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A Corpus-Based Study of Vocabulary Distribution in Omani High School English Textbooks

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Abstract. Lexical make-up of the revised *Engage with English* textbooks utilized in Omani high schools for grades 11 and 12 are under examination. The textbooks were examined through a corpus-based methodology, employing the Vocabulary Profiler to classify terms put on the General Service List (GSL), the Academic Word List (AWL), and off-list vocabulary. The results indicate that the textbooks develop foundations in high-frequency vocabulary, they may inadequately prepare students to master Academic English, particularly due to the limited inclusion of AWL terms and the excessive presence of off-list vocabulary. These findings underscore the necessity of employing a balanced vocabulary strategy in textbook design to guarantee that students cultivate both communicative and academic competencies. Our study has some implications for English language teaching in Oman and recommendations for enhancing vocabulary training.

Keywords: corpus linguistics, lexical distribution, lexical makeup, Oman, school textbooks, vocabulary profiling

Authors' contribution: H. Pathan — the concept of the study, research methodology, O. Aleksandrova — writing part of the text, text review, U.F. Alvi — collection and processing of material, writing part of the text; M. Khalid — analysis of the data obtained, collection and processing of material, writing part of the text.

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Корпусный анализ лексического разнообразия учебника английского языка для старших классов в Омане

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Аннотация. Методом корпусного анализа с помощью инструмента Vocabulary Profiler были классифицированы слова по отнесенности к списку общеупотребительных слов, академических слов и внесписочному словарю. В исследовании проанализирован лексический состав текстов переизданных учебников Engage with English, используемых в средних школах Омана для 11 и 12 классов. Результаты исследования показали, что учебники подходят для формирования лексической базы, включающей высокочастотную лексику, но недостаточно адаптированы для освоения академического английского из-за ограниченного включения академических терминов и переизбытка слов вне указанных списков. Результаты указывают на необходимость использования стратегии балансирования словаря при разработке учебников для развития у учащихся как коммуникативных, так и академических компетенций. Выводы позволили предложить некоторые рекомендации для преподавания английского языка в старших классах в Омане.

Ключевые слова: корпусная лингвистика, лексический состав, школьные учебники, профилирование словарного запаса

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Introduction

English is becoming acknowledged as a global language, having applications in trade, science, technology, and education. Countries globally have included English into their national curricula, guaranteeing that students possess the linguistic competencies necessary for international engagement. In Oman, English is instructed as a foreign language (EFL) from primary to secondary education, with a significant focus on communicative competencies and academic preparedness.

The Omani Ministry of Education has developed textbooks to facilitate this process with the *Engage with English* series acting as the cornerstone of English education for high school students. The textbooks were updated according to the Omani educational standards for Grades 11 and 12 in order to help students acquire linguistic and academic competencies. However, these textbooks were not tested for balance in terms of vocabulary of high-frequency general use and specialized academic vocabulary.

This study aims to investigate vocabulary content of commonly used textbooks in Omani high school curricula in order to provide insights into how much these materials satisfy the demands of EFL learners. The findings allow develop some practical recommendations for English language instructors and curriculum designers in Omani High School. Using vocabulary profiling tools for textbooks analysis may help for future study in comparable educational situations.

To achieve the study objectives, we posed the following research questions:

1. What percentage of vocabulary in the *Engage with English* textbooks belongs to the General Service List (GSL)? Is it enough to provide the lexical level required for effective everyday communication?
2. What percentage of vocabulary in the *Engage with English* textbooks is on the Academic Word List (AWL)? Is it sufficient to prepare students for higher education?
3. To what extent do textbooks incorporate off-list words, and how may they impact learners' language acquisition? Off-list words can pose difficulties for learners, especially if they are excessively specialized or low-frequency. May the fraction of off-list terms impair language learning?

By answering these questions, the study hopes to provide insights that will help shape future textbook creation and vocabulary instruction in Oman, as well as contribute to broader conversations about the function of vocabulary in English language teaching in EFL settings.

The study underscores the significance of vocabulary in language acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts where learners heavily depend on textbooks for linguistic exposure. High-frequency vocabulary from the GSL is essential for fostering communicative competence, while academic terminology from the AWL is necessary to equip students for advanced education. Off-list terms, though often significant, must be judiciously chosen to prevent inundating learners with specialized or infrequent vocabulary that does not contribute to their general

language acquisition. However, some studies previously observed densification, colloquialization and democratization in speech tags [1].

Numerous studies have shown that a learner's capacity to communicate effectively and comprehend both written and spoken language is significantly related to their vocabulary volume [2; 3]. A diverse vocabulary is required for learners to comprehend texts, engage in conversations, and produce language in a range of circumstances. Researchers frequently distinguish between vocabulary breadth (the amount of words a learner knows) and vocabulary depth (how well those words are known) [4]: vocabulary width has a direct impact on comprehension; knowing the various meanings, collocations, and use of terms are equally important for language proficiency. For English language learners (ELLs), the task is not only to build a vast vocabulary, but also to develop the capacity to apply and understand these words in various circumstances. Analyzing number of large-scale patterns of number use in spoken and written English with frequency of magnitude, roundness, and cultural salience, register represented a mix of numerals and number words [5]. I.S.P. Nation [6] proposed the "threshold hypothesis," which states that learners must acquire a basic threshold of high-frequency vocabulary in order to understand and process most ordinary language. This threshold is widely assumed to be roughly 2,000 high-frequency words from the General Service List (GSL), that gives learners access to over 80% of the terms in typical English texts [7; 8]. When learners achieve this level, they are better prepared to understand more advanced or specialized language, such as academic vocabulary. This concept has influenced many educational programs and textbook designs, particularly in EFL situations such as Oman, where exposure to English outside of the classroom is limited.

Studies on textbook vocabulary content have continuously emphasized the need of having GSL words to ensure that learners succeed in language learning. J. Milton and T. Alexiou [9], for example, argue that many textbooks do not offer a sufficient amount of high-frequency terms, potentially delaying language acquisition for students. Curriculum designers can help students build fundamental communicative skills by ensuring that textbooks have appropriate exposure to GSL terminology. In Oman, where students learn English as a foreign language in a setting with little exposure to the language outside of the classroom, include GSL words in textbooks is critical. However, it is also crucial to recognize that high-frequency vocabulary alone is insufficient to prepare students for academic settings that require more specialized language.

The Academic Word List (AWL), created by A. Coxhead [10], includes 570 word families that often appear in academic writings but are not included in the GSL. This list is intended to assist learners in developing the vocabulary required for academic performance in environments where technical, Abstract, or specialized language is frequently employed. According to A. Coxhead, the AWL covers around 10% of words in academic books, making it a helpful resource for those planning to pursue higher education in English-speaking environments [10]. Students lacking a robust

basis in academic vocabulary may encounter difficulties in comprehending academic texts and cultivating language suitable for scholarly writing and discourse [11]. The research indicates that students deficient in academic language face disadvantages in academic tasks, including reading science specialized literature, composing articles, and delivering presentations [12].

English textbooks usually contain technical, specialized, or culturally specific terms besides GSL and AWL words. Although off-list terms might facilitate discussions on certain themes or disciplines, they may also provide difficulties for those students who have not yet acquired high-frequency or academic vocabulary [13]. Research on the incorporation of off-list vocabulary in textbooks has highlighted concerns regarding their influence on language acquisition. B. Laufer [14] noted that textbooks containing a significant number of low-frequency terms, particularly off-list items, may hinder learners' understanding and impede their advancement. It is essential to acknowledge that off-list phrases can be beneficial in contextualizing language acquisition, particularly when they are culturally pertinent or requisite for comprehending specific subject matter. The challenge lies in achieving an appropriate equilibrium between integrating essential off-list vocabulary and avoiding the inundation of learners with specialized terms that do not contribute significantly to their overall language acquisition.

Lexical content of textbooks can be analyzed by vocabulary profiling tools, including Nation's Vocabulary Profiler and Sketch Engine. These methods categorize words based on their frequency and significance, helping to evaluate a balance of high-frequency words, academic vocabulary, and off-list words. It aids educators in verifying that the contents align with student requirements and curricular objectives. For example, T. Cobb [15] employed the Vocabulary Profiler to assess the sufficiency of GSL and AWL vocabulary exposure in Canadian high school textbooks. His research indicated that numerous textbooks included an excessive quantity of off-list vocabulary, which adversely affected students' overall language proficiency. Examining representational meanings of gender stereotyped in Malaysian English language textbooks, the author found 126 images represented in professional occupations and 81 images represented non-professional occupations. However, occupational images of males were associated to more self-assertive and agentic characteristics while females were portrayed with professional occupations such as nurses and teachers [16]. Similarly, T. Kawai [19] discovered that several Japanese high school textbooks under-represented AWL vocabulary, potentially leaving students underprepared for Academic English. In Oman, there has been little research into textbook evaluation using vocabulary profiling tools. This study aims to fill this vacuum by conducting a thorough analysis of the lexical content of the *Engage with English* textbooks, focusing on their alignment with the GSL and AWL, as well as the occurrence of off-list vocabulary.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This study used a corpus-based methodology to analyze the word distribution in two high school English textbooks adopted in Omani schools: the revised *Engage with English* textbooks for Grades 11 (Semester A) and 12 (Semester B). These textbooks were primarily chosen because they enjoy widespread usage in secondary schools throughout Oman, thus offering a significant contribution to the language exposure that students receive during these pivotal educational years. The information from each textbook underwent conversion into a digital format and was subsequently categorized into two distinct corpora, one corresponding to each grade level. The texts were then uploaded to Sketch Engine, a specialized corpus analysis tool that has an influence on various linguistic research capabilities. These include creating word lists, analyzing frequencies, and searching concordances. Still, it's worth keeping in mind that how well these tools work can change (proceeding from the research needs). While they give useful insights, you might need to think about what the data means. This makes learning language in an academic setting even more complex. Corpus analysis facilitates a systematic evaluation of lexical content, providing insights into the frequency, distribution, and coverage of essential vocabulary categories including GSL, AWL, and off-list words. So, the procedure is segmented into three phases:

- 1) corpus building,
- 2) vocabulary profiling with the Vocabulary Profiler,
- 3) subsequent analysis of the findings.

Thus, 1) The corpus was generated by manually digitizing the whole contents of the textbooks into text files. This encompasses all instructional text, reading passages, exercises, dialogues, and supplementary resources from the Grade 11 and Grade 12 textbooks.

The objective was to collect comprehensive lexical information for analysis, emphasizing linguistic elements that could affect learners' vocabulary acquisition.

The created corpus comprised a total of 5,551 words, of which 5,132 were unique. Meticulous attention was devoted to accurately counting words, including the handling of hyphenated terms and contractions, which were recorded as singular entities for uniformity. Numerals and proper nouns were included but analyzed separately, as they are not pertinent to the overarching objectives of vocabulary acquisition.

2) The corpus was analyzed with Nation's Vocabulary Profiler, a popular tool for vocabulary profiling that categorizes terms based on frequency and relevance. The investigation centered on categorizing words into some main following groups:

1. *The General Service List*, separated into two categories:
 - 1.1. GSL 1K: The most commonly used 1,000 words in English.
 - 1.2. GSL 2K: The next 1,000 most common words.
2. *Academic Wordlist*, divided into ten sub-lists depending on their frequency.
3. *Off-list Words*, technical, specialised, or low-frequency vocabulary not included in the GSL or AWL list.

4. *Proper Nouns and Numbers*: These categories were analysed independently as they do not normally contribute to a learner's overall vocabulary acquisition.

The Vocabulary Profiler provided total and unique word counts for each category (GSL 1K, GSL 2K, AWL, and off-list): the percentage of words in each category compared to the total number of words in the corpus; cumulative percentages illustrating each vocabulary list's increasing contribution to overall text coverage.

Proper nouns (the names of persons, places, organizations, and so on) and numerals were removed from vocabulary profiling but tracked independently. These items, while significant for contextual understanding, do not normally contribute to the development of general or academic vocabulary, hence they were analyzed for frequency rather than inclusion in the total vocabulary percentage calculations.

The study also concentrated on the repetition of essential language elements. The repetition of high-frequency words is crucial in vocabulary development because exposure to terms in varied contexts improves retention and comprehension (Webb, 2009). The profiling tool revealed which terms appeared the most frequently throughout the textbooks, as well as the amount to which they were repeated.

While this corpus-based approach provides for interesting insights into the lexical content of *the Engage with English* textbooks, it is necessary to recognize a few limitations:

- Manual text conversion may result in small transcription problems. However, thorough proofreading reduced the risk.
- The GSL and AWL are popular tools for vocabulary analysis, however, they are not comprehensive lists of all important vocabulary. Some words that are not on these standard lists may nonetheless be useful in specific learning environments.
- This study examines word frequency and distribution, but not their contextual usage. Understanding how words are employed in various situations (e.g., collocations, grammatical patterns) may provide for some additional insights regarding the textbooks' efficiency in encouraging vocabulary learning.

The study lacks direct feedback from students or teachers regarding the difficulty of the vocabulary. Such data could provide for a more detailed view of the difficulties students have when reading these textbooks.

3) To analyze the data we used Sketch Engine to create lists of words that include all proper nouns found in the textbooks. Proper nouns were chosen depending on their grammatical category as names of specific individuals, places, or institutions, or historical events. There existed identified proper nouns and these were classified according to human names, such as "Albert Einstein"; geographical names, for example "London"; and organizational names, for instance "UNESCO". This categorization enhanced comprehension of the thematic focus and cultural representation present in the textbooks.

Proper nouns were analyzed in terms of their frequency and their distribution across diverse sections of the textbooks, providing valuable insights into the themes and subjects addressed at each grade level. Some proper nouns came out as having a high frequency and is seen that this kind of analysis may bring forth some evidence that could be biased.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the *Engage with English* textbooks for Grades 11 (Semester A) and 12 (Semester B) in Oman sheds light on the vocabulary content of these resources. The results are presented below, emphasizing the distribution of vocabulary within the General Service List (GSL), Academic Word List (AWL), and off-list terms, alongside an analysis of the impact of this distribution on student learning (Table).

Vocabulary distribution

Vocabulary Level	Total Words	Percentage, %	Cumulative Percentage, %	Unique Words	Unique Percentage, %	Cumulative Unique Percentage, %
GSL 1K	2.088	39.5	39.5	1.907	38.7	38.7
GSL 2K	799	15.1	54.7	784	15.9	54.6
Total GSL	2.887	54.7	54.7	2.691	54.6	54.6
AWL 1	98	1.9	56.5	98	2.0	56.6
AWL 2	96	1.8	58.3	93	1.9	58.5
AWL 3	53	1.0	59.3	52	1.1	59.5
AWL 4	52	1.0	60.3	51	1.0	60.6
AWL 5	52	1.0	61.3	49	1.0	61.6
AWL 6	39	0.7	62.0	39	0.8	62.4
AWL 7	54	1.0	63.1	51	1.0	63.4
AWL 8	28	0.5	63.6	27	0.5	64.0
AWL 9	22	0.4	64.0	19	0.4	64.3
AWL 10	11	0.2	64.2	11	0.2	64.6
Total AWL	505	9.6	64.2	490	9.9	64.6
Proper Nouns	391	7.4	71.6	358	7.3	71.8
Off-list Words	1.499	28.4	100	1.388	28.2	100
Numbers	269	-	-	205	-	-
Totals	5.551	100	-	5.132	100	-

Source: compiled by Habibullah Pathan, Oksana I. Aleksandrova, Urooj F. Alvi, Muhammad Khalid.

The textbooks contain a considerable quantity of GSL vocabulary:

- **GSL 1K:** The top 1,000 English words constitute 39.5% of the total lexicon, with 1,907 unique terms. These terms are proper for everyday communication, exposing students to high-frequency vocabulary.
- **GSL 2K:** The following 1,000 words make up 15.1% of the total word count, adding 799 words. Together, GSL 1K and 2K words account for 54.7% of the overall vocabulary. The significant use of GSL terminology indicates that the textbooks establish a robust basis in high-frequency English, essential for cultivating fundamental communicative abilities.

The inclusion of AWL vocabulary in textbooks is scant.

- The AWL accounts for only 9.6% of overall word count in textbooks. This consists of 505 total words and 490 unique words.
- AWL 1 and AWL 2, which contain the most common academic words, make up only 1.9% and 1.8% of the overall vocabulary, respectively.

The low number of AWL words is concerning since it suggests the textbooks might not contain enough academic vocabulary to fully prepare students for higher education or academic conversation.

Off-list words make up 28.4% of the total word count, with 1,499 total off-list terms and 1,388 unique words. Off-list words might be challenging for learners due to their low frequency, specialization, or technical nature. This may distract students from learning the more common and academically necessary language found in the GSL and AWL.

Proper nouns, which account for 7.4% of total vocabulary, do not contribute as much to vocabulary learning as GSL or AWL words. The analysis included numbers, although they are not useful for assessing general or academic vocabulary learning.

Thus, the textbooks extensively include high-frequency vocabulary, with 54.7% of total words belonging to the GSL. This is critical for students' core language acquisition. The 9.6% representation of AWL words highlights a substantial gap in academic vocabulary, potentially hindering students' readiness for higher education. Textbooks with a large amount of off-list words (28.4%) may not be effective for ordinary communication or academic study, thereby increasing cognitive load and hindering language development.

The conclusion that GSL terms account for 54.7% of total vocabulary is consistent with prior research emphasizing the significance of high-frequency words for language learners. According to M. West [7] and I.S.P. Nation [11], learners who learn GSL terms have access to a considerable amount of ordinary English, allowing them to engage in fundamental communication. The textbooks' extensive use of GSL terminology shows that they are well-suited to improving students' basic communicative competence, which is central to language training in EFL settings. The limited presence of academic vocabulary (9.6% of total words) is concerning. A. Coxhead [10] asserts that Academic Word List (AWL) vocabulary is essential for academic success, and insufficient exposure to these terms may render students ill-equipped for the language requirements of higher education. This finding aligns

with previous research, which has shown that numerous EFL textbooks inadequately reflect academic vocabulary, resulting in learners experiencing significant gaps in their vocabulary knowledge that are challenging to address [18].

A lack of adequate academic vocabulary has numerous consequences for vocabulary acquisition. According to the research, repeated exposure to words in varied situations is critical for vocabulary learning [19; 20]. With only 9.6% of textbook terms falling under the AWL, students may not encounter enough academic words to have a solid comprehension of them. This might limit their capacity to understand academic literature, participate in academic discussions, and generate academic writing. It aims to improve communication skills and cross-cultural understanding.

Furthermore, the high number of off-list items (28.4%) indicates that a large portion of the vocabulary may not be immediately beneficial for students' communicative or academic needs. While some off-list words are undoubtedly useful for teaching context-specific content (e.g., cultural allusions or technical terminology), their great prominence may distract from the more immediate purpose of assisting students in mastering the general and academic vocabulary required for future studies. This confirms B. Laufer's claim that textbooks with a high percentage of low-frequency or specialised vocabulary can impede learners' overall language development [14].

The findings of this study highlight the need for a more targeted approach to vocabulary training in the Omani curriculum. While textbooks provide appropriate exposure to high-frequency words, there are insufficient opportunities for students to practice academic vocabulary. Teachers may need to supplement textbooks with new materials that emphasize AWL vocabulary and provide students more opportunities to see them in meaningful situations. Furthermore, vocabulary teaching tools including word families, collocations, and academic word lists should be incorporated into classroom instruction. These tactics can help students gain a deeper grasp of words beyond their meanings, allowing them to use them more effectively in various circumstances [12]. Given the large amount of off-list terms, teachers must prioritize which words to focus on, ensuring that students learn vocabulary that will be most beneficial in their academic and communicative demands.

Conclusions

The analysis of the revised *Engage with English* textbooks for Grades 11 (Semester A) and 12 (Semester B) used in high schools of Oman have provided for some findings that indicate good representation of high-frequency vocabulary, while also exposing significant gaps in academic vocabulary coverage and an over-reliance on off-list terms.

The textbooks offer substantial exposure to high-frequency vocabulary, comprising of the total items in the General Service List. This is essential for students' foundational language acquisition, guaranteeing they possess the vocabulary necessary for

fundamental communication. The incorporation of GSL 1K phrases, comparing to the overall vocabulary, is crucial for enhancing students' fluency in everyday English.

The most significant finding of the study is the minimal representation of academic vocabulary in the Omani high school English textbooks, the total of terms derived from the Academic Word List. The absence of sufficient academic vocabulary in these texts, intended for high school students potentially pursuing higher education, is concerning. The insufficient focus on AWL vocabulary in textbooks may render students ill-equipped for the linguistic challenges of university education.

A notable finding is the substantial percentage of off-list words in the overall vocabulary in the textbooks. While some off-list words are required for teaching unique cultural or specific themes, their abundance in textbooks may overwhelm students who have yet to master more significant general or academic vocabulary. This may present a barrier for the students who are still establishing their core language skills.

Proper nouns and numbers are useful for contextual comprehension, but they do not immediately contribute to students' vocabulary development. The inclusion of proper nouns and numbers in textbooks has no substantial impact on students' acquisition of general or academic English vocabulary.

The findings of the study have significant pedagogical implications for English language instruction in Oman, notably in terms of textbook design and use:

Teachers could consider introducing additional exercises or reading materials that emphasize the use of academic vocabulary, particularly those from the AWL, to ensure students are ready for the academic challenges they may face in higher education.

Curriculum makers may consider limiting the number of off-list terms in future textbook editions to ensure that the emphasis remains on high-frequency and academic vocabulary, which is more advantageous to students' language development. Teachers can also assist students prioritize which words to study by emphasizing the GSL and AWL throughout classes.

Given the results of this study, future research could cover various areas:

Gathering qualitative data from students and teachers could shed the light on how students perceive the vocabulary material in textbooks, as well as whether learners find the vocabulary challenging or insufficient. This feedback could help guide future textbook modifications.

Comparative studies could look into whether comparable patterns of vocabulary distribution exist in textbooks used in other EFL settings. This would assist evaluate whether the issues raised in this study are unique to Oman or reflect broader trends in EFL textbook design.

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