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# Teaching English Vocabulary

A Case Study of TPRS and Reading Aloud as Teaching Methods in  
an Elementary School in Sweden

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# Abstract

There are numerous methods of teaching English as a second language to pupils in the lower grades of elementary school. Previous research indicates that some teaching methods are successful among children in pre-school and older pupils, but few studies have investigated their effects on 6-8-year-old pupils. The aim of this study is to compare two teaching methods, TPRS and Reading Aloud, to decide which one is more effective in second language vocabulary learning. Previous research in the field is presented and compared to the results of this study. This case study was conducted in an elementary school in Sweden, with 12 pupils in their first year of compulsory school and 13 pupils in their second year of compulsory school. The results suggest that TPRS as a teaching method is more effective than reading aloud when it comes to second language vocabulary learning. Further research suggestions are also presented in this essay.

Keywords: TPRS, Reading Aloud, Second language vocabulary learning, Elementary school

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# 1. Introduction

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Having a knowledge of several languages can provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts and greater understanding of different ways of living. (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 34)

This quote from the curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare emphasizes the importance of understanding language to be able to interact with others in society. In a world where communication is crucial, learning English, a language that is spoken and understood by 20% of the population in the world, can be considered very beneficial. In Sweden, English is a school subject taught from the early years of elementary school. Since English is to be taught for 60 hours in years 1-3 (Skolverket, 2019), many schools choose to start immediately during the second year of compulsory school. Beginning early when it comes to learning a second language leads to more native-like pronunciation and intonation, since children of a young age are more sensitive to sounds and rhythm (Lundberg, 2016, p. 28). It could be argued that knowing one language well is a benefit when acquiring another language. On the other hand, incorrect assumptions regarding how the second language works, based on the structure of the first language, may result in errors that first language learners do not make. For this reason, some researchers agree that there is a critical period for certain parts of second language acquisition, much like there is in first language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 68). In 1967, linguistic expert and neurophysiologist Eric Lenneberg developed a theory called the Critical Period Hypothesis, and it argues that biological differences between younger and older children affect their ability to

effectively learn a second language. The theory suggests that when children start to learn a second language at an older age, they depend on general learning abilities such as cognitive maturity and metalinguistic awareness. In contrast, younger children depend on specific mental learning abilities, such as an intuitive grasp of language and an ability to be more attuned to the phonological systems of the second language (Pinter, 2006, p. 29). These specific learning abilities can be considered more effective in learning a second language. With his theory, Lenneberg argues that older learners rely on problem solving and metalinguistic skills because they no longer have access to the innate language acquisition abilities that young children have. For this reason, one can argue that it is beneficial to initiate second language acquisition at an early age, such as when children start school or even before that. Children who begin learning a second language prior to 11-12 years of age, are more likely to acquire English with more native-like pronunciation, given that they have favourable learning circumstances that often include vast amounts of input and interaction (Pinter, 2006, p. 29).

Skolverket (2011, p. 7) states that, in Sweden, all pupils have the right to equivalent education, meaning that regardless of pupils' background and conditions, teachers need to ensure that all pupils are provided enough support to reach their goals. One way of improving the chances of pupils to have the same opportunities when it comes to the acquisition of a second language is to use classroom teaching methods from which many pupils can benefit. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate which methods are beneficial for language acquisition and can be used to teach a second language with positive results.

Myrberg (in Derwinger, 2017) states that 80 percent of our vocabulary comes from written text. To comprehend our society, we need at least 50,000 words in our vocabulary. A seven-year-old has approximately 5,000-7,000 words in his or her first language vocabulary, while a 17-year-old who has read or been read to while growing

up has about 50,000-70,000 words in his or her vocabulary. By comparison, a 17-year old who has not read on a regular basis while growing up only has about 15,000-17,000 words in his or her vocabulary (Derwinger, 2017). This disparity is an indicator of the importance of encouraging good reading habits in school, starting with reading aloud to pupils to increase their vocabulary knowledge.

In this study, the focus will be on two methods related to second language acquisition, to investigate if there is one that is more efficient when it comes to the vocabulary learning outcome. The methods investigated in this study are Teaching Proficiency Through Storytelling (henceforth TPRS) and Reading Aloud. The reasons for choosing these two methods are that they are both often used in the second language classroom; previous research shows that they are both effective in second language acquisition. As Myrberg (in Derwinger, 2017) concluded, reading aloud to children has proven to have a positive effect on the vocabulary learning outcome. The TPRS approach incorporates the reading aloud method with additional elements, such as creating a story together and using props. This makes comparing the two systems to investigate differences in learning outcomes interesting. TPRS was developed by Blaine Ray in the 1980s. The method is inspired by two other methods: Total Physical Response (TPR) and Comprehensible Input (CI), which both focus on vocabulary input rather than output. Research shows that learners make progress in both comprehension and language production in these kinds of comprehension-based programmes. Although there has been research conducted on the effects of TPRS in several countries, few have been conducted in Sweden with Swedish pupils. The TPRS method is generally more frequently used with either children who are younger than compulsory school age or older pupils, and not in the first and second years of compulsory school. This study intends to make an effort to fill this gap as it specifically targets these age groups.

## **1.1 Aim and Research Question**

This study aims to investigate which, if any, effects TPRS has on English vocabulary learning in the first and second years of compulsory school, compared to reading aloud. Therefore, this study will compare TPRS and reading aloud to investigate if there are any differences in the vocabulary learning outcome among pupils in the first and second years of compulsory school. This study hypothesizes that the results will show that pupils learn more words from a class where TPRS is used than from a class where a book reading without the elements of TPRS is carried out. In line with the aim, the study will attempt to answer this research question:

Are there any differences in the vocabulary learning outcome between the two methods TPRS and reading aloud, among pupils in the first and second years of compulsory school?

## **2. Literature review**

In this study, two methods of teaching second language vocabulary will be investigated, and the results of their efficiency will be compared. The study is conducted as a case study in an elementary school in Sweden. In this section of the essay, the methods will be explained and previous research in the field will be presented.

### **2.1 TPRS**

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling was developed by Spanish teacher Blaine Ray in the 1980s (TPRS Books, 2020). This language teaching method is based on the theory that vast amounts of Comprehensible Input are needed to acquire a new language. The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, introduced by Dr. Stephen Krashen, refers to the language a learner can understand (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 197). The hypothesis argues that some language can be understood, even if not all of the

words are known, as long as gestures or prior information is used. Acquisition occurs when one is exposed to comprehensible language, and that contains  $i + 1$  (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37). The level of language already acquired is represented by “ $i$ ”, and the “ $+1$ ” indicates language that is one step beyond that level. The input in TPRS consists of interactive books and oral stories containing common words and phrases in the target language. The theory was influenced by Dr James Asher’s TPR (Total Physical Response) method, which is a second language-acquiring method focusing on physical interaction in learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 146). The pupils listen and show comprehension by using actions rather than vocabulary, while the teacher can observe the comprehension of the group and analyse difficulties encountered in the new language. As a result, pupils do not have to feel anxious about not understanding the instructions; they can merely watch their peers and imitate them. The progression in this method is obtained by giving more and more advanced commands and adding new vocabulary when all pupils understand the vocabulary previously taught (Lundberg, 2016, p. 72).

The TPRS method emphasizes that comprehension comes before production when a new language is learned (Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019, p. 136). Before children start to speak, they can understand many words and follow simple commands (Lichtman, 2018, p. 9). The receptive vocabulary (words understood) is larger than the productive vocabulary (words that can be spoken). TPRS shares Asher’s idea that the right hemisphere of the brain needs to be activated through physical activities to process new vocabulary. This means that language is acquired through actions and physical responses, such as pointing at objects when talking about them. The context of language input is also essential when acquiring a new language. Input refers to language that is seen or heard in a communicative, meaning-bearing context. One example mentioned by Lichtman (2018, p. 9) is when a mother says “Don’t touch that, it’s hot”, it is



understood by the two-year-old because of the surrounding context. When the child is approaching the object that is hot, the mother calls out a warning, which the child can understand. This input theory also applies to the acquisition of a second language (Lichtman, 2018, p. 10).

TPRS is divided into three different steps. The first step is establishing meaning and includes the introduction and pre-teaching of the target vocabulary before the storytelling activity commences. In this stage, translation, gestures, and questions to contextualize the vocabulary are utilized. The next step uses storytelling to teach the desired vocabulary. It is also called “Ask a Story”, since the story is not pre-made but rather developed jointly with the pupils during the session. Together the teacher and pupils construct a story, and this is the central, distinctive feature that separates TPRS from other teaching methods (Lichtman, 2018, p 22). The goal of this step is to create a narrative, a shared context for communication between the teacher and the pupils. The teacher begins by introducing some story elements prepared beforehand. The pupils are asked questions, and the answers are incorporated in the story. In TPRS, the outline of the story involves a problem. The main character of the story goes to more than one location to solve the problem, and in the end, there is a solution. Questions that can be asked are, for instance, the name of the character, the reason for the problem, and which location is next. The answers are expected to come from previously learned vocabulary, and with beginner pupils the questions can be mostly yes or no questions. These questions serve as comprehension checks. The teacher starts telling the story and the pupils suggest details for the story. As the story is created, it is also acted out by the pupils, and the teacher instructs the pupils regarding where to go and what to do (Lichtman, 2018, pp. 22-23). In the third step of TPRS, a previously chosen story is read, translated, and discussed (Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019, p. 137). The reading material can be a version of the class story written by the teacher or a children’s book.

Discussion techniques that are used in this step are answering questions about the story, retelling the story to a classmate, drawing pictures of the story, rewriting the story, adding details for the story, or writing a new ending (Lichtman, 2018, p. 25). The story can also be translated together with the pupils.

### ***2.1.1 Previous Research on TPRS***

Cubukcu (2014, p. 89), in his research, concluded that vocabulary instruction through TPRS had a significant impact on the lexical knowledge level among 44 11-12-year-old pupils in an elementary school in Izmir, Turkey. He divided the pupils into two groups, one TPRS group and one control group. Both groups were taught 20 target words, and the experiment lasted for three weeks. The TPRS group studied three different stories during this time period, and the control group studied the target words through repetition (Cubukcu, 2014, p. 87). A pre-test – post-test analysis showed that when vocabulary was taught through TPRS rather than through traditional repetition techniques, the pupils scored higher in the post-test. The mean of the post-test in the intervention group was 6.013, and in the control group, the mean was 5.325.

Kara & Eveyik-Aydin (2019, p. 137) conducted a study using TPRS with 19 4-year-olds in a Turkish pre-school. The study consisted of five cycles of tutelage, based on five different stories, during one school year. The goal was to teach pupils the target vocabulary from the stories. Each cycle lasted for one week and consisted of a pre-test, a lesson, an immediate post-test, and a delayed post-test. In every cycle, five teaching hours of TPRS were carried out, following the steps of the method; Establishing meaning, Personal Questions and Answers, and Asking a Story. The results showed that TPRS had a short-term effect on second language vocabulary acquisition, both receptive and productive. The results also confirmed the long-term effects of TPRS on receptive knowledge of the second language. The long-term impact on second language

production were not as evident, but the results were still significantly better than in the pre-test. In four of the five weeks, the receptive mean was higher in the delayed post-test than in the immediate post-test, which means that the pupils remembered the words learned in class but also continued to learn after the post-test, despite the fact that the new vocabulary was not repeated. The means of the productive tests are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Means of the productive tests (adapted from Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019, p. 140).

	Pretest Mean	Post-test mean	Delayed Post-test mean
Week 1	0/2	1.84/2	1.52/2
Week 2	0/2	1.63/2	1.58/2
Week 3	0/3	2.53/3	2.68/3
Week 4	0/3	2.63/3	2.63/3
Week 5	0/2	1.53/2	1.31/2

The table shows the results of the productive tests of the study. The results of the productive tests are not as high as the results of the receptive tests, but the researchers note that some words which could not be remembered in the immediate post-test were recalled in the delayed post-test, as is seen in Table 1 (Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019, p. 140). This could be explained by children's tendency to repeat new words themselves as part of the language acquisition process (Yule, 2010, p. 193).

In his research, Dziedzic (2012, p. 5) concluded that using the TPRS method when teaching Spanish as a second language is more effective than using traditional second language instruction when it comes to speaking and writing. The study was conducted during one school year in Denver, Colorado, USA, and the lessons for the control group consisted of traditional work in a text book such as grammar and vocabulary repetition. The TPRS group incorporated the different elements of TPRS, and the target language was utilized 85-90% of the time. Experienced instructors in

TPRS and traditional techniques observed the classes to make sure that the correct method was used. No pre-test was conducted since Spanish was a new language for all of the pupils. The test given after the lessons was the Denver Public Schools Proficiency Assessment, which is a test performed in all public schools in Denver, Colorado, at the end of the school year, so it can be regarded a delayed post-test. As shown in Table 2, TPRS pupils showed significantly better results than the traditionally-taught pupils on the writing and speaking portions of the test.

**Table 2.**

Results after one year of Spanish studies (adapted from Dziedzic, 2012, p. 6).

Method	Writing mean	Speaking mean
TPRS	8.25	3.5
Traditional	6.77	2.8

The results from the listening and reading tests showed no significant difference in learning outcome between the TPRS pupils and the traditionally-taught pupils.

However, the researcher mentions that the finding of no difference on the input-oriented tests, listening and reading, is not a typical result, and that the anomaly highlights the need for continuing studies of the effect of TPRS methodology.

In another study, Soleimani and Akbari (2013, pp. 4007-4009) investigated storytelling as a method for learning English as a second language in a group consisting of 31 6-year-olds in Iran. Their definition of storytelling is similar to the TPRS method, in that they describe that storytelling shares ideas and experiences through words and actions to communicate. They based their research on the hypothesis that storytelling would have a positive effect on children's vocabulary learning. The researchers used a pre-test and a post-test to investigate the learning outcome of the lessons. The test was designed as a multiple-choice test with pictures since the children could not read or

write. The teacher said the target word out loud, and the pupils circled the correct image. After the pre-test, three lessons followed, inspired by the TPRS design. The three steps were called Pre-Storytelling, While-Storytelling, and After-Storytelling. In the first step, the pupils prepared to understand the upcoming story by undertaking two sessions where new vocabulary was introduced through flashcards, followed up by having them draw pictures of the new vocabulary. In the next step, the teacher read the story during two sessions, while pictures were shown and questions were asked to confirm that the pupils understood. In the last step, which lasted one session, the teacher applied the new vocabulary to the pupils' already known vocabulary by asking related questions. The results of the study showed that storytelling enhanced the target vocabulary knowledge of the pupils, and the conclusion was that storytelling might have positive effects on children's vocabulary learning. In the pre-test, the mean of the group was 20.1/30, and in the post-test, the mean was 24.74/30. The significance of the results is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

Paired sample T-test, showing that the difference in vocabulary learning from pre-test to post-test was significant (adapted from Soleimani & Akbari, 2013, p. 4010).

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2- tailed)
Pretest- posttest	-4.645	2.882	-8.975	<0.001

In a paired sample T-test, there was a significant difference between the results of the pre-test and the post-test, showing that storytelling did have a positive effect on children's vocabulary learning.

## **2.2 Reading Aloud in Class**

Van Kleeck et al. (2003, p. 98) suggest five elements that should be considered in a successful reading aloud framework in class. The first element is the book area. Is reading aloud performed in a particular setting? Is it appropriate in size, is it comfortable, neat, and inviting? The authors recommend a space that can accommodate four to six children. The next element is time. Is there enough time to read the book? How many reading sessions are planned? The third element is curricular integration. Is there a connection between the books read and the curriculum? The fourth element is the nature of the book reading event. Are the children attentive and engaged in the reading event? Does the teacher manage the group in a certain way? Is the book read with enthusiasm? The fifth and final element is the connection between the home and the classroom. Are caretakers involved, do they receive information regarding what is taught, in order for them to help consolidate the new knowledge?

### ***2.2.1 Previous Research in Reading Aloud***

High et al. (2000, p. 931) conclude that reading aloud to children helps them develop their own language. In their study, families with 5- to 11-month-old children were divided into two groups, an intervention group (n = 106) and a control group (n = 99). Families in the intervention group received children's books and advice about book-reading to children, while those in the control group received no books or materials relevant to literacy. After the intervention, the children's receptive and productive vocabulary was tested using a modified version of the MacArthur Communication and Development Inventory (Short Form). Parents were then asked if their child understood (receptive vocabulary) or produced (productive vocabulary) 50 words that were in the books received by the intervention group families, and 50 other words. The results showed that both receptive and productive vocabulary scores were higher within the

intervention group. The effect was found for both the 50 words in the books and those not included in the books.

Grolig et al. (2019, p. 1077) investigated the effects of storybook exposure on the language skills of children in pre-school. The findings suggested that children's storybook exposure was a predictor of vocabulary, grammar, and narrative comprehension, which indicates that shared book reading increases reading comprehension. 201 5-year-olds from 32 child care groups participated in the study. The children's Lower Level Language skills (picture naming, explaining concepts, and syntactic integration) were assessed, along with Higher Level Language skills (comprehension monitoring and narrative comprehension), storybook exposure, nonverbal IQ, and verbal short-term memory. Parents and child care workers also filled out a questionnaire about storybook exposure. The results of the study showed that children's storybook exposure was significantly related to vocabulary knowledge, syntactic integration, comprehension monitoring, and narrative comprehension. The results also indicate that children's storybook exposure is linked not only to vocabulary knowledge, but explains a significant amount of unique variance in grammar, comprehension monitoring, and narrative comprehension among the children in the study.

### **3. Method**

In this section of the essay, the method and measuring device used is described. The participants are introduced as well as a description of how the results were analysed.

#### **3.1 Case Study**

This study was conducted as a case study in an elementary school in central Sweden.

Yin (1989, p. 23) describes case studies as studies investigating a contemporary

phenomenon within its real-life context. The boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not always evident, and multiple sources of evidence are used. The case analysed can involve an individual, a group, an organization, or an event. The case study can focus on one or more cases, and it can also differ in intention. It can be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory (Backman, 1998, p. 49). The benefit of this method is that it presents a view of reality without describing all cases everywhere, which would be time-consuming. The difficulty in using this method is that a single case study can never fully represent reality, and for that reason, the conclusions of the study cannot be generalised. This can lead to problems with the reliability of the study. However, if the results are compared to earlier studies in the research field that show similar results but is compiled through other methods, the results of the case study might be considered as reliable (Ejvegård, 1996, p. 32). For that reason, the results of this case study were compared with previous research in the same field, conducted through both case studies and other research methods. In this case study, four groups or cases were examined. This study intended to explain any differences in the vocabulary learning outcome in the cases analysed by exposing the different groups to various teaching methods.

### **3.2 Choosing the Vocabulary**

In this study, the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle was used for the reading aloud sessions and for the third lesson of the TPRS method. Eighteen target words from the book were chosen for the pre-test. The reason for selecting these specific 18 words was that they are common words that children use. According to Skolverket (2011), part of the core content that should be taught in English classes for children in years 2-4 of compulsory school is subject areas that are familiar to the pupils. The words chosen for this study were different animals, flowers, and food types



that are known to the children in the Swedish language. The majority of the terms were in the Longman Communication 3000 list (Longman, 2007), which is a list consisting of the 3000 most common words in the English language. After the pre-test, ten words were chosen as the target words for this study; these terms were ones that few of the pupils knew in the pre-test and could pose the best learning opportunities. The words chosen were “pear”, “pie”, “cheese”, “cake”, “ice cream”, “sausage”, “caterpillar”, “strawberry”, “leaf”, and “butterfly”.

### **3.3 Pre-test, Post-test, delayed post-test**

The design of this study was a pre-, post-, and delayed post-test, examining the vocabulary learning outcome among the pupils participating in the study. The tests measured the number of target words known before and after the learning sessions, and therefore it was a quantitative experimental research method. The pre-test – post-test model consists of finding a pre-test measure of the outcome of interest prior to performing a study, followed by a post-test afterwards. Pre-test – post-test designs can be used with or without control groups (Salkind, 2010, p.1087). The tests in this study were performed one-on-one with the pupils using flashcards with pictures representing the vocabulary included in the lesson. Each test will be described in more detail in the next section.

### **3.4 Participants and setting**

The study was conducted in a small town in central Sweden, at a school with pupils in years 1-7 of their compulsory education. Before the study was conducted, a letter of consent was sent to guardians, asking permission to have their children participate in the research (Appendix A). The selection includes 24 pupils from two classes, aged 6-8, and each class was divided into two groups for comparison. The TPRS method was used with one group from each class, and in the remaining two groups a children’s book

was read aloud without the elements of TPRS. The groups were named A1 (First compulsory year TPRS group), A2 (First compulsory year reading group), B1 (Second compulsory year TPRS group) and B2 (Second compulsory year reading group). Group A1 consisted of four boys and two girls, while group A2 consisted of four boys and one girl. Group B1 consisted of one boy and six girls, and group B2 consisted of two boys and four girls. The sessions were video-recorded and the video was reviewed to make sure that the correct method was used, and to explain any eventual anomalies in the results. If there were any unexpected results of the study, they might be explained by an error in the use of the teaching method. It is important to eliminate the risk of this being a result of other variables than the differences in the methods, such as errors in the use of teaching method.

The book chosen for all groups was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. This book is often used for the TPRS method since it contains many concrete nouns that can be illustrated in various ways. According to Lundberg (2016, p 73), it is a classic book that never ceases to fascinate children. With its repetitive elements, it is a suitable book for reading aloud several times, since the pupils learn the phrases and can read along with the teacher. For younger children, repetition is a natural way of learning a new language (Lundberg, 2016, p. 70). The learning sessions in this study consisted of three classes over the course of one week for each group. After the sessions were conducted, a post-test was performed to control the vocabulary learning outcome. The post-test was conducted in the same way as the pre-test: one-on-one with flashcards. Two weeks later the same test was conducted as a delayed post-test to control the long-term effect of the learning outcome. The results of the four groups were then compared statistically to conclude if there were any differences in the vocabulary learning outcome that could be related to the choice of teaching method.

### **3.5 Conducting the Pre-test**

The pre-test was performed one-on-one in a room with the pupil and the researcher. Flashcards with pictures of items representing the target vocabulary (Appendix B) were presented to the pupil, and the pupil was asked to say the word in English. In a protocol, the terms were marked as “Known” or “Unknown”. A total of 18 target words were used, and when the pre-test sessions were done, the ten words that were the most unfamiliar to the pupils were chosen for the learning sessions.

### **3.6 Conducting the Learning Sessions**

The TPRS learning sessions were conducted according to the TPRS structure, and the reading sessions were conducted according to the reading aloud structure described previously in the method section. Every lesson is described in detail below, starting with the three TPRS lessons.

#### ***3.6.1 TPRS Lesson One: Establish Meaning***

During the first TPRS lesson, the goal was to establish meaning (Hedstrom, 2012). Seven target words were chosen for this lesson according to the first step of the TPRS method, and translated by the teacher in the beginning of the session. The teacher showed the flashcards and said the word in Swedish, and asked if anyone knew the English word. If no pupil knew the word, the teacher said the word, and repeated it several times to make sure that all pupils heard the word. The words chosen for this first lesson were “pie”, “sausage”, “ice cream”, “cheese”, “cake”, “leaf” and “caterpillar”. Every pupil in the group was assigned one of the target words and asked to stand up when they heard their word in English.

### ***3.6.2 TPRS Lesson Two: Tell a Story***

The session started with repeating the target words from the first session, translating them and introducing the last three target words, which were “pear”, “butterfly”, and “strawberry”. In accordance with the TPRS method, the class story was then created by asking questions using the target words (Hedstrom, 2012, p. 5). This lesson followed the structure of the “Asking a story” step in the TPRS method. In this session, the teacher and the pupils worked together to create a story while making sure that every pupil comprehended the words. During the story creation, several comprehension checks were made to ensure that all pupils understood. Clay models were used to represent the target words. The plot of the created story was that a caterpillar ate different kinds of food (the target words), and then turned into a butterfly. This plot was partly planned by the teacher before the lesson, but the pupils decided what would happen by answering questions about the events in the narrative. Questions that were asked include “What did the caterpillar eat next?”, “Where did the caterpillar go next?”, and “Was the caterpillar still hungry?”. The reason for choosing these questions was that they were all questions that can be answered verbally or non-verbally, by nodding, shaking one’s head, or pointing to the next clay item, which is recommended in the TPRS method.

### ***3.6.3 TPRS Lesson Three: Reading the Book***

The third lesson consisted of reading the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* out loud and putting the target words into context. The session began with a repetition of the target words, making sure that all pupils understood the terms. According to Hedstrom (2012, p. 6), the reading should be based on the material from the previous two steps and present the content in a different format. The book was read to the pupils using the same props as in the earlier sessions, and afterwards each pupil was asked to choose a

prop and identify it, until all target words and props had been used. In the book reading, words that are not previously known by the pupils can be included, since pupils can understand more vocabulary when the input is under the reader's control. This means that the pupils do not have to understand all of the words to comprehend the story, but when they comprehend the story, they can also learn the words.

### ***3.6.4 Reading Aloud sessions***

When the reading aloud sessions were conducted with groups A2 and B2, the five elements of book reading suggested by Van Kleeck et al. (2003, p 98) were considered. The book area was a couch and three chairs in a quiet room next to the classroom, large enough for six children (four pupils on the couch, two pupils in chairs, and one chair for the reader). It was a comfortable setting where all of the children had enough space and could see the pictures in the book. The time designated for every session was fifteen minutes, and three sessions were conducted with each group. Curricular integration was considered when choosing the book for the study. The Swedish curriculum for the English language subject (Skolverket, 2011, p. 35) states that one part in the content of communication in years 2-4 of compulsory school is subject areas that are familiar to the pupils. Animals and food are subject areas that are common among children, and since the book deals with both of these subject areas, it is useful for teaching English. Part of the content of listening (reception) is clearly spoken English and texts from various media, songs, rhymes, poems, and tales (Skolverket, 2011, p. 35), and the chosen book fits this description since it is a repetitive tale. Regarding the nature of the book reading event, the pupils were attentive and engaged in the reading for the most part. The final element, which is the connection between the home and the classroom, was considered when asking caretakers for consent to perform the study, since the pupils were prepared for the book reading sessions and knew what was planned.

### **3.7 Conducting the Post-tests**

The first post-test was conducted in the same way as the pre-test, one-on-one with the researcher using flashcards with pictures of the target words. The words were marked in a protocol as “Known” or “Unknown”. The first post-test was conducted in the same week as the learning sessions were finished.

A delayed post-test was conducted two weeks after the post-test. The delayed post-test was done to evaluate whether or not the new words had consolidated in the long-term memory. The test was conducted in the same manner as the pre-test and post-test. Considering that the study had to be conducted during a period of three weeks, the delayed post-test might be argued to show a short-term effect instead of a long-term effect. This is further analysed in the discussion.

### **3.8 Analysing the results**

When analysing the results, the first step was to merge the groups by teaching method, to create a larger sample. The results of group A1 were merged with the results of group B1, and the results of group A2 were merged with the results of group B2; then the results were analysed to investigate any differences in vocabulary learning outcome depending on teaching method.

The results of the study were then cross-compared and analysed to find out if the TPRS method was more effective when it came to target word acquisition or not. The results of group A1 were compared to the results of A2, the results of group B1 were compared to those of group B2. This comparison was conducted to investigate if there were any differences in vocabulary learning outcome between the groups of the same age. The individual results of the participants in the study were also analysed, since the sample was small and remarkable individual results could affect the outcome of the study.

The results were compared and analysed with a Two-sample T-test to examine if the differences in learning outcome were statistically significant. The learning outcome was measured by comparing the mean number of target words known by each group before the learning sessions, immediately after the learning sessions, and two weeks after the learning sessions. The Two-sample T-test procedure is used to test the hypothesis that there is no difference between two variables (Salkind, 2010, p. 999). When conducting a Two-sample T-test, if the process had no effect, the average difference between the measurements is equal to 0 and the null hypothesis holds. If the treatment did have an effect, the average difference is not 0 and the null hypothesis is rejected. The data analysed in this study consisted of the mean number of target words identified in the pre-test, compared to the mean number of target words identified in the post-test. The mean number of target words known in the pre-test were then also compared to the mean number of target words identified in the delayed post-test.

### **3.9 Ethical Principles**

Stafström (2017, p. 8) states that the quality of research is highly affected by ethical considerations and guidelines. To that end, it is crucial for researchers to discuss ethical matters in their studies. Vetenskapsrådet (2002, p. 6) present four principles that should be considered in all research:

- Informed consent – all parties involved must be informed about the purpose of the study and their participation. They should also be informed of how they can access the results of the study. In this study, that requirement was fulfilled by explaining to guardians and pupils what the purpose of the study was, and how their responses would be used in the study.
- Consent requirement – participants, in this case pupils and the guardians, decide if they want to participate in the study or not. In the letter of consent that all

guardians in this study received, it was clearly stated that participation in the study was optional.

- Confidentiality requirement – All participants are guaranteed that their identities are not exposed in the study. In this study, this was fulfilled by anonymizing the test results; only the number of correct answers were presented, and the protocols were coded with numbers instead of names. The protocols were destroyed after the data was compiled.
- Usage requirement – The data collected for the study can only be used in the study, and is destroyed when the study is finished. In this study, when all data was collected and the study was complete, the data used was destroyed so that it could not be used again.

### **3.10 Reliability and Validity**

The reliability of research depends on whether or not the results could be duplicated if an identical study would be performed in a different group or by a different researcher (Bryman, 2011, p. 160). The reliability of a study can be affected by various factors: the measuring device, the researcher conducting the study, the surrounding environment, and the research object (Körner & Wahlgren, 2002, p. 23). Since this study is conducted as a case study with a relatively small group, the reliability could be negatively affected. Individual results that differ from the results of the rest of the group can affect the outcome of the tests. For this reason, any remarkable individual results will be presented in the result section and analysed in the discussion. Reliability also concerns how reliable and useful the measuring instrument is for the current study (Ejvegård, 1996, p 67). The measuring instrument chosen for this study is an oral test with pictures of the words taught in the lesson. It is a test that can be copied in other studies, and for that reason it has the potential of producing the same results, since the pictures test the same



target items. When using the same structure, protocol, and material for testing all groups in the study, the risk of the researcher influencing the results in any way is minimized. If another researcher were to conduct the research, the lessons would not be exactly the same due to individual differences such as intonation and body language, and that could affect the results of the study. To obtain the exact same conditions for lessons in another study, the original lesson would need to be observed by any researcher wanting to duplicate the study. Since the recordings from this study have been destroyed, this is not possible. However, a researcher can use the same structure when it comes to the five elements of reading aloud, thus making it possible to duplicate the results: the book area, the time for the book-reading, the curricular integration, the nature of the book reading event, and the connection between home and classroom (Van Kleeck et al 2003, p. 98).

The validity of a study shows if the study measures what it is supposed to or not, and if the purpose of the study is fulfilled (Bryman, 2011, p. 160). According to previous research, pupils can hesitate to speak English even when they know the correct words (Estling, Vanneståhl & Lundberg, 2012, p. 21), and that can affect the validity of the study since the pupils might not show their actual vocabulary knowledge. To reduce pupil anxiety about speaking out loud, the tests were conducted one-on-one so that they did not have to speak out in class. Younger pupils in elementary school also do not have the same resistance towards communicating in a foreign language that older pupils do (Sandström, 2011, p. 27); they are unafraid and often do not care what others think of their English skills (Lundberg, 2016, p. 77). Since this study is performed among 6-8-year-olds, it could be argued that they are not yet anxious about speaking English. For that reason, the validity of this study is higher than one conducted with older pupils. Another aspect that could affect the validity of this study is that the subjects of the investigation are all in the same school, and can be expected to interact with each other

during breaks. This means that the participants in the study can use their new English vocabulary skills when they talk to each other, and by doing that, create learning opportunities for each other. To eliminate the risk of pupils affecting other pupils' learning, the subjects of the study would have to be observed during the entire school day. Since this was not possible, the study was conducted during a short period of time, to minimize the risk of pupils affecting each other's vocabulary learning.

## **4. Results**

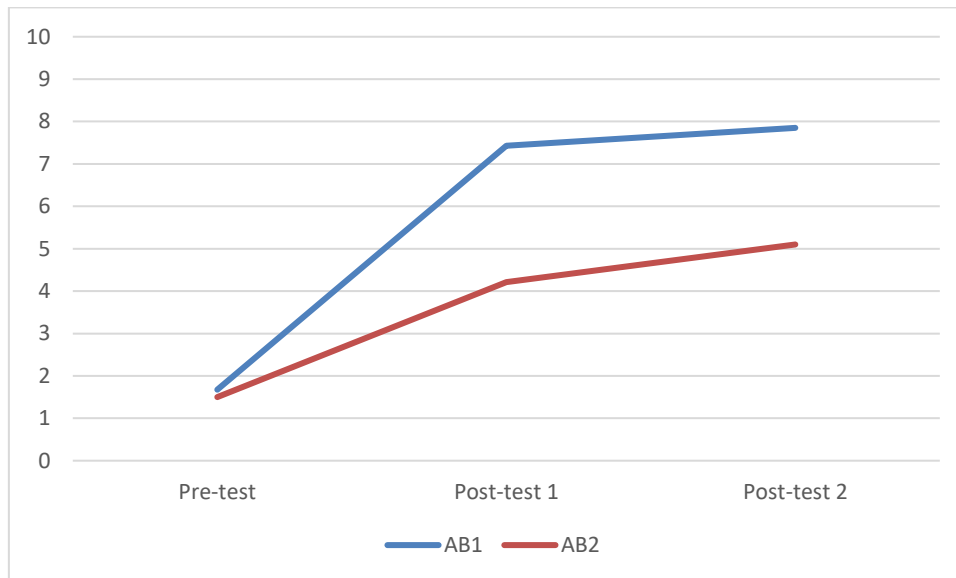
In this section of the essay, the results of the study are presented. To begin with, the vocabulary learning outcome of group A1 and B1, the two TPRS groups, are merged and presented, and the results of group A2 and B2, the two reading aloud groups, are also merged and presented. This is done to discover if there is a difference in vocabulary learning outcomes between the groups, depending on which learning method they were exposed to. A Two samples T-test was used to investigate whether or not the differences in the results are significant. Secondly, the results of group A1 and A2 are presented, along with the individual results of the group. Finally, the results of group B1 and B2 are presented, along with individual results.

### **4.1 Vocabulary Learning Outcome Presented by Teaching Method**

In Figure 1, the results of A1 and B1 are merged, the results of A2 and B2 are merged, and the results are then compared.

**Figure 1.**

Results of groups merged by teaching method.



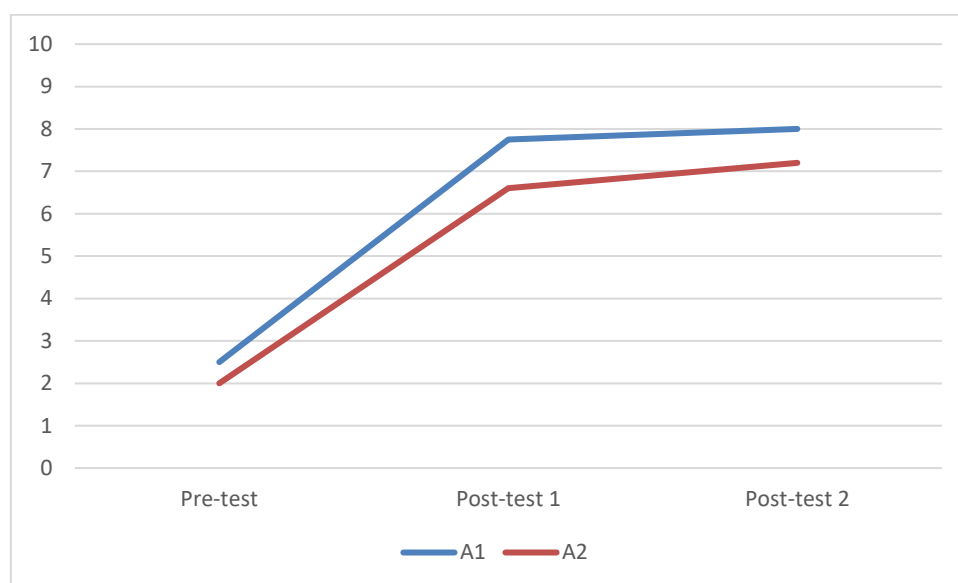
Group AB1, the two merged TPRS groups, had a mean score of 1.68 of the target words in the pre-test, 7.43 in the first post-test, and 7.85 in the delayed post-test. Group AB2, the merged reading aloud groups, had a mean score of 1.5 of the target words in the pre-test, 4.22 in the first post-test, and 5.1 in the delayed post-test. When the groups are merged by teaching method, the mean number of target words known in the first post-test differ with 3.21 in favour of the TPRS method group. From pre-test to first post-test, the difference between the groups is significant, and the difference in means is not equal to 0 at the 95 percent confidence interval ( $t = 3.31$ ,  $df = 16.56$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ). From pre-test to delayed post-test, the mean number of target words known differ with 2.75 between group AB1 and AB2, in favour of the TPRS method group. From pre-test to delayed post-test, the difference in means is not equal to 0 at the 95 percent confidence interval ( $t = 2.79$ ,  $df = 18.49$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.01$ ), which means that the difference between the groups is significant.

## 4.2 Vocabulary Learning Outcome Group A1 and A2

Groups A1 and A2 included pupils in their first year of compulsory school. Their test results are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**

Vocabulary Learning outcome for group A1 and A2.



The pupils in group A1 were taught new words through TPRS, and A2 were taught through reading aloud. Group A1 consisted of five pupils in their first year of compulsory school, aged 6-7. There were four boys and one girl in this group. After the pre-test and learning sessions, one pupil was absent from school, and his results were removed from the pre-test. In the pre-test, the mean score of the group was 2.5 target words, and in post-test 1, the mean target word knowledge was 7.7. In the delayed post-test, the mean target word knowledge of the group was 8.0. The mean number of target words learned from pre-test to delayed post-test to first post-test was 5.2, and the mean number of target words learned from pre-test to delayed post-test was 5.5.

Group A2 consisted of five pupils in their first year of compulsory school, aged 6-7, three boys and two girls. This group was taught through reading aloud sessions. For group A2, the mean number of target words known before the lessons was 2.0. After the lessons, in post-test one, the mean number was 6.2. In the delayed post-test, the mean number of target words known was 7.2. The mean number of target words learned from pre-test to post-test was 5.2.

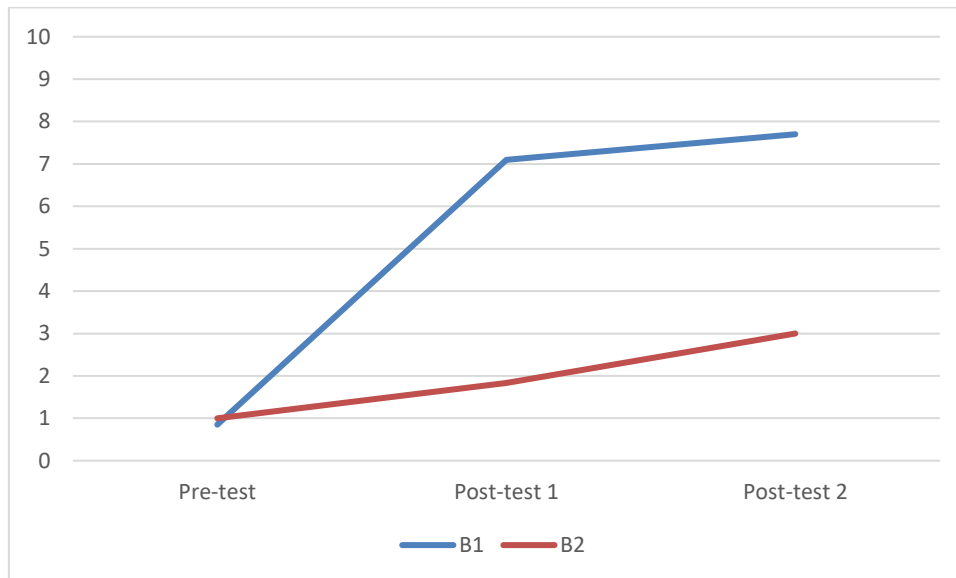
When the results of these groups were compared to each other, the mean difference in target words learned from pre-test to first post-test was 1. When using a Two-sample T-test to compare the means from pre-test to first post-test, there was no significant difference in vocabulary learning outcome between the groups ( $t = 0.51$ ,  $df = 6.81$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.63$ ). The mean difference in target words learned from pre-test to delayed post-test was 0.3. The Two-sample T-test comparing the means from pre-test to delayed post-test also showed that there was no significant difference in the mean number of target words learned between groups A1 and A2 ( $t = 0.25$ ,  $df = 6.84$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.81$ ).

### **4.3 Vocabulary Learning Outcome Group B1 and B2**

The pupils in group B1 were taught new words through TPRS, and the pupils in group B2 were taught through reading aloud. The results of the two groups are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**

Vocabulary Learning outcome for group B1 and B2.



Group B1 consisted of seven pupils, six girls and one boy, in their second year of compulsory school. In the pre-test, the group had a mean target word knowledge of 0.85. In post-test 1, the target word knowledge was 7.1. In the delayed post-test, the mean number of target words known was 7.7.

Six pupils in their second year of compulsory school, aged 7-8, were included in group B2. There were two boys and four girls. The mean number of target words known by group B2 in the pre-test was 1. In the first post-test, the mean number of target words understood was 1.8. In the delayed post-test, the mean number of target words acquired by this group was 3.

From pre-test to first post-test, the mean number of target words learned by group B1 was 6.25. The corresponding number for group B2 was 0.8. When performing a Two-sample T-test comparing the mean number of target words learned by each group, the difference in vocabulary outcome is significant ( $t = 4.84$ ,  $df = 10.15$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ). The mean number of target words learned from pre-test to delayed post-test by group

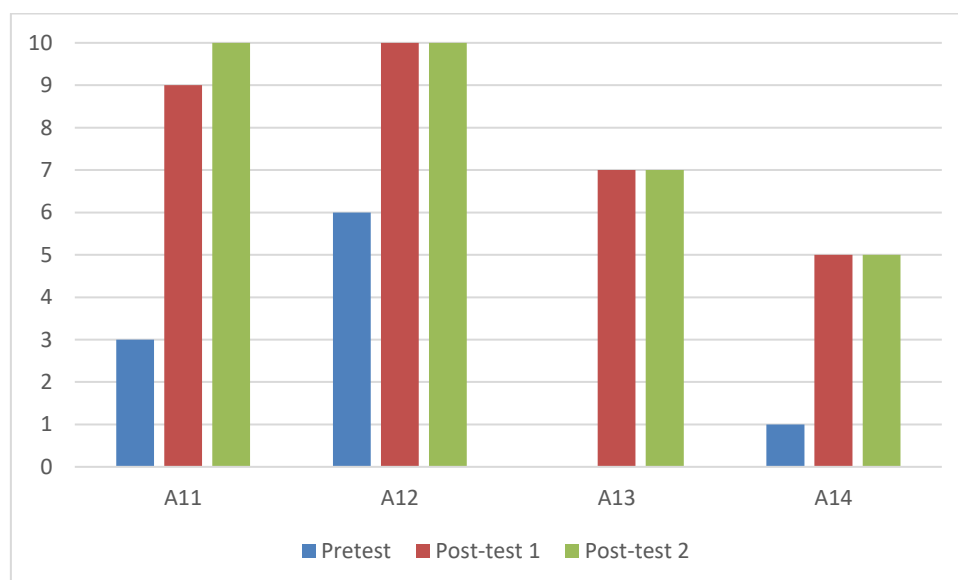
B1 was 6.85. From pre-test to delayed post-test, the mean number of target words acquired by group B2 was 2. There is a significant difference at the 95% level between these two groups ( $t = 3.60$ ,  $df = 9.88$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ).

## 4.4 Individual results

When the groups are this small, individual results that are remarkable can affect the group results considerably, and for that reason they are also presented here. In Figure 4, the individual results of group A1, the TPRS group in their first year of compulsory schooling, are presented.

**Figure 4.**

Individual results of group A1. The bars show the number of words known in pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test by each pupil.



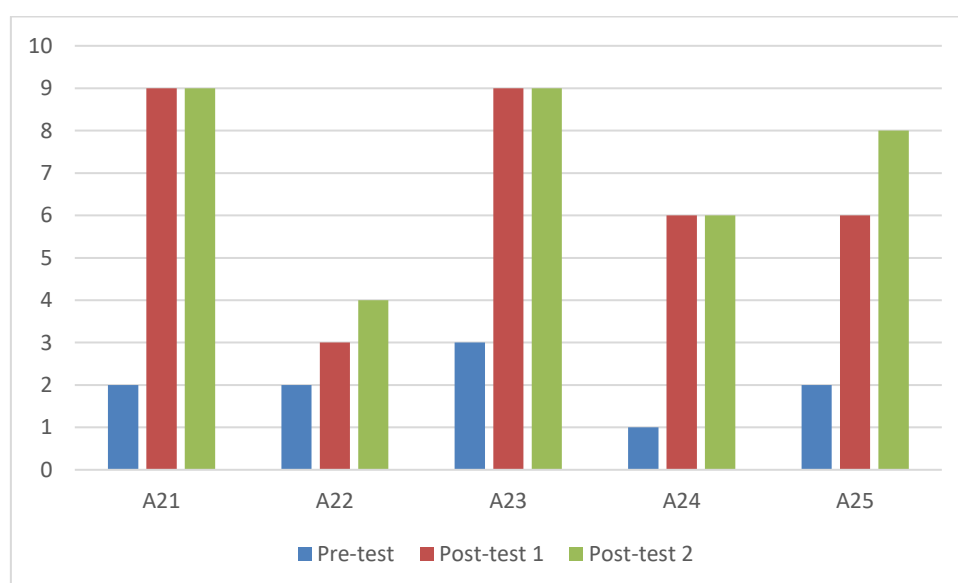
In Figure 4, the pupils are coded with numbers A11-A14. In this group, one pupil scored 3/10 in the pre-test, 9/10 in the first post-test, and 10/10 in the delayed post-test. One pupil knew none of the target words in the pre-test but scored 7/10 in both post-test and delayed post-test. Overall, the learning curve of the participants in this group is

similar; two of the pupils learned four words, and two of the pupils learned seven words.

The individual results of group A2 are presented in Figure 5. Group A2 was the reading aloud group in their first year of compulsory school.

**Figure 5.**

Individual results of group A2. The bars show the number of words known in pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test by each pupil.



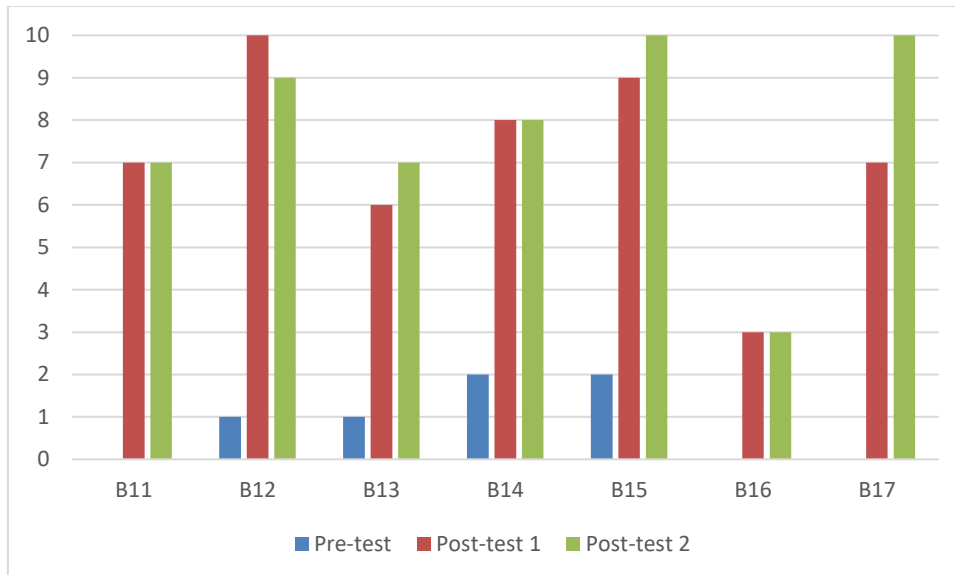
Group A2 was the group that had the most significant difference in target word knowledge from pre-test to post-test. In group A2, pupils A21, A23, and A25 increased their target word knowledge from 2-3 in the pre-test to 8-9 in the post-test and delayed post-test, which affected the group results positively. The pupil with the lowest target word learning outcome knew two more target words in the delayed post-test. The other pupils learned between 5 and 7 new words from pre-test to delayed post-test.

In Figure 6, the individual results of group B1 are presented. B1 was the TPRS group in their second year of compulsory school.



**Figure 6.**

Individual results of group B1. The bars show the number of words known in pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test by each pupil.

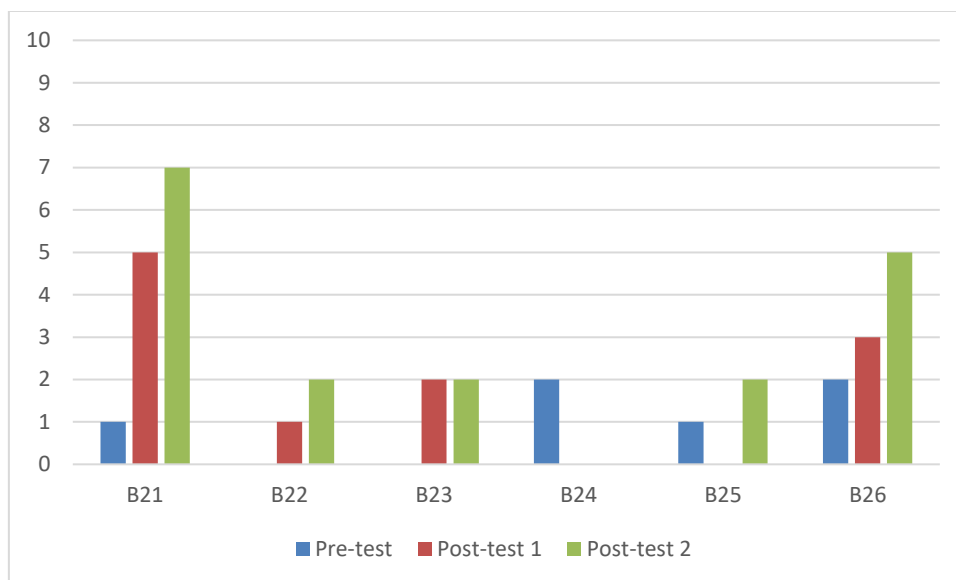


The pupils in this group were coded with numbers B11-B17. In this group, pupils B11, B16, and B17 knew none of the target words in the pre-test. In the delayed post-test, their target word knowledge varied from three to ten. The pupils in this group learned between 3 and 10 target words from pre-test to delayed post-test.

Group B2 was the reading aloud group in their second year of compulsory school. The individual results of this group are presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7.**

Individual results of group B2. The bars show the number of words known in pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test by each pupil.



In group B2, pupils B22, and B23 knew none of the target words in the pre-test, but had learned two new words when the delayed post-test was conducted. Pupil B24 knew two of the target words in the pre-test, but none in the post-test and delayed post-test. Pupil B25 knew one target word in the pre-test, none in the post-test, and two in the delayed post-test. The pupils of this group learned between -2 and 6 new words from pre-test to delayed post-test.

## 5. Discussion

In this section of the essay, the results of the study are compared to previous studies in the same field, and suggestions for further research are presented based on the results.

### 5.1 Result discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate which, if any, effects Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) has on English vocabulary learning in the first

two years of compulsory education, compared to reading aloud in class without the elements of TPRS.

When presenting the results, the groups were first merged by teaching method. When this was done, it was clear that there was a significant difference in target word learning between the TPRS group and the reading aloud group, in favour of the TPRS group. These results are in line with previous research, showing that TPRS affects vocabulary learning. In their research, Kara and Eveyik-Aydin (2019, p. 141) concluded that TPRS has a short-term and long-term impact on both second language acquisition and production among young learners. This is confirmed by Cubukcu (2014, p. 89), who states that vocabulary instruction through TPRS has a significant impact on second language acquisition among 11-12-year-olds. The mean number of target words learned through TPRS in this study was 6.17, whereas the mean number of target words learned through the Reading Aloud sessions was 3.6. This means that there was a significant difference in the vocabulary learning outcome, depending on teaching method.

Several studies have concluded that TPRS is a method that is effective for learning a second language among children who are younger than compulsory school age as well as older pupils. This study shows that TPRS also has a positive impact on vocabulary learning when it comes to pupils in the first and second years of compulsory school.

After the results of the merged groups were presented, the groups were divided back into their original forms, to discover any differences in learning outcomes on a group level. The results showed that not only group A1 and B1, the two TPRS groups, but also, group A2 improved their target word knowledge drastically. This was one of the read-aloud groups, and the outcome of this group was not expected to be as evident as with groups A1 and B1, based on previous research. When reviewing the recordings from the sessions with group A2 and B2, it was evident that group A2 was more

enthusiastic and paid more attention to the book than group B2, which may explain the difference in results between the two groups. Group A2 also had a more extensive previous knowledge of the target words than group B2, which also may have affected the results, since they understood more of the words in the book from the start. As is the case with the TPRS method, it is crucial that the new information is on the right level so that the new knowledge can be acquired. As mentioned in section 3.10 of this essay, these unexpected findings could also be the result of pupils interacting with each other after the learning sessions, and creating learning opportunities for each other.

After presenting the results by group, some individual results were presented. Some pupils showed significant progression in their vocabulary learning, while others knew more words in the pre-test than in the post-test. As discussed in section 3.10 of this essay, this could, for instance, be a result of pupil anxiety about speaking out loud. The results of these pupils affected the results of the group as a whole negatively, since they had a negative result. The total number of target words learned by the group was therefore not as evident.

As stated previously, the results of this study may also have been affected by the low number of participants. Individual results that stand out as either high or low can affect the results of the group. For this reason, the individual results have been presented in the results section, and the results of this study are compared to the results of previous studies in the same area. When comparing the number of participants in this study to the number of participants in previously conducted studies, there is not a substantial difference. In Cubukcu's study (2014, p. 89), 44 pupils participated. In Kara & Eveyik-Aydin's study (2019, p. 137), 19 pupils were chosen, and in Soleimani & Akbari's study (2013, p. 4007), 31 pupils participated.

## **5.2 Further research**

This study has investigated the effects of TPRS as a technique for learning new vocabulary in English, and compared the method to reading aloud. By doing this, the study aimed to investigate the importance of using TPRS elements to optimize learning. The study showed that TPRS did have positive effects on vocabulary learning outcomes, but also that one of the reading aloud groups had a significant difference in target word knowledge. This unexpected result would be interesting to analyse further. As is mentioned in the discussion, group A2 knew a higher number of target words in the pre-test, and they were also more involved in the reading than group B2. A study concerning the effects of previous knowledge, the zone of proximal development, and motivation would be interesting to conduct.

It would also be of interest to conduct this type of study with a substantially larger group, to investigate if the effect still holds. The pre-test, post-test design could also be exchanged to another method of gathering data, such as observing the learning sessions and conducting interviews with the participants. This study was conducted during a short period of time, and therefore, it would also be interesting to investigate the long-term effects on the vocabulary learning outcome during, for instance, a school-year.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of consent



#### **Förfrågan om att delta i en studie om språkinlärning i engelska**

Syftet med studien är att undersöka om metoden TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) är en effektiv inlärningsmetod för elever i förskoleklass och årskurs 1. Undersökningen kommer att genomföras bland eleverna i förskoleklassen och årskurs ett på XXX skola i XXX.

Studien är ett examensarbete på avancerad nivå och är en del av utbildningen till grundskollärare för årskurs F-3 vid Högskolan i Gävle. Studien kommer att genomföras med lektioner och tester under februari-mars 2020. Lektionerna kommer att utföras i klassrummet, och innan lektionerna kommer ett kunskapstest att göras. Direkt efter lektionen kommer ett nytt kunskapstest att göras, och två veckor senare görs ännu ett kunskapstest, för att säkerställa om kunskaperna befasts.

Den information som samlas in kommer att behandlas säkert och förvaras inlåst så att ingen obehörig kommer att kunna ta del av den. Redovisningen av resultatet kommer att ske så att ingen individ kan identifieras. Resultatet kommer att presenteras i form av en muntlig presentation till andra studerande samt i form av ett skriftligt examensarbete. När examensarbetet är färdigt och godkänt kommer det att finnas i en databas vid Högskolan i Gävle. Inspelningarna och den utskrivna texten kommer att förstöras när examensarbetet är godkänt.

Deltagandet i studien är helt frivilligt.

Genom att signera och återlämna detta dokument till mig godkänner du att ditt barn får delta i undersökningen.

Ansvariga för studien är Charlott Fagertun och handledare är Jessika Nilsson. Har Du frågor om studien är Du välkommen att höra av dig till någon av oss.

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## Appendix B

Flashcards used for the pre-test and post-tests

