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“The Text Comes First” – Principles Guiding EFL Materials Developers’ Vocabulary Content Decisions

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ABSTRACT

One core aspect of learning a language is developing vocabulary, an endeavor that requires a structured and principled focus in the classroom. As the EFL textbook has a central position in the language learning classroom, it should have an important role to play in structuring vocabulary development. Yet, what guides decisions concerning the vocabulary content in textbooks has not been thoroughly studied. This paper presents an interview study with eight Swedish materials developers of frequently used EFL teaching materials aimed at school years 7–9. The results show that the materials developers focus primarily on providing engaging texts and base the vocabulary content on end users’ opinions and their own intuition. The study also indicates that word lists are construed as a tool primarily for reading comprehension rather than for vocabulary learning. The study concludes that vocabulary research findings appear to have a limited impact on decisions about vocabulary content.

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Introduction

Vocabulary development is a central aspect of foreign language acquisition and proficiency (e.g., Milton, 2009; Nation, 2013a). As is well known, developing sufficient vocabulary in a foreign language is not done without practice and effort. It entails both learning many words and many aspects of each word (e.g., written and spoken form, collocations, etc.). Therefore, vocabulary researchers (e.g., Nation, 2007; Schmitt, 2008) maintain that learners need structured support in this endeavor. As the textbook plays a central role in language classrooms worldwide (see, e.g., Tomlinson, 2008), Richards (2001) argues that it has the potential to provide structure and high quality content to a language learning course. Thus, the EFL textbook could function as a structuring instrument for vocabulary development in the classroom. The way textbooks are constructed from a vocabulary learning perspective is hence of great importance and constitutes an important area of study.

While content analyses of textbooks are increasingly common (e.g., Koprowski, 2005) and contribute with insights into the nature of textbook content, what guides textbook producers when writing and selecting texts for teaching materials has been left unattended, although pointed out as needed (Harwood, 2014). Researchers like Schmitt (2019) and Richards (2006) emphasize that materials developers’ ideas about vocabulary learning are likely to influence the content and structure of teaching materials. Content analyses of textbooks have shown that there appears to be a lack of systematicity concerning vocabulary content in EFL textbooks (e.g., Criado, 2009;

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Norberg & Nordlund, 2018). To understand the reasons behind this lack of structure, studies focusing on textbook writers' ideas about vocabulary development and learning appear worthwhile.

This study is the first of its kind situated in a Swedish context and, more specifically, in Swedish secondary school, years 7–9 (students aged 13–15). It is based on interviews with eight experienced materials developers who have produced some of the most commonly used textbooks for Swedish secondary schools. The Swedish syllabus for English promotes a communicative language learning approach, but presents vague vocabulary guidelines. The only mentions of vocabulary are statements that the teaching should cover cohesive markers and “[l]anguage phenomena ... [that students] will encounter in the language” (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 2018, p. 37). This absence of explicit focus on vocabulary in the curriculum also seems to influence the way teachers perceive vocabulary learning and instruction. Bergström et al.'s (2021) interview study on Swedish EFL teachers' views of vocabulary learning shows that vocabulary is not seen as a learning objective in its own right, it is rather understood as something that happens incidentally during other activities. The scarcity of an explicit focus on vocabulary in the syllabus and, as a possible consequence, the general understanding among teachers of vocabulary learning as occurring mainly incidentally raise the question of whether vocabulary is given enough prominence in the Swedish EFL classroom. There are no current studies of to what extent EFL teaching materials are used in Swedish secondary school. A study conducted by the National Agency for Education in 2006, however, found that a majority of secondary school teachers use EFL textbooks regularly in their teaching (Skolverket, 2006). Teaching materials with a research-based approach to vocabulary content could thus function as a fruitful tool in supporting students' vocabulary development.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to illuminate what guides and influences Swedish materials developers' decisions on vocabulary content for EFL textbooks. The research questions addressed are:

- (1) What general ideas concerning teaching materials affect Swedish materials developers' vocabulary decisions?
- (2) What are Swedish materials developers' thoughts about vocabulary in EFL textbooks?

Literature Review

Principles Guiding EFL Materials Development

The traditional approach to teaching materials has been form-focused Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) with closed-practice exercises like repeating and filling in the blanks (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). It has been criticized for not being research-based and materials development researchers have therefore promoted new, theoretically based approaches to materials development. Tomlinson (2013), for example, advocates a text-driven framework where the main guiding principle is that affective engagement is a prerequisite for learning. He argues that apprehension should come before comprehension and that texts have to be matched with their intended users. Materials developers should accordingly focus on providing texts that learners can engage with and use as resources for language development. A task-driven approach is recommended by Ellis (2011), where the idea is that the learner completes a communicative task which is then used as a prompt for form focus. Materials developers can also adopt a language awareness focus, as promoted by Bolitho (2003), constructing textbooks where authentic language data is analyzed to reach new linguistic insights. It can be concluded that materials development research encourages a move away from a focus on discrete language points toward language in use (cf. Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018).

Materials developers have explained that the materials development process is highly influenced by the expectations of the target audience (Prowse, 2011) and, in line with this, what teachers expect

from teaching materials can function as guiding principles. Studies regarding EFL teachers' expectations of the textbook have shown that teachers want engaging and relevant content. Tomlinson (2010), for instance, surveyed 48 teachers from the UK, Vietnam and Malaysia concerning their views on the textbooks they use and discovered that their main concern was that current textbooks are irrelevant, boring or out of date (see also Tomlinson and Masuhara's [2008] questionnaire study with British EFL teachers reporting similar results). In terms of Swedish EFL teachers' expectations, there is one main survey that provides information on the subject, carried out by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2006). 228 EFL teachers working in school year 9 participated and 97% of them agreed with the statement that the textbook should create engagement and 83% with the idea that the textbook should facilitate teaching adapted to students' differing levels of knowledge and needs. A majority of the teachers expected commercial textbooks to follow the curriculum and that the use of a textbook would decrease their preparation time.

Vocabulary Development in the Foreign Language Classroom

The fact that vocabulary knowledge is crucial for language learning is generally agreed on among researchers (e.g., Milton, 2009; Schmitt, 2019) and, as mentioned, vocabulary development does not only mean acquiring a substantial number of words, language learners also have to develop varied knowledge about each word (cf. Nation, 2013a). To become fluent, a learner needs to develop both vocabulary breadth (number of known words) and vocabulary depth (quality of word knowledge). It has, for example, been suggested that a reader needs to know 98% of the running words in a text to fully comprehend and read it unassisted (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). Vocabulary is thus a central component in reading comprehension. As acquiring a vocabulary sufficient for communication and comprehension is a complicated and time-consuming endeavor, researchers (e.g., Nation, 2007; Schmitt, 2008) stress the importance of having a structured approach to vocabulary in the language classroom and promote teaching materials as a tool for providing structured vocabulary input.

What vocabulary is learned of course influences comprehension and communicative ability. Nation (2013a) suggests that high-frequency words (the 2,000 most frequent words) should be explicitly taught in the foreign language classroom, simply because learners will encounter these words in all kinds of texts and discourses. He also encourages learning academic vocabulary and subject-specific technical vocabulary, as these facilitate communication in, for instance, educational contexts. Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) add that mid-frequency vocabulary (the 3,000–9,000 most frequent words) also needs pedagogical attention, as these words prepare students for more authentic encounters with language, such as watching TV and reading more complex texts, and facilitate fluent use of the language. They emphasize that the mid-frequency vocabulary is required to reach 98% text coverage. A focus on these words is therefore necessary for language learning. In a foreign language learning context, language proficiency is often assessed in relation to the levels posed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), where A1–A2 reflect basic use, B1–B2 independent use and C1–C2 proficient use (Council of Europe, 2001). In a Swedish context, students in year 9 should reach the B1 level to receive a passing grade in English (Skolverket, 2012). Milton (2010) has argued that learners need to know 4,000 word families to reach the B1 level and between 4,500 and 5,500 word families to reach the B2 level. In light of this, the vocabulary target for a Swedish secondary school student should be between 4,000 and 5,000 word families, encompassing high- and mid-frequency vocabulary, as well as basic academic vocabulary. Given the magnitude of this vocabulary objective, it can be concluded that students are likely to need support in achieving a rich vocabulary, sufficient for both communication and comprehension.

Researchers agree that repetition is necessary for vocabulary learning (e.g., Ellis, 2002; Webb, 2007). There is no general figure concerning how many times a word needs to be repeated before it is learned, but ten repetitions is a figure often mentioned (Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010). Furthermore,

repetitions spread out over a longer period of time or in longer texts have been found to be more beneficial than massed repetition. As an example, Nakata and Webb (2016) discovered that learning one set of 20 words or several smaller sets had little impact on the learning rate, while longer intervals between each encounter with the words led to more effective vocabulary learning. Recycling of words in textbooks is thus important to promote vocabulary learning (Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010; Nation, 2013b). However, studies of Swedish EFL textbooks aimed at young learners (Norberg & Nordlund, 2018; Nordlund, 2016) have found a low rate of recycling, posing the question of whether recycling is an aspect considered by materials developers when creating teaching materials.

Vocabulary in EFL Teaching Materials

It has been suggested that the textbook can support vocabulary learning in several ways, for example, by providing glosses. Webb and Nation (2017) argue that glosses facilitate vocabulary development as they support the noticing of lexical items to be learned. Research regarding vocabulary learning resulting from reading has also found that reading with glosses leads to higher vocabulary gains than reading without. As an example, a study conducted by Ko (2012) on a group of Korean EFL learners' vocabulary learning from reading shows that the participants who read texts with glosses performed significantly better on an immediate vocabulary test than participants who read the same texts without. Similar results are presented in Cheng and Good's (2009) study on Taiwanese students' foreign language reading, which shows that reading a text with glosses improved the vocabulary gains, but did not facilitate reading comprehension.

The textbook can also support vocabulary learning through provision of decontextualized word lists for learning. This has been a tool traditionally used in the classroom but, in the last thirty-odd years, word pair learning, (i.e., learning a target word by connecting it to a translation equivalent in the L1) through, for example, list learning and learning from flashcards, has been regarded as an outdated and ineffective method (cf. Hulstijn, 2001). Studies have shown, however, that this kind of learning can result in a quick surge of vocabulary size and that the long-term retention rate is high (e.g., Webb, 2009). Webb et al. (2020) performed a meta-analysis of 22 studies on the effects of intentional vocabulary learning activities (flashcards, word lists, fill-in-the-blanks and writing) and found that flashcards and word lists led to greater vocabulary gains in immediate post-tests. The meta-analysis shows that the retention rate following these two activities was higher than for the other two activities. Their conclusion is that word lists and flashcards are fruitful activities for establishing form-meaning connections. These results seem to suggest that while learning word pairs is a good start, the activity has to be complemented with activities with words in context. As regards the form of word lists, studies have demonstrated that providing a first language translation supports learning considerably more than lists with a second language definition (see, e.g., Laufer and Shmueli's [1997] study on a group of 128 EFL students' vocabulary learning through different techniques).

Material and Method

Participants

Eight materials developers, four women and four men, participated in the study, all of them with experience from producing EFL textbooks for Swedish secondary school (years 7–9). The participants ranged between 37 and 59 years in age ($M = 47.25$, $SD = 6.49$). Four of them are employed by publishing houses as editors or textbook developers and four have been or are currently freelancing as textbook writers. Two of the latter currently work fulltime as teachers. Seven of them have a teacher education degree, of which six from Sweden. Three are native speakers of English.

The selection of participants was made based on an informal survey among secondary school English teachers in the north of Sweden where they were asked to name the teaching materials

they use. The five most frequently used materials, published by four different publishing houses, were used as the basis for selecting participants. The authors and the editors of these teaching materials were contacted and asked to participate. Not all of them chose to participate, but at least one developer (author or editor) from each of the five selected materials accepted to be part of the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews (guided by an interview protocol) were used to elicit the materials developers' ideas and opinions in an extended manner (cf. Richards, 2003). The interviews focused on four areas: (i) foreign language vocabulary, (ii) content decisions made when producing a material, (iii) vocabulary considerations during the development process and (iv) the role of teaching materials for vocabulary development (see Appendix 1). The aim of the interviews was to elicit ideas and principles that guide materials developers when developing a teaching material. With this aim in mind, the interviewing researcher sought to let the participants' ideas be in focus and the researcher's personal ideas or theoretical background were therefore not discussed, in hope of thus obtaining accurate data representing the developers' personal views.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype and ranged between 50 and 79 min ($M = 68.25$, $SD = 8.54$). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim. To ensure that the study accurately represents the participants' views and ideas, respondent validation was used (cf. Cho & Trent, 2006). Accordingly, the transcript of the interview was sent to each participant to allow them to correct or add statements to their respective interview. Six interviews were conducted in Swedish and two in English. Quotations from the Swedish interviews have been translated.

Content Analysis

To answer the research questions, a content analysis of the interview data was carried out. Krippendorff (2013) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 24). The qualitative content analytical method entails forming categories that reflect patterns in the material in a systematic way and as the study sought to represent patterns in the ideas that guide materials developers' vocabulary decisions, the method was considered appropriate. The study uses an inductive approach to category formation (cf. Mayring, 2014b), where only aspects of the data relevant to the research questions are considered.

Following Mayring (2014b), the first step was constructing a coding manual (see Appendix 2), which guided the category formation. The coding manual includes selection criteria, called category definitions, and levels of abstraction. Category definitions determine what segments of the text to consider for analysis. The coding manual encompasses one set of criteria per research question, based on the theoretical background and the objective of the study. The abstraction level set by the coding manual establishes how general or specific the category formation should be (cf. Mayring, 2014a). The interview transcripts were then analyzed line by line. When a text segment corresponded to criteria in the category definition, a summarizing category was formed that reflect the

Table 1. Examples of inductive category formation.

Raw data	Category
"For me, number one is an interesting text"	Text in focus
"I choose not to think okay, I'm writing a text about detectives and footprints, therefore, I need to include these words just for the sake of including them. No, I write the text and then see what comes out"	Text precedes vocabulary content

content of the text segment (see Table 1 for examples). However, if a text segment was encountered that corresponded to the criteria but was not encompassed by a previously formed category, a new category was formed. By following this inductive procedure, the categories that emerged are based on the raw data.

The process was recursive and iterative. Once the coding manual was established, the entire data set was re-categorized in accordance with the manual. The category system was thus repeatedly tested on the data set before the final categorization, from which the results are derived. The first author coded the entire data set following the coding manual. The second and third author then performed interrater reliability analysis of 25% of the material. The interrater reliability was established by a percentage-agreement figure (cf. Stemler, 2004), which was high (.95) for all parts of the coding.

The analysis resulted in a number of categories relating to vocabulary and textbook content in EFL teaching materials. In the results section, a category is referred to as a principle, as the categories capture ideas or principles that were understood as guiding the participants' materials development. The content analysis focused primarily on representing the data qualitatively. However, in order to reflect the prominence of principles, the presentation also provides the frequency of a principle, in terms of how many interviews encompassed statements that reflect the principle in question. At least four of the participants had to express ideas relating to a particular principle for it to be included in the analysis, as this ensured that the ideas were held by participants from different publishing houses with different formal roles.

Results

Textbook Principles Guiding Vocabulary Decisions

This section presents the results relating to the first research question, that is, what textbook principles influence the vocabulary decisions. While the data analysis identified a number of textbook principles in general, only the textbook principles explicitly or implicitly related to the participants' vocabulary content decisions are shown here. It was found that two main principles had this impact, namely (i) the text in focus and (ii) the supportive function of the textbook. These principles were reflected in statements from all the respondents.

The participating developers all shared the belief that one of the main objectives when producing a material is to create or select interesting texts that will engage the students. They expressed the opinion that engaging texts is a determining factor for the quality of a teaching material and that they, accordingly, focus specifically on writing and selecting texts, which is reflected in the following quotation: "the main objective is to make the students happy, to write about things that they will find interesting and actually want to read about". An engaging text in itself was described as a tool for language learning, as one developer put it: "it feels like the language comes automatically if the students are engaged enough by what they're doing", showing a general reliance on the text and its qualities to be sufficient for language learning. It was mentioned that providing students with interesting and engaging material is more important than specific vocabulary and grammar input and that students will pick up language by working with material that they enjoy.

The text focus was also found to impact their reported practices. For instance, they compared their method when writing texts for a teaching material with writing fiction. One of them stated that "the text should be strong in itself" and he explained that he, because of this, writes a text first and then edits it in terms of vocabulary once he is happy with the quality of the content. Another developer mentioned that he tries to approach materials development like an author and has "a hard time thinking primarily about the language level if the text is to be self-contained and have a psychological content that engages the reader".

The other textbook principle referred to by all the participants is that the classroom and the perspectives of the end users (i.e., students and teachers) should guide the development of a teaching

material and this was also found to influence their approach to vocabulary content. They all reported that their materials should facilitate teaching and support learning. They stressed the importance of providing materials that are adaptable in classes with big individual differences, adjusted to a suitable linguistic level and including content that teachers will enjoy working with. The classroom-focused objective was also visible in their aspiration to align their materials with the curriculum, as illustrated in the following statement: “as a materials developer, I have to make sure that our material follows the curriculum”. Similarly, another developer mentioned that an understanding of the requirements posed by the syllabus has to precede the content decisions.

The fact that the materials developers valued the perspectives of the end users during the development process was visible in their reported practices. They stated that focus groups with teachers and students prior to the production as well as feedback and piloting during the production process are used to receive input on their materials. This input was positioned as guiding the choice of topics. One developer expressed that she wants to include topics that are “connected to the students’ interests and, accordingly, the students should have their say concerning what they are interested in and want to read about”. Another participant explained that his communication with teachers has led to the understanding that it is common in Sweden to start school year 7 with a letter-writing module. Because of this, he finds it important to include letter writing in the material aimed at year 7, regardless of whether the development team finds this to be useful or not. Similarly, the developers said that they also use feedback and pilot surveys to test if a material is engaging for students and teachers and to see if the material is on a suitable linguistic and conceptual level. For example, one of them described a recent materials development procedure during which “teachers read the texts and said ‘yes this is suitable to my students’ [or] ‘this is too difficult’”. Another mentioned that she asks teachers to pilot the parts of the material that they are most unsure about and “can [then] see if the text is too difficult and edit it accordingly”. They also explained that the result of the pilot surveys is that they include the texts that students and teachers enjoy reading and working with.

Vocabulary Principles

In this section, the results concerning the second research question about the materials developers’ vocabulary-related thoughts are presented. The analysis of the statements relating to vocabulary in teaching materials resulted in principles concerning three areas: (i) *vocabulary development* in the textbook, (ii) the *vocabulary content* of textbooks and (iii) the *word lists* in the textbooks. In the presentation below, the term *word list* is used to refer to the list of glosses that is either provided next to a text or at the end of a book.

Vocabulary Development Principles

The participants’ utterances reflected four principles (presented in [Table 2](#) below) concerning how vocabulary development should be promoted in the textbook and how it should facilitate vocabulary learning.

As shown above, a majority of the participants shared the belief that vocabulary learning should not occur through list learning. One respondent explained his views on list learning by saying that

Table 2. Vocabulary development in the textbook.

Principle	Frequency
<i>Not list learning</i>	6 of 8 (75%)
<i>In context</i>	5 of 8 (62.5%)
<i>Repetition</i>	4 of 8 (50%)
<i>Use</i>	4 of 8 (50%)

he finds it difficult to learn language “dissected into small, incoherent pieces”. Their critique of word lists as a tool for learning made them pay little attention to the content of them, as illustrated in the following account from one developer: “The word lists are never the focus during the production”. The fact that many teachers demand word lists in their teaching materials was, however, put forward as an explanation for the inclusion of word lists in their books in spite of their personal views of their function.

Connected to their critical approach to word lists are their beliefs in vocabulary development in context and that the textbook should promote contextual vocabulary learning. Five of the developers expressed that students will best develop vocabulary through encountering new words in context, that is, in interesting and engaging texts. One of them argued that “vocabulary development should occur in a meaningful context”. The participants also connected contextual learning to vocabulary exercises and it was stated that students “need to practice words in context” and that students’ understanding of words is facilitated by the context. They mentioned that they put this principle into practice by constructing contextualized word lists (with example sentences and synonyms).

Facilitating use and repetition in the textbook was also mentioned as important by the developers. Half of them declared that they believe that vocabulary is best learned through use. The statement “you learn words when you use them” reflects this belief. In terms of practice, they said that they try to facilitate vocabulary learning by including usage-focused exercises, such as fill-in-the-blanks, and communicatively oriented exercises, like discussions and role-play, in their materials. The importance of repetition was also emphasized by them. Some of them referred to concrete ways in which they achieve this during the materials development process, for instance, by including the same words in several word lists or by repeating words in exercises. The use of exercises was explained by one of them in the following way: “if the students read a new word in the text, talk about it with their friends and then do an exercise using that word, they’re much more likely to retain the word and be able to use it”. While the participants mentioned recycling and sometimes taking this into consideration, they did not report on systematic methods to ensure recycling throughout a material or over a series.

Vocabulary Content Principles

In terms of vocabulary content, four principles emerged in the analysis of the interviews, shown in Table 3 below.

Six of the participants said that the text should precede and determine the vocabulary content. Thus, considerations of specific vocabulary input were perceived as subordinate to the text. Providing an engaging text in the materials was construed as the developers’ main objective. This view is illustrated in utterances like “I write the text and see what comes out” and “thinking about vocabulary during text production would result in strange texts”. It was found that the materials developers wanted the vocabulary content to be the words occurring naturally in the texts, which can be exemplified with the following statement: “we cannot structure the input freely, it’s rather that the text has created a situation with a number of words”. Nevertheless, editing finished texts on vocabulary grounds by replacing too difficult words or adding more topical words is a practice reported by some of them.

Table 3. Vocabulary content principles.

Principle	Frequency
<i>Text precedes vocabulary content</i>	6 of 8 (75%)
<i>Proportion of new words</i>	5 of 8 (62.5%)
<i>Lexical fields</i>	4 of 8 (50%)
<i>Relevance and usefulness</i>	4 of 8 (50%)

Five of the participants expressed a concern with the number of new words in each text in the teaching materials. They pointed out that a text should not contain too many unfamiliar words, as that makes it difficult to comprehend and work with. The view that texts should be edited with regard to the proportion of new words was put forward as a consequence of this idea and the general method for ensuring a suitable number of new words was by constructing the accompanying word list. One developer maintained that she “usually notices if a text is too difficult when constructing the word list” and in general, the participants described that they first decide on the length of the word list and then edit the text to comply with the decided format. As for the format, one developer stated that she “tries to keep a maximum of 20 words at the bottom of the page”. Another expressed that “no teacher or student is helped by a word list that is 50 words long”. In other words, the participants showed a concern with the proportion of new words in a text and the length of the word list. They explained that these two ideas are connected and guide their development practice.

In terms of the nature of the vocabulary content in the materials, the results show that relevant lexical fields are a prioritized aspect among the participants when writing and selecting texts. One developer said that one part of the development process is to “identify semantic fields and areas that we think we really have to cover”. Another tied this to working with a thematic content approach, where the chosen themes would point to specific lexical fields to cover. The idea expressed was that they can then write or find texts on topics that would lead to input from the chosen lexical fields. A few of them also mentioned that they add more words to a text to make sure that the material provides input from the lexical field in question.

The interviewees also stated that they want the vocabulary content to be relevant and useful to the students. For example, one criterion for vocabulary content decisions described was “how likely it is that the students will use this particular [word]”. Much in the same vein, a participant claimed that the important words to include in a material are “words that are relevant to the students’ own lives” and that refer to “things that are relevant to them, in their hobbies, their school lives”. Useful vocabulary content was also put forward as a way to motivate students to learn, as they can then directly see the applicability of the vocabulary. However, when asked, they did not provide any explanation of what words are useful to students or how these words can be identified.

Word List Principles

The analysis also revealed a number of word list principles among the participants (see Table 4). These are closely connected to the vocabulary content principles, as the word list is a way to present vocabulary in the textbook. While the materials developers were, as mentioned, critical of word lists as a tool for vocabulary development, they explained that they still include word lists in the books and mentioned several principles that guide the construction of them.

As shown above, five of eight respondents expressed that word lists have a mainly supportive function. Instead of seeing word lists as a tool for vocabulary learning, they justified and explained the inclusion of them in their materials by their supportive function. They mentioned that word lists facilitate students’ reading comprehension, save time for teachers and that they can be used for homework. One of them declared that teachers “buy a service” from the publisher, which includes carefully prepared word lists. It was evident that the materials developers promoted the practical supportive function of word lists rather than viewing them as a tool for vocabulary learning. However, even though they were critical of list learning, they said that they were aware of the

Table 4. Word list principles.

Principle	Frequency
<i>Supportive function</i>	5 of 8 (62.5%)
<i>Challenging words</i>	5 of 8 (62.5%)
<i>Gut feeling</i>	4 of 8 (50%)
<i>Not traditional translation word list</i>	4 of 8 (50%)

twofold function of word lists in teachers' daily work, as a tool for both reading comprehension and word pair learning.

The participants did not report any clear ideas as to what words from a text should be included in the word list. Without further explanation, they declared that word lists should simply include words that students are likely to find difficult. Along the same lines, four developers asserted that they base their word list decisions on gut feeling. As the developers were aware of the twofold function of word lists, they mentioned that they include words that they think could be difficult when reading a particular text and words that they feel that students should learn. One approach presented by them was "to have an author write a text and then look at what words might cause difficulties for the students and then a word list is created based on that". In relation to the actual decisions on words, the following accounts illustrate their views: "we can make quite an educated guess that these are the words that students should learn" and "I just look at the text and say the students don't know this word, I'm completely sure". Thus, they did not refer to any principled method for deciding on the word list content.

Half of the respondents stated that they avoid traditional translation word lists in favor of alternative, contextualized word lists. This idea appears to be connected to the critique of list learning and the appraisal of learning words in context. Hence, by including contextualized word lists, they said that they seek to promote vocabulary learning through context even when teachers use traditional methods such as learning words from lists. For instance, one explanation for including example sentences in the word list was that "the words can then be learned in context". A few participants said that they use definitions or synonyms instead of L1 translations in their word lists. It was further explained that they sometimes differentiate between the supportive function for reading by having one list with all the difficult words in a text next to it and a word list at the end of the book with words from the text suitable for word pair learning.

Discussion

The study presented here set out to illuminate what guides and influences Swedish materials developers' vocabulary decisions for EFL textbooks. Through a content analysis of interviews with eight Swedish developers, a number of principles concerning vocabulary and the textbook were identified. On a general level, the material shows that the participating materials developers are guided by text-driven beliefs (cf. Tomlinson, 2013) when constructing textbooks. The interviews showed that they, to a great extent, rely on the text itself as sufficient for language learning and thus also vocabulary development. Prowse (2011) reports that materials developers attest to being influenced by opinions of the target audience. A possible explanation for the participants' text focus is thus that engaging texts are demanded by the end users, as found in previous studies on Swedish EFL teachers (Skolverket, 2006) as well as EFL teachers in other countries (Tomlinson, 2010; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2008). Connected to their focus on the text as the primary source of vocabulary development is their reported reliance on incidental vocabulary learning. The idea expressed by them is that language and vocabulary will come automatically when working with interesting texts (see also Bergström et al., 2021). Considering the fact that the textbook is a potential tool to structure vocabulary development in the classroom (cf. Richards, 2001; Schmitt, 2008), and the importance of intentional vocabulary learning in language learning programs (e.g., Nation, 2007), their view is noteworthy.

The study also shows that the developers interviewed do not take vocabulary into explicit consideration when deciding on the textbook content. In line with Tomlinson's (2013) text-driven approach, it was found that they rather prioritize the engagement level of texts and input from the end users. They stated that their materials development is guided by intuition when it comes to what vocabulary to include. It was moreover made evident that they do not structure the vocabulary input in their materials in line with specified ideas concerning what words to learn. Research has shown that what vocabulary is learned is of utmost importance for a learner's linguistic

development and fluency (Schmitt, 2008). In line with this, the developers' disregard of vocabulary during the textbook production is likely to have an effect on the quality of the vocabulary input provided by the materials. The textbook is a core feature in the EFL classroom, used by many teachers regularly, and a central provider of input to all students. Students are expected to learn many high- and mid-frequency words during their school years (Milton, 2010; Nation, 2013a; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014) and schools are responsible for providing sufficient learning opportunities to all students. Therefore, the textbook, combined with other vocabulary learning activities, should provide vocabulary input that facilitates vocabulary development. One would therefore find it reasonable that teaching materials should be based on research concerning issues such as frequency and recycling (see, e.g., Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014; Webb, 2007).

Connected to the finding that the developers did not report that they prioritize structured vocabulary input is their critical approach to word lists as a tool for vocabulary learning. Hulstijn (2001) mentions that list learning is regarded as an ineffective method within the current language teaching paradigm although its many benefits have been highlighted (e.g., Ko, 2012; Webb, 2009). Considering that research has shown that the word list is one of the most efficient tools available to achieve quick vocabulary gains with good chances of long-term retention (e.g., Webb et al., 2020), the developers' disregard of word lists as vocabulary tools is again noteworthy. It is true that they mentioned that they include word lists when producing their materials, but it was evident that this is because teachers demand word lists in their materials. The participants declared that they see the word list as primarily a tool for reading comprehension. In this respect, their conceptions do not correspond to current research, which has found that reading comprehension is not improved by glosses (Cheng & Good, 2009).

It can thus be concluded that key findings from vocabulary research are mostly absent in the principles guiding vocabulary decisions among the materials developers in this study. Admittedly, recycling (cf. Ellis, 2002; Webb, 2007) as well as having an appropriate lexical burden in texts (cf. Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Nation, 2013a) were mentioned as important principles among them, which suggests that measures are taken to ensure that words are recycled and that texts are on an attainable lexical level. Yet, the developers did not report on any systematic methods for ensuring recycling of lexical items or identifying what words in a text need to be removed because of their difficulty (such as low-frequency items). Even though they showed that they have research-based ideas concerning recycling and lexical burden, they do not appear to use systematic approaches to ascertain that their materials reflect these principles. Hence, beside a need of being informed by research-based ideas when constructing EFL teaching materials, this study suggests that materials developers also need systematic methods to put these ideas into practice and align their materials accordingly.

It is true that the study is based on a rather small sample, eight participants only, and that a larger material could have yielded somewhat different results. Nevertheless, it is indicative and congruent with previous studies on vocabulary beliefs among EFL teachers (e.g., Bergström et al., 2021; Gao & Ma, 2011). The results suggest that the most central component of language learning, namely vocabulary, seems to be left unattended during the development of EFL teaching materials. As materials developers' vocabulary principles and beliefs is an area that is largely unstudied (Schmitt, 2019), additional studies relating to what principles guide the vocabulary decisions in teaching materials are needed. Future studies could, for example, focus on developers from other countries or who produce materials for different age groups. To facilitate the development of research-based teaching materials, vocabulary research could also focus on providing materials developers with concrete methods for designing supportive vocabulary input.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Swedish EFL materials developers are not primarily guided by research-based vocabulary principles when deciding on vocabulary for textbooks. Instead, the engagement

level of texts, end user input and intuition are more important guiding factors. As a result, vocabulary content is not given principled attention during the development process. Since material developers, as pointed out by Schmitt (2019), have the best conditions to provide research-based vocabulary input to the EFL classroom, this is a striking finding and is likely to have an effect on students' learning. Content analyses of teaching materials have found a lack of systematicity in EFL textbooks (e.g., Criado, 2009; Norberg & Nordlund, 2018) and the present study offers an explanation to this, namely the fact that that materials developers do not consider vocabulary an aspect in need of explicit attention and structure. It can thus be concluded that for teaching materials to support vocabulary learning, publishers and material developers need to rely less on their own intuition in their work and more on research on how to support learning. Explicit guidelines for publishers and an explicit focus on vocabulary in the curriculum for English are also likely to strengthen the role vocabulary is given during the materials development process.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview guide

The materials developer:

- Educational background.
- What teaching materials in English have you developed?
- Do you work alone or in a group?
- How long have you been developing teaching materials in English?

Vocabulary:

- What does it mean to know a word?
- What is the role of vocabulary development in EFL?
- Are there words or kinds of words that are particularly important for students to learn?
- What role does the school have in developing students' vocabulary in English?

Materials development:

- Tell me about the process when developing in material.
- What is important to think about when developing a teaching material?
- What are important parts of a teaching material? What should a teaching material include?
- On what grounds do you decide what content to include in the material?
- How do you decide on texts for the material? What affects the choice of texts?
- Do you edit texts? Why or why not?
- How do you decide on the vocabulary content in the material?
- How is the vocabulary content presented? What are your thoughts about that?
- How do you decide the extent of the vocabulary content in the material?
- What kind of learning do you think take place when working with the material and what methods do you use to support language learning or vocabulary development?
- How do you decide on what exercises to include in the textbook? Specifically in terms of vocabulary?
- Is there something that restricts you in the development of teaching materials?

Teaching materials and vocabulary development:

- What role has teaching materials in the students' vocabulary development?
- How do you want the teaching material to be used, in relation to vocabulary development?
- How do you want the teaching material to influence the work with vocabulary development?
- How do you think the teaching material supports vocabulary development?
- What do you want the teaching material to contribute with for the EFL classroom?

Appendix 2

Coding manual

Research questions:

- (1) What general ideas concerning teaching materials affect Swedish materials developers' vocabulary decisions?
- (2) What are Swedish materials developers' thoughts of vocabulary in EFL textbooks?

Research question 1:

What general ideas concerning teaching materials affect Swedish materials developers' vocabulary decisions?

Category definition: Ideas concerning what textbook content is preferable, in terms of subjects and texts as well as textual content and layout. How choices concerning content are made and what guides these decisions. Not exercises specifically. Not vocabulary content. Not content areas in general without an explanation. Not how specific texts are edited. However – general ideas on how texts can be edited (such as language level, make texts more interesting and so on).

Level of abstraction: Concrete opinions and ideas concerning the nature of textbook content and how it is decided on.

Research question 2:

What are Swedish materials developers' thoughts of vocabulary in EFL textbooks?

Category definition: Definitions of what vocabulary and vocabulary development is and its relation to textbook development. Ideas regarding what vocabulary content should be included in textbooks, how it should be presented and taught.

Level of abstraction: Ideas concerning the role of vocabulary development in textbooks. Also concrete opinions on the vocabulary content of textbooks.