

What do Primary Teachers Think about English Vocabulary Taught in Primary Schools?

Unkyoung Maeng

Ajou University

Maeng, Unkyoung. (2012). What do primary teachers think about English vocabulary taught in primary schools? *Modern English Education*, 13(1), 113-132.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of Korean primary teachers of the vocabulary of English taught in primary schools. This study also investigates the associations among the variables of teaching experience, overseas training experience, English teaching experience as a homeroom teacher and English teaching experience as an English teacher. 106 primary teachers participated in this study. Questionnaires were used to collect the data. For the data analysis, Crosstabs and Multi Response were used. The results of this study were as follows: First, 35% of the participants definitely considered the level of English words in textbooks to be easy, while 23% of them considered the level to be adequate. Second, 47% reported that they considered the size of the vocabulary to be inadequate, whereas 20% were satisfied with the size. In addition, nearly 90% of the respondents considered it proper to teach 4 words per hour. Among variables, overseas training experience was found to be significantly associated only with teachers' perception in this regard. Finally, 58% of the participants reported that words related to the category of greetings, apologizing and making excuses are overly presented in the textbook.

[perception/vocabulary size/vocabulary level/ primary teachers/
인식/어휘수/어휘수준/초등교사]

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the most important language components. It is of critical importance to foreign language learners. Words are the basic units of language and carry most of the message in communication. In other words, vocabulary knowledge enables language use and thus is a fundamental element in L2 learning (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Hulstijn, 2001; Nation 2001; Read, 2000). Several studies have reported that vocabulary

knowledge is closely related to success in communication and to literacy and cognitive development (Allen, 1999; Coady & Huckin, 1997). Atay and Kurt (2006) also noted that limited English vocabulary knowledge in the context of primary EFL education confined English communicative skills. Other studies have reported that vocabulary errors caused communication problems, while grammatical errors did not (Gass, 1988; Meara, 1984). Blass (1992) analyzed the errors of L2 learners and found most of these errors were related to vocabulary.

Although the importance of vocabulary acquisition has been recognized, it has not in fact been adequately emphasized before the 1980s. Along with the communicative language approach and the lexical approach, the importance of acquiring vocabulary has been emphasized more recently (Brown, 2007). In particular, it is essential for L2 learners to acquire vocabulary in the earliest stage of the learning process to communicate effectively (Gower, Phillips & Walter, 1995; Nunan, 2000). Laufer (1998) reported that L2 learners recognized the enhancement of their L2 proficiency when their vocabulary knowledge increased. Other studies also showed a high correlation between L2 proficiency and vocabulary knowledge (Lambert, 1972; Schmitt, 1998; Zareva, 2007).

The ultimate goal of English education in Korea is to enhance the ability of learners to communicate in English (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2008). Thus, English is now taught as a subject in Korea starting in the third grade of elementary school. Given that vocabulary constitutes the building blocks of communication with which to carry the central message and because it forms the essential base of learning listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, learning and teaching vocabulary is important in Korean primary English education. Especially for Korean primary students, how many words and what words in English should be taught are crucial factors.

However, little research has been done regarding the types of words and the size of the vocabulary needed by a foreign language learner in order to be a competent language learner. The manner of integrating vocabulary items into a curriculum is also an uncommon research topic. A few studies have been conducted on the size of the English vocabulary of Korean primary students (Y. S. Kim, 1997; Y. T. Kim, 2002; I. S. Kim & D. B. Jeong, 1999; T. S. Kim, 2003). Furthermore, the basic word list for primary students provided by the 7th national curriculum has some drawbacks. Because the word list was adopted from the vocabulary list of the sixth national curriculum without sound research and simply by removing 30% of the basic words provided to middle school students, it is questionable as to whether the types of words and the size of the vocabulary are suitable for Korean primary students (H. B. Lee, O. Kwon, I. D. Lee, W. K. Lee & Y. H. Lee, 1995; J. Choi, K. H. Park, E. J. Kim & K. C. Chung, 1997). The word list of the revised 7th national curriculum still contains problems related to the vocabulary size, despite the fact that it has been revised (K. Chang, 2007). In addition, compared to English textbooks of

other countries, the amount of vocabulary contained in a Korean English textbook is relatively low. Moreover, the vocabulary types are few (E. K. Seo, 2008). These studies indirectly indicate that a great amount of vocabulary should be selected based on specific criteria if seeking to enhance the communicative skills of L2 learners. Most research conducted in Korea was administered within the framework of the 7th national curriculum and from the perspective of professionals rather than primary teachers and students.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research from the perspective of primary teachers and students within the framework of the revised 2008 national curriculum. The present study is a follow up study of the author's earlier research (U. Maeng, 2011), which investigated the perception of Korean primary students on the vocabulary of their English textbook. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of Korean primary teachers on the vocabulary of English taught in primary schools to compose a more complete picture of the perceptions of users of primary English textbooks as opposed to that of the textbook developers. To be more specific, this study aims to investigate how the variables of overseas training experience, English teaching experience as a homeroom teacher and English teaching experience as an English subject teacher are associated with this perception. A survey was used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do primary teachers perceive the level of the vocabulary presented in the primary English textbook for their students? Do overseas training experience and English teaching experience have any association with teachers' perception in this regard?
2. How do primary teachers perceive the size of the basic vocabulary list? How many words do they consider proper to teach per hour? Do overseas training experience and English teaching experience have any association with teachers' perception in this regard?
3. What word categories or topics do primary teachers think should be complemented or eliminated?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Vocabulary Size

Vocabulary plays an important role in learning L2, as it is a basic unit of knowledge related to pronunciation, spelling, morphemes, inflection, grammar, and meaning (Laufer, 1997; Read, 2000). Vocabulary learning is ongoing process; thus, even highly proficient L2 learners still have some difficulties in L2 communication due to deficiencies in L2 vocabulary compared to L1 communication. McCarthy (1990) reported that the vast amount of vocabulary knowledge affects the success of L2 communication more critically compared to grammatical or phonological knowledge. Especially for beginners, vocabulary

knowledge is the key factor to distinguish their level of L2 proficiency. Thus, teaching basic vocabulary to beginners is crucial for the success of L2 communication (Cook, 1994; Higgs & Clifford, 1982; Nunan, 2000). Vocabulary knowledge helps to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and vice versa (Bonk, 2000; Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Hu & Nation, 2000). In other words, vocabulary plays an important role in language knowledge and use, and should therefore receive more attention in L2 curriculum design and in L2 teaching and learning.

However, it is impossible to learn or teach all L2 vocabulary. There are nearly 114,000 word families in English according to the largest non-historical dictionary of English, Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Goulden, Nation & Read, 1990). It is a very ambitious goal to teach all of these English words to L2 learners, as even native speakers do not know all of them (Nation, 2001). Therefore, it is important to set a realistic goal of vocabulary learning based on sound research related to vocabulary size. Adequate knowledge of words is a prerequisite for effective language use. Learners whose vocabulary is below a certain threshold level have difficulty in decoding the basic elements of a text (Read, 2000). Thus, what is the minimum number of words that learners need to know in order to understand a text and to communicate successfully? 95% of the running words in a text, in other words nearly 3000-4000 word families, is the amount necessary for minimally acceptable comprehension. 98% coverage is likely to be the threshold level for adequate comprehension (Bonk, 2000; Hu & Nation, 2000; Laufer, 1997; Nation, 1990). Lado (1964) mentioned that at least 2000 words are needed for speaking, 3000 words for listening and reading, and 7000 words for adequate reading. Nation (1997) stated that when L2 learners know 2000 words, they comprehend 80% of written text and 96% of spoken text. In sum, previous studies indicate that L2 learners need to know at least 2000 or more words to communicate fairly well.

It is assumed that native speakers learn 1000-2000 words per year, which is 3-7 words per day in their elementary school (Taylor, 1990). Wendy and Ytreberg (1990) suggested that it is adequate for L1 primary students to learn 4-8 words per hour, as their text book is designed to teach 4-8 words per hour. Fox (1987) reported that most of EFL textbooks are designed to teach 1500-2000 words within three years, and Cross (1995) found that it is suitable to teach 5-7 words per hour for EFL/L2 learners. Primary students in Indonesia have 4-5 hours of English classes per week, through which they learn 1000-2000 words within five years; primary students in Africa have 3-5 hours of English classes per week and learn 1500-2000 words within three years (Nation, 1990). I. S. Kim and D. B. Jeong (1999) insisted that Korean primary English learners should learn at least 3 words per hour. However, according to the revised 2008 national curriculum, Korean primary students are to learn 520 English words within four years, and it is required to teach at least 390 words from the basic word list of 736 English words (MEST, 2008). In other words, Korean

primary students are to learn 1.5 words per hour considering that they have 2-3 hours of English classes for four years starting from third grade. The goal of learning English vocabulary suggested in the revised 2008 national curriculum is very low compared to that of other EFL nations and compared to the minimum number of basic words for L2/EFL learners suggested in many studies.

Considering the learning burden of Korean primary students, it is desirable to set a limit on the size of the basic English word list. However, simply reducing the number of learned words will not decrease the learning burden. Pronunciation, the word class, similarity, the learning/teaching method, and the learner's language proficiency are factors associated with the L2/EFL learning burden in addition to the L2 vocabulary size. In other words, the learning burden is reduced when learners learn words such as nouns or adjectives, loanwords, receptive words, and words that are easy to pronounce (Henning, 1973; Jordan, 1982; Nation, 1990, 2001). The limited size of basic English words suggested in the 2008 revised national curriculum takes the opportunity away from Korean primary students to build adequate vocabulary knowledge and creates constraints for those who write authentic primary English textbooks. With this limitation, it is difficult to create a textbook of authentic learning materials that can enhance a learner's communicative skills and to design interesting and differentiated textbooks for students of different levels of English proficiency (Y. S. Kim, 1997; E. K. Seo, 2008; D. Shin & H. Joo, 2008). Due to this limitation, the lexical content level of the primary English textbook is not aligned with that of the middle school English textbook (J. R. Kim & Y. Chun, 2008). These results as well as the results from other studies strongly suggest the necessity of increasing the size of the basic English vocabulary for Korean primary students (Y. S. Kim, 1997; I. S. Kim & D. B. Jeong, 1999; W. Lee, Y. H. Choi, K. S. Boo & J. W. Lee, 2001).

Previous studies related to vocabulary size were conducted mostly from the perspective of professionals. Few studies were conducted from the perspective of teachers and students. Moreover, they were administered within the framework of the 7th national curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the perception of teachers and students within the framework of the recently revised 2008 national curriculum. In addition, the learning environment and learners' attitudes have changed greatly since the beginning of primary English education in Korea. One recent study (U. Maeng, 2011) investigated the perception of primary students of the English words of their textbooks and found that primary students recognized the importance of learning more vocabulary. However, no study has sought to investigate primary teachers' perspective of the words in their primary English textbook within the framework of the 2008 revised national curriculum. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the perception of primary teachers on these English words to create a complete picture of the perception of users of primary English textbooks along to augment the findings of the author's earlier study (U. Maeng).

2. Criteria for Selecting Basic Vocabulary

Studies of L1 learner vocabulary have suggested that EFL/L2 learners need to know very large numbers of words (Nation, 2001). The process of learning a new word for primary EFL beginning learners is quite different from that of EFL adult learners or young native speakers. Some research has shown that all words are not considered to be of equal value to L2 learners (Hu & Nation, 2000; Nation, 1990, 2001; Nation & Hwang, 1995). In other words, some words are more useful than others. EFL/L2 learners can communicate adequately with a relatively small number of well-selected words (Nation, 2001). Therefore, besides the size of vocabulary, criteria for selecting useful words for EFL learners are also important in teaching vocabulary and in the design of the lexical content of a textbook.

Various types of criteria should be adopted when selecting useful basic vocabulary items, such as frequency of use, range, coverage, availability, learnability, opportunism, and centers of interest (White, 1988). Frequency is the most obvious criteria when selecting words, as it is more effective to teach the words that appear most frequently in everyday life out of the vast number of English words so as to enhance the communicative skills of EFL students in a short amount of time. Words with a broader coverage and words found in various types of text should be also taught first. Words which are easy to learn and which are easily available to L1 speakers despite their lower frequency should be taught early. Notwithstanding their low frequency, coverage, and range, word relevant to learners' immediate situations, such as the days of week, objects in the classroom, and the names of months should be selected and taught early as well. Finally, words that are likely to interest students should be selected for teaching (Carter, 1987; White, 1988).

Other factors, such as topics, functions, notions and grammar, and teaching ability should be considered when selecting L2 words to teach (Harmer, 1991). Haycraft (1978) and Saville-Troike (1976) considered the needs of students as an important criterion with which to select useful vocabulary items. Mackey (1965) noted that it is important to select words that students need and use authentically and emphasized the priority of the criteria for word selection in the following order: frequency, coverage, range, availability, and learnability. Richard (1974) considered language needs, familiarity, and regularity as important criteria for selecting basic vocabulary opposed to frequency, coverage, and learnability. The 7th Korean national English curriculum also used frequency, range, learnability, and students' needs as criteria for formulating the basic English vocabulary (Ministry of Education, 1999).

The results of previous research as discussed above indicate that learner' factors such as interest, needs, familiarity, and purpose as well as frequency, range, and coverage are important criteria for selecting useful vocabulary. A few studies have been conducted using

student's factors to analyze the lexical content of Korean English textbooks. One study analyzed the lexical content based on learner's factors (Y. H. Kim, Y. I. Park & E. H. Cho, 2008), and another investigated primary students' perceptions of the English words in their textbooks (U. Maeng, 2011). Besides the perceptions of students, teachers' perceptions are also necessary when analyzing English words in the primary textbook designed as part of the 2008 revised national curriculum. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate what types of words primary teachers think should be included and excluded in the current primary English curriculum.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

104 teachers participated in this study. They are all primary school teachers in Seoul and Gyeonggi province in Korea. There were 13 male teachers and 91 female teachers. All of them had at least 6 months of experience of teaching English to 3, 4, 5, and 6th grade students as either as a homeroom teacher or as an English subject teacher. Table 1 shows the details of the participants in this study.

TABLE 1
Background Information

Oversea training experience		Teaching experience as an homeroom teacher			Teaching experience as an English subject teacher		
Yes	No	Less than 2years	2-4 years	More than 4years	Less than 2years	2-4 years	More than 4years
66%	34%	50%	32.5%	12.5%	39.5%	53.5%	7.0%

To be more specific, 66% of the participants had at least 6 months of overseas training experience. 50% of the participants had taught English as a homeroom teacher for less than 2 years and approximately 30% of them had done so for 2-4 years. Nearly 40% of the participants had taught English as English subject teachers for less than 2 years, and approximately 53% of them had done so for 2-4 years.

2. Materials and Procedures

In this study, questionnaires were used to gather data. The questionnaires were written in

Korean. There were 12 questions in total: 5 open-response and 7 closed-response questions. The questions fell into three different categories. Seven questions were related to vocabulary size and the level of the vocabulary taught in primary schools, four questions were related to the type of vocabulary and one question was related to difficulties and suggestions regarding the teaching of vocabulary.

The survey was administered by mailing the questionnaire to groups of primary teachers who had participated in an intensive teacher training program and by visiting primary English teacher training programs conducted by the Seoul Education Office and the Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education.

For the data analysis, Crosstabs and Multiple Response analysis were used to analyze the closed-response questions. The answers to the open-response questions were also analyzed mainly to interpret the main difficulties or problems in teaching vocabulary as well as suggestions to enhance vocabulary learning.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Vocabulary Level and Size

The perception of primary teachers of the level and size of the vocabulary of English taught in primary schools was examined. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. More teachers perceived that the level of the English words in the textbooks was not appropriate for their students. About 35% of the participants definitely considered that the level of the words in the textbook for each grade level of English was not proper for primary students, whereas 23% of them considered the level to be correct.

TABLE 2
Perception on the Level of Words

8. Do you think the level of the words presented in the English textbooks for each grade level is right level for those students?					
Absolutely No	No	Neutral	Yes	Absolutely Yes	Missing
5(5.1%)	30(30.3%)	41(41.4%)	22(22.2%)	1(1.7%)	5

Together with the results of the open-ended question related to this issue, it can be concluded that all of them considered the English words to be too easy for their students. However, the perceptions of teachers of the level and the size of English vocabulary were not affected by other variables, in this case overseas training experience and teaching experience as either a homeroom teacher or an English subject teacher. To be more

specific, some participants mentioned that the words were too easy and limited for students to read even a simple story book. Others reported that students need to learn more words since the words were too easy. When their students took a vocabulary test, only 5 of them did not score 100%; for 3rd graders, 70% of the English words in the 3rd grade textbook are known words; thus many more words are required to provide a more authentic context to enhance students' oral skills and communicative skills. For 5th and 6th grade students, the words were perceived to be too easy because they had already learned the words in private after-school classes; in this case, the respondents felt it necessary to extend the vocabulary size by revising the curriculum if necessary. In addition, some of them mentioned that the relatively low vocabulary size had led to the lack of lexical alignment between the 6th grade English textbook and the middle school English textbook.

Nearly 47% of the participants mentioned that the size of the English words presented in the textbook was not adequate for their students to achieve the goal of primary education, defined as enhancing communicative skills while focusing on spoken skills, and only about 20% of them expressed satisfaction with the size of the English words (See Table 3).

However, participants were almost perfectly split regarding the question of whether to put a limitation on the number of words taught in primary English education. 72% of participants mentioned that it is proper to teach more than 700 words in primary schools overall and almost 90% of participants considered it proper to teach at least 4 words per hour, while the national curriculum suggests teaching 520 words, 1.5 words per hour. The majority of participants (77.1%) mentioned that it is proper to teach 4-9 words per hour, and about 11% of them put this number at 10-20 words per hour. Among the variables, overseas training experience was significantly associated with this issue ($\chi^2 = 11.960$ $p=0.035$). Approximately 98% of participants with some training experience abroad and about 79% of participants with no overseas training experience mentioned that they could teach more than 4 words per hour. Nearly 85% of teachers with overseas training experience mentioned that they could teach 4-9 words per hour, while about 67% of teachers with no overseas training experience gave the same response.

Furthermore, most of the participants who responded to the open-ended question related to questions 1 and 2 in table 3 mentioned that the English words presented in the textbooks are not a proper means of achieving the goal of primary education, as the number of words is not sufficient for students to develop or enhance their communicative skills. In addition, they mentioned that the words were too easy; various types of words should be introduced to express authentic expressions. They reported that their class was at the proper age to acquire as many words as possible; because a learner's exposure to L2 spoken input is important, they felt it was necessary to increase the size of words. They also expressed that if the size of English vocabulary is not increased, it would be impossible to use authentic learning materials such as storybooks and songs in a classroom. The participants also

supported the idea of setting a limitation on the number of vocabulary items taught, as this could reduce the achievement gaps between students at different proficiency levels, mainly caused by students attending private after-school programs, and the learning burden or stress. In contrast, those who did not support this idea mentioned that the limitation should be banned in an effort to enhance communicative skills, make students learn various expressions related to everyday life, increase their interest, make use of various teaching materials more effectively, and provide an adequate amount of L2 input to the students. Some of them, however, suggested providing only the range of teaching vocabulary.

TABLE 3
Perception on the Size of Words

1. Do you think the number of basic words presented in the primary English textbook is adequate for students to achieve the goal of primary English Education, defined as enhancing spoken communicative skills?							
Absolutely No	No	Neutral	Yes	Absolutely Yes	Total		
10(9.6%)	39(37.5%)	34(32.7%)	18(17.3%)	3(2.9%)	104		
2. Do you think it is proper to set a limitation on the number of words to be taught to implement more effective primary English education?							
Yes			No		Missing		
50(49.5%)			51(50.5%)		3		
3. How many English words do you think are proper to teach in primary schools overall?							
500 words	600 words	700words	800words	1000words	Other	Missing	
12(16%)	9(12%)	15(20%)	18(24%)	16(21.3%)	5(6.7%)	29	
9. How many new words do you think are proper to teach per hour?							
Total (96)	1-3 Words	4-8 words	5-9 words	10-14 words	15-20 words	Other/ Missing	
	10(10.4%)	39(40.6%)	35(36.5%)	8(8.3%)	3(2.9%)	1(1.7%) /8	
Overseas	Y	1(1.7%)	28(47.5%)	22(37.3%)	6(10.2%)	2(3.4%)	0(0%)
Training Experi- ence	N	7(21.2%)	10(30.3%)	12(36.4%)	2(6.1%)	1(3.0%)	1(3.0%)
	T	8(8.7%)	38(41.3%)	34(37.0%)	8(8.7%)	3(3.3%)	1(1.1%)

$$(\chi^2 = 11.960 \text{ p}=0.035)$$

Overall these results are similar to the results of the earlier study by the author regarding the perception of primary student on the level of the English words in their textbook (U. Maeng, 2011). Primary teachers as well as students perceived that the level of English words for primary education is low. Both groups thought that most of the words presented in the textbook were known words. They also considered that the size of the vocabulary

should be increased. Primary students thought that they could learn at least 5 words per hour (U. Maeng), and primary teachers thought that it was proper to teach at least 4 or 5 words per hour. Primary teachers as well as students definitely considered that the number of and level of the English words should be increased. Taken together, these results and those of previous studies (Cross, 1995; Fox, 1987; Nation, 1990; Wendy & Ytreberg, 1990) indicate that the number of words to teach in primary education specified by the 2008 revised national curriculum should be increased to at least 4 words per hour.

2. Types of Vocabulary

Primary teachers' perception of the types of vocabulary and problems and suggestions related to vocabulary instruction were examined. The results of multiple responses are presented in Table 4 and Table 5. About 56% of participants reported that more words related to the category of family life should be included in the basic vocabulary list. About 49%, 48%, 45%, and 41% of participants reported that more words related to the categories of sports, hobbies, and play; school life; verbs and helping verbs; and adjectives, respectively, should be added. When participants were asked what types of words should

TABLE 4
Words to Include in the Basic Vocabulary List of Primary Education

4. Which category of words do you think should be supplemented among the categories of English words presented in the current primary English education curriculum?							
	C	Pct. of Responses	Pct. of Case		C	Pct. of Responses	Pct. of Case
Greetings, Apologizing & Making excuses	39	6.9%	37.9%	Transportation, communication, Direction	33	5.7%	32.0%
School Life	49	8.6%	47.6%	State, Properties	31	5.5%	30.1%
Family Life	58	10.2%	56.3%	Public facilities & buildings	29	5.1%	28.2%
Color, Shape	33	5.8%	32.0%	Nouns, Pronouns	27	4.8%	26.2%
Body	30	5.3%	29.1%	Verbs & Helping Verbs	46	8.1%	44.7%
Person, Jobs	40	7.1%	38.8%	Adjectives	42	7.4%	40.8%
Space, Nature	30	5.3%	29.1%	Prepositions, Adverb, Article	25	4.4%	24.3%
Sports, Hobbies, Play	50	8.8%	48.5%	Others	5	.9%	4.9%
Total	Count 567		Pct. of Response 100%		Pct. of Case 550.5%		

be added to the basic vocabulary list so as to teach English more effectively, the group with the highest number of participants mentioned that it was necessary to add more verbs; the group with the second highest number of participants mentioned adjectives; and the group of the third highest number of participants mentioned words related to family life and emotion.

The author's study (U. Maeng, 2011) showed that primary students used words related to the category of school life most often. In particular, adjective and verb forms in this category, which have a relatively broad coverage and range, were used more often. Students also responded that family life, school life, space and nature, jobs, sports and hobbies, and public facilities and buildings were the categories of words that they wanted to learn most, in that order. These results indicate that primary teachers and students both consider it necessary to include more words related to the category of family life in the basic vocabulary list; while students wanted to learn nouns more despite their greater use of adjectives and verbs, teachers wanted to teach verbs and adjectives. Overall, from the perspective of users of textbooks, they definitely want to include more nouns, verbs, and adjectives related to family life and school life in the basic vocabulary list. Thus, this indirectly indicates that coverage and student interests as well as the frequency, range, and student needs should be considered when selecting the basic vocabulary for primary English education in Korea.

About 58% of the participants indicated that words related to the category of greetings, apologizing, and making excuses are overly represented in the primary English textbook (See Table 5). Some of them mentioned that greeting words such as "hello," "hi," "good morning," and "bye" appear repeatedly; others mentioned it is not necessary to organize a unit entirely to teach greeting words as words related to greetings are very basic words which are used and taught continually. Primary students also reported that they knew words related to greetings best, with those related to colors second, according to the previous study (U. Maeng, 2011). This result shows that teachers and students have the same opinion: too many words related to greetings are presented in the textbook. Overall, these results indirectly indicate that words related to a specific category such as greetings should be balanced with other words that are less frequently presented and that textbook users consider useful.

TABLE 5
Overly Used Words in the Basic Vocabulary List of Primary Education

6. Which category of words do you think is overly represented among the categories of English words presented in the current primary English education curriculum?							
	C	Pct. of Responses	Pct. of Case		C	Pct. of Responses	Pct. of Case
Greetings, Apologizing & Making excuses	15	44.1%	57.7%	Body	3	8.8%	11.5%
Family Life	5	14.7%	19.2%	Person, Jobs	3	8.8%	11.5%
Color, Shape	8	23.5%	30.8%	Total	34	100%	130.8%

However, when participants were asked about which words should be excluded from the basic vocabulary list to teach English more effectively, most of the participants who responded to this open-ended question mentioned that no such words needed to be excluded from the vocabulary list. They mentioned that the greatest problem they faced in the classroom is the great proficiency gap among students. Thus, it would be better to retain the present vocabulary list and add new words, as even simple words are difficult for low-proficiency students whereas they are too easy for high-proficiency students.

In addition, when the participants were asked about their greatest problem while teaching English, more than half of them mentioned that they undergo great difficulty when teaching vocabulary. Specifically, they mentioned that they do not know how to teach vocabulary more effectively; they want to know how to make students learn English words and use the words receptively and productively; they have difficulty in explaining words more effectively, which affects their students to use the words more authentically; they are unable to spend enough time teaching new words to low-proficiency students because they have to consider upper-level students as well while teaching vocabulary; they want to know effective ways to teach multi-level proficiency students equally given the great gap of vocabulary knowledge that exists between high- and low-proficiency students. Furthermore, the primary teachers had several suggestions. First, they mentioned that more authentic dialogue related to students' everyday life and a greater variety of teaching/learning materials including vocabulary should be included in the textbook. Second, they mentioned that the number of teaching/learning words should be expanded; instead of setting a limitation and presenting a basic vocabulary list, they felt it would be more effective to set only a range of teaching/learning vocabulary items so that teachers could select suitable words to teach according to their students' levels of proficiency.

Lastly, they suggested that information related to effective ways of teaching vocabulary should be provided in the curriculum or in the textbooks.

Overall, the quantitative results and qualitative results show that primary teachers as well as primary students consider the current English words presented in the textbook as not demanding. They also demand additional basic English vocabulary items. They mentioned that it is adequate to learn at least 4 words per hour, whereas students were expected to learn 1.5 words per hour according to the 2008 revised national English curriculum. More specifically, they want to include more words related to family life and include more verbs, adjectives, and nouns which have a broad coverage and range. Therefore, the findings here related to the perception of users of textbooks indicate that the number of basic English words should be increased so that at least 4 words could be taught per hour while other word selection criteria such as coverage and student interests should be considered when developing primary English textbooks in the future.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight the perception of primary teachers on the vocabulary of English taught in primary schools. First, the study revealed that more teachers feel that the English words in the textbooks are too easy for primary students and that the number of words is not adequate for their students. About 35% of the participants definitely considered that the level of English vocabulary was easy for primary students, whereas 23% of them considered it to be the right level. About 47% of participants felt that the size of English vocabulary presented in the textbook does not sufficiently allow their students to enhance communicative skills, and only about 20% of the respondents were satisfied with the size of English vocabulary.

Second, primary teachers think it is necessary to teach at least 4-5 words per hour. 72% of participants mentioned that it is proper to teach more than 700 words in primary schools overall and almost 90% of participants considered it proper to teach at least 4 words per hour, while the national curriculum suggests teaching 520 words, 1.5 words per hour. The majority of participants (77.1%) reported that it is proper to teach 4-9 words per hour, and about 11% of them mentioned 10-20 words per hour as the right amount. Among the variables, only overseas training experience was found to be significantly associated with the perception ($\chi^2 = 11.960$ $p=0.035$). About 98% of participants with some training experience abroad and about 79% of participants with no overseas training experience mentioned that they could teach more than 3 words per hour. Nearly 85% of teachers who had overseas training experience mentioned that they could teach 4-9 words per hours, while about 67% of teachers with no overseas training experience gave the same response.

Overall, these results are similar to the results of the author's former study, which focused on the perception of primary student of the level of the English words in their textbook (U. Maeng, 2011). Primary teachers as well as students perceive that the level of English words for primary education is low. Both groups thought that most of the words presented in the textbook are known words. They also considered that the size of the vocabulary should be increased. Primary students thought that they could learn at least 5 words per hour (U. Maeng) while primary teachers also thought that it is proper to teach at least 4 or 5 words per hour. Primary teachers as well as students definitely considered that the size and the level of the English words should be increased. These results and those of previous studies (Cross, 1995; Fox, 1987; Nation, 1990; Wendy & Ytreberg, 1990) indicate that the number of words to teach in primary education as suggested by the 2008 revised national curriculum should be increased to at least 4 words per hour.

Third, teachers perceived that too many words related to greetings are presented in the textbook. About 56% of participants indicated that words in the category of greetings, apologizing, and making excuses are overly represented in the primary English textbook. However, most teachers reported that no such words needed to be excluded from the vocabulary list. About 56% of participants stated that more words related to the category of family life should be included in the basic vocabulary list; about 49%, 48%, 45%, and 41% of participants held that more words related to the categories of sports, hobbies, and play; school life; verbs and helping verbs; and adjectives, respectively, should be added. According to the results of open-ended questions, the group with the highest number of teachers mentioned that it is necessary to add more verbs to the basic vocabulary list, the group with the second highest number of teachers mentioned adjectives, and the group with the third highest number of teachers mentioned words related to family life and emotion. The previous study (U. Maeng, 2011) showed that primary students used words related to the category of school life most often. Specifically adjectives and verbs in this category, which have a relatively broad coverage and range, were used more often. Students also cited family life, school life, space and nature, jobs, sports and hobbies, and public facilities and buildings as the categories of words that they wanted to learn most, in that order (U. Maeng). These results, taken together, indicate that primary teachers and students both consider it is necessary to include more words related to the category of family life in the basic vocabulary list; while students want to learn nouns more despite the fact that they use adjectives and verbs more often, teachers want to teach verbs and adjectives. Overall, from the perspective of the users of the textbooks, they definitely want to include more nouns, verbs, adjectives related to family life and school life in the basic vocabulary list. Thus, this indirectly indicates that coverage and student interests as well as the frequency, range, and student needs should be considered when selecting the basic vocabulary list for primary English education in Korea.

Fourth, more than half of the teachers mentioned that they felt great difficulty when teaching vocabulary. Specifically, they mentioned that they did not know how to teach vocabulary more effectively and that they want to know how to make students learn English words and use the words receptively and productively. They also want to know effective ways to teach multi-level proficiency students equally given the great gap of vocabulary knowledge that exists between high- and low-proficiency students. Furthermore, they suggested that more authentic dialogue related to students' everyday lives and that a greater variety of teaching/learning materials, including vocabulary materials, should be included in the textbook. They also suggested that the number of words to be taught should be expanded and that teachers should have some freedom to select suitable words to teach according to the students' levels of proficiency. Lastly, they suggested that information related to effective ways to teach vocabulary should be provided in the curriculum or in textbooks.

Overall, the results of the present study and the previous study (U. Maeng, 2011) present a clearer picture of the users of primary English textbooks. Primary teachers as well as primary students consider the current English words presented in the textbook within the framework of the 2008 revised national curriculum to be undemanding. They also demand an increased number of basic English words. They consider that it is adequate to learn about 4 words per hour, whereas students were to learn 1.5 words per hour within the framework of the current national English curriculum. More specifically, they want to include more words related to family life and verbs, adjectives, and nouns which have a relatively broad coverage and range.

Therefore, the findings here pertaining to the perception of users of textbooks as well as the results of previous studies (Cross, 1995; Fox, 1987; I. S. Kim & D. B. Jeong, 1999; Nation, 1990; Wendy & Ytreberg, 1990) imply that the number of English basic words suggested to teach in the current primary English curriculum should be increased to at least 4 words per hour in order to build adequate vocabulary knowledge of primary students and obtain the goal of primary English education. In addition, this study indicates that word-selection criteria such as coverage and student interests as well as frequency, range and learnability should be considered when formulating the basic English vocabulary and developing primary English textbooks in the future. However, a more inclusive study of this issue with a broader range of participants is needed to present a more complete picture of primary teachers' perception since the participants of this study were confined to Seoul and Gyeonggi province.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. (1999). *Words, words, words*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Atay, D., & Kurt, G. (2006). Elementary school EFL learners' vocabulary learning: The effects of post-reading activities. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(2), 255-273.
- Blaas, L. (1992). *Fossilization in the advanced learner's lexicon*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Utrecht, Department of English, The Netherlands.
- Bonk, W. (2000). Second language lexical knowledge and listening comprehension. *International Journal of Listening*, 14, 13-31.
- Brown, C. (2007). Factors affecting the acquisition of vocabulary and saliency of words. In T. Huckin, J. Haynes & J. Coady (Eds.), *Second language reading and vocabulary learning* (pp. 263-286). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Carter, R. A. (1987). *Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives* (2nd ed.). London: Allen & Unwin: Routledge.
- Chang, Kyoungsook. (2007). Basic vocabulary in the revised national curriculum of English. *English Teaching*, 62(2), 331-353.
- Choi, Jinhang, Park, Ki-Hwa, Kim, Eun-Ju, & Chung, Kook-Chin. (1997). *Development of the 7th national English curriculum*. Seoul: Korean Educational Development Institution.
- Coady, J., & Huckin, T. (1997). *Second language vocabulary acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, V. (1994). Universal grammar and the learning and teaching of second language. In T. Odlin (Ed.), *Perspectives on pedagogical grammar* (pp. 25-48). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cross, D. (1995). *Practical handbook of language teaching*. New York: Phoenix ELT.
- Fox, L. (1987). On acquiring an adequate second language vocabulary. In M. Long & J. Richard (Eds.), *Methodology in TESOL: A book of readings* (pp. 307-311). Boston, Mass: Heinle & Heinle.
- Gass, S. M. (1988). Second language vocabulary acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 9, 92-106.
- Goulden, R., Nation, P., & Read, J. (1990). How large can a receptive vocabulary be? *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 341-363.
- Gower, R., Phillips, D., & Walter, S. (1995). *Teaching practice handbook* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching.
- Harmer, J. (1991). *The practice of English language teaching*. London: Longman Group.
- Haycraft, J. (1978). *An introduction to English language teaching*. New York: Longman.
- Henning, G. H. (1973). Remembering foreign language vocabulary: Acoustic and semantic

- parameters. *Language Learning*, 23, 185-196.
- Higgs, T. V., & Clifford, R. (1982). *Curriculum competence and the foreign language teacher*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Hirsh, D., & Nation, P. (1992). What vocabulary size is needed to read unsimplified texts for pleasure? *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 8, 689-696.
- Hu, M., & Nation, P. (2000). Unknown vocabulary density and reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 13(1), 403-430.
- Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). International and incidental second-language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 225-286). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jordan, R. (1982). Pyramid discussions. *ELT Journal*, 44, 46-54.
- Kim, In-Seok, & Jeong Dong-Bin. (1999). A study on the new basic word lists for elementary English education. *Primary English Education*, 5(1), 105-140.
- Kim, Jeong-Ryeol, & Chun, Yunhee. (2008). A study on the continuity of elementary and middle school English textbooks through a corpus-based analysis: The 6th grade elementary school English textbook and the 1st grad middle school English textbook. *English Teaching*, 63(2), 361-394.
- Kim, Taek-Su. (2003). A study of the vocabulary of the elementary school English textbooks. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 11(4), 1-18.
- Kim, Young-Hyun, Park, Young-Im., & Cho, Eun-Hee. (2008). Surveys and analyses of the vocabulary of nouns in the elementary school English coursebooks. *Primary English Education*, 14(1), 99-125.
- Kim, Young-Suk. (1997). A suggestion for teaching basic elementary English vocabulary. *Primary English Education*, 3, 5-17.
- Kim, Young-Tae. (2002). An analysis of vocabulary in English textbooks for elementary school students. *Studies in English Education*, 7(1), 49-75.
- Lado, R. (1964). *Linguistics teaching*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Lambert, W. (1972). *Language, psychology, and culture: Essays by Wallace E. Lambert*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Laufer, B. (1997). The lexical plight in second language reading: Words you don't know, words you think you know, and words you can't guess. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 20-34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laufer, B. (1998). The development of passive and active vocabulary in a second language: Same or different? *Applied Linguistics*, 19(2), 255-271.
- Lee, Hong-Bae, Kwon, Oryang, Kim, Im-Deuk, Lee, Won-Key, & Choi, Yeon-Hee. (1995). *National English curriculum for elementary school students*. Seoul:

Ministry of Education.

- Lee, Wonkey, Choi, Yeon Hee, Boo, Kyung-Soon, & Lee, Jeong-Won. (2001). An investigation into the effects of elementary English education: A follow-up study on first-year middle school students. *English Teaching*, 56(4), 211-241.
- Mackey, W. F. (1965). *Language teaching analysis*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.
- McCarthy, M. (1990). *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Maeng, Unkyoung. (2011). Vocabulary proficiency of primary school students and their perception on English vocabulary. *Modern English Education*, 12(2), 115-139.
- Meara, P. (1984). The study of lexis in interlanguage. In A. Davies, C. Cripser & A. P. R. Howatt (Eds.), *Interlanguage* (pp. 225-235). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Ministry of Education. (1999). *A guide of the elementary school curriculum*. Seoul: Daehane. Co. Ltd.
- Ministry of Education Science and Technology. (2008). *The 2008 National English curriculum (1)*: Ministry of Education Science and Technology Proclamation No. 2008-160. Seoul: Ministry of Education Science and Technology.
- Nation, P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Boston, Mass: Heinle & Heinle.
- Nation, P. (1997). Teaching vocabulary. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 238-253). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, P., & Hwang, K. (1995). Where would general service vocabulary stop and special purposes vocabulary begin? *System*, 23, 35-41.
- Nunan, D. (2000). *Language teaching methodology*. New York: Longman.
- Read, J. (2000). *Assessing vocabulary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richard, J. (1974). Word lists: Problems and prospects. *RELC Journal*, 5(2), 69-84.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1976). *Foundations for teaching English as a second language: Theory and method for multicultural education*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Schmitt, N. (1998). Quantifying word association responses: What is native-like? *System*, 26, 389-401.
- Seo, Eun Kyeong. (2008). A comparative study of vocabulary in Korean and Singaporean elementary school English textbooks. *English Language Teaching*, 20(3), 225-249.
- Shin, Dongkwang, & Joo, Hunwoo. (2008). Development of a vocabulary list of English textbook authorization: Reflection on vocabulary analysis programs and the basic vocabulary list. *Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning*, 11(3), 93-111.
- Taylor, B. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International Ltd.

- Wendy, A. S. & Ytreberg, L. H. (1990). *Teaching English to children*. London: Longman.
- White, R. (1988). *The ELT curriculum*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Zareva, A. (2007). Structure of the L2 mental lexicon: How does it compare to native speakers' lexical organization? *Second Language Research*, 23, 123-153.

Examples in: English

Applicable Language: English

Applicable Levels: Elementary

Unkyoung Maeng
Ajou University
Graduate School of Education
San 5 Wonchung-dong, Youngtong-gu
Swon, Kyungi-do 443-749, Korea.
Tel: (031) 219-1883
Fax: (031) 219-2096
Email: my5329@ajou.ac.kr

Received 17 December 2011

Revised 6 February 2012

Accepted 15 February 2012