

An Intentional Word Learning Task: Theoretical Foundation and Evidence-Based Suggestions

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Abstract

Although the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) specifies that teaching should be based in research and/or best practice, publications suggest a lack of evidence underpinning the teaching of English in Sweden (Bergström 2023; Elgemark, Henry, and Jansson 2023). Vocabulary researchers agree that *intentional vocabulary learning* through activities designed to promote the learning of new words should be part of any well-balanced language course (e.g., Laufer 2005; Nation 2022). Yet, English teachers in Sweden tend to rely on vocabulary learning happening *incidentally* through meaning-focused tasks like reading (Bergström, 2023). Research (Eriksson 2023; Warnby 2023) also shows that upper-secondary school students often are challenged by the lexical content of university-level textbooks in English. This suggests the need for systematic, intentional attention to vocabulary. The present article therefore describes the development, implementation, and evaluation of an intentional vocabulary learning task. The task is a sheet with seven sections. In each section, students can provide one type of information about a target word (TW): (1) synonym(s), (2) translation equivalent(s), (3) TW illustration(s), (4) explanation(s), (5) example sentence(s) containing the TW, (6) connections to prior knowledge and (7) word associations. The task sections offer separate ways to gain, consolidate, and/or demonstrate TW knowledge recommended by vocabulary experts (Nation 2022; Schmitt and Schmitt 2020). Empirical evidence shows that the word-focused task is useful in a range of EFL classrooms. Importantly, however, TW repetition, scaffolding, and student motivation is necessary to optimise the word-focused task work (Nylander 2025).

Keywords: intentional vocabulary learning; vocabulary depth; pedagogical translanguaging; adolescent learners of English in Sweden; EFL

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to describe the development, implementation, and evaluation (Van den Akker 1999) of an intentional vocabulary learning task. Intentional vocabulary learning is here defined as learning enabled through tasks explicitly designed to promote learning of words (Webb 2020). Vocabulary experts agree that intentional vocabulary learning should be part of all English as a foreign language (EFL) courses (see e.g., Laufer 2005; Schmitt and Schmitt 2020). Yet, research suggests that in EFL classrooms in Sweden, there tends to be a reliance on incidental learning of vocabulary through meaning-focused activities such as reading or listening (Bergström 2023). This tallies with the Swedish syllabi for secondary- and upper-secondary school English, which are both communicatively oriented (Skolverket 2025, 2022). The value of English communication skills can hardly be overstated. However, studies show that students also need more English intentional vocabulary learning opportunities as they advance through the education system (Bergström, 2023; Nylander 2025; Stridsman 2024, Warnby 2023). For example, upper-secondary school students are often challenged by the lexical content of university-level textbooks in English (Eriksson 2023; Warnby 2023), which suggests the need for systematic, intentional attention to vocabulary. The most recent version of the syllabus for upper-secondary school English also mentions vocabulary both in the core content and the subject aim (Skolverket 2025). This all suggests that teachers need to be equipped with more evidence-based vocabulary learning tasks (see also Bergström 2023; Stridsman 2024).

The present article attends to the above-mentioned problems by describing the development, implementation, and evaluation of a word-focused task (cf. Webb, Yanagisawa, and Uchihara: 733) intended to support upper-secondary-school students' intentional vocabulary learning. The task was first developed and used in the PhD project presented in my doctoral dissertation (Nylander 2025¹). The article has five sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 outlines the development of the word-focused task. Section 3 summarizes the implementation. Section 4 evaluates the word-focused task based on findings from Nylander (2025).

¹ The PhD project reported in my doctoral dissertation was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. Reference number: 2021-00927. Informed consent was obtained from all student participants and teacher collaborators.

The article ends with Section 5, where limitations of the word-focused task are presented together with suggestions for future research. In Section 5, I also argue that the word-focused task is widely applicable in the changing world of EFL teaching and learning in Sweden. Specifically, I claim that the task can be used in a range of classrooms. It can also be adjusted to teachers' own preferences and needs, not least when incorporating the vocabulary-related core content and subject aim from the most recent (i.e., changed) upper-secondary school syllabus for English. Further, the paper-and-pencil format of the task tallies with the government's recent call for a specific change: moving from digital towards more printed learning materials (Regeringskansliet 2025). The task itself will be provided in Sections 2 and 4.

2. Development

The word-focused task is based on the following theory pertaining to vocabulary learning and language learning in general: Nation's (2022) word knowledge framework, Schmitt and Schmitt's (2020) *engagement*, and the translanguaging framework (e.g., Cenoz and Gorter 2022; García, 2009; García and Wei 2014).

Developmentally, the first step was to establish the conceptualisation of word knowledge underpinning the word-focused task. Nation (2022) presents a descriptive framework of what it means to know a word deeply (i.e., well). The framework distinguishes between form-, meaning-, and use-related aspects of word knowledge. These are categorised as examples of either receptive (R) or productive (P) vocabulary knowledge. According to Nation (2022), it is not enough to, for example, pronounce and spell a word correctly in order to fully know it. Rather, knowing a word well requires the ability to demonstrate other types of knowledge as well. For example, students should be able to say in what patterns the word occurs or when and how often the word can be utilized. González-Fernández (2022: 3) notes that the framework 'provides a rich and precise picture of [...] lexical knowledge, which has made [it] the preferred and most widely accepted conceptualization among researchers investigating L2 vocabulary knowledge' to date. The framework is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Nation's (2022) word knowledge framework

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 are needed to express the 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 types of words occur with this one? P What words or types 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?

R = receptive knowledge; P = productive knowledge

Table 1 describes the aspects involved in word knowledge and does not denote intentional vocabulary learning per se. Maximum vocabulary depth (i.e., knowing a word as well as possible) equals mastery of all word knowledge aspects from Table 1. Knowledge of individual aspects can also contribute to vocabulary depth, as both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning is dynamic and incremental (Schmitt 2010). Word knowledge aspects related to form and meaning typically lend themselves well to intentional study, whereas aspects related to the contextual use are more likely to be learned incidentally (Nation 2022). This operationalisation of vocabulary depth is known as the *components or dimensions approach* (Schmitt and Schmitt 2020), and has ample support

in the research literature (see e.g., González-Fernández 2022; Nation 2022; Schmitt and Schmitt, 2020). The components approach presupposes that learners should learn words well in order to use them accurately and fluently in a variety of contexts. Thus, Nation (2022) suggests using the framework in Table 1 as a checklist when planning for intentional vocabulary learning opportunities in the classroom.

This article further differentiates between *recognition* and *recall* knowledge. Recognition equals selection, e.g., choosing the right definition of a word in a test with a multiple-choice format, and recall entails supplementation, e.g., providing a target word (TW) explanation. Another distinction is that between *form recall*, *meaning recall*, *form recognition* and *meaning recognition*. Form recall equals providing the form of the TW. Meaning recall requires the ability to say what the word means by, for example, providing a TW synonym. Form recognition equals identifying the form of the TW by, for instance, choosing between different forms in a multiple-choice format. Meaning recognition can be demonstrated by choosing between different potential meanings of the TW. Form recall is the most difficult level of word knowledge followed by meaning recall, form recognition and meaning recognition, respectively, in descending difficulty level (Schmitt 2010). Table 2 illustrates which aspects of word knowledge students may gain, consolidate, and/or demonstrate in task sections 1–4. It also shows the types of recognition and/or recall knowledge in focus. The example data is from Nylander (2025). The TW is *urban*.

Table 2 also maps task sections 1–4 on Nation's (2022) conceptualisation of word knowledge. Lastly, the table highlights how the task invites students to gain, consolidate, and/or demonstrate multiple knowledge aspects and types of recognition and/or recall knowledge. For example, students may demonstrate or gain receptive and productive knowledge of TW form and meaning by providing TW synonym(s) in task section (1). By independently explaining the TW, students can, at least in theory, show or acquire productive knowledge and meaning recall knowledge. Table 3 zooms in on task sections 5–7.

Table 2: Word knowledge aspects and types of recognition and/or recall knowledge possibly gained, consolidated, and/or demonstrated in task-sections 1–4 (TW *urban*)

Task section number	Task section instructions	Example data	Word knowledge aspect possibly demonstrated (Nation 2022)	Type of recognition and/or recall knowledge possibly demonstrated (Schmitt 2010)
1	English synonym(s)	‘metropolitan, nonrural [...]’	Receptive and productive knowledge of form and meaning	Meaning recall (supply definition/L1 translation, etc.)
2	Translation equivalent(s)	‘urban, stadsmässig’ (Swedish. My translation: ‘urban, city-like’)	Receptive and productive knowledge of form and meaning	Meaning recall (supply definition/L1 translation, etc.)
3	Illustration	--	Productive knowledge of meaning	Meaning recall (supply definition/L1 translation, etc.)
4	Explanation(s) in English and/or any other language(s)	‘[A]n adjective that describes nouns that are related to city [...]’	Productive knowledge of meaning	Meaning recall (supply definition/L1 translation, etc.)

Table 3: Word knowledge aspects and types of recognition and/or recall knowledge possibly gained, consolidated, and/or demonstrated in task-sections 5–7 (TW *urban*)

Task section number	Task section instructions	Example data	Word knowledge aspect possibly demonstrated (Nation 2022)	Type of recognition and/or recall knowledge possibly demonstrated (Schmitt 2010)
5	Example sentence(s) including the word English and/or any other language(s)	‘[T]he city has a bit of an urban vibe.’	Productive knowledge of written form Productive knowledge of grammatical functions Productive knowledge of use	Meaning recall (supply definition/L1 translation, etc.)
6	‘I have heard or seen this word before when... Try to be as specific as you can here.’	‘When in class and we talked about how architects plan cities.’	Productive knowledge of associations other than word associations	Form recognition
7	‘This word makes me think about the word...’	‘urbanisering’ (urbanisation in Swedish)	Productive knowledge of word associations	Form recognition

Table 3 shows how task sections 5–7 match Nation’s (2022) word knowledge framework. Table 3 also displays the knowledge students may gain, consolidate, and/or demonstrate by completing the task sections. By

independently writing down a word association, for example, students can demonstrate productive knowledge of word associations and form recognition knowledge. The word-focused task emphasises meaning recall knowledge because it is important to master and required for reading comprehension (McLean et al. 2020).

Another developmental step was to determine the forms of engagement promoted in the different task sections. The more students engage with a TW by completing different task sections, the more likely it is that learning will occur. Anything that results in increased and improved engagement with a TW facilitates students' intentional learning of it (Schmitt and Schmitt 2020). As mentioned, the word-focused task is a sheet with seven sections. Each section promotes engagement by suggesting that students provide one of the following types of information about a TW: (1) TW synonym(s), (2) TW translation equivalent(s), (3) TW illustration(s), (4) explanation(s), (5) example sentence(s) containing the TW, (6) a connection to prior knowledge in the form of a reference to when students have heard or seen the TW before, and (7) word associations, respectively. What follows is an outline of the theory underpinning each task section. The provision of each kind of TW information is conceptualised as visible use of a *resource* (Galante 2024), each recommended by vocabulary researchers (Nation 2022; Schmitt and Schmitt 2020) for gaining, consolidating, and/or demonstrating TW knowledge. The wording *visibly used* is important, as resources other than those seen on a word-focused task sheet may be activated during the task work (Grosjean 2008).

Visibly using TW synonyms is particularly useful if the TW translation equivalents are not entirely synonymous with the TW due to grammatical, stylistic and/or cultural factors (Schmitt and Schmitt 1995). In the second task section, students can visibly use TW translation equivalents. This is known to facilitate intentional vocabulary learning, as learners often possess rich associations to the TW in non-target language(s), which can help them learn the word (Nation 2022). Drawing on TW translation equivalents is a fast way to connect the form of a word to its meaning (Tian and Macaro 2012). Known as the form-meaning link, this is the most fundamental aspect of knowing a word (Nation 2022). Visibly using TW translation equivalents is also something many learners report doing when orchestrating their own vocabulary learning (Barcoft 2009). In the third task section, students can provide TW illustration(s).

The targeted activity is students' drawing of the TW rather than use of ready-made pictures representing the word. The rationale for this is twofold. Drawing a TW illustration may function as an instantiation of a word, which can be used to remember it. Drawing may also result in deeper processing than providing TW translation equivalent(s) and/or synonym(s) since it requires more imagination than the other options. Task section four invites students to explain the TW in English or any other language(s). This is a common way of demonstrating and consolidating the meaning of a word. When this is done, memory associations are strengthened (Nation 2022). In the fifth task section, students can write example sentence(s) containing the TWs. There is a lack of consensus regarding the usefulness of constructing example sentences containing TWs in order to learn them. Barcroft (2004) compared the effect of learning new words by including them in sentences versus looking at pictures representing the words. The results indicate a negative effect of the sentence writing condition and suggest that this might even inhibit learning at beginner stages. Pichette and Lafontaine (2012) compared the effect of reading versus writing sentences containing the TWs on incidental learning. An immediate test indicated that the sentence writing condition was superior to the reading condition, although a delayed test suggested that this effect diminishes with time. Zou (2017) compared the effect of cloze-exercises with 'gaps', writing sentences, and writing texts on word learning. The conditions involving sentence writing lead to larger vocabulary learning gains than the cloze exercises. This suggests that there may be a difference in vocabulary learning gains depending on whether a learner actively writes a sentence used for learning themselves versus if they use example sentences which they did not construct. Regardless, using sentence contexts in vocabulary learning tasks is advisable because it can provide contextual information used to develop vocabulary depth (Nation 2022). In section (6), students can visibly draw on prior knowledge. The knowledge sought after is references to previous experiences, interests, or subject knowledge mediated through linguistic resources (De Schonewise and Klingner 2012; Galante 2024). De Schonewise and Klingner (2012: 62) explain that one way of reinforcing students' vocabulary is to '[link] new information with prior knowledge, building on students' background knowledge, experiences, and interests'. In EFL classrooms in Sweden, this is not only a requirement, but also fairly natural, given the central role of English in many (though not all) students'

lives (Sundqvist 2024). In the last and seventh task section, students can write down word associations. This is another way of enabling deep and active vocabulary processing (Nation 2022).

Students can complete the seven task sections visibly using any language(s). This is supported by the comprehensive and influential *translanguaging* literature (e.g., Cenoz and Gorter 2022; García 2009; García and Wei 2014). Translanguaging started as an ideology (García 2009), but is now considered a framework encompassing a skill, theory, ideology, and pedagogy (García and Wei 2014). The word-focused task enables *pedagogical translanguaging*, here defined as ‘a construct that refers to teaching approaches that involve the intentional and planned use of student multilingual resources in language and content subjects’ (Juvonen and Källkvist 2021: 1). Pedagogical translanguaging is concurrently being developed by Cenoz and colleagues in the Basque Country (e.g., Cenoz and Gorter 2022) and García and colleagues in the United States (e.g., García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017). Both camps stress that judiciously using students’ multilingualism as a resource in the classroom has pedagogical, socioemotional, and identity-related benefits (e.g., Busse et al. 2020; García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017), but they differ in their conceptualisations of the repertoire. Cenoz and colleagues focus primarily on students’ *linguistic* resources (e.g., Busse et al. 2020). The version of pedagogical translanguaging associated with García rather conceptualises multilingualism as a ‘semiotic meaning-making repertoire’ (García and Otheguy 2020: 26). It emphasises the value of using both linguistic resources (e.g., words in different languages) and non-linguistic resources (e.g., images and gestures) to promote learning. This agrees with the word-focused task, which concerns visible use of both linguistic resources (e.g., explanations and TW translations in any languages) and non-linguistic resources (TW illustrations) for intentionally learning targeted English vocabulary.

For García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017), pedagogical translanguaging equals three clearly intertwined strands: (1) the translanguaging stance, (2) the translanguaging design, and (3) the translanguaging shift. All three strands relate to the *translanguaging corriente*, defined as a positive excitement towards translanguaging, which should permeate the classroom. The translanguaging stance *recognizes* the translanguaging corriente and the primary aims of pedagogical translanguaging. These are: (1) to support students as they are trying to comprehend complex

classroom content, and (2) to enable them to develop the language skills (e.g., vocabulary knowledge) they need for different academic purposes. The translanguaging design equals strategically planned lessons *corresponding* to the translanguaging corriente. Flexibility is central to a successful translanguaging design because it allows students and teachers to maximise the outcome of the teaching (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017). This tallies with the individualizable and adjustable features of the word-focused task. The translanguaging shift *follows the movement* of the translanguaging corriente, and concerns the micro-level decisions made by teachers in their everyday practice. Educators should allow students to interpret lesson content using their own unique experiences, interpretations, personalities, and perceptions in the classroom. This agrees with the word-focused task section devoted to connections to prior knowledge.

In the word-focused task, students are instructed to complete the task sections *they* find useful. The purpose of this task feature is to encourage students to coordinate and orchestrate their own learning process. This is known to facilitate learning, although it may be difficult and requires practice (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2018). It was also hoped that this task feature would make the word-focused task adjustable. An adjustable task was sought after because these can be adapted to different courses and students, and adjusted by individual teachers in light of their own expertise and systematic evaluations of the task (Nordlund and Rydström 2024:19).

With the foundation of the word-focused task in place, I started finalizing the word-focused task and testing it empirically. Nylander (2025) features three task versions: Task Version P, Task Version 1, and Task Version 2. They are all increasingly refined versions of the word-focused task. First, I independently designed a pilot-version of the word-focused task (Task Version P) using the above-mentioned theory and pedagogy as a springboard. Task Version P was a sheet with six sections. Each section was devoted to the following types of TW information: (1) synonym(s) and/or translation equivalent(s), (2) TW illustration(s), (3) explanation(s), (4) example sentence(s) containing the TW, (5) connections to prior knowledge and (6) word associations. Task Version P came in two formats: Format A and Format B. In Format A, the pilot study participants were instructed to use English and/or any other

language(s). Format B was identical to Format A, except the pilot study participants were instructed to use any language(s).

Next, I conducted a pilot study where an intact class of English 5 students ($N = 25$) completed Task Version P. The pilot study was considered successful because the pilot study participants did what they were instructed to do. Those who were told to primarily use English (i.e., English and/or any other language(s)) typically completed the task monolingually using the target language English. Those instructed to use any language(s) visibly used English and Swedish more frequently than the others. This suggests that the word-focused task is adjustable.

In light of the pilot study, Task Version P was revised and developed into Task Version 1. Task Version 1 resembled Format A of Task Version P, where students were primarily instructed to use English. Format B (where students could use any language(s)) was rejected, as it was deemed insufficiently connected to the school subject English. In Task Version 1, it was also further specified that students could self-select task sections to complete, as this was somewhat unclear to the pilot study participants. As a means to clarify the difference between TW synonyms and TW translation equivalents, Task Version 1 had separate task sections for these kinds of TW information. The Task Version 1 instructions also stressed that the participating students could complete the task sections *they* found useful, as this appeared somewhat unclear to the pilot study participants.

Task Version 1 was used in Study 1 from Nylander (2025). Based on the results and evaluations of Study 1, Task Version 1 was then revised into Task Version 2. In Task Version 2, students were reminded to self-select task sections to complete, both in the task instructions and in a blurb in the top right corner of the task, since this still seemed unclear to some participating students. For analytical purposes, the Task Version 2 instructions also specified that the participating students needed to name the languages they visibly used to complete the word-focused task. In Figure 1 below, a student has completed Task Version 2 of the word-focused task. The TW in focus is *atypical*.

Word: atypical

I start working with this word at (write the time here) 3:52

☐ I don't know this word
☐ See it, don't know the meaning
☒ I think I know this word

English synonym(s) <u>non-typical</u>	Remember!: Please fill in the information which you feel would help you learn the target words if you were to study them. Write as much as you need to learn the words ☺
Translation equivalent(s) Please also write which language the translation is in <u>Arabic => غير طبيعي</u>	
Explanation(s) in English and/or any other language(s): <u>Something not right or doesn't make sense</u> <u>An act that usually should not be done, not expected</u>	Illustration: 
I have heard or seen this word (or part of the word) before when... Try to be as specific as you can here <u>I heard this word from my friend when she told me that I was atypical at not drinking coffee in the morning.</u>	Example sentence(s) including the word in English and/or any other language(s):
I stopped working with this word at (write the time here):	This word makes me think about the word... Please also write which language the word is in
I used a dictionary or some other resource when working with this word (if you used a bilingual dictionary, please state which one) ☒ Yes, I used <u>Cambridge dictionary</u> ☐ No	

Figure 1: Task Version 2 of the word-focused task (TW atypical)

In Figure 1, the participating student has completed all the task sections except sections (5) and (7). They have visibly used linguistic resources (e.g., a TW explanation in English and a TW translation equivalent in Arabic) and non-linguistic resources (a TW illustration) to engage with the TW. This is all in line with the instructions in the top right corner of the task sheet stressing that students should visibly use the resources *they* find useful.

The word-focused task design is based on the format of Schmitt and Schmitt's (1995) *vocabulary notebooks*. Vocabulary notebooks invite learners to record substantial TW information, which can then be used to learn the vocabulary. They can take the shape of loose-leaf binders or cards. The word-focused task has one task sheet per TW. The layout of each task sheet corresponds to one of Schmitt and Schmitt's (1995) vocabulary notebook cards in that they both allow students to focus on selected TWs by considering multiple word knowledge aspects. Importantly, the word-focused task differs from vocabulary notebook cards. The latter facilitates strategic learning of recorded TW information. The word-focused task instead has two theoretical strands concerning L2 intentional vocabulary learning and pedagogical translanguaging, respectively. Next, I turn to the implementation of the word-focused task.

3. Implementation

The word-focused task was first implemented within the context of my PhD project (Nylander 2025). In Nylander (2025), 97 unique EFL students completed the word-focused task as part of their English course-work. To maximize the ecological validity and usefulness of the study, their teachers acted as teacher collaborators actively shaping the research (Ushioda 2023: 97). The task was integrated into unique didactic sequences (3–6 lessons) tailored to fit the needs of each class. The students completed the word-focused task together with other English proficiency tasks related to a specific theme. The teacher collaborators and I planned the didactic sequences together, thus ensuring that they fit their respective plans, which in turn aligned with policy documents as to the content to be covered. The TWs were underlined, marked in boldface, and planted into texts which the students read when I, the researcher, was visiting their classrooms. For example, one class engaged with the word-focused task in the context of a didactic sequence on the topic of English as an international language. In addition to reading a text containing TWs to learn using the word-focused task, the students wrote an argumentative essay arguing for or against a thesis statement related to the didactic sequence. The students were encouraged to use the TWs in their essays. They also recorded a podcast where they were encouraged to use the TWs verbally.

The pre-selected TWs were always single words like *atypical*, *opine*, and *eschew*. This was considered more suitable than using multiword items (e.g., collocations) as TWs because it allowed me to pinpoint TWs which the students could engage with using their multilingualism as a resource. This, in turn, tallied with the pedagogical translanguaging component of the word-focused task. The TWs were selected on the basis of Nation's (n.d.) frequency list, where vocabulary items are grouped in 1–14K frequency bands according to how rare or common they are. I aimed for infrequent TWs which were likely to be unknown to the participating students. However, the first two TWs were always high frequency words which the participating students were likely to know. The purpose of this was to boost their confidence and allow them to ease into the task work. In two studies from Nylander (2025), the participating students engaged with both pre- and self-selected TWs from the texts they read. Table 4 summarizes the implementation of the word-focused task.

Table 4: Implementation of the word-focused task from Nylander (2025)

Teacher collaborator	School	Class number	English course (corresponding CEFR-level)
Tove	1	1	English 5–6 (B1.2–B2.1)
Petter	1	2	English 5 (B1.2)
Nora	2	3	English 5 (B1.2)
Gabriel	3	4	English 5 (B1.2)
Hillevi	4	5	Compulsory school-level English at the Language Introduction Programme for immigrant students (A1)

Table 4 shows that I implemented the word-focused task in five different classes together with the students' respective teachers (i.e., the five teacher collaborators) from four different schools. The participating students were all adolescents (16–17 years old) learning English at the upper-secondary school. Most of the participating students were enrolled in one of the two obligatory English courses offered on this level at the time of the data collection: English 5 and English 6². The participating students in Class 5 had been living in Sweden for a maximum of four years and were studying at the Language Introduction Programme (LIP), which accommodates newly-arrived students (Bergström 2025). Section 4, to which I turn next, evaluates the word-focused task.

4. Evaluation

This section evaluates the word-focused task based on findings from my PhD project (Nylander 2025). It is a multimethods study featuring eight complementary data sets: (1) the word-focused task data, (2) language background questionnaires, (3) vocabulary tests, (4) student evaluations and reflections, (5) teacher-researcher planning meetings, (6) stimulated recall interviews, (7) language portraits, and (8) teacher and student interviews. The word-focused task will be evaluated based on participating students' learning and perceptions, as well as the teacher collaborators'

² Currently English Level 1 and Level 2

perceptions. The student-related evaluation will both include the group level, and zoom in on two individual participating students whom I call Sahar and Linnéa.

4.1 Participating students' learning

In Nylander (2025), the effect of completing the word-focused task on the participating students' word knowledge of the TWs was positive but moderate. The participating students' vocabulary test scores increased 25% on average between the pre- and immediate post-tests. On the individual level, Sahar reported studying the TWs at home using a vocabulary notebook resembling the word-focused task. This paid off as she, for example, scored 5 out of 7 points on the immediate post-test and 6 out of 7 points on the delayed post-test one month later for the TW *eschew*, despite not reporting having prior knowledge of *eschew* before to the task work. Linnéa did not report knowing *eschew* prior to the task work. She scored 3 out of 7 points on the immediate post-test and 0 out of 7 points on the immediate post-test, which suggests measurable short-term learning.

4.2 Participating students' perceptions

Student evaluations from Nylander (2025) suggested that the participating students learned new ways to engage in intentional vocabulary learning. However, the student evaluations also showed that the task work may have been overly repetitive, tedious, and demanding for some participating students. In-depth descriptions of Sahar and Linnéa indicated that they were particularly positive towards the word-focused task, albeit for different reasons. Sahar expressed a strong interest in learning new vocabulary. Linnéa was dyslectic and felt a concrete need to expand her English vocabulary knowledge to compensate for the self-reported spelling difficulties she attributed to the dyslexia.

4.3 Teacher collaborators' perceptions

Interviews with the teacher collaborators suggested that they perceived the word-focused task as a useful in-class task or as homework. They were positive towards digitising the word-focused task, although this was not necessarily considered superior to the paper-and-pencil format from Figure 1. Analyses of recorded teacher-researcher planning meetings showed that the teacher collaborator Tove independently tweaked the

word-focused task, and used it within the context of her own teaching. Figure 2 displays the word-focused task and Tove's adaptation of it juxtaposed.

English synonym(s)	Remember!: Please fill in the information which you feel would help you learn the target words if you were to study them. Write as much as you need to learn the words ☺
Translation equivalent(s) Please also write which language(s) the translation(s) is or are in	Illustration:
Explanation(s) in English and/or any other language(s):	Example sentence(s) including the word in English and/or any other language(s):
I have heard or seen this word (or part of the word) before when... Try to be as specific as you can here	This word makes me think about the word... Please also write which language the word is in

Words of Week 1

This Week's Focus

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Strategies

- Translate word to your first language
- Connect the word to other languages you might know
- Use the word in a sentence
- Find synonyms and acronyms for the word
- Draw the word or your associations to it
- Try to remember a specific situation where you have met the word before

Bonus: Vocab of the SAT

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Bonus: Add two new words of own choice

- 1.
- 2.

Figure 2: The word-focused task and Tove's adaptation of it

In Figure 2, Tove opted for a digital task sheet, where her students could tweak the layout as they wished instead of using pencil and paper like in Task Version 2. In Tove's adaptation of the word-focused task, students are encouraged to use all the resources suggested in Task Version 2 except TW explanations. In addition to providing synonyms, they can fill in TW acronyms. In Tove's adaptation of the word-focused task, the TWs are a mixture of pre-selected 'focus words' and self-selected 'bonus words' from the American SATs wordlist (CollegeBoard 2023). There is also room for learning two additional TWs of choice.

Tove's perception of letting students self-select TWs to learn changed with time. During the first recorded teacher-researcher planning meeting (18 October 2022), Tove planned to let her students self-select TWs in order to accommodate the students' varying proficiency levels in English. In the second recorded teacher-researcher planning meeting (10 November 2022), Tove had decided to restrict the TW selection more than she had planned originally, as not all students could self-select TWs effectively without guidance. When interviewed (6 December 2022), Tove reported that her students explicitly asked her to select TWs for them. Indeed, a major theme in the teacher interviews was apprehensions related to the responsibility and student agency inherent in the word-focused task. The teacher collaborator Nora said that while some students saw the usefulness of the task, others completed it in a passive way, without a long-term purpose in mind. This suggests that the word-focused task work requires scaffolding. For example, one teacher collaborator suggested focusing on one task section (e.g., TW synonyms or explanations) at a time in the classroom. The limitations of the word-focused task are further discussed in Section 5, to which I now turn.

5. Concluding remarks

This section outlines two limitations of the word-focused task and presents possible avenues for future research. In Nylander (2025), the word-focused task work did not involve *retrieval*, defined as opportunities to actively retrieve the meaning of a word from the memory (Snoder 2022). This is a limitation because each retrieval strengthens the form-meaning link and makes subsequent retrievals easier. Approximately seven repetitions with retrieval are needed to learn words intentionally, although there is learner variability with regard to the exact number of repetitions required. Whilst some words can be learned after two encounters, others may not be learned even after 20 exposures (Webb and Nation 2017). Everyone who learns a word initially notices it and understands its meaning through, for example, dictionary use or a teacher's explanation. If the noticing is followed by retrieval, the memory of the word will be strengthened. This is because retrieved words are reactivated in the robust long-term memory. If learners simply notice a word, it is only activated in the working memory, which does not lead to long-term retention. Vocabulary experts also recommend *spaced learning* where the repetitions are spread out and not concentrated to a single session, since encountering

words multiple times facilitates the integration of the vocabulary into learners' existing knowledge systems. Both spacing between learning opportunities during a single learning session and the spacing between each learning session should be considered (Webb and Nation 2017). It was previously thought that both types of spacing should be gradually increased (Nation 2022). However, Nakata (2015) showed that the amount of spacing is more important than gradual increase.

To maximize the potential vocabulary learning gains from engaging with the word-focused task, students could study their completed task sheets multiple times and then practice recalling what they wrote on the task sheets. Next, they could memorize the TWs from the task sheets by putting them on flashcards which they then study systematically. This involves retrieval and is therefore more efficient than word-lists (Webb, Yanagisawa, and Uchihara 2020). Alternatively, students could create their own fill-in-the-blanks sentences with TWs from the task sheets. Teachers should try to encourage learners to take control of their learning, as this makes the vocabulary learning more efficient and enjoyable (Nation 2022). Students should be tested on the TWs they learn because this creates another retrieval opportunity and signals that vocabulary learning is important (Schmitt and Schmitt 2020).

A second limitation is related to student motivation. Nylander (2025) suggests that task work was perceived as tedious by some participating students. The teacher collaborators also noted that not all students had the motivation to orchestrate their own learning efficiently. Thus, it is possible that the task work would have been more efficient had it been more motivating. Nakata and Webb (2016) stress that vocabulary learning tasks should have a clear motivating goal. One way to make the word-focused task work more motivating could hence be to integrate it into a didactic sequence aimed to help upper-secondary school students prepare for university-level studies in English. The didactic sequence could be aimed at students about to graduate from the upper-secondary school and enter university, thus connecting the task work to a concrete goal. Eriksson (2023) stresses the importance of repeatedly exposing upper-secondary school students to English academic word lists or subject-specific vocabulary lists to ease the transition from upper-secondary school to university. In Nylander (2025), one of the teacher collaborators encouraged her students to self-select TWs from the American SATs word list (CollegeBoard 2023) which they engaged with using the teacher

collaborator's own adaptation of the word-focused task. This makes it reasonable to assume that the word-focused task could be used to facilitate learning of TWs from academic word lists. Accordingly, the didactic sequence could start with an informative introduction explicitly pointing to the role of English in Swedish higher education, as proposed by Eriksson (2023). Next, students could practice the different ways of learning vocabulary suggested in the seven task sections, with the purpose of finding tactics that work for them (Webb and Nation 2017). After this, they could engage in intentional learning of TWs from the Academic Word List (Coxhead 2000) by completing the word-focused task. Assuming that intentional vocabulary learning is a tool for developing other language skills (Nation 2022), students should also get a chance to actually use the words and encounter them in different contexts. Teachers could plant the TWs from the wordlists into appropriately challenging academic texts which students read as part of the didactics sequence. Students could also try to use the TWs in, for instance, oral presentations of the texts, thus enabling encounters in meaning-focused input and output, respectively.

Focusing on academic vocabulary in this way is not suitable for all EFL students (Warnby 2023). What matters is that the TWs students learn by completing the word-focused task are relevant (Nation 2022). Importantly, individual upper-secondary school teachers should not be burdened with the sole responsibility of providing more intentional vocabulary learning opportunities and preparing students for university-level studies. This requires systematic efforts from both teachers, school leaders, politicians and researchers (Byrnes 2020). For example, teachers planning a didactic sequence related to academic vocabulary and English in higher education could collaborate with guidance counsellors and instructors at local universities to ensure that the information is adequate (cf. Eriksson 2023).

In Nylander (2025), the teacher collaborators suggested digitalizing the word-focused task, but did not necessarily deem this superior to a printed task sheet. A future study could compare the effect of completing a digital versus analogue version of the word-focused task on students' TW knowledge. The latter task format agrees with the Swedish government's recent call for change in the form of a move from the digital materials and tools currently dominating many classrooms towards more printed learning materials (Regeringskansliet 2025). On the other hand, assistive technology is known to help many students with learning

disabilities (Lindeblad, Nilsson, and Gustafsson 2018), which speaks in favour of the digital word-focused task format.

One teacher collaborator suggested focusing on one task section at a time during separate lessons, thus making the task work more manageable. Testing this empirically, a separate study could compare the task format from Figure 1 to a more scaffolded word-focused task format, where students do not self-select task sections to complete. Two teacher collaborators from Nylander (2025) suggested using the word-focused task as homework. As mentioned, the word-focused task was designed to promote pedagogical translanguaging. Another potential development of the word-focused task could therefore be to develop, implement, and evaluate the word-focused task as *translanguaging homework*, defined by Svensson and Svensson (2022: 217) as ‘assignments which students and parents (or other adults) do and discuss together, with the possibility of using all their linguistic resources’. Revisions of the word-focused task into translanguaging homework could include publishing printed word-focused task sheets with a QR code leading to a website with instructions. Aimed at parents or other guardians, the instructions could be available in multiple languages, hence making them useful for as many people as possible.

The aim of this article was to describe the development, implementation, and evaluation (Van den Akker 1999) of an intentional vocabulary learning task first presented in Nylander (2025). Theoretically, the task is based on Nation’s (2022) word knowledge framework, Schmitt and Schmitt’s (2020) engagement, and the translanguaging framework (e.g., Cenoz and Gorter 2022; García 2009; García and Wei 2014). Empirically, the task was developed and refined in a series of studies from Nylander (2025). This led to the final Task Version 2 from Figures 1 and 2. Task Version 2 was implemented in five different EFL classrooms, with students ranging from advanced English level 2 learners (expected CEFR-levels B1.2–B2.1) to beginner-level learners at the LIP (expected CEFR-level A1). In terms of evaluating the word-focused task, the participating students’ test scores increased by approximately 25% between the pre-tests taken before learning TWs using the task, and immediate post-tests taken after the task work. This indicates that the word-focused task can facilitate intentional vocabulary learning, granted that the task work is systematic and sufficiently scaffolded. The word-focused task was also successfully integrated into five unique didactic sequences. One teacher

collaborator from Nylander (2025) used and adapted the task based on her best practice. Thus, although the word-focused task alone does not solve any aforementioned problems related to students' English vocabulary knowledge, the present article suggests that the word-focused task is tweakable and widely applicable. As mentioned, the upper-secondary school syllabus for English has been changed. The version that came into effect on 1 July 2025 mentions vocabulary both in the core content and the subject aim, and thus has a more explicit vocabulary focus than the previous version (Nylander 2025). This makes it reasonable to assume that teachers need to be equipped with vocabulary research and vocabulary learning tasks, so that they can align their teaching with the syllabus and base their teaching on research and/or best practice, as specified in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800). Although there is a vast body of previous literature that is useful in this regard (e.g., Bergström 2023; Nation 2022, Schmitt and Schmitt 2020), there is a paucity of research centred on concrete and locally situated intentional vocabulary learning tasks, such as the word-focused task presented here (Nylander 2025: 248). This, in turn, arguably makes the article and the task presented herein a valuable contribution to the changing world of EFL teaching and learning in Sweden.

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