

Abstract

Research has shown that the extent of students' vocabulary in the language of learning and teaching, as an important component of overall language proficiency, plays a crucial role in reading and academic success, whether students are studying through their mother tongue or not. This study compares the vocabulary size of Grade 7 English second language immersion students with that of their English mother tongue classmates, focusing primarily on receptive vocabulary. Two aspects of immersion that South African children may experience are identified: length and quality. It is assumed that the longer the immersion, and the richer the immersion environment, the more positive the effect on vocabulary size will be. Overall results suggest that length has a slightly stronger effect on receptive vocabulary size than quality, though both are generally positive, and that most immersion students are beginning to develop a basic receptive vocabulary size comparable with that of their English mother tongue peers.

Key terms

Vocabulary size; immersion; deep immersion; shallow immersion; Model-C schools; primary school students; high frequency vocabulary; low frequency vocabulary; receptive vocabulary; productive vocabulary; second language learners; Lexical Frequency Profile.