Increasing Iraqi EFL Learners' Descriptive Academic Paragraph Writing Ability through Using Vocabulary-Based Approach

By

Husam Mohammed Kareem Al-Khazaali
Institution: Imam Al-Kadhum College (IKC)
Mail: husammohammed@alkadhum-col.edu.iq

Abstract

The contemporary objective of the study is to examine the effect of vocabulary-based approach on the achievement of intermediate learners in Imam Al-Kadhum College (IKC) in the writing ability in academic descriptive paragraph. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to discover a response for the subsequent study question: does vocabulary-based instruction have any influence on Iraqi learners of English language? Correspondingly two null hypotheses are prearranged. The first shows that there will not be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group (EG) and that of those of the control group (CG) in their pretest in writing ability in academic descriptive paragraph. Whereas the second hypothesis is that there will not be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the EG and those of the CG in the achievement posttest. After eight weeks of the treatment, the results show that there is a statistically significant difference between the EG and the CG in their post-test; the EG outperform in academic descriptive paragraph writing ability. Therefore, the foremost outcomes validated the first hypothesis of the study but negated the second one. The CG acquires the mean score 52.89 while the experimental group gets 60.31. This unquestionably denotes that the practice of vocabulary-based approach in class as a strategy makes learners perform better in academic descriptive paragraph writing ability.

Keywords: vocabulary-based instruction, intermediate learners, academic descriptive paragraph, lexical chunks.

1. Introduction

People need to interact among them to express their thoughts and feelings. One essential way to achieve this part of this social interaction is through gaining sufficient vocabulary chunks that enable people in general and learners to reach their goals and desires. From another side, another message can be fulfilled through written communication. One needs to have a thorough mastery of how to communicate using the written formula and how can that be developed and improved through adopting new style of vocabulary or lexical chunks instruction in class either explicitly or implicitly teach.

Cultivating vocabulary ability among intermediate learners is a challenge encountered by many institutions. Numerous glitches and restrictions have related to the elements subsidize to the level. This part has been a loop for a particular period. Various investigators, for example, do not have enough evidence of students' attainment on vocabulary knowledge where lexical items or vocabulary repertoire are required. (Mancilla-Martinez, 2010; Susanto, 2017).

Vocabulary acquisition occupies a vital role in language learning and teaching. A learner with an inadequate vocabulary bulk may not act communicatively in all aspects of language. Yang (1997) argues that intermediate learners come across complications in

reading their English schoolbooks. The central motivation for intermediate learners who have not the ability to read systematically is their restricted vocabulary repertoire. To simplify the acquisition procedure for those learners, a profound comprehension of lexical items is fundamental. Moreover, some topics relevant to the enhancement in learners' vocabulary repertoire are correspondingly stated.

1.1 The Statement of the Problem

Teaching English descriptive paragraph writing at the third year in the Department of English, University of Al-Imam Al-Kadhum is still form-based method. The students need new strategies to produce an effective and academic piece of writing a descriptive paragraph. They face a big challenge specifically in two main areas: preparing and organizing supporting sentences for the topic sentence that could be reason of lack of sufficient vocabulary that hinder the process of written communication and in providing various human sense-based words, etc.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

The study aims at examining the influence of vocabulary on the achievement intermediate learners of English department in writing academic descriptive paragraphs.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

The position of the current study arises from the principle that vocabulary repertoire influences the way learners acquires and communicate using language. It expedites the progression of attainment of an effective and academic descriptive paragraph and boosts the written communication.

1.4 Hypothesis

The researcher suggests a null hypothesis, it shows that no statistical differences in the pretest and posttest between EG and CG.

1.5 Questions of the Study

The following questions have been presumed.

1. Does vocabulary repertoire have any important role on Iraqi intermediate learners' descriptive paragraph?

2. After the treatment being applied, is there any differences between the EG and the CG in their mean score?

2. The Vocabulary-Based Approach

Language learning can possibly refer to a process of creative thinking in case it involves certain types of communicative tasks such as vocabulary learning activities and building up reading strategies, etc. so to have a complete sight of the scene on how language learning specifically how vocabulary or lexical items can be acquired, it is necessary to see deeply this process; to comprehend and yield chunks of the words all together. Language chunks constitute the unique statistics of how individuals recognize the form. Lexical approach or vocabulary-based approach highlights that language learners can use the language in chunks (Johnson, 2009: 1).

The lexical method used is public and a mode of teaching a FL created by Michael Lewis in the 1990s. The lexical approach has lately recognized as one indispensable methodology that can be applied in place of form based. Its emphases on cultivating learners' capacity through gaining lexis or chunks; a blending of words that harmonize or it can be

named grammatical lexis. Its central code is that in case learning a language, learner is able to comprehend and crop grammatical lexis or chunks, since such chunks form the primary premise of a language. (Abdulqader, Murad, & Abdulghani, 2017; Amores).

3. Written Communication

Nystrand (1983) define the concept of written communication as transfer of messages through printed words and can occur through various forms of communication such as letters, memos, circulars, reports, notices, etc. Learners need to communicate well and transfer their knowledge and interests to the external world. To write communicatively and academically, they first must gain a large amount of vocabulary repertoire; namely, lexical chunks vocabulary that occupies a special status in English language for they have a language eloquence and rhetoric style of writing. Collocational competence is the ability to use vocabulary in the advanced level and becoming a proficient learner in both spoken and written communication since vocabulary is one essential component of language learning. Henceforth, learners need to get acquainted and exposed to useful practices and rehearsal to be familiar with many vocabulary chunks through which they can develop their lexical skills and eventually write academic descriptive paragraphs proficiently.

3.1 Principles of the Vocabulary Chunks Teaching

Song and Chen (2017)categorizes the following principles of the vocabulary lexical units:

1. Language basically encompasses grammatical lexis, not lexicalized grammar. i.e., what constitutes language is grammatical lexis rather than lexicalized grammar; focus should be on vocabulary-based instruction, since it is considered one part of oral or written communication; though here in our case, we need to focus on written communication such as teaching and learning academic descriptive paragraph through those lexical chunks acquisition.

2. Its main aim is to concentrate on function-based teaching, not structure learning.

3. The categorization of vocabulary repertoire and grammar is somehow unsound. English language, in principle, comprises of grammatical lexis; lexical items or vocabulary that person needs to contact and interact socially in different life situations.

4. It focuses mainly on how learners form new chunks of language to constitute new ways of creating novel utterances and becomes easily fluent and communicate variously.

5. Lexical competency is one crucial constituent of assimilating language attainment.

6. Curricula selection and progression should be built from computational linguistics and discourse analysis.

7. The emphasis should be on grammaticalized lexis rather than lexicalized grammar.

8. The weight of importance should be on the process of activating critical thinking in relation to mental or cognitive processes of human mind through engaging learners in different contexts of practices of written communications.

9. Inactive skills, primarily listening, are necessary to get improved in relation to their position.

3.2 Taxonomy of Vocabulary Chunks

Leone and Di Caro (2020) and Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) maintain that vocabulary chunks are categorized into four sorts:

A. Polywords

Fixed phrases comprised of more than a word can be either a distinctive construction of the English-type description, such as *a loaf of bread, a piece of chocolate* etc., or an atypical formula like *as you might say, overall,* etc.

B. Institutionalized Expressions

It takes many forms such as oral communication, fixed or semi-fixed form, fixed blending of functional content of words, or full utterances; it can be fixed form at the opening of the sentence as well, comprising proverbs, aphorisms, and social formula expressions, such as *How are you? some time ago, to inaugurate with, and so on.*

C. Phrasal constraints

It denotes a phrase structure organized by some fixed words, like, *a ... ago*, which can make the phrase *a couple of days ago* / some time ago*; the ...-er* construction that can produce *the sooner, the better.*

D. Sentence builders

Regarding discourse coherence and cohesion, it is used primarily in written forms of language structure. It is in the formula of fixed or semi-fixed expressions with syntactic structures, suitable words or clauses can be supplementary as required, for instance, *"It is commonly approved that ...", "There is no doubt that ..."*

As can be realized from the directly above sorting, the formula of vocabulary chunks, dissimilar from the idiomatic expressions, is unrestricted. On the contrary, idioms are fixed terms, whose formulas occasionally alter, and the implication can scarcely be predicted from the distinct words. In college textbooks, English set phrase or idioms or vocabulary chunks or phrases are typically itemized as fixed lexes for learners to gain, whereas the vocabulary chunks, due to the free mixture and the huge records, are not once considered. Besides, the vocabulary chunks show a correlation between writing academic descriptive paragraph and learners' motivation; when learners gain so much vocabulary chunks; they can express and describe senses and reality or objects in professional way after they have acquired paragraph organization from their tutor or instructor. As Glosser and Deser (1992) such approach "it helps to communicate and apply on writing".

3.3 Utilities of Vocabulary Chunks Approach

Concerning the function and pragmatism of lexical chunks in language teaching, it can be divided into three categories as Xu and Cai (2021)state that lexical chunks can be classified into three central kinds: social interactions, necessary topics and discourse device.
(1) Social interactions: vocabulary that make learners perform better in social collaboration and they may explicate themselves superior in exchanges.
(2) Necessary topics: such kinds of division can be seen in various ordinary life speech dialogues.
(3) Discourse devices: lexical or vocabulary items can be grouped altogether to form new texts that are understandable in different social situations.

3.4 The Process of Teaching Academic Descriptive Paragraph Writing

The vocabulary-based approach certifies the significance of teaching lexical units on learners' improvement. The applicability of using such approach is confirmed to develop learners' writing Allagui (2021). Singleton and Leśniewska (2021)claim that a praiseworthy elucidation is that native speakers of English language use ordinary language frequently rather than making new grammatical forms or functions. In other words, native speakers

endure using the most recurring grammatical lexis. For this goal, teachers can assume four leading steps in teaching writing academic descriptive paragraph. Step one is to have their learners identify, form, and use lexical chunks appropriately. As well as that, the learners should be armed with tasks that surge their consciousness and comprehension and they will recognize that main stem is that whichever prevailing language essentially of off-the-rack vocabulary items. Step two, it can initiate with text analysis. The learners are armed with writing documents to recite and examine or analyze texts. Just then they are interrogated to identify the miscellaneous types of vocabulary items. Step three, the learners are requested to write a fluent academic descriptive paragraph by means of analogous chunks that teacher have practiced them. As a final point, the learners' realization is recorded and measured. Benefits of vocabulary-based approach in raising learners' fluency of writing academic descriptive paragraph can be as follows

A. Reinforce the fluency of writing efficiently and fluent descriptive paragraphs,
B. Progress the genuineness and factuality of learners' writing ability,
C. Build up structural ability of text discourse: coherence and cohesion aspects.

4. Data Collection Methods

4.1 Method

The research design is going to be experimental one to correspond with the study aims and questions. To implement this procedure, two groups (EG and CG) design was assumed for the present investigational study. The researcher deliberately selects Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as an instrument of capacity for their ability in English descriptive paragraph writing, the learners were haphazardly assigned into two groups (EG and CG). The EG was taught using vocabulary-based approach. Throughout the treatment the EG benefits from vocabulary development and write plentiful united paragraphs about disparate matters and later learners showed what they have educated and contributed with their classmates. They were requested to make use of the treatment steps in upgrading their level in their paragraph abilities. The learners in the CG did not have any treatment. They only had the teaching found in the prescribed textbook.

4.2 Participants

In the present-day study the third-year sample of Imam Al-Kadhum University College (IKC) in Misan were designated. At that time 80 learners were nominated arbitrarily. Then and there they were dispersed into two main groups (EG and CG). Every group has 40 students.

4.3 Instrumentation

The instrument of the modern study was QPT (Quick Proficiency Test), a kind of test that expects to know the learners' ability to distinguish and yield lexical competence, containing two parts, that was aimed to homogenize the learners and to know their performance accurately. The first part included 40 questions for the second one 20 questions.

The second instrument was a test of vocabulary repertoire that was assumed as the pre-test and post-test. It contained 20 MCIs and was given to the whole sample in the existing study with the scores from 0 to 30. The researcher chooses "English Collocations in Use" book, written by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell.

4.4 Procedure

The aim of the recent study is to measure the impact of lexical competence on intermediate learners. To this goal, the 80 sample were questioned using QPT (Quick Placement Test). This type of measurement has 30 vocabulary items. 80 learners have submitted to this test. 50 minutes are the selected time to finish the exam. This placement exam anticipates quantifying students' up-to-date performance. Afterward, 40 learners are picked out of 80 learners. They are divided into two groups (EG and CG), every group is 40 learners. Both the EG and CG are pretested. To apply that, all the learners are separated into two pre-tests, containing a test of collocation and interview. A 20-item collocation test is assumed to all learners. The learners have 20 minutes to answer. They are questioned to fill in the gaps with the correct collocations. Well along all the learners partake in an interview of 10 questions. The questions take each learner 15 minutes to reply. After the pre-test, the learners in the EG are taken a treatment. The EG are educated consistent with the collocations in use with furthermost communal lexical items on varied topics to enhance their ability in writing descriptive paragraphs.

In every lesson, the learners are taken a group of vocabulary chunks that are related to topics on writing academic descriptive paragraph, and they brainstorm between them after they have been grouped and they have approximately ten lexical chunks and practice them well. The EG are queried to highlight the vocabulary chunks that relate to human senses such as sight, feeling, taste, touch and hear and connect such vocabulary chunks or idioms to writing to have a clear and academic piece of writing that appeal to their instructor and aims of the present study. Later, they must apply them in realistic texting to store and retain them in a better manner. All units of the book (Collocations in Use, written by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell) embrace vocabulary chunks mainly two-word verb phrases, adjective+noun groupings and most common idioms learners can escalate the amount of vocabulary repertoire. Likewise in all lessons, the learners are taken selected important subjects in each module and at that time they are asked to practice the vocabulary chunks trainings by forming example sentences and academic descriptive paragraphs beforehand from the vocabulary chunks they have previously got. Moreover, the researcher probes learners to sort out the drills which are the next sheet of paper of the similar subjects in the entity. Afterwards the EG have been gained the noteworthy, designated vocabulary chunks, learners are requested to read the instructions well and accentuate the connected words and expressions and use them cautiously in actual sentences. In the subsequent lesson the researcher scan to the following unit to explain. He makes arm-up practice by questioning certain learners the subjects they have gained earlier. The prominence and usefulness of the matters of the units are the standards the researcher counts on when assorting units to explain. Conversely the CG is individually asked to study the recommended textbook texts, College Writing, to produce well-written academic descriptive paragraphs. Next the completion of eight weeks, the learners in both groups have post-tested in to check their progress in academic descriptive paragraph writing ability. In the test information, the learners are necessary to write down their thoughts on six dominant topics they may meet in actual life circumstances. When recording the learners' post-test, the researcher concentrates chiefly on the writing fluency of academic descriptive paragraphs in terms of advanced vocabulary selection and professional use of collocational competence related to lexical chunks arrangement that suit academic level and well-organized paragraphs in terms of coherence (meaning) and cohesion (language structure ties) and spatial order signals that denotes connectors and some essential adverbs and paragraph unity.

4.5 FINDINGS

4.5.1 Results and Discussions of the Pre-test

As demonstrated in Table 1, the mean score of EG is 52.61, while the mean score of the CG is 52.42. The calculated t-value is established to be 1.20 at 98 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, which shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the attainments of the two groups in the pre-test. This approves that the applicants allocated to EG and CG are not originally different but equal in writing descriptive paragraph ability.

Table 1 The Writing Performance of students on the Pre-test

Group	No. of students	Mean score	Standard Deviation	DF	t-value		Level of Significance
					Calculated	Tabulated	
CG	40	52.61	10.598				
EG	40	52.42	11.684	98	1.20	1.987	0.05

4.5.2 Results and Discussions of the Post-test

After the treatment and the experiment has been done, the researcher made a post-test to see whether significant differences occur between the EC and CC. The following table displays the significant differences between the two groups in their writing descriptive paragraph ability achievement.

Table 2 Comparison between the Writing Descriptive paragraph of EG and CG on the Post-test

Group	No. of students	Mean	Standard Deviation	DF	T-Value		Level of significance
					Calculated	tabulated	
CG	40	52.89	9.53	98			0.05
EG	40	60.31	10.31		5.8	2.6	

It might possibly assume, as stated by data from table 2, that the difference performed in the learners' post-test. To authenticate the test, with their S.D. as 10.31 (EG) and 9.53 (CG) correspondingly, the EG catches the mean of 60.31 more than that (52.89) of the CG. According to the above table, it can be recognized that it was vivid that in the post-test both CG and EG have got the higher mean score than that in the pretest, which indicates that both groups made a performance in their writing test. Nonetheless, the learners in the CG upgraded not as better as the learners in the EG. The learners in EG, after they have been taught using the selected unit contents by the researcher, upgraded by increasing 10.125 points. In the post-test, the mean scores in the EG are much higher than those of CG, which means that the former improved a lot more than the latter. The result shows that in the post-test, the performance of the test in EG is better than that in CG.

According to the T-test for comparison in post-test is shown in Table 2, there exists a significant difference between CG and EG. Consequently, it can be decided that there exists a significant difference between two groups.

These findings of the study indicate that using lexical chunk instruction in class increase the students' vocabulary knowledge when they want to express their idea or thoughts since they have a large amount of lexicon or word repertoire. This will reflect clearly in their writing fluency, as post-test proves that. Along with the test items analysis, the researcher pays more consideration to the students' use of lexical chunks in real life conversation. It is

proven after that analysis of the results of the current study that lexical chunks teaching aid EG to use English fluently and appropriately. As well, the processes of input of lexical chunks unable the students to avoid errors come as a consequential from vocabulary lists selection, thus depending on such technique in teaching writing refines the accuracy of language wiring.

Discussion

The current study and its outcomes signpost that the solicitation of vocabulary-based approach mends their writing ability as happened in their post-test rather than the CG who was taught according to the prescribed textbook. Voluminous activities have been applied by the researcher when teaching writing according to vocabulary-based approach; words related to spatial order signals, academic vocabulary (according to CEFR levels of language learners) and transitions words that transform from one idea into another.

Throughout the conduct of the treatment of applying the approach being adopted by the researcher in the present study, the EG made use of phrases, idiomatic expressions, fixed expressions, and collocations and put them in progress of their writings performance when they practice these lexical units then applying them in actual writing process. Teaching learners a variety of vocabulary repertoire may make learners good thinker to some extent; they can express themselves in different life situations in written communication and also, they become independent and autonomous. Far along, they argue the themes and matters and collect information and brainstorm with their classmates; this technique brings active participation and continuous commitment on the part of both teacher and their learners to extract ideas outside and practice them mutually. Congruently, EG makes use of lexical units to make notes of changed discussions on topics advocated by the researcher. As a final point they act the role-play activity to stop the monotony of the class time and activities and bring the incentive. These activities develop learners' writing and augment self-confidence additionally the advancement of their writing performance. This enlargement is due to the kind of teaching and learning huge amount of vocabulary repertoire and extemporaneously using them in their descriptive academic paragraph writing and subsequently in their written communication.

Recommendations

To implement the vocabulary-based theory in language learning to develop and enhance descriptive paragraph writing ability, the next recommendations can be taken into reason:
a) Teachers should incorporate diverse kinds of vocabulary items learning into the writing tasks.
b) They should similarly increase learners' consciousness of these lexical items.
c) They should not excess learners.
d) Learners are recommended to save written archives of the dissimilar types of lexical items every time they do the listening details procedures.

Conclusion

In sum, in line with the results of this exploratory study the implementation of vocabulary-based approach takes a vital role in increasing learners' level and performance in descriptive paragraph writing ability as it is shown by the mean score in their posttest (particularly the EG). Quite the reverse, for the CG, ever since no treatment; they receive no

vocabulary-based approach treatment procedure, consequently their achievement is comparatively not higher as that in the EG. As it is observable that the present study aims at mounting writing on the typology of descriptive. The findings of the study suggest that the learning that occurs according to the adopted approach has a constructive impression on the writing ability growth. The performance of writing of the EG was superior to that of the CG. EG outperforms in writing than CG. Accordingly, countless work should be prepared on the implementation and usefulness of vocabulary-based learning in approaching and upgrading the possibilities that may be found in writing ability in descriptive paragraphs related to human senses. Subsequently, in brief that learners' writing ability can be exalted by the practice of lexical approach that aims at raising learners' performance in vocabulary repertoire and that in turn will increase their linguistic competence and consequently enhancing their writing skill. Additionally, to the score analysis, teachers need to pay more commitment to the learners' vocabulary repertoire such as collocations and phrasal verbs in the class. It is deep-rooted that the practice of the acquisition of vocabulary items can support learners to use English positively and accurately.

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