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**JANAINA ALVES DE ANDRADE**

**VOCABULARY LEARNING AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE – CASE STUDY RESEARCH IN THE 8TH GRADE CLASSES OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL FROM EUSEBIO**

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Orientadora: Profª Drª. Lídia Amélia de Barros Cardoso

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Aprovada em: ___/___/___

BANCA EXAMINADORA

_____

Profª. Drª Lídia Amélia de Barros Cardoso (Orientadora)

Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)

_____

Profª. Dr João Luiz Teixeira de Brito

Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)

_____

Prof. Ms. José William da Silva Netto

Casa de Cultura Britânica (CCB/UFC)

A Deus, autor de toda criação. Seu fôlego de vida foi mais que sustento, me deu coragem e me fez enxergar um novo mundo de possibilidades.

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*Pelo modo espontâneo, franco e aberto*
*Com que encheste de cor meu mundo escuro.*

(Vinícius de Moraes)

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# RESUMO

O vocabulário é um elemento importante do conhecimento linguístico. No entanto, conhecer uma palavra exige mais do que poder fornecer sua tradução. O interesse no assunto vem das observações feitas em sala de aula em que os alunos apontam a falta de conhecimento de vocabulário como a principal limitação para se comunicar em L2. Além disso, a língua inglesa ganha espaço na legislação como disciplina obrigatória no currículo do Ensino Fundamental. Este é um estudo de caso exploratório realizado em uma escola pública de Eusébio que visa investigar o fenômeno de aquisição de vocabulário ao qual os alunos estão expostos pelo livro didático. A pesquisa encontra suporte em estudos de Laufer (2016), Milton (2009), Nation (1990, 2016), Brown (1994), Hulstijn (2001) e outros. As teorias relevantes exploradas para este estudo são os conceitos de *palavra*, *threshold*, abordagem intencionais e incidental. Esta pesquisa qualitativa procura buscar a média do vocabulário que os alunos adquirem do livro didático, a compreensão de qual abordagem oferece melhores resultados, seja o ensino intencional ou o incidental, e identificar como o livro didático afeta esse conhecimento. Um inventário das palavras das unidades 4 e 5 foi feito e a partir dele foram retiradas as palavras para os testes. O teste usado para coletar dados é a Escala de Conhecimento de Vocabulário - VKS (WESCHE & PARIBAKHT, 1996). Um pré-teste e um pós-teste foram administrados para que fosse possível avaliar o crescimento do vocabulário em cada grupo. Cada teste teve 15 palavras do inventário separadas por frequência e classes gramaticais. O princípio da escala é medir graus progressivos de conhecimento de palavras. A análise concentra-se em palavras receptivas porque compreende as palavras que os alunos entendem quando ouvem ou leem. A análise identificou que os alunos adquiriram uma média de 35% do vocabulário ao qual estão expostos. As palavras de alta freqüência são as mais comuns, assim como as palavras de conteúdo. A abordagem intencional provou ser mais eficiente do que incidental. Os resultados estão em gráficos de acordo com os aspectos mencionados no estudo. Os resultados desta pesquisa mostram que precisamos continuar focando no ensino de vocabulário para melhorar o conhecimento de nossos alunos.

**Palavras-chave:** Vocabulário. Aprendizagem. Língua Estrangeira.

# ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is an important element of language knowledge. However knowing a word requires more than being able to provide its translation. The interest in the subject comes from observations made in the classroom in which the students point out the lack of vocabulary knowledge as the main limitation to communicate in L2. In addition, English Language gains space in the legislation as a compulsory subject in the Elementary School curriculum. This is an exploratory single case study conducted in a public school from Eusebio that aims to investigate the phenomenon of acquisition of vocabulary to which students are exposed from the textbook. The research finds support in studies of Laufer (2016), Milton (2009), Nation (1990, 2016), Brown (1994), Hulstijn (2001) and others. The relevant theories explored for this study, are the concepts of *word*, *threshold*, *intentional* and *incidental* approach. This qualitative research attempts to seek the average of vocabulary students acquire from the textbook, the understanding of which approach provides better results, whether is the intentional or incidental teaching of vocabulary, and identify how the textbook affects such knowledge. As inventory of the words from the units 4 and 5 was made. The test used to collect data is the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale – VKS (WESCHE & PARIBAKHT, 1996). A pre-test and a post-test was administered so we could evaluate the growth of vocabulary in each group. Each test had 15 words from the inventory separated by frequency and with mixed parts of speech. The principle of the scale is to measure progressive degrees of word knowledge. The analysis focuses on receptive words because it comprises the words the students understand when they hear or read. The analysis identified that students acquire an average of 35% of the vocabulary they are exposed to. High-frequency words are the most common and also the content words. The intentional approach proved to be more efficient than incidental. The results are in graphs according to the aspects mentioned in the study. The outcomes from this research show that we need to keep focusing on the teaching of vocabulary in order to improve our students knowledge.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary**.** Learning. Foreign Language.

# LISTA DE GRÁFICOS

# LISTA DE TABELAS

# SUMÁRIO

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This research aims at analyzing the acquisition of vocabulary in English observed in an 8th grade class from a public school in the city of Eusebio. As a teacher at this school, I see the subject as something that deserves to be discussed because this processcan be challengingat alllevels of education,with a higher degreeof difficultyin early stages (primary and secondary levels) amongpublic schoolstudents.

I have been working in this school as an English teacher since 2013 and I have the daily challenge to make the subject more acceptable to the students. So I am always trying to understand their motivation to study English and what are the biggest difficulties they face.When students are asked about whatmakes comprehensioninL2harder, among the answers they reportthe lack of knowledgeof words (vocabulary), which can hinder comprehension in the communication process. Underscoring the importance of vocabulary acquisition, McCarthy (1990) emphasizes that

> No matter how well the student learns the grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way. (MCCARTHY, 1990, p. viii)

Several aspects are important for communication, but knowledge of vocabulary is essential.Therefore, "if vocabulary is considered to be an important component of language knowledge, then it naturally needs to be assessed in some way." (SCHMITT, 2000, p. 163)

Researches carried out with public school students (PAIVA; COELHO, 2005) show that the teaching of English in schools has focused on grammar, especially the *verb to be*. Thus, students retain avery limited amount of words, creating greater difficulty to communicateinL2. One of the resultsis the lossof interest. Therefore, foreign language teaching (especially English), in most publicschools does not help students to acquirea level of vocabularyin which they areable to improve the four skills.

According to Laufer (2010, p. 1) there is a "minimal vocabulary that is necessary for 'adequate' reading comprehension" which is called *threshold*. An L2 reader will only be able to apply effective reading strategies used in L1 if s/he has acquired the desired threshold level. As for the lexical threshold of reading, opinions can vary. In a survey conducted in 1990, Nation pointed out that it was necessary for the learner to know at least the 2,000 most frequent word families. Laufer (1992) considered an adequate *threshold* level the knowledge

of at least 3000 word families. More recently, Nation (2006) updated his research concluding that, in order to reach an understanding of a text, it would be necessary to know 8000-9000 word families. And in 2010 Laufer pointed out that it is necessary the knowledge of at least 4,000–5,000 word families (including proper nouns) to get a minimal understanding of a text.

This discrepancy between the two researchers may be due to the level of understanding assessed. Laufer, for example, considers as "reader" the one who reaches a level of understanding of at least 55% of the text.

This problemleads us tothink of thefollowing hypothesis: students from a public school do not acquire an adequate threshold from the English textbook. With this in mind, the research questions that this study aims at investigating are: **What is the average of words students learn from the textbook? What is the average of vocabulary that students acquire through intentional and incidental teaching? How the textbook affects the breadth of vocabulary knowledge?**

With these aspects in mind, the generalobjective of the research is to investigate the phenomenon of acquisition of vocabulary to which students are exposed from the textbook, and

- Identify the average of vocabulary students learn from the textbook.
- To measure the average of vocabulary that students acquire through intentional and incidental teaching.
- To analyze how textbook affects the breadth of vocabulary knowledge.

This research is relevant because it attempts to show this scenario in a context in which the English Language gains space in the legislation as a compulsory subject in the elementary education curriculum in Brazil.

This study is divided in six sections. The first one is the introduction that presents the research motivation, questions and goals. The second section presents the topics that cover the study and which is the basis to construct the theory to this research. Then, the methodological procedures are presented. It brings the method in which this research is based on, the steps and procedures of the study, and also the details concerning the data analysis. The next section presents the description of the results obtained through the data collected during the research followed by the analysis. Finally, the final considerations that highlight

the most relevant aspects of the research findings. The references and appendices close this study.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Vocabulary learning

This section presents the review of literature concerning to this research. This research finds support mainly in Nation (1990, 1999, 2002) Laufer (1989, 1998), Brown (1994), Hulstjin (2001), Wesche & Paribakht (1996), as follows.

The acquisition ofvocabulary has beenunderstood asanatural processthat occursduring theteaching practice for whichnospecial attention is required.That thoughtwasthe result of adesignthattook care fora "natural"and"authentic"acquisition process (BROWN, 1994). However, by the end of the twentieth century, teaching vocabularygot specialattention. This situation has been reversed "as teaching absorbs the increasing flow of information from research on the development of L2 lexicon" (NATION, 1990, p. 111).

Learning vocabulary has become a basic learner need for communicative language learning. According toLaufer (1998, p. 255), "The most striking difference between foreign learners and native speakers is in the quantity of words each group possesses". In the same direction, Nation (2002, p. 2) points out that "the positive effects of vocabulary teaching are that it can provide help when learners feel it is most needed". We are aware that vocabulary is not the only element of communication, but it is pivotal for it to occur. The more vocabulary one knows the better interaction is likely to occur.

Teachingvocabulary,however,in a communicativeapproach, cannotoccur in isolation, or by using only theprinciple of memorization. Laufer (1998, p. 257) says that "mere memorization of a word form in a given context without understanding the word's meaning cannot be called productive knowledge". Memorizing, by itself, cannot be effective. In order to use vocabulary to improve comprehension, Nagy (1988) points out that it is necessary to combine the definition of the word and the use of the context.

According to Nation, teaching vocabulary is a process that should take place based on a few principles:

1. Keep the teaching simple and clear. Don't give complicated explanations.
2. Relate the present teaching to past knowledge by showing a pattern or analogies.

3. Use both oral and written presentation - write it on the blackboard as well as explaining.
4. Give most attention to words that are already partly known.
5. Tell the learners if it is a high frequency word that is worth noting for future attention.
6. Don't bring in other unknown or poorly known related words like near synonyms, opposites, or members of the same lexical set. (NATION, 2002, p. 2)

It is necessary to connect the acquisition of a word to the acquisition of other words, in a cumulative and significant process. Brown confirms this idea by stating that

The best internalization of vocabulary comes from encounters (comprehension or production) with words within the context surrounding discourse. rather than isolating words and focusing on dictionary definitions, learners can benefit from attending to vocabulary within a communicative frame work in which items appear. students will associate new words with a meaningful context to which they apply. (BROWN, 1994, p. 365)

Meaningful vocabularylearningis perceivedbythe ability touse itin a practical way. So the teachermust provide opportunities forstudents to understandthe meaning of wordsindifferent contexts in whichthey can be used.

Another important factor related to vocabulary learning is the frequency of word occurrence. The more often a word occurs in a text, the more likely is to be remembered (MEARA, 1998). Previous researches pointed out that a range with six repetitions (COBB, 2007) to 10 repetitions (NATION, 1999) learning is most likely to occur.

In order to provide repetition, care needs to be taken to keep the context as natural as possible. In doing so, teachers should avoid simple memorization by using words in isolation. Learners are likely to recall the word, but not its meaning because of the lack of context.

### 2.1.1   What does it mean knowing a word?

Once we recognize that acquiring vocabulary is important, we need to define what it means to know a word. However, when researching vocabulary, defining the type of vocabulary knowledge that is being investigated is essential, whether it is receptive or productive, because each type will entail different tests and analyzes.

Receptive knowledge (or passive vocabulary) occurs when the learner recognizes the word by hearing or reading it and does not require the application in a context. On the other hand, productive knowledge (or active vocabulary) occurs when the learner is able to

recall the word and use it in different situations that might involve speech or writing (MILTON, 2009).

In doing so, knowing a word does not just mean knowing its translation. There are some aspects involved in the process. According to Qian (2002), it consists of four interrelated dimensions: (a) vocabulary size, (b) depth of vocabulary knowledge, (c) lexical organization, and (d) automaticity of receptive-productive knowledge. Taken together, it appears that there is a growing tendency to view vocabulary knowledge as a multidimensional construct instead of a single dimension.

Nation states that, in addition to the meaning, knowing a word involves "its form (spoken and written), its position (grammatical pattern, collocations), its function (frequency, appropriateness)" (NATION, 1990, p. 367).

Both Qian and Nation are talking about productive word knowledge, which includes all of the items above and involves the use of the word in real speech or writing situations.However, if the research is considering only the receptive knowledge, then it is enough that the student presents the translation or a synonym for the word.

Another aspect to consider is that vocabulary items are not simple orthographic units. According to Lewis (1993; 1997), they are expressions that involve multiple words divided in five different types, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1 – Taxonomy of lexical items**

| Lexical item | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Single words | The most basic type of lexical item. | *Book, pencil* |
| Polywords | Two or three words always used together and in the same order. | *On the other hand* and many phrasal verbs |
| Collocations | Groups of individual words that co-occur with other. | *Do homework, have lunch* |
| Fixed expressions | The standard way of expressing a concept or an idea. | *Happy birthday, good morning* |
| Semi-fixed expressions | Expressions that are not completely invariable. | *Could you...please?* |

**Source:** adapted from Lewis (1993; 1997)

Therefore, when studying vocabulary acquisition, we must take into account not only what it means knowing a word, but also what kind of word we are studying, because it is from this definition that the results are generated. This study, for example, focus on single words.

In addition to the aspects mentioned here, another question has been the focus of researches related to vocabulary: the number of words the learner needs to know to understand a text.

### 2.1.2   How many words do we need to know?

We are not supposed to know every single word from a text to have a general understanding. Some words are not pivotal to the comprehension. Others we can infer from the context. But how many words do we need to know exactly? As mentioned in the introduction, there is a minimal vocabulary necessary for reading comprehension – a *threshold* (LAUFER, 2010).

Knowing the lexical threshold is important specially for second language acquisition. It works as the basis to help teachers in designing goals that students must reach by the end of a course. But it is not so simple to get to a conclusion. Nation (1997) points out that, first of all, it is necessary to answer three questions: "How many words are there in the target language? How many words do native speakers know? How many words are needed to do the things that an L2 learner needs to do?" (NATION, 1997, p. 1). The answers to these questions might help to stablish how close (or how far) the students are to achieve the adequate *threshold*.

The author found that there are around 54,000 word families[1], but less than a half (around 20,000) are known by native speakers. Having these numbers as a parameter, we can come to the more central question. The word frequency is one aspect that influence in this rate (threshold), and the kind of vocabulary (whether it is academic, technical or other) too. Most of the high frequency words are content words, and knowing many of them increases the comprehension. Table 2 presents vocabulary size and text coverage in the Brown corpus.

**Table 2 - Vocabulary size and text coverage in the Brown corpus**

| Vocabulary size* | Text coverage |
|---|---|
| 1,000 | 72.0% |
| 2,000 | 79.7% |
| 3,000 | 84.0% |
| 4,000 | 86.8% |

[1] To explain what a word family is Milton states that "it makes sense to assume for most learners that if one form of a word is known, then other very common derivations and inflections will also be known." (MILTON, 2010, p. 9). So, word families are those that belong to the same semantic field.

| 5,000 | 88.7% |
| 6,000 | 89.9% |
| 15,851 | 97.8% |

*Word Families
Source: NATION (1997, p. 3)

As we can see, the knowledge of at least 2,000 word families (from the group of high frequency words) gives the learner the comprehension of near to 80% of written text, but this number is not enough to allow the learners in guessing the meaning of the unknown words. Thus, we could not consider this number as a threshold. Opinions vary in regarding to this subject. Laufer (1989), for example, suggests that 95% coverage is sufficient to allow reasonable comprehension of a text, but she establishes another rate to achieve this percentage. For this author, the knowledge of 3,000 word families would be enough to cover 95% of the text.

On the other hand, Nation (2000) states that to cover 98% of a text it is necessary the knowledge of 8,000-9,000 word families. This huge variation is due to the kind of vocabulary required, as was previously exposed. What is the threshold, then? Studies carried out by Nation (1985) and Laufer (1989) highlights two thresholds.

> The first threshold is at 95% coverage level where there is on unknown word in every two lines [...] 95% coverage of text is needed to gain adequate comprehension and to guess unknown words from the texts.
> The second threshold is around the 97%-98% coverage level, where the density of known to unknown words becomes significantly less. (HIRSH & NATION, 1992, p. 690)

Since we are talking about texts that have mostly high frequency words, it is important to highlight what can happen with the opposite situation. When a text presents many low frequency words, it is likely to have a smaller portion covered. That is why it is crucial that the teacher focuses on the low frequency words too.

## 2.2 Vocabulary teaching

After defining what it means to know a word and to which types of words the student is exposed, it is necessary to understand the different approaches of the process of teaching vocabulary in second language.

During the past few decades, the role of vocabulary in English language has been receiving special attention, and nowadays is frequently seen as the center of debates. This

topic presents a brief review about approaches in vocabulary teaching (see table 3), as well as the recent ones.

### 2.2.1 General review on vocabulary teaching approaches

The table 3 identifies the role of vocabulary in seven historical moments in the teaching of L2, according to Richards & Rodgers (1986) and Zimmerman (1997). It presents the most important approaches until the twentieth century.

**Table 3 – The role of vocabulary**

| Approach | Detailing |
|---|---|
| Gramar Translation Method | Vocabulary received limited attention and was selected only if it could illustrate grammatical rules. The main goal was to prepare students to read and write classical texts. |
| Reform Movement | The main source of this movement was Henry Sweet. He claimed that, although language is made up of words, we speak in sentences. So his concern was mainly with spoken language. |
| Direct Method | Interaction was crucial to the natural acquisition of language. Classes were conducted exclusively in the target language. The day by day vocabulary was simple and familiar, explained through figures and demonstrations. |
| Reading Method/Situational Language Teaching | Emerged in the United States aiming at the development of reading skills in which vocabulary was essencial. In the meantime, British linguistics claimed that the language should be taught through the practice of basic structures in situational and meaningful activities. For the first time vocabulary became crucial for the teaching of English language. |
| Audio-lingual Method | With the major object of language teaching being the acquisition of structural patterns, vocabulary items were selected according to their simplicity and familiarity and introduced through drills. Too much vocabulary was seen as harmful. Thus, lexical items simply show grammatical topics and have no communicative value between them. |
| Communicative Language Teaching | With this approach was introduced the concept of communicative competence, giving greater emphasis to socio-linguistic and pragmatic factors. But little attention was paid to vocabulary. Exposure to language is considered to be important and the vocabulary growth stems from this exposition. |
| Natural Approach | Based on the Monitor Model. This approach emphasizes comprehensible and meaningful input rather than grammatically correct production. Thus, vocabulary gains an important role. Student attention should be focused on the understanding of messages. |

Source: Based on Richards & Rodgers (1986) and Zimmerman (1997)

The different approaches showed more or less importance in the teaching and practice of vocabulary in the classroom. However, this importance was superficial, as it was not based on specific studies on vocabulary acquisition.

In textbooks, for example, vocabulary was treated according to the teacher's methodology, whether he decided to focus or not. Despite of Communicative Language Teaching being a great approach, vocabulary acquisition was took as a natural process. Recent researches, though, has given more emphasis in this field and we can see this change in the way some textbooks are organised nowadays.

### 2.2.2 Incidental approach

Hulstijn (2001, p. 10) defines incidental approach as "the learning without an intent to learn, or as the learning of one thing when the learner's primary objective is to do something else", that is, the vocabulary is a by-product, not the target of the main cognitive activity.

The incidental approach and its realtionship to vocabulary learning has Stephen Krashen as a well-known proponent. He argues that we acquire vocabulary and spelling through exposure to comprehensible input. According to him, students will learn all the vocabulary they need from context by reading extensively (KRASHEN, 1989). In a process where communication is the main goal, for example, vocabulary learning is considerably guaranteed, although the attention of the learner is not focused on such learning[2].

Huckin & Coady (1999) present some advantages about this approach, such as:

- It is more contextualized, it gives the learner a richer meaning of the word;
- It Is pedagogically efficient, since it allows two activities at the same time: reading and vocabulary acquisition;
- It is student-centered.

It has been proven that learners acquire more vocabulary in L1 through incidental learning, but in regard to vocabulary in L2, acquisition does not have the same result. Huckin & Coady (1999) also found out some limitations about this approach in which it worthes to

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[2] That is what Krashen named as the *Input Hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. (SCHÜTZ, 1998).

highlight the problem with inferences. Most often inference requires good reading strategies and prior knowledge of vocabulary, which a learner may not have.

Krashen (1989) in his *Input Hypothesis* advocates that we acquire vocabulary by extensive reading and that incidental acquisition contributes to substantial vocabulary gains rather than other approaches.

Even though many researches show the effeciency of the incidental approach, it is a time consuming process and there is no way to predict which words are going to be learnt. That is why there are some other researches that support the instruction intervention in order to have more effective outcomes.

### 2.2.3 Intentional approach

Intentional learning is the process of learning something deliberately/consciusly. It can be distinguished from incidental learning by the fact that, now, vocabulary is the primary objective of the practice. As Hulstijn notes, "intentional vocabulary learning refers to any activity aiming at committing lexical information to memory" (HULSTIJN, 2001, p. 271).

Nation & Newton (1997) advocate intentional vocabulary teaching, especially high frequency words. The authors emphasize that "Clearly the 2,000 high-frequency words of English should receive attention first because without these it is not possible to use English in any normal way. These words deserve considerable time and attention. (NATION & NEWTON, 1997, p. 239).

Lewis (1993) not only advocates intentional vocabulary teaching but also proposes a lexical approach to this teaching. The author understands that lexis is the basis of language and should be organized, so he proposes an approach in order to introduce and exploit the vocabulary in the classroom in a systematic way. It is important to emphasize that intentional teaching does not have to be decontextualized. As with the incidental approach, it can also be inserted into the context.

### 2.2.4 Laufer & Hulstijn's model

Laufer & Hulstijn also propose a model to vocabulary acquisition which is called *The Involvement Load Hypothesis*. This model focus on the "motivational-cognitive

dimensions of the task, i.e. its involvement load" (LAUFER & HULSTIJN, 2001, p. 21), and is based on three assumptions:

> Assumption one: Retention of words when processed incidentally, is conditional upon the following factors in a text: need, search and evaluation.
> Assumption two: Other factors being equal, words that are processed with higher involvement load will be retained better than words which are processed with lower involvement load.
> Assumption three: Other factors being equal, teacher/researcher-designed tasks with a higher involvement load will be more effective for vocabulary retention than tasks with a lower involvement load (LAUFER & HULSTIJN, 2001, p. 15-17)

Taken together: need, search and evaluation constitute the *involvement load*. The *need* component is the motivational, non-cognitive dimension. *Search* is the attempt to find the L2 word from expressing a concept. *Evaluation* entails a comparison of a given word with other words or meanings in order to asses whether a word does or does not fit its context. (LAUFER & HULSTIJN, 2001).

In this model, words that are negotiated for meaning in an interactive task are retained better than words that are not negotiated, i.e. the choice to negotiate a word implies a *need*, induced by the learner, and also a *search* for meaning. When unknown words are not negotiated, it means the learner has no need for them and therefore performs no search (NEWTON, 1995).

Thus, the construct of involvement "predicts that higher involvement in a word induced by the task (natural or artificial) will result in better retention regardless of whether it is an input or an output task" (LAUFER & HULSTIJN, 2001, p. 20). What matters is that the cognitive (search and evaluation) and motivational (need) dimension are included.

### 2.2.5 Nation's model

Paul Nation is one of the greatest researchers in vocabulary acquisition. He based his ideas on the premise that a systematic approach of vocabulary development results in better learning. In one of his papers *My ideal vocabulary teaching course (2011)*, he describes the principles in what he considers to be a well designed vocabulary course. This paper is a result of previous research called *Practice Vocabulary Teaching and Learning (2002)* where he first described these principles. The author states that

> A well-balanced language course should contain four major stands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, fluency development and language-focused instruction. [...] For most second language learners language focused vocabulary instruction is na **essential** part of a language course. (NATION, 2002, p. 7)

In the first (input) and second (output) cases the author turns to the incidental acquisition, since the main focus is on the content that learners are reading or hearing (first case) and on communication (second case). Fluencyinvolves language items that learners already know and activities that help them make better use of these items. Finally, language-focused instruction implies the study of the language system (vocabulary, grammar and phonetics). (NATION, 2011)

In addition to the principles above, Nation also explains how to teach a word. In order to have a lexical item fully acquired it must be borne in mind three things: the form, the meaning and the form and the meaning together, as he says: "if we teach a *fork,* we must teach the learner to recognize or produce the word *fork*, we must teach him what a for kis; and we must teach him that the sound or shape of a *fork* and the meaning of the shaoe go together" (NATION, 1974, p. 18). It is the teacher's role helping the learner connect form and meaning.

In another paper, Nation (2013) describes some ways of quickly giving attention to words, as I have previously mentioned:

> 1 Keep the teaching simple and clear. Don't give complicated explanations.
> 2 Relate the present teaching to past knowledge by showing a pattern or analogies.
> 3 Use both oral and written presentation - write it on the blackboard as well as explaining.
> 4 Give most attention to words that are already partly known.
> 5 Tell the learners if it is a high frequency word that is worth noting for future attention.
> 5 Don't bring in other unknown or poorly known related words like near synonyms, opposites, or members of the same lexical set. (NATION, 2013, p. 2)

By suggesting these techniques, the authors highlight the need to see vocabulary learning as a cumulative process where knowledge is built up over a series of varied meetings with the word. At best, teaching can provide only one or two of these meetings. The others involve deliberate study, meeting through meaning-focused input and output, and fluency development activities. (NATION, 2013)

### 2.2.6 Vocabulary input from the textbook

This section presents how vocabulary is approached in the textbook *Way to English for Brazilian Learners* (FRANCO, 2015)*,* adopted by the school in question.

In this textbook, vocabulary is approached both incidentally and intentionally. First, it is focused on *Vocabulary Study* section. This section works with lexical items related to the central theme of the unit. When students finish a *Vocabulary Study* they are guided to

go to the next section: *Vocabulary corner* in order to sistematize the lexical items they have just learned.

As said before, vocabulary is not only seen intentionally, but also incidentally. There are many activities in which students should infer the meaning of words through the context, and link words through its meaning. There is also the study of synonyms and semantic groups. So, the teaching of vocabulary is not limited to the *Vocabulary Study* section, but goes through comprehension activities too.

Throughout the activities, there are also boxes that help in consolidating and expanding the vocabulary, highlighting some lexical item or presenting useful expressions for carrying out proposed activities. In some sections, *Language Note* is also used to display and / or expand vocabulary related to the activity in question.

Finally, some notes are presented to the teacher along with the texts and exercise with additional comments that can be shared with the students and suggest ways for the teacher to guide students to infer the meaning of certain words.

# 3 METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 The study

This study is an exploratory researchconducted ina public school from Eusebio. It aims at analyzing the vocabulary acquisition in one student textbook used in the elementary level. The specific questions to be addressed are as follows: **What is the average of words students learn from the textbook? What is the average of vocabulary that students acquire through intentional and incidental teaching? How does the textbook affects the breadth of vocabulary knowledge?**

### 3.1.2 Participants

The experiment is carried out with the 52 students of the 8th grade classes (24% of total students of the school), 25 study in the morning and 27 study in the afternoon. The school has about 290 students, among children and adolescents and offers classes from grades 4th to 9th. Only 6th to 9th grade classes have English instruction and it lasts 50 minutes per week.

The principal and the pedagogical coordinator of the school were previously informed so I could start collecting data. This step lasted two months (August and September).

## 3.2 Material

The material analyzed comprises one textbook produced by the series *Way to Englishfor Brazilian Learners* (FRANCO, 2015) designed to students from elementary schools (6th to 9th). The textbook comprises eight thematic units. Each unit has four main sections (*Warm up, Before Reading, Reading, Reading for general comprehension)* and subsections. One of relevance to the study is the *Vocabulary corner* that aims at expanding the vocabulary presented in the main units.

The textbook presents both biases of teaching vocabulary such as through the context – incidental, and directly – intentional: "From the activities proposed in the *Vocabulary Study* section, students are invited to complete the *Vocabulary Corner* section, presented at the end of the student's book, in order to record and systematize the learned

vocabulary"[3](FRANCO, 2015, p. 198). As we can see, there is a concern to stimulate the students in developing strategies to learn vocabulary.

## 3.3 Method

This qualitative research is an exploratory case study. This choice is due to the contextual conditions that are highly relevant to the research. Besides, "case studies can describe an intervention and the context in which it occur." (MCKAY, 2006, p. 72). That is what make this an adequate choice.

According to Creswell (2007) the types of qualitative case studies can be distinguished by the size of the bounded case or based on the intent of the case analysis. This second category involves three variations: the single case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study. This research is characterized as a single case study because "the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue" (CRESWELL, 2007, p. 74).

Thus, vocabulary acquisition from the textbook is the main concern of this study and is analysed through the data collected in one grade of one public school.

### 3.3.1 Data collection procedures

In order to check the vocabulary students acquired, a pre-test and a post-test was administered. The tests were disigned to take into account students' profile[4], that is, a receptive test since it checks "a person's knowledge of the meaning of an L2 word." (MONDRIA & WIERSMA, 2004, p. 87), which means the ability to translate a word from L2 to L1. In addition, in order to measure the long term retention, it is also characterized as a delayed test, but a pre-test is applied to make possible to assess the growth of vocabulary. It is worth mentioning that words are arranged out of context.

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[3]"A partir das atividades propostas na seção Vocabulary Study, os alunos são convidados a completar a seção Vocabulary Corner, apresentada ao final do livro do aluno, a fim de registrar e sistematizar o vocabulário aprendido." (FRANCO, 2015, p. 198)
[4]The teaching of English in public schools generally focus on grammar, that is why it is complicated to require productive knowledge from the students.

The test used in this research is the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale – VKS developed by Wesche and Paribakht (1996). The aim of the VKS is to construct a "practical instrument for use in studies of the initial recognition and use of new words" (PARIBAKHT and WESCHE,1996, p. 29). The idea of the scale is to measure progressive degrees of word knowledge, as shown in the table below.

**Table 4 - The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale from Wesche and Paribakht (1996)**

| I | I don't remember having seen this word before |
|---|---|
| II | I have seen this word before but I don't know what it means |
| III | I have seen this word before and I think it means _____ (synonym or translation) |
| IV | I know this word. It means _____ (synonym or translation) |
| V | I can use this word in a sentence. e.g.: _____ (if you do this section, please also do section IV) |

Source: WESCHE & PARIBAKHT (1996)

As we can see, level I is not a level, actually, it represents no knowledge. Levels II, III and IV are a measure of recognition vocabulary and level V is to measure productive vocabulary. Since this study focuses on receptive vocabulary, the last level is out of the scale.

This study is limited to an analysis of the receptive knowledge of vocabulary studied in the units (extra material is not considered). It brings the inventory of words found in the textbook which comprises the words that are part of the seven major word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns because they are the most common.

## 3.4 Procedures

The researchsteps are arrangedas follows:

1- Inventory of lexical items found in the textbook.

2- Classification of lexical items per unit.

3- Ranking of lexical items (per frequency).

4- Designing of the test – classified in a scale of knowledge.

5- Test submission.

6- Analysis.

In order to measure the vocabulary presented in the textbook, a corpus of the texts was compiled. The first two units seen between August and September are part of this study. The vocabulary presented in the utterances are not part of the corpus of the research. In addition, texts that were not studied due to the lack of time are not part of the study either.

**Table 5 - Number of types in the corpus – Unit 4 and 5**

| Word classes | Number of types |
|---|---|
| Noun | 98 |
| Verb | 45 |
| Adjective | 8 |
| Determiner | 27 |
| Adverb | 10 |
| Preposition | 19 |
| Pronoun | 12 |
| **Total** | 219 |

Source: Author, 2017

After finishing the inventory, the words were classified according to the parts of speech, as we can see above. Then, they were categorized according to the frequency based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

**Table 6 – Quantity of lexical items per frequency**

| Frequency | # of lexical item per frequency |
|---|---|
| High-frequency 1– 2000 | 165 |
| Low-frequency 2000 or more | 54 |

Source: COCA, 2017

The selection of words is based on the lemma level. "A lemma consists of a headword and its inflected are all the same part of speech" (NATION, 2004, p. 4), i. e. since many words can appear inflected, its inflections are not included as they are not different (they belong to the same family words). They constitute a lemma, and then, one single type.

Since this is a study case that also intends to compare how much vocabulary knowledge is acquired, a pre-test and a post-test was administered. This allow us to evaluate the growth of vocabulary in each group. Each test presents a sample comprising 15 words, which represents an average of 10% of the total of the vocabulary per unit. The first five words are included in the group of one hundred most frequent words. The next five words are in the group of one-two thousand most common words. In addition, the last five are in the group of the three thousand (or more) most frequent words.

As was said before, the test is a scale adapted from Paribakht and Wesche (1996) – the VKS in which the words are selected randomly and distributed according to the frequency. The same scale is administered to the control group and to the experimental group. Both groups are equivalent classes (8th grade), but the first one receives no vocabulary

instruction, but receives a significant amount of input through the context and to the second one the teacher provides explicit vocabulary instruction.

The analysis focuses on receptive words because it comprises the words the students understand when they hear or read (MILTON, 2009). It is also based on the breadth of vocabulary knowledge the students have. This research does not aim to measure the depth of knowledge since it "refers to what the learner knows about the words" (MILTON, 2009, p. 13). Even though students are required to know the meaning of the word, the study does not go beyond that to check how deep is students' knowledge.

The results are presented in graphs according to the categories presented by the variables (dependent and independent), besides showing parallel results as the vocabulary measure according to the classes of words and frequency.

## 4 DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the outcomes and discussions of this research. First, there is the data analysis including the inventory of each unit used for collecting data, and then the analysis itself. The inventory presents the types organized according to the position they occupy in the frequency list presented by the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). COCA is the largest freely available corpus of American English.

Through the inventory, we show the average of vocabulary to which students are exposed by the textbook. As this is an exploratory single case study that involves comparison, two classes were tested (treatment and control group) so that the influence of incidental and intentional approaches could be showed.

This research took two units (4 and 5) chosen according to the period of the data collection which occurred between September and October.

### 4.1 Word inventory - Unit 4

The inventory of the vocabulary of the unit 4 is compound by one hundred types. As said in previous section (methodology), the list of words compiled come from the texts only. The table below presents the rank[5], the part of speech and the frequency[6] of the words.

**Table 7 – Word inventory of unit 4**

| Rank | Word | POS | Frequency | Rank | Word | POS | Frequency |
|------|------|-----|-----------|------|------|-----|-----------|
| 1 | The | article | 23782116 | 1009 | river | noun | 56742 |
| 2 | Of | preposition | 11155504 | 1014 | island. | noun | 47052 |
| 3 | Be | verb | 16711569 | 1035 | forest | noun | 39478 |
| 6 | In | preposition | 7557934 | 1089 | sea | noun | 43531 |
| 7 | To | preposition | 6868227 | 1155 | link | verb | 23066 |
| 10 | For | preposition | 3564803 | 1185 | combine | verb | 29072 |
| 11 | Have | verb | 5335769 | 1252 | enjoy | verb | 47970 |
| 13 | it | pronoun | 4194837 | 1276 | red | adjective | 72558 |
| 14 | On | preposition | 2703486 | 1322 | rich | adjective | 38766 |
| 16 | this | determiner | 2047852 | 1357 | kid | noun | 138349 |
| 18 | from | preposition | 1777279 | 1389 | drop | verb | 61113 |
| 32 | You | Pronoun | 3354314 | 1535 | pick | verb | 85487 |
| 34 | Who | Pronoun | 1103186 | 1767 | gift | noun | 30081 |
| 50 | year | noun | 834997 | 1876 | coast | noun | 24665 |
| 63 | People | noun | 752220 | 1987 | neighbors | noun | 28917 |
| 68 | Many | determiner | 415218 | 2200 | gold | noun | 33706 |

[5] Rank represents the position that each word occupies in the list.
[6] The frequency is the number of times a word is seen in texts like: fictions, magazines, news, academic texts and including oral production in which the list is based on.

| Rank | Word | POS | Frequency | Rank | Word | POS | Frequency |
|------|------|-----|-----------|------|------|-----|-----------|
| 70 | Your | determiner | 719699 | 2337 | ecosystem | noun | 7368 |
| 80 | Way | noun | 511585 | 2417 | acceptable | adjective | 9329 |
| 83 | High | adjective | 277214 | 2529 | iron | noun | 16328 |
| 88 | world | noun | 328689 | 3048 | finger | noun | 44148 |
| 95 | should | verb | 335540 | 3110 | wine | noun | 30088 |
| 100 | woman | noun | 382235 | 3118 | totally | adverb. | 20230 |
| 112 | know | verb | 974670 | 3167 | respect | verb | 12024 |
| 139 | show | Verb | 225869 | 3218 | quiet | adjective | 28964 |
| 144 | include | Verb | 145280 | 3248 | coal | noun | 9706 |
| 151 | country | Noun | 242456 | 3304 | southeast | noun | 8206 |
| 184 | Both | Pronoun | 157482 | 3443 | blow | verb | 29529 |
| 219 | write | Verb | 176548 | 3656 | bread | noun | 18373 |
| 229 | Fact | Noun | 173796 | 3739 | nose | noun | 23670 |
| 245 | consider | Verb | 110724 | 3909 | shake | verb | 49007 |
| 276 | hold | verb | 191472 | 4637 | generous | adjective | 7561 |
| 279 | city | Noun | 201314 | 5615 | ink | noun | 5050 |
| 283 | mean | Verb | 260180 | 5679 | greet | verb | 9096 |
| 299 | person | Noun | 123625 | 6632 | funny | adjective | 22379 |
| 331 | Live | Verb | 190933 | 7871 | shy | adjective | 6249 |
| 340 | hand | Noun | 242773 | 8328 | gum | noun | 3989 |
| 402 | food | Noun | 118201 | 8731 | insult | noun | 3296 |
| 436 | long | adjective | 161439 | 8800 | chew | verb | 6096 |
| 453 | strong | adjective | 90550 | 8890 | kiss | verb | 17173 |
| 468 | Big | adjective | 249244 | 9177 | forehead | noun | 8752 |
| 469 | land | Noun | 77538 | 9239 | wool | noun | 4580 |
| 497 | across | preposition | 115131 | 9556 | lazy | adjective | 3652 |
| 566 | along | preposition | 921016 | 9598 | polite | adjective | 4617 |
| 651 | raise | Verb | 94234 | 10069 | nod | noun | 29713 |
| 670 | all | determiner | 189207 | 10561 | outgoing | adjective | 1906 |
| 762 | ground | Noun | 81234 | 11243 | rude | adjective | 3264 |
| 835 | open | verb | 121005 | 12090 | cropland | noun | 580 |
| 836 | car | Noun | 142725 | 14224 | timid | adjective | 1266 |
| 882 | public | Noun | 49073 | 15397 | bike | noun | 1305 |
| 990 | serious | adjective | 54278 | 19546 | stats | noun | 4194 |

Source:Author(2017)

The inventory shows that high-frequency words are the majority (65%) and low-frequency words represents 35% of the corpus. High-frequency words are those that appear among the 2000 first words from a corpus. Among the words, the most commons are nouns (42%), verbs (23%) and adjectives (17%). However, the ten top most frequent words are prepositions. Other categories of words (adverb, determiner, pronoun and article) make up only 6% of the total.

Among the high-frequency words it is also observed that the majority (73%) are content words, while 27% are function words.

## 4.2 Word inventory - Unit 5

As in the previous section, this one presents the inventory of unit 5 as well as the averages according to frequency and part of speech.

**Table 8 – Word inventory of unit 5**

| Rank | Word | POS | Frequency | Rank | Word | POS | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The | article | 23782116 | 486 | together | adverb | 128820 |
| 2 | Of | preposition | 11155504 | 579 | choose | verb | 69407 |
| 5 | A | article | 10999596 | 655 | happen | verb | 199650 |
| 6 | In | preposition | 7557934 | 667 | send | verb | 105353 |
| 8 | To | preposition | 4176665 | 751 | stand | verb | 151728 |
| 9 | that | conjunction | 3709830 | 835 | open | verb | 121005 |
| 10 | For | preposition | 3564803 | 895 | die | verb | 107409 |
| 11 | have | verb | 5335769 | 913 | freedom | noun | 36992 |
| 12 | with | preposition | 2911620 | 934 | justice | noun | 43131 |
| 14 | On | preposition | 2703486 | 1008 | answer | noun | 54222 |
| 15 | By | preposition | 1608416 | 1033 | son | noun | 87765 |
| 16 | this | determiner | 2047852 | 1039 | writer | noun | 43719 |
| 18 | from | preposition | 1777279 | 1058 | win | verb | 120447 |
| 22 | At | preposition | 1823946 | 1101 | attend | verb | 36283 |
| 24 | they | pronoun | 2014813 | 1102 | election | noun | 56162 |
| 25 | Do | verb | 2800962 | 1107 | peace | noun | 45534 |
| 27 | He | pronoun | 3138989 | 1189 | doctor | noun | 75565 |
| 31 | his | determiner | 1943525 | 1193 | fully | adverb | 27120 |
| 37 | Go | verb | 1251786 | 1221 | everyone | pronoun | 81626 |
| 48 | her | determiner | 1054106 | 1386 | date | noun | 33858 |
| 57 | All | determiner | 970329 | 1543 | brother | noun | 69335 |
| 58 | time | noun | 832974 | 1661 | bright | adjective | 32290 |
| 61 | when | conjunction | 736305 | 1682 | born | verb | 38216 |
| 79 | new | adjective | 472947 | 1700 | release | verb | 37764 |
| 99 | our | determiner | 574490 | 1997 | dream | noun | 42764 |
| 103 | child | noun | 360478 | 2004 | key | noun | 29098 |
| 106 | life | noun | 361340 | 2111 | sister | noun | 52658 |
| 127 | man | noun | 459435 | 2206 | driver | noun | 34074 |
| 137 | after | preposition | 339185 | 2315 | slave | noun | 12878 |
| 140 | government | noun | 209934 | 2350 | prison | noun | 33091 |
| 146 | Day | noun | 486307 | 2616 | vote | verb | 38201 |
| 151 | country | noun | 242456 | 2752 | marry | verb | 31155 |
| 154 | family | noun | 264804 | 2823 | elect | verb | 16588 |
| 166 | often | adverb | 151696 | 2955 | withdraw | verb | 12074 |
| 168 | question | noun | 208806 | 3051 | musician | noun | 11609 |
| 176 | begin | verb | 243543 | 3360 | everybody | pronoun | 55825 |
| 193 | members | noun | 148448 | 3569 | wonderful | adjective | 29268 |
| 207 | Law | noun | 146053 | 3674 | singer | noun | 15419 |
| 233 | Old | adjective | 254505 | 3831 | grandparent | noun | 11865 |
| 235 | thing | noun | 438886 | 4336 | equality | noun | 6213 |
| 255 | allow | verb | 124739 | 4698 | painter | noun | 9537 |
| 293 | leave | verb | 260368 | 5002 | architect | noun | 9625 |
| 314 | parents | noun | 129272 | 5708 | composer | noun | 5297 |
| 344 | black | adjective | 161425 | 10405 | carpenter | noun | 4427 |
| 389 | presidente | noun | 199016 | 11180 | informally | adverb | 877 |
| 419 | start | verb | 233601 | 11814 | queue | noun | 805 |
| 430 | Term | noun | 65194 | | | | |

Source: Author (2017)

Unit 5's inventory shows that high-frequency words are the majority too (77%) and low-frequency words represents 23% of the corpus. The most commons are nouns (45%), verbs (22%) and prepositions (12%), which are, again, the ten top most frequent. While the other categories (adverb, determiner, pronoun, article and conjunction) make up 21% of the total.

As well as unit 4, the majority are high-frequency words: 63% are content words, while 37% are function words. This is not common since studies carried by Milton (2009) point out that "the most frequent words are almost always functions os structure words" (p. 23), and "less frequent words tend to be content or lexical words, nouns, main verbs and adjectives." (p. 23). This can be justified by the fact that the words are taken from a textbook where the authors use to choose the content according to students' need.

## 4.3 The average of words students learn from the textbook

This section presents the average of words that students acquired from the units 4 and 5. It is also represented according to the frequency and part of speech. This result comes from the analysis of the tests applied at the beginning and at the end of each unit. It was used the *Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)*(PARIBAKHT & WESCHE, 1996) to collect these data.

The vocabulary from the scale represents 15% of the types from the inventory. The effort was to have a combination of high and low frequency words from varied parts of speech. The graph below presents the average of words students acquired according to the frequency.

**Graph 1 - Average of vocabulary according to the frequency**
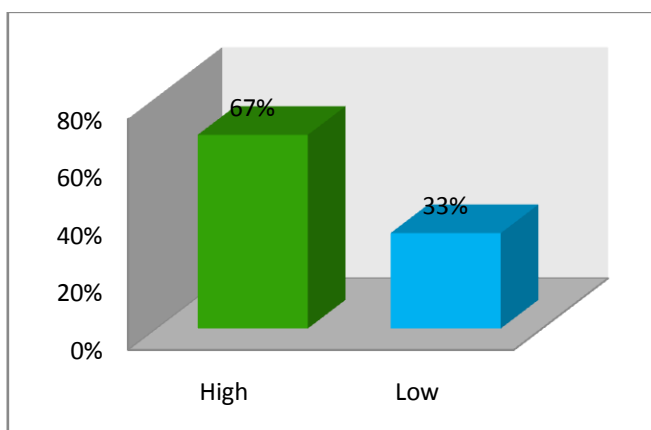


Source: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (2017)

Nation & Waring (1997, p. 2) states that "high frequency words are known before lower frequency words" that is why students are expected to retain more high-frequency words since they tend to appear more often, as the graph 1 reveals. So, 67% of the words are frequent, while 33% are less frequent.

Repetition may be the main reason why students learn more high-frequency words, but other factors also interfere such as "meaningfulness of the context and similarity to words in the mother-tongue" (HULSTIJN, 2003, p. 393). The next graph shows the result according to the parts of speech.

**Graph 2 – Results according to POS**
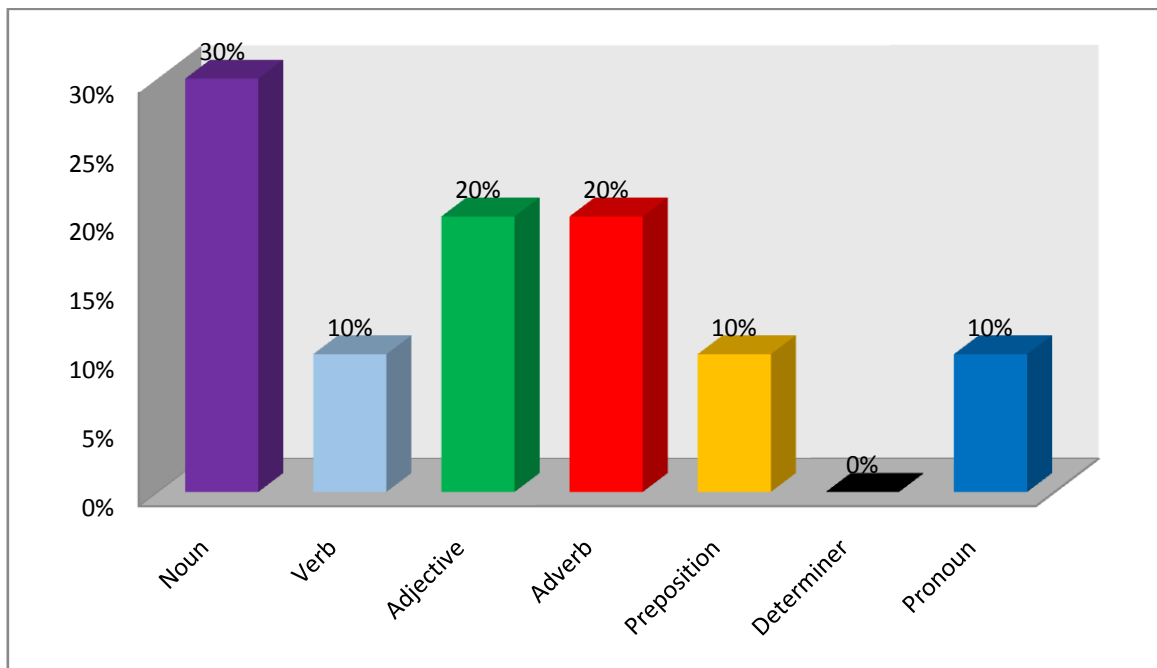


Source: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (2017)

The graph points out that the majority of words that students acquired are content words - nouns (30%), adjectives (20%) and adverb (20%). Very frequent words (function words) like prepositions are less known by the learners.

## 4.4 The average of vocabulary that students acquire through incidental and intentional teaching

This section presents the results comparing whether it is more effective incidental or intentional teaching. The test applied to both groups of students (control and treatment group) is a scale that evaluates the following levels of knowledge:

I – Students do not remember having seen the word before.

II - Students have seen the word before but do not know what it means.

III - Students have seen the word before, but it is not sure about the translation.

IV - Students know the word and can give the translation or a synonym.

### 4.4.1 Average of vocabulary that students acquire through incidental teaching

Graph 3 shows the percentage by level from the control group analyzed. It presents the results from the pre-test and the post-test.

**Graph 3 – Percentage by Level - Control Group**
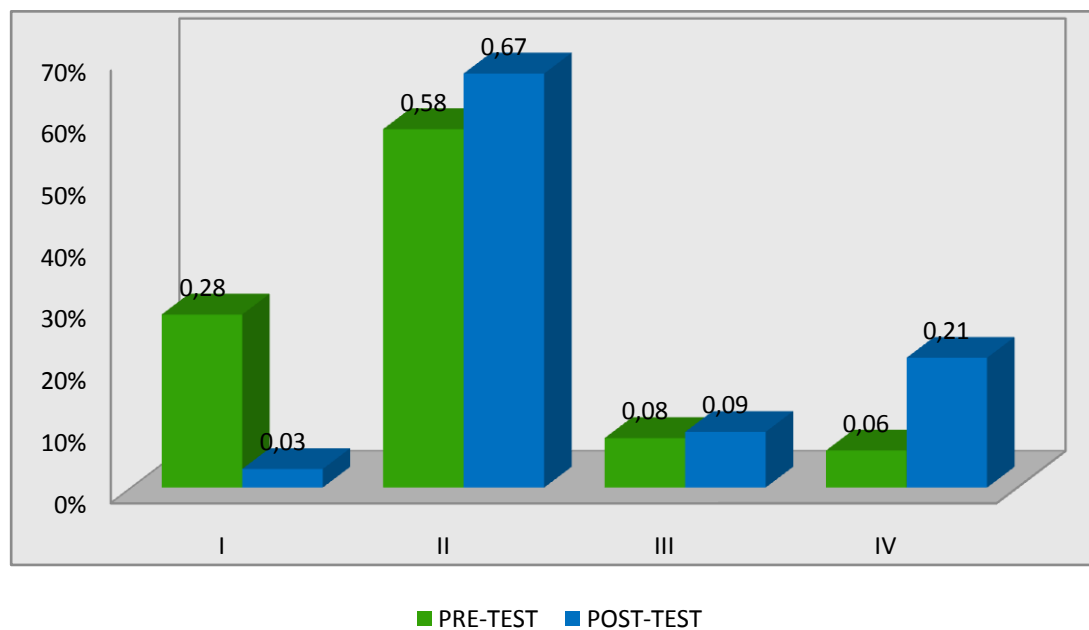


Source: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (2017)

Control group is the one that received no treatment and the acquisition occurred by incidental means. Incidental acquisition refers to the absence of the conscious intention to commit a word to memory. In this group, 27 students were tested. In order to achieve the results, unit 4 and 5 were put together. The intention is to measure the breadth of vocabulary.

In the pre-test, 86% of the students said they did not know the words, while 14% showed some knowledge. After studying the units, level I decreased while levels II, III and IV increased. Levels III and IV are the most important to analyse the breadth of students' vocabulary and the results show that there was an increase in the percentage of learners that know the words (from 15% to 30%), considering levels III and IV together. Although the

percentage represents less than a half of the learners, in this case we can see a growth of 100%.

### 4.4.2 Average of vocabulary that students acquire through intentional teaching

Treatment group is the one that received vocabulary input through the intentional approach, i.e., the students were exposed to extra activities related to the vocabulary from the units, such as: *fill in the blanks*, *relate synonyms*, *associate image with word*, and so on. In the example below there is one of the activities apllied to the students.

---

Read the fragments below from the text on page 68 and mark the correct item that completes each sentence below.

   I.     In Bangladesh, women DO NOT SHAKE HANDS. Instead, they greet each other with a **POLITE** NOD.
   II.    BLOWING YOUR NOSE in public in Japan is considered **RUDE**.

a) In fragmente I, **polite** means

( ) showing no respect for other people and their feelings.
( ) having good manners and respect for the feelings of other people.

b) In fragmente II, **rude** means

( ) showing no respect for other people and their feelings.
( ) having good manners and respect for the feelings of other people.

c) The adjectives **polite** and **rude** are

( ) opposites
( ) synonyms

d) **Polite** and **rude** are used to

( ) express na action
( ) describe or give information about things

---

Source: adapted from FRANCO (2015)

In this activity the words *polite* and *rude* were highlighted from the text that the students had previously studied. As we can see the words are not isoleted from the context and the students were required to reflect about them instead of giving only the translation. Graph 4 shows the percentage by level from the treatment group analyzed. It also presents the results from the pre-test and the post-test

**Graph 4 – Percentage by Level - Treatment Group**
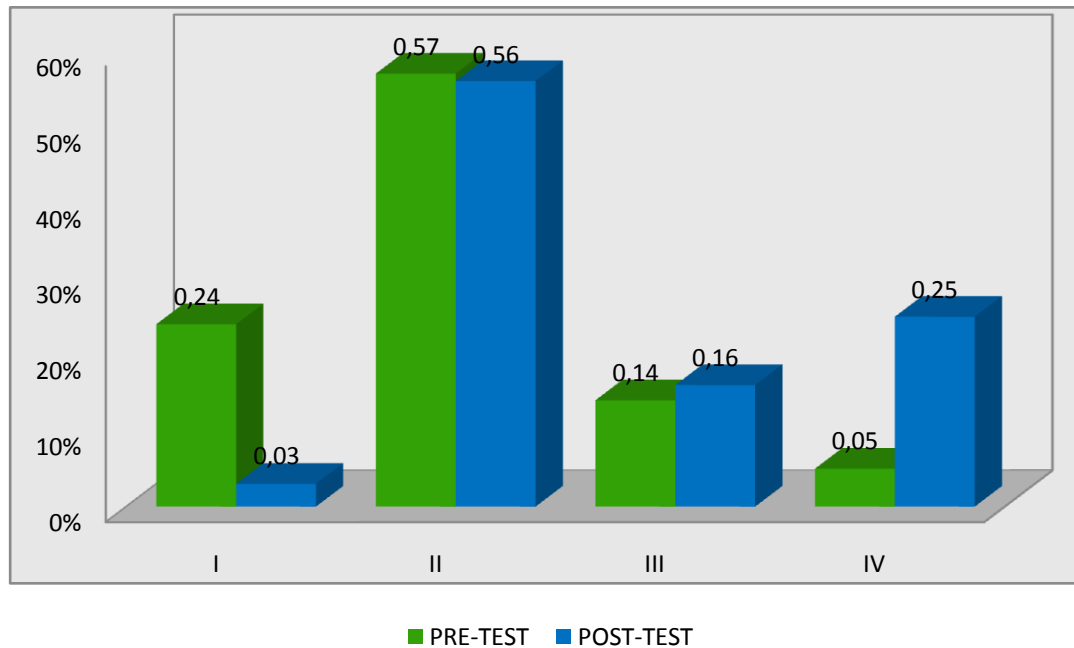


Source: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (2017)

The pre-test revealed that 81% of the students did not know the words while 19% knew them. After they study the units, level I and II decreased while the others increased. Levels III and IV, together, represents a growth of 22% (from 19% to 41%). The next graph shows the comparison between both groups.

### 4.4.3 Comparison between incidental and intentional groups

Graph 5 shows the outcomes related to the comparison between both groups, whether is incidental or intentional approach the more effective approach.

**Graph 5 – Comparison between groups**
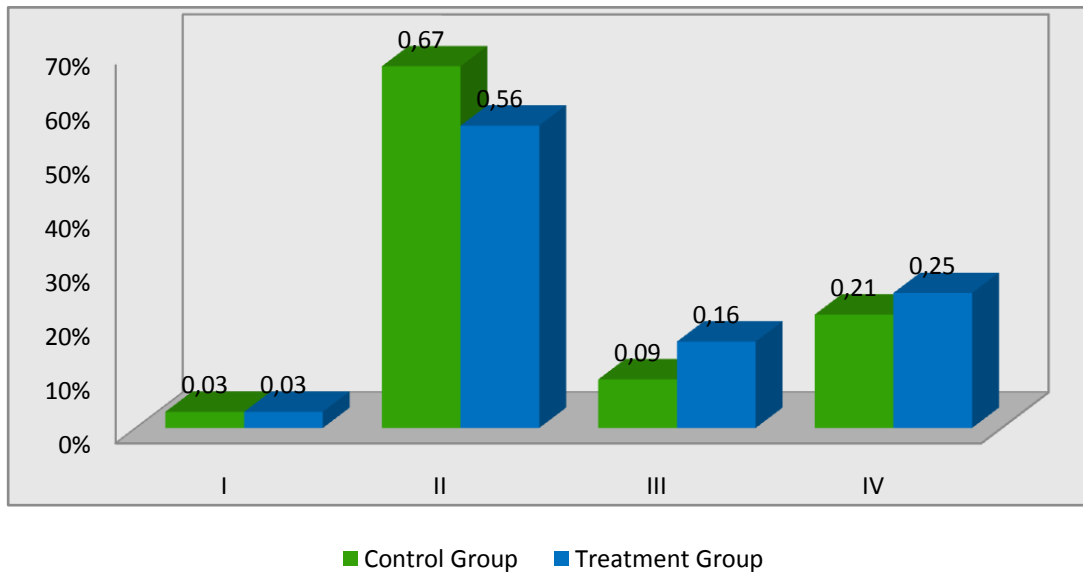


Source: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (2017)

It can be observed that there are differences in acquisition between the two groups, although it seems not very large. However, the group that presented the highest rate of acquisition was the treatment group (intentional teaching). As for this, Hulstijn (1996, p. 75) justifies that "when no such external information is available, learners often ignore an unknown word". By focusing on the vocabulary, intentional approach revealed more efficiency.

# 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research analyzes the acquisition of vocabulary observed in an 8th grade class from a public school in which English is studied as a second language. This sections intends to answer the questions adressed in this study.

## 5.1 What is the average of words students learn from the textbook?

This is a general result and involves the data from both classes. The outcomes show that the students from this school learn an average of 35% of the words (see graphs 3 and 4) from the textbook.

English is a rich language, which transits in many worlds, a language that is spoken and read wordwide, and requires the teacher to work as a mediator in which he can take the student to the world of discovery and motivation, to understand and seek for new information, and in which he can be the center of learning. So, retention of vocabulary is directly related to the involvement of the students and the context. In this case, vocabulary plays an important role: to make the students feel more comfortable in the communication process.

In doing so, teachers could make deliberate and informed decisions to focus on vocabulary acquisition, hence improving students' knowledge. Thus, motivation increases and communication is more likely to occur.

According to Laufer & Hulstijn (2001), *need* is one of the motivational components. When the learners have the need to know a word they perform a *search*, and then, when they find possible results, they *evaluate* the plausible choices in regard to the context. Words that are negotiated are retained better than words with given meanings (HULSTIJN, 1992). This process is part of the *Involvement Load Hypothesis*.

The study shows that most of the words students have learned are high-frequency words. In regards to the parts of speech, the learners know more content words (specially cognates) than function words. Although they are very frequent, the students know only 10% of prepositions, for example. This emerges as a concern once these words, even though do not carry meaning, are crucial to make grammatical and meaningful language. (MILTON, 2009). Being so frequent, why are prepositions so little known by students?

A possible answer to this question could be what Milton (2009, p. 26) called as a *Rule of thumb*. The author says that a foreign language word would be easier to learn if:

- It is like its first language translation;
- It is relatively short;
- It is concrete and imagable;
- It is different in sound and appearance from other new words.

In this case, not only prepositions, but also adverbs, determiners, and so on, do not fit these rules since they are difficult to realize in mind, as well as some of them being very similar to other words (of/off, for example), which can cause confusion. On the other hand, nouns, verbs and adjectives are more likely to imagine and find cognates.

Another possible explanation for this is time constraints. In a 50 minute class, in which we have to teach a whole lesson, it is difficult to point out all of the vocabulary. That is why teachers tend to focus more on content words because there is a general assumption that if students learn such words, they would be more likely to comprehend a text. In doing so, words that carries no meaning are not highlighted.

## 5.2 What is the average of vocabulary that students acquire through intentional and incidental teaching?

The research shows that there are differences in acquisition between the two groups, although it is not very large (Control group – 30%/Treatment group – 41%). However, the group that presented the highest rate of acquisition was the treatment group (intentional teaching). As for this, Hulstijn (1996, p. 8) justifies that "when no such external information is available, learners often ignore an unknown word". Paribakht & Wesche (1996) also states that words practiced in various exercises are retained better than words inferred from the context.

Prior research conducted in a private courseargues that "In relation to vocabulary acquisition, the intentional approach proposed in textbooks tends to be more efficient than the incidental acquisition" (ZILLES, 2001, p. 132)[7]. Although the rates are not so high, it is possible to confirm what this author stated.

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[7]"Em relação à aquisição de vocabulário, a abordagem explícita proposta nos livros didáticos tende a ser mais eficiente do que a aquisição incidental." (ZILLES, 2001, p. 132)

**5.3 How the textbook affects the breadth of vocabulary knowledge?**

It is common that textbooks focus more on comprehension and grammar rather than vocabulary. However, when analysing the one used by the participants of this research, I could find specific sections to teach vocabulary. There is one section by the end of each unit (*Vocabulary Study*) and an extra in the appendices (*Vocabulary Corner*). The words presented in both sections (*Vocabulary Study* and *Vocabulary Corner*) are related (see appendixes C and D). This fact contributes with the process of vocabulary acquisition, since repetition is one requirement for it to occur (NATION, 1999; COBB, 2007).

# 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This case study investigated the acquisition of vocabulary in English observed in an 8th grade class from a public school in the city of Eusebio. The research focused on three aspects: the average of vocabulary students most acquire, the most efficient approach (incidental or intentional) and the effects of the textbook in the breadth of vocabulary.

The teaching of English in public schools was considered as optional, but nowadays has been gaining more and more importance since the Ministry of Education (MEC) modified the national base and made the language compulsory from the 6th year of Elementary School. This delay in recognizing the teaching of English as an important stage in students' life justifies the absence of research aimed at the phenomenon investigated here: acquisition of vocabulary from the textbook.

In today's professional day-to-day, there is a common feeling of disappointment at the little visible progress of the quality of language teaching in the face of the expectations of students and authorities. The outcomes of this study show that the students from this school learn an average of 35% of the words. Laufer (1989, 1992) and Nation (2000, 2006) stablished a *threshold* to allow a reasonable comprehension of a text. They suggest that to cover from 95% to 98% of a text it is necessary the knowledge of 3,000 (LAUFER, 1989) or 8,000-9,000 word families (NATION, 2000). Although this is not the objective of the study, it is possible to identify that the participants did not acquire this percentage.

The teaching of English in the public school in Brazil faces difficulties not only for the short time of the classes, but also for the students' own interest. Therefore, the teacher should be aware of the need to include in his daily routine some moments of reflection and questioning about the actions that circulate in the language scenario. The teacher should not be a mere transmitter of content but a professional who involves, expresses and builds appreciations (DEO & DUARTE, 2004). Motivation is an important issue to learning a second language. In regard to this, Laufer & Hulstijn (2001, p. 1) state that: "motivation promotes success and achievement in L2 and learning, and that students who experience high amounts of an external or intrinsic drive or need to learn, will achieve higher levels of proficiency than students with low levels of drive.

Another aspect to mention is the kind of vocabulary students most learn. First, there are the high-frequency words, and sencond, the content words. This is an expected result that corroborates with the theory.

In regard to the approach, it is safe to advocate that students acquire more vocabulary through intentional teaching. This is due to the fact that focus is an important component of learning process. If the student knows what he should learn, then the learning is most likely to occur.

The textbook used by the students is a great ally in the study of vocabulary since it brings specific sections to it. This fact reveals a change in the way vocabulary has been approached in language teaching.

After having exposed the results from this study, it is clear that vocabulary is an important part of the teaching of English. The outcomes from this research show that we need to keep focusing on the teaching of vocabulary in order to improve our students knowledge, and in doing so, improve communication in L2.

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**APPENDIX A – TESTE DE VOCABULÁRIO APLICADO AOS ALUNOS DO 8º ANO DO ENSINO**

**FUNDAMENTAL - UNIDADE 4**

**Nome:** _____ **Data:** ___/___/___

Caro aluno, faça o teste conforme as instruções dadas pela professora. Obrigada pela participação!

**1. of**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**2. know**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**3. have**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**4. who**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**5. rich**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**6. nod**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**7. woman**

| | |
|---|---|
| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**8. wine**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**9. enjoy**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**10. finger**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**11. forest**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**12. land**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**13. both**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**14. across**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**15. shy**

| I | Eu não lembro de ter visto essa palavra antes. |
|---|---|
| II | Eu vi essa palavra antes, mas não sei o que significa. |
| III | Eu vi essa palavra antes e eu acho que significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |
| IV | Eu conheço essa palavra. Significa _____ (tradução ou sinônimo) |

**APPENDIX C – EXERCISE FROM THE SECTION *VOCABULARY STUDY***



## Aa Vocabulary Study

### Occupations

**1** On page 87 you can find an example of a great Brazilian figure, Zumbi dos Palmares. He was the last of the leaders of the *Quilombo dos Palmares*. Get to know other people from Brazil who are important to our history. Write **A-F** under each photo to match it with the corresponding person's description. Then, compare your answers with those of a classmate.

Machado de Assis
(Rio de Janeiro, 1839-1908)

Tarsila do Amaral
(São Paulo, 1886-1973)

Zilda Arns
(Santa Catarina, 1934-2010)

Alberto Santos-Dumont
(Minas Gerais, 1873-1932)

Ayrton Senna da Silva
(São Paulo, 1960-1994)

Elis Regina
(Porto Alegre, 1945-1982)

**a.** Alberto Santos-Dumont was a well-known **aviator** and **inventor**.

**b.** Machado de Assis was a **writer** ahead of his time.

**c.** Elis Regina was a dynamic **singer** known for her performances.

**d.** Zilda Arns was a respected **doctor** and **aid worker**.

**e.** Ayrton Senna was an extraordinary **racing car driver**.

**f.** Tarsila do Amaral was a famous **painter** and **illustrator**.

**APPENDIX C – EXERCISE FROM THE SECTION *VOCABULARY CORNER***