

Vocabulary Acquisition in Young EFL Learners: A Thematic Review of Strategies, Media, and Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of research on vocabulary learning among Young EFL learners. Through detailed thematic analysis, we systematically reviewed eleven (published between 2018 and 2025) peer-reviewed articles. We searched the leading academic databases using pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies related to young learners, vocabulary teaching and learning, and empirical work. Three recurring themes emerged from the findings: methods of instruction, learning materials and tools, and student performance. Findings indicate that interactive strategies, such as storytelling, realia, game-based activities, and tech-based tools (e.g., Quizizz and Wordwall), enhance student vocabulary learning, retention, and motivation. Hybrid models of traditional instruction blended with technology-based learning also support short-term gains and long-term retention when the content is both culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate. The thematic synthesis has implications for practitioners and policymakers in education who seek empirically supported principles to inform the improvement of vocabulary teaching in young EFL contexts.

Keywords:

vocabulary acquisition, young EFL learners, learning strategies, instructional media, thematic literature review

Introduction

Background of the Study

Vocabulary knowledge is an essential component of language skills that significantly contributes to enhancing proficiency and assessing people's communicative ability (Silva & Otwinowska, 2018). Components of vocabulary acquisition are vital for developing successful writing skills, cognitive development, academic performance, and long-term outcomes in young learners in an EFL context (Linda & Shah, 2020). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, however, learners cannot effectively acquire the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – so that they can fully participate in classroom activities and authentic communication.

In early language learning situations, vocabulary encompasses how words are presented,

practiced, and revisited. A successful acquisition process necessitates developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sound practices that address both learners' cognitive and affective needs (Rahmayani, 2022). In the last decade, the ways to teach vocabulary have become varied, from the conventional way, such as teacher-centred approaches (e.g., storytelling and realization) (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Rahmayani, 2022), to technology-mediated approaches such as game-based learning and digital technologies, including Quizizz and Wordwall (Nguyen et al., 2025; Morocco et al., 2025). These methods leverage the motivational effects of interactive assignments and multimodality to enhance retention.

However, while the individual contributions of these studies are valuable, the field currently lacks an integrated synthesis that bridges findings across different instructional approaches, media types, and learner contexts. The gap suggests the need for a general literature review on the topic that reviews the existing work and provides an overview of central trends and themes relevant to scholars, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

Statement of the Problems

Although the understanding of how vocabulary is learned has increased significantly, it remains difficult for teachers of young EFL learners to determine how to capitalize on this knowledge. The literature on individual learning aids, such as storytelling, games, and digital quizzes, is abundant but lacks systematic comparisons of their impact on cultural competence and an investigation of an integrated instructional model for technology-based training. Hence, teachers' strategies increasingly favor convenience and personal interest over evidence-based practices.

In addition, the widespread adoption of so-called digital tools (a fair number of which are based on engaging, gamified experiences) has opened up a new dimension for language teaching. It can also increase learner motivation and practice opportunities, but the effectiveness depends on its integration with pedagogical principles and teaching practices. Most schools do not encourage the use of these tools in their teachings. In the absence of synthesized guidance, educators often ask whether they should favor traditional, face-to-face activities when forced to choose between them and moving entirely digital, or whether blended approaches are preferable.

The absence of consolidated, research-based evidence leaves an overreliance on a priori decision-making by educators and policymakers. It is nearly impossible to create a vocabulary lesson that is sufficiently age-appropriate for young learners and pedagogically robust enough to be retained if we do not have a clear understanding of how the strategies, media, and learning outcomes are connected.

Purpose of the Study

In this regard, the aim of this review paper is to provide an all-inclusive, theme-oriented analysis of research data published from 2018 through 2025 on comprehension acquisition in young EFL learners. As a result, the present study aims to offer an integrated perspective on the main pedagogical strategies, media, and outcomes that boost vocabulary acquisition in early language education.

More specifically, the authors sought to determine how instructional strategies had been empirically shown to affect vocabulary acquisition in young learners. It also tries to investigate how the media and tools (traditional and digital) are used, focusing on their effectiveness across different EFL contexts at each level of vocabulary instruction. The review then turns to an examination of learning effects that have been found as a consequence of using such strategies and media, with particular reference to the short-term increases in vocabulary demonstrated

based on them, alongside retention over time.

Our goal in this review is to provide an integrated set of evidence across diverse settings and methodological approaches, which can be considered with a coherent thematic focus for practical application in the classroom, interventions, curriculum development, and education policy. The long-term goal is to provide teachers, curriculum developers, and educational administrators with empirically defensible guidelines to enhance word retention by prescribing practices that contribute to children's vocabulary development as young EFL learners in today's schools, where they are taught English.

Literature review

Theoretical Review

Vocabulary acquisition is a complex process influenced by political and social factors as well as cognitive factors. A commonly held perspective in reading is the Vocabulary Knowledge Framework, identified by Nation (2019), which distinguishes between receptive knowledge (the ability to recognize and understand words when hearing or reading them) and productive knowledge (the ability to use words correctly when speaking or writing). While learning new words in this model requires repeated exposure — wide reading, listening, or watching is especially advocated — reinforcement occurs mainly when learners use the L2 actively, across various contexts, suggesting that instruction should include input and output, and will help learners move from passively identifying to actively applying.

Among the many vocabulary acquisition models cited, the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001) is another commonly cited model. This model states that the cognitive and motivational participation of learners when doing a task matters in terms of the success or failure with which they learn vocabulary; this involvement is revealed through three components: need (having the motivation to hold onto a word), search (effort at discovering a word's meaning or form), and evaluation (estimating the fit of choice, use as well as interpretation). We know that tasks involving many items lead to longer-term recall when the word is presented on flashcards, and we turn them all. Elaborating on encoding, loading, and processing something creative (e.g., telling stories about the words or solving problems with new words) is much more than rote memorization.

The first assumption comes from Krashen's (1992) Input Hypothesis, which states learners learn a second language best when exposed to input slightly more advanced than their current proficiency level, which is often put as $i+1$, which has several implications for vocabulary learning, such as that input should be rich, contextualized, and meaningful to the learner (stories, dialogues, multimedia). However, it has also been criticized, for while understanding input is necessary for learning new words, learners must also produce output and interact with others.

From a sociocultural theory perspective, MacBlain (2021) proposes Social Constructivist Theory, which incorporates collaborative learning and scaffolding in language learning through dialogue, interaction, and social-practical contexts. In the case of vocabulary instruction, one might think that this kind of socially constructed activities – peer games, group tasks or teacher-mediated discussions -in which learners may negotiate and validate the meaning proposed with others, primarily would support cooperative learning activities and collaboratively based games on vocabulary teaching.

In sum, our theoretical views suggest that the kinds of construal we employ are not constrained

by rote or massed word rehearsal. What is needed instead is real experience that comes through repeated exposure, intellectual engagement, and social interaction. This has clear implications for the teaching of young EFL learners: strategies and media need to be captivating, interactive, and age-appropriate to arouse interest, capture attention, and reduce post-instruction loss.

Review of Related Literature

Many studies have explored methods for teaching vocabulary to young EFL learners and have identified the importance of traditional and technology-assisted approaches. One of the most compelling developments has been the creation of rich, meaningful contexts for word learning, Namely Storytelling. The results of Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) also supported the view that puppet picture storytelling has a natural visual scaffolding since picture is reliable information reinforcement, one role in short-term memory due to the importance of regular vocabulary retrieval, which keeps language items stored in long-term memory, faster recall pathway as opposed to manual lists with low imagery or written texts generate verbal rehearsal.

Realia (real, tangible objects) is another way to solidify and give experience for vocabulary acquisition. When asked, Rahmayani (2022) stated that realia promoted better understanding and retention of vocabulary because learners could touch and interact with objects representing target words, consistent with multimodal, or multisensory, learning principles—using multiple sensory channels enhances encoding.

The most well-known success stories of game-based learning are for younger learners. Hidayatullah et al. (2005) found that integrating current digital games with traditional classroom games positively affected student participation, evaluation, and vocabulary retention. Moreover, Silva and Otwinowska (2018) confirmed that additional vocabulary tasks with slightly different formats might not differ much in their learning outcomes if they are balanced for cognitive engagement according to the Involvement Load Hypothesis.

Over the years, vocabulary learning through digital technology has gained much momentum. Nguyen et al. (2025) demonstrated the use of another gamified quiz platform, Quizizz, for the power of instant feedback and healthy competition-induced enjoyment in vocabulary learning. Morocho et al. (2025) also found benefits of Wordwall; as a result, they argued that Wordwall allows teachers to create visually appealing interactive games suitable for low-level learners, such as A2-level learners, and help them acquire new vocabulary. Aedo and Millafilo (2022) examined the effectiveness of multimodal texts in vocabulary acquisition and retention through memes, finding that presenting humorous visuals related to target vocabulary aids recall and motivates learners to engage with language outside the classroom. Recent studies have demonstrated the potential of AI-based tools to support language learning, especially in oral proficiency and adaptive feedback (Nguyen, 2024). Although Nguyen's study primarily focuses on speaking proficiency, its insights into learner engagement, personalization (i.e., difficulty level), and real-time feedback remain applicable to vocabulary learning, particularly when AI platforms are integrated as reinforcement tools in the classroom.

Comparison studies show that no single approach is superior to the others. Linda and Shah (2020) also found, in a survey of primary learners, that they used various vocabulary learning strategies, ranging from rote memorization to collaborative games, which appeared to stem from either their learning styles or classroom contexts.

In short, the general trend that emerges from these studies is a multimodal approach to first-language vocabulary learning for young EFL learners, with many opportunities to teach words through meaningful contexts in an interactive manner using suitable media. While the literature identifies a need for comprehensive thematic syntheses that examine how these elements—

strategies, media, and learning outcomes—are interwoven to facilitate ongoing vocabulary growth, new literacies have not been analyzed within specific literacy domains. We aim to address this gap.

Methodology

A thematic review of the literature was conducted to synthesize findings from empirical studies on vocabulary acquisition among young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Although the review is not a comprehensive systematic review or meta-analysis, it has been conducted through precise, limited, and reproducible processes in searching for, selecting, and analyzing studies. The methodological approach was designed to be rigorous yet sufficiently flexible to interpret patterns across a variety of research contexts and methods.

Search Strategy

We conducted a systematic literature search for studies published between 2018 and 2025. The search was conducted primarily through Google Scholar, which was selected to maximize coverage of both internationally indexed journals and regionally published peer-reviewed articles related to EFL and vocabulary teaching. The reliability of evidence and academic status of primary sources were confirmed by database-indexed literature available in ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus, and Web of Science, where applicable.

Search queries were constructed using terms and Boolean operators related to vocabulary learning, learner age, and instructional approaches. Some of the most frequent search terms included vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary learning, young EFL learners, primary learners, storytelling, realia, game-based learning, digital tools, and Quizizz and Wordwall. Furthermore, backward reference searching was used by checking the references of eligible articles to identify additional eligible studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

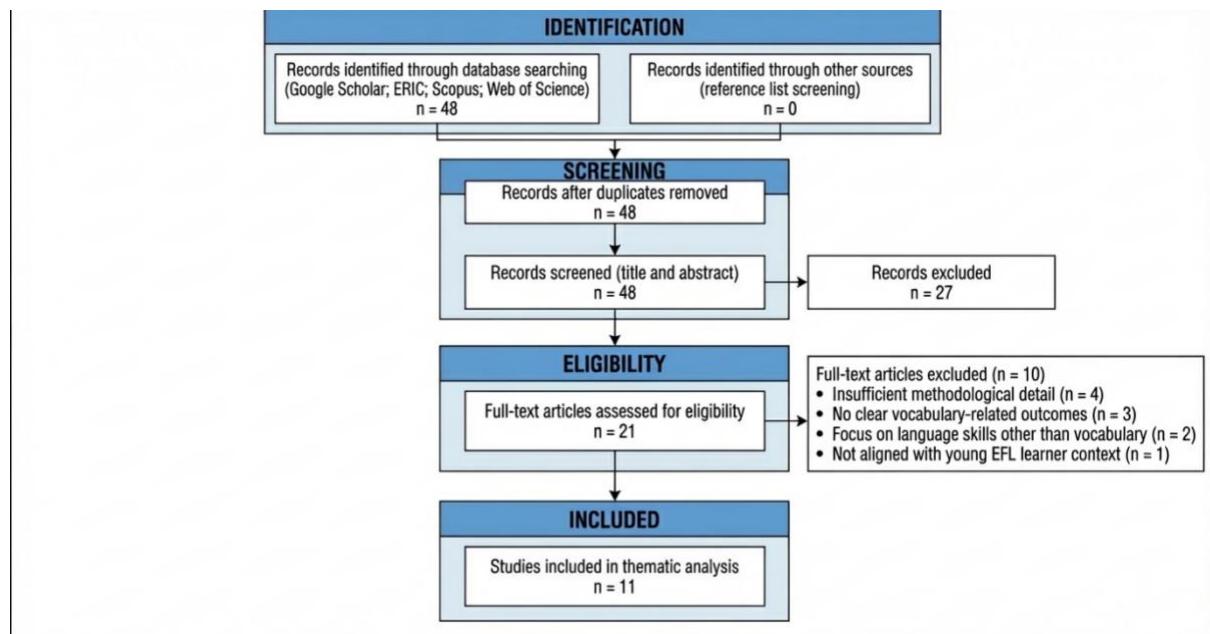
To be relevant and methodologically sound, the inclusion and exclusion of studies were based on predefined criteria. Those materials were included in the review that dealt with young or primary-level EFL learners, whose primary concern was vocabulary acquisition or learning outcomes, and which presented data-based research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), were published as peer-reviewed journal articles in English and came out during the designated timeframe (2018–2025). Particular interest was shown in adult or tertiary learners, other language competencies not focused on vocabulary (vocabulary skills), studies of a theoretical or conceptual nature, and reports lacking depth or empirical background to support thematic analysis, which were used as exclusion criteria.

Study Selection Process

The initial database search retrieved 48 records. Following the deduplication, titles and abstracts were screened for inclusion, and 21 studies were selected for full-text review. The full texts of these articles were checked for inclusion and exclusion criteria. With these more stringent inclusion criteria, 11 studies were eligible for final analysis. To ensure reproducibility and transparency, we conducted the study selection in accordance with PRISMA guidelines, specifically the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. A PRISMA flow diagram is provided to illustrate this process accordingly.

Figure 1.

PRISMA-Informed Flow Diagram of Study Selection

*Data Extraction and Study Characteristics*

After selecting the final review studies, data extraction from each study was performed systematically. Extracted information included publication details, research environment and country, participant age, sample size, type of study conducted, and target practices or media in the scholarship; and reported results on vocabulary learning. The key features of the studies were tabulated to facilitate comparison across studies and inform the thematic synthesis.

Thematic Analysis Procedure

The Braun and Clarke (2006) process, comprising six phases, was followed for thematic analysis. In the first phase, the studies were read and re-read to become familiar with their aims, methods, and results. Second, we created initial codes drawn from the text that related to vocabulary instruction, instructional materials, and learning gains. Finally, the codes were reviewed and grouped into higher-level categories with common themes. Fourth, meta- and sub-themes were refined by revisiting the preliminary themes to ensure internal coherence and thematic separation. Fifth, the end themes were well characterized and named. From this analysis, three main themes emerged: instructional strategies, instructional media and tools, and learning outcomes. Finally, the themes were compared and interpreted in relation to an appropriate theoretical framework and pedagogical implications.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to increase the rigor and credibility of the review. These included explicit use of search strategies and selection criteria, transparent reporting of the selection process, and rigorous line-by-line application of an established thematic analysis framework. Coding decisions were reconsidered iteratively, and new themes were repeatedly cross-checked against the original studies to allocate more time to transcriptions. While formal inter-coder reliability statistics were not computed, consistency was achieved through repeated coding and constant comparison across studies.

Methodological Limitations

As a thematic review of the literature, this does not claim to cover all research on vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners. The limited number of included studies and mixed methodological quality restrict the ability to make direct comparisons or generalize the findings. Notwithstanding this, the clear and processual methodological rules contributed to strengthening the robustness of the thematic synthesis in our study and making it relevant for evidence-based pedagogical practice.

Findings

This targeted review synthesized data from 11 empirical studies on vocabulary learning in young EFL children. Three main themes were identified through systematic thematic analysis: instructional strategies, instructional media and tools, and learning outcomes. The results are reported and described below to indicate how they relate to other studies, without any interpretation, which is reserved for the Discussion section.

Effectiveness of Instructional Strategies

Interactive and context-specific behavior principles predominantly had positive effects on vocabulary learning in the studies reviewed. Narrative forms of instruction, especially when visual or concrete aids (e.g., puppets or pictures) were available to help explain the object, both aided in understanding and retention by presenting related words in context. Likewise, realia helped to link new words to real referents and enriched word-meaning connections and memory.

Game-based learning activities, delivered in the classroom and digital games, have been frequently identified as effectively fostering engagement and participation. Studies have shown that this playful, challenging, and targeted approach leads to repeated exposure to the target vocabulary and yields significant gains in vocabulary learning.

Role of Instructional Media and Tools

The literature surveyed emphasized the increasing importance of digital and multiliteracies-based tools for vocabulary acquisition. Platforms such as Quizizz and Wordwall were found to facilitate vocabulary retention through instant feedback, repetition, and interactive practice. Multimodal resources, such as visual text and digital games, were also identified as meeting diverse learning preferences and supporting learners' motivation. Several studies have emphasized that digital tools function best as parts of a larger teaching or learning arrangement, rather than in isolation.

Learning Outcomes

Regarding learning gains, most studies have found that, after adopting interactive or technology-based instruction, participants significantly increase their short-term vocabulary. Several studies have also highlighted enhanced learner motivation, engagement, and willingness to participate in vocabulary tasks. Evidence of long-term retention was less frequent, as few studies employed delayed post-tests. However, studies that combined traditional and digital reinforcement revealed longer retention of vocabulary over time.

Table 1.

Summary of Thematic Findings on Vocabulary Acquisition in Young EFL Learners

Theme	Sub-theme	Key Findings
Instructional Strategies	Storytelling & Realia	Contextualized vocabulary instruction supports comprehension and retention through meaningful and concrete associations
	Game-based Learning	Traditional and digital games increase engagement, repetition, and active participation in vocabulary learning
Instructional Media & Tools	Digital Platforms	Tools such as Quizizz and Wordwall provide interactive practice, immediate feedback, and learner motivation
	Multimodal Resources	Visual and multimodal materials enhance memory and appeal to diverse learning styles
Learning Outcomes	Vocabulary Gains	Interactive strategies lead to significant short-term vocabulary improvement
	Motivation & Engagement	Increased learner interest and participation observed across multiple studies
	Retention	Blended approaches show potential for improved long-term retention, though evidence remains limited

Discussion

Building on the results of the previous section, this discussion aims to interpret the themes in light of theories and research on vocabulary learning among young EFL learners. The synthesis indicated that multimedia use and multimodal learning resources repeatedly provide effective means of promoting vocabulary development by encouraging student interaction and allowing students to encounter lexical items multiple times. Rather than finding a single method superior across contexts, these studies indicate that the effectiveness of various forms of vocabulary instruction depends on the level of cognitive engagement and the contextualized use embedded in instructional practices. This section thus goes on to explore this latter issue: in other words, how the findings reported here connect with theories relating to how new vocabulary is learned – such as the Involvement Load Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and social constructivist-based theories – and what pedagogical consequences these have for young EFL settings which seek well-founded approaches for designing effective vocabulary instruction.

Discussing the Research Methodologies

As we discussed, the heterogeneity outlined in the literature reviewed is understandable and reflects differences in context, research aims, and resources. Quantitative designs, with pre-test–post-test experimental and quasi-experimental frameworks, are most frequently employed to measure vocabulary gains from targeted instruction. For example, Nguyen et al. (2025) employed a quasi-experimental design with control and treatment groups to investigate the effect of the Quizizz platform on Vietnamese young EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition. Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) employed a pretest–posttest design to assess the specific impact of puppet-based storytelling on vocabulary learning. Moreover, such designs provide strong statistical evidence of short-term vocabulary growth but offer limited insight when long-term retention is examined.

There was also a range of qualitative methodologies that could deepen our understanding, such as providing rich descriptive data on learners' and teachers' lived experiences, thereby fostering broader involvement. In a study by Linda and Shah (2020), the authors used surveys and interviews to examine vocabulary-learning strategies among primary learners, focusing on learner motivation and factors that influence strategy selection.

Mixed method approaches that integrate quantitative and qualitative data were particularly useful for providing a rich, well-rounded perspective on vocabulary learning. Hidayatullah et al. (2025) combined test score data with learner feedback to examine the use of contemporary and traditional games, yielding quantitative measures of gameplay and qualitative measures of motivation.

Digital learning analytics, including quiz performance, participation frequency, and time on task, have been incorporated into technology-enhanced vocabulary learning research methodologies, supported primarily by objective data to complement traditional assessment tools (Morocho et al., 2025; Aedo & Millafilo, 2022). However, a comparison is challenging due to variations in sample size, treatment duration, task difficulty, and assessment tools used across studies. However, the lack of standardization in most vocabulary assessment tools employed by identified studies adds concerns about validity and cross-context generalizability.

Discussing the Results/Findings

Across literature reviews, the findings are consistent: more interactive, text-based tasks and strategies are more effective for young EFL learners with limited English vocabulary than cramming by force, which is detached from context.

Story-based methods had powerful results. For example, Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) demonstrated the use of puppet-assisted storytelling, which helped introduce meaningful contexts and images, known to bolster comprehension and retention in learners.

Realia and authentic materials proved beneficial in making vocabulary tangible and memorable. Rahmayani (2022) reported that young learners exposed to real-life objects retained new vocabulary more effectively, as these materials facilitated concrete associations between words and their referents.

Game-based learning (i.e., both conventional and digital games) was consistently perceived to have a positive impact on motivation and active involvement. Hidayatullah et al. (2025) concluded that integrating older games with new interactive activities increased learner engagement. In contrast, Nguyen et al. (2025) demonstrated that Quizizz, a competitive and gamified tool, was associated with significant short-term gains in vocabulary. Similarly, Morocho et al. (2025) demonstrated that Wordwall is beneficial for A2-level learners by

providing engaging practice with repetition.

Multimodal digital technologies were also effective. Aedo and Millafilo (2022) demonstrated that humorous visual memes can serve as a strategy for vocabulary acquisition and retention, capturing learners outside the classroom.

A notable finding in these results is the role of cognitive participation. We, however, side with Silva and Otwinowska (2018) in asserting that it may not be the type of task but rather the level of cognitive processing that affects task effectiveness. This is consistent with the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001), which posits that tasks with greater need, search, and evaluation are more conducive to successful vocabulary retention.

Discussing the Research Gaps

Although the reviewed studies provide a solid basis for understanding vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners, some shortcomings remain.

First, there is a paucity of longitudinal research. Most investigations have assessed vocabulary gain through immediate post-tests, paying scant attention to delayed post-tests or long-term retention. Without this data, we cannot determine whether the observed benefits persist over time. Second, few comparative studies have been conducted on strategies and media. While any specific tool or activity may be shown in isolation to improve student learning, they are often not compared extensively with other well-accepted interventions for a particular student population. These comparisons may provide educators with clearer direction when deciding whether to use storytelling, realia, games, or digital tools. Third, learner autonomy and self-regulatory capacity are not well examined in the context of technology-facilitated vocabulary learning. Gamification applications and digital media can support learners in developing opportunities for autonomous practice; however, few studies examine how young learners plan to practice vocabulary independently, without teacher direction.

Context and cultural diversity are less abundant in this dataset. Most studies are based on small, non-representative samples drawn from a single school or region, which may be difficult to generalise beyond their particular EFL context. Finally, there is a lack of AI-based tools that can support personalised instruction and the provision of adaptive feedback. Such tools have emerged in educational technology, but they are not widely recognized as a research area.

Summary of Results and Future Directions

To sum up, the literature overwhelmingly favours the incorporation of interactive, multimodal, context-anchored approaches to vocabulary learning among young EFL learners. Strategies such as storytelling, realia, game-based learning, and digital tools have demonstrated quantifiable benefits and are particularly effective when implemented as part of blended learning, which combines standard instruction with technology-enabled tasks. The effectiveness of these strategies is closely related to the degree of cognitive engagement they elicit; functions that require more processing deepen learning (e.g., problem resolution, active recall, contextual application) and lead to higher retention. Despite this positive picture, several directions for further research have been identified in the review. First, we need to identify longitudinal studies that track how long the gains in vocabulary retention persist, as the literature has thus far examined only short-term gains. Second, further comparative studies investigating the relative effectiveness of different instructional procedures within the same population are warranted. This would enable educators to make more data-informed choices about which methods – or combinations of methods - have the best outcomes in specific situations. A third promising direction is to investigate AI-supported vocabulary-learning tools, focusing on adaptive feedback and personalization designed for young novice readers. These

technologies can provide personalized pathways and ongoing support; however, they are underexplored in early language education. Fourth, we need more studies on the effect of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning on vocabulary acquisition, particularly in self-paced or home-based digital contexts. The recognition of these factors can be utilised by educators to design activities that promote self-reliance and personal responsibility for learning.

Finally, there is a need for more cross-cultural studies to ensure that strategies proven effective in one context are transferable to others. Expanding research to diverse EFL settings will help build a more globally applicable body of evidence. These gaps need to be addressed to guide the development of stronger, transferable, and sustainable models for vocabulary instruction that will support young learners' literacy development in the fast-moving tide of a digital and globalised educational environment.

Conclusion

Summarizing the Discussions

A systematic thematic literature review was conducted, specifically analyzing studies on young EFL learners, focusing on how vocabulary is taught (strategies adopted and materials) and on overall outcomes. These studies point to the positive effects of interactivity, multimodality, and contextual grounding in vocabulary teaching. When we can put new vocabulary into concrete, meaningful contexts, such as storytelling or realia, the focus on lexical items improves real-time recall. If, however, one has relied on game-based learning — both traditional and digital — we can keep them entertained; the context of play and competition tends to turn tedious, rote tasks into possibly slightly more palatable, albeit quasi-useful, endless exposures to target language in various more or less meaningful forms. The gamification and instant feedback components of platforms such as Quizizz and Wordwall, in combination with adaptive practice, provide a strong impetus for improved vocabulary learning, particularly for building an active vocabulary at an accelerated rate. These resources promote student engagement and are available at levels that accommodate every student's learning style and ability. The review concludes with an emphasis on the critical role of these techniques in cognitive engagement. It suggests that their effectiveness varies with the depth of participation, consistent with predictions from models (e.g., the Involvement Load Hypothesis). Tasks with greater involvement, forcing students to find, evaluate, and apply new words in real-life contexts, result in better memorization and long-term learning.

In general, the findings indicate that no single strategy is superior across all domains. Instead, the most optimal outcomes were achieved when multiple strategies were integrated to increase engagement, provide diverse learning contexts, and meet the needs of various EFL learners.

Suggesting Future Research

There are many studies on vocabulary acquisition. Further research may be warranted in the future. A second problem is that relatively few of the many L2 vocabulary learning studies are longitudinal, as they typically evaluate immediate outcomes rather than long-term retention. Furthermore, most research is single-strategy-based, and comparative effectiveness designs that compare social interaction with other learning strategies within the same study location at the same time could yield a more detailed understanding of which specific combinations perform best, given diverse learner profiles.

Third, the role of AI-supported vocabulary learning has been a focus of attention. Intelligent Tutoring Systems, AI-driven games, or Adaptive learning platforms can personalize instruction,

provide targeted feedback, and adjust difficulty during gameplay. This could greatly benefit younger learners in vocabulary learning, yet there is little empirical evidence to date.

Fourth, another line of future research could examine the effect of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in vocabulary acquisition. With more learning occurring in home-based, blended, and self-paced environments, it is even more important to understand how to encourage young learners to control their own vocabulary learning.

Finally, cross-cultural and multilingual research is needed to determine whether effective strategies identified in one EFL context are equally applicable in others. Expanding the research base to diverse geographical, cultural, and linguistic settings would ensure that recommendations are globally relevant and adaptable.

Implications

The findings of this review have practical implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. For teachers, blended teaching models that combine traditional and digital tools, should be used to create lessons that are dynamic, interactive, and delivered in authentic contexts. By integrating storytelling, realia, and collaborative games with technology tools, it is possible to develop a multisensory environment for the multimedia learner that enhances vocabulary learning. For curriculum designers, the review recommends that vocabulary instruction not be taught in isolation but presented within larger communicative activities. Materials should include high-engagement activities that encourage learners to search, evaluate, and use new words in context. Moreover, it is necessary to incorporate technology training into teachers' professional development programs so that they can confidently and efficiently use such tools to promote vocabulary learning. Those who make policy need to understand that learning a language successfully is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Investment in edtech, a focus on teacher training, and the development of flexible curricula to facilitate blended learning can make all the difference when it comes to language outcomes for young EFL learners. Lastly, the academic world can contribute to building an evidence base of internationally transferable strategies to support young learners' success in a globalized world by filling identified research gaps.

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Biodata

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