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## Lexical Diversity, Density, and Word Frequency in CEFR A2 ELT Coursebook Reading Texts in Turkish Higher Education: A Corpus-Based Comparative Analysis of Three Coursebooks

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**Abstract.** Coursebooks remain a dominant source of lexical input in ELT, yet CEFR labels are often treated as proxies for lexical suitability without empirical verification. This study applies corpus-based analysis to compare the lexical characteristics of A2-level reading texts in three widely used ELT coursebooks (*Language Hub*, *Empower*, and *The Big Picture*). Reading passages exceeding 50 words were compiled into three sub-corpora and analyzed across lexical diversity (TTR and MLTD), lexical density, and frequency/coverage patterns (NGSL vs. off list). Results show that surface diversity (TTR) is broadly similar across books ( $\approx 53\%$ - $55\%$ ), but length-sensitive diversity (MLTD) and text-level peaks reveal non-equivalent lexical variety across materials. Lexical density averages cluster within a moderate band ( $M = 50.71$ - $52.76$ ), yet within-book distributions include substantial shifts, with multiple texts exceeding 60% density and sizable sets below 50% in two series. Frequency profiling indicates high overall NGSL alignment

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(85.17%–89.35%) alongside meaningful differences in off-list load (10.65%–14.6%) and localized spikes above 30% off-list in individual texts. These findings demonstrate that CEFR alignment does not guarantee comparable lexical input and support the use of corpus-informed diagnostics in materials selection, curriculum planning, and coursebook development.

**Keywords:** CEFR A2; corpus-based analysis; ELT coursebooks; higher education; lexical density; lexical diversity; reading texts; Turkish preparatory programs; word frequency

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, the choice of materials in English Language Teaching (ELT) has been mainly based on pedagogical intuition rather than empirical evidence. They may provide valuable data on the thematic attraction of clothes, but the subjective checklists are not sufficient in expressing the "invisible" linguistic framework, such as lexical density and variety that influences the actual readability of a text. For example, it is common to consider Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) labels as substitute for lexical suitability without any quantitative verification. That assumption generally leads to the ignorance of the major differences in the actual input provided to the learners. In the Turkish university preparatory programs, which are probably coursebooks as syllabus and the main source of linguistic input, it can be inferred that the problems in vocabulary acquisition will occur because of only relying on coursebooks' subjective judgement since this way of working causes different levels of difficulty.

In recent decades, corpus linguistics has increasingly contributed to English Language Teaching (ELT) by offering empirical insights into how language is actually used and how learners are exposed to lexical input (Sun & Mizumoto, 2025). Corpus-based analyses have made it possible to move beyond intuition-driven judgments about teaching materials and to examine their linguistic characteristics systematically, particularly in relation to vocabulary (Tang et al., 2025). Within ELT, vocabulary has been widely acknowledged as a central component of language proficiency, shaping learners' comprehension, production, and overall communicative competence (Chen & Yuan, 2025; Hunt & Beglar, 2005; Nation, 2017). Consequently, the quality and nature of lexical input provided through instructional materials warrant scrutiny.

Further studies have shown that the use of English language teaching coursebooks for reading instruction is not only common but also looks quite unavoidable in Turkish universities. Of course, such heavy reliance on coursebooks may be given as an example of a case where teachers may not be able to contribute or do their own things, mainly because of the lack of time and no other realistic option. To give another example, the setting and type of EFL courses which largely utilize the coursebook approach (as harbored in the EFL centralized curriculum, etc.), may also be complemented with the teachers' choice of additional/interchangeable materials (Tomlinson, 2012; McGrath,

2016). Despite the coursebook dominating the scene, there is always the concept of an alternative, or a different one, aside from that. The case of Turkish university foundation programs is that the selection of coursebooks adaptation is usually determined at the institutional level, which in turn burdens these materials with the task of providing learners with the appropriate lexical input that matches their proficiency levels.

Among instructional materials, coursebooks continue to occupy a dominant position in ELT classrooms worldwide (Jalalian et al., 2025; Valizadeh, 2025). Despite the methodological diversification associated with post-method pedagogy and the growing availability of digital resources, published coursebooks remain the primary source of structured linguistic input in many educational contexts (Sheldon, 1988; Cunningsworth, 1995; Mishan, 2021). Coursebooks not only organize the syllabus and sequence learning objectives but also shape classroom practices by determining the scope of grammar, vocabulary, and skills work (Liao, 2025; Ur, 1996; Harmer, 2001). For many learners, especially in foreign language contexts, coursebooks constitute the most sustained and systematic exposure to English, making their linguistic content particularly influential (Burns & Quan, 2025).

From a corpus-informed perspective, the lexical characteristics of coursebook texts are crucial because they directly affect readability, learnability, and opportunities for vocabulary acquisition (Sun & Mizumoto, 2025). Lexical density, lexical diversity, and word frequency have been widely used to describe how information is distributed in texts and how demanding those texts may be for learners (Biber et al., 1998; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010; Sung et al., 2025).

Lexical density, commonly defined as the proportion of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) relative to the total number of words in a text (Halliday, 1985), is a key indicator of informational load and textual complexity, particularly in written discourse. Lexical density reflects the proportion of content words in a text and is closely associated with informational load and processing demands while lexical diversity captures the range and variability of vocabulary. Word frequency and coverage, particularly in relation to established word lists, such as the General Service List and the New General Service List, provide insights into how closely instructional texts align with high-frequency language use (West, 1953; Nation, 2017).

Research in second language acquisition has consistently emphasized the role of comprehensible and sufficiently rich input in vocabulary development (Li, 2025). Theoretical frameworks, such as the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), the Incidental Learning Hypothesis, and the Lexical Approach all highlight the importance of repeated exposure to lexical items in meaningful contexts (Lewis, 1993; Nation, 1990). Reading texts in coursebooks plays a particularly significant role in this process as they combine lexical and syntactic features in contextualized discourse and often serve as the primary written input for learners. Repeated encounters with vocabulary in reading texts have been shown to support retention and long-term acquisition, provided that the lexical

load is appropriately balanced (Elgort & Warren, 2014; Rahayu & Syaifullah, 2022).

Despite the growing body of corpus-based research in ELT, much of the existing literature has focused on learner-produced texts, such as essays and examinations, to evaluate lexical proficiency and development. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the lexical properties of the instructional materials themselves, particularly coursebook reading texts, which serve as the foundation of input for learners. Where coursebook evaluations do exist, they often rely on impressionistic checklists or pedagogical criteria rather than quantitative lexical analysis (Lai, 2025; Williams, 1983; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Tomlinson, 2013). This leaves an important gap in understanding how coursebooks differ in terms of the lexical input they provide, even when they are designed for the same proficiency level.

This gap is especially relevant in higher education preparatory programs, where learners are expected to develop sufficient lexical competence to cope with academic demands. In such contexts, coursebooks are typically used intensively and systematically, and their reading texts function as a key source of vocabulary exposure. If the lexical density or diversity of these texts is misaligned with learners' proficiency levels, this may hinder comprehension or limit opportunities for vocabulary growth. On the other hand, well-calibrated lexical input can facilitate incidental learning and support the development of reading fluency and overall language proficiency (Sobotkova et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a corpus-based approach to examine the lexical characteristics of reading texts in widely used A2-level ELT coursebooks employed in higher education preparatory programs. By analyzing lexical density, lexical diversity, and word frequency, the study aims to provide an empirical account of the nature and quality of lexical input offered by these materials. Rather than evaluating coursebooks in terms of pedagogical design or activity types, the focus is placed on the linguistic properties of the texts themselves, viewed through the lens of corpus linguistics.

By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the literature on ELT materials evaluation in two ways. First, it extends corpus-based lexical analysis to instructional materials that are often taken for granted as appropriate for their intended level. Second, it offers evidence-based insights that can inform coursebook selection, adaptation, and development by highlighting similarities and differences in lexical input across comparable materials. Ultimately, understanding how coursebooks distribute and present vocabulary is essential for ensuring that learners are exposed to language that is both accessible and sufficiently rich to support effective language learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Coursebooks as Linguistic Input in ELT**

In ELT contexts, coursebooks are widely regarded as the primary vehicle through which linguistic input is delivered to learners. Beyond functioning as

organizational tools or syllabi, coursebooks shape the quantity, quality, and sequencing of language exposure in the classroom (Ur, 1996; Richards, 2014; Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al., 2025). Particularly in EFL settings, where opportunities for authentic language use outside the classroom are limited, coursebooks often constitute learners' most sustained contact with English (Li & Chen, 2025; İnal, 2006). As a result, the linguistic features embedded in coursebook texts play a decisive role in learners' language development.

Unlike the authentic texts designed for the real communication among the proficient users, the pedagogical texts in the ELT coursebooks are deliberately included to act as 'a comprehensible input.' Instead of being authentic materials that demonstrate the actual use of language, they often introduce a vocabulary that is beyond the reach of an A2 level student. Thus, the pedagogical texts are the subject of the 'lexical staging' process—this is a systematic vocabulary management method, which comprises initial presentation, a recycle phase, and bridging classroom learning to real language use.

Previous research (Bist & Kandel, 2025; Yüceer-Öztürk & Tan-Şişman, 2025) has consistently highlighted the centrality of coursebooks in ELT programs. They provide structured content, reduce teachers' preparation load, and offer coherence across lessons and proficiency levels (Harmer, 2001; Tsiprakides, 2011). For learners, coursebooks provide a sense of progression and stability, enabling them to monitor their development over time (Haycroft, 1998, as cited in Yüksel et al., 2023). However, the prominence of coursebooks also raises concerns regarding over-reliance and the potential mismatch between learner needs and the linguistic content of published materials (Allwright, 1981, as cited in Tosun & Çinkara, 2019).

Recent work published in 2025 extends corpus-informed evaluation beyond checklist traditions by treating coursebooks as measurable input environments rather than purely pedagogical artefacts; however, this emerging line of research remains methodologically uneven—often concentrating on a single book or a single lexical index, and relying on length-sensitive metrics that can distort comparisons across texts and units. The rationale for corpus-based evaluation itself is not new: early corpus linguistics established the value of attested patterns and systematic comparison (e.g., John Sinclair, 1991) and later register-driven corpus work emphasized that lexical and grammatical choices vary systematically by text type and communicative purpose (e.g., Douglas Biber and colleagues' corpus approaches).

Building on these foundations, the present study adopts MTLT alongside TTR because MTLT was specifically developed to reduce text-length effects by estimating the mean span of running words that maintains a stable diversity threshold, making it more robust for cross-text and cross-coursebook comparisons than raw TTR alone. Finally, lexical density is not treated merely as a descriptive count: because it indexes the proportion of content words (nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, adverbs), it is theoretically tied to informational load

and processing demands, and this explains why increases in lexical density often coincide with reduced readability for lower-proficiency readers.

## **2.2 Coursebook Evaluation and Corpus-Based Perspectives**

Traditionally, coursebook evaluation has relied on checklist-based frameworks that assess pedagogical suitability, cultural representation, and alignment with curricular goals (Pintado et al., 2025; Williams, 1983; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Cunningsworth, 1995). While these frameworks have contributed valuable insights, they often focus on surface-level features or subjective judgments rather than the linguistic properties of coursebook texts. As a result, the actual language input learners receive has remained underexplored.

The emergence of corpus linguistics has introduced more objective and data-driven approaches to materials evaluation (Flowerdew, 2025). Corpus-based methods allow researchers to analyze large samples of text systematically and to examine the patterns of vocabulary use, frequency, and distribution (Biber et al., 1998; Yang & He, 2025). In ELT research, corpus analysis has been widely applied to learner writing and spoken production to investigate lexical proficiency and development. However, fewer studies have applied similar methods to instructional materials, despite their foundational role in shaping learner input.

Several scholars (Looi et al., 2025; Vo & Tran, 2025) have emphasized the need to evaluate coursebooks not only pedagogically but also linguistically. Tomlinson (2013) argues that effective materials should provide extensive exposure to authentic and representative language use, and there is also a need to maintain an achievable level of difficulty. From this perspective, corpus-based lexical analysis offers a means of assessing whether coursebooks meet these criteria by examining the balance between high-frequency and low-frequency vocabulary, lexical density, and diversity.

## **2.3 Lexical Density, Diversity, and Word Frequency in ELT Materials**

Lexical density, lexical diversity, and word frequency are the key constructs in understanding the linguistic demands of texts (Sung et al., 2025). Lexical density reflects the proportion of content words relative to function words and is often associated with informational load and textual complexity (Biber et al., 1998; Zhang & Lu, 2025). Texts with high lexical density may pose comprehension challenges for lower-level learners while overly simplified texts may limit exposure to meaningful vocabulary (Wen & Yu, 2025).

Lexical diversity refers to the range of unique lexical items used in a text and is commonly measured through indices, such as the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and the Mean Length of Textual Diversity (MLTD) (Fang et al., 2025; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010). These measures provide insights into vocabulary richness while accounting for text length. In ELT materials, appropriate lexical diversity is essential for promoting vocabulary growth without overwhelming learners (Weisi & Torang, 2025).

Word frequency analysis further complements these measures by examining how closely texts align with established frequency lists, such as the General Service List and the New General Service List. High-frequency vocabulary is crucial for comprehension and fluency, particularly at lower proficiency levels, while controlled exposure to less frequent items supports lexical expansion (Nation, 2017). Studies have shown that texts with balanced frequency profiles are more likely to facilitate incidental vocabulary learning through reading ((Lai & Wang, 2025; Elgort & Warren, 2014).

#### **2.4 Reading Texts and Vocabulary Acquisition**

Reading texts occupy a central position in coursebooks as they integrate vocabulary, grammar, and discourse features within meaningful contexts (Sheng & Li, 2025). Research grounded in the Input Hypothesis and the Incidental Learning Hypothesis underscores the importance of repeated exposure to lexical items in context for successful vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Nation, 1990). Reading materials that are appropriately calibrated in terms of lexical density and diversity can enhance comprehension while promoting vocabulary retention (Nakai & Shintani, 2025).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that repeated encounters with words across texts and contexts improve learners' ability to infer meaning and retain vocabulary over time (Rahayu & Syaifullah, 2022). However, if reading texts contain excessively dense or lexically diverse input relative to learners' proficiency levels, they may hinder comprehension and reduce learning efficiency. This highlights the importance of systematically examining the lexical characteristics of coursebook reading texts.

#### **2.5 Research Gap**

Although previous research has acknowledged the importance of vocabulary and reading in ELT, there remains a gap in corpus-based analyses of coursebook reading texts, particularly at specific proficiency levels. Existing studies tend to prioritize learner output or rely on qualitative evaluations of materials, leaving the lexical input embedded in coursebooks underexamined. Moreover, coursebooks designed for the same CEFR level are often assumed to provide comparable linguistic input, an assumption that has rarely been tested empirically.

Addressing this gap, the present study applies corpus-based lexical analysis to reading texts drawn from widely used A2-level ELT coursebooks in higher education preparatory programs. By examining lexical density, lexical diversity, and word frequency, the study seeks to offer a data-driven comparison of the lexical input provided by these materials and to contribute to more informed decisions in ELT materials selection and development.

#### **2.6 Research Questions**

The present analysis, the questions stated below are being answered through data collection and analysis.

**RQ 1:** What is the **lexical diversity** of reading texts in the three most widely used EFL coursebooks in Turkish university preparatory programs, as measured by **Type-Token Ratio (TTR)** and **Measure of Textual Lexical Diversity (MLTD)**?

**RQ 2:** What is the **lexical density** of the reading texts in these coursebooks?

**RQ 3:** How are the words in these reading texts distributed across frequency lists, particularly the **New General Service List (NGSL)**?

**RQ 4:** To what extent do **lexical diversity (TTR/MLTD)**, **lexical density**, and **NGSL-based frequency coverage** vary **within each coursebook** across texts/units, and what do these patterns imply for **curriculum planning and materials design** in ELT programs?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative corpus-based research design to examine the lexical characteristics of reading texts in ELT coursebooks **used specifically within Turkish higher education English preparatory programs**. These programs typically rely on commercially published materials to provide the primary linguistic input for learners. To reflect this regional reality, three sub-corpora were constructed from the **three most prevalent A2-level coursebooks in the Turkish university context**: *Language Hub*, *Empower*, and *The Big Picture*. Corpus-based analysis enables systematic and replicable investigation of linguistic features across comparable texts, making it particularly suitable for analyzing instructional materials that are assumed to provide level-appropriate input (Zhang, 2025). The analysis focuses on three lexical dimensions—lexical density, lexical diversity, and word frequency—as indicators of the nature and quality of vocabulary input embedded in coursebook reading texts.

The current research is directed to the materials that are exclusively made for the Turkish higher education by analyzing their "invisible architecture" under a pedagogical reading text perspective rather than authentic discourse. From this particular standpoint, the consideration of such a distinction is quite significant, for it not only unveils the fact that the pedagogical texts are practical tools for teaching but also they have to be checked for sole; in addition to that, their lexical density and frequency profiles should be verified empirically as well in order not to create random "difficulty spikes.

Two software programs are used for the corpus analysis:

- a) **AntConc**: This software was utilized for tokenization, conducting frequency analyses, and inspecting concordances.
- b) **Lextutor**: These web-based tools were employed for word frequency profiling and lexical coverage analyses, specifically to classify words into frequency bands and identify off-list items.

The "off-list" category is determined using the following specific frequency list:

- **New General Service List (NGSL):** This is the primary benchmark used for word frequency profiling in the study.
- **Definition of Off-list:** Any vocabulary found in the coursebook reading texts that does not appear within the NGSL is classified as "off-list".
- **Analytical Purpose:** The off-list category identifies lower-frequency or topic-specific items that may increase the lexical burden for A2-level learners.
- **Tool Integration:** The classification of these items was performed, using **Lextutor**-based frequency tools, which compared the compiled corpora against the NGSL to identify the proportion of high-frequency versus off-list words.

Three sub-corpora were constructed, each consisting of reading texts extracted from one CEFR A2-level ELT coursebook widely used in Turkish university preparatory programs: Language Hub, Empower, and The Big Picture. Only Student's Book reading texts exceeding 50 words were included to ensure the reliability of lexical calculations. The resulting sub-corpora contained **5,468 tokens (Language Hub)**, **5,324 tokens (Empower)**, and **5,142 tokens (The Big Picture)**, respectively. All texts were transcribed verbatim and converted into plain-text format prior to analysis."

Lexical analyses were conducted, using **AntConc** for tokenization, frequency analysis, and concordance inspection. Word frequency profiling and lexical coverage analyses were carried out with reference to the **New General Service List (NGSL)**, using **Lextutor-based frequency tools**, which were employed to classify words into frequency bands (e.g., 1-500, 501-1000) and identify off-list items, as reflected in the thesis analyses and figures.

Lexical diversity was measured, using Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and Measure of Textual Lexical Diversity (MTLD). For diversity calculations, the texts were lemmatized, and this means that that inflectional variants of words were reduced to a single base form (e.g., *runs, running, ran* → *run*). This procedure ensured that lexical diversity values reflected conceptual lexical variation rather than morphological variation, thereby allowing more reliable comparison across texts of differing lengths.

Lexical density was operationalized as the proportion of content words relative to the total number of tokens in each text. Content words were defined as nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and this was followed by the established conventions in corpus-based lexical analysis. Function words—such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, and pronouns—were excluded from density calculations.

Regarding ethical considerations, the coursebook materials analyzed in this study were accessed through institutional resources and used solely for research and analytical purposes. No copyrighted texts are reproduced in full, and all findings are reported in aggregated or quantitative form. The study complies

with academic fair-use principles and ethical guidelines that govern the analysis of copyrighted instructional materials.

### 3.2 Corpus and Materials

The corpus consists of reading texts extracted from three widely used A2-level ELT coursebooks employed in higher education preparatory programs:

- *Language Hub Level 1* (Macmillan Education)
- *Empower Second Edition A2* (Cambridge University Press)
- *The Big Picture Second Edition A2* (Richmond ELT)

These coursebooks were selected due to their widespread use and comparable proficiency level, and the selection allowed meaningful comparison of lexical input across materials designed for the same target learners. Only the student's book (SB) reading texts were included to ensure consistency across the series.

To maintain analytical reliability, only reading texts exceeding 50 words were included in the corpus. Shorter texts were excluded due to the limitations they posed for calculating lexical diversity and density measures. All eligible reading texts from each unit were transcribed verbatim and compiled into separate sub-corpora corresponding to each coursebook.

### 3.3 Analytical Measures

The lexical analysis focused on three complementary dimensions:

#### 3.3.1 Lexical Density

Lexical density was calculated by examining the proportion of content words relative to the total number of tokens in each text. This measure provides insight into the informational load and potential processing demands of reading texts.

#### 3.3.2 Lexical Diversity

Lexical diversity was assessed using both traditional and length-sensitive measures. Type-Token Ratio (TTR) was used to provide an initial overview of lexical variation while Mean Length of Textual Diversity (MLTD) was employed to address the sensitivity of TTR to text length. Together, these measures offer a balanced account of vocabulary richness across texts of varying lengths.

#### 3.3.3 Word Frequency and Coverage

Word frequency analysis was conducted to examine how vocabulary in the reading texts aligned with high-frequency lexical items. Coverage patterns were analyzed with reference to the established frequency lists, with particular attention paid to the distribution of high-frequency and off-list words. This analysis provides insight into the extent to which the texts reflect commonly used English vocabulary while still introducing opportunities for lexical expansion.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

All texts were processed using corpus-analysis tools to generate token counts, type counts, lexical density values, diversity indices, and frequency distributions. Each sub-corpus was analyzed separately to allow for within- and across-coursebook comparisons. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize

patterns in lexical density, diversity, and frequency, and comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences among the three coursebooks. The analytical focus remained descriptive and comparative rather than inferential as the aim of the study was to characterize and contrast the lexical input provided by the selected materials rather than to test causal relationships.

#### 4. Findings

The first research question (RQ1) of the current study investigates: “What is the level of lexical diversity in the top three most commonly used EFL coursebooks in Turkish university preparatory departments?” This section reports the corpus-based lexical analysis of A2-level reading texts from three widely used ELT coursebooks (Language Hub, The Big Picture, and Empower). Results are organized around (1) lexical diversity (TTR + MLTD), (2) lexical density, and (3) word frequency/lexical coverage (NGSL vs. off list). Findings are presented descriptively and comparatively to foreground key contrasts in lexical input profiles. Table 1 shows the highest and lowest values for lexical density and lexical diversity.

**Table 1: The Highest and Lowest Values for Lexical Density and Lexical Diversity**

		Language Hub	The Big Picture Empower	Empower
Lexical Density	Highest Value	63.07	60.47	64.86
	Lowest Value	44.52	43.56	42.03
TTR	Highest Value	75.0	74.0	77.0
	Lowest Value	39.0	45.0	34.0
MLTD	Highest Value	132.38	122.7	125.87
	Lowest Value	36.18	48.75	31.99

##### 4.1 Lexical Diversity (TTR and MLTD)

As it is shown in Table 1, across the corpus, lexical diversity patterns were similar at a broad level (as expected for A2), yet meaningful differences emerged once a length-sensitive measure (MLTD) was considered. Overall, Empower showed the most consistently strong MLTD profile while Language Hub tended to display lower MLTD values, with occasional high-diversity exceptions. Several Empower readings combined moderate TTR with notably high MLTD, and this indicates sustained lexical variety across longer passages. For example, “*Why not travelling and never stop?*” recorded MLTD = 91.55 and TTR = 0.58 while the shorter text “*Story*” showed MLTD = 89.85 with an unusually high TTR = 0.76. Other texts displayed more moderate diversity (e.g., “*Film International*” MLTD = 79.20, TTR = 0.47), and this reflects a balance between recycling and expansion.

##### 4.1.1 The Big Picture (high diversity overall, including the corpus peak)

The Big Picture also demonstrated high MLTD values and, in some cases, exceeded Empower. “*The art of taking it easy*” reached MLTD = 122.70, the highest value highlighted in the thesis findings, and this suggests a particularly rich lexical range for an A2 text. Other readings showed more modest

diversity – e.g., “*The Boomerang Generation*” (TTR = 0.45, MLTD = 50.38), and this indicates that the series alternates between lexically rich and more repetitive texts across units.

#### 4.1.2 *Language Hub (lower MLTD overall, but with standout high-diversity texts)*

Language Hub generally presented lower MLTD values, which suggests stronger lexical recycling, yet it included clear exceptions. “*City Guide*” registered MLTD = 107.50 and TTR = 0.63, and this indicates a sharp rise in lexical variety relative to the series’ typical pattern. At the lower end, shorter/instructional texts showed limited diversity, such as “*Carlos Typing*” (MLTD = 36.79) and “*What’s in your Hand Luggage?*” (MLTD = 52.45, TTR = 0.48).

#### **Interpretive Takeaway**

Even within a shared CEFR level label, the books vary in how they distribute lexical variety: Empower appears to provide more consistently diverse input, Language Hub provides more recycling with occasional spikes, and The Big Picture combines high-diversity peaks with more conservative texts.

The second research question (RQ2) of this study explores “How dense is the lexical content of these coursebooks in terms of vocabulary usage?”

### **4.2 Lexical Density (Informational Load)**

As shown in Table 1, lexical density values fell in a moderate band appropriate for A2 reading input, but the average levels and the spread (range) differed by series, and this indicates different degrees of informational load and within-book consistency.

#### 4.2.1 *Language Hub (highest mean density; moderate fluctuation)*

Language Hub recorded the highest overall mean lexical density (M = 52.76). The within-book range extended from a high of 63.07 to a low of 44.52, and this suggests generally steady but still noticeable topic-based variation.

#### 4.2.2 *The Big Picture (lowest mean density; relatively controlled range)*

The Big Picture showed the lowest mean density (M = 50.71), with a maximum of 60.47 and a minimum of 43.56. The pattern was interpreted as comparatively stable and “gradual,” and this suggests more controlled density progression across units.

#### 4.2.3 *Empower (mid mean density; widest range)*

Empower’s mean density was M = 51.80, but it displayed the widest dispersion, reaching a high of 64.86 and a low of 42.03. This indicates that learners may encounter sharper shifts between information-dense texts and lighter texts across units.

#### **Interpretive Takeaway**

While all three series are broadly comparable in average density, Empower is the most variable, Language Hub is the densest on average, and The Big Picture is the least dense and most controlled, and this implies different assumptions

about how much lexical/informational load A2 learners can handle at different points.

The third research question (RQ3) of this research paper relates, “What is the frequency level of the words used in reading texts in these coursebooks?”

Lexical density is a metric for the amount of information that is crammed into a text, but it is not an indicator of whether the conveyed information involves known or unknown words. A text with a certain level of density may still be hard if it features too many uncommon or specialized terms. Thus, it is crucial to observe the frequency bands of these Turkish university materials in order to grasp their lexical landscape completely. The subsection below elaborates on how the reading texts correlate with high-frequency language and their distribution of 'off-list' vocabulary.

### 4.3 Word Frequency and Lexical Coverage (NGSL vs. Off list)

Word frequency profiling showed strong reliance on high-frequency vocabulary across all coursebooks, but with meaningful differences in off-list load (i.e., vocabulary beyond the NGSL), directly affects accessibility and incidental learning opportunities.

#### 4.3.1 Overall NGSL alignment (coverage)

Across the three series, the proportion of NGSL-based vocabulary was high, but not identical:

- Language Hub: NGSL = 85.17%, Off list = 14.6%
- The Big Picture: NGSL = 89.35%, Off list = 10.65%
- Empower: NGSL = 87.3%, Off list = 12.98%

This pattern indicates that The Big Picture provides the highest overall high-frequency coverage while Language Hub introduces the largest proportion of off-list vocabulary.

#### 4.3.2 Texts with heavier off-list loads (potential lexical challenge points)

The findings highlight several readings where off-list vocabulary becomes salient. For instance, “*World Markets*” contained 77% NGSL vs. 23% off-list (reported as among the highest off-list counts, with 78 off-list items). In Empower, “*Jonnie Peacock: Champion Runner*” included 33.8% off-list (25 off-list words), and “*Mail*” contained 53 off-list words (18.5%).

#### 4.3.3 Lowest NGSL coverage examples (by series)

The reported lowest NGSL coverage points included:

- Language Hub: “*Famous Families*” 66.5% NGSL
- The Big Picture: “*I’m from*” 74.7% NGSL
- Empower: “*Jonnie Peacock: Champion Runner*” 66.2% NGSL

### Interpretive Takeaway

All three coursebooks largely align with high-frequency vocabulary, yet they differ in how often and how sharply they “spike” into off-list territory. The Big Picture appears most conservative (higher NGSL, lower off-list), Empower tends

to balance accessibility and expansion, and Language Hub provides comparatively more off-list exposure overall—potentially beneficial for lexical growth, but also more demanding without scaffolding.

The fourth research question (RQ4) of this research paper is, “How can the findings of lexical analysis and overall results contribute to curriculum and material design in ELT programs?”

#### 4.4 Comparative Overview (Integrated Profile)

Taken together, the three measures show that CEFR A2 alignment does not yield uniform lexical input. Each series offers a distinct lexical profile:

- **Empower:** strongest and most consistently high lexical diversity (MLTD), but also the widest density range (high variability in informational load).
- **The Big Picture:** includes very high diversity peaks (e.g., MLTD = 122.70) while maintaining the highest NGSL coverage overall (i.e., most high frequency).
- **Language Hub:** tends toward lower lexical diversity (more recycling) yet shows higher mean lexical density and the highest off-list proportion overall, and this indicates denser input and greater exposure to less frequent items.

Accordingly, no single coursebook is uniformly “best” across all dimensions; instead, the books distribute lexical richness, density, and frequency exposure differently—an important consideration for coursebook selection and curriculum alignment when reading input is a primary source of lexical development.

### 5. Discussion

This study examined the lexical input characteristics of A2-level reading texts in three widely used ELT coursebooks through a corpus-based perspective, focusing on lexical diversity, lexical density, and word-frequency alignment. Overall, the results show that CEFR level labeling did not guarantee comparable lexical input. This finding aligns with Zhang and Lu (2025), who identified both common and distinctive language characteristics across CEFR levels. In addition, they (Zhang & Lu, 2025) also emphasized how text classification models must be modified to account for the different linguistic profiles of readers with low and high proficiency.

Another finding of the current study is that the three coursebooks broadly clustered around “moderate” lexical demands, and the result is consistent with Liao’s (2025) call for a comprehensive approach to understanding instructional resources (Liao, 2025). Furthermore, the results of the study of Liao (2025) highlighted the need for taking a comprehensive approach to comprehending how instructional resources can be used in foreign language learning. Liao (2025) emphasized the dynamic interaction of elements that lead to the creation of useful materials and efficient practice.

In addition, the results of the current study show that the three coursebooks diverged in how they balanced vocabulary variety, informational load, and exposure to lower-frequency items. Consequently, these books create distinct reading-input profiles despite sharing the same nominal level. The findings of the present study are compatible with the results of the studies of Judy et al. (2023), Loi and Van Hong (2025) and Sabag-Shushan et al. (2023). According to Loi and Van Hong (2025), although the integrated skills approach has improved students' English proficiency and classroom engagement, there are still issues with its successful application. Moreover, their study (Loi & Van Hong, 2025) emphasized the significance of incorporating all four abilities into general English classes in order to increase student interest and competency.

Concerning lexical diversity and vocabulary exposure (TTR & MLTD), pedagogically, MLTD is more informative than raw TTR for comparing texts of different lengths and for capturing sustained lexical variety (Bestgen, 2025; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010). This combination – moderate averages with occasional spikes – has two implications for vocabulary learning through reading. First, materials that systematically sustain higher MLTD may provide richer opportunities for lexical expansion, and this result aligns with views that reading can support incidental vocabulary learning when input is sufficiently rich but not overwhelming (Nation, 2017; Nguyen & Doan, 2025; Elgort & Warren, 2014). Second, high-diversity outliers may create "difficulty jumps" within an A2 pathway; these can be productive if they are scaffolded, but they become problematic if a smooth progression is assumed.

Regarding lexical density and textual demands (Information Load), lexical density results reinforce the same overarching message: overall similarity with meaningful local variation. The data suggest that while all three books provide appropriate information density for the level, they are not equivalent with the processing demands. This result aligns with the study of Bai et al. (2025). The results of the current study also show that within-book variation is non-trivial. The data demonstrate that from a curriculum and materials-design standpoint, "A2" reading input can vary not only across books but within a single series, producing alternating stretches of lighter and heavier informational load (Burridge et al., 2024). If these shifts are not explicitly supported through task design, pre-reading support, and staged recycling, learners may experience inconsistent comprehension pressure across units – even when the nominal level remains constant.

With regard to word frequency and high-frequency alignment (NGSL vs. Off-List), word-frequency analysis showed strong overall reliance on high-frequency vocabulary across all three coursebooks, but again with meaningful differences (Li et al., 2025). This means that high-frequency alignment is closely tied to readability and fluency at lower levels (Nation, 2017). A book with stronger NGSL alignment may provide more stable comprehension conditions while a higher off-list proportion can increase lexical burden unless it is supported by recycling and pedagogy. This research paper showcases that exposure to lower-frequency items can be valuable, but they increase the importance of scaffolding

and sequencing. If a coursebook introduces texts with unusually high off-list vocabulary without sufficient pre-teaching, glossing, recycling, or post-reading consolidation, the reading input may function less as comprehensible input and more as a decoding burden, reducing the likelihood of productive incidental uptake (Krashen, 1985; Nation, 2017).

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes to ELT research by moving beyond broad proficiency labeling and offering a fine-grained, corpus-based analysis of instructional input, focusing on what CEFR A2 learners are required to process in coursebook reading texts. By integrating lexical density, length-sensitive lexical diversity (MLTD), and word-frequency profiling, the study demonstrates that CEFR alignment alone does not ensure comparable lexical input across coursebooks targeting the same level.

Although the three A2-level coursebooks displayed broadly similar Type-Token Ratio (TTR) values, MLTD revealed clearer differences in lexical diversity once text length was controlled, and this confirms the methodological value of length-robust measures in materials evaluation. Lexical density analyses further indicate that, while all series generally operate within an A2-appropriate range, informational load is unevenly distributed across texts, and this results in peaks and troughs that may impose inconsistent processing demands on learners within the same coursebook.

A particularly salient finding concerns off-list vocabulary. While high-frequency coverage is strong across all three series, the amount and concentration of off-list items vary noticeably, and this reflects different editorial assumptions about when and how lower-frequency or topic-specific vocabulary should be introduced. Even limited lexical spikes may disproportionately affect comprehension and learner confidence at lower proficiency levels, and this underscores the need for transparent and principled lexical staging in coursebook design.

### 6.1 Pedagogical Implications

Taken together, the findings suggest a practical conclusion for ELT programs: materials selection should not rely on CEFR labels alone. Even when overall averages appear similar, the three coursebooks differ in their lexical design tendencies—(i) slight but meaningful differences in overall density and diversity, (ii) within-book volatility (peaks and troughs), and (iii) differences in frequency alignment and off-list exposure.

The findings of the current study would be a valuable guide for teachers and curriculum planners since the results of the study support combining traditional evaluative frameworks (e.g., checklist-based or pedagogical alignment approaches) with corpus-informed diagnostics that make lexical input visible (Williams, 1983; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Cunningsworth, 1995; Biber et al., 1998). A corpus lens can help stakeholders ask more precise questions at adoption time—such as whether a coursebook systematically supports recycling

vs. expansion, whether lexical density is stable across units, and whether off-list vocabulary is distributed evenly or concentrated into a small number of “lexically heavy” texts. The results of the current study can be prominent guides for materials designers since the results of the study point to the value of more transparent lexical specifications at lower proficiency levels: clearer guidance for the intended degree of lexical recycling, tighter control (or deliberate staging) of lexical density, and purposeful handling of off-list vocabulary—especially in reading texts where input quality strongly conditions vocabulary growth.

In addition, this study contributes to corpus-informed ELT research by shifting evaluation from learner output to instructional input, providing a quantitative picture of what A2 learners are asked to process in coursebook reading texts. The main contribution is not claiming that one book is “best,” but showing empirically that different A2 coursebooks operationalize lexical progression differently—and that these differences are visible through a compact set of corpus measures (diversity, density, and frequency). In that sense, the study strengthens the case for integrating corpus-based evidence into routine ELT materials evaluation and curriculum decision-making.

From a practical standpoint, the findings also point to the growing value of AI-assisted and corpus-informed tools in supporting teachers’ day-to-day materials decisions. Readily accessible tools, such as Lextutor, AntConc, NGSL-based frequency profilers, and AI-enhanced readability analyzers can help teachers quickly check whether a reading text aligns with A2-level lexical expectations before classroom use. Based on the present results, a simple lexical checklist for teachers might include: (a) checking whether the majority of running words fall within high-frequency bands, (b) monitoring lexical density to avoid sudden spikes in informational load, (c) ensuring that off-list or topic-specific items are pedagogically motivated, and (d) confirming that new vocabulary is recycled across subsequent units rather than introduced in isolation.

These considerations are particularly relevant when balancing lexical recycling and lexical expansion within a syllabus as excessive novelty may undermine comprehension while insufficient expansion may limit vocabulary growth. The implications extend to digital versus print materials as well: digital platforms allow for adaptive glossing, hyperlinked support, and data-driven text selection, potentially mitigating high lexical density more effectively than static print texts. Finally, the results highlight the need for teacher training in basic corpus literacy, including interpreting frequency lists, understanding length-sensitive diversity measures, and using AI-supported tools responsibly, so that corpus evidence becomes a routine component of informed pedagogical decision-making rather than a specialist research skill.

Building on these implications, future research may extend corpus-informed evaluation by incorporating Teacher’s Manuals alongside Student’s Books to examine how lexical demands are pedagogically scaffolded through pre-reading activities, sequencing of tasks, and post-reading reinforcement. Comparative analyses of global versus locally adapted versions of the same coursebook series

would further illuminate how lexical density, diversity, and off-list vocabulary are adjusted in response to specific educational contexts. To complement quantitative findings, qualitative methodologies, such as teacher focus groups, stimulated recall interviews, or classroom-based observations, could be employed to explore how instructors perceive and manage “lexical spikes” in practice and how such spikes influence learner motivation, engagement, and perceived text difficulty.

From a technological perspective, advances in AI-driven text analytics offer promising avenues for automating these lexical diagnostics at scale, enabling real-time detection of abrupt increases in density or low-frequency vocabulary and supporting adaptive materials design. Together, these directions suggest a research agenda in which corpus analysis, qualitative inquiry, and AI-supported tools converge to support more responsive, context-sensitive ELT materials development.

## 6.2 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study adopts a quantitative, text-focused approach and does not include classroom interaction or learner perception data. In addition, the analysis is limited to three coursebooks at a single proficiency level (CEFR A2), which constrains generalizability. These limitations, however, help clarify the scope of interpretation rather than diminish the study’s contribution. Overall, the findings call for greater transparency in lexical progression, particularly regarding recycling, controlled expansion, and the pedagogical justification of off-list vocabulary, to support more consistent learner input and informed curriculum decisions.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to this study.

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