



# “Everyone Needs to Expand Their Vocabulary”

A Quantitative Study of Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices Regarding the Teaching of Vocabulary

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## Abstract

Vocabulary is the most important part of any language in communicating content. In ESL/EFL teaching, the focus for long has been on incidental learning of vocabulary, e.g. vocabulary through reading and *guessing meaning from context*. The pendulum has swung and today the research field has concluded that there are more efficient ways of teaching vocabulary which also include intentional teaching like language/form-focused teaching (Nation, 2003; Schmitt 2008). This study aims to investigate the beliefs and practices of vocabulary teaching and learning of EFL teachers in Sweden. Furthermore, it aimed to investigate if these beliefs and practices were coherent with what the research today suggests as being the most effective, especially concerning the role of morphological awareness for vocabulary expansion. By using a questionnaire, a large respondent group of 71 EFL teachers in Sweden reported on their perception of vocabulary teaching. The result showed that EFL teachers in Sweden to some degree still rely on incidental and meaning-based vocabulary teaching. More importantly, this study illustrates an internal discrepancy within the EFL teachers of Sweden regarding beliefs and practices of vocabulary teaching, as well as pedagogical implications such as the need for teachers to have time and resources so to update themselves on the current findings of the research field. The results of this study have the potential of providing a foundation of data on which further and more qualitative studies could be based on.

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# 1 Introduction

Without grammar very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. (Wilkins, 1972, p. 111)

As this quote by Wilkins (1972) suggests, vocabulary is the primary part of any language. Without words, there would be no language. Size of vocabulary and language proficiency in general has been found to have a strong correlation. (e.g., Nation, 2006; Stæhr, 2008; Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2015). The same can be said about the link between vocabulary size and reading comprehension (e.g. Ku & Anderson, 2003; Laufer, 2006). To be able to understand a text, research suggests that one has to understand 98–99% of the written words (Hu & Nation, 2000). To be able to have a 98% coverage of authentic texts (e.g. novels or newspapers), Nation (2006) concluded that it is necessary to have knowledge of 8000–9000-word families. The importance of vocabulary in language learning is clear, so how do ESL/EFL (English as a second language/English as a foreign language) teachers teach words? What are their beliefs and practices? And what approaches are in accordance with the conclusions of contemporary research?

During the 80s, Kraschen's (1981) input hypothesis dominated the language learning field. Languages were thought to be *acquired* rather than *learned*, and therefore, teachers should not use any explicit language teaching of, e.g. grammar or vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary, therefore, was to be done through meaning based-input and output, like the method of "vocabulary through reading". Since the 90s, the research field has slowly come to agree on the fact that second and foreign language learning needs to rely on a more explicit teaching of grammar and vocabulary as well, and that *to know a word* means to know not only the *meaning* of it but also its *form* and *use* (Nation, 2001, p. 49). The need for teaching vocabulary explicitly is due to the fact that when learning a second language the learner receives less amount of input and output than a learner of English as a native language do. In an EFL setting where the learner does not even live in a country where English is spoken by the majority of the people, the chances for input and output is considerably less and therefore the need for effective vocabulary teaching is more important. Nation (2001) advocates a four-strand approach to vocabulary teaching which involves four equally emphasized parts: 1) meaning-focused input, 2) meaning-focused output, 3) language focused learning, and 4) fluency development. The first two strands aim to create meaning for words. The third strand involves form-focused teaching of, e.g. morphology, word-families, and decoding of words.

The fourth and final strand concerns fluency development in all four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Even though the research field has since the 90s concluded that only focusing on meaning is not the most efficient way to teach L2 language, when investigated, L2 learners of English have been shown to wrongly believe having knowledge of a word, because they thought that they knew the meaning of it (Schmitt & Meara, 1997, p. 29). Furthermore, it seems that teachers most frequently use tasks which primarily have a focus on the meaning-creation of words, such as exercises focused on paraphrasing or translating (Schmitt 2008, p. 344). There seems to be a gap between the understanding of vocabulary teaching of the research field and the practice amongst teachers. For example, the notion that morphological awareness is important for vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension has been supported by many studies over the years (e.g., Schmitt and Meara, 1997; Mochizuki and Aizawa, 2000; Carlisle, 2000; Kieffer and Lesaux, 2008, etc.), but studies conducted in Asia and Canada suggest that teachers do not work actively to enhance this skill with their students (e.g., Schmitt & Meara, 1997; Zhang, 2008; Tran, 2011; Gerami & Noordin, 2013; Rossiter, Abbott, & Kushnir, 2016).

To summarize, a vast range of research has been conducted over the past decades which highlight the importance of a more complex L2 vocabulary teaching approach, and, even if to a lesser degree, on the beliefs and practice of teachers regarding vocabulary teaching (Schmitt, 2008; Germani & Nordin, 2013; Zhang, 2008, Rossiter, Abbott, & Kushnir, 2016). However, no research has been conducted on the beliefs of teachers of English in Sweden. Here, teaching generally follows a communicative approach, which may or may not include an explicit focus on form. Only one study in Sweden has come close to examine this area, but it focused on learners' attitudes towards vocabulary learning (Norberg, Vikström & Kibry, 2018). As a result, it is of interest to investigate the beliefs and practices of English teachers of today in a country like Sweden.

This current study will give a hint to the practices of vocabulary teaching by teachers of English in Sweden. Are they teaching in a way described by Schmitt (2008) and Schmitt and Meara (1997) with focus on meaning, or have they adopted the theories of the 21st century illustrated by Nation's four strands? This research will also contribute to a better understanding of EFL teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning.

The aim of this study is to investigate the beliefs and practices of vocabulary teaching and learning of EFL teachers in Sweden. It will also examine if their practice is coherent with

what the research today suggests being the most effective, especially concerning the role of morphological awareness for vocabulary expansion. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are Swedish EFL teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning?
2. According to teachers, what is their practice for teaching vocabulary?
3. Are the beliefs and practice of EFL teachers in Sweden coherent with findings from the research field?

The outline of this paper will be as follows: first, the theoretical premises for this study will be examined. Next, a literature review will be presented of previous research regarding 1) *good practice of vocabulary teaching*, 2) *morphological awareness and its connection to reading comprehension and vocabulary Expansion*, and 3) *the beliefs and practices of ESL/EFL teachers*. A section which presents the results of this study will be followed by a discussion, and the final part will conclude the study as well as provide some recommendations for further research.

## 2 Theoretical Preliminaries

This section will provide a background of English vocabulary teaching and explain some of the definitions used in this paper. The first section will explain the difference between first and second language learning. Next, a short description of 'Nation's four strands' will be provided. Finally, the definition of '*knowing a word*' will be discussed.

2.1

### The Difference in Vocabulary Learning in L1 and L2

Vocabulary learning in an ESL or EFL context differs from a context where English is taught as a first language (L1). When a native speaker of English begins school, his/her formal studies of English begin at the age of about six years old. At that time, the child would already have a vocabulary size of around 3,000 to 4,000 word families (Nation, 2001). Compare this vocabulary size of post-secondary English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, which ranges from 1,200 to 2,000 word families after 800 to 1,500 hours of instruction (Nation, 2008). ESL/EFL learners do not have access to the same source of input as native speakers do, nor do they have the same opportunity for to create output. Since a new word must be encountered about 10 times or more (Coady, 1997; Hirsh & Nation, 1992), and each

encounter should occur before the word is forgotten, Nation and Ming-tzu (1999) claim that e.g. reading needs to be done at an intensive rate of around one or two books per week. According to Nation (2008), research which has compared incidental learning and deliberate learning has shown that deliberate word learning is more efficient in terms of the time taken to learn and the amount learned. As ESL learners live in a country where English is the official language, they will have greater access to input and output of English than EFL learners in say Sweden. Students in Sweden spend a more limited time encountering English outside school. This limited time in a limited setting puts higher pressure on the EFL learning in school and should, therefore, be spent wisely with a certain amount of deliberate and direct learning of English vocabulary (Nation & Hunston, 2013).

## Nation's Four-strands Approach

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have been changes in the approaches to teaching vocabulary. As Sökmen (1997) puts it: “the pendulum has swung from direct teaching of vocabulary (the grammar-translation method) to incidental (the communicative approach) and now, laudably, back to the middle: implicit and explicit learning” (p. 239). The four learning strands suggested by Nation (2001) provide a structure by which to integrate intentional and incidental vocabulary learning, which include: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (see table 1).

Table 1: Four strands of vocabulary teaching (Nation, 2001, p. 390)

Strand	General conditions	Vocabulary requirements	Activities and techniques
Meaning-focused input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the message</li> <li>• Some unfamiliar items</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Noticing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95%+ coverage (preferably 98%)</li> <li>• Skill at guessing from context</li> <li>• Opportunity to negotiate</li> <li>• Incidental defining and attention drawing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading graded readers</li> <li>• Listening to stories</li> <li>• Communication activities</li> </ul>
Meaning-focused output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the message</li> <li>• Some unfamiliar items</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Noticing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95%+ coverage (preferably 98%)</li> <li>• Encouragement to use unfamiliar items</li> <li>• Supportive input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication activities with written output</li> <li>• Prepared writing</li> <li>• Linked skills</li> </ul>
Language-focused learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on language items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill in vocabulary learning Strategies</li> <li>• Appropriate teacher focus on high-frequency words, and strategies for low-frequency words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct teaching of vocabulary</li> <li>• Direct learning</li> <li>• Intensive reading</li> <li>• Training in vocabulary strategies</li> </ul>
Fluency development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the message</li> <li>• Little or no unfamiliar language</li> <li>• Pressure to perform faster</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 99%+ coverage</li> <li>• Repetition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading easy graded readers</li> <li>• Repeated reading</li> <li>• Speed reading</li> <li>• Listening to easy input</li> <li>• 4/3/2 speaking exercise</li> <li>• Rehearsal tasks</li> <li>• 10-minute writing</li> <li>• Linked skills</li> </ul>



Meaning-focused input involves focusing on the message where the learner develops their skill of guessing from context. Some new lexical items are introduced through activities such as reading graded text, listening to stories, and communication activities. The teachers should choose materials of which the learners would have a 95+% vocabulary coverage so that incidental vocabulary learning and guessing from context is possible.

Meaning-focused output is similar to the previous strand but has a focus on output rather than input. It requires supportive input and encourages learners to use unfamiliar items. Activities linked to this strand could be communication activities with written output, prepared writing, and linked skills. As the previous strand, it is beneficial for the learner to have a 95+% coverage of the vocabulary, which means that only some unfamiliar words should be introduced.

Language-focused learning involves form-focused instruction or word-focused instruction which directs the learner's attention to new lexical items by means of a variety of techniques, such as glosses, training in vocabulary learning strategies, intensive reading and decontextualized word-focused activities (Laufer, 2005). An example of decontextualized word-focus activities could be activities with a focus on developing morphological awareness. Morphological awareness is used by learners when decoding words by examining the morphemes (parts) within the word. For example, a transparent compound such as *football* can be decomposed and understood by analyzing the parts: *foot* and *ball*. According to Nation and Hunston (2013), teaching morphology (word parts, affixes, and stems) would benefit vocabulary learning in two ways; firstly, it would help learners to remember new words by relating them to the meanings of the parts they contain (the affixes and stems). Secondly, if the learners has knowledge of the prefixes and suffixes modifying an unknown word, the awareness helps them to see the relationship between word family members and can through that decode the word. Within this strand, it is appropriate for teachers to focus on high-frequency words and strategies for the acquisition of low-frequent words.

The final strand focuses on the activity of fluency development by rehearsing and producing vocabulary already "known" and focuses on the message, rather than the language items as in the previous strand. Activities could involve speed reading, listening to easy input, 10-minute writing, and repeated reading. It has a vocabulary requirement of 99+% coverage, and the aim is to repeat words to the point of full ability to understand and use the words. One example of an activity given by Nation (2001) is the *4/3/2/ speaking exercise*: a learner

gives the same talk to three different peers with decreasing time to do it on (four minutes, three minutes and finally two minutes), and in that way the learners develops fluency.

Meaning-based input and meaning-based output are, as stated earlier in this paper, the most common way for teachers and learners to work with learning new words. What Nation advocates is the need to understand the teaching of vocabulary as a balance, with even focus on all four strands (see table 2). However, in order to know how to teach words, one also has to know what it actually means to *know a word*, which is what we now will take a closer look at.

Table 2: The proportion of time in a course that should be given to vocabulary teaching (Nation, 2013, p. 32)

Meaning-focused input		
Meaning-focused output		
Language-focused learning	pronunciation vocabulary	strategy development intensive reading word card learning <b>vocabulary teaching</b>
	grammar discourse	
Fluency development		

### 2.3

## What Is Involved in Knowing a Word?

According to Nation and Hunston (2013), there are three parts involved in knowing a word: *form*, *meaning*, and *use*. These three parts have a receptive and productive dimension, as shown in the table below found in Nation's book *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* (2013). *Form* includes spoken, written, and word parts. *Meaning* includes form and meaning, concepts and referents, as well as associations. *Use* include grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use. This definition of knowing a word is the one that this paper will base its research on because even though researchers have used other definition (e.g., Graves, 2006; Miller, 1999; Stahl & Nagy, 2006), their definitions are very similar to the one of Nation.

Table 3: What is involved in knowing a word (Nation & Hunston, 2013, p. 49)

Form	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?
		P	What word parts can be used to express this meaning?
Meaning	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concepts and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or type of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or type of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency...)	R	Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when and how often can we use this word?

Note: R = receptive, P = productive knowledge

### 3 Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to review recent literature written in the field of vocabulary teaching and learning in an L2 setting. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section reviews studies conducted on L2 vocabulary teaching. The second section reviews studies concerning morphological awareness and its connection to reading comprehension and vocabulary expansion. Finally, a section which reviews studies conducted on the beliefs and approaches that EFL/ESL teachers have regarding vocabulary teaching and learning.

#### What Is Good Practice for Teaching Vocabulary?

3.1 According to Schmitt (2008), the presently preferred language teaching paradigm is one with a focus on meaning-based learning, where language elements “are learned by using them rather than by focusing on them explicitly, but with a supplementary focus on language forms (e.g., explicit grammar teaching) when necessary” (p. 340). There is a belief among ESL/EFL teachers that rather than focusing on activities aimed at committing lexical information to memory (*intentional* learning), students will learn new words in a situation in which they process new information without the intention to obtain this information to memory (*incidental* learning). However, according to the results of the literature review of Schmitt (2008), only relying on incidental vocabulary learning is not the most effective way. What is good practice will now be examined further.

Laufer, (2006) investigated whether “learners benefit from attention to form only when it occurs within a communicative task environment (FonF) as meaning-focused input, or whether they can benefit equally from focusing with decontextualized items (FonFs)” (p. 153). Participants were 158 high-school learners in Israel. They were in Grade 11 and had studied English for seven years. Twelve target words were chosen, and Laufer tested both incidental and intentional learning with the conditions of both FonF and FonFs. The participants in the incidental FonF group read a text and answered five comprehension questions on it. For the incidental FonF part, the participants received a list of the words with translations into their L1 and an explanation of the word in English. They did not get to read the text. The second part of the study examined the intentional learning of words, which included all the groups. This part came directly in time after the incidental learning session. The participants were asked to study for an upcoming test by spending 15 minutes on memorizing the 12 target words and their meanings. The first test came immediately after the

memorization session, and here, the participants had to present the target word in English when seeing the translation of it in their L1. In the second test, the participants were to give a translation of the target word in their L1 or explain it in English. Two weeks later, the same two tests were repeated to ensure a lasting effect of the sessions. The result showed that the Focus on FormS condition gave significantly higher results than Focus on Form. In the incidental FonFs session, 72% of the word meanings were retained, compared with FonF, where only 47% were retained. However, the second part where intentional learning was in focus, the immediate recall of word meaning (L1-L2) were 87% (FonF) and 88% (FonFs).

Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2015) examined the retention of new words, and specifically “the effect of type of task and number of encounters, and their combination on incidental L2 word learning over time.” (p.5). The participants were 185 post-high-school learners who were studying English for the purpose of further academic studies. Three different tasks (‘Reading only’, ‘Reading + Focus on Form’, and ‘Reading with one encounter in text + Focus on Forms’) and three different ‘number of encounters’ (‘[b]etween 6 & 9 times’, ‘[b]etween 12 & 15 times’, and ‘[b]etween 18 & 21 times’) which resulted in nine main combinations. The aim was for the learners to learn 30 target words. The result showed that *Reading with Focus on Form* required a considerably smaller ‘number of encounters’ than *Reading only* to produce similar or better scores. The conclusion was that besides extensive reading, “a course also needs to include word focused vocabulary learning, because the effects of such learning are so strong” (p. 23).

In a review article by Schmitt (2008), he examined the current stand on vocabulary teaching and learning of the research field in question. Schmitt reviewed articles regarding 1) *Issues in vocabulary acquisition and pedagogy* which include the importance of wordform, the role of the L1 in L2 vocabulary learning, engagement with vocabulary and phrasal vocabulary, 2) *Intentional learning of vocabulary* which include the use activities that maximize learner engagement with target lexical items, maximize repeated exposures to target lexical items, and consider which aspects of lexical knowledge to focus upon), and 3) *Incidental learning of vocabulary* which includes the effectiveness of incidental vocabulary learning from reading, number of exposures necessary to promote incidental learning from reading, incidental learning from listening, inferencing from context, glossing, and adding explicit activities to implicit learning situations. According to Schmitt (2008), the main basis for more efficient vocabulary learning is to “increase the amount of engagement learners have with lexical items” (p. 352). To add on that, Nation’s (2001, p. 81) overview of several

studies concludes that to ‘learn’ words, a range between *five to more than 20 repeated encounters* are necessary. This notion that a word needs to be encountered many times and in a variety of contexts to be remembered and added to long-time memory is well supported (Aitchison, 2012; Nation, 2006; Nation & Gu, 2007). Through the results of the review, Schmitt concluded that “[v]ocabulary learning programs need to include both an explicit, intentional learning component and a component based around maximizing exposure and incidental learning”. He further suggests that the four strands provided by Nation (2001) (meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language focused learning, and fluency development) would give a structure where both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning could be integrated.

## Morphological Awareness and Its Connection to Reading

### 3.2 Comprehension and Vocabulary Expansion

One of the aspects of Nation’s (2001) strand *language-focused learning* is to enhance learners’ morphological awareness. During the last decade, there has been an upswing in research concerning morphological awareness and its positive effects on vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension. However, the interest in researching this skill and its positive effects started with research on learners with English as L1.

One pioneering project that sought to investigate morphological awareness in L1 learning was Carlisle (2000). He examined to what extent reading comprehension is dependent on 1) awareness of morphological structure, 2) the ability to read morphologically complex words, and 3) knowledge of the meanings of morphologically complex words. The participants were 34 third graders and 25 fifth graders in a middle- to upper-middle-class suburban community in the U.S. Three tests were used: the first was a word-reading test where the purpose was to assess the students’ ability to read morphologically complex words (e.g., *movement*, *powerful*, *puzzlement*). The second part was used to evaluate the morphological structure awareness of the students by asking them to 1) decompose derived words, and 2) complete a sentence by producing a derived word. In the final part, the subjects were interviewed and asked to give the meaning of a word, to use it in a sentence, and if needed, chose a meaning from a multiple-choice set. The results of these three tests were compared with the results of two tests establishing the subjects’ vocabulary size and their reading comprehension skills. Through this comparison, Carlisle concluded that the

awareness of structure and meaning, and the ability to read derived words, contributed significantly to the comprehension of words, as well as the comprehension of texts.

Furthermore, Ku and Anderson (2003) investigated morphological awareness, vocabulary size, and reading proficiency of 256 American L1 students in elementary school, as well as 412 Chinese speaking students in Taiwan. The aims of this study were to compare morphological awareness of English-speaking children and Chinese-speaking children and examine whether there are “aspects of morphological knowledge that are important for one language but not for the other”. Six tests were used: 1) the *Recognize Morphemes Test* (they were to judge whether two words were related in meaning, e.g., *teacher* and *teach*), 2) the *Discriminate Morphemes Test* (they were to examine three words consisting of the same word part, e.g., *classroom*, *bedroom*, and *mushroom*, and then identify the one which did not share the same meaning as the other two), the 3) *Select Interpretations Test* (they had to choose the most suitable definition of 16 low-frequency derived and compound words which included high-frequency base words), 4) the *Judge Pseudowords Test* (a receptive test where the participants were to judge whether or not a pseudoword was semantically plausible, e.g. possible compound as *cowhouse*, and ill-formed compounds as *mansmall*), 5) the *Select Vocabulary Test* (a general vocabulary test in the checklist format), and 6) the *Reading Comprehension Test*. The results of these tests suggested that “[c]hildren who are good readers for their age are aware of the information in word parts” (p. 419). It also confirmed that there is a strong link between morphological awareness and both reading comprehension as well as vocabulary knowledge in both languages.

Nagy et al. (2006) examined morphological awareness and literacy outcomes of 607 L1 English speaking students in grade four through nine. Morphological awareness was measured through a *Suffix Choice Test* and a *Morphological Relatedness Test*. Measurements of literacy outcomes were carried out through several tests measuring reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, spelling, and the ability to morphologically decode words (including both existing and pseudowords). The results showed that the ability of students of all grades regarding reading comprehension, reading of vocabulary of all grades and spelling were significantly and uniquely contributed to their morphological awareness. Nagy et al. (2006) made a comparison of their data to the data found in Ku and Anderson (2003) which further supported the findings of Nagy et al. (2006) concluding that “[h]igher levels of morphological awareness are associated with greater accuracy and fluency in decoding morphologically complex words, which would in turn contribute to greater comprehension.” (p. 144).

Kieffer and Lesaux (2008) sought to examine whether the conclusions made by Carlisle (2000) and Nagy et al. (2006) could be true for ESL learners as well, i.e. that students' awareness of variation of English derivational morphology can explain different levels of skills regarding reading comprehension, and that "morphological awareness would contribute to explaining reading comprehension over and above the contributions of vocabulary, word reading, and phonological awareness" (Kieffer and Lesaux, 2008, p.789). The 87 students participating in the study had Spanish as their L1 and was in fourth and fifth grade. During kindergarten and first grade, Spanish was the instructional language used by their teachers. By the fourth grade, approximately 80 percent of the instructions were spoken in English and 20 percent Spanish, and by the fifth grade, they were instructed in English only. The morphological awareness of the students was tested by asking the students to extract the base from a derived word in order to complete a sentence, (e.g., students were given the word *popularity* and requested to complete the sentence: *The girl wanted to be very \_\_\_\_\_*). To test reading comprehension, the students were asked to provide a missing word from a paragraph orally. In addition to that, the fifth-graders did an extra reading comprehension test, which contained a short reading passage and answered multiple-choice questions. The result showed that derivational morphology awareness of both fourth and fifth grade correlated to their vocabulary breadth, which would support the hypothesis of a relationship between morphological awareness and word learning, as well as a morphological awareness direct effect on reading comprehension.

### 3.3

#### Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Only a small number of studies has been conducted with the aims to investigate teachers' belief and practices on vocabulary teaching and learning. Zhang (2008) conducted an investigation into EFL teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction. It aimed to understand the teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning and teaching, as well as "the relationship between their knowledge of vocabulary instruction and vocabulary teaching practices, and the sources of their knowledge about vocabulary instruction" (p. 1). There were three methods used with each of the seven participants: semi-structured interviews (five interviews per participant, 35 in total), classroom observations (four times 1.5 hours per person during a 14-week time span), and stimulated recall (two per participant where they were to, through a video recording, "re-visit" and explain actions he/she conducted in the classroom at that time). One of the more interesting results of the study was that all seven participants had well-



qualified knowledge of EFL vocabulary regarding almost all the aspects of knowing a word. They also expressed well-established beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning, and their beliefs were also in line with how they practiced vocabulary teaching. For example, they all stated that knowing a word “is associated with four components: its pronunciation, form, meaning, and usage” (p.132), and agreed that teaching vocabulary mostly included these same components, with the addition of stress, word formation, syntactic structure, and collocations. Some of the techniques for teaching vocabulary which were more or less shared by the seven participants were: 1) *Introducing a word in context* 2) *Making a sentence* 3) *Reading words aloud in class*, and 4) *Definition*. One of the views which were strongly shared by five of the seven participants was that:

Knowing word formation, you can quickly become familiar with the words concerned. For example, if you know the root astro- in astronaut, it's easy for you to recognize or learn other words like astronomy, astrology, and asterisk. This way is much more effective than vocabulary recitation in isolation.

(Lili, Interview 1, September 22,  
2006, in Zhang, 2008, p. 156)

The classroom observations showed that these five teachers frequently used the technique of word formation analysis. The two teachers who did not use the technique of word formation considered it to be an important strategy for vocabulary development; however, they had found it to be too boring to teach. Zhang concluded that the knowledge of the teachers regarding what students should learn about English vocabulary, primarily focused on three aspects: the process and components that learning a word involves, the selection of words for learning, and the receptive and productive knowledge of a word. The participants, all but one, felt that they did not have the right knowledge to teach vocabulary efficiently.

A similar study was conducted by Tran (2011), where he examined the perception of vocabulary learning strategies (SVL) of ESL teachers in Vietnam. The group of participants consisted of 49 ESL teachers with five or more years of experience in teaching. A mixed-method approach of both a quantitative and a qualitative method was used; the participant answered a questionnaire concerning their beliefs, and seven of the 49 also participated in semi-structured interviews. One of the results of this study was that teachers valued vocabulary learning strategies such as *guessing words from context and look for a word's meaning in a monolingual dictionary* (p. 254). The strategy of *connecting words with a*

*synonym or antonym* was also widely used by the participating teachers. The quantitative data showed that all the participants agreed, more or less, with the statements that “Vocabulary learning strategies (or ways to learn words) are extremely important” and “Vocabulary plays an extremely important role in English language learning”. All but three agreed that “Reading is a powerful way to improve vocabulary” and all but two agreed that “guessing words from context is an excellent strategy for foreign language learning”. The statement which the participants were most ambiguous to was “A word is learned when learners know its meaning”. Almost half (42.7%) answered that they agreed, and the other half answered that they did not agree (57.3%) (p. 277). All but one of the seven interviewed participants reported that they had not received training in teaching vocabulary, and all of them stated that “they learned to teach vocabulary on their own through their teaching experience” (p. 391).

Gerami & Noordin (2013) investigated the cognition of four male Iranian high-school English language teachers through five semi-structured in-depth interviews and classroom observations field during one semester. This study aimed to investigate the teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and insights of vocabulary teaching, as well to investigate whether Iranian high school English language teachers' vocabulary teaching was in agreement with their beliefs system. Their findings showed that these teachers expressed beliefs about vocabulary teaching, which were in line with the current stand on how to teach vocabulary. For example, all four of them expressed the necessity for teaching about vocabulary learning to develop their students' awareness about word formation, as well as the importance of repetition, contextualization, learning in chunks, fluency practice and so on. However, the classroom observations showed that the techniques mostly used were translation to L1, reading out loud and bare word memorization. Techniques such as word-formation and the use of dictionaries were limited to a general introduction and questions from students, and exercises on pronunciation were used rarely and only on especially difficult words. In the interviews, the teachers stated that their beliefs were not coherent with their teaching practice, and that was, according to teachers, due to the students' lack of sufficient learning strategies.

A more recent study conducted by Rossiter, Abbott, & Kushnir (2016) aimed to explore adult ESL teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and instructional practices. They assembled an online survey which was answered by 30 ESL teachers in Canada with five or more years of teaching experience. The survey dealt with six themes: teacher knowledge of selected vocabulary research findings, assessment of vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary teaching techniques, vocabulary learning strategies, repetition and retention, and vocabulary learning

resources. The study found that there were discrepancies between current research and the participants' beliefs. According to Rossiter, Abbott, & Kushnir (2016), this would suggest that “instructors’ teaching would benefit from a deeper understanding of evidence-based best practices” (p. 12). Areas where the teachers lacked knowledge were, for example, the benefits of extensive reading, assessment, technology, and dictionary choice, use, and training.

In Sweden, a study which examined learners’ perceptions of vocabulary learning was conducted by Norberg, Vikström, and Kibry (2018). Nineteen students who studied English in the ninth grade in Swedish compulsory school were interviewed. Their answers involved thoughts on word knowledge, decontextualized knowledge, and contextualized knowledge. They were also asked about the strategies which they used when learning new words. A majority of the students explained that they learned words through vocabulary lists each week, where memorization and translating words without context were used. Only three of nineteen students expressed an awareness of complex strategies in learning words which, according to the researchers, includes a combination of different strategies. Even though this study does not examine teachers’ views on vocabulary learning and teaching, the thoughts from these students are a reflection of the teachers’ beliefs and practice, and it is thus conducted in the same context as the present paper.

## 4 Method

The method for this study is based on a mainly quantitative survey in the form of a questionnaire, which, according to Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010), is an excellent method for examining attitudes. One of the benefits of choosing a quantitative method is that it is an effective way to gather a large amount of data. With a large amount of data, the result could be generalized to a greater extent than if one would have used a qualitative method like interviews. Since the research area is relatively unexplored, a quantitative method is preferable because it can create a solid foundation of data on which further and more qualitative studies could be based (Barmark & Djurfeldt, 2015).

### Participants

The participants of the survey were English teachers in lower and upper secondary school, representing a sample of convenience. In the earlier mentioned study by Rossiter, Abbott, and Kushnir (2016), *experience* was used as a criterion because of the notion that “pre-service and novice teachers often have knowledge and beliefs that differ greatly from those of experienced teachers” (p. 6). This notion was taken into consideration by the researcher in this current study, but it was decided that teachers of English no-matter their years of experience would be invited. The experience will, however, serve as a factor when analyzing the results of the survey.

Seventy-one EFL teachers in Sweden answered the survey. Thirty of the respondents taught lower secondary school (years 6 to 9), 35 taught upper secondary school (levels 5-7) and 6 of the participants taught both in lower and upper secondary school. Out of the 71 participants, 23 had worked between 0-5 years as a teacher, 14 had worked for 5-10 years, 18 for 10-15 years, 9 for 15-20 years and 7 of them had worked as a teacher for more than 20 years (see figure 1).

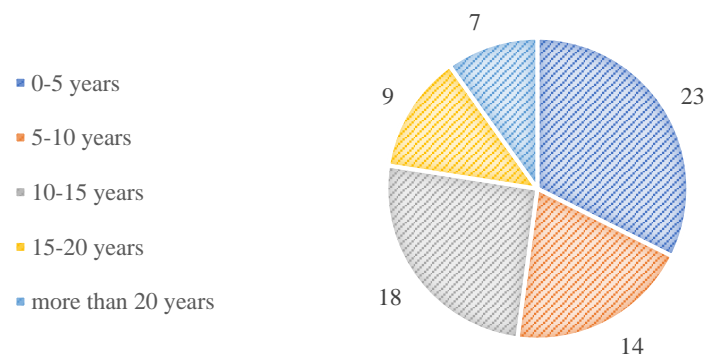
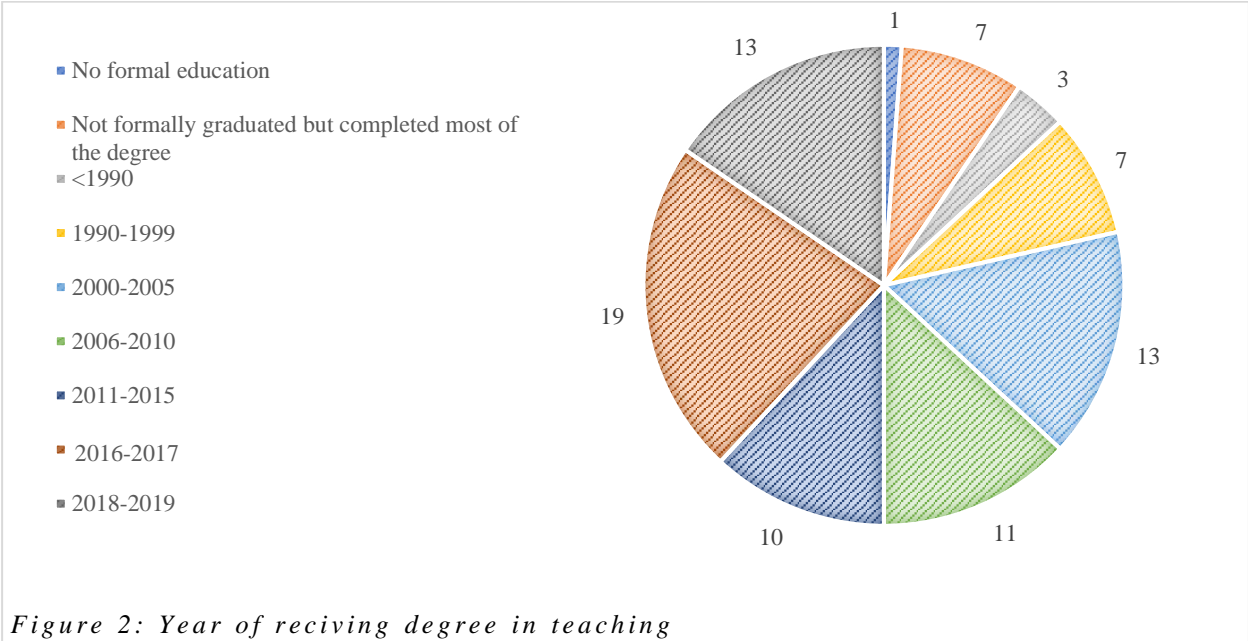


Figure 1: Years of teaching

Figure 2 shows the years of teaching ranged from before the 90s up to today. Only one of the 71 participants did not have a degree (see figure 2), and they had been working for 0-5 years as a teacher. Seven of the participants reported that they had not completed their formal teaching education. Four of these reported that they have been teaching between 0-5 years, one reported to have taught for 10-15 years and the last reported to have taught for 15-20 years.



4.2

**Material**

The questionnaire constructed for this study (see Appendix) was made using Google Forms. This program was chosen due to it being both free of charge and easy to use.

When composing the questions for the survey, the intention was to create questions which were easy to understand and easy to answer. Therefore, multiple choice questions were mostly used where one could have chosen to use open-ended questions. To avoid the frustration for participants of encountering a question with no appropriate answers, the option of writing an answer of your own was added to these questions. Likert-type scales, check-all-that-apply were also used, as well as some open-ended questions where participants were asked to elaborate. For instance, they were asked several times to give examples to illustrate an earlier answer in a multiple-choice question, explain why they answered the way they did on previous questions or simply to ask whether or not they had anything to add to the section in question. All the questions were constructed in such a way that it always asked about the

participants' feelings towards or thoughts on their knowledge; no questions had any correct or incorrect answers.

The survey was composed of seven sections. The first one contained some general information to the participant, including the aim of the research, and a request for the participants to leave their email address for the purpose of limiting the chance that one person would answer several times. The second section included questions about their teaching background, such as years of teaching experience, teacher education, and the levels of which the participants teach. No question was asked about gender or age since it had nothing to do with the aims of the survey. Questions were asked about whether or not the participant teaches another language, and in such case: which language/s.

The third section of the survey aimed to investigate English teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning. Questions concerned the participant's interest in theories, their thoughts on time spent on vocabulary teaching, their knowledge of their students' vocabulary size, and their definition of '*knowing a word*.' This last part of '*knowing a word*' was constructed with Nation's definition in mind. The participants were asked to rank each of the aspects within the concepts of *form*, *meaning*, and *use* from 1 (less important) to 7 (very important). However, since the question of the participants' knowledge of their students' vocabulary size is not relevant to the research questions of this paper, the results concerning this question will not be included in this paper.

The fourth part concerned the testing of vocabulary. The fifth aimed to investigate teachers' knowledge about morphological awareness. The final section sought to investigate the participants' thoughts on how their beliefs affect their teaching practice. In this last section, one open ended-question was included where the participant could write if they had anything to add to the whole survey.

The final version of the survey was sent to four test-participants with teaching experience. The purpose of piloting a survey is to identify 1) problems in clarity of the directions and 2) which parts could be difficult or confusing (McKay, 2006, p. 41). They test-participants answered the survey without any interference from the researcher. After the final feedback from these participants, and some rephrasing of questions, the survey was ready to be published.

## Procedure

A link to the survey was posted in several language teacher groups on Facebook, as well as sent to teachers known to the researcher. When asked if they were willing to participate in the study, they were also asked to send a link to the survey to colleagues and other teachers in their area, following a snowball sampling technique. The purpose of this was to recruit as many informants as possible to take part in the study. Because of a low number of respondents from teachers from upper secondary school, a request per email was sent to 101 upper secondary schools. These schools were chosen from a list provided by the Swedish National Agency for Education where every 10<sup>th</sup> school was sent an invitation to participate in the study. A reminder was sent to each school after a week, and at the same time, a reminder was also posted in the Facebook-groups for teachers of English in Sweden.

## Analysis

The analysis process started as soon as the data had been gathered. First of all, the data was inserted into an excel spreadsheet where the email addresses were checked so that no address appeared more than once. Then, all the email addresses were deleted. In the second step, the answers to each question were summarized so to get an overview of the participants' answers. The answers to the quantitative questions were analyzed as a whole, as well as in parts where general factors such as time spent working as a teacher, levels of English taught, and specific factors such as the participants own perceived knowledge level of theories about vocabulary teaching, were analyzed together. The quantitative parts of the survey, where the informants answered open-ended questions, were analyzed through a thematization method where the theoretical framework such as “Nation’s four strands” and Nation’s three parts of “knowing a word” were used. To find a pattern, answers to several questions, both the qualitative and the quantitative, were compared with each other.

## Reliability and Validity

With validity in mind, the questionnaire was composed in such a way that the questions and the terminology used would not be misinterpreted. As described earlier, four teachers were asked to answer the last version of the survey and give feedback on it. However, as always with questionnaires, the respondent’s perceptions and preconceived ideas alongside possible

compliance bias may affect their response (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Limitations like these are difficult to eliminate completely.

When constructing the questionnaire, there was an intention to keep it short and concise in order to lower the possible risk of respondents losing interest, a fatigue effect. This intention was weighed against the prospect of a sufficient amount of qualitative data. This aspect was also commented on by the four test-participants.

The reliability of a study is dependent on a transparent method which another researcher easily could replicate. The use of a questionnaire as the method for gathering data makes it easy to replicate. To further strengthen the reliability, the method of analyzing the data has been described in detail in this chapter of the paper.

## Ethical Considerations

4.6 When constructing a survey like this, it is of utmost importance that the participants trust the researcher to keep the answers anonymous or confidential. Therefore, the survey did not ask for a name, gender, sex, age, or school in which they work. This decision was made with ethical considerations in mind, as well as the intention to make an easily answered questionnaire which did not make the participants in any way feel uncomfortable. However, for the purpose of controlling whether or not a participant answered more than once they were asked to leave an email address at the beginning of the survey, however, the addresses were later erased to minimize the risk of affecting the analysis process in any way, as well as to keep the information confidential.



# 5 Results

In this section of the paper, the results of the study will be reported. It is primarily divided into two parts; the first part focusing on teachers' beliefs, and the second on their practice.

## Teachers' Beliefs on Vocabulary Teaching and Learning

### 5.1.1 The self-reported knowledge of vocabulary teaching and learning

When asked on a scale of 1-10 how knowledgeable the participants estimated they are about vocabulary teaching and learning, the mean value of the participant was 6.3 (see figure 3). Zero participants answered neither the *highest* nor the *lowest* on the scale. Only two chose a "2" or "3" on the scale. Thirty-six respondents answered that they felt *quite* knowledgeable (7-9), and almost as many, 33 respondents, answered that they were *more or less* knowledgeable (4-6).

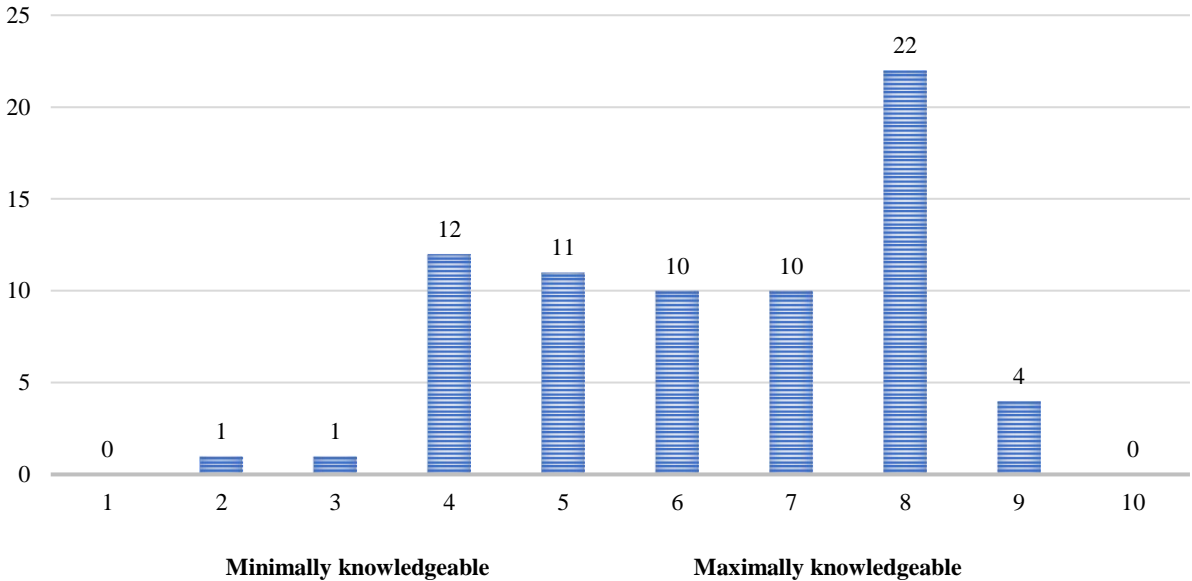


Figure 3: Teachers' perception about their own knowledge about vocabulary teaching and learning

When dividing the group by years of experience, as in shown in figure 4, the result shows that over half of the respondents who have been teaching for 5-10 years feel that they are quite knowledgeable, while the other half did not feel especially knowledgeable. The mean value was 6.3.

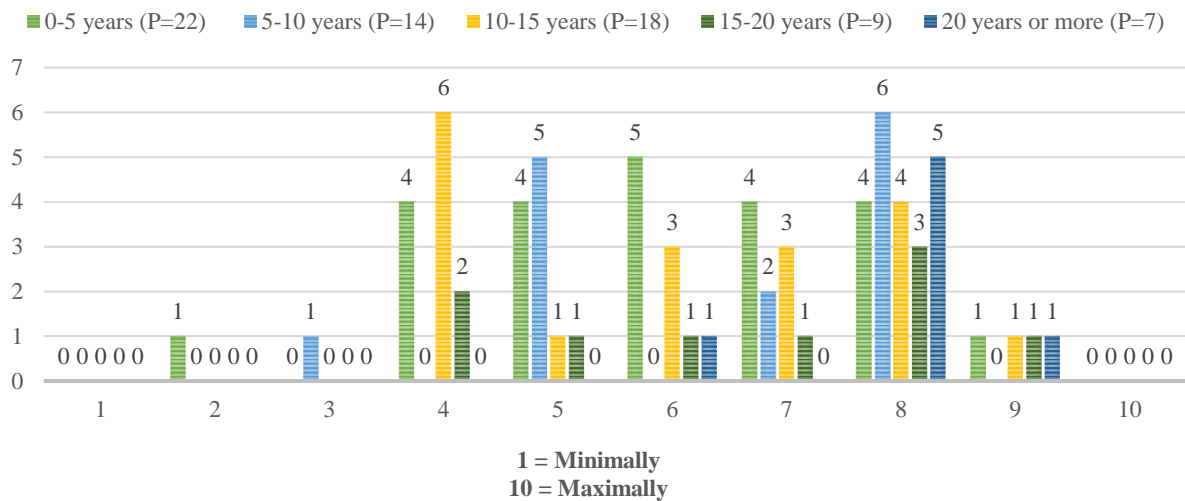


Figure 4: How knowledgeable do the groups feel?

Regarding the question of how interested the respondents estimated they were in theories on vocabulary learning and teaching, as shown here in figure 5, eight answered that it is the *most interesting aspect of teaching*. Fourteen out of 71 chose to answer on the lower side of the spectrum, and 57 answered on the higher side. The mean value for this question was 6.9 out of 10.

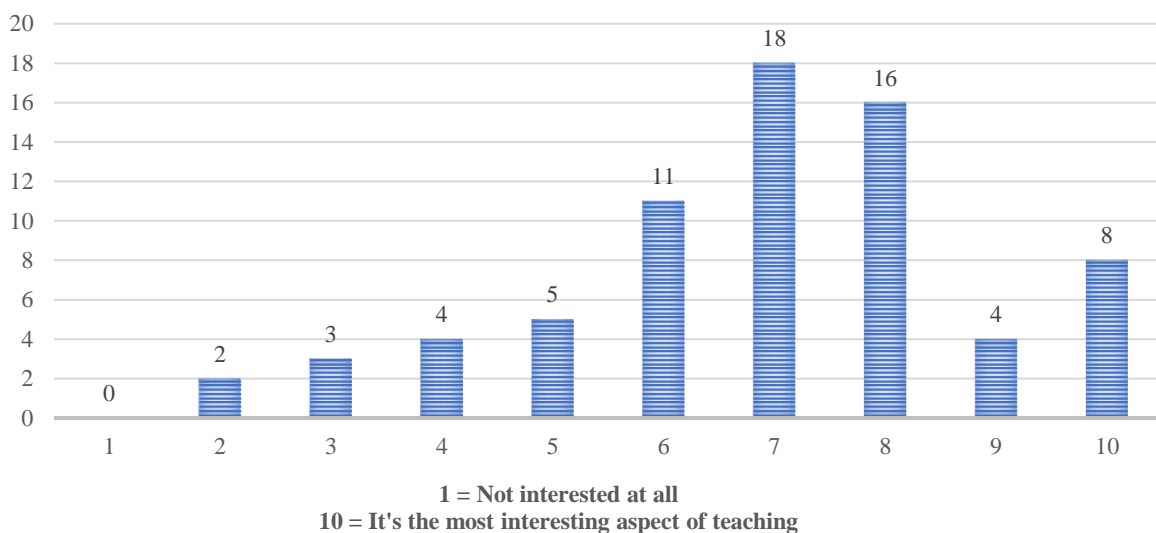


Figure 5: How interested are teachers in theory on vocabulary teaching and learning?

When examining this question with the different groups of teaching experience in mind, the result shows that there was a wide variety of answers within the groups (see figure 6). No

patterns could be found that suggest that participants with a certain number of years of experience are more or less interested in theories on vocabulary teaching and learning.

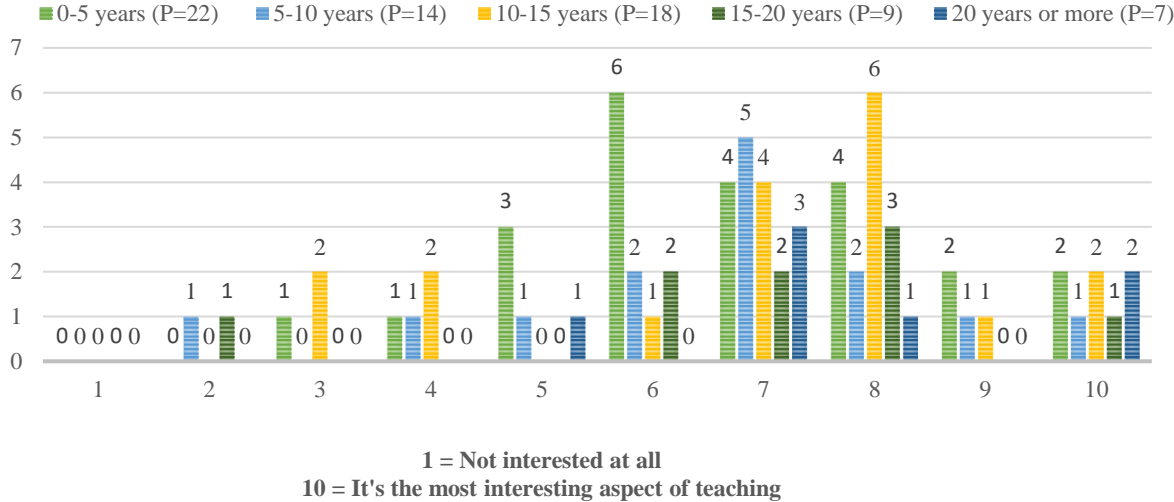


Figure 6: How interested in theory are the groups with different amount of experience?

### 5.1.2 Time spent on vocabulary teaching

As figure7 shows, all participants answered that they do spend time teaching vocabulary in class. Seven answered *not very often*, 22 answered that *average*, 33 answered *often*, and nine answered *very often*. The mean value was 3.6. It is worth noting that the survey did not include a question on how many minutes in a week/month/term they actually spend on vocabulary.

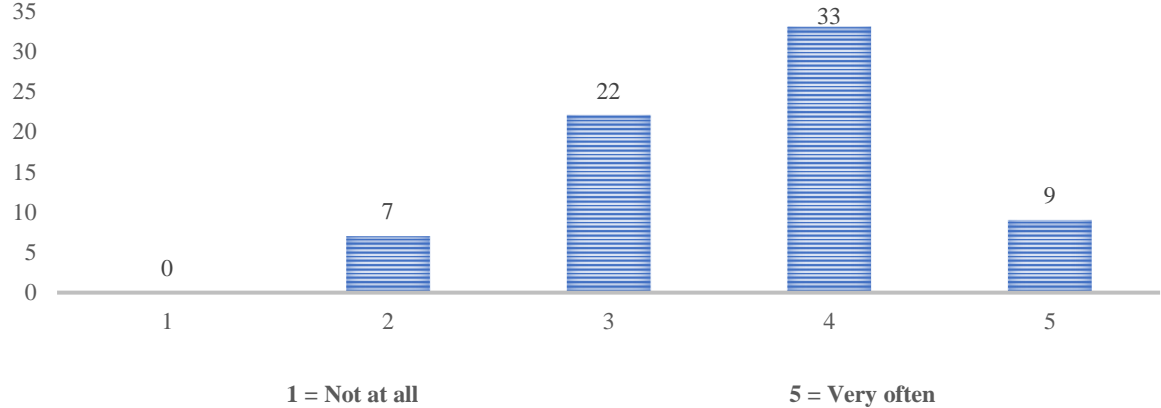


Figure 7: Time spent on vocabulary in class

The participants were asked to report on why they thought they spend or do not spend time on vocabulary *in class*. The free written answers were analyzed and organized so to get an overview. As shown in figure 8, most of the group wrote an answer which positioned them positive towards teaching vocabulary in the classroom (P=53). Within this group, two categories could be found: the answers from the first group, consisting of 31 participants, included highly affirmative words and phrases such as *crucial, important, necessary* and *well used time*, and the answers from the second group (P=23) included less but still significantly affirmative words and phrases such as *its needed*. Nine of the participants wrote answers which were interpreted as negative in the sense that they did not teach vocabulary in the classroom. Most of these answers stated that the respondents found vocabulary teaching “important” or “needed” but that they, for example, had to “prioritize other things”.

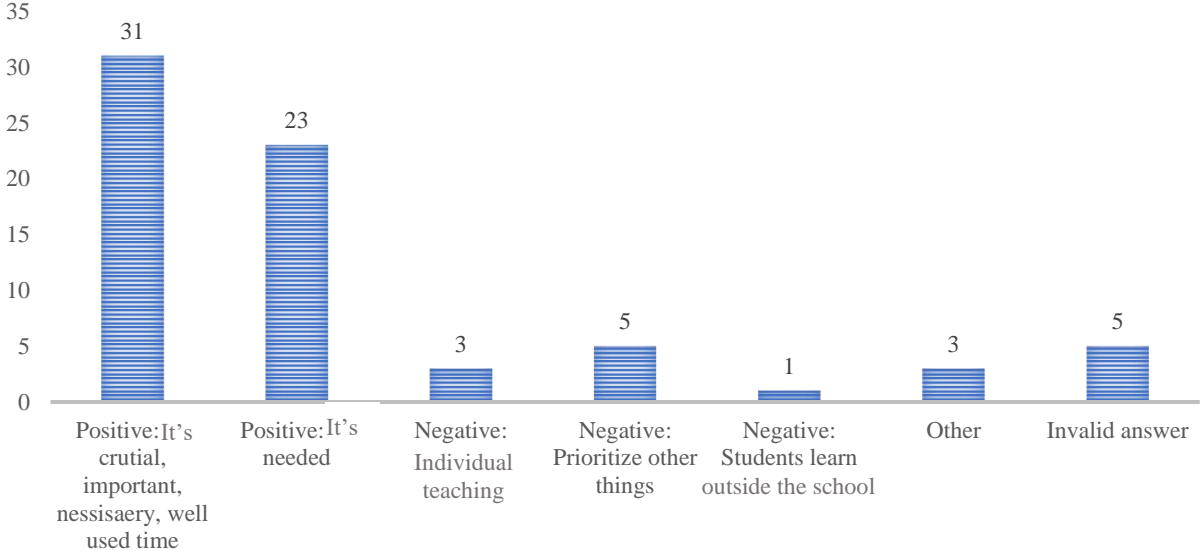


Figure 8: Why do you or don't you spend time in class on vocabulary teaching?

Regarding whether or not teachers feel that they spend *enough* time on vocabulary teaching, thirty-three respondents answered that they think they spend enough time, while 32 respondents think they do not spend enough time (see figure 9).

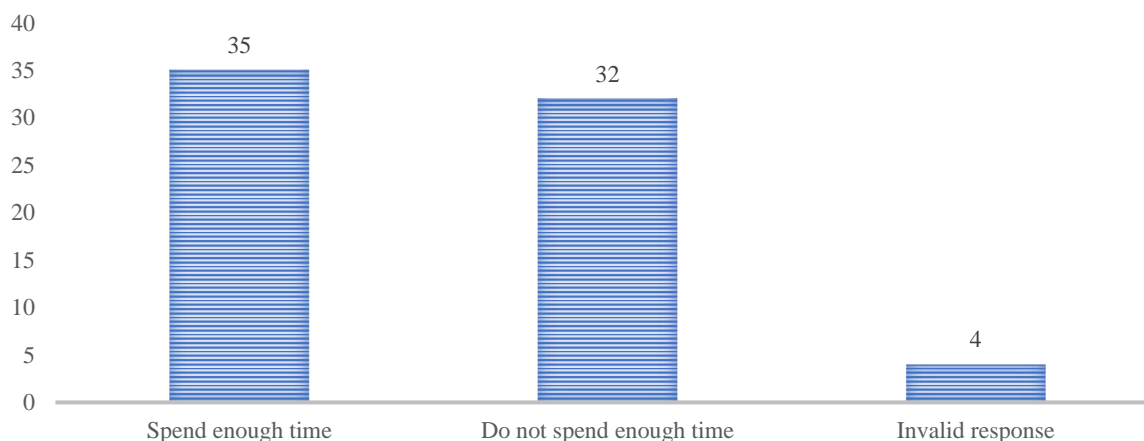


Figure 9: Do teachers think they spend enough time on vocabulary teaching?

The participants were asked to elaborate on why they spend or do not spend enough time on vocabulary teaching, which was in the form of an open-ended question. Within the group of participants who think they do *spend enough time* on vocabulary teaching, the form of the responses varied widely. Eight of them argued that they *work with vocabulary every lesson/week*, and that is why they spend enough time. The rest of the respondents did not answer the question, but instead gave examples of methods that they use in their vocabulary teaching.

The group who *did not think they spent enough time on vocabulary* elaborated to a greater extent on their thoughts. As figure 10 shows, most of them felt that they lacked time. One respondent answered: “[i]t's important but I don't have enough time at my disposal to work with vocabulary more than I already do. Besides, students learn vocabulary in a lot of other ways in their spare time “. This same respondent answered to the question of *time spent teaching vocabulary in the classroom* with a (3) out of (5). This means that even though this participant thinks he/she spends *more or less* time in class on teaching vocabulary, he/she still thinks they *do not spend enough time* and in addition, that the students learn vocabulary outside the classroom.

A smaller but still significant group of five participants reported that they lacked sufficient knowledge on the matter. One of them reported that “[w]ith a good vocabulary a student will have a higher fluency in the language overall. The reason I am not spending more time on vocabulary is probably because I have a hard time figuring out how to make it interesting for students and create a real learning opportunity”.

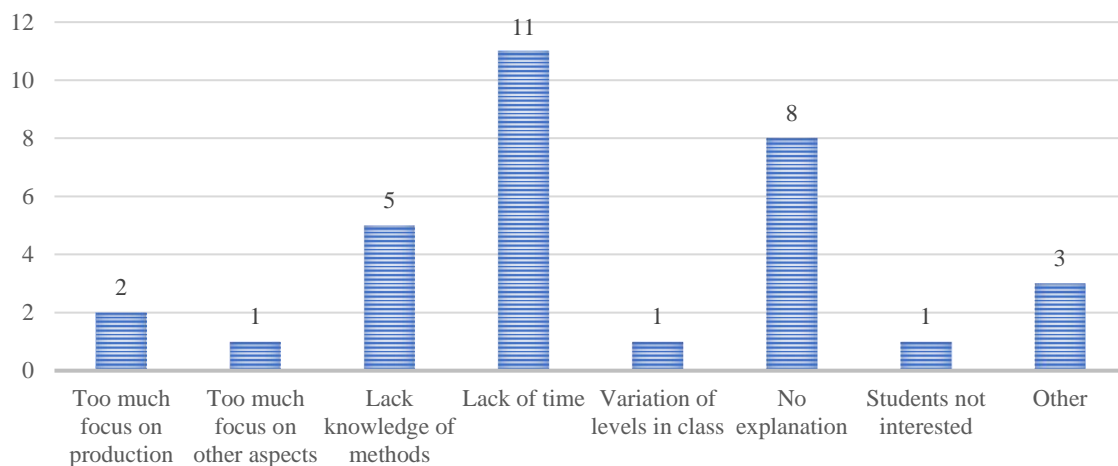


Figure 10: Explanations for why teachers think they do not spend enough time on vocabulary teaching

### 5.1.3 Teachers' knowledge of vocabulary acquisition

When the participants were asked to give a number on how many encounters are needed in order to learn a word, most respondents answered either 4-6 times (N=16) or 10-14 times (N=17) (see figure 11). Eleven out of the 71 respondents answered between one and three encounters, and as many as 10 chose a number higher than 30. The mean value for this question was 13.3.

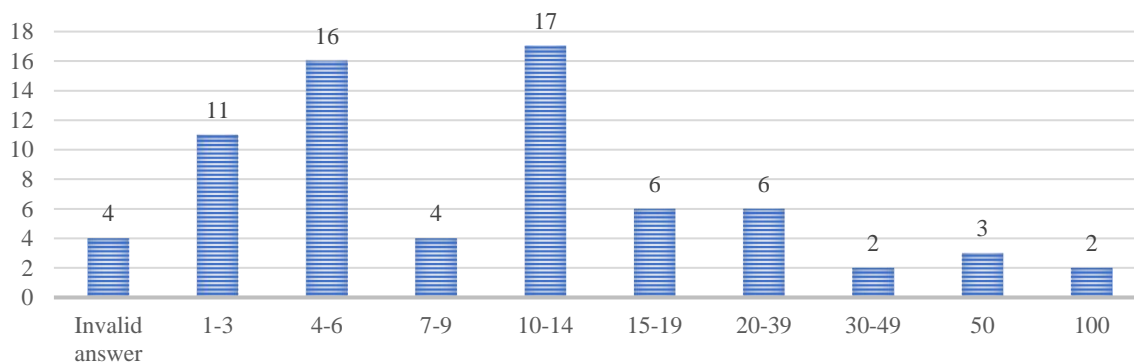


Figure 11: How many encounters of a word is needed in order to learn a word?

### 5.1.4 The definition of knowing a word

The respondents were then asked to rank eleven factors of knowing a word on a scale of one to seven. One was *less important*, and seven was *very important*. As figure 12 shows, most participants reported that *to be able to use it in a sentence* (no. 4) was one of the most

important aspects. Being *able to explain the meaning of the word in English* (no. 11) was also ranked high, together with *be able to use it fluently in conversation*, as well as *in written texts* (no. 8 and no. 7). *To be able to know the words' building blocks* (no. 9) was the one which most respondents answered *less important*.

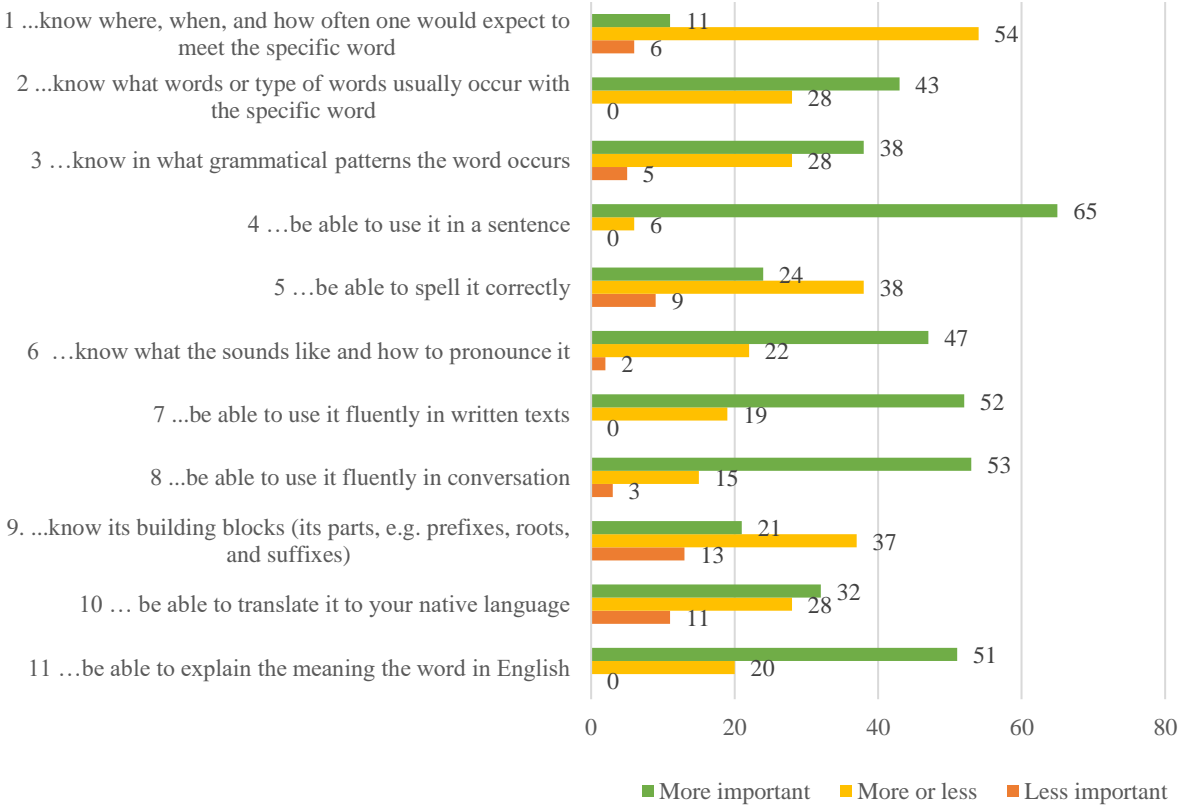


Figure 12: In knowing a word, how important is it to...

As shown in table 4, to be able to use it in a sentence (no. 4) had the highest mean value of 5.5 (out of 7 points), followed by *be able to use it fluently in written texts* which a mean value of 5.1, closely followed by *be able to explain the meaning the word in English* (no 11) which had a mean value of 5.0. The lowest mean value was received by *know where, when, and how often one would expect to meet the specific word* (no 1) and *know its building blocks (its parts, e.g. prefixes, roots, and suffixes)* (no 9) with scores of 3.6 and 3.7.

Table 4: In knowing a word, how important is it to... (in order of importance according to the participants)

In knowing a word, how important is it to...	Mean value
4 ... be able to use it in a sentence	5.5
7 ... be able to use it fluently in written texts	5.1
8 ... be able to use it fluently in conversation	5.0
11 ... be able to explain the meaning the word in English	5.0
2 ... know what words or type of words usually occur with the specific word	4.7
6 ... know what the word sounds like and how to pronounce it	4.7
3 ... know in what grammatical patterns the word occurs	4.3
10 ... be able to translate it to your native language	4.1
5 ... be able to spell it correctly	3.9
9 ... know its building blocks (its parts, e.g. prefixes, roots, and suffixes)	3.7
1 ... know where, when, and how often one would expect to meet the specific word	3.6

The participants could choose to add more information regarding how they define *knowing a word*, which eight of the 71 participants did. However, their answers were either not related to how the respondents define knowing a word, or they were elaborations on the definitions provided in the questionnaire.

### 5.1.5 Morphological awareness

Regarding the question of whether or not the participants had heard the term “morphological awareness” before reading about it in the survey (see appendix 5), 54 answered that they had, eight answered that they had not, and nine answered “maybe” (see figure 13).

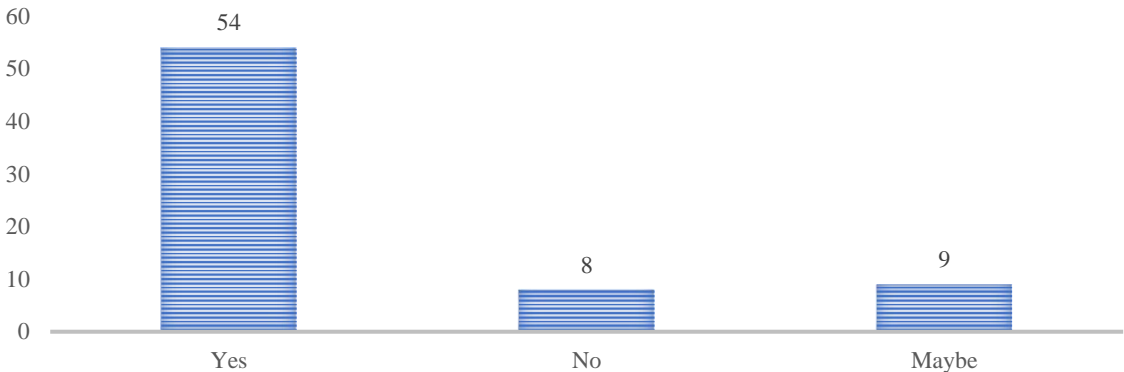


Figure 13: Have you heard of the term morphological awareness before?



It is clear that there is no connection to years of experience and perceived knowledge of the term (see Figure 14).

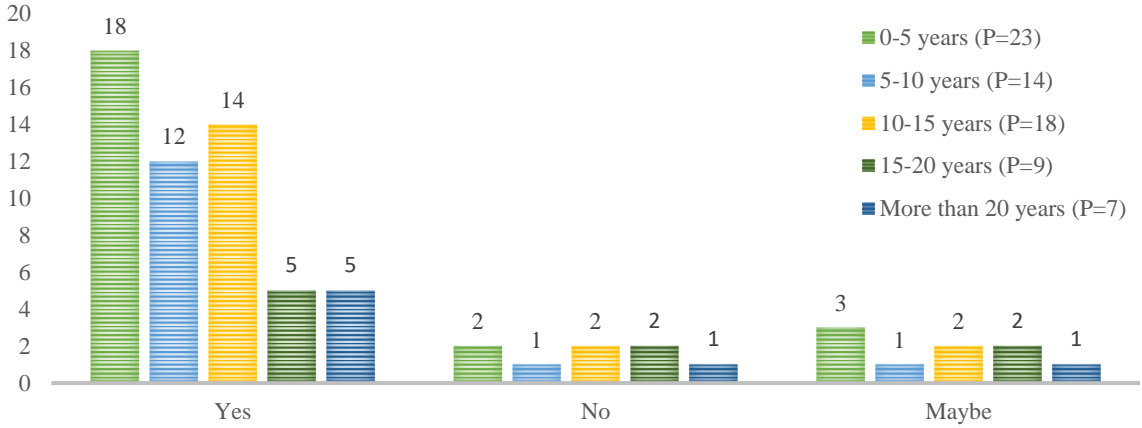


Figure 14: Have you heard of the term morphological awareness before? Divided by years of experience

The participants were also asked to rank this skill in order of how important they think it is. Figure 15 shows that a large majority answered affirmative to this question. Ten respondents ranked the skill with a nine and a ten (ten stating that it is the most important skill of them all), 25 answered a seven or eight, and 26 answered with a six or seven. Out of the 21 participants who answered below six, two reported the skill of morphological awareness not to be important at all. The mean value for this question was 6.3, which shows that the group as a whole still valued this skill as important.

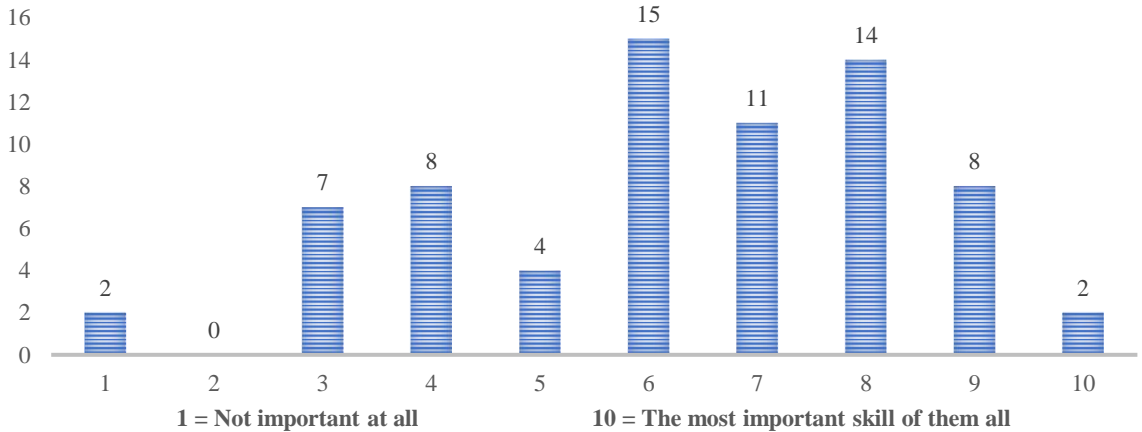


Diagram 15: To what degree do you think that morphological awareness is important for vocabulary expansion?

When asked to describe to what degree they think that their students develop this awareness with the support of their teaching, most of the respondents chose to answer between three and eight (on a scale from one to ten, one being *not at all*, ten being *to the fullest*). Four respondents answered *not at all* (see figure 16). Thirty-three gave an affirmative answer, and thirty-eight chose a negative answer to the question. The mean value was 5.2, which means that the group as a whole still thought that their teaching, to some degree, developed this skill.

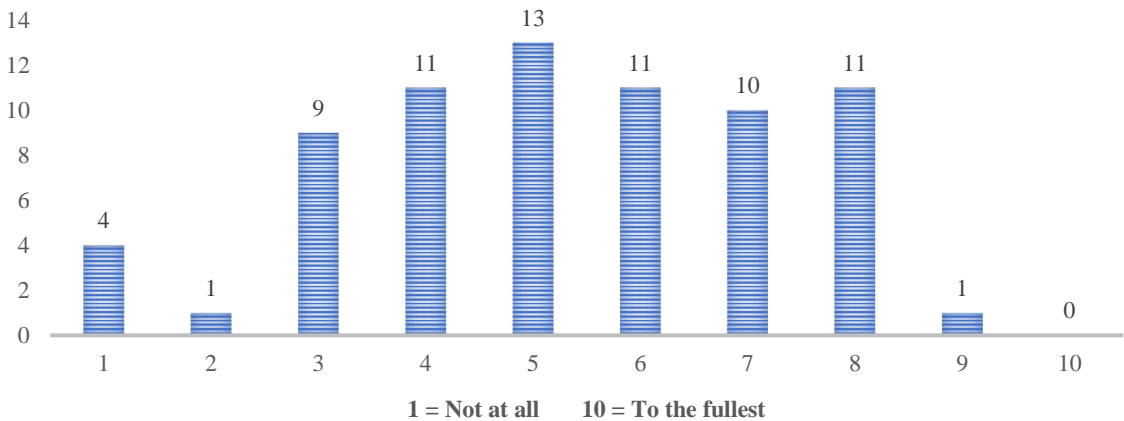


Figure 16: To what degree do you think your students develop this awareness with the support of your teaching?

## 5.2 Teachers’ Reported Practice of Vocabulary Teaching

### 5.2.1 Methods used for vocabulary teaching

When it comes to the question of which methods the respondents use when teaching vocabulary, they were given six methods and asked to rank each from a scale from zero to seven. *Zero* stating that the recipient did not use this method at all, *one* stating they use it less, and *seven* stating that it is the method they use the most. As figure 17 shows, all of the participants use the following methods in their teaching: 1) *Giving students lists of words as homework*, 2) *Listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or giving synonyms in class*, 3) *Simply listening to/reading different texts to expand vocabulary without any production*, and 4) *Listening to/reading texts and discussing the content only*. The methods of *Exercises focused especially on vocabulary and word families*, and *Exercises focused especially on morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem)* was used *less* by 11 and 23 participants respectively, and *not at all* by five and seven participants respectively.

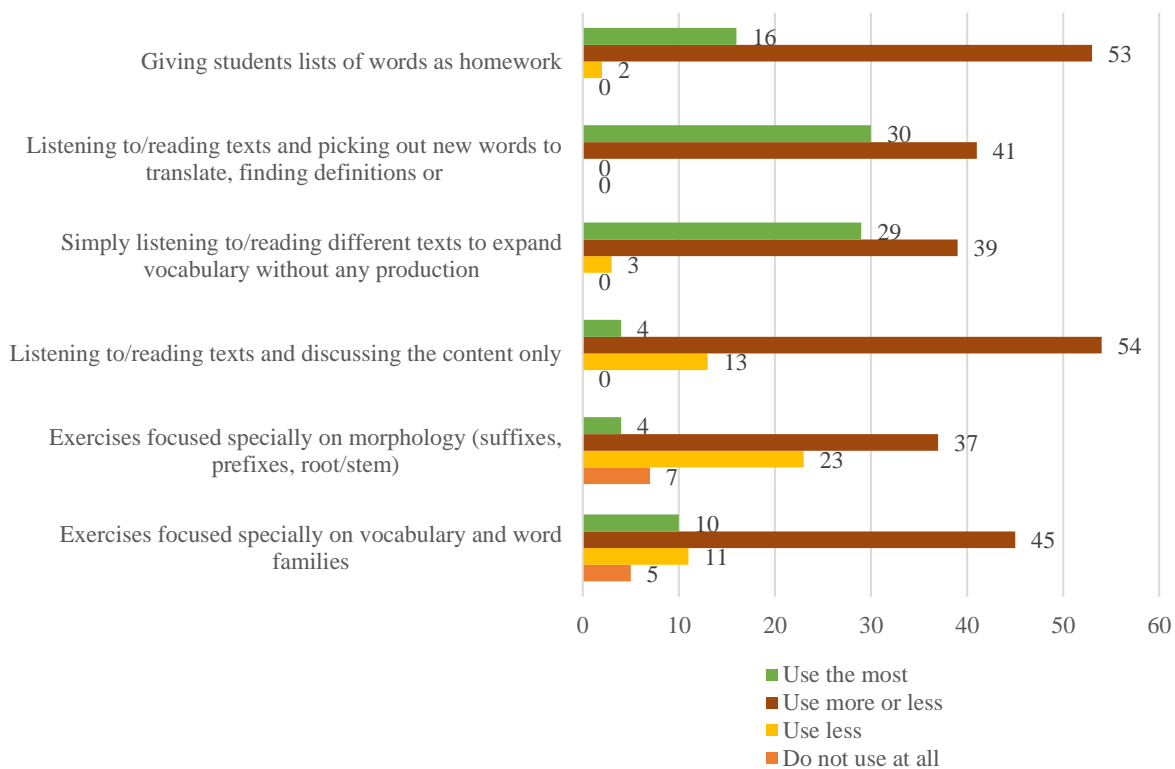


Figure 17: Which methods do the teachers use the most?

As table 5 shows, the two most popular methods with the high mean value of 5.1 and 5.0 were *Listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or synonyms in class* and *Simply listening to/reading different texts to expand vocabulary without any production*. The least used was *Exercises focused specially on morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem)*, with a value of 2.8.

Table 5: Mean value of methods used by participants, ranked from most (7) to least (1) used

	Mean value
Listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or synonyms in class	5.1
Simply listening to/reading different texts to expand vocabulary without any production	5.0
Giving students lists of words as homework	4.8
Exercises focused specially on vocabulary and word families	3.8
Listening to/reading texts and discussing the content only	3.8
Exercises focused specially on morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem)	2.8

The respondents were also given a choice of reporting on other methods they use, which 37 of the 71 chose to do. However, these answers were elaborations on the methods provided by the survey (such as “Brain storming on what Words may be useful in a text about... synonyms, antonyms etc.”, “listen to music and rewrite the missing lyric word” and “Focus on different ways of learning a list of words + encourage the s[t]udents to find words they need to learn themselves”), and did not provide with useful information for this question.

The participants of the survey were asked to express what they felt prioritized most when it comes to vocabulary teaching. The free-written answers were organized and grouped so to illustrate any patterns better (see figure 18). The aspect which was most prioritized by the recipients was *knowing/using/learning in context*. Fourteen of the respondents expressed that this was one of their most prioritized aspects. Next came *meaning, teaching useful or common/specific words*, and *reading*, which all had five responses each.

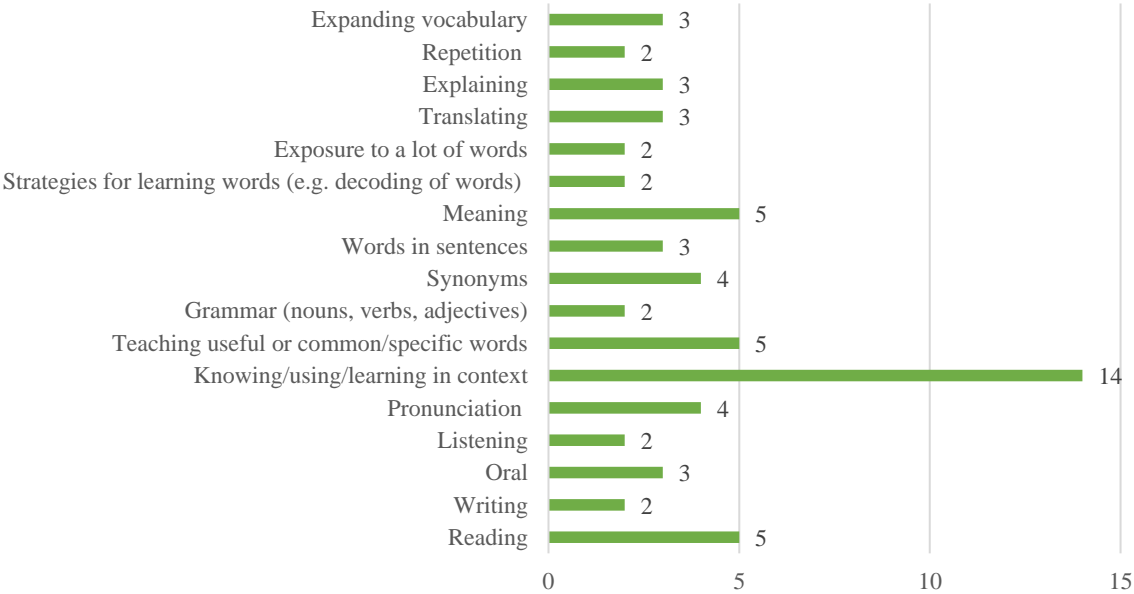


Figure 18: What do you prioritize most when it comes to vocabulary teaching?

### 5.2.2 Testing vocabulary

Regarding testing of vocabulary, participants were asked to specify how often they test specific vocabulary (e.g. in connection to a certain text or movie) as well as general vocabulary. As shown in figure 19, most of the participants (32) answered three on a scale of one to five. Only three answered that they do not test vocabulary at all. The general

vocabulary was tested less compared with specific vocabulary; five participants answered that they test *general* vocabulary *very often*, and nine tested *specific* vocabulary *very often*.

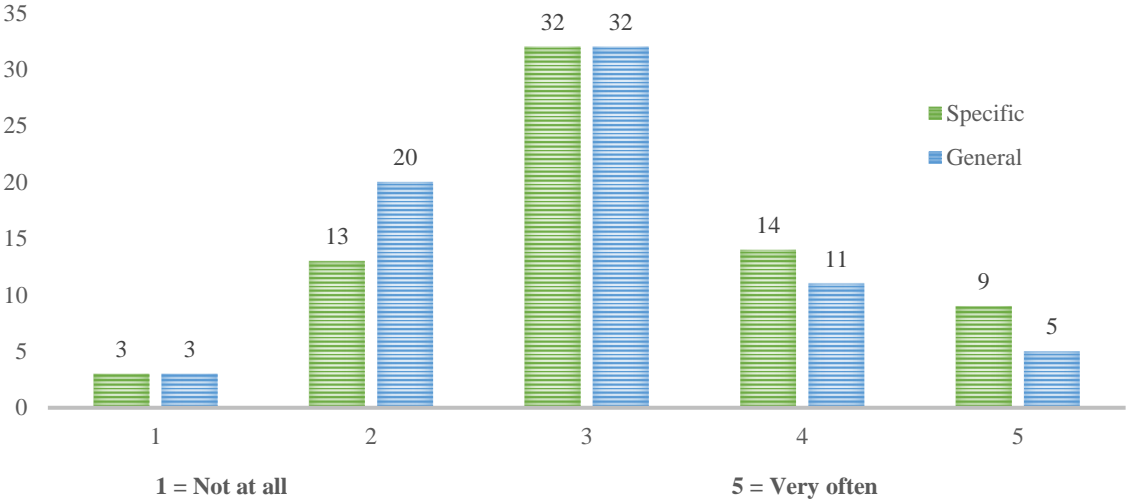


Figure 19: How often do the participants test vocabulary knowlegde?

As figure 20 shows, within the group that teaches English in lower-secondary school (English years 6-9), there is a discrepancy in how often they test vocabulary. Out of these 30 respondents, 13 stated that they test specific vocabulary *fairly often*, one stated that they *do not test vocabulary at all*, five answered that they test it *very often*, two answered *not often*, and nine answered that they test vocabulary *often*. The mean value for this group was 3.5.

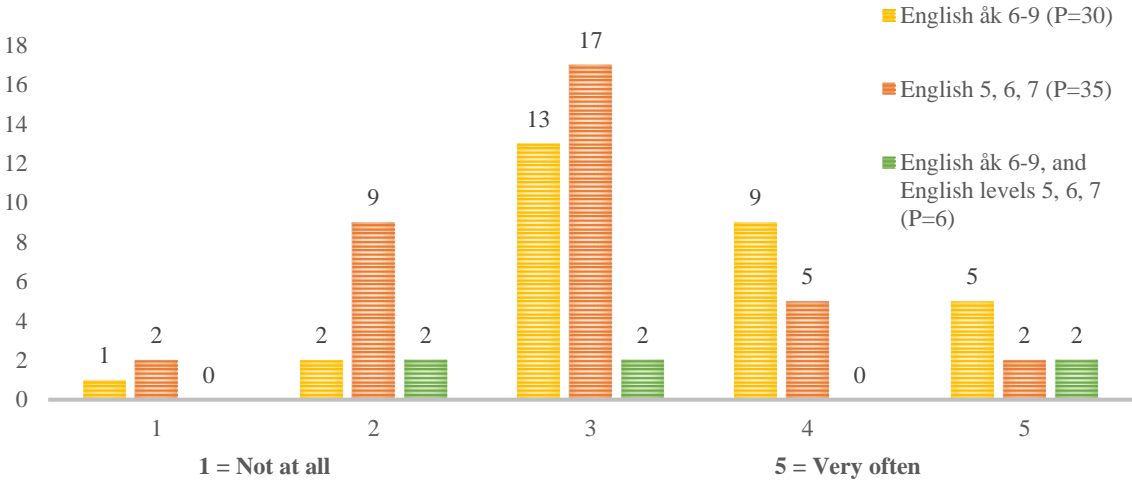


Figure 20: How often do the participants test vocabulary knowlegde?(Divided into teaching levels)

The participants that teach upper-secondary students had a mean value of 2.9. In this group, a similar pattern could be found: the larger part (17 out of 35) test vocabulary *fairly often*, two participants test *very often*, two do *not test at all*, nine do *not test often*, and five test vocabulary *often*. However, this pattern is the reverse of the one of the “English years 6-9”. In the group of participants who teach “English years 6-9”, the majority of the participants that did not answer *fairly often*, answered *often* or *very often* (P=14), whereas in the “English 5, 6, 7” group, more answered *not often* or *not at all* (P=11) than *often* or *very often* (P=7).

When reporting on how many times per year they test vocabulary, seven respondents stated that they test *every lesson*, twenty answered *once a week*, twenty-three answered *once a month*, eleven answered *once per term*, and one answered *never* (see figure 21). The remaining eight gave other answers such as “[w]hen I feel it helps”, “often in the beginning of each term to inspire students to keep studying words even without tests”, “as needs”, and “[w]hen necessary/relevant. Not often through a test”.

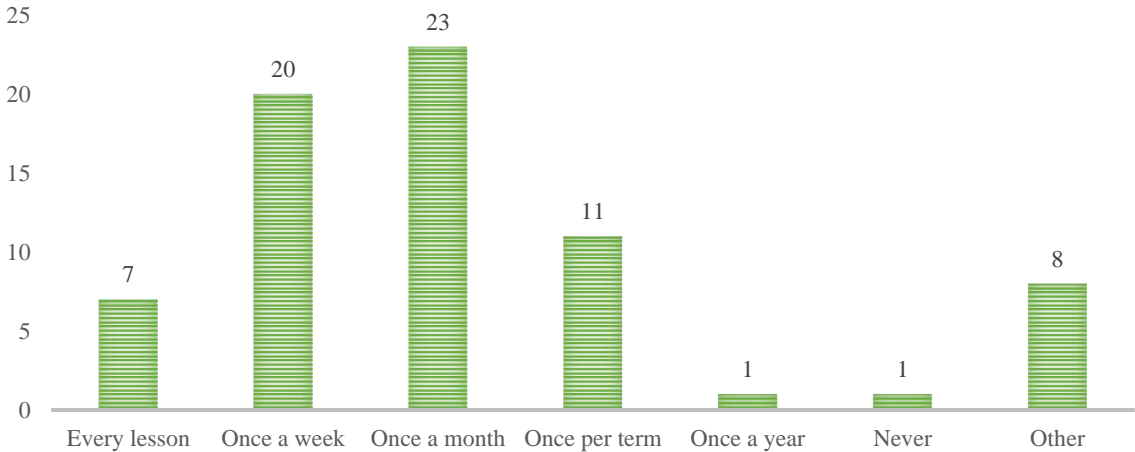


Figure 21: How often to the participants test vocabulary?

As shown in figure 22, out of the 32 participants who chose to state that they neither tested specific vocabulary *often* nor *not often*, three tested *every lesson*, eight tested vocabulary *once a week*, 13 tested *once a month*, and one participant said that *they never tested vocabulary* (even though this participant stated that they test *fairly often* on the previous question).

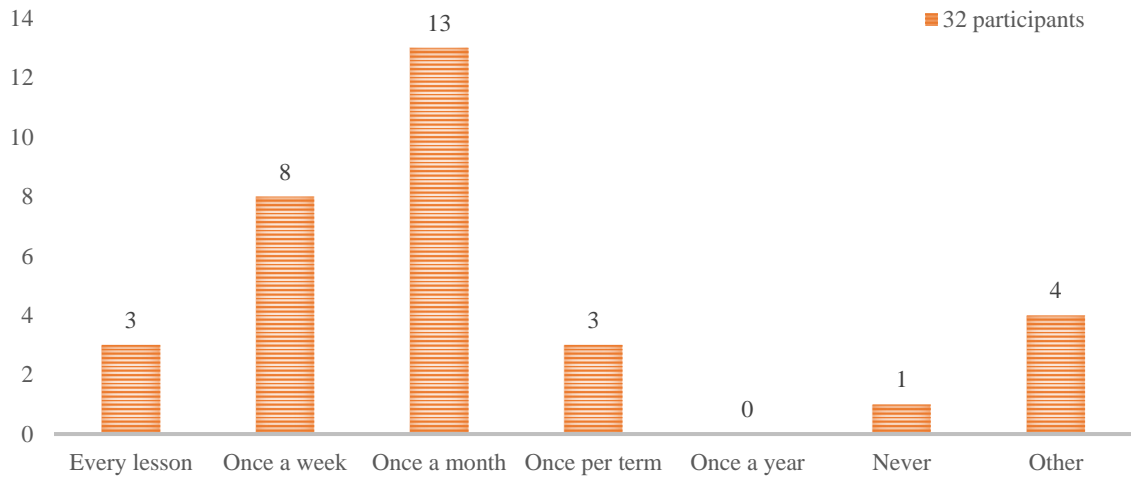


Figure 22: Participants reporting to test vocabulary *fairly often*

As shown in figure 23, out of the 14 participants who stated that they test specific vocabulary *often*, two tested *every lesson*, five tested vocabulary *once a week*, four tested *once a month*, and one tested *once per term*.

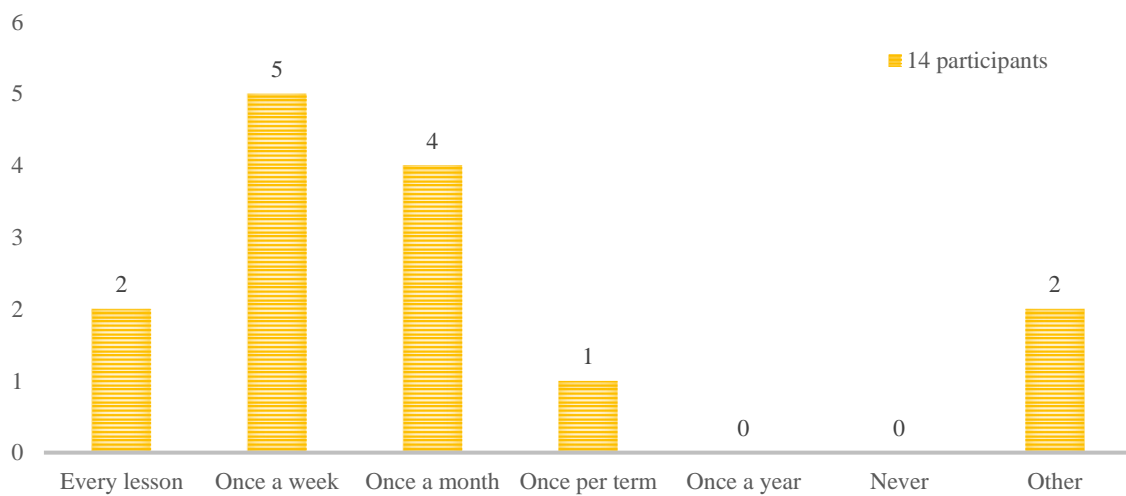


Figure 23: Participants reporting to test vocabulary *often*

In the group that stated that they test specific vocabulary *very often*, seven out of the nine reported testing it *once a week*, one reported testing *every lesson* and one reported to testing *once a month* (see figure 24).

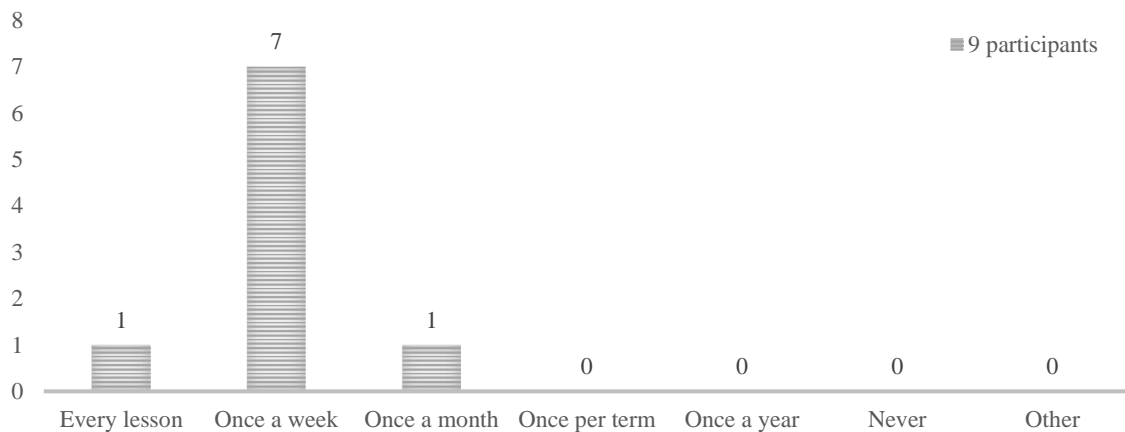


Figure 24: Participants reporting to test vocabulary *very often*

Moving on to the question of *how* the participants test vocabulary; the participants were provided with eight methods of testing, of which they could choose as many as they preferred. Additionally, they could also state that they do not test vocabulary (which four participants did), and they could also write an open-ended answer if they felt like there was any method missing within the options provided to them (see figure 28). As figure 25 shows, 43 of the 67 participants, who in this section chose to answer that they did test vocabulary, used the method of *using the word in a sentence (orally)*, and 60 of the participants used the same method when provided *in writing*. Thirty-three reported using the method of asking the students *to provide a synonym orally*, and 39 respondents chose *in writing*. *Providing a definition (orally)* was used by 35 participants, and *in writing*, 45 used the same method. *Translating into L1 (orally)* was used by 23 participants, and *in writing*, 37 participants used the same method.

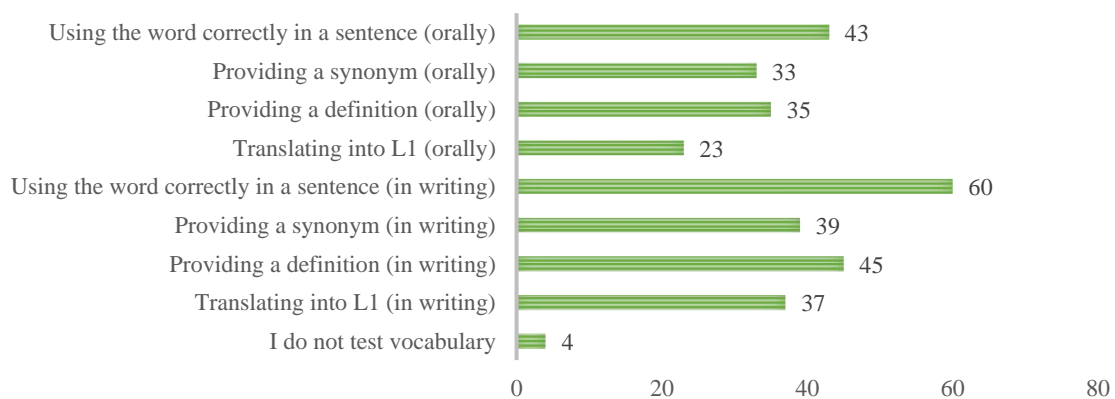


Figure 25: How do you test vocabulary?



Six respondents answered with additional methods which involved translating from L1 to English (2 participants), implicitly via reading/listening comprehension (1 participant), retelling in writing (1 participant), and matching/describing pictures (2 participants) (see figure 26).

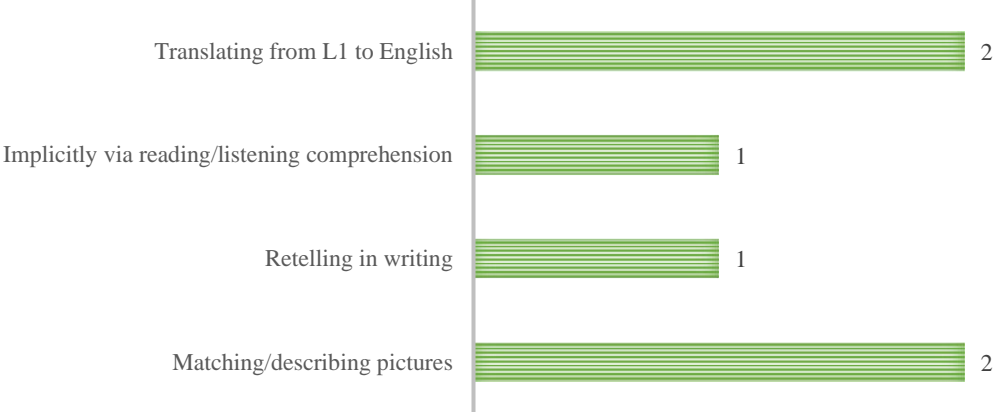


Figure 26: How do you test vocabulary? Other methods.

When examining how many methods each of the participants chose, a prominent internal discrepancy was found (see figure 27). Only three participants chose one kind of method, 12 respondents chose two methods, 16 respondents chose four different methods, and eleven of the participants reported to use eight different methods. On average, the participants used 4.8 number of methods.

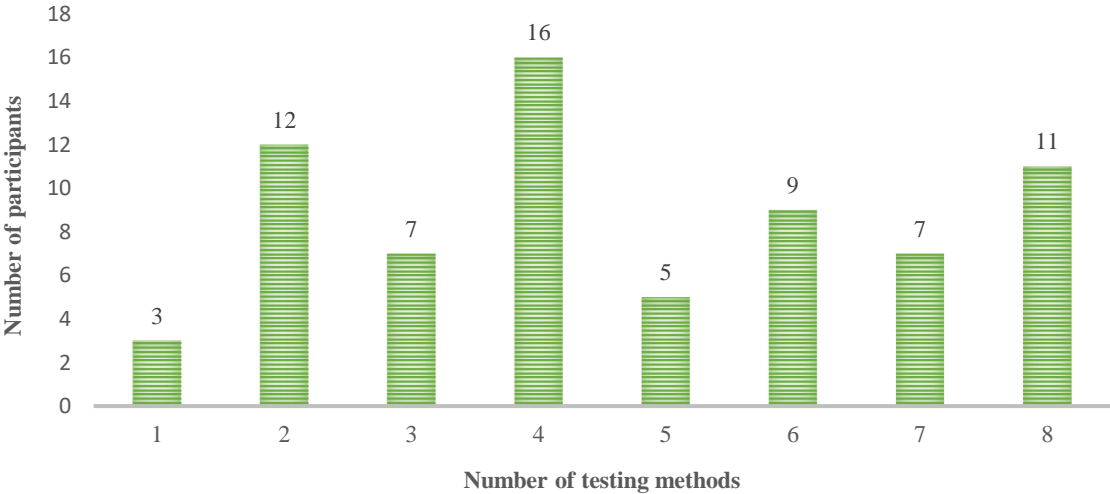


Figure 27: Number of methods of testing vocabulary reported

## 6 Discussion

This study has sought to give some clarity to the question of the beliefs and practices of vocabulary teaching and learning of EFL teachers in Sweden. Furthermore, it aimed to investigate if their practices were coherent with what research today suggests being the most effective, especially concerning the role of morphological awareness for vocabulary expansion. Through the use of a questionnaire, a respondent group of 71 EFL teachers in Sweden commented on their perception of vocabulary teaching. Therefore, it has the potential of creating a foundation of data on which further and more qualitative studies could be based on.

This part of the paper is devoted to discussing the results of the study. The first part of this discussion focuses on Swedish EFL teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning (RQ1). The second part focuses on their reported practice for vocabulary teaching (RQ2). Both parts also include a discussion on whether or not the *beliefs* and *practice* of EFL teachers in Sweden are coherent with *findings from the research field* (RQ3).

### 6.1 What Are Teachers' Beliefs about Vocabulary Teaching and Learning?

When answering the survey, the participants were asked to estimate how many encounters are needed to learn a word. According to Nation (2001), between five to more than 20 repeated encounters are necessary. The participants of this survey answered from between one to 100 encounters, with an average of 13.4. Eleven participants answered *less than* four, and seven answered *more than* 30 encounters, which means that there were 53 participants who answered between the range Nation (2001) suggest being true. However, this result also showcases the large internal discrepancy among EFL teachers in Sweden.

Regarding what the teachers believe to be of importance when "knowing a word", the result showed that *to be able to use it in a sentence* was most prioritized by the participants, followed by *be able to use it fluently in written texts* and *be able to use it fluently in conversation*. This result is similar to what Zhang (2008) found: that one of the most prioritized aspects for teachers regarding vocabulary learning was the receptive and productive knowledge of a word. The results of the questions of "knowing a word" indicate that Nation's (2001) fourth strand *fluency development* could be prioritized by the EFL

teachers of Sweden since the answers involving *use* and *fluency* were ranked in the top by the participants of this study.

Even though the participants ranked *knowing the building blocks of a word* as one of the least important aspects of knowing a word, as well as ranking the method of *exercises focused especially on morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem)* lowest, the group as a whole were more affirmative than negative towards the statement that morphological awareness is an important skill for EFL learners. Almost half of the group reported that their students developed this skill to some degree. This provides us with a mixed picture of their beliefs and attitudes towards this skill, and one could conclude that the participants have not thought all that much about this.

One of the expectations on this study was that there would be a difference in the attitudes and approaches depending on how many years of teaching experience the participants had, and what levels of English they were teaching. However, this was not the case. Apart from the higher frequency of testing opportunities provided the lower-secondary teachers (as will be discussed in the upcoming part), no significant finding could be assigned to these aspects.

## 6.2 According to Teachers, What Is Their Practice for Teaching Vocabulary?

According to Schmitt (2008), “intentional learning is much more effective than incidental learning” (p. 345). When examining the results of this study concerning teachers’ practice of vocabulary teaching, one could conclude that the teachers participating in this survey do not know of or do not agree with the statement of Schmitt. If we first examine the results of methods used in teaching vocabulary, the two ranked highest out of the six methods were: 1) *listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or synonyms in class*, and 2) *simply listening to/reading different texts to expand vocabulary without any production* with almost similar mean values (‘5.1’ and ‘5.0’). This could indicate that *intentional* and *incidental* teaching methods are used equally. However, an important aspect of intentional teaching is form-focused teaching, and the results from the study show that exercises focused especially on *vocabulary and word families*, and *morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem)* were used the least with the mean values of ‘3.8’ and ‘2.8’, additionally several of the participants did not use these kinds of exercises at all. This result is similar to

the one found by Gerami & Noordin (2013) which concluded that techniques such as word-formation were not often used.

After examining the results concerning the time teachers spend on vocabulary, an internal discrepancy among the EFL teachers was found. Even though 42 participants reported to teach vocabulary in class *often* or *very often*, only 35 reported spending *enough time*. These participants had difficulties stating **why** they *spent enough time*, but the 32 who said they *did not spend enough time* said that this was due *to lack of time* and *too much focus on production or other unspecified aspects*. The latter argument, one could argue, is the same thing as lack of time. Even though there seems to be an internal discrepancy within EFL teachers regarding whether or not they spend time and enough time on vocabulary teaching, they seem to think that vocabulary is an important part of language teaching.

Based on the result, there is also an internal discrepancy among EFL teachers on 1) how much they test vocabulary, and 2) what they think *testing very often* means. First, EFL teachers who teach in lower-secondary school test more often than teachers in upper secondary school (mean value of 3.4 vs. 2.9). Second, teachers who report testing vocabulary *fairly often* do so with a time span of *never*, *to once a term*, *to once a week*, and even *every week*. The teachers who report that they tested vocabulary *often*, did so with a time span from *once per term* (P=1), *once a month* (P=4), *once a week* (P=5) to *every lesson* (P=2). Finally, among the group who believe themselves to be testing vocabulary *very often*, only one tested *every lesson*, seven tested *once a week*, and one tested *once a month*. This could indicate that there is no agreement among the teachers concerning how often vocabulary should be tested.

Moving on to **how** teachers test vocabulary, we find some positive results: the number of testing methods used was on average 4.8, out of a total of eight methods. What this result suggests is that EFL teachers in Sweden use different kinds of testing methods, both oral and written, and they also test the different aspect of “knowing a word” such as providing synonym, translating into L1, retelling in writing and matching/describing pictures.

In accordance with the results of previous research, this group also relied significantly on meaning-focused input and output of Nation’s four strands rather than the other two strands: *language-focused learning* and *fluency development*. For example, a large part of the group specified that context is one aspect that they prioritized, which was similar to the result of Tran (2011). Additionally, when reporting on which methods they use when teaching vocabulary, all participants reported using the method of *listening to/reading texts and discussing the content only* to some degree, and the method of *simply listening to/reading*

*different texts to expand vocabulary without any production* to a very high degree. These two techniques for vocabulary expansion rely on the students' ability to *guess words from context*, which is what meaning-focused input and output focus on. The method of *Listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or synonyms in class* which was used the most, also falls under the category of the first two strands. As stated earlier in this chapter, language-focused techniques such as exercises focused on morphological aspects were not prioritized, nor was the ability to recognize *the parts of a word* important in *knowing a word*. Fluency and usage seem to be important for the teachers since they prioritized these aspects when trying to define *knowing a word*. However, no evidence could be found on how they develop fluency and usage with their students. This could be because there were no options in the question about teaching methods which would develop these skills, but no participants wrote an answer of their own concerning this either.

The Swedish EFL teachers can be included in the presently preferred language teaching paradigm referred to by Schmitt (2008) where focus is on meaning-based learning, and where language elements “are learned by using them rather than by focusing on them explicitly, but with a supplementary focus on language forms (e.g., explicit grammar teaching) when necessary” (p. 340). The beliefs of ESL/EFL teachers, described by Schmitt (2008) and the beliefs amongst EFL teachers in Sweden are similar: rather than focusing on activities aimed at committing lexical information to memory (*intentional* learning), teachers believe students will learn new words in a situation in which they process new information without the intention to obtain this information to memory (*incidental* learning). According to the study of Norberg, Vikström, and Kibry (2018), EFL students in Sweden reported spending time every week on expanding their vocabulary through word lists where memorization and translating words without context were used which could be described as *intentional* learning. The result of this study, however, shows that EFL teachers tend not to believe that *intentional* learning is as important as *incidental*, and that there is an internal discrepancy among EFL teachers in Sweden regarding their beliefs and practices concerning vocabulary teaching and learning. There is no balance between the four strands Nation is advocating, and instead, teachers seem to approach the teaching either on one side of the spectrum or on the other.

Teachers participating in this survey reported having more interest than knowledge about vocabulary teaching and learning (6.9 vs 6.3 in mean value). Several of the participants also wrote a comment at the end of the survey reporting that they do not think they have enough knowledge of vocabulary teaching and would like to learn more about it. This could

be one answer for why a large part of the participating teachers relies on *incidental* learning and *meaning-based* vocabulary teaching, as well as shows internal uncertainty regarding their knowledge of their own attitudes and practice of vocabulary teaching. Teachers, whether they have recently graduated or worked for many years, call for further professional educating and would, according to the results of this study, benefit from such as well. The pedagogical implication which can be drawn from this is that the teacher education in Sweden needs to reinsure that this knowledge is provided to the teacher students and that working teachers should be provided with further education about vocabulary teaching and learning.

## 7 Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the results of this study, EFL teachers in Sweden have a good estimation of how many encounters are needed to learn a word. Their beliefs of what it means to *know a word* are in coherence with the paradigm described by Schmitt (2008) (meaning focused), but with the addition of an emphasis on fluency.

Furthermore, EFL teachers in Sweden still spend most of their time and energy on meaning-based teaching. Language-focused teaching receives little attention. Fluency development and usage seem important for the teachers even though we cannot in this study state whether or not they spend time on it. Also, *incidental learning* seems to be preferred over *intentional learning*.

The main conclusion of this study is that EFL teachers in Sweden are inconsistent in their beliefs of vocabulary teaching and learning. Both teachers who have recently graduated from the teacher education program, as well as teachers with long experience, are in need of further education on the subject of vocabulary teaching and learning to be able to keep up to date with current research.

To provide an even greater insight into the beliefs and practice of EFL teachers in Sweden, more studies similar to this one, and to the ones of Tran (2011), Gerami & Noordin (2013), and Zhang (2008) which include qualitative research methods such as interviews and classroom observations, are needed. It would also be interesting to examine *how* and *to what degree* EFL teachers in Sweden feel that they would like to receive further professional education about vocabulary teaching and learning, as well as to investigate how the internal discrepancy found in this study could affect the notion of an equal educational system.

Finally, one reassuring result of this study is that the participants in this study all believe that vocabulary is important and needed, because, as the quote in the title of this study illustrates, “[e]veryone needs to expand their vocabulary”.

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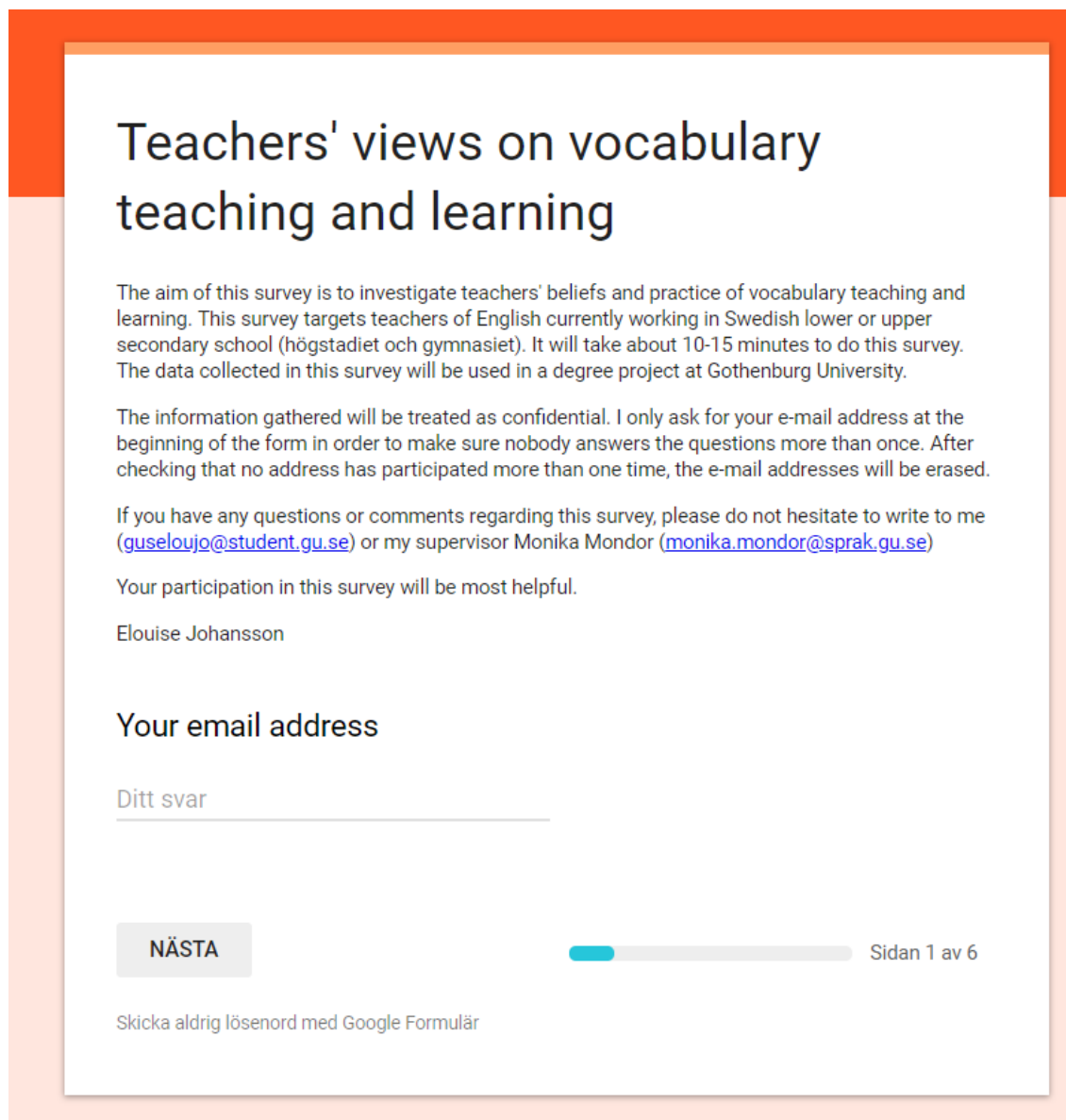


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# Appendix 1

The appendix includes screenshots of questionnaire used in this study. Each section is presented individually. This first section stated some general information to the participant, including the aim of the research.



**Teachers' views on vocabulary teaching and learning**

The aim of this survey is to investigate teachers' beliefs and practice of vocabulary teaching and learning. This survey targets teachers of English currently working in Swedish lower or upper secondary school (högstadiet och gymnasiet). It will take about 10-15 minutes to do this survey. The data collected in this survey will be used in a degree project at Gothenburg University.

The information gathered will be treated as confidential. I only ask for your e-mail address at the beginning of the form in order to make sure nobody answers the questions more than once. After checking that no address has participated more than one time, the e-mail addresses will be erased.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please do not hesitate to write to me ([guseloujo@student.gu.se](mailto:guseloujo@student.gu.se)) or my supervisor Monika Mondor ([monika.mondor@sprak.gu.se](mailto:monika.mondor@sprak.gu.se))

Your participation in this survey will be most helpful.

Elouise Johansson

**Your email address**

Ditt svar

**NÄSTA** Sidan 1 av 6

Skicka aldrig lösenord med Google Formulär

## Appendix 2

Section two of the questionnaire sought to establish the participants teaching background.

### Your Teaching Background

This section of the survey aims to survey your teaching background.

For how long have you been working as a language teacher? \*

0-5 years

5-10 years

10-15 years

15-20 years

More than 20 years

Which year did you graduate as a teacher? (If you have no formal teacher education, please write 0. If you have completed most of your degree but not formally graduated, please write 1.) \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

Which levels of English do you currently teach? \*

English åk 6-9

English 5

English 6

English 7

Do you teach other languages than English? \*

Yes

No

If you teach other languages also, which ones?

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 3

This third section aimed to investigate English the beliefs of teachers regarding vocabulary teaching.

**Your Vocabulary Teaching**

How knowledgeable do you feel that you are when it comes to the theories behind vocabulary teaching and learning? \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Minimally           Maximally

How interested are you in theories concerning vocabulary teaching and learning? \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

It does not interest me at all           It is the most interesting aspect of teaching

If you are somewhat interested in it, how does that show? (You can choose multiple answers and/or write an answer of your own)

- I read studies
- I discuss theories and/or studies with my colleges
- I visit seminars that has do to with vocabulary teaching
- I focus a great deal on vocabulary in my teaching
- Övrigt:

Do you think you spend enough time on teaching vocabulary?  
Please explain why you think so. \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

In order to learn a word in a second language, how many encounters of that specific word do you think are needed? \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think about the size of your students' vocabulary? \*

Yes

No

Do you have an idea about the size of you students' vocabulary? \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all           Absolutely

Please estimate how many words an average student in your highest teaching level knows? \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

According to you, in knowing a word, how important is it to...

...know how to explain the meaning of the word in English (e.g., synonyms, antonyms) \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know how to translate it to your native language \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know its building blocks (its parts, e.g. prefixes, roots, and suffixes) \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...be able to use it fluently in conversation \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...be able to use it fluently in written texts \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...be able recognize what a word sounds like and how to pronounce it correctly \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...be able to spell it correctly \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know how to use it in a sentence \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know in what grammatical pattern/s the word occurs \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know what words or type/s of words usually occur with the specific word (e.g., the word "job" often collocates with words like: "look for" "apply for" "get" etc.) \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

...know where, when, and how often people would expect to meet this specific word \*

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Less important       Very important

Do you have anything to add regarding how you define "knowing a word"?

Ditt svar

## How do you work with vocabulary expansion with your students?

Please rank how often you use the following methods:

Exercises focused specially on vocabulary and word families \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Exercises focused specially on morphology (suffixes, prefixes, root/stem) \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Listening to/reading texts and discussing the content only \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Simply listening to/reading different texts to expand vocabulary without any production \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Listening to/reading texts and picking out new words to translate, finding definitions or synonyms in class \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Giving students lists of words as homework \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I don't use this method         This is one of the methods I use the most

Do you use any other method? If so, which method and to what degree do you use it? \*

Ditt svar

If you give students vocabulary homework, how often do you do it?

Ditt svar

Do you spend time on vocabulary in class? \*

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all      Very often

Why do you or don't you spend time on vocabulary in class? \*

Ditt svar

What do you prioritize most when it comes to vocabulary teaching? \*

Ditt svar

BAKÅT

NÄSTA

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# Appendix 4

Section four of the survey concerned the testing of vocabulary.

### Testing vocabulary

This section of the survey aims to investigate how English teachers test their students' vocabulary.

How often do you test specific vocabulary knowledge (e.g., in connection to a certain text or movie)? \*

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all      Very often

How often do you test general vocabulary knowledge? \*

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all      Very often

Approximately, how often do you test vocabulary? (Choose one answer, or write an answer of your own) \*

Every lesson

Once a week

Once a month

Once per term

Once a year

Never

How do you test vocabulary? (Choose one or several answers, and/or write an answer of your own) \*

I do not test vocabulary

Translating into L1 (in writing)

Providing a definition (in writing)

Providing a synonym (in writing)

Using the word correctly in a sentence (in writing)

Translating into L1 (orally)

Providing a definition (orally)

Providing a synonym (orally)

Using the word correctly in a sentence (orally)

Övrigt: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think testing vocabulary affects vocabulary expansion in any way? How? \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any comments regarding how you test vocabulary?

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix 5

The fifth section aimed to investigate teachers' knowledge about morphological awareness.

### Morphological Awareness

This section of the survey aims to investigate teachers' view of learners' morphological awareness.

#### Definition of Morphological awareness

Morphological awareness is basically the understanding of how to connect morphemes, such as affixes, stems, and roots, within the word to create meaning. Language learners use their morphological awareness when decoding words by examining the morphemes within the word. For example, a compound such as *bedställe* can be decomposed and understood by analyzing the parts.

Had you heard of the term "morphological awareness" before? \*

Yes

No

Maybe

To what degree do you think that morphological awareness is important for vocabulary expansion? \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not important at all           It is the most important skill of them all

To what degree do you think your students develop this awareness with the support of your teaching? \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all           To the fullest

If you think you are teaching in a way which develops students' morphological awareness, can you give an example of the activities you use? \*

Ditt svar \_\_\_\_\_

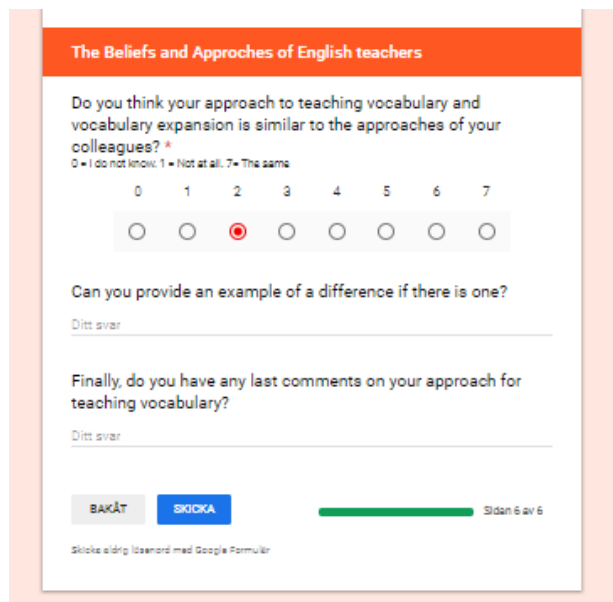
Det här är en obligatorisk fråga

BAKÅT NÄSTA Sidan 5 av 6

Sökta utgång baserad med Google Formulär

## Appendix 6

The final section sought to investigate the participants' thoughts on how their beliefs affect their teaching practice.



The Beliefs and Approches of English teachers

Do you think your approach to teaching vocabulary and vocabulary expansion is similar to the approaches of your colleagues? \*

0 = I do not know, 1 = Not at all, 7 = The same

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Can you provide an example of a difference if there is one?

Ditt svar

Finally, do you have any last comments on your approach for teaching vocabulary?

Ditt svar

BAKÅT SKICKA

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