



# Suitability of Vocabulary Teaching Materials of Grades 6 & 7 textbooks for learners with Dyslexia

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# Background



**The Context:** English is taught as the main second language in Sri Lanka. Government-issued pupils' books are the primary classroom resource.



**The Challenge:** Learners with dyslexia and other SpLDs face significant hurdles in vocabulary acquisition.



**The Problem:** Textbook design can either **mitigate** or **exacerbate** these barriers.



**Research Question:** To what extent do vocabulary teaching materials in Grade 6 and 7 textbooks assist learners with dyslexia to learn words?

# Literature Review

**Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011):** Avoid extraneous cognitive load (e.g., long, unstructured lists of words) to help learners form schemas.

**Vocabulary Pedagogy (Nation, 2013; Nijakowska, 2010):** Focus on a small number of new words (6-8) per lesson and provide repeated practice over time.

**Multisensory Approaches (Schneider & Crombie, 2003):** Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic input creates stronger memory pathways.

**Inclusive teaching:** Good for all learners

# Methodology

- **Approach:** Qualitative document analysis
- **Sample:** Six vocabulary units (3 from Grade 6, 3 from Grade 7)
- **Tool:** A 7-criterion checklist derived from the literature:
  1. Font clarity & spacing
  2. Multisensory input
  3. Structured layout
  4. Vocabulary load
  5. Functional use of colour
  6. Clarity of instructions
  7. Repetition & spaced review
- **Scoring:** Each criterion rated 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent).

# Results Overview

Average scores by criterion  
across all six units

Criterion	Mean score
Font clarity and spacing	2.00
Multisensory input	1.33
Structured layout	0.00
Vocabulary load	1.33
Functional use of colour	1.00
Clarity of instructions	2.83
Repetition and spaced review	1.83

## Key Findings

**Suboptimal Typography:** Serif fonts, italics, and decorative letters were common; dyslexia-friendly sans-serif fonts were rare (M=2.00).

**Limited Multisensory Input:** Tasks mainly relied on visual matching and gap-fills, lacking structured auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic activities (M=1.33).

**Non-functional Use of Colour:** Colour was used for decoration, not to highlight target features of vocabulary consistently (M=1.00).

**High Vocabulary Load:** Some units presented overly large lists of new words, e.g., thirty synonym/antonym pairs on a single page, which risks cognitive overload (M=1.33).

**Inconsistent Spaced Revision:** Opportunities for systematic review were sporadic (M=1.83).

#### Activity 4

Match the opposite words.

a) patient	impolite
b) noisy	lost
c) early	disobedient
d) polite	receive
e) dry	wet
f) found	impatient
g) give	late
h) heavy	wide
i) narrow	light
j) obedient	quiet

#### Similar words / Synonyms

centre	- middle	new	- modern
dangerous	- risky	polite	- courteous
glad	- happy	quick	- fast
hard	- difficult	well-known	- famous
intelligent	- clever	brave	- fearless

#### Activity 5

1) Circle the two synonyms in each set of words.

1. warm	chilly	cool	comfortable
2. walk	crawl	stroll	run
3. argue	scare	confuse	frighten
4. gift	honesty	present	winner
5. sing	paint	colour	write


2) Write a synonym for each word.

1. silent -
2. see -
3. tasty -
4. tiny -
5. beautiful -

# Discussion

Identified weaknesses directly align with challenges faced by learners with dyslexia:

- Long lists of words increase **extraneous cognitive load** (Sweller, 2011).
- Limited multisensory practice reduces the number of **encoding pathways** available.
- Poor typographic choices and non-functional highlighting impede **visual processing**.



**Teacher guidance** is crucial to complement material adjustments, including modeling pronunciation and providing socio-emotional support (Kormos & Indrarathne, 2025).



# Recommendations

1. **Limit New Vocabulary:** Present only **6-8** new items per lesson. Distribute longer lists across subsequent lessons.
2. **Embed Micro-Tasks:** Add short (**1-3 min**) multisensory activities:
  1. **Auditory:** Choral repetition.
  2. **Kinaesthetic:** Miming meaning, tracing words.
3. **Adopt Functional Design:**
  1. Use a consistent, sans-serif font (e.g., Arial, Calibri).
  2. Use **bold** or a single highlight colour for target words.
  3. Avoid italics for blocks of text.
4. **Schedule Spaced Review:** Plan brief reviews—after 1 day, 3 days, 1 week, and fortnightly.
5. **Teacher Mediation:** Model pronunciation and meaning first before moving to spelling.



## Long and Short A Hearing the Difference

Name:

1

Date:

1. Look at the pictures. Say each word aloud. Listen out for the vowel sound. Is it a short A (like in 'apple') or a long A (like in 'aim')? Draw a line to the sound you hear.
2. Challenge: Complete the sheet by thinking of your own examples and adding them to the blank boxes.



Long & Short A: Hearing the Difference. (n.d.).  
Squarespace.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5452398fe4b08a9d2089dea2/t/6003286d4f994d4e735c4663/1610819695155/Long+A+-+1+-+Hearing+the+Difference.pdf>

## Conclusion

- The existing vocabulary activities in Grade 6 & 7 textbooks are not dyslexic friendly.
- Materials designers should rethink about the contents and lay-outs of vocabulary materials.

# References

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Q & A