

## Teachers, learners, and corpora provide integrated insights into vocabulary in EAP learning materials

### What this research was about and why it is important

In English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts, teachers typically adapt textbooks and develop in-house materials to supplement textbooks to cater for their learners' specific needs. However, the extent to which those materials actually match the learners' proficiency levels remains unknown. The present study combined corpora, learners, and teachers to investigate vocabulary in all core materials in an EAP course for postgraduates in a Chinese university as vocabulary knowledge is closely related to students' comprehension of the learning materials and their academic success. Particularly, it examined vocabulary in both the commercial textbook and the teacher-created handbook. It found that both types of learning materials were too lexically demanding for the learners, which was confirmed by the teachers in the interviews.

### What the researchers did

- This study combined corpus analysis, learner vocabulary knowledge testing, and teacher interviews to investigate vocabulary in all core materials in an EAP course for postgraduates in China.
- The vocabulary levels of 537 students in this course were measured at the beginning of their EAP course.
- All core learning materials were collected and the vocabulary in them was analyzed.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers teaching in the EAP course under investigation.

### What the researchers found

- The corpus-based analysis showed that the learners would need to know the most frequent 4,000 words in English to achieve reasonable comprehension of the learning materials in the examined course. Moreover, the academic vocabulary was well represented in the learning materials.
- The vocabulary test revealed that the learners had mastered the most frequent 1,000 words in English, but not the other levels.
- The teacher interviews showed that most teachers perceived the vocabulary in the learning materials as difficult for their students.
- It was also revealed that vocabulary did not receive sufficient attention from the teachers in the development of learning materials.

### Things to consider

- This study suggested that the vocabulary in the learning materials of the examined EAP course was too challenging for the majority of these students compared to their existing vocabulary knowledge.
- When selecting commercial textbooks for their courses, EAP teachers should be aware of the assumption underlying the development of these textbooks so that they can better evaluate the suitability of the textbooks for their students.
- When adapting textbooks or designing supplementary materials in EAP courses, more attention should be given to vocabulary in these learning materials.
- It would be useful to keep the EAP teachers updated with the research-based principles in vocabulary given their important role in bridging the gaps between research-based information and the actual teaching practice.
- In future research, it would be interesting to explore the extent to which the learners find vocabulary in their EAP learning materials challenging and helpful.

**Material, data, open access article:** N/A

**How to cite this summary:** Lu, C. & Dang, T.N.Y. (2022). Focusing on vocabulary in EAP materials with a mixed-method approach. *OASIS Summary of Lu, C. & Dang, T.N.Y. (2022) in System*. <https://oasis-database.org>

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