

THE BENEFITS OF LEXICAL APPROACH IN QUIZLET-BASED VOCABULARY LEARNING

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Abstract. In the present experimental study second-year students majoring in “Agricultural Engineering” and “Electrical engineering” revise for the Unified Entrance Exam to join the Master course. Both groups learn vocabulary through the online vocabulary learning platform Quizlet. In contrast, to control group the experimental group entered not isolated words, but words in chunks according to the lexical approach. To compare students’ progress in vocabulary acquisition the Student’s t-test was used. The results show that the first hypothesis should be taken into consideration: there is a significant difference in the average indicators in the groups. Learning words in chunks had a significant effect on the test scores and, consequently, increases the chances to pass the Unified Entrance Exam and do postgraduate studies.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition; Quizlet; lexical approach; chunks

Introduction

The modern population will never be satisfied with the speed and effectiveness of EFL learning methods. That is why the process of creating new and updating existing ones will always be relevant. The introduction of the Unified Entrance Exam as the requirement for getting a Master degree equalled the students of all specialities. On the one hand, such arrangements highlight the importance of foreign language fluency, on the other hand, such testing provides fewer opportunities to students of technical universities. If we compare, for example, the English language and literature curriculum for bachelor students majoring in “Philology” (035.04) and the English language curriculum for bachelor students majoring in “Agricultural Engineering” (208), the students of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University have 43 ECTS credits for the discipline “The English language” as obligatory subject and 30 ECTS credits as a selective component of the curriculum. The engineering students who entered the State Agrarian and Engineering University in 2021 have only 12 ECTS credits for “The English language” as an obligatory subject and study the foreign language only for 4 semesters, have a two-year gap in foreign language learning and pass Unified

Entrance Exam in 2023. Not surprisingly, during the EVI, entrants demonstrated a very different level of training.

In 2021 Unified Entrance Exam showed that our bachelor students don't know a foreign language. According to the Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment, only 65,185 participants out of 87,124 passed the threshold during the main session of the Unified Entrance Exam. That is, almost 25 per cent of entrants (21,939 people) did not score the minimum required the number of points. **The distribution of scores on the results of the Unified Entrance Exam gives reason to think about the level of study of foreign languages in universities in general. 10% of participants hardly passed an exam, while the maximum score (200 points) earned only 0,17% of participants.**

To improve foreign language competence with the students of technical universities short-term learning strategies that ensure good results should be implemented. Most Ukrainian universities today are more concerned with how many Mater students will study at their high school. Consequently, the primary focus should be done on passing the Unified Entrance Foreign Language Exam. The exam program was created according to the European recommendations on language education (level B1 – B2). The test contains two parts: “Reading” and “Use of English” and aims at identifying the level of candidates' ability to independently read and understand authentic texts for a certain period (60 minutes). The tasks for determining the level of foreign language competence in reading can contain up to 5% of unfamiliar words the meaning of which can be guessed out of context by word-forming elements and in consonance with the native language (internationalism words). The total number of texts is up to 2,500 words. One of the urgent issues for those students who are revising for this exam is learning as many new words as possible.

Literature review

Vocabulary researchers have mainly focused on the significant part played by vocabulary breadth or size on reading success (Laufer 1992, McCarthy 1988) claim that learners relied on word meaning first, then on their knowledge of the subject and least of all on syntax in the interpretation of texts. It has been found that vocabulary knowledge can predict success in reading (Laufer 1992; Qian, Schedl 2004). The amount of words is a dominant factor (Chapelle 1998; Henriksen 1999; Nation 2006) and “word knowledge is a requisite for reading comprehension: people who do not know the meanings of very many words are most probably poor readers” (Anderson, Freebody 1981, 44). There have been numerous attempts to define the number of words necessary for foreign language fluency. According to Beck, McKeown and Kucan, the number of words that students need to learn is exceedingly large; on average students should add 2,000 to 3,000 new words a year to their reading vocabularies (Beck et al. 2002).

The question is how to learn so many words during a short period to provide the successful passing exam. Should the students use dictionaries in vocabulary acquisitions or vocabulary instructions must go beyond the traditional methods, engaging and challenging students to learn new vocabulary learning techniques.

However, some scientists claim that it doesn't consider isolated words. They state that most learners with „good vocabularies“ have problems with fluency because their „collocation competence“ is very limited, and that, especially from the intermediate level, we should aim at increasing their collocation competence with the vocabulary they have already got (Richard, Rodgers 2003). Hence, teaching words in chunks can largely enhance the range of the words one can apply in the process of meaning negotiation (Nattinger, DeCarrico 1992). Fluency is related to the fact that their vocabulary is not stored only as individual words, but also as parts of phrases and larger chunks, which can be retrieved from memory as a whole and reduce processing difficulties (Willis, Willis 1996). In addition, the use of language corpora in the classroom can improve students' knowledge of the language and their ability to use it effectively (Mudraya 2008).

To provide effective vocabulary instruction with the students of technical specialities we decided to use a lexical approach to learning vocabulary and make students' "language production more effective by having chunks of language in long term memory, language reception" (Nation 2001, 321). Nation concluded that "language knowledge is collocational knowledge and fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge". He claims that many words are used in a limited set of collocations and knowing these are part of what is involved in knowing the words. (Nation 2001, 318).

The principles of the lexical approach were stated by Lewis in 1993. Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalised grammar. Collocations are integrated as an organizing principle within syllabuses. Successful language is a wider concept than accurate language. The primacy of speech over writing is recognised. Receptive skills, particularly listening, are given enhanced status. Task and process rather than exercise and product, are emphasized. Vocabulary learning can be aided through classroom procedures that help students identify lexical items correctly, encourage recording in helpful not linear formats, and encourage transfer from short to long term memory. (Lewis 1993, 6)

Purpose of the study

Based on the literature review, results of experimental research on vocabulary acquisition through online vocabulary platforms (Chaikovska 2020) the problem of the study can be stated as follows: second-year students majoring in "Agricultural Engineering" and "Electrical engineering" lack adequate vocabulary to pass their Unified Entrance Exam. This problem could be related to students' unawareness of learning words in collocations or so-called chunks.

The purpose of the present study is to study the effectiveness of the lexical approach in vocabulary acquisition via Quizlet in preparing for the Unified Entrance Exam. The Student's t-test for two samples was used to test whether two groups were different in terms of a quantitative variable. Accordingly, two hypotheses were stated:

H0: There is no difference in the average values of the number of points in independent samples t-test scored in experimental and control groups.

H1: There is a significant difference in the average indicators in the groups.

Results

The participants of the present study comprised thirty-nine second-year students majoring in agricultural engineering and electrical engineering. The present study adopted the quasi-experimental design, using one experimental group and one control group. The experiment was conducted during the first term of the academic year 2020/2021. The groups were chosen according to the equal number of ECTS credits in Foreign language study and the common learning targets – passing the exam. Both groups were learning new vocabulary with the help of Quizlet. Since all the participants are university students they used this platform since the first year of their study. At the beginning of their study, they were screened by a university placement test. This test showed that both groups have a similar level of foreign language proficiency (A2, B2). Unlike the control group (EE) the experimental group formed Quizlet modules according to the lexical approach: the words were written in chunks, while the control group was taught vocabulary entering the single words in an online dictionary and learning isolated words through the Quizlet exercise machine.

The instrument used in this study to measure participants' vocabulary knowledge in sections reading and use of English was the Unified Entrance Exam test of 2020 available at osvita.ua. The Unified Entrance Exam test was produced by experts of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and approved by the Order No. 411 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (March 28, 2019). The test consists of two sections: "Reading" and "Use of English". The first section is made up of 4 texts and 22 tasks (headings, multiple-choice, gap-filling). The second section "Use of English" is made up of 2 texts and 20 tasks (gap-filling). The study took place in the academic year 2020 – 2021. The participants had one period a week in their foreign language curriculum revising for the Unified Entrance Exam. Both groups used similar test booklets available at the official site of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and for all exams created by E. Moutsou and published by MM Publications. The aim of using resources of previous years in the form of test booklets is twofold: to develop the reading strategies and master the vocabulary used in previous tests. All the unknown words were typed in Quizlet, however, the experimental group was given the vocabulary in collocations, phrasal verbs

and prepositional phrases. Figure1 shows the samples of Quizlet flashcards based on task 1 (test booklet 2018) and Use of English B2 (section 3, p. 26 – 27) for the experimental group.

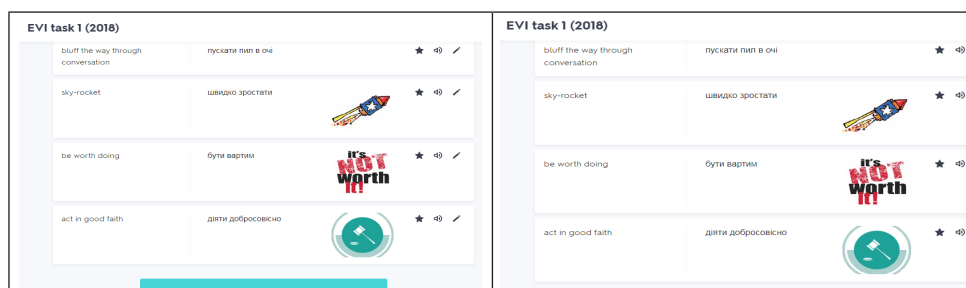


Figure 1. The samples of Quizlet flashcards based on task 1 (test booklet 2018) and Use of English B2 (section 3, p. 26 – 27) for the experimental group

Figure 2 shows the samples of Quizlet flashcards based on task 1 (test booklet 2018) and Use of English B2 (section 3, p. 26 – 27) for the control group.

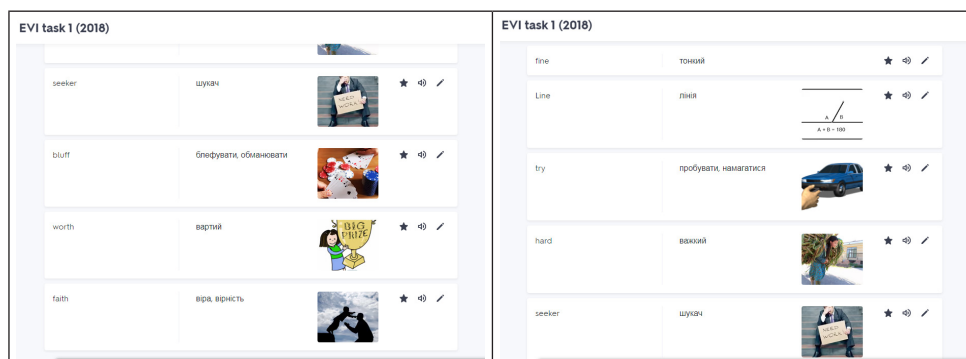


Figure 2. The samples of Quizlet flashcards based on task 1 (test booklet 2018) and Use of English B2 (section 3, p. 26 – 27) for the control group

To master new vocabulary we used the Quizlet exercise machine and exercises in Use of English B2. At the end of the term, the participants of the experiment were given the test identical to the Unified Entrance Exam test we used the sample test of 2020. The maximum test score was 42. To have a detailed analysis of test results, the final scores were divided into five ranks: A (30 – 27), B (26 – 24), C (23 – 21), D (20 – 18) and F (17 – 0). The results of the test in the control group (N=20) and experimental group (N=19) are listed as follows:

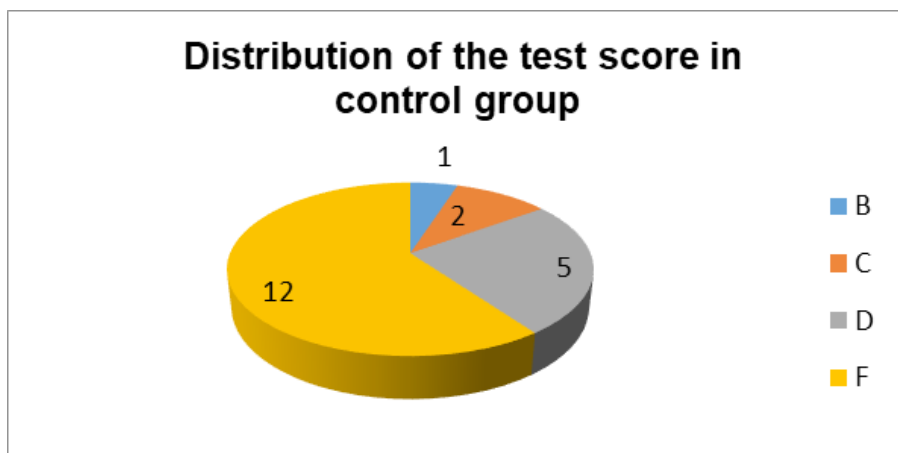


Figure 3. Distribution of the test score in the control group

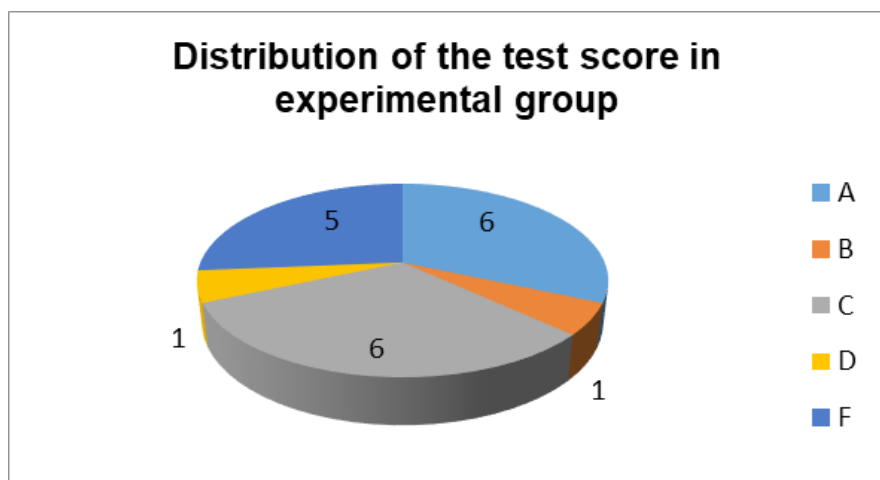


Figure 4. Distribution of the test score in the experimental group

To compare students' achievement in the test we used Student t-criteria, created two hypotheses to prove and made all calculations through an automatic T-test machine. First of all, we stated the following given hypotheses:

H0: There is no difference in the average values of the number of points scored in both groups.

H1: There is a significant difference in the average indicators in the groups.

T-Test for the paired samples was used to compare the mean score of the control (B1, n=19) and the experimental (B2, n=20) groups. Table 1 shows the calculation.

Table 1. Results of the control and the experimental groups on the vocabulary test

№	Sample		Deviations from the average		Squares of divergences	
	B.1	B.2	B.1	B.2	B.1	B.2
1	7	9	-7.68	-13.53	58.9824	183.0609
2	7	9	-7.68	-13.53	58.9824	183.0609
3	9	11	-5.68	-11.53	32.2624	132.9409
4	9	11	-5.68	-11.53	32.2624	132.9409
5	10	14	-4.68	-8.53	21.9024	72.7609
6	10	15	-4.68	-7.53	21.9024	56.7009
7	12	18	-2.68	-4.53	7.1824	20.5209
8	12	21	-2.68	-1.53	7.1824	2.3409
9	14	21	-0.68	-1.53	0.4624	2.3409
10	16	22	1.32	-0.53	1.7424	0.2809
11	17	22	2.32	-0.53	5.3824	0.2809
12	17	23	2.32	0.47	5.3824	0.2209
13	18	26	3.32	3.47	11.0224	12.0409
14	18	26	3.32	3.47	11.0224	12.0409
15	19	31	4.32	8.47	18.6624	71.7409
16	20	35	5.32	12.47	28.3024	155.5009
17	20	36	5.32	13.47	28.3024	181.4409
18	21	38	6.32	15.47	39.9424	239.3209
19	23	40	8.32	17.47	69.2224	305.2009
Total	279	428	0.08	-0.07	460.1056	1764.7371
Average	14.68	22.53				

The critical value is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Critical value

t_{kp}	
$p \leq 0.05$	$p \leq 0.01$
2.03	2.72

The empirical value obtained (3.1) is in the zone of significance. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be very statistically significant. **It means that** the null hypothesis should be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Summing up the results of the Student's t-test indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean score of that control and experimental group. The second hypothesis can be accepted. The implementation

of the lexical approach to vocabulary learning in the EFL classroom contributed to better vocabulary acquisition.

Conclusions and summary

The study compared test results of a control class, which learnt new vocabulary entering single words in Quizlet, and an experimental group class that acquired new vocabulary entered not isolated words, but only words in chunks in Quizlet. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in test scores between the control and experimental groups. The most noteworthy results show that the lexical approach in EFL vocabulary acquisition can foster speeding up students' lexical development. Based on study results we recommend providing lexical approach-based activities in students' preparation for exams.

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