



**Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University
Faculty of Humanities**

English Department

**The Effect of Lexically Based Language Teaching
(LBLT) on Vocabulary Learning among Iranian Pre-
university Students**

By: Ghodrat Momeni

Supervisor: Dr. M. Rahimi

Reader: Dr. R. Nejati

**A thesis submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English as
a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

In the Name of God



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Dedication

To my faithful family whose support and patience provided me with abundant energy to get through this project.

To my greatest professor, Dr. M. Rahimi whose unfailing patience, scrupulousness and constant support enabled me to finish this research. Thanks her also for her insightful suggestions which inspired me to pursue TEFL courses seriously.

To all English language teachers and instructors who do their best to improve the status of English language teaching in our country.

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Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of Lexically Based Language Teaching (LBLT) on vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-university students. In order to attain this goal, two pre-university classes were selected and assigned to be control and experimental groups. Prior to the study, a vocabulary test was administered among both groups to ascertain their homogeneity regarding vocabulary knowledge. Then, the researcher started the treatment including teaching the new words of the pre-university textbook for sixteen weeks using LBLT techniques. Meanwhile, students in the control group were taught based on conventional techniques such as giving definitions and synonyms. At the end of the treatment, the researcher administered a vocabulary test to both groups again. To measure the effects of LBLT on vocabulary learning a One-way analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was run. The findings of the study showed that teaching vocabulary by LBLT affected vocabulary learning significantly in favor of the experimental group. The findings of the current study can be beneficial for curriculum developers and syllabus designers in general and EFL teachers in particular.

Key terms: Lexically Based Language Teaching (LBLT), Collocation, Vocabulary learning

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Abbreviations

CL: Corpus Linguistics

COBUILD: Collins Birmingham University International Language Database

ELT: English Language Teaching

L2: Second Language

LA: Lexical Approach

LBLT: Lexically Based Language Teaching

OCD: Oxford Collocation Dictionary

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Vocabulary may be a central component of language teaching and is of great significance to language learners. Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, and ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning (Thornbury, 2002). The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by second language theorists and researchers. Vocabulary is recently regarded as one of the most important aspects of language learning and communication. The underlying reason lies in this fact that vocabulary conveys a great deal of intended meaning of speakers and writers (Hedge, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Accordingly, numerous types of approaches, techniques, exercises and practices have been introduced into the field to teach vocabulary (Hatch & Brown, 1995).

Although grammar remains an important part of language acquisition, the lexical memory load, even for an intermediate learner, is enormous (Schmit, 2000). It is now recognized that the principal difference between intermediate and advanced learners is not the complexity of their grammatical knowledge, but the greatly expanded mental lexicon available to advanced learners (Lewis, 1997).

There are lots of techniques to teach and present vocabulary in a course such as physical demonstration, verbal explanation, providing students with synonyms and antonyms, translation, using visual aids, asking learners to check the meaning in the dictionary, exemplification, and presenting a word in the context (Hedge, 2008; Nash & Snowling, 2006). However, it is evident that some of these proposed techniques cannot bring about a great deal of vocabulary retention since learners are not able to make use of presented words in

performing academic tasks and communicative activities (Hedge, 2008). Thornbury (2002), for instance, elaborated on the limitation of translation as a technique to presenting words. He added that in spite of being economical, translation cannot warrant a great deal of vocabulary retention since learners over rely on the L1 equivalent and are not actively involved in guessing the meaning from the context. Moreover, researchers believe that the example sentences used to present the words are not authentic examples used by L2 speakers and writers most of the time. They are usually elicited from the course book writers and language teachers' intuition, knowledge, and experience (Willis, 2000).

Among the proposed techniques, research shows that teaching words in chunks can largely enhance the range of the words one can apply in the process of meaning negotiation (Nattinger & Decaricco, 1980). In line with this, lexical approach to language teaching places more emphasis on presenting the words in language chunks not in isolation (Willis, 2006). In this framework, a distinction is made between vocabulary and lexicon, whereas the former concerns words in isolation and the latter is related to words along with their surrounding context or collocations (Lewis, 2006).

Lewis (1993) concentrated on lexical chunks as the teaching foundation of the lexical approach. He stresses the importance of learning chunks of the language which are made up of lexico-grammatical patterns, which accordingly can increase the possibility of learning of the key structures. Also, Widdowson (1989) in defining the concept of communicative competence stresses the importance of such chunks:

Communicative competence is not a matter of knowing rules for the composition of sentences... it is much more a matter of knowing a stock of partially pre-assembled patterns, formulaic frameworks, and a kit of rules, so to speak, and being able to apply

the rules to make whatever adjustments are necessary according to contextual demands. Communicative competence in this view is essentially a matter of adaptation, and rules are not generative, but regulative and subservient (p. 80).

There are several kinds of lexical chunks proposed for language teaching. Collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms, sentence frames, social formulas, and discourse markers are among the most important ones (Thornbury, 2002).

The lexical approach to language teaching gives priority to teaching the most frequent words in the language and their patterns in language use. To find the authentic examples and their patterns, the learners are supposed to consult concordances, whether online or printed version made by the teachers (Lewis, 1997). The most significant development in corpus linguistics and concordances made it possible for the learners, teachers, and researchers to have access to authentic and naturally-occurring examples in support of language learning and teaching (Willis & Willis, 1990; Willis, 2006). Concordancing technology can provide both teachers and students with a rich tapestry of examples of specific linguistic elements embedded in a variety of rhetorical contexts. It also helps the user to construct meanings and usage patterns based on sentences or pieces of discourse collected from published or transcribed texts (Bloch, 2009).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As far as vocabulary teaching and learning are concerned, some of the techniques used to teach the words cannot bring about a higher degree of success in vocabulary retention and learning (Willis, 2006). Some techniques such as translation, explanation, and exemplification

may not take into account the general patterns of the words used and they are not effective ways of vocabulary teaching and learning (Schmit, 2008).

Research shows that among the proposed techniques and strategies to teach vocabulary, lexically-based teaching may result in a great deal of vocabulary retention (Nunan & Carter, 2001). The most important principles underlying lexical approach to teaching vocabulary are word frequency, usefulness, and combination (Lewis, 1997).

The problem existing in Iranian high-school English textbooks in general and pre-university book in particular is the lack of attention paid to patterns in which the words are used and the way they occur in these patterns (collocations). Also, they suffer from lack of attention given to naturally-occurring language (authentic language). The example sentences chosen to teach new words are elicited based on material developers and teachers' intuition and experience (Mazlum, 2010). Moreover, research shows that the words are not well explained and exemplified and the number of activities regarding vocabulary is not enough (Doudman, 2007).

The aim of the current study is to investigate the effect of integrating lexical approach on teaching vocabulary and thus vocabulary learning among pre-university students in Iran. To achieve this goal, the new words would be taught using techniques of lexically based language teaching like using example sentences taken from COBUILD dictionary and printout of online concordances to present collocations.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Considering the important role vocabulary plays in communicating the intended meaning of the speaker, it is worth devising optimal techniques and strategies to teach words. As teaching learners a variety of grammatical structures is no guarantee that their communicative needs will be met, it would be a better idea to start with useful meanings first (Thornbury, 2002; Hedge, 2008).

A lexical approach to teaching language argues that meaning is encoded in words (Willis & Willis, 2006) and a syllabus around the meaning, particularly the most frequent meanings, is more useful than a structural one (Wilkins, 1976).

The application of lexically based teaching vocabulary can be beneficial in several ways. First, the most frequent words in the language are taught on the grounds that they convey the most frequent meanings (Nunan, 1999). In addition, the pattern in which these words are used can warrant a great chance of memorizing. As learners do not focus on a single word but the accompanied words, they are able to recall it more successfully (Carroll, 2008).

Second, there exists a higher probability for development of fluency. According to Thornbury (2002), the co-occurrence of words in the context or chunks can aid fluency. Finally, as the learners are required to consult the concordances and dictionaries, data-driven learning, they are exposed to the common patterns and collocations of a particular word. Therefore, this kind of discovery learning can prompt learners to remember the words more easily (Chang & Sun, 2009). The potential impact of computer-processed language data on language teaching has been examined (Sinclair, 1997). It is suggested that the use of examples of real language in the classroom (as opposed to invented ones) and corpus data can provide

language teachers and learners with illuminating (and often counter-intuitive) guidance as to frequent collocations and other language patterns.

1.4. Research Question

The primary purpose of the current study is to understand the impact of lexically based language teaching (LBLT) on vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-university students. Therefore, the main research question of the present study is:

Does Lexically Based Language Teaching affect vocabulary learning among pre-university students in Iran?

1.5. Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis of the current study can be stated as follows:

Lexically Based Language Teaching (LBLT) does not influence vocabulary learning among pre-university students in Iran.

1.6. Definition of key terms

In this section, definition of the terms and concepts that have a key role in the current study are presented.

Lexically Based Language Teaching: An approach to language teaching that is based on the view that the basic building blocks of teaching and learning are words and lexical phrases than grammar, functions or other units of organizing the teaching course (Richards & Schmit, 2002). A lexical approach to language teaching foregrounds vocabulary learning both