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Lexical Analysis of a Textbook based on the EVP

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ABSTRACT

Commonly accepted as an important component in EFL, vocabulary teaching in textbooks plays a great role in how well a learner can communicate in a language because it is the lexical items that convey the information and meaning of what the learner wishes to express. In this paper, we examine the words selected for the vocabulary activity of the textbook. Aiming at A2 Level, Mastermind is used by the 8th grade learners of English attending secondary schools in Turkey in order to portray whether the level of each word in vocabulary activities of the textbook is calibrated and appropriate according to A2 Level, determined by the English Vocabulary Profile based on the levels of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages ranging from A1 to C2. In this context, the Text Inspector, a search tool based on the EVP, is employed as a search instrument in this study. As a result of the analysis carried out, it is found out that the textbook, Mastermind for 8th grade secondary school does not correspond with A2 Level suggested by the 8th grade curriculum of BED in terms of the activities for teaching vocabulary.

Key Words: Lexical analysis, English textbook, English vocabulary profile, Text inspector.

1. Introduction

Textbooks used in language learning process all around the world cover the syllabus for teachers to be able to structure their lessons. Lessons are designed up to 90 percent based on the textbook in the US. This is similar figures when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language (Harwood, 2014; Larsson et al., 2017). It is also ascertained that textbooks play a very essential role in teaching and learning a language and affect views over what is regarded as central and crucial for both teachers and students (López-Jiménez, 2014). Therefore, textbooks become a reasonable target of teaching and learning vocabulary when the leading role of vocabulary in English as a foreign language (henceforth, EFL) textbooks over the last two decades is also taken into consideration (López-Jiménez, 2014).

The breadth of vocabulary knowledge that learners of English acquire is both a crucial indication of and an important contribution to language abilities, since a rich vocabulary enhances mastery of the basic language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Hu & Nation, 2000; Qian, 2002). In the same vein, learning vocabulary is seen as a key element to achieve a high level of proficiency in

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language learning by some of the theoreticians (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Zu, 2009; Schmitt, 2000). It is also believed that having large and varied vocabulary knowledge is a sign of communicative competence and learning vocabulary should be regarded as an integral part of learning a foreign and second language since it paves the way for communication (McCrostie, 2007).

In the 21st century, it is commonly seen that teaching vocabulary is a central component of learning and teaching a language; thus, it should be dealt with thoroughly in foreign language (henceforth, FL) classroom. Vocabulary tends to feature prominently in EFL textbooks, especially in contextualized and accompanied with “word-building” activities. In the process of selecting vocabulary for EFL textbooks, such factors as frequency of use, coverage, culture, needs, and proficiency level are among the ones that should be under consideration (Nation, 2001; Okamoto, 2015; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014).

One of the most current methods of selecting vocabulary and setting a teaching and learning path for vocabulary is the English Vocabulary Profile project (Capel, 2012), which is fundamentally grounded on the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth, CEFR). The CEFR, including more fully and newly updated “plus levels” and a new “Pre-A1” level along with newly developed illustrative descriptor scales in addition to the existing ones (Council of Europe, 2018), describes language skills learners of English are supposed to develop at each of proficiency level of the scale (North, 2005).

2. The English Vocabulary Profile

The English Vocabulary Profile (henceforth, EVP), known as the English Profile Wordlists previously, was initiated as a project under the active support from the Council of Europe in 2007 by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, Cambridge University Press, British Council, Cambridge University, University of Bedfordshire, and English UK. It aims not only to reveal which words are widely known by learners of English at the CEFR levels around the world, but also assign these levels to the words and their individual meanings (Capel 2010; Kurtes & Saville, 2008).

In the construction process of the EVP, English Profile researchers utilise the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC), the Cambridge English Profile Corpus (CEPC) and the Cambridge English Corpus (CEC) by integrating expertise and judgement thanks to the exhaustive evidence from receptive and productive language use and the EP corpus with the intent of providing the basis of detailed diagnostics for grammatical, lexical and exponents within the levels of the CEFR (Good, 2010; Harrison, 2015; Saville & Hawkey, 2010).

In terms of its vocabulary coverage, considered as ever-growing resource, the EVP includes many more phrases, phrasal verbs, and idioms rather than just words, derived from corpus-based evidence. Commonly employed by educators, exam writers, materials developers and teachers, syllabus designers, and researchers, the EVP provides its users with interactive database and functions such as the presentation of words with multiple meanings across different CEFR levels, audio and written pronunciations, real examples of words used in sentences and different filters including parts of speech, affixes and topics (Capel, 2012). In the process of compiling, words are classified depending upon their actual senses. To illustrate, the word “blue” is widely available in the six levels of CEFR. Being a colour adjective, “blue” is taught at A1 level, while it is used as the expression “to feel blue” at C2 level.

For each level of English competence there are two versions of the EVP as the British English version and the American English version. Composed of words, phrases, phrasal verbs and idioms, the glossary in the EVP reflects the actual language competence of learners qualified for each level of the CEFR (Sun, 2017). Even though the EVP is principally designed not to prescribe but to describe the lexical aspects of English language, it also provides an indirect account of English grammar and discourse as a consequence of a fairly complex procedure of linking words, their meanings and recurrent expressions with the CEFR levels (Leńko-Szymańska, 2015) because of the fact that the EVP developers look up each word, meaning and set phrase in the the Cambridge Learner Corpus to make sure how they are used by EFL learners at the CEFR levels around the world in real examination scripts (Capel, 2012).

A set of criteria such as level of learners, age and educational background of learners, their reason for learning English, their areas of interest, their experience should be weighed by ELT professional while making decisions regarding what to include in a course and textbook. Hence, at this point the EVP, providing a guide to common words and phrases that learners need to know rather providing a list of terms that learners have to be exposed to, is also of value in designing English language curricula, textbooks, and specifying strengths and weaknesses of their learners at different stages of their learning programmes (Capel, 2015; Harrison, 2015; Saville & Hawkey, 2010).

In this study, for this reason, it is necessary to investigate whether publishers of EFL textbooks establish and follow a systematic criterion for the selection and treatment of vocabulary in lexical content of EFL textbooks. In this context, the aim of this study is to analyse whether the level of each word in vocabulary activity of the textbook is calibrated and appropriate according to A2 Level as expected by both 8th grade English language curriculum of the Ministry of Education (hereafter, MONE) and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth, CEFR).

3. Methodology

The material that serves as a basis for this study is made up of a textbook, Mastermind for 8th grade learners of English who are supposed to acquire English language at A2 level as basic users in line with the principles of the CERF. The textbook is chosen since it is written by the commission and approved by the MONE to be used for 5 years from 2017 to 2022 in public secondary schools in Turkey. The textbook is designed in line with the 9th-12th grades English curriculum prepared by Board of Education and Discipline (henceforth, BED). Another reason for choosing the textbook is that it is commonly used in public secondary schools in Turkey. As the textbook is written in accordance with A2 level based on the CEFR principles and 8th grade language curriculum designed by the BED, it is expected to cover the required lexical and linguistic features at A2 level. Table 1 shows an overview of the information presented in the textbook.

Table 1. General information about the textbook

General information	Grade	Level	Year of publication	Publisher	Pages	Units	Number of vocabulary activity
Mastermind	8 th	A2	2018	MONE	157	10	54

This textbook was published by MONE in 2018. The textbook is 157 pages long and divided into ten units with its such themes as friendship, teen life, and adventures that draw direct parallelism with 8th grade language curriculum of BED. Each unit further divided into 5 part under the names of lessons, assignment, self-assessment, revision, and additional activities. Each unit is composed of 6 lessons with focus on language skills, an assignment, a self-assessment checklist, a revision and a 3 page-additional activity. In order to figure out what CEFR levels the words belong to and establish the vocabulary profiles of the textbook, the main methodology employed in this study is lexical analysis of vocabulary activities. When it comes to the validity and reliability of this study, this study proves its validity since it investigates the vocabulary profiles covering 10 complete units in English language textbook used in Turkish public secondary schools by employing the tool, Text Inspector made for this specific reason. As regards reliability, according to Winter (2000), the measurement is expected to be stable even if the same study were conducted by anyone else. The vocabulary activities and the search tool provide this study for a higher reliability as in anyone else's potential attempt to reproduce the same study.

3.1. Instruments

We employed the online application Text Inspector, which is solely capable of processing words as to CEFR level accurately, to analyse the words of vocabulary activities belonging to the units of the textbook. Text Inspector draws on the EVP, which is a part of the English Profile project that is a global research dedicated to creating a database of the grammar and vocabulary EFL learners are supposed to know at each CEFR level.

As is seen in Figure 1, in the wake of the analysis at the lexical level, words are classified into the proper CEFR levels based on corpus-oriented research in the EVP database; however, some words are labelled Unlisted as these words are either personal names, geographical names, numbers, or words that are not available in the EVP database.

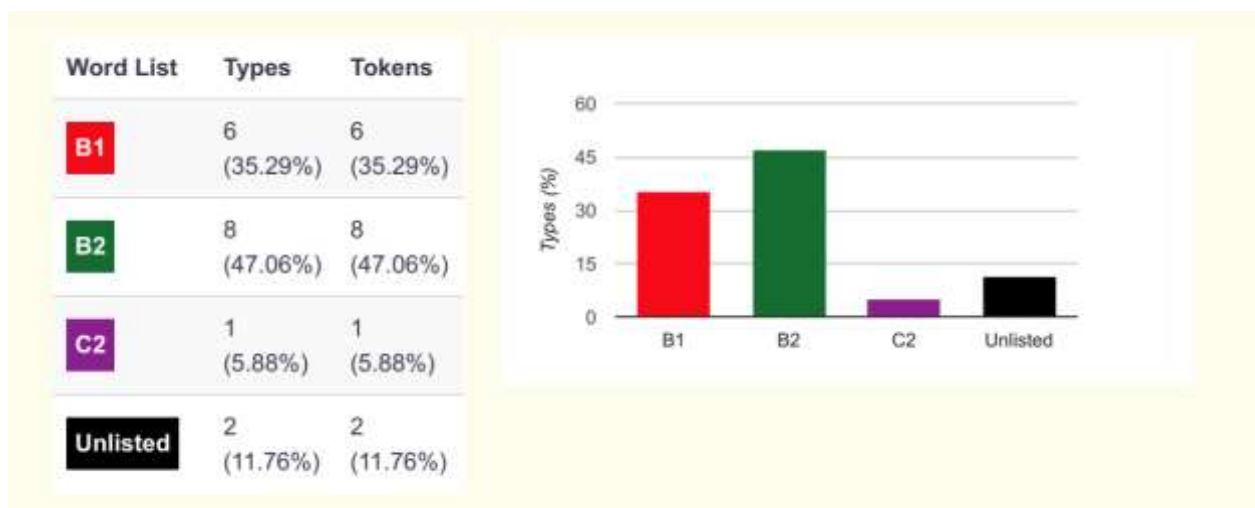


Figure 1. Text Inspector search result of 10th unit

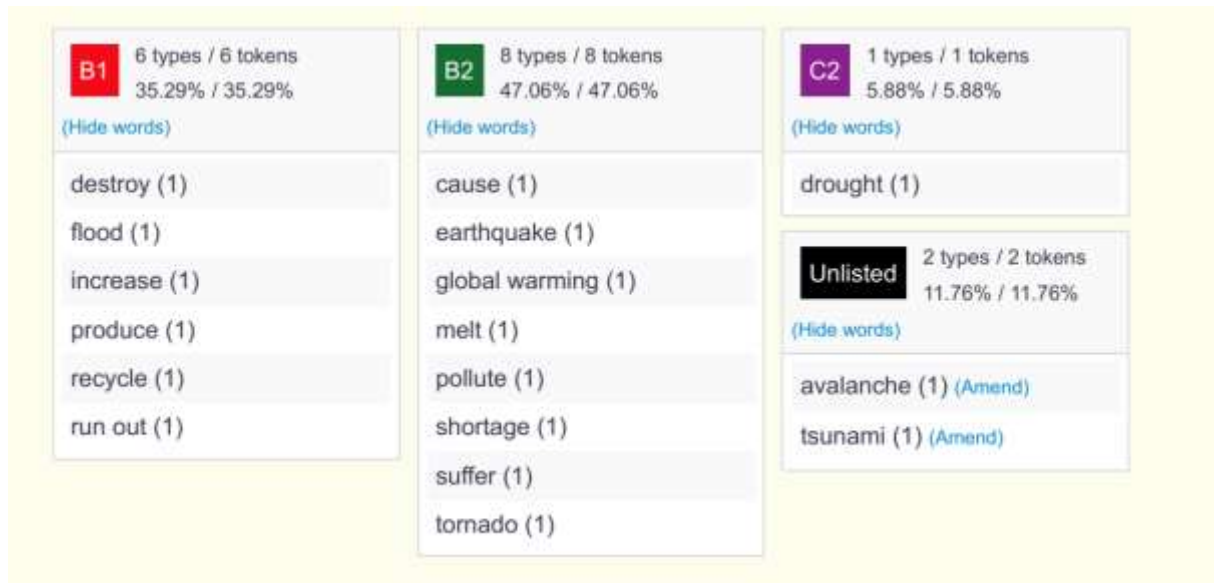


Figure 2. Text Inspector classification of words in the 10th unit by levels

3.2. Procedure

There are three phases to our investigation. Firstly, we scanned the vocabulary activities of the textbook, and then we specified the words in the vocabulary activities of each unit in the textbook in order to make the words computer-readable. The scanned words from vocabulary activities in each unit were proofread and corrected to ensure that there were no errors or differences between the words in the textbook and scanned ones. Secondly, using Text Inspector, we analysed these words in order to assess the appropriateness level of the vocabulary in each unit of the textbook in terms of British English version of the EVP. As Text Inspector displays the lowest value of each word typed by default, in the analysis process for contextual appropriateness of each word in the textbook, the UPDATE button was employed by choosing the correct use provided by database of the EVP. When the words come out as Unlisted as a result of the analysis, they are manually checked in the EVP once again in order to provide exact and accurate results. In the analysis process, some words are labelled Unlisted because of the fact that these words are either names, geographical names, numbers or words that are missing from the EVP database. Lastly, the CEFR levels of the vocabulary are determined based on the EVP. This analysis portrays whether the vocabulary of each unit is at the appropriate level for 8th grade learners of English.

4. Results

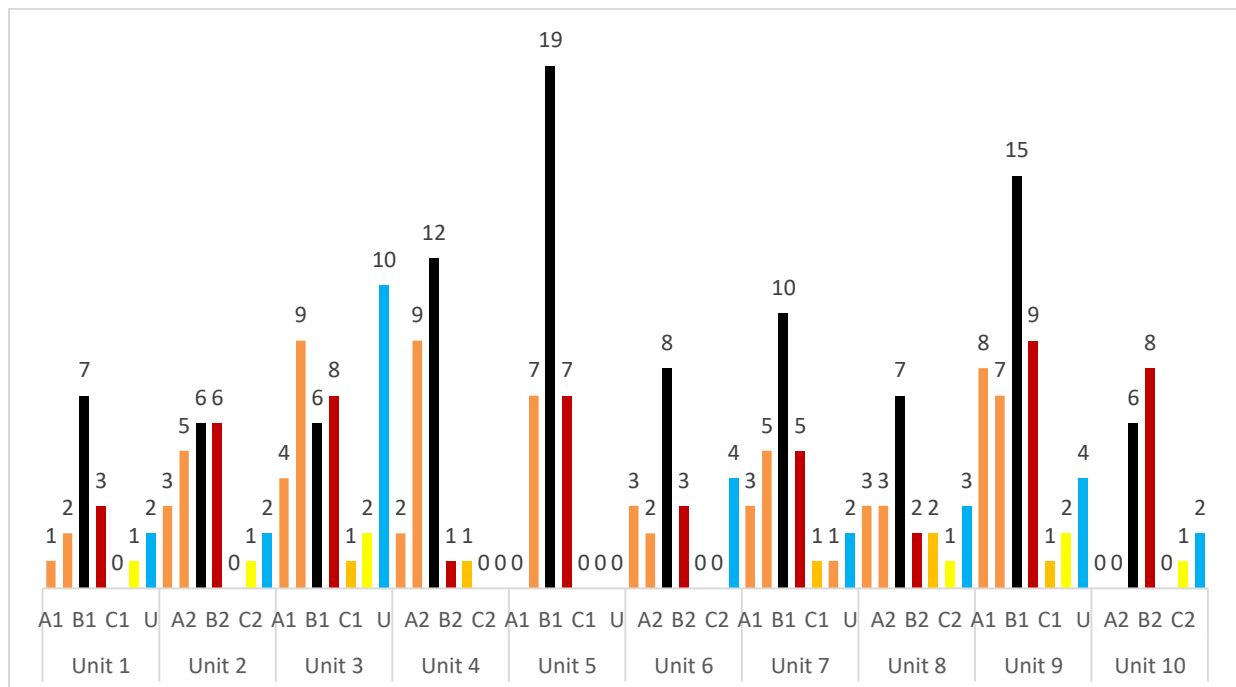


Figure 3. Distribution of words/phrases in vocabulary activities in terms of each unit based on the CEFR levels

In figure 3 above, the number of words belonging to vocabulary activities and their CEFR levels in each unit of the textbook are presented as a result of the analysis based on the EVP. A1 and A2 Levels as Basic User are labelled by green colour to make a comparison with the other levels of the CEFR concerning the words in the vocabulary activities of each unit of the textbook. Additionally, there is no standard number of word in vocabulary activities belonging to each unit of the textbook. For instance, whereas 25 words are included in different vocabulary activities in the fourth unit, the unit five covers 33 words in different vocabulary activities in the textbook. The first unit includes total 16 words in the vocabulary activities, only 3 of which belong to A1 and A2 Levels (Basic User) according to the CEFR. In the second unit, 8 of the words out of 23 are at the levels of A1 and A2. In the third unit of the textbook, there are 40 words in the vocabulary activities, 13 of which fit into A1 and A2 Levels. When it comes to the fifth unit vocabulary activities, only 7 of the words fall under the level of A2. Similarly, out of 20 words belonging to the vocabulary activities of sixth unit, merely 5 of the words are classified under the levels of A1 and A2. Only 8 of the words the vocabulary activities cover belong to the level of Basic User. In the same vein, out of 21 words in the vocabulary activities, solely 6 of them are at the Basic User level. In the ninth unit of the textbook, vocabulary activities include 15 words at the levels of A1 and A2 out of 46 words in total. In the final unit of the textbook, there is no word in the vocabulary activities at the levels of A1 and A2.

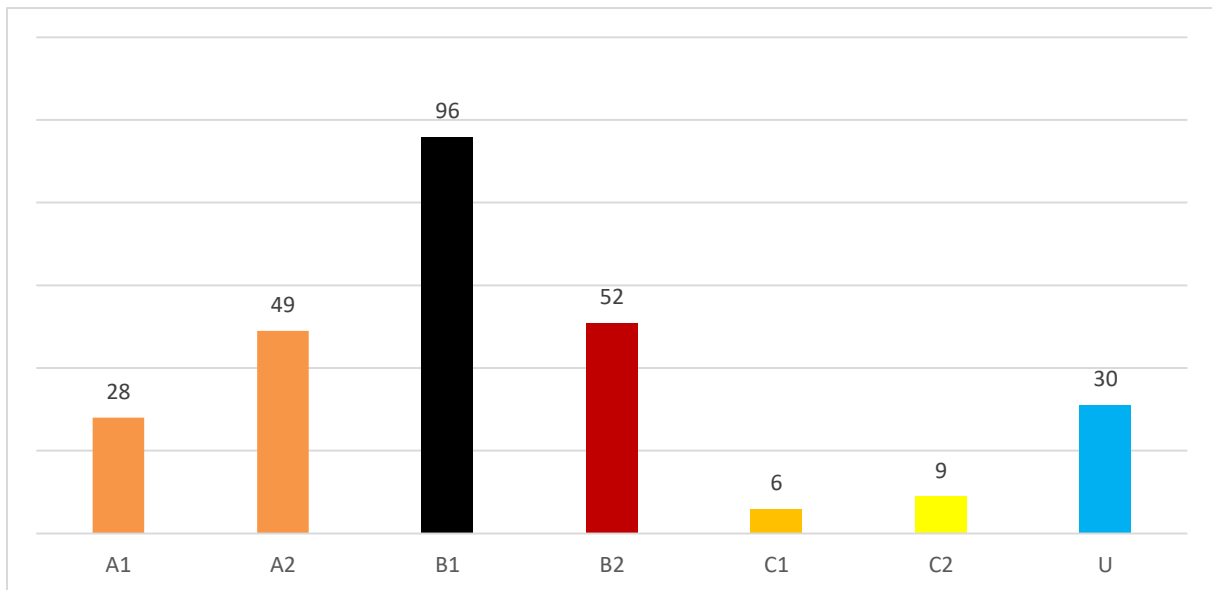


Figure 4. Distribution of words/phrases in terms of the CEFR levels in vocabulary activities of the textbook

In the 4th figure, as a result of the analysis of all units of the textbook based on the EVP, the total number of words falling under the CEFR levels is presented. Out of 270 words in the vocabulary activities of all units of the textbook, Basic User level is represented by only 77 words (28,51%), 28 (10,37%) of which belong to A1 Level and 49 (18,14%) of which belong to A2 Level; however, 193 (71,48%) words in the vocabulary activities of the textbook are at the higher levels of the CEFR. Specifically, 148 words (54,81%) are classified under the Independent User level, 96 (35,55%) of which are at the level of B1 and 51 (19,25%) of which are at the level of B2 level. In addition to this, 5,59 % of the words (6 words at C1 and 9 words at C2) in the vocabulary activities fall under the Proficient User level. 30 words (11,11%) in all vocabulary activities of the complete units belonging to the textbook are labelled as Unlisted since those words might be either names, geographical names, numbers or words that are missing from the EVP database.

5. Discussion

What should be initially noted and recalled regarding the textbook is that it is supposed to help 8th grade secondary school learners of English to acquire English language skills at the level of A2 in line with the 8th grade A2 Level English language curriculum prepared by BED under the umbrella of MONE. However, there is a noticeable difference between how many words that belong to each of the CEFR levels in the textbooks. In other words, as is seen generally in Figure 4, there is a very low coverage of words belonging to the Basic User (levels A1 & A2) in vocabulary activities in the whole textbook. It is also notable that the number of words belonging to higher levels such as the Independent User level (B1&B2) is much higher. A couple of words belonging to the CEFR levels from lower to higher ones respectively including an Unlisted one are to get on in the first unit at the level of B1, unbearable in the second unit at the level of B2, chores in the eighth unit, to sprinkle in the third unit at the level of C2, and to mash in the third unit as an Unlisted one. This indicates that the authors of the textbook have not considered the relevant corpus, the EVP linked to the CEFR scale when selecting vocabulary based on the set of criteria regarding vocabulary range specified by Council of Europe as is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Vocabulary range criteria from Council of Europe (2001)

VOCABULARY RANGE	
C2	Has a very good command of a very broad lexical repertoire including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning.
C1	Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.
B2	Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his or her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution.
B1	Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel and current events.
A2	Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs.
A1	Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations.

The CEFR, establishing vocabulary range at a particular proficiency level in a given language, suggests that A2 Level learners has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. That said, it clarifies some important principles concerning vocabulary selection in the process of preparing materials and textbooks. Among these principles are to follow lexico-statistical rules, that is to say, selecting the highest frequency words in a large general word-counts, and to select words from spoken and written texts in order to teach them to learners of English (CEFR, 2001). To be more precise, as the CEFR portrays, the Basic User (A1&A2 Levels) is expected to acquire basic lexical sets including high frequency, many of which are the grammatical building blocks, enabling learners of English to structure their language at phrase and sentence level like a, the, some, any, but, and so on. In addition to this, there are some expressions at A1 and A2 Levels that learners of English may come across such as See you soon, No thanks, and Take care (Capel, 2010). However, when Table 3 below is examined in terms of aforementioned knowledge as to the level of Basic User, the phrases and words in the table show that they are not composed of ones that are proper for learners of English at the level of A2.

Table 3. Examples of vocabulary based on EVP analysis

WORDS	
C2	laid-back (adj.), sprinkle (v.), snob (adj.), province (n.), drought (n.), vaccination (n)
C1	workshop (n.), memo (n.), transportation (n.), clean up (phr. v), chores (n.), genius (adj.)
B2	back up (phr. v.), count on (phr. v), pollute (v.), rural (adj.), log off (phr. v), comment (v.)
B1	get on (phr. v), argue (v.), honest (adj.), excuse (v.), support (v.), embarrassed (adj.)
A2	art (n.), cool (adj.), full (adj.), check (v.), dry (v.), break (v.)
A1	friend (n.), wash (v.), holiday (n.), exciting (adj.), boring (adj.), plate (n.)
UNLISTED	chit-chat (n.), culinary (adj.), season (v.), trendy (adj.), whisk (v.), knead (v.)

In a study conducted by Koprowski (2005) regarding the usefulness of the chunks presented in ELT textbook, it was concluded that the authors of ELT textbooks pursue an unprincipled and careless vocabulary selection strategy based on much personal discretion and intuition. In the same context, Gilmore (2015) ascertained that the authors of ELT textbooks do not control the textbooks against relevant corpus data, thereby excluding many essential words in natural discourse from those textbooks. According to Granger (2015), the reason why ELT textbook authors are not in favour of checking/using corpora lies in the fact that a lack of awareness of the benefits of corpora among language teachers and materials writers. No matter how useful corpora is regarded in the design of language teaching materials (Meunier & Reppen 2015), the amount of work necessary to render corpus findings into accessible teaching materials is the other main reason observed by Gilmore (2015). Similar observations have been made by other scholars. For instance, both Harwood (2005) and Burton (2012) underlined a lack of fit between natural language represented in corpora and textbook language found in ETL textbooks. Based on the findings of the aforementioned studies and samples of words/phrases taken from the selected textbook for 8th grade secondary school learners of English as a result of the EVP analysis, it may be deduced that no corpus data is taken into consideration if any word/phrase suits and meets the needs of learners of English at the level of A2 in the process of designing vocabulary activities. This issue draws a very close parallelism with the studies of aforementioned scholars. Actually, at the Basic User Level learners of English should acquire mainly topic nouns, action verbs together with some basic grammatical words like determiners, prepositions, as well as functional phrases (Harrison, 2015). Nevertheless, vocabulary activities of different units belonging to the selected textbook cover words/phrases that are beyond A2 Level such as get on (phr. v), embarrassed (adj.) back up (phr. v.), count on (phr. v), workshop (n.), memo (n.), sprinkle (v.), and snob (adj.). In this respect, it could be expressed that when 8th grade learners of English are exposed to learn and know the words/phrases belonging to higher levels of the CEFR like the ones shown in Table 3, they may be deprived of the words/phrases that they need to know at the level of A2 especially when language learners are supposed to take a standard exam like KET (The Key English Test), this issue could be troublesome for them in terms of the vocabulary knowledge of A2 Level. Meanwhile, these learners of English are not able to meet the instructional and knowledge requirements of the 8th grade English language curriculum designed by BED.

When the distribution of words/phrases in each unit in terms of CEFR levels is taken into consideration, it is perceived that the textbook, Mastermind for 8th grade secondary school learners of English does not correspond with the level (A2 Level) suggested by the 8th grade curriculum of BED with regard to activities for teaching vocabulary. The results also show that the textbook does not provide essential vocabulary appropriate for 8th grade learners of English in terms of both the CEFR Levels and related curriculum. According to some scholars (Alber, 2014; Gairns & Redman, 1986; Schmitt, 2010), in the selection of words/phrases a set of criteria including frequency and coverage of vocabulary, needs and levels of language learners might all affect whether a lexical item will be perceived as difficult. Gairns and Redman (1986) argue that when the needs of English learners conflict with their proficiency level in the course of designing a material for low level language learners, preference is given to language learners' proficiency level over their needs. In this regard, the results of the current study contradict with the studies of the aforementioned scholars. Under the theme of third unit in the kitchen, some words/phrases labelled as Unlisted including season (v.), grate (v.), whisk (v.), marinate (v.), and knead (v.) are the ones missing from the EVP database because of the fact that they may be at very low frequency in the written and spoken texts. Without taking into account the essential vocabulary needs and priorities of language learners at A2 Level, it is highly questionable whether ELT textbook writers or material designers should integrate those kinds of specific and rare words/phrases belonging to higher CEFR levels into the vocabulary activities of ELT textbooks since the fact that the most commonly used words/phrases are learned faster and remembered better. (Gough, 1984; Tomayo, 1987).

6. Conclusion

To sum up, in the light of the findings of the current study, in the process of words/phrases selection for vocabulary activities, appropriateness plays a very crucial role in composing ELT textbooks. Textbooks for language teaching are expected to be prepared at the appropriate level, taking into considerations the age group of learners, needs and interests. Additionally, it could be emphasised that in order to meet the real instructional and knowledge necessities of learners of English, there are no set of criteria and guidelines either prepared by MONE or private publishing companies for textbook authors that they could take benefit concerning which word belongs to which CEFR level and which word should be and shouldn't be taught at each CEFR level. Considering that this study solely investigates the textbook for 8th grade learners of English, it might be difficult to draw general conclusions regarding all textbooks employed by schools of MONE in Turkey; however, specific to this textbook one could assume that the authors do not pay attention to both 8th grade curriculum designed in accord with A2 Level and the needs of learners of English with regard to teaching vocabulary and its suitability to their readiness level at the level of A2

There are several pedagogical implications that can be drawn from this study. It could be considered to conduct a more extensive investigation of ELT textbooks used in primary, secondary, and high schools in Turkey by choosing higher number of textbooks from different education levels to represent all education levels and get more generalizable results concerning all the textbooks employed in the process of teaching/learning English as a foreign language. It could also be fruitful for textbooks authors, curriculum designers, and English language teachers to make the most of the EVP in order to figure out what vocabulary is necessary and suitable for learners of English to master in the process of teaching/learning English, preparing educational materials and even assessing learners of English at the desired level in the light of the English language curricula principles and the CEFR principles.

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