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Vocabulary depth and the relationship to reading skills in school beginners

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Vocabulary knowledge is comprised of two dimensions: vocabulary breadth, and vocabulary depth. While breadth is commonly defined as the number of words stored in one's mental lexicon (Hadley & Dickinson, 2018), depth is a woolly and multidimensional construct that is, thus far, less investigated. For the present purposes, we define vocabulary depth in narrower terms as "precision of meaning or semantic knowledge". In most studies reviewed, vocabulary depth is measured by explanations of word meaning.

In our project, we investigate the mutual influence of a range of vocabulary and reading skills from first to third grade. These include, among others, vocabulary depth. In a first step, we present our method of vocabulary depth assessment drawing on oral responses from 348 first graders to 15 items, taking into account multiple word types including nouns, adjectives and verbs as well as polysemous words. In a second step, we discuss the relationship of this measure of vocabulary depth to vocabulary breadth (assessed via the PPVT) as well as its links to reading skills and to further factors such as rapid automatised naming, phonological awareness, intelligence scores (CFT), and socio-demographic variables.