

1. Introduction

The ability to cope with different levels of lexical complexity is fundamental to an individual's success, both academically and in life post-education. However, in Wales in 2019, the number of children reaching the expected standards in reading and writing by age eleven (end of Key Stage 2) decreased by 1.4% (Qualifications Wales 2019). Additionally, in 2019, the English language GCSE pass-rate in Wales dropped by 4.1%, with just 59.2% achieving an A*-C grade compared to 61% in 2018 and 63% in 2017 (Qualifications Wales 2019). This evidence suggests that there is a 'gap' between the academic vocabulary children should know and understand, compared to what they actually know and understand. Consequently, this project examines whether integrating explicit etymology and morphology teaching into English language education could influence children's ability to use and comprehend complex academic vocabulary.

2. Aims & Objectives

This doctoral project asks: *How does integrating word etymology and morphology into English Language teaching impact children's academic vocabulary development?*

It aims to:

- Investigate to what extent morphological and etymological skills are present in English language classrooms in Wales.
- Explore whether external factors, such as age, English language school-level and bi/multilingualism affect vocabulary deconstruction skills.
- Examine if and how explicit word-component teaching affects etymological and morphological skills (i.e. meta-linguistic comprehension) and ultimately, academic vocabulary development and literacy skills.

3. Rationale

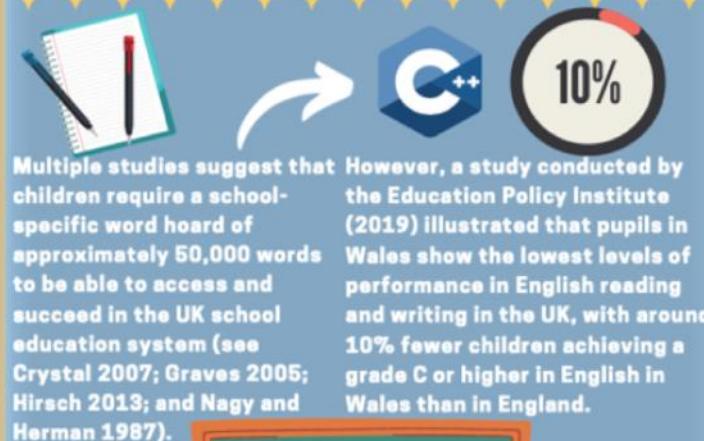
Being able to understand, read and interpret vocabulary is a learned skill. As Rastle (2018:45) states, it is this element of language learning that 'requires years of practice and formal instruction'.

Evidence has shown that those who acquire the ability to recognise and apply knowledge of more complex derivational prefixes and suffixes alongside inflexional, grammatical affixes, have higher reading achievement levels than those who do not (Nagy and Townsend 2012).

However, as far as I am aware, research to date focuses primarily on if and how individual's *pre-existing* levels of morphological awareness affects their reading comprehension ability (e.g. Kirby *et al.* 2012; Levesque *et al.* 2017).

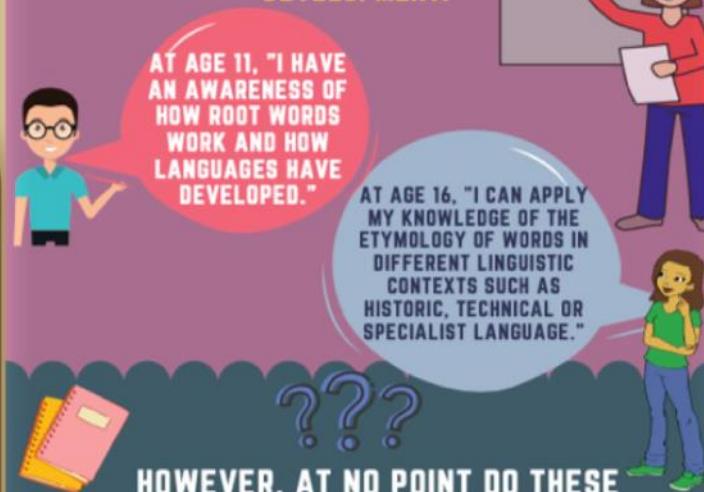
Consequently, if and how morphological skill could be explicitly taught and the impact this could have on children's vocabulary development remains unclear.

The school 'vocabulary gap' is defined in the Oxford Language Report (2018:2) as, a 'lack of the vocabulary children require to access their learning' and 'a vocabulary far below age-related expectations'.



EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THERE IS A NOTABLE ENGLISH LANGUAGE VOCABULARY GAP FOR CHILDREN IN WALES

TO ADDRESS THESE LITERACY STATISTICS, THE WELSH GOVERNMENT HAS DESIGNED A NEW CURRICULUM TO BE IMPLEMENTED FROM 2022 AND VOCABULARY HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE KEY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT.



HOWEVER, AT NO POINT DO THESE GUIDELINE DOCUMENTS ADDRESS HOW THESE VOCABULARY STANDARDS AND MORPHOLOGICAL AND ETYMOLOGICAL SKILLS SHOULD BE TAUGHT AND/OR ACHIEVED.

4. Method and materials

To address these uncertainties, an online vocabulary development programme is being designed in support of the forthcoming curriculum. It draws on different progression targets from the forthcoming curriculum, previous morphological awareness studies and children's language development theories.



5. Expected outcomes and impact

- An understanding of how vocabulary-based pedagogical practices could be developed to help students access the high-level academic vocabulary required in the forthcoming Curriculum for Wales (2022).
- An understanding of the role etymological and morphological skills play in the English language classroom.
- An understanding of if and how certain learner factors, such as age, sex, languages spoken etc. may influence individual's vocabulary abilities, specifically, their morphological and etymological skill.
- An understanding of how practitioners can support the diverse and varied language needs of students as they transition from the vocabulary of primary school to the more complex language secondary school.

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