



Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction



To be considered high quality, vocabulary instruction for English learners should be provided consistently and though all content areas. Students should receive in-depth instruction on essential content words as well as on the meaning of common words and phrases not yet learned.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Adopt an evidence-based approach to vocabulary instruction.
2. Develop districtwide lists of essential words for vocabulary instruction. These words should be drawn from the core reading program and from the textbooks used in key content areas, such as science and history.
3. Vocabulary instruction for English learners should also emphasize the acquisition of meanings of everyday words that native speakers know and that are not necessarily part of the academic curriculum.

Potential roadblocks

1. Teaching vocabulary effectively is difficult. Many teachers will struggle learning how to provide effective vocabulary instruction to English learners.
2. Some teachers may incorrectly assume that English learners know a concept and the word for that concept in their primary language—when, in fact, they do not. This is particularly true for technical terms encountered in science, geography, and history.



Reference: Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/6>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Adopt an evidence-based approach to vocabulary instruction.

Students should be engaged in explicit vocabulary instruction daily. All curriculum areas, including reading, writing, science, history, and geography, need to emphasize vocabulary development. Effective vocabulary instruction must include repeated exposure to targeted words over several days across all curriculums. The goal of rich vocabulary instruction is that students understand words on a deep level. The depth of understanding is demonstrated by the students' meaningful use of the vocabulary in communication. Core reading programs are a good starting resource but often require the addition of more advanced instructional methods and additional vocabulary words to support English learners. Interactive study groups are effective in supporting the professional development needs of teachers, especially in the areas of selecting essential vocabulary and developing lesson plans.

2. Develop districtwide lists of essential words for vocabulary instruction. These words should be drawn from the core reading program and from the textbooks used in key content areas, such as science and history.

Word lists identified in core reading programs do not meet the vocabulary needs of English learners. Districts, in coordination with reading coaches, teacher teams, and specialists, need to collaboratively build a meaningful, districtwide core vocabulary list. This list of words will help educators focus their instruction on keywords while reducing duplication. The selection of words must be targeted, so teachers have enough time to provide rich vocabulary instruction for all selected words.

3. Vocabulary instruction for English learners should also emphasize the acquisition of meanings of everyday words that native speakers know and that are not necessarily part of the academic curriculum.

Teachers should provide a brief instruction of common English words, phrases, and expressions as they arise during lessons. During reading instruction and English language development, teachers can utilize explicit vocabulary instruction to teach these words and phrases but at a faster pace than what is required for content words.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Teaching vocabulary effectively is difficult. Many teachers will struggle learning how to provide effective vocabulary instruction to English learners.</i>	Extensive and focused training is essential for teachers to be able to teach vocabulary effectively to English learners. Teacher study groups led by vocabulary experts provide an effective way for educators to collaborate, share frustrations, discuss solutions, and provide suggestions with other teachers. In-classroom coaching is also an effective way for teachers to learn new vocabulary instruction and routines.
<i>Some teachers may incorrectly assume that English learners know a concept and the word for that concept in their primary language—when, in fact, they do not. This is particularly true for technical terms encountered in science, geography, and history.</i>	While it is recommended that teachers support English learners in making connections to their native language when possible, many concepts and terms do not have clear transferability to other languages. If students do not know the concept in their primary language, teachers should teach the word to the student in English.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.