

Children's vocabulary shrinking as reading loses out to screen time, says Susie Dent

Level 3: Advanced

Article summary: This article is about children's language development in the 2020s. It focuses on the UK and the impacts of screen time, reading and other aspects on children's English language skills and vocabulary acquisition.

Time: 60 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Words with multiple meanings

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

- A *translator* takes written materials in one language and puts in another language; translators can work with literature, legal or technical documents, and more.
- An *AI data trainer* works with written data sets to help AI programmes 'learn' language; they categorise language and give feedback on the accuracy of the AI content.
- An *interpreter* takes spoken language (or sign language) in one language and puts it in another language; interpreters work in many different settings and situations.
- A *lexicographer* researches, writes and edits dictionaries and other language references; they collect data, write definitions and keep dictionaries accurate and up-to-date.

2. Key words

1. Warmer

- The purpose of this activity is to get students to think about the different ways that professionals work with languages and language development. Before students start the activity, read the list of professions aloud and elicit ideas about what each job does. If necessary, share the definitions below. Then have students work in small groups to discuss the questions. Invite volunteers to share their ideas with the class.
- A *language teacher* helps students learn an additional language in a classroom or other formal setting; usually, a language is not spoken in the students' home country.
 - A *linguist* is a social scientist who researches language; they can focus on different languages and different aspects of language and often work in academic settings.
 - A *speech and language therapist* is a healthcare professional who assesses and treats people who have difficulty with language or communication.
 - A *textbook author* writes original materials to help students learn language skills; a *textbook editor* works on the author's drafts and suggests changes.

- Ask students to work individually or in pairs to match the words and the definitions and then find the words in the article. Tell students that some words may appear in a different form in the article. Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class.

Key:

- eloquence
- gap
- acquisition
- monolith
- magnify
- accelerate
- lexicographer
- in thrall to
- advent
- golden age
- hyperbole
- enhance
- exponentially
- amid
- foregone

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- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences using the words from the previous activity. Encourage students to read complete sentences to you when they give answers so that you can check their pronunciation of the key words.

Key:

1. *lexicographer*
2. *advent*
3. *in thrall to*
4. *eloquence*
5. *monolith*
6. *foregone*
7. *exponentially*
8. *Amid*
9. *enhance*
10. *hyperbole*

- c. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to write their own sentences with the remaining vocabulary items. Encourage students to read complete sentences to you when they give answers so that you can check their pronunciation of the key words.

3. Comprehension check

- a. Students can work individually or in pairs to do this activity. Encourage students to underline the section in the article where they found the answers. Remind them that if they can't find the information in the article, then they should circle *Not mentioned*. Check answers as a class. Compare the ways students corrected the false sentences. Is there more than one way to correct any of the sentences? To extend, have students quiz each other on more true and false statements about the article.

Key:

1. *True*
2. *False – Children are spending less time reading.*
3. *False – There are several examples of people worrying about the effects of technology on language (the postcard, the telegram, the internet).*

4. *False – The internet has helped to add variety to the English language, and online word games can help children learn vocabulary.*
5. *True*
6. *Not mentioned – She gives her opinions about her love of dictionaries now, and their importance to children, but she doesn't say that she personally loved dictionaries as a child.*
7. *True*
8. *True*
9. *Not mentioned – The article talks about parents being distracted by their phones, but it doesn't say that parents don't care about their children's language skills.*
10. *False – She says that studying foreign languages can have a positive effect on students' English language development.*

4. Key language

- a. Remind students that words often have more than one meaning. Sometimes, the two definitions relate to the same part of speech (e.g. both are nouns), but sometimes the definitions come from different parts of speech (e.g. one is a noun and one is a verb). We can use context to work out the intended meaning. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to read the sentences and choose the correct definition. Check answers as a class. To extend, ask students to share the context clues they used to work out the answer.

Key:

1. *b*
2. *a*
3. *a*
4. *b*
5. *b*
6. *b*
7. *a*
8. *a*

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- b. Have students work individually to make their own sentences using the words from the previous activity. Students should use each definition once. To extend, have volunteers share a sentence with the class. Ask the class to decide which meaning the sentence uses.

5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Ask them to justify their opinions, referring to their own experiences or beliefs whenever possible. Invite volunteers to share their answers with the class. To extend, ask students to share what they learned from discussing the questions with their classmates.

6. In your own words

- a. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to reflect on what they learnt from the article. To begin, have students skim (quickly read) the article to find Susie Dent's concerns and recommendations. Remind students that word games were briefly mentioned in the article as a useful tool for language development. Put students in pairs or small groups. Tell students to start by discussing the bullet points and questions. Have them make notes once they agree on the answers to the questions. Then give students time to develop a sample of the game. The sample should address all of the main points in the bullet point list. If possible, give students access to supplies like poster board or paper, markers or pens and other materials. Alternatively, students can use phones, tablets or in-class computers to create the sample.
- b. Have students present their games to the class. If there's enough time, let students play each other's games.