Exploring the (Un)Suitability of the Amount of Vocabulary Input in the Middle School Textbooks: A Critical Analysis of the Amount of Lexical Words in "My Book of English, Year one" and "My Book of English, Year Two"

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Abstract:

The present article aimed at evaluating the suitability of vocabulary content in the Algerian Middle School textbooks "My Book of English, Year One" (MBE1) and "My Book of English, Year Two" (MBE2) with a specific focus on the analysis of the amount of lexical words. This investigation was guided by three questions: (1) Is the amount of lexical words included in MBE1 suitable to first year middle school learners' age and language level? (2) Is the amount of lexical words included in MBE2 suitable to second year middle school learners' age and language level? (3) Is the transition from a sequence to another within each textbook and from MBE1 to MBE2 appropriate? In order to answer these questions, corpora and sub-corpora of lexical words in the sequences /textbooks were compiled. The analyses were done using computer software "Compleat Lexical Tutor" and manually when required. The findings revealed that the textbooks are lexically overloaded, especially MBE2. More specifically, the textbooks introduced a huge number of lexical words, of which most of them are not repeated/recycled sufficiently and of which a significant percentage consists of new/almost new words, which makes them unsuitable to the age and level of the students. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the transition from MBE1 to MBE2, on the one hand, and the transition from a sequence to another, on the other hand, is totally ineffective: neither MBE2 as a whole is built on MBE1, nor each sequence is built on the previous sequence(s).

Key words: Frequency, Lexical Words, Middle School Textbooks, Recycling, Vocabulary amount

1. Introduction

Developing an adequate level of vocabulary knowledge is of crucial importance to foreign language learners. Vocabulary is not only perceived as an integral element of effective communication (Wilkins, 1972; McCarthy, 1990) and as the main carrier of meaning (Lewis, 1997); some even go as far as considering it to be the most important aspect in language learning (McCarthy, 1990; Lewis, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Folse, 2004; Norburg and Nordlund, 2021). Nation (2013), for instance, regarded it as the core component of language proficiency and one of the primary goals in language learning. The same view is supported by Webb and Nation (2017) who viewed it as central to the development of the four language skills. It goes without saying that learners with insufficient vocabulary find it difficult to achieve comprehensibility and, thus, successful communication. In this respect, Meara and Jones (1988) claimed that "vocabulary knowledge is heavily implicated in all practical language skills" (cited in Criado, 2009, p.47) and that "speakers with a large vocabulary perform better than speakers with a more limited vocabulary" (cited in Criado, 2009, p.47 and Criado 2017, p. 368). Schmitt (2008, p.329) also pointed out that "One thing that students, teachers, materials writers, and researchers

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can all agree upon is that learning vocabulary is an essential part of mastering a second language" and about four decades ago, Allen (1983, p.1) wrote "the need for vocabulary is one point on which teachers and students agree".

However, although ESL/EFL learners do generally recognize the importance of vocabulary, the overriding majority of them might lack the skills needed to enhance its acquisition. Barcroft (2016, p.1), for instance, indicated that according to many advanced second language learners "vocabulary is at the center of language" and the ability to communicate successfully and Lessard-Clouston (2013, p.2) argued that "Students often instinctively recognize the importance of vocabulary to their language learning". Nonetheless, learning vocabulary is challenging for EFL learners (Schmitt, 2008; Lessard-Clouston, 2013; Webb and Nation, 2017). This is due to some factors which include , but are not limited to, the huge amount of the vocabulary of any language and the several aspects involved in learning a word.

In EFL contexts, textbooks are considered as the major resources in teaching/learning a foreign language. Therefore, the vocabulary content covered in textbooks constitutes the main source of learners' vocabulary acquisition. In this respect, Milton (2009, p. 193) stated that for many EFL learners, "the principal and sometimes the only source of foreign language vocabulary will be from the language they are exposed to in the classroom; the textbooks and the teacher's language". This attests to the paramount importance that should be allotted to vocabulary learning issues, such as the quantity and the quality of vocabulary items to include, in the design of textbooks for EFL classes.

The findings of studies focusing on analysing the vocabulary input in various textbooks shed light on serious weaknesses related mainly to the inclusion of low frequency vocabulary and the neglect of the important aspect of recycling. These findings are a clear indication that vocabulary is not covered adequately in curricula, materials and courses (Folse, 2004). Recently, Nordlund, (2016) and Nordlund and Norberg (2020) advocated the use of L2 acquisition research and corpus linguistics in the development of teaching materials. According to Nordlund and Norberg (2020, p.107) , "empirical research results do not seem to have found their way into the construction of commercial teaching materials" and that "it would, thus, be desirable if there were knowledge requirements as regards language learning (e.g., the frequency, recycling and noticing of vocabulary) that material writers and publishers would have to fulfil". Referring to O'Dell (1997), Milton (2009, p.195) also stressed that the vocabulary content of a course or textbook "has escaped the detailed attention of most syllabus theorists over the last 50 years or so".

In the Algerian EFL context, research on the vocabulary component in textbooks is extremely scant. In this respect, one of the rare empirical investigations in this specific research area is the one undertaken by Torki (2012). In his attempt to examine the relationship between the learners' lexical coverage and the readability levels of Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks, he concluded that the textbooks have low lexical coverage and readability, that the rate of common vocabulary across the textbooks is very low and that the learners are not exposed to sufficient, useful and appropriate vocabulary.

In 2015, the Algerian Ministry of Education launched the second generation curriculum reform, which led to the introduction of new textbooks at the middle school level. As vocabulary has an undeniable role in the development of a foreign language, and given that vocabulary research has been gaining an ever-growing importance, it has been expected that the new textbooks cover appropriate vocabulary for middle school leaners by taking into account what vocabulary research highlights. This expectation is corroborated by the fact that the Curriculum of English for Middle School Education conceived by the Ministry of National Education (2015) urges the textbook writers to ensure that "the vocabulary used in the learning situations must be appropriate to the age of the learners" (p.65) and that " the selection of content should be consistent with the number of teaching hours and the age of learners" (p.66).

However, informal discussions with some middle school teachers and learners has raised our awareness to the alarming level of dissatisfaction with the vocabulary component, in addition to other aspects, prevailing among the users of the latest generation of textbooks . In this regard, the amount and the type of the vocabulary included in the second generation curriculum textbooks are generally considered to be too large and too difficult to be assimilated and learnt by pupils at this level.

On the basis of the above and given that the (un) suitability of the amount of vocabulary in textbooks constitute an under-researched area in applied linguistics, the present study analysed two EFL textbooks to gauge the level of the (un)suitability of the amount of vocabulary content included in the textbooks. In particular, it focuses on the amount of lexical words in the first two grades textbooks of middle school education, namely "My book of English, Year One" (MBE1) and "My Book of English, Year Two" (MBE2.

Stemming from the conviction that the results of the whole are not necessarily the sum of the parts in textbook analyses, and that strategic textbook design should also consider appropriate progression from one unit to another and from one textbook to another, we deemed it necessary to find out how the amount of lexical words is distributed and how it develops across the sequences of both textbooks. Hence, the study sought to provide answers to the following research question:

1. Is the amount of lexical words included in MBE1 suitable to first year middle school learners' age and language level?
2. Is the amount of lexical words included in MBE2 suitable to second year middle school learners' age and language level?
3. Is the transition from a sequence to another within each textbook and from MBE1 to MBE2 appropriate?

2. Literature Review
2.1. Vocabulary and Vocabulary Learning: Definition and key terms

Vocabulary can be simply defined as the words making up a language. In this regard, McCarthy, O'Keeffe and Walsh (2012, p. 1) provided a very general definition as they wrote "vocabulary is all about words". For Ur (2012, p.60), vocabulary "can be defined, roughly, as the words in the language" and it also includes more than a single word and multi-word expressions. In the same line of thought, Barcroft (2016, p2) and Scrivener (2011) defined it as consisting a variety of forms including morphemes, their combinations such as derivatives and compounds, idioms and other fixed expressions such as proverbs. In the literature, vocabulary and lexis are sometimes used interchangeably. While Harmer (2010, p.33) referred to lexis as " the technical name for the vocabulary of a language", Scrivener (2011, p.186) explained that the concept of lexis, which refers to "our internal database of words and ready-made fixed/ semi-fixed /typical combinations of words that we can recall and use quite quickly without having to construct new phrases and sentences word by word from scratch using our knowledge of grammar" is bigger than that of vocabulary.

Furthermore, the appreciation of the role of vocabulary learning necessitates an adequate understanding of some of the key terms used in the related literature. In this vein, researchers (Nation, 2013, Milton, 2009) set distinctions between lemmas, flemmas and word families. While a lemma consists of a headword, also referred to as root word, and its inflectional forms along with the irregular forms and reduced forms based on the same part of speech, a flemma covers all inflectional forms of a headword irrespective of the part of speech. A word family comprises a base word and its varied forms– inflections and most common derivations. A good way to explain the difference is by means of an example. The following are eight words: *play, plays, played, player, players, playing, playful, playfully*. The headword is *play*. The noun *play* and its plural form *plays* belong to a lemma while the verb *play*, *plays* (verb in the third person

singular), *played*, *playing* belong to another lemma. The words belonging to the previous two lemmas belong to one flemma and all the eight words are members of the same word family. Moreover, two other important words are tokens and types. Tokens are all the running words in a text whereas types are the words without considering the repeated forms. The type/token ratio reflects the extent of lexical density (calculated by multiplying the type/token ration by 100) in a text. Lexical density measures the difficulty of a text: the lower the lexical density , the less difficult the text.

Furthermore, words can be grouped into two major categories: lexical (or content) words and function (or grammatical) words. Nation (2016) and Milton (2009) pointed out that the category of lexical words encompasses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (e.g. *man, think, nice, slowly*) and that of function words includes articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions and conjunctions (e.g. the, a, an, I, you, he, she, *be, her, they, and, from*) . While content words are important for the conveyance of the message, grammatical words, are mainly used to signify grammatical relationships among content words in the sentence. Another difference between the two categories is that the number of lexical words is exceedingly large in comparison with the number of function words whereas most of the function words are among the high-frequency words and cover a significant percentage of English. Thus, it is recommended that these facts should be taken into consideration and included in the language learning process right from the beginning (Nation, 2013). Additionally, Milton (2009) stated that in spite of the fact that both categories play an important role in the mastery of language, lexical words "appear to carry a greater burden of meaning in any sentence" (p.43). Thornbury (2002) also stated that, traditionally, the teaching of vocabulary was more concerned with content words as function words belonged to grammar, but recently the focus has been shifted to the interdependence of grammar and vocabulary.

2.2. Important Issues in Vocabulary Learning/Teaching

One important issue in vocabulary learning is what aspects knowledge of a word involves. There is a general consensus that knowing a word involves many aspects (Schmitt, 2000; Milton, 2009, Yule 2012, Thornbury, 2012; Nation, 2013). According to Nation (2013), a wide range of aspects are involved and can be subsumed under three main aspects: form (knowledge of pronunciation, orthography and morphology), meaning (consisting of the relationship between a word and its referent) and use (knowledge regarding grammatical functions, collocations, and registers to use the word).As far as this issue is concerned, while Schmitt emphasised the complexity of meaning, Harmer (2010, p. 33) pointed out that *meaning* seems " the least problematic issue of vocabulary". Barcroft (2016) replaced *use* by *mapping* and argued that "form, meaning, and mapping are all integral parts of successful vocabulary learning" (p.9). Likewise, Ur (2012, p.60) stressed the importance of learning the written and spoken form of a lexical item and its most usual meaning and also some "additional aspects" such as its grammar,

Also important in vocabulary teaching/learning is how vocabulary can be learnt. There are two major approaches to vocabulary learning: deliberate and incidental (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2013; Webb and Nation, 2017). In deliberate vocabulary learning, the learners are engaged in explicit vocabulary practice and gain more opportunities of vocabulary retention. By contrast, incidental vocabulary learning occurs "when language is used for communicative purposes(Schmitt, 2000, p.120). For instance, extensive reading or listening tasks which focus on the context enable students to infer or guess meanings of words. Schmitt (2008, p.347) stressed the role of incidental learning as he pointed out that "teachers and materials writers need to consider the maximization of meaning-focused exposure as an equal partner to explicit vocabulary learning, and thus actively promote and manage it" and that "an important issue related to incidental learning is the number of exposures that is necessary to push the incremental learning of a word forward, especially in a way that is durable". Likewise, Webb

and Nation (2017) and Ur (2012) recommended that both ways should be emphasised in language courses in the sense that incidental learning supplements deliberate learning through extensive reading and listening. On her part, Barcroft (2016, p.12) argued that "The incidental-intentional distinction also can be viewed as a continuum given that we can learn vocabulary with varying degrees of intentionality".

Another important issue is concerned with setting realistic goals for learners with different proficiency levels. Indeed, the foci of teaching vocabulary should vary from one level to another. Researchers (Allen, 1983; Folse, 2004; Webb and Nation , 2017) claimed that while the focus in low-level classes should be on building the foundation for vocabulary, fostering leaner autonomy through the use of learning strategies, such as the use of dictionaries should be prioritised with advanced leaners. As for the intermediate leaners, Allen (1983) suggested that it is necessary to increase the students' interest because they become aware of the difficulties as "their effort may bring less satisfaction, fewer rewards" (p.67).

2.3. The Importance of Including a Suitable Amount of Vocabulary in Textbooks

As vocabulary is an important aspect as far as foreign language learning is considered, it is necessary to examine whether the textbooks cover appropriate vocabulary for the learners. Milton (2009. p.194) argued that "the selection of vocabulary should be important because if choices are made inappropriately then this may hinder learning". Even though a great deal of research exists about vocabulary acquisition, determining the appropriate amount of vocabulary in EFL materials seems a difficult task for many textbook designers. As far as this issue is concerned, Adolphs and Schmitt (in Boggards and Laufer, 2004, p.40) pointed out that "the study of vocabulary is an essential part of language learning and the question of how much vocabulary a learner needs to know to achieve a particular purpose remains an important area of research and discussion". In a study carried out by Criado (2009), which aimed at analysing the lexical content of a textbook targeted at the last year of Spanish Upper Secondary Education, the findings revealed that "the amount of lemmas presented to the students was too high in relation to their assumed rates of learning"(p.372).

EFL textbooks should sufficiently represent vocabulary needed for students' success in real/authentic situations. Indeed, it is of crucial importance to include a proper amount of vocabulary in the textbook. An oversupply of new words within a textbook will inevitably prevent language learners from learning the meaning of words, in addition to the other important aspects involved in a word, namely form and use, mentioned above. Schmitt (2000), for instance, asserted that "the percentage of known and unknown vocabulary is one of the most important factors that determine the difficulty of a text" (p.152). This percentage is referred to by Nation and Coady (1988) as density and maintained that if the density of unknown words is not high, the students can guess 60-70% of them. Because it is impossible to teach all the words in a deliberate way, guessing from context plays a significant role in this case in understanding texts and in reading a textbook . In this respect, Nation (2013, p.156) argued that the higher the density of unknown words, the more daunting the guessing work will be. The density of unfamiliar words plays a significant role in lexical coverage, generally defined as the percentage of the words known by a reader in relation to the total amount of tokens in a text (Nation, 2006, cited in Torki, 2012; Webb, 2021). According to Webb (2021),"Studies of lexical coverage are valuable because they reveal the importance of vocabulary knowledge to comprehension" (p.278). According to him, research points to a positive correlation between lexical coverage and comprehension: as lexical coverage increases above 90%, comprehension tends to be better. Concerning textbooks, it can be deduced, then, that the big role of density of unfamiliar words in a text in the success or failure in reading texts is also applicable to the reading of textbooks.

Based on the above, it can be asserted that the amount of unfamiliar words in a textbook constitutes a major cause for the lower-level students' possible encouragement or

discouragement. In other words, an amount that is manageable allows the students to read the textbooks without difficulty and feel encouraged while an inappropriate amount is likely to be a cause of demotivation as the students will be frustrated by the incomprehensible words in the text. In this respect and in order to arouse the students' interest, Allen (1983, p.67) suggested the use of simplified readings which "create a helpful sense of achievement" and explained that " the student feels encouraged by being able to read a story or essay in English without great difficulty". Therefore, it is also of crucial importance that the number of unknown words or new words introduced in a textbook should be manageable. This can be achieved by the avoidance of including unnecessary and unlearnable words. In this regard, Vassiliu (2000, cited in Milton, 2009) explained that it would be strange to include words which are not intended to be learned or which cannot be learned by the best students. Hence, he suggested excluding them to reduce the unnecessarily lexical load to improve learning.

2.4. The Amount of Vocabulary in EFL Textbooks and Vocabulary Development

A very important issue in L2 vocabulary learning is the amount of vocabulary that can be learned by EFL learners. Scholfield (1991), for example, emphasised the importance of the rate at which new words are introduced in a course. Criado (2017, p.371), on the other hand, pointed out that "besides considering which words to learn and how to learn them, a very important issue in L2 vocabulary learning is the growth rates or how many words the students are able to learn throughout time". Due to the lack of empirical studies and to the fact that opinions may be divided concerning levels of vocabulary processing, there is no consensus among second language researchers regarding the amount of vocabulary that can be learned/taught. Many researchers provide different estimations, which are mainly based on their intuitions and teaching experiences while only a few reported the amounts revealed from empirical research .

According to Gairns and Redman (1986), an average of 8 (for low-level learners) to 12 (for high-level learners) productive items per class represents a "reasonable input, which might lead to over 1000 items being presented in 125 hours of tuition" (p. 196). This suggestion is not very different from that of Cunningsworth (1995, p.38) who suggested that "we would expect to see at least 1000 new words taught in each stage of general course, where a stage represents 120-140 hours' work".

Based on Gairns and Redman' figures (1986) , Milton (2009) argued that "in a semester of 14 weeks with three hours of instruction per week, a teacher could present 336–504 words per semester, 672–1,008 per year,3 and 1,344–2,016 in two years". He noted that "these numbers would include instances of both explicit teaching and incidental learning, given that several words, as articles or classroom management words will be repeated class after class and might not require as much explicit attention" (p.80-51).

Based on the time usually devoted to EFL instruction weekly and yearly, Ur (2012) estimated the inescapable huge amount of words that the EFL learners need to learn is about 20–30 word families a week, and that such an amount may include less words for the younger classes and more for the older ones. Dang and Webb (2016) compiled a wordlist for beginners, labelled the Essential Word List (EWL). It includes 800 lemmatised words (headwords) intended to be learnt in a two-year course. They argued that a list for beginners should not include more than 1000 words as earlier research shed light on the learners incapability to learn the first 1000 most frequent word after a long instructional time. What distinguishes the EWL is the division of the list into function words (176 words) and lexical words (624 words). The EWL was valued positively by Nation (2016) and Webb and Nation (2017) as they considered it as a key resource for beginners in their first two years of EFL learning.

In addition, Webb and Chang (2012, cited in Webb and Nation 2017) suggested that learning 400 word families per year may be a realistic goal for EFL learners. Webb and Nation (2017) commented that such an amount "would involve developing a relatively comprehensive

knowledge of these words through repeated encounters in spoken and written discourse, as well as frequent opportunities to use them". They also stressed that vocabulary should be introduced gradually. In this respect, Milton (2009) pointed out that the Hungarian National Core Curriculum specifies that the learners are expected to gain 350 words in their first year and add 150 and 200 words in their second and third year, respectively. Quite logically, a gradual increase in the introduction of vocabulary can be explained by Krashen's (1985) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (i+1), which emphasises that the learners should be introduced to linguistic input that is slightly beyond their existing knowledge.

Determining the amount of vocabulary that needs to be included in textbooks is an issue that has seen growing attention among those researching vocabulary growth. For instance, Milton (2009) and a number of studies (Barnard, 1961; Quinn, 1968; Vassiliu, 1994; Milton and Meara, 1998; Milton, 2006b, all reported in Milton 2009) who studied empirically vocabulary growth among different groups of a second language revealed that the mean vocabulary gain ranges between 1.7 and 5.4 word per hour. In another empirical study targeting vocabulary uptake by Spanish elementary school children instructed four hours weekly during a period of three months, Alcaraz (2011, cited in Criado 2017) concluded that children learnt 3.6 words per teaching hour.

Based on the above, it seems that despite of the fact that there is no consensus among researchers, it is obvious that the amount of words that can be learned is determined by some factors, including the duration, the goal and the nature of the course as well as the level and the age of the students. As far as this issue is concerned, Schofield (1991) explicitly stated the learners' age, the nature of the course and learners' autonomy affect the number of the words that can be learned. In addition, the students may be influenced differently by classroom materials (Milton, 2009). Unlike low-level learners, "the more advanced learners may be expected to take individual responsibility for expanding their knowledge through reading and other activities" (Milton, 2009). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that, roughly speaking, a reasonable amount of vocabulary for beginning/elementary young learners, who need scaffolding, over a two-year general English course that lasts about 140 hours should not exceed 1000 words. This means that the average amount of words is approximately 7-8 words per one teaching hour.

2.5. Frequency, Repetition and Recycling in Vocabulary Acquisition

In vocabulary research, frequency, repetition and recycling are interrelated. Frequency, generally, refers to a criterion of vocabulary selection: the focus should be on words of high frequency in general discourse (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). The role of frequency in selecting textbook vocabulary items has been the focus of a considerable number of studies. In particular, these studies have analysed the extent to which textbooks fulfil the frequency criterion by comparing the vocabulary incorporated in textbooks with well-known frequency lists. However, the term "frequency" is also used to refer to the number of times a word is encountered by the learners, is repeated or recycled. In order to store words in long-term memory and be able to recall them later, repetition and recycling play a crucial role in the process of vocabulary learning (Nation, 2013, Schmitt, 2000). Research has consistently shown that a word frequency or repetition of a word is a determining factor in vocabulary learning. That is , a learner is enabled to actually learning a word only if he is given the opportunity to encounter such a word several times. Schmitt stressed the importance of recycling as he said "If recycling is neglected, many partially known words will be forgotten, wasting all the effort already put into learning them" (2000, p. 137).

Webb and Nation (2017) , citing Brown, Waring andDonkaewbua(2008), Kweonand Kim (2008), Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2011), Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010), Pigada and Schmitt, (2006), Rott, (1999), Waring andTakaki, (2003) and Webb (2007a) argued that "there is plenty of L1 and L2 research showing the importance of repetition". Interestingly, the issue

of how many times learners need to encounter a word has been addressed by many researchers who have provided different figures, which provides ample evidence concerning the absence of consensus regarding this issue. Schmitt (2000) pointed out that the numbers which are often cited are in the area of ten words per hour, seem reasonable. According to Matsuoka, 2012 (cited in Nordlund and Norberg, 2020), "ten times is a figure mentioned more often than others".

Regarding repetition and different levels of proficiency, Schmitt (2008) pointed out that advanced learners appear to learn new words in fewer encounters than low proficiency learners. In the same respect, Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001 as cited in Nordlund, 2016 p. 51) indicated that "frequent and repeated exposure to new vocabulary is even more important for beginners than it is for more advanced learners".

Accordingly, in textbooks designed for low proficiency learners, it is primordial to increase the opportunities for students to retain and consolidate their vocabulary knowledge and, hence, the amount of new vocabulary to be introduced in each section or unit should be reasonable and the recycling of vocabulary items in subsequent sections and sequences is of utmost importance. Despite of the fact that there is no consensus on this issue, the literature generally indicates that one or two encounters are insufficient at all, six encounters may be enough in a part of the textbook whereas with 12 encounters throughout one or two textbooks, the possibility of learning a word is reinforced significantly.

3. Method

3.1. The Research Instrument

The analyses of the textbooks was carried out by means of the online Web Vocabulary Profiler (*Compleat Lexical Tutor v.8.5*) available on *lextutor.ca*. The latter, with its different profilers (*Fammilizer+Lemmatizer v.2.3*, *The Compleat Lister* and *Text Lex Compare*), was used as a computational tool to obtain the total number of words (the different forms including tokens, types, Lemmas and word families), the frequency of the lexical words and to find out the amount of new words in the sequences/textbooks. It is noteworthy that the results provided by the vocabulary profiler regarding the distribution of the words in BNC-COCA levels of most frequently used words were ignored because they do not serve the purpose of the present study.

3.2. The Materials

The materials analysed consist of the middle school textbook "My Book of English, Book One" (MBE1) and "My Book of English, Book Two" (MBE2) that are currently used in all Algerian middle schools. First year middle school students, aged 11-12, were formally introduced to English for the first time through MBE1. In their second year, MBE2 is used. Both textbooks, published by local publishing companies in Algeria, namely Casbah editions and ENAG editions, have been in use since the implementation of the second generation curriculum: 2016-2017 for MBE1 and 2017-2018 for MBE2. It is noteworthy that both textbooks were designed by Algerian authors and that three of the four authors of MBE are also among the five authors of MBE2.

As regards the structure of the textbooks, they are organized in approximately the same way. While MBE1 encompasses a pre-sequence and five sequences with three term projects, a recap section and a trilingual glossary (Glossary 1), MBE2 is divided into four main sequences with three term projects, a basic irregular verb and a trilingual glossary (Glossary 2).

3.3. The Procedure

In the present study, a unit which is between type and lemma (simply referred to as lemma), is used as the main counting unit. It is regarded as the most appropriate unit of calculating the amount of lexical words for a textbook intended for beginning/elementary students. As mentioned above, a lemma, as generally defined, includes all inflectional forms; nonetheless, a lemma in the present study includes certain inflectional forms while it ignores

others that are thought of to be unsuitable to the learners. In particular, only inflectional -s endings (third person singular and plural including most irregular forms such as *lady/ladies, oasis/oases* but not *child/children*), inflectional -ing of progressive tenses and -ed endings of the past tense form part of a lemma whereas inflectional ing of gerunds and -ed ending of adjectives do not. The justification for this is that while it is possible for learners at the early stages of learning a foreign language to generalize the meaning of the type *friend* to *friends*, it is unlikely for them to understand and use the word *greeting* (N) and *greet* (V) appropriately without focus on both of them, especially that only inflectional -ing of progressive tenses is introduced throughout both textbooks. By the same token, the past and past participle forms of irregular verbs are considered as different lemmas as the simple past tense is surprisingly not introduced until the end of MBE2 (in Sequence 4).

In analysing vocabulary in texts or textbooks, the use of a software is very useful and saves time. However, in certain cases, the results can be insufficient or inaccurate. For example, the count excludes the word *asthma* and instead breaks it into *a, ma, th.* In order to solve this problem and ensure consistency in the analyses, the researcher thoroughly examined the textbooks to give a clearer picture of the vocabulary amount. Overall, the procedure consists of the following stages:

a. Creating the textbook corpora of Lexical words:
a. Determining the sections to be included in the analysis: Drawing on Torki (2012), the researcher decided to include all the sections representing the core instructional material for the textbook. Hence, the sequences (including the pre-sequence in MBE1), the term projects, the recap section the basic irregular verb list and the trilingual glossaries are included while the book map, the coursebook presentation and presentation of a sequence are excluded. It is worth mentioning that unit titles, section headings and instructions are also taken into consideration because students would encounter them when using the textbook.
b. Identifying and extracting all the lexical words included in the main sections of the textbook and compiling separate sub-lists for the different sections as well as of the whole textbooks. This means that the materials were categorised into many sub-corpora in order to make the various analysis achievable. It is worth mentioning that proper nouns, foreign words and acronyms were excluded from the data.
b. Calculating the amount of the lexical words: the vocabulary profiler *Lextutor* program helps to determine the number of tokens, types, lemmas and families through the applications Vocab Lister and Familizer/Lemmatiser. Because of the problems mentioned above and given that the main counting unit in this study is the lemma, the researcher constantly checked the findings provided and adjusted them when necessary.
c. Calculating the frequency of the lexical words: Lextutor also helps in determining the frequency of words through the application *The Compleat Lister*.
d. Calculating the amount of new/repeated lexical words: *Text Lex Compare* is used to identify the lists of new (unique to a wordlist) and previously encountered words (shared in both lists).

4. Results and Data Analysis

In order to determine whether the textbooks' vocabulary amount is suitable for middle school learners and whether there is an effective transition from a sequence to another and from MBE1 to MBE2, it was felt necessary to examine the following aspects:
- The amount of lexical words.
- Frequency of lexical words.
- Amount of New /Repeated Lexical Words and the rate of introducing new words.
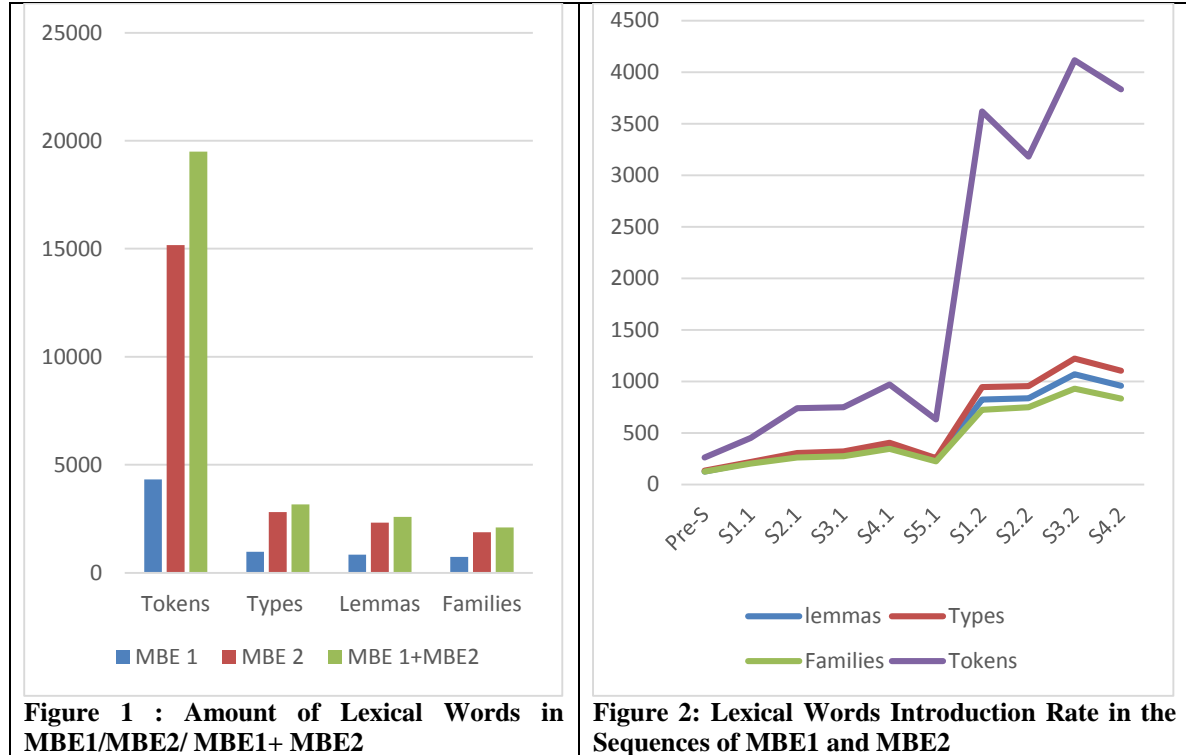
Thus, the amounts of lexical words, the distribution of tokens, types, lemmas and families amongst the sequences of each textbook, the amount of the lemmas that are

repeated/recycled sufficiently and those included but with limited repetition or no recycling as well as the amount of new lemmas in each sequence were computed.

MBE1: Pre-sequence (**Pre.S**),Sequence 1 (**S.1.1**), Sequence 2 (**S2.1**) , Sequence 3 (**S3.1**), Sequence 4 (**S4.1**), Sequence 5 (**S5.1**)

MBE2: Sequence 1 (**S1.2**), Sequence 2 (**S2.2**), Sequence 3 (**S3.2**), Sequence 4 (**S4.2**)

4.1. Amount of Lexical Words

Figure 1 : Amount of Lexical Words in MBE1/MBE2/ MBE1+ MBE2

Figure 2: Lexical Words Introduction Rate in the Sequences of MBE1 and MBE2

The results reveal that the amount of tokens in MBE1 is 4325 while the number of lemmas is 834 (subsuming 947 types and belonging to 763 families), which gives a lemma-token ratio of 0.19 (5.18 tokens per lemma). This finding suggests that the number of words expected to be taught in a seventy-hour course is about 14 words per hour, without including the function words and other content words not included in the analysis such as proper nouns and foreign words as abovementioned. Thus, it is fair to conclude that this amount is above what beginning learners can learn in a limited instructional time.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate that the amount increases drastically from MBE1 to MBE2. Surprisingly, the amount of tokens in MBE2 is 15166 while the number of lemmas is 2319 (belonging to 1873 families) , which gives a lemma-token ratio of 0.15 (6.53 tokens per lemma). This finding implies that the number of words to be taught in a seventy-hour course is between 21 words (assuming that the learners are already familiar with all the words in MBE1) to 33 words (assuming that all the words are new) per hour. When this number is added to the number of function words and other content words not included in the analysis, one can safely say that the amount is far beyond the learners' level and age.

When the included words were added together as a sum, the amount of tokens in both textbooks is 19491 represented as 3164 types, 2591 lemmas and 2099 families. This gives an average of 18.50 lemma per hour. This average is , without considering the actual number of all words, sufficient to judge that the amount of lexical words is inappropriate. Additionally, the lemma-token ration is 0.13 (7.52 tokens per lemma), which points to a low overall lexical density and ,thus , to the possibility that the textbooks are somehow readable.

It is also displayed in Figure 2 that the introduction of words is somehow balanced in the sequences of MBE1 characterised by a gradual increase up to S4.1 and then a decrease in S5.1. Figure 2 also shows that the amount increases sharply from S5.1, the last sequence of MBE1 to S1.2, the first sequence of MBE2. Such an illogical increase is highly questionable. As regards MBE2, inconsistency is noticed in the amounts of words in the sequences: no significant difference between the first two sequences, followed by a noticeable increase in S3.2 and then a decrease in S4.2.

Another striking finding noticed in Figure 2 is the fact that the space between the lines representing tokens and the other words (types, lemmas and families) is gradually widened across the sequences of MBE1 and widened enormously across the sequences of MBE2. As previously mentioned, this confirms that lexical density is lower in MBE2 than in MBE1. Also noticeable is the gradual widening of the gap between the amounts of types, lemmas and families. More specifically, there are slight differences between the amounts of types, lemmas and families in MBE1. This is a clear indication that the textbook writers did take the learners' age and level into consideration by focusing on simple words. Nonetheless, the differences become larger in MBE2. Indeed, more members of the word families have been incorporated.

4.2. Frequency of Lexical Words

In addition to counting the amount of lexical items and the rate of their introduction, it was felt necessary to examine the frequency of words. The lemma –token ratio may not reflect whether repetition/recycling are accounted for in the textbooks. Hence, the occurrences of words were calculated. Figure 3 displays the results of MBE1, MBE2 and MBE1+ MBE2. It is worth mentioning that "→" is used to indicate cumulative sequences (for example **Pre.S→S2.1** means From Pre-sequence/MBE1 to Sequence 2/ MBE1).
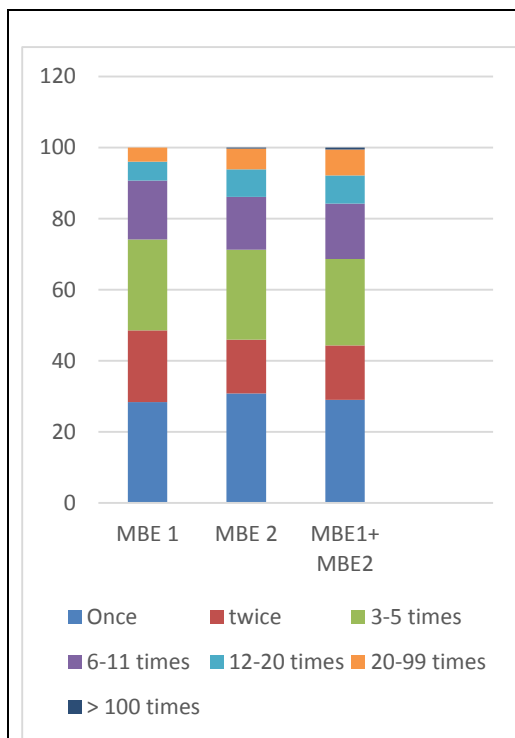

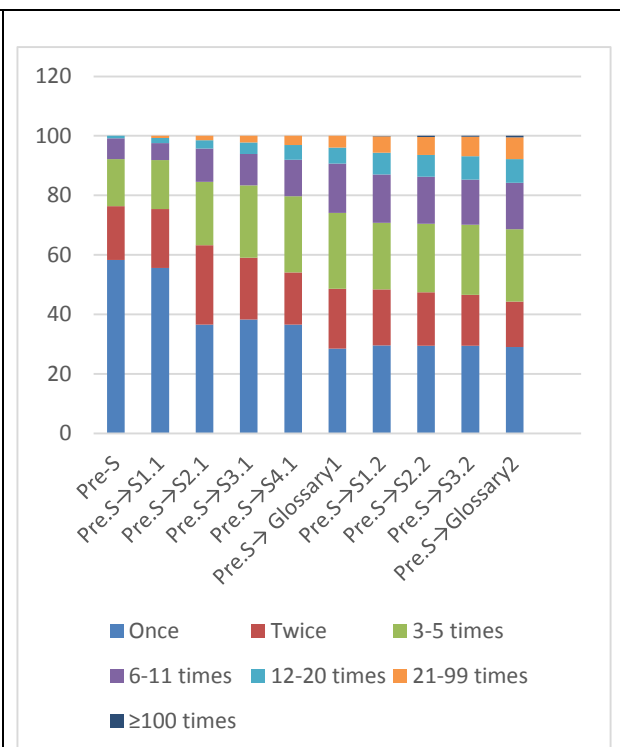**Figure 3:Frequency of Lexical Words in MBE1/ MBE2/ MBE1+MBE2**

Figure 4 : Evolution of Lexical Words Frequency Throughout MBE1 and MBE2

Looking at Figure 3, it immediately becomes clear that the results in the separate textbooks as well as in the two textbooks together are approximately the same. It can be noticed that a significant percentage of the words (48.56%, 45.99% and 44.31%) in both textbooks occur

only once or twice (28.42 % +20.14% in MBE1 , 30.85% + 15.14 % in MBE2 and 29.06%+15.25 in MBE1+MBE2). The percentages of the words occurring three to five times are also noticeable as they represent about a quarter of the whole words. Moreover, the results are rigorously the same (about 15%) for the words occurring six to 11 times. Concerning the words of high frequency, the percentages are very low, ranging from 9.35% to 15.82%. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that the highly frequent words in both textbooks are *task* (428 occurrences), followed by *listen* and *partner* with 199 occurrences each. It is also worth noting that there is a very slight increase in the number of words in this category.

Moreover, as Figure 4 demonstrates, except for the cumulative sequence combining Pre.S and S1.1 of MBE1 where only a negligible discrepancy is noticed, there is only a very slight increase in the words of high frequency (occurring 6 or more times) as a new sequence is added to the previous ones in MBE1. Quite clearly, the results also indicate that the same pattern characterizes the cumulative sequences resulting from the addition of the sequences of MBE2. That is the percentages of the words of low frequency (between 44.31% and 48.42%), of medium frequency (between 22.32% and 24.35%) and of high frequency (between 29.25% and 31.33%) to in the four cumulative sequences are approximately the same. These results show an unquestionable evidence that while the textbook writers' approach to vocabulary instruction is systematic within the sequences of each textbook and across both textbooks, the important aspect of repetition /recycling is disregarded.

4.3. Amount of New /Old Lexical Words and Rate of Introducing the New Words

In order to get an idea of the number of new words across the different sequences, a comparative analysis was carried out for the words introduced in a sequence(s) and in the preceding consecutive sequence(s) using *Lex compare*. Based on vocabulary researchers' claim that words should be repeated several times to be learned and retained, it was judged that words included in a sequence and were presented only once or twice in the previous sequences are almost new. It could be assumed that instances of low occurrence (under three occurrences) in a textbook can hardly be learnt or retained. The amount of these almost new words is also counted using *Lex Compare*. Figure 5 displays the results.
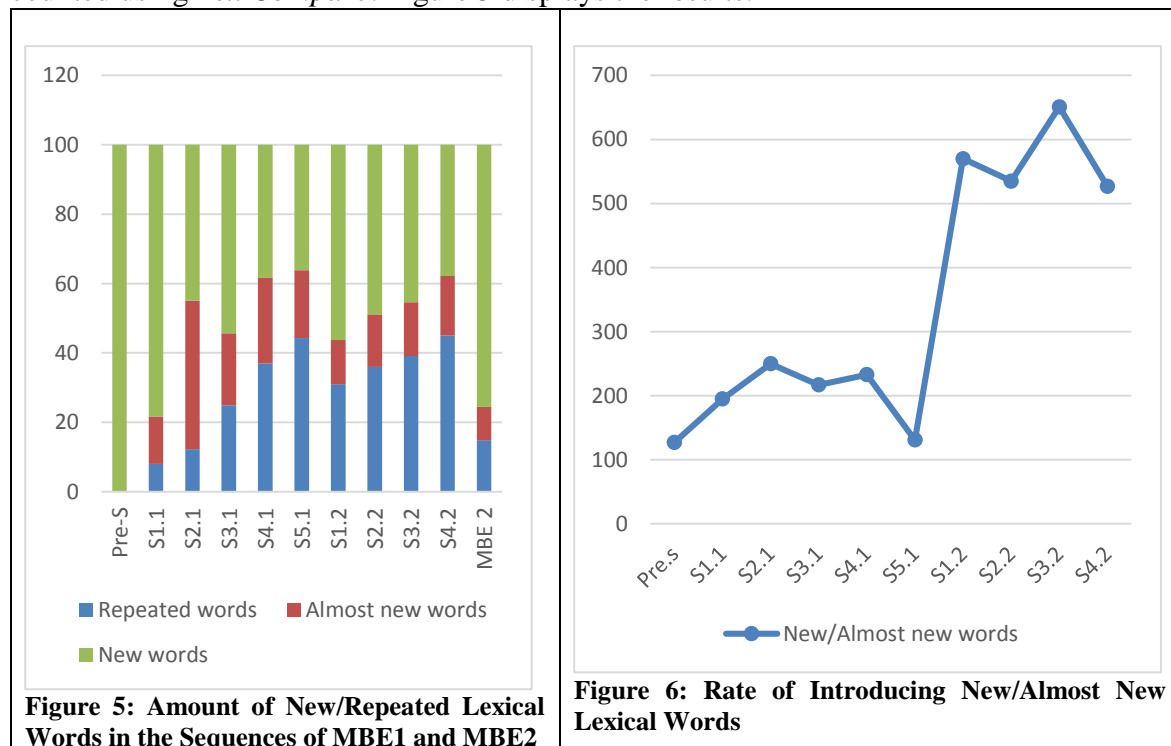

Figure 5: Amount of New/Repeated Lexical Words in the Sequences of MBE1 and MBE2
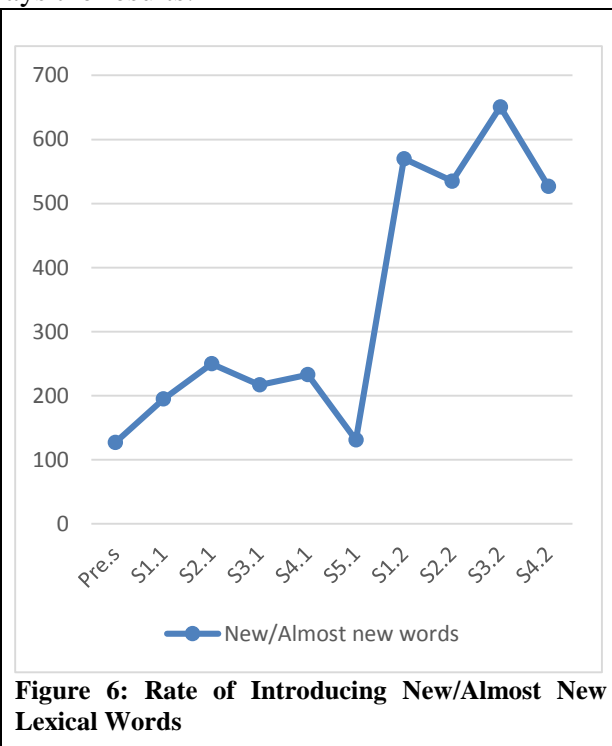
Figure 6: Rate of Introducing New/Almost New Lexical Words

As can be observed from Figure 5 , the amount of new/almost new words throughout the different sequences significantly outnumbers that of repeated words. This suggests that the lexical coverage of each sequence is at the frustration level. The results also reveal that when MBE2 as a whole is compared to MBE1 , the number of totally new words amounts to 1752 (representing 75.55%) while the percentage of already encountered words is 24.45%. When the percentages of new and almost new words were added together as a sum, the percentage is 85.17%. This finding is very alarming and confirms the fact that the textbook writers ignored the important aspect of repetition/recycling vocabulary across the textbooks while they insisted on integrating a surmountable amount of words. Consequently, it is fair to conclude that the lexical coverage of MBE2 is very low, suggesting that it is far above the learners' abilities.

Furthermore, the number of new/repeated words varies considerably across the sequences. Quite logically, all the words included in the Pre.S are new words since it represents the first opportunity for the leaners to learn English. Unexpectedly, in S1.1, only 36 words are old words, of which 29 were introduced only once or twice. This means that the overwhelming majority of words are new/almost new words. In the following sequences of MBE1, an increase in the amount of old words is noticed (from 8.02 in S 1.1 to % to 44.26 % in S5.1). It is noteworthy here that the considerable decrease in the amount of new/almost new words in the last sequence S5.1 is explained by the fact that this sequence *Me, My Country and the World* contains a huge amount of proper nouns such as names of people, nationalities, places and different foreign words such as currencies (Dinar, Yuan, naira…) which were excluded from the analysis.

As regards MBE2, there is, surprisingly, as also shown in Figure 6, a sharp increase in the amount of new words in the first sequence (30.99% old words against 69.01% new/almost new words). The huge number of new words (465 totally new and 105 were introduced in MBE1 only once or twice) introduced to elementary learners whose previous exposure to English is limited to seventy hours does not only represent an unattainable goal but also a demotivating experience. In the Yearly Plans of English of first and second middle school years provided by the Ministry of National Education (2018), it is specified that the time devoted to S5.1 is 18 hours and to S1.2 is 14 hours. Statistically speaking, given that the 131 new/almost new lemmas of S 5.1 are supposed to be covered in about 18 hours (and the 570 words of S1.2 in 14 hours, it is fair to conclude that the sharp increase from 7 to 40 words per hour on average is highly questionable. As regards the amounts in the subsequent sequences, they decrease gradually , yet very slightly (new/almost new words represent 63.99% in S2.2, 61.84% in S3.2 and 54.95 % in S4.2), suggesting that while there is a balance in the amounts as the students move from one sequence to another, these amounts remain significantly huge and far above the learners' age and level.

5. Discussion of the Results

The amount of vocabulary that a textbook should include is of paramount importance. Arguably, EFL learners should not be overwhelmed with too many new words over a short period of time while they should be given the opportunity to encounter the new words several times to ensure vocabulary learning and retention. This study, which focuses on lexical words in MBE1 and MBE2, intended for two successive academic years, has yielded some unexpected, yet interesting findings that provide answers to the research questions.

To begin with, the results revealed that the amount of lexical words in MBE1 (834 words) is higher than the reasonable amount that can be learnt in a seventy- hour course by absolute beginners aged 11-12. It is unlikely that beginning students with no prior knowledge of English will be able to actually learn all this number of lexical words in addition to another significant portion of function words and other lexical words in such a limited amount of time. Quite probably, the allotted time, seventy-one hours, as specified by the Ministry of National

Education (2018), would enable the learners to learn about 50% of this quantity. In addition, the results revealed that a significant percentage of the words occur only once, twice or in a limited number of times (less than six times). This means that most of these words are unlikely to be retained by beginning learners, a fact that goes against what is recommended by researchers (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008; Ur, 2012). As regards the amount of new/almost new words, it was found that the number, which is far above what can be introduced, increases from one sequence to another. Despite of the fact that the percentages of old words increase gradually from one sequence to another, the fact that the percentages of new/almost new words are considerably higher is a clear indication that the textbook writers ignored the aspects of repetition/recycling. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the lexical words including the new ones are distributed in a balanced way within the different sequences. What's more, MBE1 is characterised by slight differences between the amounts of types, lemmas and families, which suggests that the textbook writers tried to take the learners' age and level into consideration. In fact, beginners and especially young ones need to learn simple words without too much inflectional forms or derivations.

More importantly, the analyses showed that the amount of lexical words in MBE2 is extremely inappropriate to second year learners' age and level. The lexical words in MBE2 amounts to 2319 words, of which 1752 (representing 75.55%) are introduced for the first time in addition to 223 (representing 9.62%) which were encountered before in MBE1 but only once or twice. It is worth to stress that this amount does not include all the words. If function words and proper nouns excluded from the analyses were included, the figure would be much larger. This finding is very alarming because it is impossible for elementary students, even for the excellent ones, who had only about seventy hours of instruction in their first year to learn all these numbers of lexical words in a seventy- hour multi-skill course. In order to learn all this amount, the learners would need more than four or five times of the time allotted. While these results echo those obtained by Torki (2012) who found that the number of families is 1406, of which 52.49% are new words and concluded that the second is at the frustration level as it includes 52% , they are more alarming.

Another surprising finding is the sudden increase in the amount of lexical words from MBE1 and MBE2, especially from the last sequence of MBE1 to the initial sequence of MBE2. This is illogical as it goes against Krashen' s (1985) Comprehensible Input Theory (i+1). It also contradicts vocabulary researchers' suggestion that vocabulary should be introduced gradually (Webb and Nation, 2017). It's true that an increase is expected form one grade to another as the leaners become older and more mature, but such an increase should be gradual, not abrupt and shocking. Here, one wonders how it is expected that second year learners who had about seventy hours of English instruction in their first year cope in the initial sequence of the new year, supposed to be covered in 14 hours as specified by Ministry of Education (2018), with 405 totally new words and 105 previously encountered one or two-time words. One also wonders how it is expected that those learners can read a textbook with a lexical coverage of 14.83 %. This finding is congruent with Alsaif and Milton's (2012) finding regarding the transition from the sixth to the seventh grade textbooks , which are comparable to MBE1 and MBE2. Their findings also point to a sharp increase in the amount, which the students in their second year of instruction encounter compared to the one encountered in their first year (by over three times).

More surprisingly, not only is the transition from MBE1 to MBE2 ineffective, but also there is no smooth transition from one sequence to another regarding the distribution of new and repeated words. Because of the inclusion of so many new words and the limited repetition of old words, the lexical coverage of all the sequences is very low and confirm the unsuitability of the vocabulary content in the scrutinised textbooks. Moreover, not only is the number of lexical words huge but also most of the words occur only once, twice or in a limited number of times, as in MBE1. This decreases the likelihood of their retention as explained earlier. Even

worse is the finding that the frequency of lexical words in both textbooks together is unexpectedly similar to the results of the separate textbooks, which is another evidence that the textbook writers' major concern was introducing huge amounts of new words while disregarding repetition/recycling. This conclusion is also confirmed by the results focusing on the evolution of frequency from one or more sequence(s) to the following: the percentages of the high-frequency words (occurring 6 times and more) slightly increase throughout the sequences of both textbooks. In addition, the findings show that the space between the amounts of types, lemmas and word families becomes significantly wider in MBE2 . This also suggests the existence of a huge gap between the amounts of complex words, which provides another evidence that the transition from MBE1 to MBE2 is not effective.

It also emerges that there is some kind of regularity in the textbook writers' approach to vocabulary introduction. This regularity is revealed by the balanced amount of lexical words, new/almost new words , the frequency of lexical words in the sequences of each textbook and by the development of the words frequency across both textbooks. Furthermore, it is also revealed by the inclusion of simple words in the first stage and then increasing the level of complexity, especially in MBE2 as shown by the space between tokens, types, lemmas and word families throughout the sequences. This might hint that the textbook writers could have included an appropriate amount by eliminating many of the unnecessary one- or two-time words and by prioritising the repetition and recycling of useful words.

All in all, considering the excessive quantity of lexical words offered in the textbooks and the overrepresentation of new words against the underrepresentation of repeated words in addition to the speedy rate of introducing new words and given that MBE1 is intended for first year middle school learners aged 11-12 who are introduced to English for the first time and who had about seventy hours of instruction , that MBE2 is intended for the second year middle school learners aged 12-13 with the same time allowance, and that both MBE1 and MBE2 are multi-skill textbooks whose goal is to prepare learners for oral and written communication in two consecutive academic years, it would be legitimate to conclude that the amounts are fairly unsuitable to the learners' age and level and that the transition from MBE1 to MBE2 on the one hand and the transition from a sequence to another, on the other hand, is totally ineffective. Arguably, the textbook designers did not consider carefully the limited instructional time, the learners' age and level the principles of vocabulary teaching/learning recommended by vocabulary researchers and the fact that the vocabulary component is only one of the skills/components required to be taught/learned. Finally , while the present study confirms the idea that textbook writers rely heavily on their own beliefs and intuition (Biber and Reppen, 2002) and, possibly, Milton's (2009) and Folse's (2004) beliefs that vocabulary is not assigned considerable attention during the textbook design process, it contradicts Thornbury's (2002) claim that textbooks nowadays emphasise regular recycling.

6. Conclusion

A fundamental issue in EFL teaching/learning is determining the amount of vocabulary that needs to be learnt to develop learners' communicative competence. Therefore, one of the primary goals in developing materials for EFL learners should be the inclusion of an appropriate amount of vocabulary that is learnable by a specific group of learners and compatible with the instructional time allotted. There is not much to be gained from having learners encounter a surmountable number of vocabulary , if the latter results in no retention, unsuccessful learning and inevitably demotivation. In the light of the findings of the present study, it can be argued that MBE1 and MBE2 failed to provide absolute beginners and elementary learners with sound opportunities for the acquisition and the development of their vocabulary. Hence, it is of paramount importance that textbook writers should take into consideration the available perspectives in vocabulary instruction gained from vocabulary research and strive to

incorporate them appropriately into their materials. Further research should, of course, be conducted to evaluate the quantity and the quality of the vocabulary content in the textbooks analysed in the present study and in all the other textbooks at all levels in order to provide the students with accessible, motivating and friendly-user textbooks. Finally, it is hoped that the present study, despite its limitations, will provide insights to inform the design of more appropriate EFL textbooks in Algeria, especially as far as a suitable quantity and quality of vocabulary items is concerned.

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