

# Teaching Too Much or Too Little? Rethinking Vocabulary Demands in EFL Materials

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## Previous studies

- 3,000 most frequent word families are a well-established benchmark for understanding a variety of academic materials (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014).
- Students failed to master the most frequent high-frequency vocabulary (Olmos, 2009).
- Studies showed insufficient coverage of high-frequency words in textbooks (Sun & Dang, 2020).

## Research questions

1. To what extent do EFL students using the Pathways textbook\* know the most frequent 3000 word-families?
2. To what extent are the most frequent 3000 word-families and words at lower frequency levels encountered in the Pathways textbook?
3. How many word-families are needed to reach 95% and 98% coverage of the Pathways textbook?

\* *Pathways: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking" (2nd Edition)* by Laurie Blass and Mari Vargo - Print year: 2022

## Methodology

- Assessing the receptive vocabulary knowledge by using the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (Webb et al., 2017).

Example of an item from *The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test*  
(Adapted from Webb, Sasao & Ballance, 2017)

	game	island	mouth	movie	song	yard
land with water all around it		√				
part of your body used for eating and talking			√			
piece of music					√	

- Analyzing the vocabulary load in the textbook through following steps:
  - Scanning the textbook and create a corpus of Pathway textbook
  - Running the RANGE program analysis
  - Analyzing word frequency bands
  - Calculating the cumulative vocabulary coverage across different frequency levels.

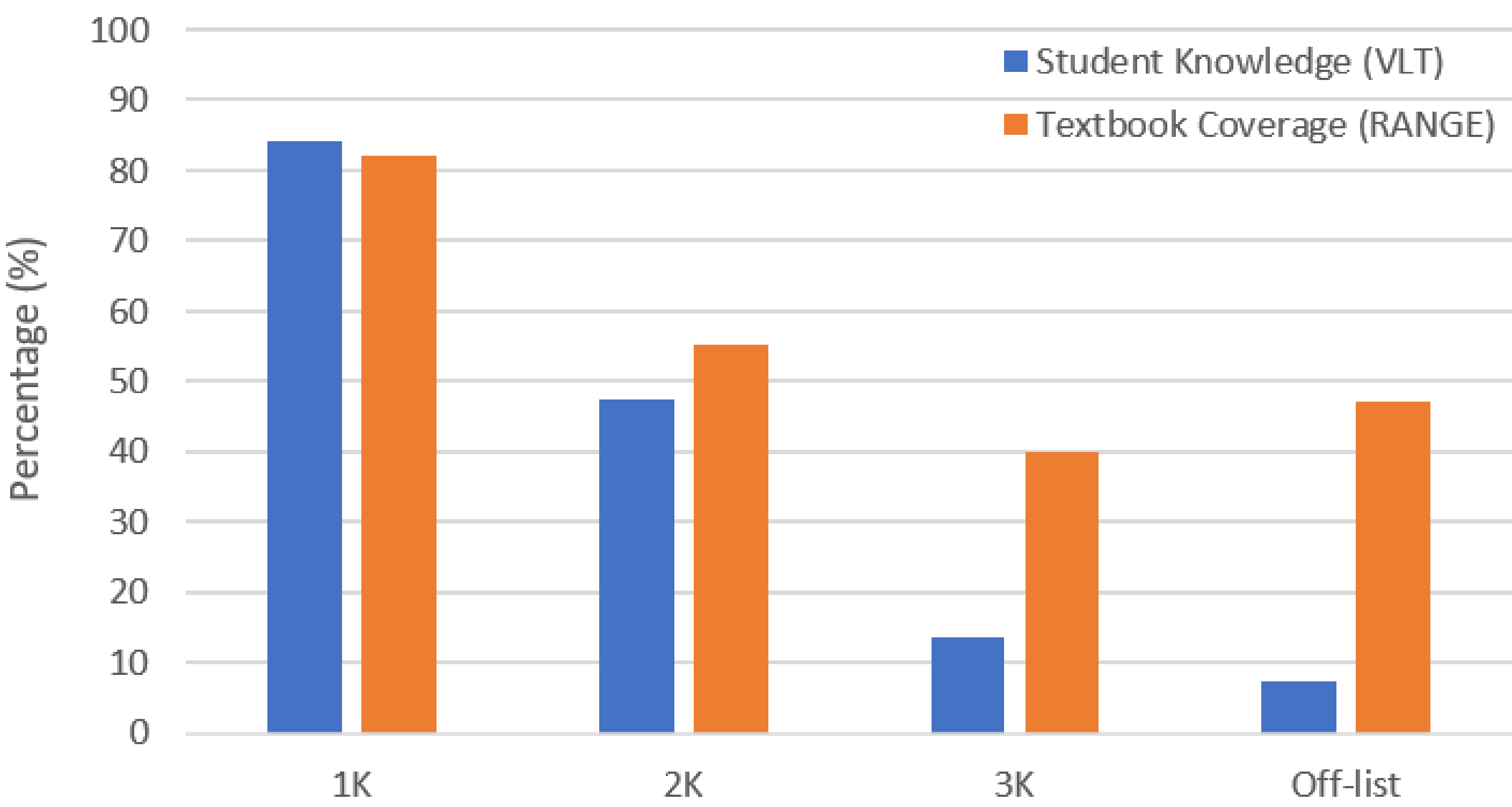
## Importance

1. Investigating the extent to which the vocabulary load of an integrated-skills EFL textbook aligns with the receptive vocabulary knowledge of first-year university students in Vietnam.
2. Giving implications for vocabulary instruction in the textbook, and offering recommendations for supporting students' vocabulary growth and selecting materials.

## Findings

- Students demonstrated strong proficiency with the most frequent vocabulary (1,000 and 2,000 words).  
VLT mean score: 1,000 level = 97.2%    2,000 level = 93.3 %
- The coverage focus of the textbook was at level 1,000 frequency words (see Figure 1).
- To achieve 95% or 98% coverage of any textbooks, students have to equip themselves with at least 3,000 frequency levels.

Vocabulary Knowledge vs. Textbook Demands



## Implications

- For writers and course designers:
  - Enhance the frequency and repetition of high frequency words (1,000 – 3,000 word level)
  - Analyze materials with RANGE or VocabProfile (accessed in this website <https://www.lexutor.ca/>)
- For learners:
  - Solidify high frequency words (2,000-3,000 words) and expand in mid-frequency range.
- For teachers:
  - Test students' receptive knowledge by means of the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 2017b) before the course.

## References

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