

# Vocabulary instruction failing US students

January 24 2013

---



A study led by Michigan State University's Tanya Wright suggests vocabulary instruction in the early grades is not preparing US students for long-term reading comprehension. Credit: Michigan State University

Vocabulary instruction in the early years is not challenging enough to prepare students for long-term reading comprehension, argues a study led by a Michigan State University education researcher.

The study, which appears in *Elementary School Journal*, analyzed commonly used reading curricula in U.S. kindergarten classrooms. It

found that, generally, the programs do not teach enough vocabulary words; the words aren't challenging enough; and not enough focus is given to make sure students understand the meaning of the words.

"Vocabulary instruction does not seem to have an important enough role in the curricula given how substantial it is for kids' long-term [academic success](#)," said Tanya Wright, MSU assistant professor of [teacher education](#) and lead researcher on the study.

The research by Wright and Susan Neuman from the University of Michigan comes on the heels of a National Assessment of Educational Progress report that showed poor and [minority students](#) struggle with vocabulary achievement. Low vocabulary scores were associated with low [reading comprehension](#) scores on the NAEP test.

Wright said low-income children may start school with 10,000 fewer words than other students and are then exposed to reading programs that teach as few as two vocabulary words per week. She said more than 10 vocabulary words should be taught every week – not just in reading class but across all subject areas including math, science and social studies.

The words should also be more challenging, Wright said. For example, "hysterical" could be used instead of "funny."

"We found that most of the words that are being taught are common words that the kids will learn in everyday language anyway," Wright said.

Further, the study found that not enough attention was given to reviewing [vocabulary words](#) – or going back over the words in different contexts – and to monitoring whether the [students](#) truly grasped their meanings.

"So you're spending time teaching something," Wright said, "but not spending time checking if the kids ever learned it."

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Vocabulary instruction failing US students (2013, January 24) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-vocabulary-students.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.