

# Book review of ‘Vocabulary in the foreign language curriculum: Principles for effective instruction’

Elif Saribas

*“Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Curriculum: Principles for Effective Instruction,”* by James Milton and Oliver Hopwood. 2022. 211 pages, paperback, ISBN 9781032244853, \$48.95 USD, e-book, ISBN 9781003278771, \$44.05 USD.

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Despite the well-established principle that vocabulary is an indispensable area of language learning, there still exist classrooms in which vocabulary is neglected due to many reasons, such as the curriculum, instructor beliefs, and lack of proper training in the field. Further discussion and guidance are needed to serve the critical needs of foreign language learners in such classrooms. James Milton and Oliver Hopwood, who are two experts in foreign language vocabulary instruction, address this critical need in their extensive guide, *Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Curriculum: Principles for Effective Instruction*.

The book serves as a practical guide for instructors, curriculum designers, and teacher educators by connecting theory with practice, dismantling myths, and offering real-life solutions backed by research. While it addresses the ongoing neglect of vocabulary in the UK, especially in England, it also presents implications of vocabulary in curricula that could be applied everywhere. With its research-based arguments and recommendations, *Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Curriculum* promises to address not only the readers in England, but also resonate with language experts worldwide.

The book consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 starts with providing background information on ongoing changes in foreign language curricula while highlighting a persistent neglect of vocabulary. Milton and Hopwood offer this book as both a new perspective and a manual for a practical way of teaching vocabulary. Chapter 2 provides very clear explanations of the concept of vocabulary. The authors offer a realistic perspective on the use of word families by expressing the complexity of the issue. Their argument for teaching different derivations as the learner progresses is legitimate, as learners can only learn new vocabulary through existing lexical knowledge.

Chapter 3 offers an important discussion about vocabulary learning beyond the most frequent words, since the essence of meaning is often carried in words that are not considered as highly frequent. The authors then criticize the current curriculum for focusing merely on the most frequent 2,000 words, arguing that this limited coverage is not sufficient for comprehension. While some readers may find certain aspects of this information widely accepted, it is important to remember that the authors' primary goal is to re-establish the importance of vocabulary in educational environments where it has been largely overlooked.

In Chapter 4, the authors emphasize the importance of multiple encounters, retrievals, and practical exercises in meaningful contexts for effective vocabulary acquisition. While they

advocate for explicit instruction methods, Milton and Hopwood also recognize the potential benefits of implicit acquisition for certain aspects of vocabulary, such as phonological forms. Some practical suggestions include using explicit lexical activities, such as gap-fill exercises and word drills, engaging learners in communicative tasks and role-plays for implicit vocabulary development, and incorporating structured exposure to vocabulary through graded readers, films, songs, and apps for both in-class and outside-class learning.

Chapter 5 emphasizes aligning vocabulary instruction with CEFR proficiency standards. It notes the correlation between classroom hours and vocabulary uptake and recommends aiming for ten words per hour. The Saudi curriculum example highlights the importance of ample classroom time, quality teaching materials, and the value of structured informal learning alongside formal instruction. The authors note that while textbooks are important, supplementary materials may be needed to address gaps and engage learners, promoting systematic vocabulary acquisition for effective communication. Chapter 6 outlines the progression of lexical learning over multiple years within a curriculum, focusing on a balanced lexicon needed for effective communication. The authors express the importance of introducing new vocabulary across different frequency bands, recycling vocabulary for retention, and utilizing resources such as word lists for curriculum design. The chapter also touches upon the need for setting vocabulary targets, monitoring learner progress, and providing training for teachers.

Chapter 7 focuses on British vocabulary myths and systematically debunks them. The authors attribute the popularity of these myths to the simplification of standardized exams and how reducing content coverage aims to inflate reported scores, which portrays an illusion of educational success. Chapter 8 examines the critical role of textbooks in effectively delivering vocabulary, emphasizing the need for appropriate presentation, retrieval opportunities, and practice while also considering motivational and communicative factors. Chapter 9 discusses the teacher's role in expanding students' vocabulary repertoire. Teachers are advised to introduce new words, improve noticing, and encourage vocabulary notebook use. Additionally, frequent retrieval practice through quizzes and activities is recommended for reinforcing vocabulary retention.

Chapter 10 focuses on the extensive aspect of vocabulary learning and underscores the need for continued learning outside the classroom. It highlights the benefits of exposure to authentic materials and offers practical activities, such as singing songs, reading graded readers, using word lists, and utilizing language learning apps. The authors also stress the importance of incorporating informal activities into curricula to complement formal instruction. The final chapter of the book addresses key aspects of vocabulary instruction within curriculum design, emphasizing the need for teachers to understand vocabulary acquisition dynamics and adapt teaching methods accordingly. It suggests assessing progress on vocabulary acquisition rather than just grammatical proficiency. The chapter also advocates for aligning teaching materials with specific vocabulary goals and calls for more meaningful assessment methods by test designers and exam boards. Additionally, it suggests investing more time in the design of foreign language materials to enhance learning outcomes.

*Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Curriculum* is a tremendous work. Effectively addressing language learners' needs demands deliberate and thoughtful steps, and every experienced foreign language learner and teacher is aware that this process is beyond simple. While the language of the book might become harsh when addressing the audiences that are responsible for the level of

neglect in vocabulary, it is completely understandable considering that it comes from the lens of experienced language teachers and learners. In some ways, this book shares some elements of Folse's *Vocabulary Myths* (2004), especially in the way it defines vocabulary and attempts to dismantle pervasive lexical myths. In addition to discussing issues relevant to the UK and England's educational system, Milton and Hopwood provide invaluable information regarding their recommendations of detailed steps that should be taken in vocabulary instruction.

While there is still progress to be made in foreign language education, *Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Curriculum: Principles for Effective Instruction* is very promising with its highly practical approach that consistently prioritizes the real needs of language learners within a realistic perspective. The fact that the book focuses on the foreign language rather than English as a second language curriculum fills a notable gap in books on vocabulary instruction. Furthermore, the authors are also aware of the fact that foreign language curricula should not be designed based on one language only since inflectional, derivational, and lexical rules differ. Milton and Hopwood show great expertise in language teaching by recognizing the fact that there are many factors to consider in curriculum design, and there is not always a one-size-fits-all solution, as shown in their carefully analyzed systematic solutions to vocabulary instruction.

## References

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## Author bio

Elif Saribas is a doctoral student in Education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages track at the University of Central Florida. Her background in teaching includes teaching English as a foreign language at the K12 level in Turkey and teaching English as a second language to adult learners in the United States. She is currently teaching undergraduate teacher education courses that prepare students to teach in EFL and ESL environments. Her research interests include several aspects of second and foreign language speaking, such as pronunciation, utterance fluency, vocabulary instruction, and affect in second and foreign language speaking. contact: [elifsaribas1@outlook.com](mailto:elifsaribas1@outlook.com)

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