanovich observed, “As skill develops and word recognition becomes less resource demanding and more automatic, more general language skills, such as vocabulary, background knowledge, familiarity with complex syntactic structures, etc., become the limiting factor on reading ability” (pp. 137-138).

This study examined the effect of vocabulary development serving as an essential segment of reading comprehension and the learning process of students at the middle school level. Stahl and Bravo (2010) asserted, “Vocabulary instruction plays an essential role during both literacy and disciplinary area instruction” (p.566). An enhanced vocabulary program increased the students’ ability to read across the curriculum. This was confirmed by Weiser (2013), who asserted that “Vocabulary development focuses on helping students learn the meaning of new words and concepts in various contexts and across all academic content areas” (p. 1). Jadallah (2000) emphasized, “Learning building upon students’ prior knowledge” and

furthered that, “Learning is constructing meaning from experience” (p. 221). Weiser found that familiarity with vocabulary assisted with actuating and the building of background knowledge and enabled students to make connections to text, thus increasing reading fluency, comprehension and vocabulary knowledge across all content areas.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences and identify the strategies of eight social studies teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). The perceptions of the teachers served as the focus of this study. In addition to the perceptions, the research questions guiding this study explored the instructional practices utilized, the effectiveness of professional development, and the comfort levels with both. Six of the teachers participating in this study attended and the Dan Mulligan professional development workshop on vocabulary-centered instructional strategies (Flexible Creativity, 2013), and two of the participants did not attend the workshop. Participant perceptions regarding vocabulary instruction were evaluated through the use of interviews, classroom observations, and the collection of artifacts of regularly used instructional materials.

This research study demonstrated the importance of vocabulary instruction for middle school students. This study offered various researched-based instructional strategies that may be incorporated into concepts-based content areas. The goal of this study was to extend the existing body of knowledge by placing emphasis on the importance of vocabulary-centered instruction at the secondary level. This research sought to provide insight into the impact of student academic achievement specifically in concepts-based content areas, particularly social studies. The problem of the study examined the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers as related

to vocabulary instruction and improving their students' academic performance. The research centered on teachers incorporating these learned strategies into daily classroom instruction. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences of eight teachers that were utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. The significance of the study was based on the impact on the academic achievement of middle school social studies students through employing vocabulary instructional strategies in a content area versus traditional instructional methods used at the middle school level. The research sought to identify those instructional strategies and methods best utilized in the classroom based upon those presented in a vocabulary workshop. The three research questions that guided this research aimed to determine the impact of vocabulary-based instructional activities, the building of background knowledge through vocabulary instruction and the effect of strategy-focused instruction on the vocabulary development of middle school students.

The sample consisted of eight middle school social studies teachers located in the suburb of a large city in the southeastern United States. Analysis of the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of vocabulary-centered instructional strategies by responses received from open-ended questions, teacher interview questions, teacher and student artifacts, and classroom observations. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Piaget's (1972) Constructivist and Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist theories. Vygotsky developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky also stated that social interaction served an integral role in cognitive

development. This theory suggested it becomes easier for students to learn new terms proficiently as students become more familiar with vocabulary terms. The results of Vygotsky's work provided a foundation that aided in developing best practices for teaching vocabulary within a concepts-based content area.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study centered on the academic achievement of middle school social studies students regarding the development of their vocabulary. Paynter et al. (2006) supported the findings of Anderson and Nagy (1992) in that, "One of the most consistent findings of the educational research is that having a small vocabulary portends poor school performance and conversely, that having a large vocabulary is associated with school success" (p.7). The study focused on the impact of teaching research-based vocabulary strategies in a content area versus the use of traditional instructional methods. The study sought to determine those instructional strategies and methods best utilized in the classroom to increase vocabulary understanding.

There are various types of vocabulary as related to education. Merriam-Webster (2016) defined vocabulary as "a list or collection of words or of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined." A second definition offered by Merriam-Webster described vocabulary as "the words that make up a language." The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, authors of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2010), defined academic vocabulary as "words that appear in a variety of content areas." Bauman and Graves (2010) determined there are several variations of academic vocabulary. Some of the varied uses Bauman and Graves (2010) discussed included "general academic vocabulary, academic literacy, academic background,

general academic words, domain knowledge, academic competence, linguistic knowledge, domain-specific vocabulary, content vocabulary, academic language, and academic language skills (p. 4). The definition that Bauman and Graves derived was that general academic vocabulary encompassed the “words that appear in texts across several disciplines or academic domains” (p. 6).

Baker et al. (2014), in conjunction with the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, and the U.S. Department of Education identified academic vocabulary as those words that are specific to the academic disciplines: history, geography, literary analysis, science, and mathematics. This report furthered that “These words are much more frequently used in discussions, essays, and articles in these disciplines than in informal conversations and social settings” (p. 14). Baker et al. also asserted that the meaning of a word may change slightly when used in context. Additionally, Baker et al. noted there are content specific academic vocabulary terms that are unique to particular academic disciplines. Larson and Dixon (2013) agreed that, “In order to make sense of increasingly dense academic texts, middle-level students must possess strategies to understand and use words, which will, with other types of text-based support, increase comprehension” (p. 17). Based on the aforementioned contributors, Larson and Dixon noted there has been a greater focus on academic vocabulary among practitioners and researchers.

Watanabe (2013) defined direct instruction as the “systematic instructional approach applicable with a wide range of learners while emphasizing the instructional design” (p. 150) and determined this method of instruction had become a collection of teacher practices associated with student academic achievement characteristic of effective classroom instruction. Archer and Hughes (2011) defined explicit instruction as a “structured, systematic, and effective

methodology for teaching academic skills” (p. 1). Reutzel and Cooter (2013) identified vocabulary instruction as “teaching word meanings and how one determines word meanings from an understanding of word parts or word clues when available” (p. 216). The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) noted, “Effective vocabulary instruction requires educators to intentionally provide many rich, robust opportunities for students to learn words, related concepts, and their meanings,” (p.7) and went on to state that effective vocabulary learning involved active student engagement extended beyond definitional knowledge. Marzano (2009) established effective vocabulary instruction was comprised of the following six components:

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.
3. Ask students to construct a picture, pictograph, or symbolic representation of the term.
4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their vocabulary notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
6. Involve students periodically in games that enable them to play with terms. (pp. 83-84)

Weiser (2013) further delineated vocabulary development referred to the process of acquiring new words for daily use and served as the basis for learning the language. Weiser added that vocabulary development concentrated on assisting students to attain the meaning of new terms and concepts in various cross-curricular contexts and providing explicit instruction related to significant words, developed vocabulary, and aided students in learning the meaning of words independently. Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, and Gress (2008) affirmed, “Teaching vocabulary in the content areas of mathematics, science, history, and English is not a separate entity from teaching the core understandings of each domain” (2008, p. 2). Schmitt & Schmitt

(2014) and Sedita (2005) noted on average most students learn between 2,000 and 3,600 words each year. It is estimated that these numbers, fluctuate from 1,500 to more than 8,000.

Vocabulary directly relates to reading comprehension and is essential to the learning process, thus building background knowledge according to Feldman and Kinsella (2005) who surmised, “A clear consensus among literacy researchers that accelerating vocabulary growth is a vital and often neglected component of a comprehensive reading program”(p.1). Harmon et al., (2008) further declared that as individuals we learn words incrementally by adopting greater understanding with each subsequent encounter with each word. With this knowledge word meanings become deeper and more refined with exposure to words several times in varying contexts and with additional writing, reading, listening and speaking opportunities. Harmon et al., referenced Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown (1982), by quoting, “Our knowledge of specific words at any time can shift on a continuum ranging from no knowledge to thorough understanding” (p.2).

Direct vocabulary instruction was shown to have a positive impact on students for improving reading comprehension, building background knowledge, and increasing academic achievement. According to Fixen (2012), in a report published by the National Institute for Literacy, direct instruction “allows educators to build upon students’ prior knowledge and introduce new information contextually” (p.32). Wilson (2006) referenced M. Graves’ book on vocabulary instruction and learning, where Wilson discussed the goal of “empower[ing] educators to develop vocabulary instruction that is principled, efficient and effective” (p.18).

This study may be significant to all Georgia school districts and schools nationwide. This study discussed research that targeted the significance of vocabulary instruction at the elementary level and for English Language Learners (ELL), and made the application to middle

and high school students. Researching the effects of student vocabulary instruction and the impact the instruction had on student performance provided insight into the significance of students attaining a good vocabulary. Incorporating direct vocabulary instruction into each content area and at each grade level may promote continued academic achievement in conjunction with the implementation of the nationwide Common Core Curriculum initiative. The study is significant to student achievement in concepts-based content areas. Findings from this study may assist school districts in identifying and utilizing research-based vocabulary instructional techniques in an effort to achieve the NCLB goals for students. Using knowledge from this study, educators may bridge the gap between those students with poor word vocabulary knowledge and those students with what Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) described as robust word knowledge. Larson and Dixon (2013) furthered that it was important for educators to create a learning environment where students value vocabulary.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study focused on middle school social studies teachers' experiences and perceptions of vocabulary instruction. The initial question addressed the instructional experiences that enhance content vocabulary as described by the teachers who had attended professional training. Sweeney and Mason (2011) affirmed that teachers should be provided with professional development that informs educators of effective research-based alternatives to teaching vocabulary. Past instructional strategies have solely encompassed the teaching of words unfamiliar to students (Weiser, 2013). Sweeney and Mason (2011) affirmed that teachers should be equipped and become knowledgeable of techniques that ensure that learning new words is a meaningful experience for students.

The second research question sought to understand the perceptions of participants and the

value placed on teaching social studies vocabulary. According to Kucan (2007), the NRP tasked educational researchers to create alternative approaches that supported vocabulary development. Although the literature indicated this should be addressed, the majority of the research focused on elementary age students. Additionally, Kucan found that secondary level teachers who instructed students in the content areas of science, history and mathematics did not use scaffolding of vocabulary development as a means to broaden student academic achievement.

The final research question obtained the beliefs participants described related to vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes. Many teachers understand the significance of vocabulary instruction to the academic success of students, and although teachers may be familiar with effective vocabulary-centered instructional strategies, teachers' daily instruction may not reflect that knowledge (Hedrick, Harmon, & Linerode, 2004). Moreover, Glende (2013) adamantly stated the responsibility of every teacher was to enhance and develop the vocabulary knowledge of students in the primary content areas and from a cross-curricular approach. Hence, the participants in this study were asked to describe classroom vocabulary instructional practices after attending a professional development workshop. This information resulted in the study's analysis of the perceptions of eight middle school teachers at Cornerstone Middle School (CMS) regarding the value of vocabulary training in relation to improving student learning.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the instructional experiences that teachers describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students?

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?

Research Question 3: How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?

Research Plan

CMS, a middle school located in northern Georgia, served as the site where the research was conducted. The research plan that governed the study was qualitative in nature and employed a phenomenological design. Moustakas (1994) developed the phenomenological research design and believed that this type of research encompassed the total experience and explored the core of those experiences being examined. The study considered the perceptions of teachers and the effectiveness of vocabulary instructional activities for middle school social studies students. According to Creswell (2013), “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). Phenomenological research seeks to embody the essence of shared experiences of participants. Data collection consisted of teacher interviews, open-ended questions, teacher and student artifacts, and classroom observations in an effort to gather specific information regarding the effectiveness of the vocabulary instructional strategies used. Data collection involving phenomenological research generally consists of interviewing individuals, observations, artifact collection, and teacher work samples (Creswell, 2013).

A purposeful, conveniently available sample of eight social studies teachers, grades six through eight, was chosen from the entire staff who attended Dan Mulligan professional learning workshops, served as the participants of the study. Creswell (2013) stated, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.37). A qualitative, phenomenological research design was selected to obtain an

understanding of the perceptions of teachers' use of vocabulary instructional strategies. Creswell noted that in-person, semi-structured interviews lasting less than one hour are most effective, and these were conducted with the middle school social studies teachers at Cornerstone Middle School.

All other research approaches were excluded and deemed inapplicable as this study purported to understand the phenomena of the perceptions and beliefs of the eight teachers' lived experiences with vocabulary instructional strategies used in their classrooms. Although similar in nature, a phenomenological approach was chosen as opposed to a Grounded Theory approach, since according to Creswell (2013) the sample size did not meet the minimum of 20 participants for a Grounded Theory approach. This research only utilized eight participants. The Ethnography and Case Study approaches were excluded, as established by Creswell the study did not focus on a cultural group or require access from a gatekeeper, or one serving as a representative sample. This study sought to explore the experiences of middle school teachers of varied cultures. The Narrative approach (Creswell, 2013) was not selected, as the study was inclusive of more than one participant. This research study included the perceptions of eight middle school teachers, as opposed to the view of only one participant.

Data collection for the study consisted of interviews, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts. Attaining these items aided in understanding the perceptions of teachers and in identifying the classroom instructional strategies used. The data were collected over a period of four weeks. Analysis of the teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of vocabulary-centered instructional strategies was conducted by responses received from the in-person, semi-structured teacher interviews and one 30-minute classroom observation per class. Teacher work samples were also collected, which consisted of lesson plans, PowerPoint and Prezi

presentations, rubrics, and examples of assignments and student work samples. All documentation and materials were locked and secured during the study and destroyed following the completion of the study. All conversations during each teacher interview were transcribed. All files were password protected and the names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Data gleaned from the aforementioned sources were reviewed for trends and inconsistencies. Information obtained was utilized to formulate the conclusions of the study.

Qualitative research aligned with the constructivist paradigm in that the researcher relied on the “participant’s views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p.8). The intention of this study sought to create a theory or pattern of meanings by relying on the collection of qualitative data and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2013). The data obtained from the audio-taped interviews, classroom observations, and the collection of teacher and student artifacts were triangulated in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the participants. The data were collected at varied times throughout the study and triangulated to identify the consistency of the study findings. Memoing and coding were utilized to determine the essence of the participants’ experiences. Common themes were categorized from the vocabulary instructional experiences of the middle school social studies classroom teachers. The data were compiled and overarching themes from the participants’ perspectives were identified.

Delimitations and Limitations

The selected school for this study had shown academic improvement. School continued improvement was shown across each academic content area and continued to increase its academic gains in the area of social studies. Delimitations of this study included that only the middle school teachers from this school who attended the vocabulary-centered instructional

workshops presented by Dr. Dan Mulligan were included, as well as two other middle school social studies teachers who had not attended the workshops.

Limitations of the study centered on the lack of control over the length of teaching experience of the participants in this study, the demographic data, and the prior perceptions held by the participants relating to vocabulary instruction. Other limitations included the sample size and the geographical location of the study. These factors were considered limiting, as the research was conducted at one location and only included the perceptions and beliefs of middle school social studies teachers.

Definitions

1. *Academic Vocabulary* - Academic vocabulary comprises the word knowledge necessary for students to engage with, produce and discuss texts utilized in schools (Flynt & Brozo, 2008).
2. *Academic Knowledge Domain Vocabulary* - Words representing specific concepts and ideas located within core subject areas (i.e., mathematics, science, social studies, English/language arts. (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013).
3. *Economically Disadvantaged* - An economically disadvantaged student is a student who is eligible for free or reduced-priced meal programs. (The Governor's office on Student Achievement, 2015).
4. *Minority* -A minority is a person having familial origins in other than the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East and who has a Hispanic origin. (The Governor's office on Student Achievement, 2015).
5. *Students with Disabilities* - A student or youth from three through 21 years of age is considered to have a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) if the

student or youth meets one or more of the categories of eligibility consistent with State Board Rule 160-4-7-.02. Categories of eligibility include autism, deaf/blind, deaf/hard of hearing, emotional and behavioral disorder, mild intellectual disability, moderate intellectual disability, severe intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, significant developmental delay, specific learning disability, speech-language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. Such students are eligible to receive special education services. (The Governor's office on Student Achievement, 2015).

6. *Strategy Focused Instruction* - Strategy instruction is a student-centered approach to teaching (Luke, 2010).
7. *Background Knowledge* - Researchers and theorists refer to what a person already knows about a topic as "background knowledge" (Marzano, 2004, p.1).
8. *Vocabulary Knowledge* - Vocabulary knowledge incorporates recognizing words and word meanings. Vocabulary knowledge also encompasses pronunciation and understanding, including the appropriate and effective use of words to comprehension and communication. (Weiser, 2013).

Summary

Existing research has shown that vocabulary focused instructional practices and interventions were used as a predictor for improving academic achievement in social studies and reading. The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) identified five main components of reading and recognized vocabulary as a major component. The NRP (2000) established the significance of vocabulary to overall academic success and its importance to reading comprehension had been widely documented. The appropriate use of the instructional methods used by the participants

may increase the success of students in other concepts-based content areas such as mathematics and science, as well as reading comprehension across all courses for each of the content specific academic areas. This information may further determine the impact of vocabulary focused instructional practices and interventions and be used as a predictor in improving academic achievement, specifically in social studies and reading.

This qualitative study reviewed teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of vocabulary-centered instruction and specifically focused on the vocabulary-centered practices established by Marzano (2009) and the academic achievement of middle school social studies students. Dan Mulligan, owner of Flexible Creativity, Inc. (2015), has delivered instructional resource professional development of Marzano's (2009) vocabulary focus strategies to schools nationwide. Six of the eight participants from the school where the study was conducted attended Mulligan's professional development workshop. Limited research exists on vocabulary instruction in concepts-based content areas and beyond the elementary student level or for English Language Learners.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences and identify the strategies of eight teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). The study may initiate a dialogue about continued vocabulary instruction in concepts-based content areas at the secondary level. The research questions that guided this study focused on those instructional experiences the teachers described that enhanced the content vocabulary of their social studies students, the teachers' perceptions of the value of teaching vocabulary, and the teachers' descriptions of the vocabulary instructional practices they used in their classrooms. The limitations and delimitations were discussed and the definitions of the uncommon language used

throughout the study were presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Language and vocabulary are active agents and portray expansive roles in many facets of everyday life (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994). Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) found vocabulary directly relates to intelligence, an individual's ability to grasp new concepts, and an individual's earning potential. Vocabulary is a contributing factor in determining an individual's verbal intelligence (Reynolds & Turek, 2012). As it relates to education, language and vocabulary directly impacts academic success. Bowers and Kirby (2010) reiterated, "Vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in literacy development and therefore scholastic success" (p. 516). Academic achievement is due in part to the relationship between a student's vocabulary knowledge and school success, thus direct vocabulary instruction has reemerged as a teaching practice within the last decade (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). Familiarity with vocabulary enables individuals to acquire new information (Bromley, 2007). Marzano and Pickering (2005) state the more terms an individual knows concerning a certain topic, the easier it is for the individual to gain new information related to the topic.

Burns, Hodgson, Parker, and Kathryn (2011) gleaned from the Research and Development Corporation (RAND) that the reading comprehension skills of secondary students are at a record low. This low rating is particularly concerning due to the fact that at the middle and high school levels the academic focus of reading instruction centers on vocabulary and comprehension. Thompson (2003) devised a list of six factors that relates to the importance of vocabulary instruction. The first factor includes understanding the significance of vocabulary and how it directly relates to increasing academic achievement. Secondly, Thompson noted existing vocabulary is instrumental to the way in which individuals organize the

environment and the world that surrounds them. In addition, the labels or words that are applied to objects facilitate learning and also cultivate new perceptions. Finally, Thompson stressed that vocabulary instruction should be the central focus of all instruction and should be considered for all learners, specifically for students of lower socioeconomic status. Vocabulary instruction is essential when implemented appropriately as a tool to accelerate learning and according to Sweeny and Mason (2011), “Vocabulary instruction must be deliberate, include direct instruction, and involve small group intervention in order to adequately support and accelerate these students’ vocabulary development” (p. 1). Additionally, Wright and Neuman (2015) encouraged vocabulary be taught in context and be content specific.

In spite of the significance of vocabulary knowledge and the impact vocabulary has on content specific comprehension, there is limited research focusing on the impact of vocabulary instruction on actual student learning within the content areas. According to Hairrell, Rupley, and Simmons (2011), “The research base to confirm specific vocabulary instruction may be insufficient; the importance of vocabulary to comprehension and academic achievement has been well documented” (pp. 253-254). Hairrell (2008) emphasized, “As this evidence grows, it is important to understand how instructional practices are implemented, particularly in content-area classrooms where vocabulary is a critical bridge to comprehension” (p. 20). The National Educational Psychological Service (2012) asserted that limited research is being conducted that explores multiple strategy approaches for improving the skills of those readers who tend to struggle with the comprehension of social studies text at the secondary level. Even fewer studies target the multiple strategies approach for teaching vocabulary and comprehension in the social studies classroom have been conducted, as noted by the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (Butler, Urrutia, Buenger, & Hunt, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This phenomenological research study was representative of the theoretical ideologies of constructivist theorists and the associated philosophies related to learning. Constructivists' beliefs align with the idea that learning builds on experiences and knowledge that was previously obtained. The views of constructivists Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget are those upon which this study was predicated. Both theorists believed social interaction was instrumental to cognitive development and each identified the correlation between the development of language and thinking.

Constructivism

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural constructivist theory focused on how individuals acquired language skills, which contrasted with Piaget's (1972) cognitive constructivist theory that centered on cognitive development occurring before language attainment, as surmised by Blake and Pope (2008). Followers of Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory as related to learning believe that humans actively create individual knowledge. This frame of thought suggested that the meanings of words are created and built by learners creating relationships between actual words and knowledge previously acquired. Ültanir (2012) purported that Piaget also believed that comprehension improved as individuals created a personal understanding of that which they had read.

Vygotsky's beliefs (as cited in Miller, 2011) in regard to the acquisition of language directly conflicted with those of Piaget. Piaget believed that knowledge was constructed by children through an intricate process of assimilation, which caused the child to adapt to the mental stimulation, which in turn created the learning. Because of this assimilation process that Piaget described, vocabulary activities, including graphic organizers, pictures and other activities

assisted with furthering comprehension.

Singleton and Filice (2015) concurred with the significance of utilizing the aforementioned vocabulary instructional strategies with explicit instruction, and stated, “Graphic organizers are tools shown to enhance comprehension and may be used to help remediate reading difficulties associated with advanced comprehension tasks” (p. 110). Vygotsky’s (1978, 2011) social constructivism theory and Piaget’s cognitive constructivist theory directly align with Singleton and Filice’s research. These researchers believed that the student learns by being actively involved in the learning process rather than by solely observing what is being taught.

Assimilating prior knowledge. Both Piaget and Vygotsky were of the thought that students incorporated prior knowledge into the learning process and while actively engaged, broadened, and extended their knowledge base. Piaget disbelieved the notion that learning consisted of the integration and adoption of knowledge merely provided to children. Piaget was a proponent of learning serving as an active process inclusive of facets that learners actively create knowledge by constructing and assessing their individual theories of the world. This process progressed through a sequence of four stages in the cognitive development of a child. Vygotsky (2011) reiterated the influence of culture and language on cognitive development and how learners perceived the world based on communication and experiences that shaped reality. These theories served as the foundation for the explicit instruction used in the vocabulary instructional strategies in the current study.

Language and vocabulary both develop through social interactions, and according to Winner and Crooke (2014) vocabulary is predicated upon language, and considered a social concept. Vygotsky (1978) was a staunch believer that the intellectual development of a child was fundamentally essential to language development. Vygotsky, a prominent psychologist from the

former Soviet Union, was a theorist who believed language acquisition was a mutually dependent compilation of a child's exposure to words and the growth process encompassing the thought process and language. These concepts form the basis for his theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which affirmed that the teacher was responsible for considering the potential academic ability of the student prior to attempting to further develop the language of the student. Vygotsky (1978) was a theorist who believed that words should exemplify ideas and objects, reiterating that words were indicators. Daniels (2005) summarized Vygotsky's thoughts as follows, "Through social and language interactions, older members of a community teach younger and less experienced members the skills, values, and knowledge needed to be productive members of that community (p.248). Vygotsky (2011) theorized that educators should extend learning beyond introducing words as mere words, but engage students to see that words represent objects and ideas.

Social interaction. The theories related to learning formulated by Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) directly related to this study, as both recognized that social interaction is significant to the learning process. Piaget established the development of cognitive ability was influenced by learning from and the interaction with other individuals. Vygotsky concurred that social interaction was a contributory influential factor in development and greatly influenced language and the thought process. Both ideologies align with the focus of this study, as this study sought to identify those teaching strategies teachers used to deliver vocabulary-centered instruction. The study identified those strategies utilized by the teacher participants that involved facilitator led, student led and student facilitated group activities. In each instance, students demonstrated learning through social interaction. The students of the participants were provided with opportunities to increase their cognitive ability through the use of technology, interactive

games, songs, and the textbook, which all built upon their prior knowledge.

Historical Perspective

Social studies has served as a research point of interest for some time as it relates to the correlation and relevance to vocabulary and reading comprehension. Nielsen (2013) reiterated this thought with, “The larger the student’s reading vocabulary, the better his or her comprehension, and the more one comprehends, the more one can learn new words” (p. 1). This statement challenges educator thought regarding the insignificance of vocabulary instruction at the secondary level. Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011) stressed the importance of informing educators about effective practices and uniformly incorporating the regular use of these techniques beyond the elementary level and outside the English Language Learners (ELL) classroom. This process includes and offers consideration to the varied learning styles and academic abilities of the learners who comprise our classrooms.

The body of research available on English-only students has identified effective instructional vocabulary strategies such as providing definitional and contextual information about each word’s meaning and actively involving students in word learning through talking about, comparing, analyzing, and using targeted words (Vaughn et al., 2009). The purpose of the instructional activities used in this research was to increase the academic achievement of diverse learners and to create and increase positive attitudes towards learning for the students receiving instruction from the teachers in this study. The aim of the research was for educators to understand the significance of consistently utilizing vocabulary-specific instructional strategies. If these techniques were properly incorporated into academic lessons, the potential to expand the intellectual competence, capacity and cognitive ability of students could thereby increase academic achievement (Ramsden et al., 2013).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013) has been evaluating reading achievement since 1992. Since the inception of this report, the U. S. Department of Education (2012) has found that there was minimal academic growth in our nation's fourth and eighth grade students. As a result, Ford-Connors and Paratore (2014) found that research conducted in recent years has shown an increased focus on the literacy development of adolescent students, largely due to the aforementioned results of the U. S. Department of Education's findings. According to Ford-Connors and Paratore, the NAEP (2013) report referenced, "[Although] the percentage of eighth-grade students achieving reading proficiency has increased slightly (from 30% in 2011 to 32% in 2013), the overall result was the same: only one-third of those tested comprehend text proficiently" (p. 50). As of 2009, the NAEP (2013) has incorporated the measuring of "students' understanding of word meaning with the measurement of passage comprehension in the NAEP (2013) reading assessment" (p.1). The NAEP assessed the meanings of vocabulary terms in context as opposed to knowledge of individual words (Wilhelm, 2013).

Many states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as the standards that were designed to guide instruction and strengthen the rigors of reading in the classroom. The CCSS were created by the National Governors Associate Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. Larson and Dixon (2013) advocated that with the well-documented evidence in the literature, which states that with those students experiencing difficulty with academic vocabulary, the inception of the CCCS provided the capacity to broaden the literacy gap. Researchers have found a deficit in the level of academic vocabulary knowledge possessed by students, which presents academic challenges (Sprenger, 2013). In previous years, instruction centering on vocabulary was unintentional and unrelated, and was perpetuated by questions

posed by students and unplanned opportunities during instruction where teachers incidentally offered insight. As students encountered unfamiliar terms and concepts, they were directed by teachers to a dictionary or glossary or provided with a quick explanation by the teacher, offering limited exposure. This knowledge was reiterated by the participants' interview responses in regard to their past vocabulary instruction during their formative years. Reading comprehension is a crucial factor in understanding vocabulary, and therefore gaps in vocabulary knowledge have contributed to low reading achievement (Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Faller, 2010).

Understanding the diversity of learning crosses cultural backgrounds and ethnicities, as does distinct learning styles, cultural influences, environment, intellectual deficits and ability, inferred meanings of words and the level and shaping of background knowledge. All of these factors are significant contributors to academic achievement. Students should possess critical thinking skills and must maintain a specific level of background knowledge in order to aid in facilitating the learning process. Background knowledge was shaped by prior learning experiences, familial experiences and exposure to environmental factions (Marzano, 2004).

There have been several studies conducted that have demonstrated effective vocabulary instructional methods in the classroom. For example, the National Reading Panel published a review of existing research in 2000. Five areas focusing on reading instruction were identified in the review: fluency, alphabets (phonics); reading instruction and teacher education; reading instruction and computer technology; and comprehension (vocabulary instruction). Of these five categories, vocabulary was selected as the primary area of focus. Marzano (2012) stated, "The importance of vocabulary development and, consequently, vocabulary instruction was recognized long before the National Reading Panel report. Numerous studies have documented its critical role relative to learning in general, and reading in particular" (p. 31). In this synthesis

compiled by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000), literature was researched on text comprehension and vocabulary instructional studies from 1979 to 2000. The NRP extensively analyzed those studies specifically relating to vocabulary instruction. Forty-seven of these studies met the NRP's selective criteria. The studies were reviewed centering on vocabulary instruction, including frequent exposure, explicit classroom instruction, and language attainment strategies. Language arts and reading curricula typically emphasized vocabulary instruction and seldom allowed for little to no in depth vocabulary instruction beyond the definition of the terms. The majority of the existing research surrounding vocabulary instruction has been conducted at the elementary level or has centered on ELLs, and those studies have concentrated primarily on struggling readers and students with learning disabilities. The NRP (2000) study furthered that few studies have been conducted at the secondary level, even a smaller number at the middle school level and a couple international studies. In a synthesized review of research relating to vocabulary instruction, the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (Butler et al., 2010) identified 14 studies where elementary age students were the focus.

Additionally, there have been significant advances over the past three decades related to effective research-based vocabulary instructional strategies; however, there has not been a sufficient systematic transfer of the implementation of these methods into practice within classrooms, especially at the secondary level. Graham, Graham, and West (2015) agreed that it was necessary for teachers to obtain the knowledge about how to incorporate effective instructional strategies into their instruction to promote literacy development for their students. Graham et al. added, "Knowledge of successful instruction is important for classroom knowledge and application" (p. 148). Classroom teachers have been plagued with determining when to employ vocabulary instruction, at the beginning, end, or within the context of the lesson.

According to Bintz (2011), research has demonstrated that vocabulary instruction has been shown to be problematic for teachers. Berne and Blachowicz (2008) cited that as related to vocabulary instruction, teachers were not “confident about best practice in vocabulary instruction and at times don’t know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning” (p. 315). In conjunction with the Research Report published by the Educational Testing Service, authored by Trukan et al. (2012), instruction should be designed to be relevant and easily applicable to the content. It is also important to ensure that students can relate to the presented material through the instructional activities. This involves deciding which strategies to utilize, as well as employing age and ability appropriate techniques that proactively produce success in the learning process. Participating in pleasure reading is a factor in expanding vocabulary. Building word knowledge may be supported by independent reading in subjects related to the content of the academic discipline. Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, and Gress (2008) noted that students who lagged behind in reading achievement usually could be attributed to limited pleasure reading. As a result, these students attained and added fewer words to their existing vocabulary base and it was thus more difficult for them to handle simplified reading tasks related to content related subject areas.

Much of the vocabulary instruction presented in classrooms outside of language arts and reading has focused mainly on discussing vocabulary, as opposed to instruction and instructional activities directly centering on vocabulary. Flynt and Brozo (2008) found that a small percentage of academic instructional time was devoted to vocabulary development and that even less time was devoted to the development of vocabulary knowledge. An increasing number of evidence-based vocabulary focused strategies have been made available for use in each academic content area and grade level. A major concern of students at the secondary level within urban school

settings centers is reading comprehension. A limited vocabulary base and poor reading comprehension have served as challenges facing many students from lower socioeconomic statuses attending schools in metropolitan areas. In an article published by the ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), entitled *How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement*, “Children who grow up in low socioeconomic conditions typically have a smaller vocabulary than middle-class children do, which raises the risk of academic failure”(Jensen, 2013,p. 25).

Effectiveness of Structural Method of Teaching Vocabulary

The research contributions of McKeown, Beck, Omanson, and Perfetti (1983) and Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown (1982) conducted with fourth-grade students aided in establishing a fundamental understanding of the instructional circumstances that developed and increased student learning of vocabulary. According to Ford-Connors and Paratore (2014), although this research was performed with elementary age students, in-depth vocabulary learning was recognized when vocabulary-focused instruction was inclusive of (a) the definition and a complete understanding of the term and its application in varying contexts, (b) multiple exposures in various contexts, and (c) the verbalization and justification of the knowledge of the term.

Research related to vocabulary stated that possessing background knowledge in vocabulary directly related to reading comprehension. For example, Rupley, Nichols, Mraz, and Blair (2012) asserted, “The ultimate goal of teaching vocabulary is for the students to expand, refine, and add to their existing conceptual knowledge and enhance their comprehension and understanding of what they read” (p. 299). There have been several goals for vocabulary instruction. For example, vocabulary instruction should be designed in a manner such that

instruction familiarizes students with a vast range of vocabulary that increases their fundamental knowledge. Another goal was vocabulary instruction should result in adaptable and contextualized knowledge of those terms. This thought was confirmed by Coyne, Capozzoli-Oldham, Cuticelli, and Ware (2015), who directed, “Both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge are important” (p. 55).

Gillis (2015) established that some words have multiple meanings and can create difficulty for students. She furthered, “Knowing a word involves the degree to which a word is known, the dimensions of the word, and the interrelatedness of that knowledge (p. 281). There are no specific methodologies associated with determining which words should be learned and taught by grade level. Students should be taught those words that are important to know and those words that are essential to comprehension. Montgomery (2005) pointed out, “Vocabulary is often taught implicitly in the classroom as part of the content areas – not enough for some students” (p.2). Word choice has usually been determined by most teachers and students usually are not introduced to certain words until a specific grade level.

The background knowledge a student possesses can be improved with classroom instruction that includes pre-teaching vocabulary terms that are essential to the actual meaning of the words as they relate to the text. Rupley et al. (2012) found explicit vocabulary instruction was necessary given the direct correlation between vocabulary and comprehension. Instruction that centered on specific vocabulary words prior to reading aided the learning of words and reading comprehension (Khamesipour, 2015). Khamesipour (2015) also noted, “Explicit vocabulary instruction can increase students’ knowledge of words and help them to understand what they are hearing or reading” (p. 1620). Vocabulary instruction at the middle and high school levels incorporated the practice of pre-teaching vocabulary words less frequently than at

the elementary level. Burns et al. (2011) saw pre-teaching and previewing instructional strategies as imperative to student academic achievement and found that both processes consistently attributed to the increased comprehension skills of students.

Flynt and Brozo (2008) placed emphasis on academic vocabulary and stated, “Word knowledge that makes it possible for students to engage with, produce and talk about texts are valued in school” (p. 500). Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts-Taffe (2006) equally emphasized the significance of determining which words should be taught, and both researchers concluded that the words chosen should be those that enhance comprehension. Graves (2000) stressed the importance of vocabulary in the instructional process and stated that increased vocabulary improved instruction and increased academic achievement. Graves directed educators’ attention to negating focus on the significant impact of vocabulary-centered instruction. Educators recognized the considerable positive impact vocabulary instruction offered, but classroom practice failed to coincide with this ideology. Flynt and Brozo found the majority of classroom instruction merely included advising students of vocabulary, followed by the assigning of words.

Kelley et al. (2010) stressed the importance of academic vocabulary instruction for urban middle schools and stated, “To ensure that students enter high school able to comprehend sophisticated texts, academic vocabulary instruction should be incorporated into standard practice to improve language skills and consequently boost reading comprehension for struggling readers” (p. 5). They noted that although many students in their study possessed reading skills, they tended to read words without fully understanding what was read, thereby formulating fundamental gaps between reading and actual vocabulary knowledge. They stressed that vocabulary should be common and relevant to students in order for them to learn.

Blachowicz et al. (2006) summarized four factors related to vocabulary instruction:

1. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the most significant predictors of reading comprehension.
2. There is a gap in vocabulary knowledge between economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged children.
3. Vocabulary knowledge is a critical factor in school success of English Language Learners.
4. Vocabulary knowledge also differentially affects comprehension in school reading and learning depending on the nature of what is being read.(p.526)

Wilhelm (2013) noted a correlation between vocabulary, comprehension and the acquisition of new information and established that students who demonstrated high vocabulary knowledge tended to exhibit increased reading comprehension and vice versa. Students who struggled with reading comprehension were less likely to comprehend text and the associated vocabulary (Glende, 2013). Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) identified this connection and the link to the reading ability of students. Beck et al. (2013) stressed that educators should choose appropriate words for instruction and students should create the meanings of words as the words are learned, read, and comprehended through reading. Beck et al. (2013) also emphasized that selecting the most appropriate words was difficult for teachers, but this process should center on those words that are relevant to the content and applicable to what students find useful in daily life.

Teachers and Daily Instructional Methods

Direct Instruction

Traditional vocabulary instructional methods include utilizing a dictionary or glossary to

define words and memorize the terms without application of knowledge. Mixan (2014) noted that memorization alone was an ineffective method of learning, but rather repeated exposures to newly learned terms in context increased student comprehension and learning. McKeown and Beck (2004) were staunch believers that, “Direct instruction is an important component in students’ vocabulary development” (p. 13). Collins-Block and Mangieri (2006) concurred that, “Direct instruction has consistently been found to be an effective strategy for vocabulary learning” (p.17). According to Marzano (2004), student learning functions as a direct result of the effectiveness of the teacher. Marzano (2004) created three factors that may be attributed to teacher effectiveness: instructional strategies, classroom management, and classroom curriculum design (p.76). Thus, research supports the concept that direct instruction does play a significant role in vocabulary instruction.

Sweeney and Mason (2011) asserted, “Vocabulary instruction must be deliberate, include direct instruction, and, in some instances, involve small group intervention in order to adequately support and accelerate these students’ vocabulary development” (p. 1). Educational environments should offer a practical setting where teachers and students are productive in each format of language: written, oral and reading, especially in content specific areas (Blachowicz et al., 2006; Sweeney & Mason, 2011; Vitale & Romance, 2008; Wood, Harmon & Hedrick, 2008). There has been a great deal of emphasis placed on the utilization of direct vocabulary instruction. Johnson and Johnson (2012) asserted, “Direct instruction of word meanings, discussions about words and word parts, and encouragement of wide reading is the best way to help students develop vocabulary” (p.2). Graves (2000, 2011) acknowledged four essential components of comprehensive vocabulary instruction, including “rich and varied language experiences, direct teaching of individual words, independent word-learning strategies and fostering word

consciousness” (p.2). The National Reading Panel (2000) emphasized the significance of explicit instruction and identified the correlation between longstanding reading comprehension and increased word knowledge. Research over the last decade has shown that a relationship existed between vocabulary and the academic success of students.

According to a Research Synthesis from the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (Butler et al., 2010), vocabulary instructional strategies positively impacted vocabulary knowledge when embedded in newly learned content. The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed valuable vocabulary learning and direct learning approaches beneficial for classroom teachers. The NRP found three factors in common. First, students learned meanings of words indirectly from daily experiences and exposure to written and oral language, being read to and from reading. Second, vocabulary was learned through the explicit instruction of the meanings. “Explicit instruction helps students learn unfamiliar word meanings” (Taylor, Mraz, Nichols, Rickelman, & Wood, 2009, p. 109). Pre-teaching vocabulary associated with the text enhanced reading comprehension (Webb & Sasso, 2013). Third, teachers who created word consciousness comprised of classroom activities stimulated learning and encouraged interest in words. Marzano and Pickering (2005) emphasized the more terms an individual was familiar with related to a specific topic, the easier it was for that individual to expand upon that knowledge with new information related to the topic.

Kelley et al. (2010) stated that the English language was very complicated, with many words having varied meanings and noted, “Truly knowing all levels and meanings of a word is a complex process” (p. 6). Understanding the varied meanings of words may be achieved through direct and indirect experiences in learning. Direct learning encompassed tangible facets, such as field trips, simulated learning, and manipulatives. Indirect learning involved teacher modeling

and utilizing several other texts and resources to reinforce learning. Employing both direct and indirect instructional strategies and methodologies aided the learning process. Within the classroom, it was imperative that the teaching techniques used enhanced background knowledge through various instructional strategies (Eison, 2010).

Peterson (2011) stated that direct instruction was an effective method versus incidental learning and noted that direct instruction engaged students in the learning process and was advantageous for those students who may not have grasped the concepts as quickly. Additionally, Behol and Dad (2010) studied the impact of utilizing structured methods of vocabulary instruction and noted that in the mid-1970s instruction focused on grammar instead of vocabulary instruction. Graves et al. (2014) stressed direct instruction and multiple exposures to vocabulary may increase opportunities for students to build upon existing background knowledge, which may lead to increased academic achievement. Many students lack background knowledge as it related to content specific vocabulary. Far more students did not possess the background knowledge that leads to student understanding of newly introduced vocabulary and content. Sedita (2005) pointed out, “Vocabulary knowledge is important because it encompasses all the words we must know to access our background knowledge, express our ideas and communicate effectively, and learn about new concept” (p. 1). Background knowledge assisted in improving student understanding of new content and terms, and teachers need to be responsible for building and activating this knowledge, according to Fisher and Frey (2010).

Vocabulary for Content Areas

Vocabulary can vary by academic content area and provided students the essentials of the four main subject areas. Vocabulary terms related to concepts-based content areas such as the social sciences, sciences, and mathematics make up a large segment of many of the new concepts

that students learn. Simmons et al. (2010) found most students have only “just acquired that capability of learning-to-read, whereas the tasks required in content-area classes expect them to be proficient at reading-to-learn from the expository text, a skill not emphasized during early stages of reading development” (p.122). The skills associated with reading-to-learn and learning-to-read are required for many students in concepts-based content areas.

Rich vocabulary instruction offers a foundational basis for learning new concepts.

“Vocabulary might be considered the unsung hero of reading and reading instruction, not just because it has stepped into the national limelight as a component of literacy achievement but because it plays a significant role in reading and writing success” (Wilson, 2006, p.41). Wilson (2006) also asserted vocabulary instruction may be attributed to their cognition of words, comprehension, literacy, and verbal skills. Vocabulary instruction was emphasized in the elementary classroom and for ELL students, particularly within the reading or language arts content areas. Instructional activities and research centered on reading and comprehension. There are minimal resources that focus on developing vocabulary and instructional strategies for secondary students in a concepts-based content area.

Brozo and Flynt (2008) pointed out research suggested students enthusiastically engaged in learning if the content interested them. This in turn according to Brozo and Flynt may have led to students becoming better readers and better learners. With this in mind, the types of activities teachers utilized in the classroom may have helped determine the degree of learning. Each instructional strategy is significant to learning the vocabulary. Brozo and Flynt established six principles that motivated learning in the content-based classroom:

1. The student needs to believe that he can achieve the task before him (*elevating self-efficacy*).

2. Teachers are tasked with creating ingenious ways in which to generate interest in the content area (*engendering interest in new learning*).
3. Teachers need to create correlations of new content and make it applicable to the student (*connecting outside and inside school literacies*).
4. Teachers should ensure that additional relevant resources are available to the student (*making an abundance of interesting texts available*).
5. Choices for students increase as they mature, but classroom options are Limited (*expanding choices and options*).
6. This refers to those crucial social networks that sustain literacy and content learning of students (*structuring collaboration for motivation*). (pp. 172-173)

Each of these principles should be directly related to the new content, offer students various choices, and ensure collaboration between the student and the teacher to facilitate motivation in learning.

Exposure to Vocabulary

Exposure to vocabulary was essential to learning and expanding the language base. Humans are exposed to vocabulary by way of reading and conversation. “Reading and being read to increase vocabulary learning (Blewitt, Rump, Shealy, & Cook, 2009; Reutzel & Cooter, 2013). Additionally, children who were exposed to vocabulary through conversations learned words they needed to recognize and comprehend while reading (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013). Though reading served as a major contributor to expanding the vocabulary base, reading may not always aid in the comprehension process. The National Reading Panel compiled a synthesis of over 20,000 studies related to vocabulary research. The synthesis presented by the NRP suggested that vocabulary instruction must be direct, and age and skills commensurate in

order for students to demonstrate gains in comprehension.

Repeated and frequent exposure to new vocabulary remains essential to the learning process (Gillis, 2015; Marzano, 2009; McKeown, Crosson, Artz, Sandora, & Beck, 2013; Nagy & Scott, 2000). Smith (2008) believed “integration, meaningful use and repetition” (p. 207) were three elements significant to vocabulary instruction. Marzano (2009) offered several strategies integral to student learning. Marzano (2009) provided six practices that ensured vocabulary was learned and retained. He termed these the Six Steps to Better Vocabulary Instruction: (a) describing the newly introduced term, (b) allowing students to restate and describe the term in their own words, (c) having students create a pictorial summary of the word, (d) ensuring that students maintain words in a notebook, (e) allowing students to discuss these words with one another, and (f) engaging students in other activities that allow for manipulation of the terms.

Reutzel and Cooter (2013) addressed the four types of vocabulary: listening, reading, speaking and written. Fallahrafie, Rahmany, and Sadeghi (2015) further established that, “Learning vocabulary is an essential part of language learning linking the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing together” (p. 836). Listening vocabulary was the primary category that comprises those words that we hear and understand. Speaking vocabulary includes those words that are commonly spoken. Reading vocabulary are words easily identified and understood through reading. Finally, written vocabulary represents the smallest set of words, which are used in writing.

Beck et al. (2013) introduced a three-tiered system demonstrating the learning of vocabulary words. Tier 1, which was basic speaking vocabulary, encompassed approximately 8,000 words that did not require any form of instruction. Tier 2, elaborated speaking, and included terms that required explicit instruction, and was comprised of approximately 7,000

words. Tier 3 included academic domain knowledge, and was made up of terms that necessitated planned instruction, and included approximately 400 words per year. Academic domain knowledge terms were important to student learning and were essential in order for students to progress academically.

Much of the existing research and studies reviewed by the NRTAC (2010) recommended all students should be provided with rich vocabulary instruction that included repeated exposure to words, involved questioning techniques, and was interactive in nature. Students frequently exposed to target vocabulary terms while focusing on a specific assignment or task benefitted greatly (Rahimpour, 2013). Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) noted there were a minimal number of types of words that occurred frequently, but constituted the majority of words that students were required to learn. Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009) stated that the majority of all vocabulary was learned incidentally and certain vocabulary necessitated the use of explicit instruction. Research performed by Kelley et al. (2010) recommended that students should be provided with rich vocabulary instruction in an effort to increase background knowledge and to promote vocabulary development.

In their research, Fisher and Frey (2010) found that students did not understand as teachers began introducing new content, as the students had not established the vocabulary foundation upon which to build the learning of the new concepts. Larger class sizes made it even more difficult to take the time to account for academic deficits. Teachers often presumed that students possessed a rudimentary level of knowledge due in large part to initial class placement. Although provided with research findings, Flanigan and Greenwood (2007) noted that teachers often were not provided with the methods by which to employ effective instructional strategies. Considerations were made for words specific to content area, especially in social studies and the

sciences. As a result, Flanigan and Greenwood deemed that when teaching vocabulary related to a specific content area, allowances should be made for the level of the students, the nature of the selected words, the instructional purposes, and the methods utilized to teach the selected words.

Gillis (2015) noted teachers were often not familiar with the most effective instructional strategies and were less comfortable with implementing those strategies and incorporating them into their teaching pedagogy. Vocabulary instruction was a focus nearly a century, and Bukowiecki (2006) stated, “Despite the strong research base concerning the important place for vocabulary instruction in literacy teaching and learning, teachers, especially novice instructors, still wonder about optimal techniques for helping to increase students’ vocabulary knowledge” (p. 29). The NRP (2000) addressed this concern by referencing the increase in information published in recent years regarding the ideal methods, techniques and materials available for teaching vocabulary.

Vocabulary development and literacy were a significant part of the nationwide implementation of the Common Core standards. Research studies conducted by the NRP compiled in a synthesis centering on vocabulary instruction demonstrated that inadequate amounts of class time was devoted to vocabulary instruction. Insufficient instructional time centering on direct vocabulary inadequately prepared students for reading and, in turn, reading comprehension, according to Simmons et al. (2010). Less significance has been placed on pre-teaching vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction and related instructional techniques, coupled with frequent exposures to academic vocabulary each coincided with these new educational standards. Blamey and Beauchat (2011) acknowledged once educators were aware that vocabulary instructional strategies were properly delivered and applied in the context, students responded appropriately and positively to the learning process.

As a result, it becomes important for content area teachers to become aware of the need for the implementation of research-based vocabulary strategies in their classrooms and then to seek appropriate professional development opportunities to aid in the process (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute [NICHD], 2010). The NICHD (2010) furthered, similar terminology shared between each subject areas can eventually become a part of the student's everyday language. This lends to students creating connections between words with which students are already familiar, as well as new words with similar meanings.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (2000) conducted a comprehensive review of vocabulary instruction. The report recommended nine key considerations for teachers for effective vocabulary instruction, three of which include (a) stressing the use of direct and indirect instruction, (b) suggesting multiple exposures to vocabulary terms, and (c) considering the impact of vocabulary assessment on instruction. The gaps in the research that the NRP identified included the need to conduct additional research within the school setting. Research reviews and meta-analyses of vocabulary-centered instruction published between 1998 and 2009 primarily focused on diverse learners, restrictive populations, or specific topics, and none of the reviews centered on specific methodologies and instructional practices at the secondary level. Hairriell et al. (2011) evaluated vocabulary strategy effectiveness in the research from 1999 to 2007, which included 24 studies published in 18 journals. Hairriell et al. (2011) found there was a growing interest in vocabulary instruction and gaps in the research regarding best instructional practices still existed.

Strategies

A gap between theory and practice exists between what the research stipulated regarding the effective use of vocabulary instructional strategies and actual classroom use. Flanigan and

Greenwood (2007) wanted to ensure that teachers were aware that this represented a common concern: “General principles of vocabulary instruction, although helpful, are not sufficient to help content area teachers make the leap from theory to practice” (p. 227). Flanigan and Greenwood also suggested four generalizations that should be considered related to determining content specific academic vocabulary: the ability and skill set the student possesses, the composition of the word as the word is being used in context, the intended purpose of teaching the selected word, and the strategy that will be utilized during instruction of the lesson (pp. 230-231). Flanigan and Greenwood recommended that new vocabulary terms should be commonly introduced throughout the instructional process, during the time when students are learning the new concepts by way of discussion.

Archer and Hughes (2011) noted that students benefitted more from learning and were more inclined to retain what was taught through direct instruction. Harmon et al. (2008) referenced Beck et al. (1982) by quoting, “Our knowledge of specific words at any time can shift on a continuum ranging from no knowledge to thorough understanding” (p. 2). Beck et al. (1982) asserted that essentially, direct instruction represented an effective and a more efficient form of learning than incidental learning as related to the acquisition of vocabulary. Specific thought and consideration should be afforded to specific terms used. The vocabulary terms sought for instructional purposes should be content specific, relevant to the lesson, and the lesson should appeal to the interest of the student. Teachers were tasked with ensuring that the lesson relates to the concepts and further enhances the ability to develop a skill set for the student. Finally, lessons should align with the overarching goal of instruction, the curriculum, and the governing instructional standards. Instruction should allow students to be actively engaged in the learning process and enhance the student’s foundation of knowledge and allow students to exercise

cognitive ability. The learning process should include multiple exposures to the new vocabulary word, the teacher should share the relevance and purpose of the term, and adequate time should be allowed for the instructional process.

Flanigan and Greenwood (2007) devised an instructional process based on the vocabulary tier system created by Beck et al. (1982), which considered the most basic words. Flanigan and Greenwood noted that time is rarely dedicated to these basic words, noting which words were most frequently used for mature users of language and which words were less frequently used. The process created by Flanigan and Greenwood was designed to assist teachers with understanding where in the context of the lesson to most effectively introduce vocabulary terms considering the time allotted for the lesson, and the extent to which the concepts are learned. This process represented four levels that consider critical terms that should be introduced prior to instruction and are essential to understanding the reading of the text. The list included the “foot in the door” words that are necessary for comprehension, those words that teachers denote as beneficial vocabulary, and finally those words that are not relevant to the learning process and will not pertain to the goal of the lesson (p. 229). Feldman and Kinsella (2005) suggested, “Schools need to commit themselves to implementing rigorous and informed vocabulary and language development programs so that they can aggressively address the challenges inherent in narrowing the endemic language divide” (p. 10).

Literature emphasized the significance of vocabulary instruction and the direct relationship between reading and comprehension (Beck et al., 1982; Harmon et al, 2008; McCarten, 2007; Mixan, 2014; National Reading Panel, 2000). The problem was many educators were not aware of nor were familiar with the most applicable vocabulary terms to teach, nor the most effective strategies for teaching vocabulary (Marzano, 2012). The timing concerning when

to introduce the strategies during instruction, selecting the appropriate and applicable terms, and the amount of time to devote to these strategies often presented confusion for many teachers.

Harmon and Hedrick (2000) agreed with the significance of content specific Vocabulary and the relevance to student learning and confirmed, “Many content area words are labels for concepts that cannot be adequately portrayed in any one definition” (p. 156). Harmon and Hedrick designed a technique entitled Zooming In and Zooming Out. This concept was divided into two sections. The first of the two sections, zooming out, placed the concept in the larger realm thereby providing a panoramic assessment of the concept and defined how it related to other ideas. The second section, zooming in, closely examined the specific concept. Harmon and Hedrick suggested that this section, zooming in, could be used with the Frayer Model, a concept map graphic organizer created by Frayer, Frederick, and Klausmeier in 1969. The Frayer Model utilizes a concept word, the actual definition of the word, characteristics of the word, and examples and items that would not be considered the same as the word that was presented. The Frayer Model is divided into four components for recording information related to the concept and is a graphic organizer commonly used to develop vocabulary by expanding the word’s definition (Graves, 2006).

Discussions surrounding the discernment in selecting the pertinent vocabulary terms upon which to focus instruction were predominant within the existing research as well as in the school setting, and were a concern across each content area (Berg & Buckerfield, 2015). Bintz (2011) noted, “Recent research, however, indicates that vocabulary instruction may be problematic because many teachers are not confident about best practice in vocabulary instruction and at times do not know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning” (p. 44). Beck and McKeown (2007) found that the uncertainty of the focus of vocabulary instruction

stemmed from teachers receiving conflicting advice as to the vocabulary terms upon which to focus. David (2010) stressed that the focus should be placed on introducing the more difficult terms in order to create interest and encourage further advancement in achievement. David (2010) also noted that teacher uncertainty regarding when and how to implement vocabulary instruction also may have led to unstructured or disorganized lessons, and stressed that teachers needed to be equipped with effective vocabulary instructional strategies that aid in systemizing the learning process. As teachers became familiar with specific instructional strategies, this helped to organize instruction which in turn led to an increase in student achievement. Sedita (2005) cited, “Vocabulary instruction experts all recommend a multi-component approach to developing vocabulary knowledge” (p.3).

Graves (2011) encouraged the use of a program that included four key aspects that fostered the teaching of individual words and strategies for learning words, reading, and developing word consciousness. Grave’s model aligns with Stahl and Kapinus’s (1991) approach to vocabulary instruction, which was an interactive process comprised of varying strategies. Stahl and Kapinus’s approach involved understanding the definition and context of the word, actively involving students in the learning process, and exposing students to the word multiple times. Fisher and Frey (2011) stated, “Vocabulary instruction, therefore, must be intentional – that is explicit—in order for it to be effective” (p. 1). Sedita (2005) emphasized there was an enormous need for vocabulary instruction at each grade level by all teachers and stated, “Vocabulary knowledge is important because it encompasses all the words we must know to access our background knowledge, express our ideas and communicate effectively, and learn about new concepts” (p.33). The majority of the research reviewed at the time of this study focused on vocabulary instruction at the elementary level and for English Language Learners.

David (2010) pointed out, “The consensus of researchers and educators today is that such students need explicit vocabulary instruction” (p.85). Research conducted by Johnson and Johnson (2012) emphasized the prominence of direct vocabulary instruction and found, “Word knowledge in primary school can predict how well students will be able to comprehend texts they read in high school” (p. 1). An emphasis on vocabulary instruction remains significant beyond the elementary level and for students other than English Language Learners.

Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Instruction

The RAND Report (Snow, 2002) noted vocabulary knowledge directly impacted overall reading. This report defined reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 11). The NRP, the creators of the RAND Report, identified reading comprehension, as a multifaceted cognitive process that worked in conjunction with vocabulary development and instruction and understanding what was read. The RAND Report (Snow, 2002) pointed out that reading comprehension involved a purposeful interaction between reading and the text. The NRP noted the need for educators to provide students with the skills necessary to apply reading and comprehension strategies that are directly related to student academic achievement.

The RAND report (Snow, 2002) also established that the reader must possess varied skills and expansive cognitive abilities in an effort to be able to adequately comprehend. These cognitive capacities encompassed making references, paying attention, visualizing, and using memory and logic. The report also noted that the reader must hold an interest in the content. Simmons et al. (2010) stated, “Accruing evidence suggests that complex text comprehension requires strategy combinations” (p. 123). According to Brazo and Flynt (2008), students avoided reading texts and topics that had been interpreted as difficult, which prevented them from further

expanding integral background knowledge. Simmons et al. (2010) concurred with Brazo and Flynt by confirming, “It is generally agreed that when students have knowledge of vocabulary that occurs in expository text and the ability to derive word meanings independently, they are more likely to understand the content of what they are reading” (p. 126). Gill (2008) noted that the level of comprehension of the reader was impacted by the level of interest, background knowledge of the content, reading strategies, and the reader’s physical and emotional state. In addition to the vocabulary knowledge required for comprehension, possessing background knowledge, language and verbal skills, and utilizing an assortment of comprehension approaches were also necessary.

Comprehension represents another area affected by the elements presented in the text. This includes the prior knowledge of the reader, genre of the text, verbiage utilized, structure of the linguistics, and the dialogue utilized. Gill (2008) stated additional attributes such as the layout, organization, and style of the text in conjunction with the level of the vocabulary complexity and knowledge of the concepts also impacted the student’s ability to comprehend text. Gill (2008) went on to say that each of these components may serve as a factor that may impair the intended stage of comprehension, and the level of comprehension was hindered by readers with limited vocabularies, which impeded purposeful reading. In 2012, Rupley et al. established when the reader lacked knowledge of the intended meanings of words this limited his/her ability to make the necessary connections between accessing prior knowledge and creating rational inferences, which in turn limited the reader’s ability to create logical judgments in reading the text.

Social Studies and Vocabulary Instruction

There are several different instructional strategies that have been shown to be effective

for vocabulary instruction. Kiliçkaya and Krajka (2010) affirmed that teachers needed to be provided with resources that allowed for additional effectiveness and established, “Vocabulary teaching is generally restricted to presenting new items as they appear in any activity without preparing the learners through activation of prior knowledge or helping them regularly revise the previously learned vocabulary items until they are thoroughly learned” (p. 55).

Social studies impacts concepts taught across content areas. Alexander-Shea (2011) confirmed, “Social studies is distinctive as it is more closely tied to the learning cycle than any other field because the impact of culture, society, and the communication of ideas in various contexts is the very foundation of the discipline” (p. 95). According to the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEERA), Institute of Education Sciences, in a report written by Kamil et al. (2008), as students got older and reading skills were enhanced, oral vocabulary was not solely obtained from texts. Pubescent youth were expected to further develop knowledge by comprehending knowledge from various texts, thereby discovering and incorporating the use of new vocabulary and sharing new ideas with others.

Hedrick, Harmon, and Linerode (2004) affirmed that as students entered the secondary level of education, the intensity and level of vocabulary increased within the academic content areas. The increased intensity was due to the introduction of vocabulary at a much faster rate in conjunction with a myriad of ideas that were essential to conceptual learning across each of the academic disciplines. This conceptual learning that Hedrick et al. discussed was essential to exploring expository texts that encompass dense specialized terms. In concepts-based content areas such as social studies, students are expected and required to quickly grasp, comprehend and employ proper use of newly presented concepts and vocabulary terms. As a result, by incorporating explicit vocabulary instruction of the terms within the text demonstrated by

teachers in content-specific academic areas, student ability, comprehension, and academic achievement are likely to increase.

According to Burns et al. (2011), prior research had established that utilizing explicit instructional strategies improved the comprehension skills of students. As a result, Burns et al. determined it was imperative to intervene at the middle school level and offer explicit vocabulary instructional strategies. Comprehension strategies only served as one of many factors associated with literacy-related instructional practices, yet were essential to building skills of adolescent struggling readers. Burns et al. cited Torgensen (2002), a proponent of teachers providing reading support in specific content areas such as social studies, specifically for adolescents, and strongly suggested this support for struggling readers.

Marzano et al. (2001) identified teaching as a phenomenon that has become more of a science than an art. A meta-analysis conducted by Marzano et al. (2001) showed that the most effective instructional methods related to vocabulary instruction are those techniques that “have a high probability of enhancing student achievement in all subject areas at all grade levels” (p. 7). Several studies compiled in the National Reading and Technical Assistance Center (2010) research synthesis documented the relevance and significance of explicit vocabulary instruction in social studies classrooms. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified explicit vocabulary instruction as a very effective method of teaching. Khamesipour (2015) concurred, “To develop vocabulary intentionally, students should be explicitly taught both specific words and word learning strategies” (p. 1621).

Harmon et al. (2008) conducted a study focusing on the reading comprehension of fifth-grade students and the increased academic achievement of those students after being exposed to vocabulary instruction prior to the introduction of new social studies content. The study focused

on effective reading strategies and activities involving pre-reading and methodologies involving classification and contextual techniques. The findings of the Harmon et al. study were confirmed by Espin (2005), in that vocabulary was found to be an applicable measure and sizeable factor when considering student academic success in social studies.

Social studies represented a concept-based area of study inclusive of many historical facts, persons who have made significant contributions, dates, and content specific vocabulary. Stoddard (2009) upheld that social studies curriculum was designed to investigate significant issues, to explore core concepts, and to develop and attain key knowledge. Stoddard further maintained that students must be able to comprehend specific academic vocabulary, identify main ideas presented, have the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, bridge and draw correlations between newly introduced concepts and prior knowledge, and maintain the ability to effectively communicate and synthesize information obtained from a variety of texts in an effort to infer meaning and further develop comprehension, which is essential to foundational learning.

At the secondary level, social studies instruction requires students to use a high level of critical thinking skills. In 2001, Rosenbaum conducted a study that centered on student-led vocabulary academic instructional activities and found an increase in academic performance in concepts-based content related courses. Graves (2011) agreed with Blachowicz et al. (2006) and noted that teachers did not always allow sufficient instructional time during lesson delivery to provide the most effective techniques for vocabulary instruction. Espin (2005) noted that traditional instructional methods used in social studies classrooms have been lecture-led and teacher driven. According to Colombo and Fontaine (2009), social studies content offered “thought provoking and language rich content, which has the potential to enhance literacy” (p.46). Students must possess an understanding of the vocabulary in order to fully comprehend

the content. Vocabulary instruction may be a time-consuming feat, yet it was essential to building background knowledge and developing comprehension.

Social Studies Textbooks and Instruction

Utilizing the content-based textbook provides a foundation for social studies, which is a heavily text-based content area. Allington, McCuiston, and Billen (2014) attested that in the latter part of the 1960s, complexity of school textbooks began to increase, a process still in effect today. Pullen (2010) stated, “When the word is not in the learner’s oral vocabulary, it will not be understood when it occurs in print” (p. 110). Dexter and Hughes (2011) pointed out, “Many textbooks are written above grade level reading ability and lack organizational clarity” (p. 51). Alexander-Shea (2011) directed that, “Deficiencies in vocabulary instruction create the most critical obstacles to comprehension in the social studies” (p.95). Other resources are consulted and utilized for instructional purposes as well. The majority of the informational concepts presented in the social studies content area serve as a collection of facts, terms, and concepts primarily maintained in the textbook. Ford-Connors and Paratore (2014) asserted, “As students advance through the grades, the texts they are expected to read increase in both concept density and linguistic complexity” (p.51). Snow, Lawrence, and White (2009) pointed out that middle school students were expected to read subject specific textbooks that consisted of discipline specific, technically precise language. These words were generally not taught explicitly during classroom instruction in social studies classrooms.

Hairrell et al. (2011) expounded on several aspects when discussing the factors that may have contributed to the reading difficulties of students at the middle school level, stressing that one specific source of difficulty was the textbook. Hairrell et al. emphasized that the textbook presented inbuilt difficult abstract concepts, complicated text structures, complex and often alien

vocabulary, and words that contained multiple syllables. Hairrell et al. noted that all of these factors served as obstacles for student decoding, which led to the concern that student learning was impeded. Simmons et al. (2010) affirmed, “Many students have not received sufficient instruction to adequately prepare them for the tasks that reading expository text requires” (p. 122). Hairrell et al. confirmed this concept by stating, “When the complexity of the text outpaces students’ vocabulary knowledge, the ability to learn through reading and assimilate vocabulary into content knowledge is compromised” (p. 19). Harmon et al. (2008) disputed the ongoing use of textbooks as the primary source of instruction due to the level of difficulty students had with reading and understanding many of the concepts presented. Many students lacked the background knowledge and familiarity with many of the terms and concepts presented in the textbook. Harmon et al. also stipulated that textbooks generally only offered traditional methods of learning vocabulary.

Generally, textbooks contain more information than necessary for the intended learning. Additionally, teachers of content areas often do not possess the skills, resources, or time to teach reading, which further creates a gap in the learning process. Simmons et al. (2010) stated, “It is generally accepted that effective comprehension of expository text involves awareness and coordination of multiple teaching and learning strategies” (p. 122). Heafner (2004) found that many secondary level teachers read the text aloud to students and provided small condensed lessons or offered a summary of the text to students. Beck et al. (2013) supported reading aloud as a strategy that teachers should use in further developing vocabulary. Beck et al. (2013) noted that vocabulary contained within social studies textbooks were discipline specific and common to the content presented at the designated grade level yet students were generally not provided with direct instruction or an introduction to the vocabulary prior to the presentation and teaching

of the lesson.

Beck et al. (2013) noted that teachers generally introduced new vocabulary by either verbally defining the terms during instruction, or asking students to write the definitions of the terms using the textbook glossary or a dictionary. The method of defining terms using a dictionary followed by memorizing the word definitions only offered students a shallow and limited understanding of the intended terms, which were then quickly forgotten (Feldman & Kinsella, 2005; Greenwood, 2010; Wilfong, 2013). Seldom were activities designed specifically to focus on new concepts that reinforced understanding and relevance that served to maintain and commit terms to memory for future use. Alexander-Shea (2011) found that classroom activities related to vocabulary instruction were commonly inadequate and left students with superficial knowledge of words.

Although the teachers were aware of the importance of the students understanding the terms, the teachers often lacked the ability and knowledge to effectively offer explicit vocabulary instruction and effective accompanying activities. Alexander-Shea added that seldom was time taken by the teachers at the secondary level to identify the level of vocabulary students already possessed, or to gain an understanding of the words students may have already known. Many teachers were uncertain and unaware of how much time should be devoted to vocabulary instruction, which includes the teaching of concepts or selecting the vocabulary not specified in a pre-scripted lesson or in the textbook. Many teachers are unfamiliar with the myriad effective instructional strategies that are available. Hairrell et al. (2011) found that instruction devoted to vocabulary within the typical classroom setting showed most assignments consisted of practicing word definitions, utilizing a worksheet, or repeatedly writing words. None of these practices created any sort of connection to the meaning of the vocabulary term, nor did they allow for the

terms to be committed to memory or enable knowledge transfer.

Vocabulary Instruction and Technology

Graves (2000) summarized instructional strategies when learning new words and enhancing word knowledge. Graves identified modeling and thinking aloud, beginning with the most basic concepts, utilizing concrete cues, and incorporating the use of those verbal cues in an effort to facilitate learning, and beginning the assignment and completing part of the assignment for students. Marzano (2009) advocated instruction should actively involve students, and as a result created an overview of four factors that he viewed as essential to student-led instruction and in facilitating vocabulary instruction: (a) students should be exposed to the word multiple times in context to assist in the learning process, (b) instruction related to newly introduced terms in context enhances learning, (c) symbolic references are effective to word learning, and (d) direct vocabulary instruction positively impacts the academic achievement of students.

Incorporating technology into instruction has become commonplace and highly recommended in most school districts. Utilizing computers within instruction may be highly effective, and may encompass the Internet, education-based websites and teaching software to reinforce vocabulary instruction. Pritchard and O'Hara (2009), proponents of technology to support instruction, stated, "When developing their vocabulary, students benefit from environments that provide contextualized, authentic learning opportunities and engage them in tasks where they use words to communicate in meaningful ways (p.18). Blachowicz et al. (2006) noted that technology was beneficial for student learning but admonished, "Technology was more effective for learning when adult facilitation is provided" (p.533). Kayaoğlu, Dag Akbas, and Öztürk (2011) incorporated the use of animation with vocabulary instruction to increase the learning of content with a multi-sensory appeal that provided entertainment while learning was

taking place and allowed students to learn while experiencing knowledge. Kayaoğlu et al. also declared, “Multimedia provided the multiple modalities needed to meet the needs of students of different learning styles” (p. 27). There was a considerable need for student-led activities that required increased cognitive processing that reinforced learning in each of the content-based academic content areas.

Graphic Organizers

There are many ways to reinforce learning, including the use of graphic organizers. Graphic organizers provide a tool to link new material with prior knowledge and offer an aid to creating correlations and improving comprehension by offering a meaningful visual display of the relationships between facts and concepts. Graphic organizers are illustrative depictions of essential information and display how the information relates to specific concepts. Pictorial learning tools provided a visual illustration of one or more concepts as well as aid in the development of the proficiency of writing abilities and enhancement of reading comprehension. According to Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012) graphic organizers were initiated by R. Baron in 1969 and “the purpose of the organizer is to activate students’ prior knowledge and relate the new material to the previously stored information providing optimal anchorage and rendering the new material more familiar and meaningful” (p. 349). Serving as word categorization tools, graphic organizers arrange information, build upon the educational foundation, and also create a correlation between concepts or words. Graphic organizers can be completed individually or as a group and more than one format may be used for the same concept (Singleton & Felice, 2015). These concept maps may also be introduced at any point during instruction, from activating prior knowledge with an Anticipatory Guide, to comparing and contrasting ideas.

Three common types of graphic organizers that Ryder and Graves (1994) found to be

most useful for vocabulary instruction were *Frames*, *Concept Maps*, and the *List, Group, Label* activity. The Frame graphic organizer shows the information categorically displayed in the form of a chart comprised of columns and rows. This format was generally utilized when the relationship between the main concepts are examined. According to Ryder and Graves, once determining that a Frame organizer is to be utilized, the creation of the organizer begins by first locating the principle ideas of the text, then deciding the type of Frame organizer to be used (matrix, goal or problem-solution) and finally generating the Frame organizer and labeling the columns and rows.

Ryder and Graves (1994) described Concept Maps as pictorial summations of concepts and the connection between the concepts. These depictions define a relationship between concepts, which are normally ambiguous. The information contained within Concept Maps is generally displayed in a hierarchical format demonstrating the broadest information first, to the most specific information. When Concept Maps are utilized the most significant information should be selected, then that information should be organized and a correlation identified, and finally the Concept Map is created (Ryder & Graves, 1994).

The List, Group, Label graphic organizer requires students to rely upon “reflective learning where they construct conceptual arrangements from their prior knowledge” (Ryder & Graves, 1994, p.84). The use of this format places the onus on the student and requires the teacher to merely facilitate the activities. With the use of this activity, students of all learning styles and varying levels of knowledge of the concept are actively engaged in all facets of the exercise. The teacher presents a concept or word to the students and then allows students to provide responses and explain the relevance of the chosen word or information shared related to the topic. All information is displayed and demonstrated before the students on the board. This activity is

followed by students working in small groups to further discuss the relationship between the words or concepts. Finally, the students presented the basis and justification for their responses (Ryder & Graves, 1994).

Interactive Activities

Interactive activities are important portions of any lesson, because students take an active role in the learning process and demonstrated learning. Games are an effective way for the concepts to be creatively integrated and reinforced in a stimulating and motivating format. “Games can provide opportunities to review terms as well as interject an energizing break into the routine of the day” (Marzano & Pickering, 2005, p.53). These activities offer an alternative to direct instruction, while ensuring that the learning objectives still remain as the focus. Games may also be adapted to any lesson or student skill set.

According to Nosidlak (2013), students must be presented with new vocabulary multiple times. Games can modify the atmosphere and generally all students are willing to participate. Games should involve rules and students appreciate awards for doing well. In relation to social studies, games can include activities involving a map with specific names of physical features or places, a game similar to Tic-Tac-Toe and Bingo, but using the vocabulary words.

Another interactive vocabulary activity is a word wall. Yates, Cuthrell, and Rose (2011) defined word walls as “collections of developmentally appropriate vocabulary displayed somewhere in a classroom” (p. 31). These authors stated that word walls function as a resource of information in assisting students in making an effort to analyze unfamiliar words and correctly define and spell unfamiliar words. Blachowicz and Fisher (2004) presented compelling research evidence that specified, “Students benefit greatly from word-rich classrooms” (p.528). Blachowicz et al. (2006) found that when teachers allowed time for instruction to offer

discussion regarding new terms and concepts and included word games, puzzles, riddles, and word calendars, the learning process was enriched and enhanced and an enthusiastic learning environment was created.

The Role of Professional Development and Teachers

Teachers need to be aware and understand that vocabulary instruction encompasses more than teaching words. The process of vocabulary instruction also includes the selection of a specified group of purposeful words that are significant to the lesson (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Rosenshine (2012) pointed out that a disconnect between theory and practice occurs for teachers with incorporating research-based practices into daily instructional activities and lessons. The thought process can be corrected and alleviated through professional development that employs the use of effective vocabulary-centered instructional practices for the content-specific subject (Mizell, 2010). Hairrell et al. (2011) stressed, “The impact of these practices on student outcomes in vocabulary, comprehension, and content learning resulted in statistically significant differences in vocabulary learning and reading comprehension” (p. 24). Through these processes, educators learn proper techniques, word selection, and placement of the strategy within the lesson all in an effort to enhance student background knowledge and increase the vocabulary base of students.

According to Quattlebaum (2012), professional development is defined as “the development of a person in his or her professional role” (p. 2). Nine professional development standards for teachers were created and established by The National Staff Development Council (2007) and stated that professional development opportunities should consider: content knowledge, quality teaching, research-based strategies, collaboration, diverse learning needs, student learning environments, family involvement, evaluation, data-driven design, and teacher

learning (p. 103). Sweeney and Mason (2011) addressed the significance of the training of teachers in vocabulary instruction and noted, “Professional development that informs teachers about research-based alternatives to the traditional 20-word vocabulary test will help ensure that all teachers are equipped with the knowledge to make word-learning meaningful” (p. 2). Various techniques used by teachers were examined by Sweeney and Mason (2011), including types of graphic organizers, specific teaching techniques, and instructional games using the vocabulary terms.

Summary

This review of the literature examined the impact of vocabulary, vocabulary instruction, and activities that reinforce learning new words and concepts and their impact on comprehension. This research study was designed to identify the strategies and describe the experiences of eight teachers who were utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. Vocabulary has been a concept that has been researched for decades. A review of the existing literature demonstrated less research has been conducted specifically relating to vocabulary-centered instructional strategies at the secondary level. Ketabi and Shahraki (2011) contended over the last three decades the position on vocabulary has changed, as researchers directed more attention towards this area. Minimal studies have been conducted with teachers examining personal perceptions of vocabulary instruction and classroom instructional strategies at the secondary level. The fundamental research presented in this review of the literature on vocabulary instruction coupled with effective teaching practices demonstrated the limited research dedicated to this topic.

This research aligned with Piaget’s (1972) constructivist theory of learning and Vygotsky’s (1978) socio cultural theory of the role of language in cognitive development. Both

views relate to the thought process of how cognitive and mental conceptions influence and impact human development. Piaget was considered a primary theorist amongst cognitive constructivists and Vygotsky was a primary theorist representing social constructivists. Gredler (2012) made a distinction between the two: “Theories of cognitive development differ from theories of learning that primarily address the acquisition of particular skills or information” (p. 121).

The correlation between reading comprehension and vocabulary in social studies has been the interest of research in recent years. Antonacci and O’Callaghan (2012) established that the larger the child’s vocabulary in the primary grades, the greater his/her academic achievement in the upper grades. The majority of existing research has been devoted to English Language Learners and elementary students. In the research synthesis compiled by the NRTAC (2010), 14 studies were reviewed related to social studies instruction, each devoted to elementary age children. The scant research that has been conducted related to vocabulary instruction at the secondary level has demonstrated a disconnect between theory and practice (Bintz, 2011).

Effective classroom instruction centering on vocabulary instructional strategies may not adequately display teacher skill and knowledge. Teachers may possess a wealth of knowledge, but by not being aware of the most effective teaching practices, the methods of teaching vocabulary may be ineffective (Burns et al., 2011). Existing research has determined that classroom instruction centering on vocabulary should be planned and purposeful (Sweeney & Mason, 2011). Orawiwanakul (2011) agreed that listening, speaking, reading and writing are each an essential factor in learning vocabulary. The English language has varied meanings and is complex, and learning these diverse meanings was attained through both direct and indirect learning experiences (Kelley et al., 2010). The review of literature presented foundational

material established primarily by Beck et al. (2013). These authors created a 3-tier system of vocabulary word learning and their studies have been used over the past three decades. The review of literature also revealed the multitude of ineffective vocabulary instructional strategies used by educators. These strategies included using dictionaries to locate definitions and writing the terms multiple times in order to aid in memorization of the terms. Effective research-based instructional techniques that are available for use by educators were also presented.

Textbooks are heavily used in social studies and contain academic vocabulary that contains specific to the content. Alexander-Shea (2011) found that this creates problems for those students who are not familiar with the vocabulary. This concern established the need for effective vocabulary instruction to reinforce the academic success of students. Existing research called for the use of technology, graphic organizers, and additional resources to supplement the instructional process.

The perceptions held by middle school educators as they relate to identifying and describing vocabulary instructional strategies suggests a qualitative design that primarily remains unresearched. As described, the existing review of literature relating the teacher perceptions of vocabulary instruction remains scant. The absence of this literature indicates the necessity for additional research to be conducted in this area. This may be beneficial with the recent adoption of the Common Core Standards and their reliance on reading and focus on vocabulary instruction across content areas.

This chapter reviewed relevant literature. The next chapter will present this study's methodology. The research design, setting and participants will be explained in detail.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The scope of daily instructional techniques and views on the point when to introduce new information varies among classroom teachers. Astika (2015) stated, “One of the teachers’ concerns in teaching English vocabulary is how to teach it in a way that learners can understand and use the vocabulary appropriately” (p. 85). The various learning strategies of middle school teachers and their perceptions of vocabulary instruction are explored through a phenomenological approach in this research study. Phenomenology represents a qualitative research theoretical framework developed by Husserl in the early 20th century. According to Lester (1999), “The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation” (p. 1). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences and identify the strategies of eight middle school teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. The researcher used classroom observations, participant interviews, and the collection of artifacts to identify the perceptions of the eight teachers. This chapter reviews the chosen research design, presents the research questions guiding this study, and includes a discussion of the setting and the selection of the participants. The data collection and data analysis processes, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also presented. The chapter concludes with the summary of the research methodology.

Design

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was employed in order to identify and describe the experiences of eight middle school social studies teachers of a southeastern

suburban metropolitan school district in northern Georgia. Participants were interviewed and observed utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) cited qualitative research as “the qualitative, interpretive, or naturalistic research paradigm that defines the methods and techniques most suitable for collecting and analyzing data” (p. 2.).

According to Creswell (2013), “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). Phenomenological research seeks to embody the essence of shared experiences of participants. Phenomenological research aligns with the constructivist paradigm in that the researcher relies on the “participant’s views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p.8). The intent of this study was to create a theory or pattern of meanings by relying on the collection of qualitative data and analyzing the data; therefore, a phenomenological approach guided this study. Scientists conducting phenomenological research focus on the mutual phenomenal experiences of all participants. Creswell concurred with van Manen (1990) in defining the primary purpose of phenomenology as reducing “individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). Once the researcher collected, compiled and combined the data from the individuals with the shared experiences, a detailed account was created that described the phenomena of the shared experiences.

Phenomenology is a method commonly used in the health and social sciences and focuses on lived experiences. Phenomenology is based upon the written submissions of German mathematicians and philosophers Edmund, Husserl, and Alfred, abstract thinkers who emerged in the 20th century who furthered the ideas of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There are two methodologies associated with phenomenology:

hermeneutic and psychological phenomenology. Empirical or transcendental studies are also referred to as psychological phenomenology. Creswell (2013) defined hermeneutic phenomenology as “research oriented toward lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting the ‘texts’ of life (hermeneutics)” (p. 59). Hermeneutic phenomenology is grounded in six research actions, which include identifying the issue, determining a concept of interest, identifying pertinent themes that establish a lived experience, drafting the phenomenon, ensuring relevance to the topic, and maintaining the equilibrium of each part to the primary or main idea.

Psychological phenomenology is based on the ideology of Moustakas (1994), who furthered the processes of Husserl. Moustakas found that psychological phenomenology centers less on “the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 59). Moustakas adopted and incorporated Husserl’s model of the epoch (also referred to as bracketing), which required researchers to dismiss personal experiences and ideologies in order to apply a renewed viewpoint to the phenomenon being examined. As the research questions guiding this study centered on the thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of middle school teachers, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach guided this research in exploring the perceptions of the effective vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers sharing the lived experience of attending a professional development workshop for vocabulary-centered strategies.

The research plan that governed this qualitative study was phenomenological in nature and considered the perceptions of teachers and the effectiveness of the use of vocabulary centered on instructional activities with middle school social studies students. Teacher interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to gather specific information regarding their perceptions of vocabulary instruction. Interviews with teachers were audio recorded and

transcribed. According to Creswell (2013), triangulation corroborates evidence from more than one research source to validate data collection and increases confidence in the findings. Data obtained from the responses to each open-ended question posed to each participant during the interview process were recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The data was organized by question and interviewee responses. This process was followed in order to identify and classify consistencies and differences of responses. Recurring themes were easily visible and commonalities amongst responses were easily identifiable. The process of memoing was simplified from the information gathered. The information was categorized by way of the data being coded by overarching themes, followed by an interpretation of the data. Creswell identified this process as the researcher “providing an interpretation in light of their own view or views or perspectives in the literature” (p. 151). All data collected was kept confidential and secured at an offsite location.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the instructional experiences that teachers describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students?

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?

Research Question 3: How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?

Setting

The selected middle school has been in existence for 54 years and is located in the suburb of a large city in northern Georgia. Commencing with the 2015-2016 school year, the school was

relocated to a newly constructed building. Beginning in 2001, schools in Georgia were assessed using Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), this school has met AYP each year. The school, during the time of this study, participated in the International Baccalaureate Program and adhered to the curriculum constructs of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS, Georgia Department of Education, 2016) in conjunction with the newly implemented Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2015) for instruction. As of the 2014-2015 school year, there were 1,573 students enrolled in the school.

This school was selected as the setting for the study based on the fact that six years prior, and for each succeeding year, this school performed poorly on the state mandated assessments. The school began to make academic strides toward improvement and student achievement during the two years prior to the study. Significant gains in student academic achievement were made in the area of social studies at each grade level. The principal at the time of this study had been the administrator for the past six years. The school had six assistant administrators with varying levels and years of experience and who each focus on a different aspect of administration. The assistant principals govern the grade levels, discipline, Title I, curriculum, instructional support, testing and data, and the International Baccalaureate program. The school hosts instructional coaches, department Chairs, and grade level Chairs, with a total staff of 148. The sample participants were assigned a pseudonym and a four-digit numeric identifier in an effort to offer anonymity and to protect the identity of school personnel. The pseudonym used for the school was Cornerstone Middle School.

The population used for this study included a public secondary school located in a suburb of a metropolitan city in northern Georgia. The middle school is equivalent to the neighboring

middle school within the high school feeder cluster in terms of student population, location, gender, size, and ethnicity. According to the State of Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2013), the Student, and School Demographics Report Card website (2014) the ethnic demographic data for this school at the time of the study were as follows: 0.02% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 8% Asian, 24% African American, 0.03% Caucasian, 0.02% two or more races, and 62% Hispanic. Fourteen percent of the students were classified as Students with Disabilities (SWD), 22% were considered Limited English Proficient, and 93% of the students were considered to be economically disadvantaged. By gender, the school is comprised of 50% male and 50% female. At the time of the study, the student to teacher ratio was 28:1, and 90% of the student population received Free or Reduced Lunch.

This school system educates over 176,000 students and has 136 schools. Due to ongoing and continued growth, the school district opened a new school at an average of every two years. This school district served as the 14th largest school district in the United States and received numerous local, state, and national awards. This school district was regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), as well as the Georgia Accrediting Commission.

Participants

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated, "A participant is commonly used by qualitative researchers to describe the individuals being studied" (p. 162). Merriam and Tisdell furthered that participants are cautiously selected and willing contributors. The participants consisted of eight teachers employed at Cornerstone Middle School, six of whom had attended a six-hour Dan Mulligan professional development workshop and two participants who did not attend the workshop. The six participants were selected based on purposive sampling technique, non-

probabilistic sampling strategy, following a maximum variation sampling approach. The two participants who did not attend the workshop were randomly selected by the school's administrator.

The setting was intentionally chosen due to the continued upward climb to surpass academic standards for the school as set by the state. The school seeks to increase student academic achievement and performance in social studies across the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The strategy of purposeful sampling was utilized in selecting the sample, as six participants from this school attended a six-hour professional development workshop and were presented with strategies that may be utilized in the classroom as a way to achieve the goal as established by the school. The purpose was to utilize these six participants in the study who attended the professional development workshop to determine if the research-based strategies presented would then in turn make an impact on classroom instruction. Creswell (2013) defined the concept of purposeful sampling as "the means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p.125). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained purposeful sampling as "the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Purposeful sampling provided the insight necessitating the phenomena at the center of this study.

According to Creswell (2013), maximum variation was the most commonly used method in qualitative research, as this approach "maximizes the different perspectives at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives" (p. 126). The participants for the study were selected from the content area and by grade level according to the premise of this study. Pseudonyms were used in lieu of the actual

name of the school and replaced the actual names of the research participants. Cornerstone Middle School served as the pseudonym school and research setting. Initial contact was made and a meeting was established with the principal of Cornerstone Middle School, where the purpose and processes of the research were discussed, and permission was obtained to conduct the research (see Appendices A & B). The school principal was asked to randomly suggest and select two individuals from the staff of varying experience to participate in the research study and he agreed to do so. These two individuals had not attended the professional development workshop centering on vocabulary strategies. These two participants were chosen to ascertain their perceptions of vocabulary-centered instructional practices that had not been influenced by the information obtained during the professional development workshop.

Next, an email was sent to the participants in the entire social studies department of the school soliciting volunteers for the study (see Appendix C). Two participants who had attended the professional development workshop were selected from each grade level (i.e. sixth, seventh and eighth) and two participants were selected who did not attend the professional learning workshop were secured to participate in the study. Dr. Dan Mulligan is the owner of Flexible Creativity, a private consulting, instructional resource and assessment firm. Dr. Mulligan has worked with several educational consulting firms and has conducted and facilitated workshops nationwide, including those attended by six participants in this study. All eight participants were social studies teachers at Cornerstone Middle School.

Each participant was interviewed regarding personal experiences and attitudes relating to vocabulary-centered instruction. The interview consisted of 23 predesigned open-ended questions intended to ascertain demographic information and the perceptions of the participants regarding vocabulary instruction. Interviews were conducted at the school in a private

conference room located in the school's media center. A 30-minute observation was also conducted in each of the classrooms of the eight participants. Data collection consisted of the interviews, the classroom observations, and an examination of artifacts collected from each teacher.

Maximum variation was directly applicable to this study, as six of the participants had attended the professional development workshop and were each familiar with the instructional strategies presented. These participants regularly incorporated several of the research-based vocabulary-centered strategies presented at the workshop into daily instruction. These strategies included repeated use of the vocabulary terms, graphic organizers, and various other vocabulary-centered activities. The demographic data for each participant are presented in Table 1.

The six participants who willingly volunteered and attended the vocabulary professional development six-hour workshop were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Two participants, who did not attend the professional development workshop were randomly selected by the school's administrator and also participated in a face-to-face interview. The goal was to have two participants from each grade level, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. All eight participants were included and represented in the study sample. The initial segment of the interview sought to gather demographic information from the participants regarding their certification status, age range, level of education, grade level of instruction, and number of years as an educator. The last segment of the interviews sought to obtain the perceptions of vocabulary instruction and obtain information from the participants regarding their classroom instructional strategies. The participants were interviewed based upon teacher willingness to participate and number of years of teaching experience, and they received no compensation for participating in this study.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
Anna	53	Caucasian	Female
Thomas	36	African-American	Male
Alexander	35	African-American	Male
Susan	29	Caucasian	Female
James	43	Caucasian	Male
John	48	Caucasian	Male
Wendy	25	Caucasian	Female
Edna	55	Caucasian	Female

Procedures

A letter was sent to the principal of the school (see Appendix A) in an effort to obtain permission to utilize the school data and speak with the participants. Measures were used to ensure that the privacy of each teacher and the confidentiality of the school were protected. In addition, the participants were aware and assured of the availability of the researcher, should any participants or administrators have questions concerning the study. After feedback was received from the principal (see Appendix B), the application was submitted and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix D).

A listing of social studies teachers who had attended the Dan Mulligan professional learning workshop was obtained from the assistant principal who maintained attendance for professional learning workshops. In addition, the assistant principal provided a listing of names of the social studies teachers who had not attended the Dan Mulligan workshops. The school's

administrator randomly selected two of these teachers to participate in the study. These two participants were emailed a letter soliciting professional interest and willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix E). These two participants who had not attended the professional development workshop were solicited for professional perceptions regarding vocabulary instruction. These two participants represented the sixth and seventh grades. A letter was also emailed to each of the social studies teachers who attended the professional development workshop (see Appendix C). Of those teachers who responded with interest to participate in the research study, two participants from each grade level: sixth, seventh, and eighth, were randomly selected to participate for a total of six teachers.

An emailed letter was sent to each of the eight participants confirming personal willingness to participate in the research. An individual private meeting was arranged with each teacher to discuss personal willingness to participate, and a consent form was provided outlining the study procedures for review. The eight participants reviewed and signed the consent form, and submitted it to the researcher. The verbiage contained in the consent form for those six participants who had attended the professional development workshop (see Appendix F) varied from the consent form provided to the two participants selected by the school principal (see Appendix G) who had not attended the professional development workshop. The slight variance noted that these two participants had been selected by the school administrator. The purpose of the letter of informed consent was to ensure that all participants involved were thoroughly familiar with all relevant aspects of the study. Once the participants were selected, each participant was assigned a unique numeric identifier that would be used to replace actual names of participants. A secured list of participant numeric identifiers was maintained at an offsite location on a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet that was password protected on a computer that did

not have Internet access.

The face-to-face audio recorded teacher interviews were conducted in a private conference room in the media center located at the school. The audio-recordings were kept confidential and secured at an offsite location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Each interview was conducted within a 20 to 30 minute time span at a time that was convenient for the participant and the researcher.

Each participant was observed providing classroom instruction that demonstrated various vocabulary instructional strategies and techniques, within their respective classrooms over a 30-minute period. During the observations, the researcher remained a passive observer. An agreed upon time to visit the classroom of each participant was decided by the teacher and the researcher. All actions of the participants and the observations of the lesson delivery were documented on the Classroom Observation Form (see Appendix H). Lesson plans, assigned tasks, rubrics, examples of products that incorporated the use of technology, and completed student work samples were all collected as artifacts. These artifacts were used to reinforce the data collected from the classroom observations and participant interviews.

Once all data was collected, organized, and reviewed, it was analyzed and categorized. The triangulation of data consisting of the interviews, observations and collection of artifacts was maintained and recorded on a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet and included information for each participant by response. All data collected were maintained in a confidential, secure, and offsite location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

The Researcher's Role

There was no interaction, including discussions or any form of relationship with the participants outside of the times allotted for conducting the research. The researcher served only

as a human instrument to interview participants and collect data. At the time of this study, I served as a teacher at the site where the study was conducted. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the media center at the school where the participants were employed. Throughout the research, clear efforts to avoid any bias or hold any assumptions as related to any of the responses or the participants occurred and efforts to keep the researcher's personal thoughts, views, or ideas out of the study were practiced.

Data Collection

The sequencing for data collection began with teacher interviews, which were conducted first as a means of obtaining an initial understanding of the perceptions and the ideas the eight participants had regarding vocabulary instruction. During the classroom observations the subject matter content, including the type of instruction, the type of lesson, the classroom set-up, student-teacher interaction, teacher-led or student-led approach, personal and general observations, and classroom management were all noted. Finally, the collection of artifacts was used to reinforce the information acquired through the teacher interviewing process and classroom observations, and as samples of teaching activities and evidence of student work. Each of the three forms of data collected from the interviews, classroom observations and the artifacts of student and teacher work samples was triangulated to generate overarching themes.

Data collection consisted of audio recorded interviews with each teacher in the study. The interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. The predesigned interview questions were separated into three sections, which aligned with each of the three research questions. The order of the research questions was unbeknownst to the participant and followed smooth transitions from question to question. Each of the audio recorded interviews was transcribed word for word. None of the responses were modified in any form. Interviews and transcriptions included questions

posed by participants, pauses, chuckles and digression from the topic. The process of transcribing the interviews verbatim generated 54 pages of unedited, dictated documentation. After each of the interviews was transcribed, each account was read, and re-read, and coded by color in observance of common themes and similarities of teacher perceptions and instructional practices. Common themes of the participants were highlighted with the same colors and dissimilarities amongst the participants were highlighted with varying identifying colors. After the specific themes were determined, interviews were once again reviewed and coding of the interviews was completed to ensure the process.

Demographic data was gathered and asked of the participants in a series of open-ended questions (See Appendix I) regarding personal beliefs about the effectiveness of the use of research-based instructional strategies in the respective social studies classrooms. The instrumentation for this study included structured teacher interviews and classroom observations. The interviews were utilized to consider participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of instructional strategies on student academic achievement. The classroom observations were conducted with each of the eight participants demonstrating personal active teaching practices and vocabulary instructional strategies within the classroom. Teacher interviews, classroom observations, and a collection of artifacts were selected as means to obtain insight into the experiences and perceptions of the eight middle school social studies participants' use of vocabulary-centered instructional strategies.

Interviews

DeMarrais (2004) described the interview process as the manner in which the participant and the researcher participate in a conversation centering on questions directly related to the research study. Interviews are considered purposeful conversations, conversation with an

intended purpose, where the objective is to obtain specific information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The rationale for conducting interviews was that the responses obtained from the teacher interviews offered additional insight into teacher perceptions regarding effectiveness of instructional strategies.

The researcher met with each purposefully selected participant individually in a face-to-face interview conducted in a private conference room inside the school media center. Each teacher was provided with a consent form requiring a signature that acknowledged a willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix F). Each interview was audiotaped. As anticipated, it took 20 to 30 minutes to conduct each interview. Following introductions and an explanation of the purpose of the study, the participants were informed of the approximate time to complete the interview. The interviews began once the teacher was asked to respond verbally to the open-ended questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix I).

The participants were addressed with questions that had been prepared prior to the study, transcribed on a written and typed interview protocol (see Appendix I), with adequate space provided for the researcher to write responses and note informal responses. The questions asked directly correlated with the research questions guiding the study. The open-ended questions allowed participants opportunities to express and share personal satisfaction or disapproval of the instructional strategies addressed in the interview. Time was respected throughout the interview and the conversational exchange was polite, courteous and respectful. During the interview, the researcher remained an intent listener and offered limited clarifying questions to the participants. After the interviews were completed, the responses were reviewed and summarized, and then color coded for the overarching themes based upon commonalities among the responses of the participants.

The purpose of Questions 1 to 8 of the interview questions was to obtain information regarding the background of the teacher and ascertain how the participant had received vocabulary-related instruction in their past educational experience. These questions were asked in order to understand if the participants' past formal learning had influenced their current teaching practices. Questions 9 to 11 of the Interview Questions allowed for a full understanding to be gained of how the teacher currently delivered vocabulary instruction. Question 12 related to understanding what the participants believed to be the leading influences that attributed to improving the content vocabulary of students. The interview questions probed participants for an interpretive definition of vocabulary, content-specific vocabulary, and effective vocabulary instruction. Marzano, Kendall, and Paynter (2005) noted that the understanding and knowledge of significant vocabulary terms are crucial to learning in all content areas. The intent of Question 12 was to gain an understanding of the views of the participants related to the significance of vocabulary instruction in the social studies classrooms. Vocabulary plays an integral role in the academic success of all students (Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, & Gress, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Questions 13 to 16 of the interview requested that participants share beliefs about the importance and effectiveness of instructional practices. Improving and increasing experience in the role of the teacher leads to a systematic improvement in experience, professional growth and overall ability (Quattlebaum, 2012). Workshops and in-service meetings are integral to professional development (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). The questions presented in this section asked teachers about their comfort level with implementing and employing newly introduced vocabulary in their daily classroom instruction. The interview questions also addressed the teacher supports available to reinforce effective classroom instruction.

The final set of questions, items 17 to 20 (see Appendix I), specifically addressed the methods and techniques that the participants employed in teaching academic vocabulary. These questions also related to incorporating research-based vocabulary instructional strategies into daily instruction. The questions in this section emphasized the direct instruction, classroom activities, and student-centered activities used to teach vocabulary. Research has shown that students require multiple exposures to newly introduced vocabulary terms to reinforce learning (Graves, 2000; Marzano, 2009; NRP, 2000).

Observations

Classroom observations in qualitative theory allow for participants to be examined in their social setting. Creswell (2013) identified the participant observation process as the researcher being immersed in the daily activities of participants and having the opportunity to interview and observe them. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that observation involves the methodical documentation of behaviors, events and the collection of artifacts within the social setting selected for the study. The classroom observations afforded the opportunity to assess actual content area instruction. During the classroom observations, insight was presented into the strategies and techniques demonstrated by the social studies teachers. Information obtained was gathered for comparing the instruction delivery observed to the information shared and discussed during the interviews. The Observation Form (see Appendix H) was used to record the content area, grade level, essential question guiding the instruction for the day and the lesson objective. The following were observed and documented during each classroom observation: teaching methods, preparation and organization of the lesson, classroom design, teacher interaction with students, classroom management, general observations, personal observations and the overall impression of teaching effectiveness. The teacher pseudonym, date of the

observation, grade level, portion of the lesson being observed (i.e. beginning, middle or end of the lesson) and the beginning and ending times of the observation were also recorded.

During the time of the interviews, permission was sought from the participants for a scheduled classroom observation. The time of the classroom observation and the role of the researcher were decided prior to the visit. During the classroom observation, the teacher introduced the researcher and shared the purpose of the visit. On each occasion, the researcher sat as an inconspicuous observer in the back of the classroom, using the Observation Form for documentation purposes. During the classroom observation, the researcher served as a non-participant observer, documenting all observations on an observational protocol form to include descriptive and reflective observations (see Appendix H). The actions being observed, along with comments for each category, were also documented. The layout of the desks varied in each classroom. Desks were arranged in rectangular groups of four to six students, with rows in a U-shaped design. In each instance, the teacher was able to see students from any location within the classroom. Within each classroom setting the teacher was standing or walking around to each student during the facilitation of the lesson and interacted with each student a minimum of two times, verbally or nonverbally.

The participants were then observed demonstrating various instructional techniques within their respective classrooms over a period of approximately 30 minutes. The unifying characteristic in each classroom was observed noting that essential question and the lesson objective were written on each teacher's whiteboard. The teaching methods witnessed and instructional aids used were detailed on the observation form. Also noted were the textbooks, all materials used, the use of technology, games, graphic organizers and any other resources and strategies. The type of instruction observed was also recorded on the data collection form,

including if the instruction was independent, student or teacher-led, or if the students were engaged in a group activity. Evidence of a prepared and organized lesson plan, the classroom layout and design, classroom management strategies, and how the teacher interacted with the students were also documented. General comments and personal observations, which included the student levels of engagement throughout the lesson, and the researcher's overall impression of teacher effectiveness witnessed during the classroom observation was documented.

All observations were recorded chronologically, reflecting a summation of the classroom activities, as well as reflective observations detailing the processes, reflections observed, and summation of conclusions. All detailed accounts, observations, electronic communication, and information interactions with participants were maintained in a field notebook that served as field notes. Acknowledgment and verbal praise and feedback were consistent across the classrooms. There appeared to be few to no classroom management concerns witnessed during the classroom observations. General observations included from each classroom observation revealed the use of a variety of instructional techniques being utilized, with teacher facilitation of instruction and repeated exposures to vocabulary content in varying contexts of lesson delivery. At the conclusion of the 30 minutes allotted for the observation, the researcher quietly and unobtrusively exited the classroom.

The field notes included the setting, classroom set-up, number of students and student interactions, teacher interactions with students, explanations and transitions to activities, descriptions of the activities, student responses and participation in activities, including personal reactions from the observer and learning witnessed from the students. When the classroom observation came to an end, the teacher was thanked for allowing the visit and then left the classroom. During each observation, a comprehensive view of the classroom activities provided

an abundance of data. All recorded data were reviewed and coded by color, each color representing a common theme. Each color signified commonalities amongst teaching methods, lesson preparation and organization, classroom design, student and teacher interaction and classroom management.

Vocabulary instruction is important to social studies instruction (Larson et al, 2013). During classroom observations, students left the class with a tangible resource that could be used as a future means of studying. Two classes implemented a student notebook that maintained student work. At varied points throughout the lessons during each classroom visit, the participants revisited previously taught content. This instructional strategy occurred in context or was used as an activating strategy for new content to be introduced. Multimedia presentations were projected onto a whiteboard or screen for lessons presented.

Artifacts

The collection of artifacts in qualitative research is instrumental in offering insight in phenomenological research. Silverman (2001) concurred that when examining a social setting, phenomenon or a culture, analyzing and gathering artifacts used and created by participants can foster understanding. Artifacts collected for this study consisted of the collection of lesson plans from the participants, sample assignments from the students, and instructional aids used by students and teachers. Lesson plans, student work samples, note-taking guides, graphic organizers, rubrics, and other worksheets and activities the students were working on during the observation were also gathered. These documents were collected during the observation to identify alignment of instructional strategies with lesson delivery and interviews, indicate instructional purpose, and further develop the perceptions of the participants. The type of lesson, lesson materials, use of technology, activities, length of time spent in the activity, and the teacher

interaction with the students each aided in the founding of the participants' beliefs related to the significance of vocabulary instruction.

Articles obtained varied by classroom, grade level, activity, content, and instructional focus. Each artifact was sorted and coded according to the type of instruction (independent, student-led, teacher-led or group activity), and level of difficulty. The articles collected for each participant were filed by participant pseudonym and stored in a locked cabinet. A spreadsheet was created and maintained by the type of lesson, the strategies used, and the resources included in the lesson. All recorded data were reviewed and coded by color, each color representing common themes. The data maintained on the spreadsheet were sorted, color coded, and used to develop a comparison of activities used during instruction. Teacher-led lectures were coded with one color, lessons involving a written activity were emphasized with an alternate color, activities involving technology used another color, and student-led and group activities were highlighted with a different color. Lessons involving the use of the textbook were left unshaded. The spreadsheet was password protected on a computer that did not have Internet access. All collected data were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

The items were collected to determine if the instructional strategies aligned with the lesson delivery. Information obtained included the type of lesson, supplemental materials, technological aids, and resources supporting activities. The interviews with and classroom observations of participants, along with teacher and student artifacts were all maintained and categorized according to each participant. These data included audio-taped interview responses, the record of classroom observations, and teacher and student artifacts that included lesson plans, assignments, and student work samples. All documentation and materials were maintained, locked, and secured at an offsite location and destroyed following the completion of the study.

Participants' identities were replaced with a numeric identifier to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested that qualitative research involves the ability “to understand the meaning attributed to individuals’ experiences” (p. 3). Qualitative research focuses on processes, as opposed to the context of the outcome of specified variables. Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research offers methods for investigation, exploration, and understanding of individuals or a group that belong to a social or human enigma. Morse and Field (1992) determined that in qualitative research the objective of the researcher to observe participants while in the respective environment and/or to attend to the voice of the participants of a study. Creswell described that the purpose of qualitative studies was to describe a phenomenon from the participant’s point of view through interviews, a collection of teacher work samples, and observations.

In this phenomenological study, the major findings in the descriptive phenomena were sought and identified, by way of themes and experiences. Throughout the research process, the data was collected, organized, and analyzed from participants in the study to identify common themes. Interviews were conducted, field notes logged, audiotaped and transcribed and the data was triangulated to determine the overarching themes (Creswell, 2013). Following the collection and analysis of all data, coding and identifying commonalities from interviews, observations, and artifacts, the overarching themes were recognized. All three sources of data were reviewed, analyzed and utilized in developing the overarching themes. These themes sought to further resolve the research questions governing the research.

The responses received from the open-ended questions on the interview protocol provided the means by which analysis of the teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of

vocabulary-centered instructional strategies could be accomplished. All data obtained from participant interviews, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts were qualitative in nature and were maintained and secured offsite in a Microsoft Office Excel Spreadsheet. The file was password protected and the names of the participants were replaced with a number to protect confidentiality. All forms, consent forms, completed interviews, observations, field notes, teacher and student work samples, audio recordings, and participants' pseudonyms were filed and locked in an offsite safe. Following the conclusion of the collection of all audio recordings, and once interviews were transcribed all data were destroyed.

It was the supposition of the researcher that the participants in this research study answered the interview questions to the best of their abilities. The success was limited and contingent upon the strategies used in the designated classes. Other considerations and possible threats to external validity could include a disparity in class size, the ability levels of the students, and the time of the school year the study was conducted. Irregular attendance of the students could have impacted teacher perceptions as it related to the effectiveness of the strategies. The study was conducted at the same school and during the same school year, which could have impacted population validity. Attendance at the school fluctuated at certain intervals throughout the school year and could have impacted history and experimental mortality. At the beginning of the school year there were late enrollees, near the winter holidays and during the school year student enrollment was impacted by new enrollees, and students withdrawing was a concern near the end of the school year as well.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research trustworthiness contends with ensuring that the research was conducted with morals and ethics and by a knowledgeable researcher. The trustworthiness of

qualitative research was predicated on four factors. Shenton (2004) directed that the “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (p. 63) are criteria researchers must contain and measure during independent qualitative research. In an effort to ensure the significance and relevance of this study, the researcher warranted that the study maintained integrity through being credible, reliable and allowing for the possibility of future duplication of the study. The data were coded on multiple levels.

Since the 1990s, Lincoln (1995) shared that qualitative research was still being defined and prevailing in research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) termed the aforementioned four concepts (i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability), and recommended that each be considered by qualitative researchers aiming for a trustworthy study. Credibility aligns with internal validity and suggested that the researcher makes certain that the research assesses exactly what it intends to measure. Transferability aligns with external validity and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that external validity “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). Dependability aligns with reliability and addresses the idea that if the research were duplicated by another researcher utilizing the same techniques and participants, the results produced would be similar. Finally, confirmability aligns with objectivity, and according to Shenton (2004), ensures that the proper protocols are taken to “help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p. 72).

Transferability

According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), transferability “refers to the extent to which the researcher’s working hypothesis can be applied to another context” (p. 6). Detailed descriptions and data were maintained in that the research could be duplicated in varied settings.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) cited that external validity “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). Transferability was addressed by thoroughly describing, with a detailed account, the methods utilized in data collection to complete the research. This included the assumptions that were essential to the research to ensure applicability in other contexts. The intended purpose of this study was for the findings to be applicable to all secondary level classrooms and the significance of vocabulary instructional practices were emphasized.

Dependability

Dependability involves the processes by which the study was comprised. The processes were explicitly written in specifying details whereby the research could be duplicated, though not in an effort to obtain the same outcome. The processes were written in which the research design of the study served as an example. This method also allowed the person who reads the study to determine if the scope and effectiveness of appropriate research practices were adhered to and displayed an in-depth understanding of the research methods. Dependability refers to “the coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena” (Bradley, 1993, p.437).

Dependability involves examining the uniformity of the processes of the research study. This includes the process of triangulation of the data and the collection of data from multiple resources. Triangulation occurred with the verification of the differing data sources that included interviews, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts. The research methodology that governed this study was written in explicit detail with descriptors, thereby allowing for the theories presented in the research to be applicable in other contexts. Aspects relating to the purpose, problem, research questions, setting, participants and all processes were outlined.

Confirmability

Bradley (1993) affirmed that confirmability refers to “the extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or reviews the research results” (p.437). The primary methods for determining the confirmability and dependability of a study employ the use of audits of research processes followed and the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that confirmability was established by verifying the consistency of the data and results, interpreting the data and making recommendations. This encompasses audits of the data, memos, field notes, documentation used for coding and notes maintained by the process during the research. Confirmability aligns with qualitative researchers’ concerns about objectivity. Shenton (2004) pointed out in this category that the researcher must be certain that the findings of the research directly relate to the experiences of the participants and not those of the researcher. Additionally, triangulation was emphasized to alleviate the concerns related to the bias.

Methodological triangulation was utilized, thereby allowing the inclusion of the data from each source and adding to the reliability of data usage relating to the findings. Triangulation allows for the use of multiple sources in gathering data to validate the theme and yield understanding (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation was substantiated by the corroboration of the three data sources, which included classroom observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts to identify shared content from among the types of information. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) stated triangulation encompasses the use of “multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding” (p. 1). The data was initially classified through open coding with the use of axial coding as an additional measure of coding and organizing the data. Open coding precedes the process of axial coding. Axial coding occurs once all data are categorized. This

process was followed by further research to understand the cause, a response, precipitating circumstances and the consequences of utilizing the strategies (Creswell, 2013). To ensure further trustworthiness, all transcribed data obtained from the participant interviews and classroom observations were double-checked against the original documentation for accuracy.

Work samples were collected from each participant and maintained as artifacts throughout the research process. Artifacts included tangible items used by participants during the delivery of vocabulary instruction to reinforce student learning. Student work samples were also collected that served to demonstrate the learning targets and aided in the triangulation of the data. While conducting the interviews, the researcher actively listened to the responses of the participants and strictly observed and ensured that conversations and discussions remained relevant and focused on the questions purposed for the study.

Credibility

Experience and knowledge of the researcher have a considerable impact on the findings of research. Credibility refers to the “adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study” (Bradley, 1993, p.436). It was imperative to capture the true experiences of participants and equally important for researchers to encompass proper data collection methods. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) asserted, “To improve the credibility of qualitative content analysis, researchers not only need to design data collection strategies that are able to adequately solicit the representations but also to design transparent processes for coding and drawing conclusions from the raw data” (p. 6). Lincoln and Guba (1985) created a listing of actions to be useful in increasing credibility of research findings: extended commitments at the field location, regular observations, triangulation, negative case analysis, monitoring and comparison of raw data and the interpretation of results, member checking, and cross-examining data with

colleagues.

To ensure accuracy and establish validity for the purpose of member checking, the information was reviewed a second time after having been typed. All observations, dates and times of meetings, methods of communication, and associated actions were recorded in a timely fashion and accurately maintained in a field notebook. The notebook contained a detailed account of all methods and included the collection of data, techniques, detailed instructions, behaviors of the participants and researcher, and directions utilized for data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The goal of the study was to identify the strategies and to describe the experiences, beliefs and perceptions of eight middle school social studies teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. Six of the participants had previously attended a six-hour professional development workshop developed by Dan Mulligan that centered on vocabulary instructional strategies. During this professional development workshop participants were presented with research-based instructional strategies established by Marzano (2009). Techniques presented and learned during the workshop may be easily transferred to daily instruction. Creswell (2013) addressed the importance of being conscious of all ethical issues regarding participants to include “seeking consent, avoiding the conundrum of deception, maintain confidentiality, and protecting the anonymity of individuals with whom we speak” (p. 44). Intense measures were taken to ensure that the anonymity of the research participants was maintained and pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. All responses provided by participants were kept confidential and all data were destroyed following the study. At the beginning of the study, all participants were made aware of the purpose,

expectations, objective and scope of the research study. The study adhered to each of the procedures outlined by the Liberty University IRB as outlined on the Liberty University website (2016).

Summary

Chapter Three described a phenomenological design that addressed the research questions with qualitative data analysis. This chapter detailed the research design and methodology that governed the study, which was designed to describe the experiences and identify the strategies of eight middle school social studies teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. The research study employed the use of participant interviews, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts. The interview sampled teachers of a major metropolitan school district in a suburb of a southeastern city in northern Georgia using open-ended questions. Demographics, participants, the setting of the study, and the instrumentation utilized to collect and analyze the data were examined. Data was interpreted by triangulation, with data collected from teacher interviews, a collection of artifacts, and classroom observations. The next chapter will present the results from the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of eight teachers who were utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). The study used three research questions to guide the research. The research questions addressed the phenomena of the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and strategies as related to vocabulary instruction in the classroom. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the instructional experiences that teachers describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students?

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?

Research Question 3: How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?

Participants

Participants defined effective vocabulary instruction, detailed how vocabulary was taught within personal classrooms, and were given the opportunity to expound upon why a particular instructional method was selected. Table 2 represents a summary of the participants' demographic data taken from the interviews. Many of the perceptions and experiences maintained by the participants were commonly held. All participants interviewed believed in the importance of vocabulary instruction and affirmed the significance to social studies. Each participant discussed learning should be engaging and appealing to the learning style of students.

Every participant who experienced the benefits of professional development incorporated many of the techniques into daily instruction.

The two participants who did not attend the Dan Mulligan workshop had not previously participated in professional development focusing on vocabulary instructional strategies. These two participants appeared to have been as comfortable as the six participants who had attended the professional development workshops with delivering vocabulary-centered instruction. Each of these participants placed equal emphasis on the significance of vocabulary instruction. These two participants were included in this research study to determine if there was any notable differences between those participants who had and those participants who had not attended the workshop, yet there appeared to be no difference between their teaching and strategies used. The results from the interviews with the two participants who did not attend the professional development workshop revealed each relied on those participants with additional professional experience as resources, thereby emphasizing the need for effective professional development opportunities.

The participants employed various types of activities into their instruction in order to reinforce vocabulary. During the classroom observations the use of various technologies, group and individual activities, and countless graphic organizers was noted. There was only one instance witnessed while conducting the classroom observations where a textbook was utilized. Within this class, a Cornell note-taking graphic organizer accompanied the lesson, requiring students to read the text for 10 minutes. In many of the classes, interactive note-taking that included input from the classroom was observed. These interactive note-taking tools included using graphic organizers, drawing pictures, creating mnemonic devices, and filling in the blank exercises. Each activity was facilitator led, and involved individual, or group activities that

involved discussion. All participants dutifully used vocabulary terms as part of warm-up activities, whether for new content where background knowledge was being ascertained, or to reiterate newly learned content. Of the instructional techniques being used, each teacher stated that they followed chosen methods due to the increased academic achievement demonstrated on student formative and summative assessments.

All eight participants were interviewed and answered all of the interview questions. All of the comments that were not solicited were also included in the transcription. The participants represented a wide range of ages. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 55, with the average age of 40 years. Two of the participants were in the 22 to 29 age range; two were in the 30 to 40 age range; two were in the 41 to 50 age range; and two participants represented the 51 to 55 age range. The total number of years of teaching experience was 55 years, with each teacher possessing a minimum of three years of teaching experience. The average number of years of teaching experience was just over six years. Each participant taught social studies and one teacher also taught math. All participants participating in this study were certified educators and were highly qualified to teach in the respective content area as stipulated by the state of Georgia.

Of the eight participants interviewed, four were female and four were male. Table 2 also displays the highest level of education attained by each of the participants. One of the participants possessed two bachelor degrees. Five of the participants began teaching after earning a bachelor's degree. Two of the participants earned master's degrees in education. None of the participants had pursued a specialist's in education degree. One of the participants holds a doctoral degree. The number of years of teaching experience for each teacher, grade level taught and the average number of students in each class are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Years of experience	Grade taught	Average number of students per class	Level of education	Ethnicity	Gender
Anna	53	13	6	29	Masters	Caucasian	Female
Thomas	36	5	6	25	Bachelors	African American	Male
Alexander	35	5.5	7	30	Masters (2)	African American	Male
Susan	29	4	7	27	Masters	Caucasian	Female
James	43	11	7	28	Bachelors	Caucasian	Male
John	48	10	8	27	Masters	Caucasian	Male
Wendy	25	4	8	35	Masters	Caucasian	Female
Edna	55	3	8	25	Doctorate	Caucasian	Female

Each participant offered significant insight into identifying the instructional strategies used and into their perceptions related to vocabulary instruction as offered during the face-to-face interview and exemplified during the classroom observations.

Anna

Anna had taught for 13 years and possessed a master's degree. Anna taught gifted sixth-grade social studies students. Each class Anna instructed contained an average of 29 students in each of her four content area classes. Anna's achievements included Teacher of The Year, Social Studies Department Chair, Junior Achievement Lead Teacher for sixth grade, County

Assessment team school representative and a member of the County Social Studies Leadership Team. Anna incorporated a myriad of instructional activities into her daily instruction. During the interview, Anna described several of the activities that she utilized in her daily teaching that included: *30 Second Vocab*, *Four Picks - One word*, *Ten and Two*, *Ticket Out The Door* and *Paper Slides*. Anna believed that her students demonstrated understanding of social studies vocabulary as exemplified by formative and summative assessments as expressed during class discussions. Anna shared that she has found that the professional development workshops she had attended had been helpful. During the interview, Anna pointed out that she incorporated vocabulary instruction into her daily instruction.

Thomas

Thomas had taught for five years and held a master's degree in education. Thomas taught sixth-grade social studies and described the role as a social studies teacher as "not only an educator who instills the social studies curriculum into his students but also believed in the importance of vocabulary instruction in social studies." All of Thomas's teaching experience had been at the middle school level. Thomas averaged 25 students in each of his classes. Thomas spoke quickly and provided several examples with each of his explanations during the interview, which was observed within his teaching style during the classroom observation. Thomas utilized a great deal of advanced technological resources in instructional delivery and encouraged students to demonstrate mastery of concepts learned through these channels.

Alexander

Alexander had been teaching for five and a half years and possessed two bachelor degrees, in history and secondary education. Alexander was a seventh-grade social studies teacher who believed that "Learning is best taught through storytelling and song." Alexander's

classes were comprised of 30 students in each of his mixed ability, special education, and regular education classes. Alexander once considered a career in law but chose the career path as an educator. Alexander was a strong proponent of actively engaging learning activities. He learned and was taught new vocabulary in the same fashion by repeatedly writing the words and definitions during his formative years of education. Alexander appreciated the supports received at his school, specifically all the professional development workshops attended. During the interview, Alexander pointed out that in addition to storytelling and song, he incorporated the use of foldables and played interactive games to reiterate learning. The review games he described were very similar to Charades and interactive games utilizing technology that students used on their personal cell phones or computer.

Susan

Susan had earned a bachelor's degree and taught dual subjects, math and social studies. Susan, a seventh-grade teacher who had been teaching for four years, saw her role as being responsible for teaching the content as outlined in the curriculum. Each of Susan's classes were comprised of 27 regular education students. During the classroom observation, Susan's instructional delivery included a great deal of recall in which students energetically responded with the correct and appropriate responses. Susan was taught to learn new vocabulary by repeatedly writing down the words and with memorization. During the interview and demonstrated during the classroom observation, Susan incorporated what she termed as "visual vocabulary," a method she learned from a previous professional development workshop. This encompassed the use of pictures incorporated into the multimedia presentations Susan used to discuss several of the vocabulary terms. She stated during the interview that there were times when she allowed students to create their own pictures. Susan believed that social studies content

was inclusive of a great deal of vocabulary and regular formative assessments were the best method to ensure that her students had an understanding of the social studies vocabulary. When asked how often she taught vocabulary, Susan replied, “I feel like I teach it initially [sic] but I feel like I reinforce it every day.”

James

James taught science and social studies at the middle school level for 11 years. James earned a bachelor’s degree and taught seventh-grade social studies. James described his role as more of a mentor than a teacher. As discussed during the interview, James described the current year as more challenging as a teacher due to more disciplinary issues. Each of his classes averaged 28 students. When asked during the interview how he had learned vocabulary during his formative years of education, James stated he learned through the use of notecards, repetition, and memorization. When asked how he had been taught to learn vocabulary during his formative years, he was not able to recollect, sharing that he had moved to different schools frequently. James defined effective vocabulary instruction as:

[Sic] Effective vocabulary instruction would be taking the word that you are studying, have the kids to understand the meaning and how it can relate to them – put it on their level. Don’t just give them a word. Give them a word with the meaning and an explanation on how they can use the word or wherever they have heard the word before.

James had taught science for many years prior to the year of the study, and during time of this study, and was in his second year teaching social studies. James shared that he regularly incorporated vocabulary instruction while he taught science and chose to do the same since teaching social studies classes. He regularly referred to a resource book of Latin and Greek roots that he shared during the interview, and used it as an aid in devising lessons. He was a proponent

of the Dan Mulligan professional development training that he had attended and tried to utilize strategies from the workshop. In responding to the interview questions, James expressed that vocabulary instruction was key to social studies and that he included it daily, throughout the lesson contained in the multimedia presentations that he frequently used. While discussing instructional strategies he used in his classroom, he shared that he incorporated the use of mnemonic devices as a means to assist his students to learn the geography of the Middle East.

John

The eighth grade gifted social studies teacher was John. John held a bachelor's degree, and at the time of this study, and had been teaching for 10 years. He described himself as a coach in relation to the way he provided instruction in the classroom. John estimated that each of his classes contained 27 students. John had taught in school systems varying in socioeconomic status, and shared that he understood that instruction should be adjusted according to the ability of his students. John described being taught and learning vocabulary during his formative years through a combination of spelling lists and word wall exercises. He succinctly defined effective vocabulary instruction as "Whatever it takes [sic] to get the kids to know the words." He determined that the way he was aware of his students having had an understanding of the social studies vocabulary was demonstrated on the common and other summative assessments. John required his students to read specific passages from the text for 10 minutes daily and pointed out that through the readings, his students encountered new words. Additionally, he stated that he incorporated the use of video lectures, content posters, and reading assignments to incorporate new content into his instruction. John ended the interview being quoted, "Education is at the core of these students' academic success".

Wendy

The majority of the students taught by Wendy consisted of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. The majority of the ESOL students were of Latin descent and spoke varied forms of Spanish. Each of her large classes were comprised of 35 students. Wendy described the value of vocabulary in instruction, especially due to the dynamics of the students who constituted the classes that were taught. Wendy possessed a master's degree and taught eighth grade social studies. She described her role "to teach students about American History and provide lessons on citizenship." Wendy recalled her mother encouraging her to create and review vocabulary cards. Wendy previously worked with special education students in co-taught classroom settings. Based on these teaching experiences, during the interview Wendy spoke of the value and significance of vocabulary instruction based upon the current student population taught. With the beginning of the school year, at the time of this study, Wendy stated that she had begun to devote an entire class period to vocabulary instruction commencing with each unit. She stated that vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important. She found vocabulary instruction to be effective, which was why she devoted additional instructional time to activities centering on vocabulary. Wendy found beneficial collaborating with other ESOL teachers and the Dan Mulligan professional development workshop she had attended.

Edna

Edna held a doctorate degree, and had the least number of years of teaching experience. Edna changed careers from the private sector and began teaching three years ago. She had 25 students in each of her mixed ability, social, exceptional and regular education classes. Edna saw her role as not only a teacher of the curriculum of social studies and history but as teaching her students about life in general and the significance of being successful through the choices that

they made. Edna had learned vocabulary through the SRA Reading Program and felt that it was a valuable resource. She shared that she was taught to learn vocabulary during her formative years through reading and being told regularly to utilize the dictionary to seek the definitions for unfamiliar words. Edna valued the support from her workplace colleagues and appreciated suggestions for how to improve upon and further develop her craft of teaching. She believed that her students demonstrated mastery of the social studies vocabulary based upon the results of common and other summative assessments. During the interview, Edna spoke of how colleagues shared resources, gave suggestions and offered classroom management strategies and supporting instructional techniques. As a first-year teacher at Cornerstone Middle School, Edna appreciated the lessons and resources that had been shared with her. Edna noted the utilization of professional journals and other texts.

Results

The findings of this study demonstrated the importance of incorporating research-based instructional strategies into daily instruction. Direct instruction including frequent exposures to vocabulary utilized across each of the content areas and an appropriate and adequate amount of time devoted to direct vocabulary instruction is essential at each grade level. McKeown, Crosson, Artz, Sandora, and Beck (2013) reiterated the necessity for repeated exposures to words and felt that

Representations that are based on a rich network of connections built from experiencing words in multiple, informative contexts will likely be complex, flexible, and nuanced, allowing the learner to bring the most relevant connections to bear to help understand newly encountered contexts. (p. 46)

Eckerth and Tavakoli (2012) affirmed that, “For full word knowledge to develop, repeated

encounters with unfamiliar or partially known words in one or multiple texts are assumed to be indispensable” (p. 229).

Findings from the Research Questions

Research question 1. Interviews revealed insight into the perceptions of participants as related to vocabulary instruction. The types of resources, student work samples, and instructional aids and techniques used within the classrooms as observed during the classroom visits, coincided with the information shared during the interviews, demonstrated during classroom observations, exemplified through student work products. The initial research questions focused on the instructional experiences the participants described to enhance content vocabulary of their social studies students.

Participants were asked to explain how they knew that their students had an understanding of the vocabulary that was taught in their classrooms. All of the participants agreed that student mastery of vocabulary instruction was reflected in the positive results from the formative and summative assessments, as well as appropriate use during class discussions. James believed that assessments were the best way to ensure that his students had an understanding of social studies vocabulary. James determined that the way he was aware of his students having an understanding of the social studies vocabulary was demonstrated on the common and other summative assessments. Wendy stated that the positive effects of her vocabulary instruction were demonstrated on the formative and summative assessments.

Participants were also asked to define effective vocabulary instruction. Responses included that vocabulary instruction should be engaging, involve consistent instruction centering on the terms, ensure that the terms were taught in context, and provide opportunities for students to apply the terms’ meanings in varying contexts. Alexander defined effective vocabulary

instruction for his students as “mainly letting them see the word, [sic] saying the word, drawing a picture with the word and then we do song with the word.” Thomas’s definition of effective vocabulary instruction included repetition with the terms used in context. Thomas included repetition and frequently incorporated the terms into daily instruction. Anna defined effective vocabulary instruction as “engaging and not [sic] rote” and found that “if students teach each other it’s [sic] far more effective”. Anna shared that to her, “if they’re engaged [sic] that equates to learning to me.” Wendy defined effective vocabulary instruction as being consistent and allowing for instructional time during class and ensuring that students had a full understanding of the terms. Susan defined effective vocabulary instruction: “Effective vocabulary instruction I think is when the kid can not only tell me what it means but they can use it in situations, not just applying it to social studies.” Alexander believed that vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important. He shared, “Very important. The kids [sic] need to know vocab,” and furthered that “It’s very important [sic] to help kids know and understand the content better.”

Participants were also asked about vocabulary instructional practices. These teaching practices consisted of: note taking, repeated exposures to the words, the use of word walls, songs and interactive activities, lectures, the teaching of word parts and incorporation of various forms of technology. Each expressed that the chosen methods were followed as students demonstrated retention and varied use of the newly learned terms. Each participant classroom displayed a word wall reflecting terms and concepts from the current instructional unit which was referred to through lesson. During the interview, Thomas stated that he maintained an updated Word Wall and regularly referred to it during daily instruction. John taught vocabulary through the use of Cornell notes in conjunction with the students reading the content text. Edna frequently relied on the textbook to supplement lessons and was looking forward to incorporating more games and

activities to reinforce learning with her students. Classroom observations and a review of the artifacts revealed several methods of instructional delivery used in the classroom to ensure that students were being repeatedly exposed to newly learned terms to reinforce comprehension.

Research question 2. The second research question centered on how the eight participants perceived the value of teaching vocabulary in order to improve the academic achievement of social studies students. Each teacher wholeheartedly believed that vocabulary instruction was essential to student learning. Each agreed that social studies content contained a great deal of vocabulary and understood that the social studies classroom may be the only place where students would be exposed to many of those specific terms, which would in turn enable students to better understand the content. Anna expressed that she felt that vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important, and stated, “Oh! It’s the foundation! [sic] Without it, we’re like a rudderless ship going nowhere.” Edna staunchly agreed that vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important and taught vocabulary daily. James felt that vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important and expounded with “Because sometimes the— In Social Studies is will be the only time certain words are going to be used, so if they don’t get it here, then they won’t be exposed to it.”

The perception of the participants was transferred to the classroom and was indicative to the lessons, tasks assigned to their students, and observed during classroom visits. During the observation in Susan’s classroom, she relied on student recall from the previous day’s lesson to ensure that students retained the information. Anna exemplified this perception through group-based student-led activities. John regularly provided examples relevant to his students that each could relate to then connect the example to the content. Each participant reiterated vocabulary terms in daily lessons as a means to reinforce content and the significance of their beliefs related

to vocabulary instruction.

The participants shared that support received included professional development opportunities, specifically the Dan Mulligan workshop, various texts and shared resources as well as the assistance of more experienced colleagues. With this knowledge and support, the participants were each comfortable implementing vocabulary-centered strategies into daily instruction. Wendy shared, “I’ve had some professional development on co-teaching strategies and differentiation as well”. John stated “Dan Mulligan was three years ago uh, let’s see...let’s see...let’s see...as I recall, the good strategies with vocabulary concepts and teaching and getting the kids to understand.” During the interview, only one participant, James could not recall any supports that he felt were beneficial to his professional development.

The participants were asked how often vocabulary was taught in classrooms and each responded that direct instruction related to vocabulary was taught on a daily basis. Participants were also asked at what point during instruction new vocabulary terms were introduced and responses varied: the beginning of the lesson, repeatedly throughout the lessons, and two participants shared that they only introduced vocabulary at the beginning of the instructional unit. James stated “It’s kinda continuous because I do a 10 minute read every day so the students are constantly coming up against new words and new things.” Wendy’s was cited as saying:

As far as focusing on just vocabulary, at least once a unit. But I do bring in, you know the words as often as needed. Whenever we go through the curriculum, I’ll remind students you know, I’ll ask students, check for their understanding, ask them informally, do you know like, “hey guys, you remember learning this word?”, “who can remind me what it means?”, so on and so forth as it comes up.

Table 3

Instructional Timing of Vocabulary Instruction

Participant	Instructional timing of vocabulary instruction
Anna	“Daily”
Thomas	“Daily”
Alexander	“Every day.” “Vocab is in every lesson.”
Susan	“Everyday.”
James	“Throughout the lesson.”
John	“At the beginning of class each day.”
Wendy	“Usually at the beginning of each unit.”
Edna	“I teach it every day.”

Anna stated:

Um, sometimes it’ll be ‘let’s review vocab from the day before in your warm up’, other times it will be as we are going through a lesson. Other times it will as be your *Ticket Out The Door*, or however you term it. Um, let’s um, either preview tomorrow or review today. Um, sometimes it will be in an entire lesson. The whole lesson is focused on these vocabulary words or that concept.

All of the participants discussed and demonstrated the positive differences in student comprehension based upon the specific strategies used within their respective classrooms.

Research question 3. The final research question examined how participants described vocabulary instructional practices in social studies. The participants were asked how vocabulary for new content was incorporated into their instruction. Answers to this inquiry were reflective of the responses to how the participants taught vocabulary. Replies to this question included daily reiteration involving warm-up exercises, student reading, storytelling, songs, interactive activities, classroom word walls, the activation of background knowledge, and multimedia

presentations. Participants used additional strategies to reinforce learning that included foldables, group activities, and projects centering on the new terms and concepts. Thomas incorporated varied forms and uses of technology into instructional activities and student work samples demonstrated the use of many of these techniques. Alexander incorporated regular use of storytelling and songs in the majority of his lessons and advocated that “Kids learn things faster through song. Um, [sic] I do storytelling because it’s more-it seems more like gossip, and kids love gossip! So that’s the reason why I do it that way.”

The final interview question posed to the participants addressed if there were any questions pertaining to vocabulary instruction that had not been asked and the teacher respondents agreed that each of the questions asked was inclusive of their thoughts regarding vocabulary instruction. All of the participants agreed that the questions posed encompassed their thoughts and beliefs.

Themes

Common themes were developed from information collected from interviews with participants, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts from the participants. The overarching themes were identified through a process called memoing, which Creswell (2013) defined as the process where the researcher documents the ideas about the developing theory throughout the process as axial, selective and open. The data were then coded, categorized and interpreted to obtain a generalized meaning. Creswell stated that the researcher collects and analyzes the data for further interpretation.

The intention of this study was to interpret the critical meanings associated with the phenomena. A description of the setting and participants was produced to ascertain specific themes from the coding and determine if connections could be made in seeking the value of

content specific vocabulary and determining the essences of these phenomena. The data was compiled into a report was then interpreted on a larger scale as to the meaning and if content specific vocabulary was valuable. This preparation initiated the data analysis process. Creswell (2013) asserted the information collected was then reduced to themes with a procedure coding, consolidating all of the codes into data represented in tables, figures and a discussion.

The initial part of the interview centered on the participants' demographic information and included a question that asked participants to share how each had been taught vocabulary in their own past learning experiences. All participants openly and candidly discussed their instructional experiences. Based upon the responses received from the participants, commonalties were derived from similar participant responses. The 30-minute classroom observations divulged active demonstration of the participants' perceptions regarding vocabulary instruction. The classroom visits revealed that the participants actively engaged with their students, used different types of instructional activities, and reiterated and reinforced vocabulary concepts. The artifacts obtained from each teacher, which included lesson plans and assignments from participants and student work samples, solidified the methods of instruction observed.

The qualitative data sources included a prescribed series of questions from participant interviews, classroom observations that included the type of lesson, lesson focus, classroom design, teacher interaction with students, instructional aids, use of technology, group or individual student and examining the instructional tools (i.e. worksheets, notes, videos, lesson plans, etc.), which served as artifacts, and the field notes. The collection of each of the data sources provided triangulation which contributed to the validity and trustworthiness of the study and corroborated the data and findings. Previous investigations (Simmons et al, 2010) regarding vocabulary instruction provided insight and allowed for a predetermined listing of codes was

used based on areas of concern related to vocabulary instruction, including teacher instructional practices, and effective vocabulary instruction. This process of coding aided in summarizing the data and assisted the researcher in drawing conclusions related to the thoughts, beliefs and perceptions of the participants related to content specific vocabulary instruction. Data was deduced from coding to manageable, meaningful sources of information that was easily identifiable.

Coding occurred throughout the data collection process and was recorded in the notebook used for field notes. Notes were made on commonalities and differing information to discover recurring patterns amongst each of the data sources. The coding within the field notes was instrumental in combing and differentiating all data and for reflections by the researcher about the information and making meaning of the data. The recording of all of these data in the field notes helped to capture all ideas and decisions, and allowed the researcher to evaluate all conclusions, plus provided logical consistency of the data collected. Assigning codes to the data throughout the collection process assisted in the analysis and organization of the data for later examination. Examples of codes utilized included: repeated encounters with vocabulary terms (RE), discussions centering on vocabulary (DV), findings from interviews (I), class discussions (CD), observations of students using vocabulary (SV), group activity (GA), and occurrence of teacher assisting students (TA).

The codes were assigned based upon information obtained during the collection of all data. The codes were reflective of and directly related to the research questions. Determining the final set of codes involved the process of organizing each data sources in general categories and involved several references to the field notes, observations and participant interviews. Field notes were transcribed, read several times and manually coded noting relevant statements and

observations related to this study. Data analysis continued and progressed, the researcher began to discover emerging themes and patterns developing within the codes.

Following interviewing the participants, interviews were transcribed, analyzed and manually coded. The responses to the participant interview questions were each analyzed individually for qualitative data. Responses from each teacher, according to each question were compiled on a Microsoft Word document. Responses to each question were detailed below each research question in an effort for each response could be compared and analyzed by the researcher. The process of coding was determined initially by visually observing responses were from each transcribed participant interview for common terms and phrases. Repeated terms or phrases were highlighted with the same color. This was followed by several searches in Microsoft Word of specific words found to as common of the interviews to identify the number of occurrences the terms and phrases appeared across each participant response. The same words and phrases that were repeated were again highlighted in the same color. Each response from the participant interviews, notations recorded from the classroom visits and types of artifacts collected were compiled on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each data source was detailed on a different spreadsheet. Again, the same words and phrases that were repeated were again highlighted in the same color. Enlarged posters were created from the interview responses of the transcribed responses from the interviews and notes from the observations. Each of the lesson plans and student work samples were sorted, examined and labeled according to commonalities. Again, recurring terms, phrases, and factors were highlighted to identity the frequency of the appearance terms and repeated phrases.

The participant interviews and field notes were reviewed prior to the researcher visiting the classroom of each teacher. Observations provided insight as to what to expect in future

classroom visits. The Observation Form (see Appendix H) was also used to record qualitative data that included notes recorded in the Personal Observation section of this form to note observations, notes and codes and was also used for later analysis that aided in the coding process. During classroom observations, notes were taken and the information was being analyzed, exemplifying the process of memoing. During this process, data was being condensed, aligned with the research questions, and conclusions were being drawn for this study. The notes taken during the observation assisted in the explanation in addressing the results for the research questions. The information observed from the classroom visits was later typewritten. This information in this section of the Observation Form was also reviewed during the coding process and in the analyzing of all data that aided in determining emerging themes. The collection of each of the lesson plans, written assignments involving the textbook, copies of notes taken by students based upon teacher lecture, worksheets, group activities, activities involving technology, activities incorporating other source. These data sources were sorted, labeled, and coded for data analysis. Notes were taken from each activity and recorded in the field notes, transcribed, and analyzed. This information was then coded.

After conducting the participant interviews, classroom observations and examining the instructional tools collected, and field notes, the researcher sorted each data source according to commonalities and codes were assigned. This process established the initial essences for identified and generalized themes. All information obtained from the classroom observations was entered on to a Microsoft Excel spread sheet, commonalities were identified and highlighted by color, and coded. Color coded identifiers were grouped and cut and pasted on to a separate worksheet and categorized. Information compiled on the Microsoft Word document from the participant interviews was cut and pasted by relevance on to the Microsoft Excel spread sheet by

category. Each of the instructional tools, including student assignments were then analyzed, labeled, labeled by color, and coded. This procedure allowed for all of the data to be gathered into manageable segments of information making the information easier to identify for purposes of interpretation and recognition of recurring themes.

Categories were created from this information that could be linked for interpretation and to recognize the essence for recurring themes. For example, the theme of each teacher believing in the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction and additional exposure to content specific vocabulary in middle school was demonstrated through the interviews, observations and the instructional formats of delivery. These associations resulted in the researcher establishing overarching themes as they were emerging. Throughout the process additional ideas and associations began to develop for the researcher. Additionally, the participants pointed out the significance of the frequency of vocabulary instruction, again demonstrated through each of the data sources. The individual similar themes which emerged were used to organize data into categories of overarching themes.

Themes identified through this research emerged after careful examination and coding of all data. Descriptive data centered on the common relationships related to significance of vocabulary instruction for middle school social studies students. The recurring themes were clustered according to the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction, the significance of content specific vocabulary and the frequency of vocabulary instruction. The final themes that emerged as a result of this research after careful examination and coding of all data were: (a) effective vocabulary instruction must be engaging; (b) social studies is comprised of several content-specific terms; (c) vocabulary instruction is significant to social studies; and (d) effective instructional strategies should be implemented on a daily basis. The process of saturation

occurred, as exemplified through the collection of and analyzing each of the data sources. Repeated occurrences appeared related to the defining of terms, types of instructional strategies, repeated exposure to terms, benefits of professional development, and the significance of content specific vocabulary instruction. Once the common relationships were clustered and noted repeatedly, the themes were identified. As more information was collected, the same conclusions were drawn. Table 4 displays repetitive terms and phrases which derived from the analysis.

Emerging Themes

Subsequent to interviewing the participants, the researcher transcribed, analyzed, and manually coded the interviews. The responses to the participant interview questions were analyzed individually for qualitative data. Responses from each teacher according to each question were compiled on a Microsoft Word document. Responses to each question were listed below each research question in an effort for the researcher to compare and analyze each response. The analysis of this initial data established the fundamental essence of the study. This information yielded the perceptions and beliefs related to content-specific vocabulary and those common terms expressed by the participants. The mutual terms led to the emerging themes which were: (a) engaging instruction, (b) repetition, (c) defining terms, (d) student-led activities, and (e) professional development.

The researcher reviewed the data from the participant interviews prior to visiting the classroom of each teacher. Observations provided insight as to what to expect in future classroom visits. The Observation Form (see Appendix H) was also used to record qualitative data that included notes recorded in the Personal Observation section of this form to note observations, notes and codes and was used for later analysis to aid in the coding process. The information observed from the classroom visits was typed and reviewed during the process of

Table 4

Repetitive Terms and Phrases derived From Data Analysis

Terms/ Phrases	Associated Code	Data Source
Definitions	D	TA, I, O, A
Discussions centering on vocabulary	DV	SV, I
Repetition/Repeated exposures	RE	SV, I, O, A
Writing/Re-writing	W	SV, I, O, A
Engaging Instruction	E	SV, I, O, A
Graphic Organizers	GO	SV, I, O, A
Professional Development	PD	TA, I
Daily exposure to terms	DE	SV, TA, I, O, A
Colleagues	CO	
Technology	TECH	
Activities	A	RE, I, O, A
Essential question displayed on board	EQ	TA, O
Desks arranged in groups	DESK	TA, O
Activities involving technology	TECH	SV, TA, I, O, A
Student-led activities	S/L	SV, I, O, A
Group based activities	GB	SVI, O, A
Assessment	AS	TA, I, O
Note taking	NT	TA, I, O, A

analyzing all data to determine emerging themes. The researcher also analyzed the artifacts collected, such as each of the lesson plans, written assignments involving the textbook, copies of notes taken by students based upon teacher lecture, worksheets, group activities, activities involving technology, activities incorporating other source. Notes from each activity were recorded in the field notes, transcribed, and analyzed, and then coded.

After conducting the interviews, classroom observations and examining the instructional tools collected and coding each, the researcher identified and generalized the themes. All information obtained from the classroom observations was entered on to a Microsoft Excel spread sheet, organized according to theme and color coded, with each theme cut and pasted on to a separate worksheet. Information compiled on the Microsoft Word document from the participant interviews was cut and pasted by relevance into each of the identified themed categories. Each of the instructional tools, including student assignments were then analyzed and coded.

Previous investigations (Simmons et al, 2010) regarding vocabulary instruction provided insight and allowed for a predetermined listing of codes to be used based on areas of concern related to vocabulary instruction, including teacher instructional practices, and effective vocabulary instruction. This process of coding aided in summarizing the data and assisted the researcher in drawing conclusions related to the thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants related to content specific vocabulary instruction. Data was deduced from coding to manageable, meaningful sources of information that was easily identifiable. Categories were created from this information that could be linked for interpretation and for recognition of recurring themes. For example, the teachers sharing their beliefs related to the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction and exposure to content specific vocabulary at the middle school level

was exemplified through the interviews, observations and the instructional formats of delivery. These associations resulted in the researcher establishing emerging overarching themes. Throughout the process additional ideas and associations began to develop for the researcher. Furthermore, the participants pointed out the significance of the frequency of vocabulary instruction, again demonstrated through each of the data sources. The themes which emerged were used to organize data into categories of overarching themes. The primary theme that emerged was that the participants in this study each believed that vocabulary instruction is a significant factor in learning social studies content. The themes that were identified are displayed in Table 5.

The process of saturation occurred, as exemplified through the collection of and analyzing each of the data sources, once the themes were identified as the more information was collected, the same conclusions were drawn. Saturation was exemplified through an exhaustive review of the literature, observing of the phenomenological methodology, consideration of previous experiences, maintaining detailed field notes, included an adequate participant sample, and interviewing of participants until the process of saturation was attained (Creswell, 2013). The participants each expressed the identical thoughts during the interviews and demonstrated through instruction related to the significance of defining terms, the importance of students being repeatedly exposed to terms and concepts, and the belief that instruction should be engaging. According to Creswell (2013) saturation occurs when the researcher “find(s) as many incidents, events, or activities as possible to provide support for the categories” (p. 240). This was indicated by and substantiated by the data with the participants though responses to the interview questions, revealed during observations and was typified through the instructional activities related the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction.

Table 5

Themes Generated Based upon Data Analysis

Terms/Phrases	Associated Themes
Definitions	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
Flashcards/Note cards	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
Repetition/Repeated exposures	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Writing/Re-writing	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Engaging	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Graphic Organizers	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Daily exposure to terms	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Activities involving technology	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Student-led activities	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Group based activities	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction
Assessment	Significance of defining terms
	Repeated exposure to terms and concepts
	Engaging instruction

Themes identified through this research emerged after careful examination and coding of all data. After identifying the recurring terms and phrases established through the coding process, the researcher clustered data into common ideas that supported each emerging theme.

Descriptive data presented centered on the common relationships related to significance of vocabulary instruction for middle school social studies students. The recurring themes were clustered according to the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction, the significance of content specific vocabulary and the frequency of vocabulary instruction. The synthesis of the three forms of data collected determined final themes that emerged as a result of the participant perceptions of vocabulary instructional strategies.

Final Themes

The final themes that emerged as a result of this research were: (a) effective vocabulary instruction must be engaging; (b) social studies is comprised of several content-specific terms which should be defined; and (c) vocabulary instruction is significant to social studies; and (d) effective instructional strategies should be implemented on a daily basis with engaging lessons. The repeated themes derived from the data centered on the significance of defining terms, repeated exposure to terms and concepts, and ensuring that instruction was engaging. The themes were identified and aligned with the three research questions relating to instructional experiences that enhanced social studies vocabulary content, perceptions regarding the value of teaching vocabulary as related to academic achievement, and how participants described vocabulary instructional practices.

This study provided insight into the thoughts, beliefs, and instructional strategies of the participants relating to the significance of vocabulary instruction at the middle school level. Three research questions guided this study that focused on the instructional practices participants described that enhanced social studies content specific vocabulary for students, the perception of the value of teaching social studies vocabulary, and participants were asked to describe those instructional practices that guided their respective classrooms. Results for each of the research

questions were derived from the field notes, participant interviews, classroom observations, and the instructional and strategies tools that aided the delivery of the lessons. The qualitative data helped address and answer the research questions. The participant interviews provided specific information based upon the specific questions that were asked. The instructional strategies and tools that aided instruction were attained during the classroom observations, as these categories overlapped. After analyzing the data, the researcher determined the results for the research questions.

Influences from Past Educational Experiences

Reflections on personal vocabulary learning. The first Research Question focused on the instructional experiences that participants described as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students. During the interview, participants described personal accounts of how vocabulary was taught to them through formative experiences and how each participant actually learned vocabulary. Each account varied and included the use of file and notecards, looking up terms in a glossary, as well as obtaining word meanings from reading.

During the participant interview phase, at the beginning stage of the interview, prior to addressing the research questions, the participants shared their foundational past vocabulary learning experiences during their formative years of education. These questions were asked with the researcher's goal of determining how those experiences may have influenced the participants' current teaching practices. During the interview, participants were asked to describe personal accounts of how they learned vocabulary during personal formative years of education. Six of the participants learned vocabulary through writing definitions and through the use of flash cards.

Questions were posed inquiring about the participants' formative vocabulary instruction

as it related to how each teacher learned and how they were taught content specific vocabulary. During the interviews, the participants stated that their past experiences as students included using flash cards for memorization of terms, using a dictionary or glossary to define words, and writing the words multiple times. Anna stated that she had learned vocabulary by creating flash cards and writing definitions. Anna had been taught new vocabulary by repetition of the newly introduced terms. During his formative years of education, Thomas learned vocabulary by being given a list of words and using a dictionary to define new terms. He shared that he had been taught many new words through reading. Thomas stated,

Let's say if you saw [sic] a words you had never seen before underline them, make notes, and once again look them up. I remember my teacher Mr. Seals he used to always... come in and say these big words and we would always look at him.

Susan learned vocabulary in her formative years with the use of flash cars and memorization. It was apparent that none of the formative instructional practices and assignments given by the participants influenced current instructional practices of the participants. This was observed and ascertained during classroom observations and through analyzing the artifacts.

None of the participants recalled having received vocabulary instruction in context. Wendy described learning vocabulary during her formative years of education as writing the definitions and creating flash cards. She recalled frequently being provided with a list of words and being told to learn the words independently, and recalled there not being class time allotted for vocabulary instruction. The participants stated that their past learning experiences had not included their teachers specifically teaching nor directing attention to or focusing classroom instruction on vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary instruction had been an independent exercise for these participants in the way that they had learned vocabulary during their educational

experience.

Anna stated, “Ooh, just writing definitions, but flash cards have always been what have worked for me.” Terrance added:

The way I basically learned vocabulary in school was I remember my teachers used to give me a whole bunch of words and I used to have to look them up in the dictionary.

And my teacher would, especially if you didn’t know how to spell a word or something, my English teacher would say “Well, that’s what dictionaries are for!” And we’d look it up in the dictionary and stuff, we didn’t really use a dictionary, that’s the way it is you know. Here’s a whole list of words, like ten words, look them up.

Susan said, “Eh when I was in school, it was basically glossary and sometimes we did flash cards. Very much from memorization when I was in school.”

Wendy shared how she was taught to learn vocabulary:

Um, when I had teachers that would focus just on vocabulary, normally it would either be by writing down definitions or creating vocabulary cards. But usually, they would just give us a list of words and tell us to learn it on our own. We did not spend any time in class.

Edna learned vocabulary through the SRA Reading Laboratory program, which emphasized reading. She recalled, “Oh! SRA! And so that was another way of learning vocabulary. And, you know, it also happened to update your reading comprehension.” Table 6 displays the various ways that the eight participants had been taught vocabulary during their formative years.

The participants were asked to discuss the specific instructional strategies that their teachers had used during their formative years of education. Each person described an activity that involved repetitiously writing vocabulary terms that involved some form of memorization.

Table 6

Ways Participants Learned Vocabulary During Formative Years

Identified method	Participants learning by this method
Definitions and flash cards	6 (75%)
Spelling lists & word walls	1 (13%)
Audio	1 (13%)

Table 7 provides a summary of the ways in which had participants learned and had been taught vocabulary during the formative years.

Alexander remembered, “In K through 12 (chuckle) it was you got the, you got the vocab word, you rewrote it, you got the...that was how we did it. Write and rewrite.” Anna quantified how she learned in one word: “repetition.” James recollected, “I do remember you know, notecards and you know, writing down, uh that was a strategy we learned with vocabulary – rewriting the words over and over again.” Wendy stated that she did not remember her teachers focusing on vocabulary a great deal and was encouraged by her mother to focus on vocabulary. Wendy shared:

Well, when I did it, my mom would encourage me to create vocabulary cards. But usually, I was never really taught a specific way by any teacher. Not that I can remember. So we would, um, a lot of times, I would write them on pieces of paper or in notebooks, or wherever. There didn’t seem to be a lot of emphasis on vocab.

Contrary to Wendy’s experiences of not having teachers who focused on vocabulary instruction, Thomas spoke of a teacher who challenged students to increase their vocabulary through writing down terms, looking up terms in the dictionary, and strongly encouraging his students to read. Thomas reminisced about a time how his teacher would present new vocabulary:

Table 7

Participants' Descriptions of Formative Instructional Experiences

Participant	Numeric identifier	How participants <i>learned</i> vocabulary	How participants were <i>taught</i> vocabulary
Anna	2378	Writing definitions, flash cards	Repetition
Thomas	8756	Teacher provided terms defining words using dictionary/glossary	Reading, underlining terms, making notes, and once again looking them up.
Alexander	9028	Teacher provided terms, multiple exposures, defining words using dictionary/glossary	Repetitive writing of terms and definitions.
Susan	1012	Glossary, flash cards, memorization	Writing terms, memorization
James	624	Notecards, repetition, vocabulary on terms on tape	Notecards, Repetitive writing of terms and definitions.
John	818	Spelling lists, word walls, taking notes	Spelling lists, word walls, taking notes
Wendy	1105	Writing definitions, creating vocabulary cards, independent learning	Parental assistance, vocabulary cards. Repetitive writing of terms and definitions.
Edna	1908	Reading, defining words using dictionary/glossary, SRA program, multiple exposures, using words in sentences	Reading, defining words using dictionary/glossary, using terms in a sentence

Um, one, well basically, through reading let's say if you saw a words you had never seen before - underline them, make notes, and once again look them up. I remember my teacher Mr. Seals he used to always give us like, come in and say these big words, and we would always look at him. But he would say if you get these big words then they will help you out later in life. And he would write the word down and he left us with options, if you want to choose it, write it down, write it down – you know you either you did or didn't. Sometimes, he would throw us like a bonus question on there to see if we were paying attention. So sometimes, that kind of put an incentive on us, “So okay he's talking a big word today,” let's write this big word down and see if just in case if he'll give it to us. But, uh, they were good words. And that's the way we were kinda...kinda were taught. Any words you don't know, you'd write them down, and that's how you would build your vocabulary from there. And then he would always stress reading. He said no matter what you read, it could be a comic book, it could be a sports book or whatever, but he always stressed reading.

In summary, the first Research Question focused on the instructional experiences that participants described as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students. This question appeared to evoke a pleasant memory for each participant as they were reminded of how they had learned vocabulary. Based upon the responses received, it did not appear that the participants' current teaching practices had been influenced by the ways they had learned and had been taught vocabulary.

Reflections on teaching vocabulary. The second portion of the interview focused on participants' perceptions of the leading influences that attributed to improving content vocabulary. This segment of the interview was also related to Research Question 1, but focused

on those instructional experiences that participants described as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students. Participants were asked to define effective vocabulary instruction, describe methods of vocabulary instruction in their classrooms, and explain their reasoning for those methods being incorporated into daily instruction (see Table 8). Participants were also asked to communicate understanding of student comprehension of social studies specific vocabulary. Finally, participants were asked to identify supports the school had provided for vocabulary instruction.

Effective Vocabulary Instruction Must be Engaging

All of the participants maintained a solid, mutual understanding of what effective vocabulary instruction was and what instruction should encompass. Defining effective vocabulary instruction segued to the initial understanding of those experiences participants described to enhance content vocabulary for students and presented in the first research question.

Anna mentioned, “[It] needs to be engaging,” and added “I’ve found that if students teach each other it’s far more effective.” John summarized effective vocabulary instruction as “whatever it takes to get the kids to know the words.” Alexander asserted, “I would have to say that effective vocabulary instruction for me will be uh...on... going- teaching, mainly letting them see the word, saying the word, drawing a picture with the word and then we do a song with the word.” Susan stated, “Effective vocabulary instruction I think is when the kid can not only tell me what it means but they can use it in situations, not just applying it to social studies. James contended:

Effective vocabulary instruction would be taking the word that you are studying, have the kids to understand the meaning and how it can relate to them – put it on their level. Don’t just give them a word. Give them a word of the meaning and an explanation of how they

Table 8

Participants Define Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Participant	Definition of effective vocabulary instruction
Anna	It needs to be engaging and enable students to teach each other
Thomas	Introduce the word to a student, repetition, lecture, modeling, use in instruction, assessment
Alexander	Includes teaching, allowing students to see, say, draw a picture, and use the words in song and storytelling
Susan	Effective vocabulary instruction is when student can define the term and use it in context
James	Effective vocabulary instruction would be ensuring the student understands the meaning of the word(s), ensuring that the content is taught in a fashion which the students can relate
John	Whatever it takes to get the kids to know the words.
Wendy	Consistent vocabulary instruction, allowing time in class, review each term, ensure students understand the content of each term.
Edna	Ensure that student can explain the term in full sentences and understand the context.

can use the word or wherever they have heard the word before.

The classroom observations and the collection of artifacts demonstrated the emphasis that participants placed on vocabulary instruction, as evidenced by the well-developed lessons, methods of instructional delivery and the ways student comprehension were gauged. Each of the participants contended that in order for vocabulary instruction to be effective, students should be engaged, instruction should require teacher participation, and students should be able to use the word in varying contexts.

The participants described several varied activities and instructional techniques

implemented into daily instruction. These practices included games, note taking, multimedia presentations, use of various technologies, songs and storytelling, individual and group activities, and conversations with another student or students in their immediate seated area. Seven of the eight participants chose to deviate from utilizing a textbook to define words and create note cards as their students learned, and employed varied activities during instruction. One participant chose to incorporate the traditional method of the use of a textbook and note cards to deliver vocabulary instruction. Anna integrated a myriad of activities into her daily instruction to ensure that her students were mastering the concepts, terms, and content.

Anna described some of these activities:

Turn to Your Partner. While I'm lecturing, and um, they will discuss a vocabulary word and then report out, um, and usually, one of those six groups will get it right. The other thing is *30 Second Vocab*, and this is where students uh, create an artifact or a performance, and they uh, um then get up and present that word and they are teaching students... It's either as a preview or as a review. Another way we have done it is I've done skits...we've also done, *Four Picks - One word*, where um, they are given a word and uh, you know like game on the uh, phone, the app, and they have to draw four pictures and they have to put them under the Ladybug and project them and again they confer to see if they can figure out what the word is... *Paper Slides* and this is where the students um, as a group, three or four at the most, they are given a word and they have to write a script, they have to create the little slides and um, then they tape them and we play them as a class... Sometimes we'll do like uh, uh *Kahoot!*

Thomas combined the use of a word wall, where he posted all of the words from the current unit and selected words from the wall daily and incorporated those words into daily

instruction. Thomas explained, “For every unit, I put the word wall up. And then out of every word wall, I’ll take the top seven or eight words out of that unit.” Alexander added, “We actually do a lot of songs with the words now. Um, I actually, well I want to show you. But yeah, we do a lot of songs with the words.”

Susan discussed:

When I teach vocabulary I do a lot of visual; I call it “visual vocabulary.” So the students will be taking notes. For example, we are doing a PowerPoint and I usually have pictures for each - but not for every single vocabulary term. Sometimes they draw their own pictures. And that’s the main way that I usually introduce vocabulary.

James expressed that students benefitted most from “breaking down the words.” He relied heavily on the use of mnemonic devices and on a text entitled *Latin and Greek – From the Roots Up*, which “gives the meaning of the word and discusses breaking down the root words.” He mentioned if you can break down the root words the kids have a better way to understand what the word means. John used Cornell notes while requiring students to read. Active student engagement, a positive learning environment, and increased student academic achievement all appeared to be the common denominators in the participants’ classrooms.

During the classroom observation, Anna’s class participated in a vocabulary learning activity that focused on terms essential to governmental systems. Students participated in a skit demonstrating their mastery of the concepts. The details of the assignment, rubric, and observation notes regarding the students’ delivery during the skit constituted the artifacts. All of the students were actively paying attention and were questioned as to their comprehension of the performance.

Evidence gleaned from the researcher visiting the classrooms indicated that participants

incorporated activities learned from professional development workshops attended and shared by colleagues. Modified versions of two different activities were observed in two different classrooms. The adjustments were made according to the skill set and abilities of students comprising each classroom and available resources. In one classroom, during an activity titled *30 Second Vocabulary*, small groups of students displayed knowledge through brief skits involving students. In the other classroom, small groups of students' demonstrated knowledge through technology based resources that included Animoto, Prezi, videoed skits, PowToons, and a puppet show. In each case, a guideline outlining the assignment and a rubric was provided to ensure that the final product encompassed each aspect of the assignment. Within two other classrooms, the activity allowed for the use of the students' personal devices directing students to explore teacher directed websites for content specific information related to the lesson focus. During one classroom visit, students worked independently, while in the other classroom the assignment was abbreviated and the participant allowed students to work in groups and offered assistance as well as displayed the information on the large classroom whiteboard.

Social Studies Has Content-Specific Terms Which Should be Defined

Each participant found certain methods to be effective and felt that use in respective classrooms yielded increased academic achievement. Each of the participants was in agreement that defining new terms and concepts for students is key to learning social studies content. Each of the participants attested to the fact that repeated exposure to newly introduced content was essential to student academic success. Students being exposed multiple times to academic vocabulary was demonstrated during the classroom visits, and included terms displayed on word walls, teacher-led lectures, and various class activities. Many of the assignments collected from participants as artifacts showed that the participants activated background knowledge, with

students to recall and apply terms they had been previously taught. Edna reiterated:

Well, I really think that the more exposure they have to words, the better. It's going to sink in, um, they get more comfortable with the vocabulary, and it becomes part of their normal jargon. And, I like to see them use it in writing because then we know they can apply it. And, it becomes, you know, common usage to them, maybe not immediately but at another time. But yeah, the more exposure to the word the better.

Wendy chose methods that benefitted her diverse student classroom. Wendy recalled, "So when I learned that I would be teaching ESOL students this year, I wanted to focus more on vocabulary because I knew with it being a difficult curriculum to retain that especially the ESOL students could benefit from focusing on just on the vocabulary." Thomas described a preferred method: "I think that it's key because you want them to one, learn the material, but also learn the material you want to also point out the key countries, phrases and words that you're going to use throughout that unit." John basically stated, "It works!" Anna mentioned, "Because I've found them to be very effective. Um, and, the thing that is so exciting like about, well, all - *30 Second Vocab, Four Picks - One word, Paper Slides* – kids can't wait to do this." The teachers discussed an effective research-based strategy that provided effective vocabulary instruction to their respective students.

Vocabulary Instruction is Significant to Social Studies

Each teacher reported improved student comprehension of social studies specific content vocabulary as a result of the various instructional strategies utilized in the classroom, as demonstrated on formative and summative assessments. Participants spoke of improved student comprehension due to various instructional strategies by comparing current assessment results to the results from the prior year, and also by comparing one assessment to the next assessment.

Anna confirmed this thought by stating, “It’s demonstrated informative assessments, uh, as well as in summative assessments; it’s demonstrated in our class discussions and, um especially in that *Turn to Your Partner*.” Alexander added, “Of course the testing, um, we do testing, of course, the uh, the uh, common assessments, but the other is the *Ticket Out The Door*.”

Susan affirmed with “I constantly assess them, formative assessments.” John condensed the thoughts of all participants with “their—usually their scores on their common assessments. ‘Cause their common assessments are usually pretty vocabulary specific.” This was also exemplified with the activities observed in James’s classroom, where he paused throughout his lecture to gauge student understanding and provided real-life analogies that were applicable to his students. James shared a copy of the multimedia presentation, complete with images that students related to the term being studied. Susan also used a multimedia presentation during her lesson. She termed the images she used as “visual vocabulary.”

Professional Development and Support from Colleagues

Each of the six participants who attended the six-hour professional development workshop mentioned the benefits of the strategies presented. Dan Mulligan’s professional development workshops are inclusive of a variety of engaging, student-centered, and interactive vocabulary-centered activities. Each participant spoke highly of the techniques learned and how they were being utilized in their classrooms. Participants who participated in the workshop, and even one who did not, spoke favorably about colleagues as resources, as well as other instructional resources available at the school. James pointed out, “Dan Mulligan was three years ago uh, let’s see...let’s see...let’s see...as I recall, the good strategies with vocabulary concepts and teaching and getting the kids to understand.”

Thomas first discovered the Dan Mulligan professional development and recalls, “I took

a training, I can't remember when. When I first started I took a training on Mulligan, I think his last name is and he came out to Cornerstone Middle School and before I first started and he gave some great strategies and kinda use, to take for your classroom and to get the kids to not only teach the vocabulary but them learning it and getting excited about it." Conversely, John was not able to recall any supports that he found helpful and stated, "Nope, I don't think so. Nothing is coming to mind." Anna mentioned professional development and the usefulness of conferring with a colleague, "I've gone to some professional development like the Dan Mulligan and, one of the things that I uh, well actually *30 Second Vocab*, I learned from a professional development at the school from actually Erica Vaughn (pseudonym), who is currently now at the county office."

Edna, the participant with the least amount of teaching experience and who had attended a very limited number of professional development workshops, did not attend the Dan Mulligan workshop, but relied on other available resources. Edna stated, "Well, incredible support from my colleagues, the resources that are available, the books they have suggested, the activities that are already available to us on the shared drive, my sister's a teacher..." Edna depended on one of her colleagues; used books; the text; the schools shared drive of resources; relied on her sister, who is also an educator; and online supports such as Teachers Pay Teachers.

When the researcher observed Anna and Thomas, students demonstrated modified versions of the *30 Second Vocabulary* activity. One involved a group skit and the other incorporated the use of multimedia presentations and various forms of technology. In both instances, students were actively learning and demonstrating mastery of newly introduced vocabulary. Both participants shared assessment tools, and Thomas provided copies of the student presentations. In each case, students were engaged in the learning process with research-

based instructional methods provided during the professional development workshop. Table 9 presents a summary of the various instructional supports that the participants mentioned.

The third segment of the interview addressed the participants' comfort level with vocabulary instructional practices and focused on the second research question. Research Question 2 asked: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in relation to improving student academic achievement in social studies? The results from this research question encompassed analyzing information from the field notes, participant interviews, classroom visits and each of the artifacts. This portion of the interview concentrated on participants' perceptions of the importance of vocabulary instruction, the time and frequency that vocabulary was taught, and the comfort level of the participants in providing vocabulary instruction. The last question of this section of the interview also asked if participants had observed a difference in student comprehension of the social studies content based on a specific strategy that they had found to be useful.

Evidence gleaned from the researcher's visits to the classrooms indicated that participants incorporated activities learned from professional development workshops attended and shared by colleagues. Modified versions of two different activities were observed in two different classrooms. The adjustments were made according to the skill set and abilities of students comprising each classroom and available resources. In one classroom, with an activity titled *30 Second Vocabulary*, small groups of students displayed knowledge through brief skits involving students. In the other classroom, small groups of students' demonstrated knowledge through technology based resources that included Animoto, Prezi, videoed skits, PowToons, and a puppet show. In each case, a guideline outlining the assignment and a rubric was provided to

Table 9

Vocabulary Instructional Supports within Educational Setting

Identified method	Participants learning by this method
Professional development	5 (63%)
Colleagues	1 (13%)
Other resources (i.e. texts, online, etc.)	1 (13%)
No resources available	1 (13%)

ensure that the final product encompassed each aspect of the assignment. Within two other classrooms, the activity allowed for the use of the students' personal devices directing students to explore teacher-directed websites for content specific information related to the lesson focus. During one classroom visit, students worked independently, in the other classroom the assignment was abbreviated and the participant allowed students to work in groups and offered assistance as well as displayed the information on the large classroom whiteboard.

Effective Instructional Strategies Should be Implemented on a Daily Basis

The themes generated for the research questions were attained following a thorough evaluation of each data source: interviews, classroom observations, examination of artifacts, and analysis of the field notes. Information discovered through coding and data analysis revealed that the application of knowledge, the significance of defining and repeated exposure to terms, engaging instructional activities appealing to all learning styles, and application of the new found knowledge. Subsequent coding and data analysis of the data sources divulged the essence of the theme for Research Question 1. The theme that emerged placed significance on defining terms by way of repeated exposures to terms and concepts and application of knowledge of terms to evidence comprehension. The participants believed that instruction should include daily exposure to vocabulary, was student-led, engaging, and involve varied activities and wide-

ranging uses of technology. In addition, participants' perceived professional development received related to vocabulary-centered instruction was beneficial as evidenced by the knowledge gained what transferred to the classroom setting and the results positively impacted student achievement as demonstrated on various assessments.

Themes by Research Questions

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 centered on "What instructional experiences do teachers describe to enhance content vocabulary of their social studies students?" The results from Research Question 1 were based upon data collected and analyzed from each data source. The responses provided by each of the participants during the interviews, demonstrated during classroom observations, in conjunction with student assignments and work products yielded similar responses. The participants noted that definitions provided for effective vocabulary instruction must be engaging and repetitive and that the instructional methods described and utilized in classroom instruction produced positive results for students being assessed. The participants were satisfied with and confident in the methods used for vocabulary instructional delivery.

The classroom observations yielded a myriad of instructional strategies being utilized in each of the classrooms of participants. During the classroom visits, participants incorporated activities which they had used during instruction in the past and had proved effective. The participants found the strategy used effective and modified the lesson to align with the students' skill set. The lessons delivered on the day of each classroom visit revealed well designed lessons that guided the day's instruction. Lessons were content and specific to the academic standard. In each instance, the teacher facilitated the student centered lesson, addressed questions, managed any concerns, provided clarification and guidance. Students were observed as being engaged,

participating, and provided a quality product. The apparent goal during each visit was for student mastery of the academic standard.

In response to Research Question 1, the results from analyzing each data source determined that participants described that lessons designed that were engaging for students, allowed an adequate amount of time was provided for completion of assignments, and a form of summative or formative assessment offered ways to demonstrate mastery of knowledge of vocabulary terms and concepts. This included lessons that included repeated exposures to the term or concept, adequate definitions, and the students' ability to appropriately use the term or concept in context.

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 asked "How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in relation to improving student academic achievement in social studies?" Based on the responses to the questions supporting this section of the participant interview, in conjunction with the classroom observations, and the types of lesson plans used and assignments offered to students, participant responses and lesson delivery demonstrated the emphasis placed on and the significance of vocabulary instruction. These middle school participants felt that adequate time was devoted to vocabulary instruction, which was demonstrated by various student assessment results that were mentioned. After the data was analyzed pertaining to this research question, the conclusions drawn determined that the participants of this study perceive that there is a high degree of value on teaching vocabulary in social studies. The participants' perceptions matched instructional delivery as illustrated in the instructional techniques observed during the classroom visits. The teaching methods aligned with the participants' perception of the value each placed on teaching vocabulary specific to social studies for the content specific grade level. This was exemplified through the well-designed student engaging lessons and the

importance placed on with the depth of knowledge each teacher expected students to attain.

Significance of vocabulary instruction related to social studies. Each of the participants agreed vocabulary instruction related to social studies was important. These beliefs transferred into the classroom observations and were validated through the amount of time devoted to vocabulary instruction, the carefully planned lessons, and the attention directed to ensuring that students comprehended the content. The artifacts obtained as artifacts reiterated the fervor for student academic achievement. Anna described, “Oh! It’s the foundation! Without it, we’re like a rudderless ship going nowhere.” She went on to say, “Uh, I mean for me if I don’t understand the words, and I mean for anybody, if you don’t understand the words, everything else is gobbly-gook after that!” Thomas added, “Very much so! ‘Cause like I was saying earlier, that a lot of these key phrases and terms students will not be familiar with and you want to make sure that they are familiar with these terms. Because a lot of the stuff that will come back not only on the quizzes or pretests but again, they will see it again, they will see it again in the next unit.” James concisely responded and expounded with, “Yes, mnemonic devices.” Edna concurred with Susan by responding, “Absolutely!” Susan added, “Social studies is a lot of vocabulary. It’s just like science, without the vocabulary the kids won’t understand what I’m teaching them. It’s one of the main, main points that you have to establish before you can dig deeper.” Anthony also discussed that social studies vocabulary is “very important. The kids need to know vocab.”

Social studies content primarily consists of specific academic vocabulary. This can create teacher apprehension about incorporating vocabulary into instruction. Each of the participants expressed being comfortable with providing vocabulary-centered instruction. Observing participants in the classrooms allowed for that comfort level of disseminating vocabulary specific

lessons to be examined. In each instance, after reviewing the lesson plans, over planning did not hinder the lesson being delivered. Adequate time in preparation and delivery appeared to have been dedicated to the activities in each observation. Anna, an experienced teacher, was very comfortable with incorporating vocabulary-centered strategies into daily instructional and felt that “Hmmm, (chuckle), it’s like second nature.” Wendy’s thoughts aligned with Anna’s and she stated, “I am very comfortable with it. Probably because I am already spending time on it this year and focusing more on it this year.” James was also comfortable with teaching vocabulary. He mentioned, “Ah, on a scale of 1 to 10, I’d probably say about an 8 ½. I feel pretty good about it. Ah, this is a new subject for me and I’ve not taught this grade level before in relation to the Middle East.” As a relatively new educator, Edna was not as comfortable with incorporating vocabulary-centered methods into her instruction. She stated:

Well I haven’t...you know my, my exposure to it has been limited I would be, I am so you know I’m like a sponge and all of my colleagues have been so extremely supportive. So umm, I rely on their expertise, to say either this works or that works. I am a little gun shy about trying something if I don’t fully understand it – which makes sense.

The discussion of the participants demonstrated an overall comfort level providing vocabulary instruction regarding social studies content.

Regularity of vocabulary instruction. Of the eight participants in the study, all but one attested to providing a form of vocabulary-centered instruction daily. Edna offered, “Everyday. Ok, it’s not always a vocabulary lesson, but everyday we’re encountering new terms.” James explained, “It’s kinda continuous because I do a 10-minute read everyday so the students are constantly coming up against new words and new things.” John pointed out, “I’d have to say daily. We’re always introducing new words and revisiting words. So, yes, I’d say every day.

Either reviewing the previous vocabulary or you're introducing new, so it'd be daily." Susan has chosen to reinforce vocabulary daily through her lessons. "I feel like I teach it initially but I feel like I reinforce it every day." Thomas emphasized:

Well, I mean um it's, I don't want to say that it's...it's easy, um but this is what you want to do. You just kinda want to edge these words in especially the key terms that we're gonna use throughout the unit or throughout the year and you want to start out day one with...especially when I introduce a unit, I tell the students what's going to be on there.

One teacher, Wendy, shared, "As far as focusing on just vocabulary, at least once a unit. But I do bring in, you know the words as often as needed." Each teacher claimed to reinforce vocabulary through daily instruction. While observing the classrooms of Edna, Wendy and John, it was noted that each teacher reverted back to reflect on vocabulary previously taught in order to establish a connection with the current content. Each used a different yet effective method to formulate the association between the two concepts. On those days, Wendy and Edna used the same activity to introduce content for the upcoming unit, while John utilized a version of Cornell Notes and the textbook. Copies of each lesson and assignment were collected and maintained as artifacts from those participants.

Daily vocabulary instruction. Participants were asked when vocabulary was taught and the teacher responses varied. Responses included during every lesson, at the beginning of the lesson and at the beginning of the unit. Edna reported, "The way I've done it, you know I teach it every day whether we're doing it overtly or not. I typically, I'm trying to cover it at the beginning of the unit so that they have a baseline." Wendy also taught vocabulary at the beginning of the unit and was cited as saying, "I usually teach it at the beginning and then go deeper, so say it's more surface level at the beginning, but throughout instruction I dig deeper to

where my kids can actually apply the meaning to those terms.” Alexander mentioned, “It’s kinda funny. Everyday. Vocab is in every lesson. It must be, its ingrained into it.” Anna stated:

Um, sometimes it’ll be ‘let’s review vocab from the day before in your warm up’; other times it will be as we are going through a lesson. Other times it will as be your *Ticket Out The Door*, or however you term it. Um, let’s um, either preview tomorrow or review today. Um, sometimes it will be in an entire lesson. The whole lesson is focused on these vocabulary words or that concept.

In Alexander’s classroom, an all class song and dance centering on the geography of the Middle East was the focus. The lesson began with reviewing the current and previous lesson’s terms. The students rehearsed twice, then performed their presentation that was videotaped, which was shared as an artifact. Participants were not clear as to when to begin vocabulary instruction, at the beginning of the unit or during the lesson, as each teacher’s response varied. Table 10 summarizes the point during instruction when vocabulary served as the focus.

Benefits of Student Comprehension

The experienced participants and those who had attended and participated in various workshops centering on instructional strategies provided ways that this information benefited them not only as educators but how these resources had benefited students. Participants candidly shared effective instructional strategies that had found beneficial to students. Anna spoke about one of her favorite strategies:

Ok, um, as a result of using *Ten and Two*, my scores were the highest they’ve ever been and I guess, tooting my own horn, I had the highest scores in the school, the sec-the first full year that I used that strategy. So to me, vocabulary attainment is, whatever way you do it, you have to do it and you have to do it well.

Table 10

Interval when Vocabulary Instruction is Offered

Identified time	Participants delivering instruction at this time
Daily	4 (50%)
Beginning and throughout lesson	3 (38%)
Introducing unit - only	1 (13%)

Alexander enthusiastically added, “Yes! Now the strategies that will be more useful than others is [sic] the storytelling and the songs. I see that the kids love making songs.” Thomas changed one of his processes this year based on a personal observation:

Um, well I would have to say yes. I mean I have seen an increase in, um you know this year. I’ve seen growth already in um, from our test, first test this year to um our first test last year. And the biggest thing I think that I did was basically more focusing on one or two words and putting those into my warm up. Uh, last year I didn’t really focus on more of those words in my warm up, but this year I’ve actually put them into my warm up and I’ve noticed that, especially on the weekly quizzes, they’ve gone up.

James used a vocabulary sheet and John preferred using Cornell Notes. Wendy adopted a graphic organizer that relied on the creative abilities of her students. Wendy noted, “I usually encourage students to not only write the term and definition but also to draw a picture or symbol.” Edna was not as familiar with the various research-based instructional strategies centering on vocabulary and responded with “I really think, um, that – again it’s hard (sigh) because I don’t have that much exposure to it.” Edna’s response may point to the need for professional development centering on research-based vocabulary instructional strategies, as her fellow colleagues have found them to be extremely helpful. The benefits of the supports in place for the participants were exemplified in the instruction witnessed during the classroom

observations through the lessons and activities that have been devised for student learning.

Research Question 2 focused on “How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?” The findings from Research Question 2 were determined as a result from extensive analysis of each data source. The observations, interviews, review of the collection of artifacts, and the field notes each produced comparable results. The consensus was that each participant perceived that instruction on vocabulary centering was essential for students learning social studies content. The theme that generated from this research question was obtained after evaluating each of the data sources. Facts obtained after analyzing these sources determined that participants found value in teaching content specific vocabulary which lead to the theme associated with Research Question 2. The theme that evolved showed that participants perceived that daily instructional focus directed to vocabulary had a significant impact on student comprehension and academic achievement. Participants devoted time to focus on the learning of new vocabulary at the beginning of and throughout lesson delivery.

Time was allowed within each daily lesson to emphasize the learning of new vocabulary terms. This teaching occurred at the beginning or throughout the lesson. One participant expressed that additional time was devoted to focusing on vocabulary instruction at the introduction of a new content unit. Participants believed that lessons were adequately prepared and a suitable amount of time was dedicated to instruction for the grade level and concepts presented. There was a high degree of comfort with implementing new instructional strategies learned either through professional development or attained from colleagues. Classroom observations along with the student work samples utilized in conjunction with lesson delivery demonstrated varied warmup exercises and activities which reiterated the perceived value participants placed on vocabulary instruction. In addressing Research Question 2, “How do

teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?”, after analyzing all data sources the results determine that participants perceived and have placed a high value on vocabulary instruction related to social studies content as indicative of the lessons devised, student products, observed during classroom visits, and expressed during participant interviews.

Research Question 3. The purpose of Research Question 3 was to ask participants to “Describe vocabulary instructional practices in social studies”. During the interview, participants honestly discussed the interpretation of social studies instructional practices. Participants were questioned as to how each incorporated vocabulary for new content into instruction. The strategies used for vocabulary instruction and were probed as to beliefs about the effectiveness of the chosen strategy. Wendy and Thomas used various games and Alexander used songs and storytelling in instructional delivery for new content. James was the only participant who discussed that new vocabulary was taught in context and was cited as stating “I’d say that I just bring it in as the words [sic] come across the slides or in the presentations”. The final question asked the participants if there were any additional topics related to vocabulary instruction that was not asked or considered that should have been discussed.

Research Question 3 asked, “How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?” This research question generated the beliefs of the participants based on classroom instructional practices. Each data source were carefully reviewed and analyzed in obtaining the answer to Research Question 3. The data addressing this research question yielded the greatest information. Participants eagerly provided information a great deal of information in the participant interviews relating to the types of instructional practices utilized in the social studies classrooms. The types of activities observed coincided with the vocabulary and content specific instructional goal written on the board in each classroom. The activities

observed included a combination of lecture and note taking by the students, students using QR codes which directed students to various pre-established websites to define terms, a group activity where students demonstrated knowledge of governmental terms in a skit. In another classroom students demonstrated understanding of those same governmental terms employing the use of technology. These students created multimedia presentations using Prezi, AniMoto, PowToons, and skits recorded on their personal devices. The types of instructional tools being used directly aligned with the responses provided by each participant in the interviews.

The results for Research Question 3 revealed that participants described engaging activities utilizing a myriad of activities that included technological resources, group and individual activities, interactive activities, and the text that accompanied the content area. These activities produced active student engagement as discussed during the interviews, observed during the classroom visits and collected in the form of student work samples and lesson plans. The participants felt that the types of instructional activities were suitable for the skill sets of their students and commensurate with the academic level.

Daily Vocabulary Instruction

The participants incorporated vocabulary for new content into social studies through a variety of methods. The participants primarily used multimedia presentations, including videos, lectures, and reading to accompany daily instruction for introducing new content. Anna, Alexander, Edna and James considered the students' background knowledge in creating lessons and developing instructional strategies. Table 11 addresses how instruction was introduced into daily instruction by the participants.

There were several ideas shared for incorporating new content into instruction. Edna used a warm-up as an introductory lesson, where she gauged the background of her students. Edna

Table 11

Point Where Vocabulary Instruction is Presented

Participant	Point where vocabulary instruction is presented
Anna	“Before the warm-up exercise, within the lesson, Ticket Out The Door, either review tomorrow or review today, sometimes the entire lesson. The whole lesson is focused on these vocabulary words or that concept”.
Thomas	“Indirectly you are teaching it every day because you’ll see some of the terms. It’s because we’re using the terms that are up on the wall throughout the lesson, quizzes, tests.”
Alexander	“Vocab is in every lesson.”
Susan	“I usually teach it at the beginning and then go deeper so say it’s more surface level at the beginning, but throughout instruction, I dig deeper to where my kids can actually apply the meaning to those terms.”
James	“Throughout the lesson. PowerPoints and Prezis and when the words come in throughout the lesson is when we introduce the vocabulary.”
John	“At the beginning of class each day.”
Wendy	“Usually at the beginning of each unit.”
Edna	“I teach it every day... I’m trying to cover it at the beginning of the unit. I intersperse it throughout the lesson as we come up with it. I try to do is summarize at the end of a lesson and go through some of the new terms. Usually, every lesson and some lessons may just center on vocab, but those are typically early in the unit so that we know what we’re talking about when we get there.”

stated:

Um, sometimes for the warm up, I will add uh use it as an introduction for something

“What do you – what do you know about this?” or “What do you think this is about?”

Um, so, I try to pique their interest or give them a hint about what we are going to be talking about as part of the warm up.

John introduced new content “through video lectures, content posters, and reading assignments.”

James shared:

No, I'd say that I just bring it in as the words uh come across the slides or in the presentations. We bring it up then, and then we stop and focus, and revisit the key areas of the word, breaking it down and into the simplest form and uh you know, having them get an understanding and see if they can apply it. “Where else have you heard that word?” or “Where else might this word be used?”

Susan had a similar technique where she: “put it into the PowerPoint sometimes uh, sometimes I'll start by giving them the vocabulary and they'll do like a matching thing just to see what they already know.” Anthony found success with the storytelling technique when incorporating new social studies content into instruction. Many of the participants spoke of techniques used in incorporating vocabulary for new content into instruction. There appeared to be a great degree of clarity warranted in understanding how and when to introduce new social studies content among the eight participants.

Instructional Activities Strategies used in Vocabulary Instruction

Participants used several strategies for vocabulary instruction. Graphic organizers, interactive activities, use of technology, writing and re-writing vocabulary terms, and reading terms in context for comprehension were the teaching methods utilized by participants for reinforcing content knowledge and new vocabulary. These instructional techniques also included multimedia presentations, charts, stations, digital flash cards, visual vocabulary, foldables, projects, homework packets, interactive word walls, and games. Many of these activities were collected as artifacts and noted in use during the classroom observations. Several technologically based activities were used, such as the use of the clickers that accompanied the smart board,

Kahoot!, Prezi, Animoto, YouTube and the use of students' personal devices – cell phones and tablets. Alexander eagerly offered,

Foldables, which I, uh...foldables is one. Games is[sic] huge! (*laugh*) I use a lot of games! We just used a game today!...of course *Kahoot!* I love using that! Uh, we use clickers for games. I use what I call the *Writing Game*.

Susan shared a favorite: "The visual vocabulary, uh, I use stations where they have to match terms." Wendy encouraged students to decide, stating, "I leave some of it up to the students. But whenever I do have them do their vocabulary I-most Kids, I have them either create flash cards or create a chart in their notebook that includes images and definitions." Table 12 details the vocabulary instructional strategies utilized during instruction. Many of the activities included various forms of multimedia and technology, foldables and graphic organizers, individual and group activities and traditional methods.

During the classroom observations, a myriad of activities and presentations that appeared to maximize student learning and engagement was witnessed. Table 13 displays the instructional strategies utilized by the participants.

Several of the strategies discussed were effective and research-based; many were learned during the Dan Mulligan professional development workshop. Participants were asked to share why each felt that their chosen strategies were considered effective. Thomas stated:

Well, I mean I think if you know the vocab, you know the term then it will help you, you are better familiar with the content at hand. Especially since social studies has a lot of dates, places, and names that we aren't used to. Alexander pointed out:

The kids get into it. And, even though it's hard to say that not every teacher entertains.

But, I know I like listening to storytellers. They entertain me and most kids and they try

Table 12

Strategies Utilized During Instruction

Participant	How participant teaches vocabulary
Anna	Turn to Your Partner, lecturing, students discuss with each other, 30 Second Vocab, skits, Four Picks - One word, Paper Slides, Kahoot!
Thomas	Word wall, teaching in context, use in warm-ups, lecture, regular review, formative and summative assessments
Alexander	Songs and storytelling using the words pictures to accompany the term
Susan	“Visual Vocabulary,” taking notes, PowerPoint presentations including the terms and pictures, allowing students to draw
James	Breakdown words by prefix, root, and suffix, provide Greek and Latin roots, ensuring the student understands the meaning and-and how it relates to them, provide word and meaning
John	Using Cornell notes and reading
Wendy	Allowing a class period to focus on vocabulary at the beginning of each unit to review word and allow students to explain the words to each other
Edna	Word wall, utilizing the text (glossary, content, and index), define online, self-assessment, common assessments, short answer responses, read aloud in class, interactive activities, providing a list of terms, self-assessment, and use in a sentence

not to be, they want to be entertained.

Susan said, “because they touch on the visual learners as well as auditory when I’m saying it.” James reiterated with, “because understanding the vocabulary helps them understand the content. If they, they may not understand the exact uh, idea we’re going for. But if they understand some of the keywords, it helps make understanding the ideas easier.” John suggested, “Just basically because I’ve seen an improvement in overall student achievement.” Wendy felt her strategies worked best with her students due to:

Well, so far I think that the chart and the notebook have been the most effective because their notebook is always with them. The flashcards have been good for organized students. But I think that it’s especially effective for students which are visual learners. It kinda brings in some differentiation into vocabulary instruction which is usually very cut

Table 13

Vocabulary Instructional Strategies Utilized in the Classroom

Identified strategy	Participants using this strategy
Multimedia Presentations, Video, Lectures & Reading	6 of 8 participants
Games	5 of 8 participants
Storytelling and Song	1 of 8 participants
Warm up	7 of 8 participants
Reading, Word Wall, Flash Cards	6 of 8 participants

and dry.

Each classroom teacher discussed his or her favorite activity and shared why it was effective and spoke of the academic success of the instructional strategy.

The final question concerned any topics pertaining to vocabulary instruction that were not mentioned that participants felt should have been discussed. Each teacher agreed that the interview encompassed their thoughts and ideas and was grateful for the opportunity to contribute.

The theme generated for this research question reached after an exhaustive assessment of each of the data sources. This included and in depth review of the artifacts, interviews, and analysis of the field and observation notes. This information was uncovered through the coding process and was inclusive of the extensive use of graphic organizers, interactive activities, varied uses of technology, writing of terms in differing formats, and reading terms in context for comprehension. Analysis of these data established the essence for the theme related to Research Question 3. The theme that materialized disclosed that participants recognized there were several and differing instructional techniques available to reinforce learning social studies vocabulary. The resources were modified in some instances, adapted to the learners of the respective classrooms. Information attained

Research Question 3 centered on “How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?”. Research Question 3 can be answered with participants describing and demonstrating the use of a myriad of instructional techniques. These methods included wide-ranging uses of technology incorporated into instructional delivery by the participants and work products generated by the students. Interactive activities, individual and group based, involving technology or props, along with song, storytelling, call and response, were also included in the descriptions provided by participants and observed during classroom visits. Participants described and displayed the use of graphic organizers, foldables, reading, and writing activities as inclusive of their lesson delivery. Each of the instructional practices was purposed for learning new terms, comprehension and academic achievement.

Summary

This qualitative research study employing a phenomenological approach began with a series of overarching questions focused on identifying the strategies used and describing the experiences of social studies teachers incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies into lesson delivery. The participants’ perceptions and beliefs about vocabulary instruction through the use of a 23-question, open-ended question in depth interview, classroom observations, and the collection of artifacts were obtained. Eight social studies middle school participants from a large school district located in northern Georgia served as the research participants.

An examination and the analysis of multiple data sources enabled the summation of the experiences of these participants. The synthesis of the data enabled an understanding from participants that contributed to this phenomenon of their perceptions associated with vocabulary instruction to be formulated. The data was analyzed through the process of coding, and then common themes were identified. The characteristics of effective vocabulary strategies identified

from this research highlight the participants' beliefs that (a) vocabulary instruction should be engaging and relevant, (b) vocabulary is essential to social studies as there are specific vocabulary terms associated with this content area, and (c) vocabulary should be included in daily instruction.

With respect to the research questions that guided this study, the findings of Research Question 1 centered on the instructional strategies teachers described as enhancing social studies content vocabulary. Participants revealed that effective vocabulary instruction should be engaging and students should receive repetitive exposures to newly introduced terms. Research Question 2 focused on the perceptions of the value teachers placed on social studies vocabulary. The results of data for this question showed that the teachers believed social studies vocabulary was essential to instruction. The data from the final research question, Research Question 3 required the teachers to describe the instructional practices utilized in personal respective classrooms. Data revealed that the middle school teachers that were included in this study were utilizing a myriad of instructional strategies and were satisfied with the types of instructional practices that they were using in classrooms. The results of this data will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of eight teachers that were utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). Chapter Five summarizes the findings of the research in relation to the research questions, discusses the findings in relation to the empirical literature related to vocabulary instruction, reviews the implications and limitations related to the study and provides recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to describe the experiences of eight teachers that were utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction at Cornerstone Middle School (pseudonym). At the site of the study, participants of varying experiences were incorporating effective and research-based instructional strategies learned from professional development into lessons on a daily basis. These participants demonstrated research-based instructional strategies related to the importance of vocabulary instruction in their social studies classrooms. The findings of this research study determined that the participants perceived content specific vocabulary instruction and effective instructional strategies should be implemented on a daily basis. Effective instructional strategies was determined to be a common theme that was mentioned by all of the participants in response to several of the interview questions. This finding was also used during recall activities exemplified during the instruction witnessed during each of the observations, incorporated into the lessons' activities and referenced by every participant during the teacher led portion of instruction. These findings also suggested that these participants believed that effective vocabulary instruction must

be engaging. Engaging instruction was also determined as a finding theme used to reinforce the content. Each of the eight participants shared a variety of instructional techniques used to support learning that included skits, demonstration of comprehension through the use of technology, and group activities. The findings reiterated the significance of vocabulary instruction within the social studies content area classroom.

The data acquired by addressing each research question was obtained from each of the eight participants by partaking in face-to-face interviews, classroom observations and the collection of artifacts. The interviews consisted of 23 questions and were divided into four sections: the participants' demographic information and questions devoted to each of the three research questions. A 30-minute classroom observation revealed alignment of the information discussed during the interviews and during the lesson delivery. Finally, student work samples and teacher lesson plans were collected and reviewed. All three sources of data were reviewed, analyzed, and utilized to devise the overarching themes.

There were three Research Questions that guided this study. The research questions focused on the beliefs, perceptions and instructional strategies of middle school social studies participants related to content specific vocabulary. The research questions that steered this research were:

Research Question 1: What are the instructional experiences that teachers describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students?

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies?

Research Question 3: How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in their social studies classes?

Research Question 1.

The first Research Question focused on those instructional experiences that enhance the content vocabulary of social studies students. This information gathered from each of the data sources was coded and analyzed. After analyzing each of the data sources, common qualities were discovered included student engagement, student centered, and student ability to verbalize or demonstrate knowledge of the content. Results of the initial interview questions gleaned demographic and historical information from participants understanding how each had been taught and learned vocabulary during his/her formative years of education. Those findings offered varying accounts as to the differences in how participants learned and were taught vocabulary and revealed that these formative experiences did not influence current instructional techniques for seven out of eight of the participants. The descriptions that detailed those instructional experiences that enhance the content vocabulary of social studies students were demonstrated during classroom observations and reinforced with lessons and by the student work products.

Participants discussed the myriad of techniques used to provide vocabulary instruction within the classroom. Stobaugh, Tassell, Day and Blankenship (2011) established that “social studies teachers are charged with the task of developing students’ understandings as students engage in critical examination of social studies issues and topics” (p.4). This directly related to Research Question 1, as participants described instructional experiences that enhanced social studies content instructional delivery. Being knowledgeable of the characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction served as a fundamental factor and was used as an important influential factor in understanding the instructional experiences of the participants.

Additional information revealed that participants were knowledgeable about the

characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction, as referenced in Table 8. The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) noted, “Effective vocabulary instruction requires educators to intentionally provide many rich, robust opportunities for students to learn words, related concepts, and their meanings,” (p. 7) and went on to state that effective vocabulary learning involved active student engagement that extended beyond definitional knowledge. The findings of Research Question 1 determined that the application of knowledge, significance of defining and repeated exposure to terms, engaging instructional activities appealing to all learning styles, and application of the new found knowledge were each qualities participants described as the instructional experiences that participants describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students. In addition, participants’ perceived professional development received related to vocabulary-centered instruction was beneficial as evidenced by the knowledge gained what transferred to the classroom setting and the results positively impacted student achievement as demonstrated on various assessments.

In response to Research Question 1, the results from analyzing each data source determined that participants described that lessons designed that were engaging for students, allowed an adequate amount of time was provided for completion of assignments, and a form of summative or formative assessment offered ways to demonstrate mastery of knowledge of vocabulary terms and concepts. This included lessons that included repeated exposures to the term or concept, adequate definitions, and the students’ ability to appropriately use the term or concept in context.

Research Question 2.

Research Question 2 addressed participants’ perceptions of the value of teaching vocabulary in social studies. During the interview, participants were provided with an

opportunity to explain student understanding of social studies vocabulary. The participants offered personal beliefs regarding the importance of social studies vocabulary instruction, comfort level in teaching vocabulary, the regularity of vocabulary instruction, and if they had observed any variance in student comprehension resulting from a specific vocabulary strategy. Each teacher equally resounded positively regarding the importance of social studies vocabulary-centered instruction. As a result of the findings of this study, the perceptions of the participants indicated that these participants believed that social studies vocabulary was essential to instruction. Several research-based instructional strategies were incorporated into regular instruction, as noted during the classroom observations and through the collection of artifacts. Research Question 2 centered on the social studies teachers' perceptions relating to the value of teaching vocabulary and student academic achievement. Participants used a wide variety of summative and formative assessments to gauge student comprehension.

Every participant also expressed being very comfortable with teaching vocabulary which was observed during classroom visits. There was a high degree of comfort with implementing new instructional strategies learned either through professional development or attained from colleagues. Inconsistencies arose in regards to the timing as to when participants provided the instruction – at the beginning of a lesson, throughout the lesson or devoting a day of instruction solely to vocabulary (see Table 3). In each instance, each teacher reported increased academic achievement as a result of the chosen time to focus on vocabulary. The relevance of this information corroborates the significance that the participants placed on vocabulary in that vocabulary-centered instruction was incorporated into daily lessons and was reflected in lesson delivery and student work samples. The findings based on the analysis of the data yielded that each participant valued teaching content specific vocabulary, believed vocabulary instruction

centering on vocabulary was significant to social studies content area, and was essential for students learning social studies content. Additionally, participants perceived that daily instructional focus directed to vocabulary had a significant impact on student comprehension and academic achievement. After analyzing all data sources addressing Research Question 2, the results determine that participants perceived and have placed a high value on vocabulary instruction related to social studies content as indicative of the lessons devised, student products, observed during classroom visits, and expressed during participant interviews.

Research Question 3.

Research Question 3 focused on the teachers' descriptions of social studies vocabulary-centered instructional strategies. Participants provided insight regarding the inclusion of vocabulary for new content into instruction, the strategies utilized, and perceptions of the effectiveness of their chosen strategies. The results from the data gathered from this research question revealed the participants utilized a variety of instructional strategies in their daily instruction. Participants were content with the types of instructional practices being used to facilitate lessons in classrooms. Instructional practices described to reinforce learning included wide use of technology, graphic organizers, interactive activities, group and individual assignments and activities, each of which offered repeated exposures to and reiterated new found content all to increase student comprehension. The results for Research Question 3 revealed that participants have placed a high value on vocabulary instruction related to social studies content as indicative of the lessons devised, student products, observed during classroom visits, and expressed during participant interviews. Additionally, participants recognized there were several and differing instructional techniques available to reinforce learning social studies vocabulary.

Research Question 3 centered on "How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional

practices in their social studies classes? These methods included wide-ranging uses of technology incorporated into instructional delivery by the participants and work products generated by the students. Interactive activities, individual and group based, involving technology or props, along with song, storytelling, call and response, were also included in the descriptions provided by participants and observed during classroom visits. Participants described and displayed the use of graphic organizers, foldables, reading, and writing activities as inclusive of their lesson delivery. Each of the instructional practices was purposed for learning new terms, comprehension and academic achievement.

Discussion

Within the research studies synthesized by the NRP (2000) and the findings of the NRTAC (2010), there have been a limited number of studies conducted for middle school students in concepts-based content areas focusing on learning and instruction. The limited number of studies examining the effects of concepts based vocabulary instruction at the middle school level remains an area requiring attention in vocabulary research. The need has been demonstrated for an educational emphasis to be placed on vocabulary focused instruction, as displayed in the NAEP (2013) reported findings of student achievement nationwide. Evidence-based practices in vocabulary instruction centering on instructional strategies are common (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Kame'enui & Bauman, 2012; Marzano, 2004, 2009, 2012). The findings from the NAEP (2013) study show only a slight increase over the two-year period assessing student reading achievement.

The current Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading and language necessitated that students applied knowledge of language and were able to decipher literal and figurative word meanings and phrases in context within textbooks. As stated in the CCSS (2016)

Knowledge of Language and Vocabulary Acquisition and Use standards, both required that students were knowledgeable, comprehended and were able to apply the terms in context. For grades K-12 Language Anchor Standard 3: Knowledge of Language (2010) required that students “apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.” Language Anchor Standard 4: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (2010) stated that students were able to “determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.” The CCSS History and Social Studies (2010) standard for grades 6-8 related to vocabulary required that students “use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.”

In the literature review, the significance of students becoming familiar with vocabulary was discussed, as it assisted individuals with the acquisition of new information and supports comprehension (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Beck, 1983; Glende, 2013; NRTAC, 2010; Sedita, 2005). The research corroborated with the existing literature knowledge base and revealed that vocabulary was a significant contributing factor to all aspects of language. The fact directly aligned with the beliefs of the participants of this study. This research encompassed content specific vocabulary and was perceived as an influential factor to student learning.

The NRP (NICHD, 2000) identified four factors related to reading as vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. Vocabulary impacts each of these components. Teaching and learning Social Studies was inclusive of reading and content specific vocabulary. Instructional delivery and practices demonstrated by participants involved each of those components. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) stated that “vocabulary is not a developmental skill

or one that can ever be fully mastered” (p.2). These authors furthered that learning vocabulary is a process that was expand and elaborated upon throughout an individual’s lifespan.

This study was inclusive of the participants extending the knowledge of their students. The findings of this research revealed that with the application of knowledge, significance of defining and repeated exposure to terms, engaging instructional activities appealing to all learning styles, and application of the new found knowledge, participants perceived that instruction centering on vocabulary was essential for students learning social studies content. The participants recognized there were several and differing instructional techniques available to reinforce learning social studies vocabulary. Leung (2008) established that “after hearing a new word, the child encodes a phonological representation of the word” (p.166).

Repeated exposures to vocabulary is essential to learning

Repeated and frequent exposures to newly learned terms were essential to student comprehension, the learning process, and retaining the information (Gillis, 2015; Marzano, 2009; McKeown, Crosson, Artz, Sandora, & Beck, 2013; Nagy & Scott, 2000, Zhu, 2015). Inclusive of the extensive use of graphic organizers, interactive activities, varied uses of technology, writing of terms in differing formats, and reading terms in context for comprehension. Beck et al. (2013) found that “a large vocabulary repertoire facilitates becoming an educated person to the extent that vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency in particular and school achievement in general” (p. 1). The application of knowledge, significance of defining and repeated exposure to terms, engaging instructional activities appealing to all learning styles, and application of the new found knowledge has been presented as one of the primarily findings in this research. Vadasy and Nelson (2012) believed that learning should involve “actively engaging students in processing new words in their natural context. Word definitions are only the

starting point in learning words, merely preparing students for repeated encounters with the words and ever deeper levels of processing” (p .88).

Repeated exposures to vocabulary is essential to learning and is essential to the student comprehension and application of knowledge (Beck, et al., 2013; Gillis, 2015; Marzano, 2009; McKeown et al., 2013; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Sedita, 2005). Participants in this research reiterated this concept as was confirmed through each of the data sources. This research revealed that effective instruction involved engaging interactive activities that appealed to all learning styles. Berry (2013) noted “the underlying assumption is that this type of engagement develops semantic network connections and also facilitates learning related words from context. Imbedded in these activities is implicit instruction directed toward reasoning with words and that likely strengthens children’s comprehension” (p.88).

Instruction Centering on Vocabulary is Essential for Social Studies

A second result of this research determined that participants perceived that instruction centering on vocabulary was essential for students learning social studies content. Data analysis revealed the emphasis the participants placed upon the professional supports that served as instrumental contributors to those instructional experiences that participants describe as enhancing social studies content vocabulary for their students. Collaboration with colleagues for assistance and professional development were the instructional supports that were identified by the participants. Avalos (2011) stated “professional development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth” (p. 10). Regular involvement for participants in professional learning was essential to increased knowledge, improving instructional practices, and vital to student learning (Akiba & Liang, 2016). The teaching techniques learned through attending professional

development workshops and collaboration with colleagues, participants learned and demonstrated instructional methods within the classroom which they felt positively impacted their students. This thought was reiterated by Akiba and Liang (2016) and asserted “through a collaborative and research-based learning process promoting in-depth discussions and reflections on specific teaching approaches and student learning, it is likely that these investments in promoting teachers’ professional learning activities will result in improved student learning” (p.107).

The second finding resulted in discovering that participants perceived that instruction centering on vocabulary was essential for students learning social studies content. The research revealed that participants believed that content specific vocabulary was integral to the content area. Participants placed emphasis on vocabulary instruction. Kihlstrom and Cantor (2011) believed that learning directly correlated with how well students are taught and the literature has stipulated that a “students’ knowledge acquisition is reciprocal and interactive, building and supporting one another” (p.220). Each participant expressed being comfortable in their teaching practices and appeared confident during the classroom observations. Participants also communicated their belief of their perceived correlation between centering instruction on vocabulary, student comprehension and student academic achievement. Vasdasy and Nelson (2012) concurred with this point and expressed “there is broad consensus on the strong link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.” (p.88). The research uncovered that participants believed that there were adequate resources to perform their teaching responsibilities and the curriculum prescribed by the district was well written. Berry (2013) concurred with the necessity of a well-defined curriculum and quantified this statement with “a supportive curriculum that provides models, scripting, definitions, and examples may therefore

assist in the development of teachers' professional expertise" (p. 168).

Effective Instructional Strategies Should be Implemented on a Daily Basis

The third result of this research found that participants recognized there were several and differing instructional techniques available to reinforce learning social studies vocabulary. Inclusive of the extensive use of graphic organizers, interactive activities, varied uses of technology, writing of terms in differing formats, and reading terms in context for comprehension. The review of literature dictated that there were a myriad of research based vocabulary-centered instructional techniques that have been endorsed by experts in the field. Vacca, Vacca, and Gove (2000) endorsed vocabulary as an instructional tool that reinforced when taught in conjunction with the development of concepts. Marzano (2012) and McKeown et al. (2013) believed in the concept that vocabulary should students should be repeatedly exposed to vocabulary.

Sweeney and Mason (2011) felt that vocabulary was most effective when taught in smaller groups. Each of these research proven techniques were exhibited by each of the participants in delivering effective vocabulary instruction. Berry (2013) pointed out that "since students need to gain an understanding of how words are used in different contexts, vocabulary instruction should help students apply these terms across numerous contexts and teach them strategies for figuring out the meanings of new words they encounter" (p. 198). He furthered that "word identification strategies, concept combining, semantic feature analysis, concept formation, and several other specific strategies can be employed to enhance vocabulary learning" (p. 198).

According to Adelson, Geva, and Fraser (2014), one of the most significant indicators of proficiency in oral language was vocabulary knowledge. In conjunction with the findings of participants' perceptions of the significance of content specific vocabulary, Sweeney and Mason

(2011) concurred that vocabulary was vital in accelerating the learning process. Wright and Newman (2015) agreed that vocabulary should be taught in context and was content specific, this was in concordance with the findings and the beliefs of participants of this study. The majority of the studies focused on vocabulary instruction word knowledge and reading comprehension (NRTAC, 2010; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). There was a relationship between student comprehension, vocabulary, and acquiring new information (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982, Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; McCarten, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000). Student academic achievement is based upon and occurs by expanding access to effective instruction was reiterated by Rivkin and Schiman (2015). Hence, there was practical significance in conducting this study centering on the content specific vocabulary instructional strategies at the middle school level and the perceptions and beliefs of those participants employing those strategies.

Effective and comprehensive vocabulary instruction encompassed four components. Graves (2000, 2011) identified these components as (a) rich and varied language experiences, (b) direct teaching of individual words, (c) independent word-learning strategies, and (d) word consciousness. Predicating vocabulary instruction on the aforementioned concepts could enhance the instructional experience, attainment, and retention of academic vocabulary for students, as confirmed by Graves (2011). Additionally, instructional strategies inclusive of repeated exposures to vocabulary terms, technology assisted instruction, and direct instruction each lead to increased word knowledge (Marzano, 2012). Pritchard and O'Hara (2009) were staunchly advocated for incorporating the use of technology in lessons and found that many school districts are supporters of the same. Marzano's (2012) frame of thought aligned with the findings of this research of the participant's beliefs in the significance of content specific vocabulary instruction. The participants believed that direct instruction was a beneficial format for vocabulary

instructional delivery. The findings of this study reinforced the beliefs of Rupley, Nichols, Mraz, and Blair (2012) that vocabulary should be taught explicitly due to the significance of and correlation between comprehension and vocabulary.

The initial findings disclosed that participants were not influenced by the way they had been taught nor by the way they had learned vocabulary to influence their current instructional practices. The methods by which they were taught and learned vocabulary (i.e. looking up terms, writing definitions, and memorizing with flashcards) have been deemed less effective by current standards. The participants utilized various vocabulary enriched instructional strategies, including graphic organizers, semantic mapping, and analysis and grouping of words versus students participating in traditional instructional methods. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (2000) identified a strong correlation between the used of research-based vocabulary instructional strategies and improved academic performance. These participants chose to utilize and incorporate research-based methods into daily instructional practices and stated that students improved academically as reflective of formative and summative assessments. The repeated and practical use of these instructional strategies by the participants reinforced their commonly held perception of the effectiveness of the use of these techniques accompanying vocabulary instruction.

Gillis (2015) found that many teachers were unfamiliar with many research-based strategies and the most effective teaching techniques focusing on vocabulary. Gillis furthered that many teachers were uncomfortable with vocabulary-centered instruction. As Flanigan and Greenwood (2007) stipulated, many teachers were not equipped with knowledge of those strategies related to delivery instruction for content specific vocabulary. The participants included in this study were comfortable teaching vocabulary and selecting those content specific

concepts and terms on which to focus instruction. These participants also believed that vocabulary instruction was a significant contributor to social studies instruction and was instrumental to comprehending the content which students were assigned to read. Beck et al. (2013) identified the need for teachers to select those vocabulary terms which were essential to the content and center instruction around those words.

Beck et al. (2013) further established that selecting the appropriate vocabulary terms created unease for some educators. Traditional instructional methods center on using a dictionary or glossary to define key terms and some form of memorization. This technique only provided students with a limited understanding of the term and was often not retained (Feldman & Kinsella, 2005; Greenwood, 2010; Wilfong, 2013). Few instances involved practical application of this knowledge. Mixan (2014) advocated that lessons involving only memorization were an ineffective way for students to learn new terms and concepts. Direct instruction served as an instrumental strategy to process of students learning vocabulary (Collins-Block & Mangieri, 2006; Marzano, 2004; McKeown & Beck, 2004). The data sources did not reveal that any of the participants required students to memorize terms. Each of the data sources demonstrated that participants required that students learn and apply the knowledge of the newly learned terms and concepts in context.

The participants of this study incorporated multiple vocabulary focused strategies into daily instruction. These techniques were inclusive of not only lecture, but technology, group and individual student led activities. The vocabulary instruction demonstrated by these participants was well designed and deliberate. Sweeney and Mason (2001) firmly believed that vocabulary instruction should be purposeful and involve direct instruction. The students in receipt of the rich instruction provided by the participants exercised various formats of the vocabulary-centered

lesson delivery. This included reading, oral and written modes of application of the knowledge of the intended terms. These strategies were deemed as effective and were included in daily instruction by each of the participants in their respective classrooms. As reiterated by the NRTAC (2010) instructional techniques focused on vocabulary have a positive effect on learning new concepts and terms. The NPR (2000) reported on the impact of students learning with daily instruction and repeated incidences. This information reinforces the association with the perceptions and beliefs of the participants that contributed in this study.

Social studies embodied a concepts-based content area that presumed students comprehend and grasp new concepts and terms quickly (Hedrick, Harmon, & Linerode, 2004). Participants spoke of the vast amount of content contained in each grade specific district curriculum. Ensuring that instruction is engaging for the students was a commonly held belief by the participants. These participants demonstrated targeted methods of lesson delivery where the newly introduced terms and concepts were easily understood and instrumental to the conceptual learning process. The participants taught in format that students were able to attain, retain and apply the new found knowledge appropriately. Rosenbaum (2001) performed a study that focused on student-led vocabulary-centered activities that increased academic performance. Participants spoke of their chosen methods as those techniques increased the skills and academic achievement amongst the students they taught. Student learning occurred through frequent and repeated exposures to these terms daily, thus reinforcing the perceptions of the significance of content specific vocabulary instruction. Repetitive and recurring exposures to new content that included interactive activities and questioning practices were significant to the learning process and lends to retaining this new found knowledge (Marzano, 2009; MeKeowin, 2013, NRTAC, 2010).

The content based textbook was heavily relied upon by many social studies educators. Allington, McCuiston, and Billen (2014) spoke of the reliance of many educators upon the textbook in this text-based content area. The data revealed that the majority of the participants of this study incorporated the use of supplemental resources for lesson delivery. Only one teacher was observed using the textbook. This same participant provided lesson materials with which the students were reliant upon the text. The general consensus of the participants was that the text did not encompass all of the content they were required and responsible for teaching. The participants of this study admitted to being resourceful and were content with the available sources of material afforded to them.

In each data source, participants indicated that interactive activities were significant to students' learning. Group activities including games, skits and group song were prevalent sources in this study. Participants believed that these activities were a fundamental segment of the lessons and served to provide a foundation of the content. These activities were a method by which learning was reinforced and a means of knowledge application, thereby demonstrating mastery of the content and terms in context. According to Marzano and Pickering (2005) these activities were a way to reinforce the learning objectives by providing an alternative to direction instruction.

Professional Development Assists in Vocabulary Instruction

The findings of this study established that there was a greater need for vocabulary instruction focused professional development in order for all teachers to reiterate the need to improve and offer consistency amongst classrooms at Cornerstone Middle School and this served as an overarching theme through this research. Kiliçkaya and Krajka (2010) pointed out that teachers need to be equipped with the appropriate resources that will allow for adequate

instruction. As discovered by the NICHD (2010) familiarity of the research-based vocabulary-centered instructional techniques is warranted for teachers and would be significant for content area teachers to be knowledgeable of these practices.

Continued research surrounding vocabulary instruction classroom delivery and the need for professional development to adequately prepare teachers was warranted (Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2014; Glende, 2013; NRTAC, 2010). Cervetti, Tilson, Castek, Bravo, and Tranin (2011) agreed, “The further refinement of our understanding of vocabulary knowledge can ultimately inform the development and implementation of instructional approaches that capitalize on opportunities to build multifaceted and flexible word knowledge” (p.61). Additionally, based on the limited professional development workshops afforded to content specific regular education teachers, vocabulary specific instruction was restricted to the classroom to relying on peers and classroom resources made available by schools. Sweeny and Mason (2011) asserted that professional development that offers teachers evidenced based alternatives to traditional less effective methods of instruction aid in ensuring that all educators are equipped with the knowledge to ensure that all word learning is meaningful.

This information from the literature is directly related to the findings of this study. The findings of this research study indicated that the participants perceived content specific vocabulary instruction was significant to social studies content. Participants believed that effective instructional strategies should be implemented on a daily basis. These findings also suggested that these participants believed that effective vocabulary instruction must be engaging.

Implications

This research study aligned with the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two that reiterated the need for additional vocabulary instruction research in concepts-

based content areas. Research has supported the thought that vocabulary-centered instruction was imperative to student learning and academic achievement (Feldman & Kinsella, 2005). This research did not account for participants' reliance on colleagues as a means of support. This research was shown to be an effective means of support, as the more experienced educators in most instances attended a professional development workshop and were able to share learned techniques with those less experienced teachers. This research study affirmed Ladd's (2013) thoughts, who noted that more experienced teachers are a great resource for less experienced novice teachers, by way of sharing instructional strategies and offering ways to increase student academic achievement.

With regard to the social studies classrooms included in this study, the findings provided evidence of and validated the use of research-based vocabulary activities being incorporated into daily instruction. Marzano (2009) identified several research-based vocabulary-centered instructional activities conducive to all classrooms. On the contrary, many of the research-based strategies that have been made available within the past two decades are not being transferred into all classrooms (Gulamhussein, 2013). Vocabulary instruction was shown as an essential contributor in social studies classrooms. Moreover, it is important that educators receive content-specific instructional strategies to ensure the academic success of their students. The results of this research study reinforced the significance of vocabulary instruction in content-based classrooms at the secondary level, the effectiveness of structured vocabulary instruction, and those vocabulary-centered instructional activities which reinforce learning. In addition, this research necessitates the need for additional research studies and recommendations from national organizations to continue research centering on vocabulary instruction for secondary level students.

Theoretical Implications

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to the way individuals learn, in conjunction with Piaget's (1972) models of cognitive development, influenced the theoretical framework for the study. The sociocultural theory considers learning to be a social process and establishes that human intelligence originates in society or culture (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory encompasses the thought of when an individual possessed more skill supported and build upon the abilities of a less skilled person in an effort to promote growth. As in the case of this study, participants assisted and built upon the students' academic foundation through guidance and collaboration with the more skilled teacher and through social interaction. Learning transpired following meaningful and active engagement of the newly introduced relevant terms and content.

The learning environment was inclusive of physical and social interaction between teachers and students. During a classroom visit, Anthony and his class created a skit with song after learning the unit vocabulary that he and his students each portrayed an active role. According to Miller (2011) this knowledge, with guidance from the skilled teacher can be adapted and applied to diverse learning circumstances and situations. Theoretically, vocabulary and language acquisition are developed through collaboration and social exchanges. Vygotsky's (2011) thoughts were based upon the means by which individuals developed language skills. Vygotsky (1978), a sociocultural theorist, described learning as "a social process and the origination of human intelligence is society or culture. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework was that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition" (p.86).

Vygotsky's theory postulated that social interaction is instrumental to cognitive development. Each of the eight participants was observed in classroom activities where student

interaction served as the primary focus. Vygotsky's second theory stipulated that cognitive development was limited to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD centers on the space of exploration determining what the student is cognitively prepared. In order for the ZPD to fully develop, social interaction is required. Within Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, teachers connect with students at their respective academic skill level and academic growth occurs from that point. As the skills of the student increase the support provided by the teacher decreased. The discussions that occur during these exchanges and interactions served as a tool for establishing meaning for the student. This was demonstrated during a class visit with Susan, when she elaborated and extended the class discussions centering around content specific vocabulary and the belief systems of the Middle East. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD stipulated that "learning should be matched in some manner with the child's developmental level" (p.85) at this intersection, learning is optimized. Students actively developed understanding of the newly introduced targeted words through repeated exposures during classroom instruction (Blachowicz, 2000) and student thinking expanded with interaction with a more experienced adult (i.e., participants) (Vygotsky, 1978).

Piaget (1972), a cognitive constructivist theorist, examined the ways in which children developed understanding and beliefs throughout childhood and cognitive development. The results from this study demonstrated the ideologies of both theorists. Vygotsky's theory was evident through the participants' instruction and Piaget was validated through student engagement and academic success. The learning target of participants in this study was through vocabulary-centered strategies focused instruction and attempt to build word and conceptual knowledge of their students. This transpired through scaffolded interactions among teachers and students and between students and a direct instruction model. This process was patterned after

Piaget's framework related to understanding cognitive processes. Piaget affirmed that learning occurred through experience and that new learning was connected to prior knowledge. This was exemplified by James providing examples during his lecture, relating a newly introduced term to concepts with which students were already familiar.

Vocabulary is important to reading and student comprehension. Moore (n.d.) noted "Decades of research have confirmed the important role that vocabulary plays in reading comprehension and in students' overall academic success" (p. 6). Students should be able to read and comprehend the material. Nagy (1988) believed vocabulary was fundamental to the educational process and stated, "Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one can't understand the text without knowing what most of the words mean" (p. 2). The findings of this study are inclusive of vocabulary serving as an integral part to reading and student comprehension. The results of this study also demonstrated that effective vocabulary instruction must be engaging.

Vocabulary is only as effective as the instructional methods utilized to deliver the content (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theories and Piaget's (1972) cognitive constructive theories both related to the ways children develop understanding. Both of these theories aligned with the current study's purpose of examining the perceptions of the content area participants who utilized effective vocabulary instructional techniques and academic vocabulary.

As affirmed by the results, this study confirmed Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory to the way individuals learn and connected this theory to Piaget's cognitive models related to the child's development. Participants delivered explicit instruction using varied research-based teaching strategies which assisted students in independently using the newly attained knowledge.

These teachers aided students in constructing new understandings for content specific targeted words. Students were also taught to rely upon individual thinking to further expand that understanding which directly aligned with the data that was collected and analyzed and coincided with the results of this research.

Empirical Implications

Teachers and administrators at school and district level aim to offer the best education opportunities for students. State mandated and district wide assessments serve as the primary purpose that drives instruction. Many factors may impede satisfactory student academic achievement including diversity of the student population, exceptionalities and poverty (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2015) many administrators have redirected emphasis and educational efforts to focus on instructional practices of teachers to ensure students receive optimal instruction.

Research has demonstrated the necessity of direct instruction to enhance vocabulary focused instruction (Beck et al., 1982; Donlevy, 2010; Kelly et al., 2010; Pickering & Polluck, 2001; Rosenshine, 2008). Despite the past experiences of the participants in learning vocabulary, the teachers participating in this study used many research-based instructional strategies centering on direct vocabulary instruction. The classroom observations exhibited the participants providing instruction that offered students multiple exposures to newly introduced vocabulary content through engaging lessons that appeared to have been of interest to the students (Beck et al., 2013; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Graves, 2006; Kame'enui & Baumann, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). As the research stipulated, minimal time was devoted to vocabulary instruction, as well as a lack of systematic and efficient explicit vocabulary instruction included in daily classroom lessons (Biemiller, 2005; Hiebert & Kamil,

2005; Moore, n.d.).

The results of this research supported the perception that targeted vocabulary instruction is essential to increasing student knowledge of concepts based content. In analyzing data contributing to this research, the data revealed that teachers are utilized the resources afforded and transferring skills learned from professional development to develop lessons to benefit student and support instructional delivery. Participants relied upon information learned through professional development, colleagues and use of available resources for lesson preparation and delivery. Participating in professional learning workshops enabled those teachers to maintain focus on impact of vocabulary instruction and the impact upon students.

The themes identified through data analysis established the participants believed in the effectiveness and significant of content specific vocabulary instruction. The participants also believed in the benefits students provided with frequent exposures to targeted vocabulary terms. The participants utilized a variety of vocabulary-centered instructional strategies. During the interviews, those participants who had attended the professional development workshop spoke of several research-based techniques that they had learned, and how each felt that these strategies had made a positive impact on student retention of the content as evidenced by increased scores on both formative and summative student assessments.

The participants also discussed the benefits of professional development opportunities teaching practice. Each participant expressed a level of comfort with teaching content level vocabulary; however, disparity remained amongst the participants as to the amount of time that should be devoted to teaching vocabulary and the point in the lesson when it should be introduced. The findings of this study were determined after careful examination and coding of the data by using analytic induction. The participant interviews, classroom observations and

artifacts were analyzed and a generalized after considering the associated theories. The findings encompassed those ideas discovered after analyzing each data source. All of this information was utilized in interpreting the findings related to the thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of the middle school teachers that were purposively selected to participate in this research study.

In order for professional development to positively impact the school culture, it should be specific to the instructional requirements of staff and educators, implemented with fidelity and support (Jacques & Potemski, 2014). The results of this research study support the benefits of professional development specific to developing staff, which in turn may positively impact student academic achievement, as will be demonstrated on state mandated assessments. Those participants who attended the professional development workshop ascertained techniques that were easily implemented into their classrooms. The participants modified these strategies according to the content also believed that with continued use of these strategies and continued experience would improve lesson delivery and further develop their student's skills.

Practical Implications

Ensuring that teachers are prepared with adequate tools to perform instructional duties empowered these educators to carry out those duties to the best of their abilities. Analysis of the data provided insight into what the teachers of this study believed were necessary to accomplish these tasks. This recommendation included the necessary resources and supporting instructional tools. Offering to teachers the necessary supports allowed for effective education to students. The results of this research study revealed implications considered applicable to many contributors who support teachers.

The findings to this study suggested that teachers believe in the significance of vocabulary instruction for instruction of the concepts presented in social studies. These teachers

credited student academic success with the instructional focus placed on those perceived effective instructional strategies used in the classroom. The data analysis supported these stances by the techniques used, inclusive of games, use of technology, and group and individual student led activities. This research demonstrated that targeted vocabulary instruction was beneficial in the further development of word knowledge and enhanced comprehension. These recommendations can prove beneficial to teacher educators, school administrators, county level personnel, and school districts. As the students were engaged with the experienced teachers, their knowledgebase was expanded beyond what the students could have accomplished without the support of the teacher.

Teacher education programs. Two themes generated from the data analysis in this research identified the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction and the significant of content specific vocabulary. Teacher education preparation programs in universities may also assist by adding vocabulary-centered instruction to their programs to better equip teachers for classroom instruction by offering additional research-based vocabulary instructional strategies. Course offerings that emphasize these instructional strategies could be segregated by content area and across content areas. The research presented that not all teachers received professional learning related to vocabulary instruction, yet each of the participants saw the importance of targeted and strategies based instruction in middle school social studies classroom instruction.

Administrators. Implications for administrators include soliciting ideas from classroom teachers regarding vocabulary professional development opportunities that may prove beneficial. Increasing the skill set of teachers may directly impact students and possibly increase academic achievement. Participants of this research study perceived content specific vocabulary instruction and the use of effective instructional strategies incorporated into lessons daily. Administrators

and teachers believe that effective vocabulary must be engaging. Administrators considering these contributors to the findings of this research may assist by providing educational and training opportunities, supporting, listening, providing resources, and offering a platform that allows for teacher collaboration. Additionally, having administrators at the middle school level with a vested interest in curriculum and instruction is also necessary. Further, ensuring teachers are able to collaborate and by offering a mentoring program whereby teachers can have a platform and designated person to share ideas and instructional strategies and afford accountability.

Allowing teachers to build relationships may lead to professional growth for all teachers involved as it builds confidence and contributed to the decision making process within the classroom(Wang, Haertel and Walberg, 1993). One teacher in this study regularly relied upon content specific team mates that attended profession learning for instructional techniques that were best suited for her students. Further by instituting the instructional coaches as a resource for a regular and furthering the development of strategies based instruction, in considering financial aspects, in-service delivery may be provided to staff by more experienced teachers. Finally, understanding the importance of collaboration amongst teachers in relation to exchanging ideas about vocabulary instruction and providing a platform for such an arena could be beneficial.

County office personnel. Administrators and county office personnel continually seek ways to improve student performance and further develop staff skills. Directing county office personnel to regularly focus resources geared toward vocabulary-centered instruction for each content area teacher would enhance the teaching techniques of novice and veteran teachers alike, which would in turn likely positively impact student achievement. Each of the participants validated having a genuine interest in the text, but the text did not always support all of the

content required to be taught. County office personnel may seek to provide a text and supplemental resources which could better benefit content area teachers in order for teachers to better facilitate classroom instruction. Curriculum and content developers at the county level should consider developing curriculum and content pacing guides that would allow for time to multiple exposures to social studies content and the reinforcement of vocabulary. These should include recommendations for the points during daily instruction when vocabulary should be taught (i.e. at the beginning of the unit or lesson, or daily during each lesson). Moore (n.d.) stated, “Given the pivotal role of vocabulary, it is surprising that typically very little class time has been focused on vocabulary instruction” (p.145). Assessment personnel can aid in the development of the district-wide use of tools to gauge student understanding of vocabulary. Additionally, assessment personnel should consider the uniformity of verbiage utilized in classroom and county assessments with which students become familiar.

Limitations

Teachers in the study continue to be challenged each day with creating engaging lessons that reinforce the content as stipulated in the curriculum. The social studies curriculum includes a large quantity of content, and time is limited for the content that is disseminated and taught. These factors limited the amount of additional time that the participants had to devote to certain topics and required a balance of time spent on all aspects of the content

Limitations of this study included several factors, including a small and limited sample size located in one school, and within one state. This research focusing on eight middle school social studies teachers, offering an indiscriminate representation of results, may serve as a limitation of the research. Finally, the differences among perceptions between those participants who had attended the professional development workshop versus the views of those who had

not, as well as the number of years of teaching experience may have influenced the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological research study centered on identifying the strategies and describing the experiences and perceptions of eight middle school social studies teachers related to the use of effective vocabulary instructional strategies. The participants each served a role as a social studies teacher that shaped their personal teaching experiences and molded their teaching style. Many times additional responsibilities, including leading departments, leading content areas, fulfilling responsibilities representing schools at the county office, leading extracurricular activities can aid or hinder this effective classroom instruction if the teachers are not prioritizing their responsibilities (Ledesma, 2011).

Further studies should explore teacher knowledge contributing to the selection of instructional practices. Another recommendation would be soliciting participants from an urban school district. In a more metropolitan area, the socioeconomic status of the students would differ as would the diversity of the student population. In a different setting, the instructional strategies teachers may employ vary according to the needs and resources made available to the teachers. Follow up replicated studies could focus on progress monitoring gauging student achievement through the examination of summative and formative assessments based on vocabulary instruction by conducting a quantitative study examining the impact of academic achievement. In addition, replicating this study at the high school level where teachers focus on varying segments of the social sciences where vocabulary is equally significant. Teachers at this level do not collaborate and the content is more rigorous.

Extending this research could encompass more in depth teacher interviews, classroom observations spanning a time period longer than 30 minutes and more than one observation. The

collection of student and teacher work samples could occur over a period of time, involving more samples, and inclusive of examination of the types of assessments focusing on vocabulary. The teacher interviews may include the location (i.e. domestic or international) where teachers received formal education and parental guidance influenced the way the participants taught and learned vocabulary. Additionally, interviews could also explore teacher preferences, such as if participants preferred group and/or individual activities in their instructional activities. Finally, the interviews may seek the perceptions of vocabulary instruction as it relates to vertical grade instruction.

Summary

This phenomenological study identified the strategies and described the experiences of eight middle school teachers utilizing and incorporating various vocabulary-centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction. Chapter Five presented an overview of the chapter, summary of findings, discussion, practical and empirical implications, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. This study contributed to the existing knowledge base by reiterating the need for additional emphasis vocabulary instruction at the secondary level by identifying vocabulary instructional practices used in middle school classrooms and describing the perspectives of these participants.

The findings of this research study revealed that the application of knowledge, significance of defining and repeated exposure to terms were important. Also, with engaging instructional activities appealing to all learning styles, and application of the new found knowledge, participants perceived that instruction centering on vocabulary was essential for students learning social studies content. Furthermore, participants recognized there were several and differing instructional techniques available to reinforce learning social studies vocabulary.

The influential research conducted by McKeown and Beck and their colleagues established the foundation for research related to vocabulary (Beck et al., 1982; Beck et al., 2013; Coyne, Capozzoli-Oldham, Cuticelli, & Ware, 2015; McKeown & Beck, 2004). Vocabulary directly related to reading and language comprehension leads to critical thinking (Beck et al., 2013; Graves, 2011; NAEP, 2013; Nagy, 1988; NRP, 2000). In recent decades, research has been dedicated to content specific vocabulary within the classroom and the existing body of knowledge and correlation with instruction.

Researchers have shown that students require multiple exposures to vocabulary in several contexts in order to comprehend, retain and apply the knowledge (Beck et al. 2013; Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2014; Graves et al., 2014; Marzano, Kendall, & Paynter, 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000). Orawiwanakul (2011) contended that offering and engaging students with wide-ranging and expansive language experiences allowed for learning to occur through reading, speaking, writing and listening. These varied experiences and exposures were demonstrated through the various instructional techniques gleaned from the classroom observations and work products in the current study. Incorporating effective research-based instructional strategies reiterates learning, retention and comprehension.

This research study produced significant findings and useful themes related to the research questions that guided the study. As the research dictated and this study has reinforced, there is a greater need for professional development focusing on vocabulary-centered strategies in content specific content areas. The findings of the study suggested that the participants perceived content specific vocabulary instruction and effective instructional strategies should be implemented on a daily basis and should be engaging. The focus needs to be broader than the English Language Learner and the English language arts classroom. This research reiterated the

need for additional professional development opportunities, and resources should be afforded to content area teachers enabling the additional honing of the craft of implementing research-based vocabulary instructional strategies.

Continued research centering on vocabulary instruction for secondary level students remains warranted. To enhance education for students', additional research reports and federal research should continue research that focuses on vocabulary instruction for secondary level students. The practical implications addressed in this study demonstrate the need for the school administrative personnel and county curriculum officials to ensure content area teachers are afforded the opportunity to attend professional development to enhance their teaching practices. Additionally, at the collegiate level, teacher preparation programs should emphasize vocabulary instructional strategies to better equip their graduating educators.

The limitations of this study encompassed the concern that the study primarily involved social studies middle school teachers who had attended a professional development workshop for vocabulary instructional strategies. Additionally, the sample size was small and the research was only conducted at one school at the middle school level in the state of Georgia. Suggestions for future may research include: (a) implementing longer classroom observations to assess the types of activities devoted to specific vocabulary, (b) ascertaining the types and impact of vocabulary instructional assessment tools, and (c) noting the actual amount of time spent on vocabulary instruction.

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APPENDIX A

Permission Form

July 1, 2015

Principal

Dear

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education. The title of my research project is ***THE BELIEFS, PERCEPTION STRATEGIES OF VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IN MIDDLE GRADES SOCIAL STUDIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY*** and the purpose of this study is to offer insight into the use of vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers and to examine their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and effectiveness of these strategies. The information gleaned from this sample of the population will be beneficial to teachers of all content areas at the secondary education level, building and central office administrators and curricula design personnel. The findings of this study could assist secondary administrator's insight as to the perceptions of and techniques employed by their teaching staff and allow for commonality, improvement and further professional development.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Middle School, Public Schools and to contact eight (8) Social Studies teachers, six of which have attended the Dan Mulligan workshops focusing on vocabulary instruction and invite them to participate in my research study. Two of the teacher participants will not have attended the professional learning workshop. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview (outside of school hours), allow me to observe classroom instruction while delivering vocabulary centered strategies and share teacher lessons and student work samples. The data will be used to reinforce the effectiveness of incorporating various vocabulary centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on approved letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,

Lisa-Renée Gilford
 Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

APPENDIX B**Approval/Permission Form**

July 14, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

Lisa Renee Aniagor is a Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University. She has requested my permission to conduct her research at Su [REDACTED] A. It is my pleasure to grant Ms. Aniagor permission to conduct her research here for her research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education with Liberty University.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Committed to Creating a Culture of Excellence by Working Hard and Being Nice

APPENDIX C

Email Invitation for Participants Who Attended a Workshop

Email: WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol#2255.071515

Dear Colleague:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education. The title of my research project is ***The Beliefs, Perceptions and Strategies of Vocabulary Instruction in Middle Grades Social Studies: A Phenomenological Study*** and the purpose of this study is to offer insight into the use of vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers and to examine their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and effectiveness of these strategies. The information gleaned from you will be beneficial to teachers of all content areas at the secondary education level, building and central office administrators, and curricula design personnel. The findings of this study could assist secondary administrator's insight as to the perceptions of and techniques employed by their teaching staff and allow for commonality, improvement, and further professional development.

I am writing to request your assistance and participation in this study. You have been selected as a possible participant in this research study because you attended the Dan Mulligan Professional Development Workshops focusing on vocabulary instructional strategies. Participation will involve participating in a 20-30 minute interview (outside of school hours), allowing me to conduct a 30 minute observation of classroom instruction while delivering vocabulary centered strategies, and sharing teacher lessons and student work samples. The data will be used to reinforce the effectiveness of incorporating various vocabulary centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your expertise and input would be greatly valued. You may respond to this email with your response or email me directly at lgilford@liberty.edu. I would appreciate your response to accept by <date>. Please let me know if I can address any questions or concerns for you.

Lisa-Renée Gilford
Cell (XXX) XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX D**IRB Approval**

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol # 2255.071515

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 15, 2015

Lisa-Renee Gilford
IRB Approval 2255.071515: The Beliefs, Perceptions and Strategies of Vocabulary
Instruction in Middle Grades Social Studies: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Lisa-Renee,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling



LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX E

Email Invitation for Participants Who Did Not Attend a Workshop

Email: NON-WORKSHOP ATTENDEES – Selected by Administrator

Dear Colleague:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education. The title of my research project is ***THE BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIES OF VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IN MIDDLE GRADES SOCIAL STUDIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY*** and the purpose of this study is to offer insight into the use of vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers and to examine their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and effectiveness these strategies. The information gleaned from you will be beneficial to teachers of all content areas at the secondary education level, building and central office administrators, and curricula design personnel. The findings of this study could assist secondary administrator's insight as to the perceptions of and techniques employed by their teaching staff and allow for commonality, improvement and further professional development.

I am writing to request your assistance and participation in this study. You have been selected as a possible participant in this research study because you were recommended by your principal. Participation will involve participating in a 20-30 minute interview (outside of school hours), allowing me to conduct a 30 minute observation of classroom instruction while delivering vocabulary centered strategies and sharing teacher lessons and student work samples. The data will be used to reinforce the effectiveness of incorporating various vocabulary centered strategies in lesson delivery and instruction.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your expertise and input would be greatly valued. You may respond to this email with your response or email me directly at lgilford@liberty.edu. I would appreciate your response to accept by <date>. Please let me know if I can address any questions or concerns for you.

Lisa-Renée Gilford
Cell (XXX) XXX-XXXX

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol#2255.071515

APPENDIX F

Consent Form for Participants Who Attended a Workshop

The Beliefs, Perceptions and Strategies of Vocabulary Instruction
in Middle Grades Social Studies: A Phenomenological Study

Lisa-Renée Gilford

Liberty University

School of Education

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol #2255.071515

You have been asked to participate in a research study of the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and strategies of middle school social studies teachers and your use of vocabulary instructional strategies in the classroom. You were selected as a possible participant because you attended the Dan Mulligan Professional Development Workshops, which focused on vocabulary instructional strategies. I would like to ask that you read this form in its entirety and please feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa-Renée Gilford, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to offer insight into the use of vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers and to examine their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and effectiveness of these strategies. The information gleaned from this sample of the population may be beneficial to teachers of all content areas at the secondary education level, building and central office administrators, and curricula design personnel. The findings of this study could assist secondary administrator's insight as to the perceptions of and techniques employed by their teaching staff and allow for commonality, improvement, and further professional development.

This research study seeks to address and answer the following questions:

1. 1 What instructional experiences do teachers describe to enhance content vocabulary of their Social Studies students?
2. How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in relation to improving student academic achievement in social studies?
3. How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in Social Studies?

Procedures:

By agreeing to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Participate in a 30 minute interview, which will be audio recorded
2. Agree to a 30 minute classroom observation by the researcher.
3. Check for accuracy of transcripts of interviews and observations. (Member checks)
4. Provide lesson plans or other documents for lessons observed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks of the study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. Study participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit.

Compensation:

You will not receive any form of payment or compensation for participation in this research.

Confidentiality:

All records, recordings, and transcriptions affiliated with this study will be kept private and securely stored at an offsite location. All information will be maintained for three years following the conclusion of the research and then destroyed. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to this information. Any published report will not include any information to identify any participant in this study. All information collected will only be used for the sole purpose of this research project and will not be shared.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your agreeing to participate in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your current nor future relations with the researcher, your current employer, or Liberty University. Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw or refuse to provide a response on any question at any time without impacting any of the aforementioned relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Should you choose to withdraw your participation in this study, please inform me via email at  and all information collected will be deleted and destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa-Renée Gilford. Please free to ask any questions you may have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Lisa-Renée Gilford at home (XXX) XXX-XXXX, cell (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email [REDACTED] and my faculty advisor, David Nelson, email [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board Chair,
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. The interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. By signing below, you agree to have the interview recorded.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G

Consent Form for Participants Who Did Not Attend a Workshop

The Beliefs, Perceptions and Strategies of Vocabulary Instruction
in Middle Grades Social Studies: A Phenomenological Study

Lisa-Renée Gilford

Liberty University

School of Education

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol #2255.071515

You have been asked to participate in a research study of the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and strategies of middle school social studies teachers and your use of vocabulary instructional strategies in the classroom. You were selected and were recommended for participation by your principal. I would like to ask that you read this form in its entirety and please feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa-Renée Gilford, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to offer insight into the use of vocabulary instructional strategies of middle school social studies teachers and to examine their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and effectiveness of these strategies. The information gleaned from this sample of the population may be beneficial to teachers of all content areas at the secondary education level, building and central office administrators, and curricula design personnel. The findings of this study could assist secondary administrator's insight as to the perceptions of and techniques employed by their teaching staff and allow for commonality, improvement, and further professional development.

This research study seeks to address and answer the following questions:

4. What instructional experiences do teachers describe to enhance content vocabulary of their Social Studies students?
5. How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in relation to improving student academic achievement in social studies?
6. How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in Social Studies?

Procedures:

By agreeing to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Participate in a 30 minute interview which will be audio recorded.
2. Agree to a 30 minute classroom observation by the researcher.
3. Check for accuracy of transcripts of interviews and observations. (Member checks)
4. Provide lesson plans or other documents for lessons observed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks of the study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. Study participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit.

Compensation:

You will not receive any form of payment or compensation for participating in this research.


Confidentiality:

All records, recordings, and transcriptions affiliated with this study will be kept private and securely stored at an offsite location. All information will be maintained for three years following the conclusion of the research and will be destroyed. The researcher will be the only respondent that will have access to this information. Any published report will not include any information to identify any participant in this study. All information collected will only be used for the sole purpose of this research project and will not be shared.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your agreeing to participate in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your current nor future relations with the researcher, your current employer, nor Liberty University.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw or refuse to provide a response on any question at any time without impaction any of the aforementioned relationships. Should you choose to withdraw your participation in this study, please inform me via email at  and all information collected will be deleted and destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa-Renée Gilford. Please free to ask any questions you may have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Lisa-Renée Gilford at home (XXX) XXX-XXXX, cell (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email [REDACTED] and my faculty advisor, David Nelson, email [REDACTED]

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board

Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. The interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. By signing below, you agree to have the interview recorded.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H

Observation Form

Classroom Observation Form

Teacher Identifier _____

Date: _____

Grade: 6 7 8

times observed ____ of ____

Lesson: Beginning Middle End Observation Began: _____ Observation Ended: _____

Action Being Observed	Comments
1. SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT	
2. TEACHING METHODS What is being used? <i>Describe teaching methods and techniques employed, teaching aids utilized, textbook, detail listing of all materials, and use of any technology, graphic organizers, games, resources, strategies, etc.</i>	

Action Being Observed	Comments
<p data-bbox="183 285 542 317">Note: Type of Instruction</p> <ul data-bbox="334 352 841 680" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="334 352 553 384">○ independent<li data-bbox="334 426 537 457">○ student-led<li data-bbox="334 499 570 531">○ facilitator-led<li data-bbox="334 573 841 680">○ group activity (Describe activity in detail)	

Action Being Observed	Comments
<p>3. PREPARATION & ORGANIZATION</p> <p>Is the activity or lesson organized?</p> <p>Adequate preparation?</p>	
<p>4. CLASSROOM DESIGN</p> <p>Layout of classroom – rows, groups, etc. Number of students, appearance of organization/grouping, number of students per group/row,</p>	
<p>5. TEACHER INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS</p> <p>How does the teacher interact with the students: facilitator, hands-on, etc.</p>	
<p>6. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Time and behaviorally: How much time is spent on the activity?</p>	

Action Being Observed	Comments
7. General Information	
8. General Observations	

Action Being Observed	Comments

Personal Observations:

Overall impression of teaching effectiveness:

APPENDIX I

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Date: _____ Grade: 6 7 8 Teacher Identifier _____

Time Interview Began: _____ Time Interview Ended: _____

Part I: *Participant History*

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/15/15 to 7/14/16
Protocol#2255.071515

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What is the highest degree that you have attained?
3. What subject(s) do you teach?
4. What grade level do you teach?
5. How did you learn vocabulary while in school?
6. How were you taught to learn new vocabulary?
7. Approximately how many students do you have per class?
8. How would you describe your role as a social studies teacher?

Part II: Professional: *Leading influences which attribute to improving the content vocabulary*

Research Question 1: What instructional experiences do teachers describe to enhance content vocabulary of their Social Studies students?

9. How would you define effective vocabulary instruction?
10. Describe how you currently teach vocabulary.
11. Why do you follow that method?
12. How do you know that your students have an understanding of the social studies vocabulary?

13. What support are you provided with vocabulary instruction?

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the value of teaching vocabulary in relation to improving student academic achievement in social studies?

Comfort Level with vocabulary instructional practices

14. Do you feel that vocabulary instruction related to social studies is important?

15. Please expound on your response (why)?

16. Please explain your comfort level with implementing vocabulary centered strategies into daily instruction.

17. How often do you teach vocabulary?

18. When do you teach vocabulary?

19. Have you seen a difference in student comprehension of the material based upon specific strategy that you found to be useful?

Research Question 3: How do teachers describe vocabulary instructional practices in Social Studies?

20. How do you incorporate vocabulary for new content into your instruction?

21. What strategies do you currently use in vocabulary instruction?

22. Why do you feel these/these strategies are effective?

23. Are there any topics pertaining to vocabulary instruction that we did not mention that you feel we should have talked about, that you would like to discuss?