

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

THE EFFECTS OF A LEXICAL APPROACH-BASED EFL PROGRAM USING MOODLE AND STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS IT

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory-sequential mixed method study aims at investigating the impact of a specially designed Lexical Approach-based teaching program on the use and recognition of lexical chunks. Participants came from full-time and part-time Bachelor's degree programs at Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria. The relationships between the use and recognition of lexical chunks and the semester participants attend (2nd, 4th, 6th) and their mode of study (full- or part-time) were examined. Additionally, the usefulness of Moodle for teaching the Lexical Approach was investigated. Quantitative data was collected by using questionnaires and by testing participants' productive and receptive knowledge of lexical chunks through appropriate tasks. Qualitative data was obtained by conducting guided interviews. Results show that the exposure to the Lexical Approach was perceived as very relevant and useful by the learners. The same is true for the accompanying Moodle activities. Also, part-time students from higher semesters seem to be even more likely to profit from the teaching program focusing on the Lexical Approach. This implies that integrating the Lexical Approach into English language teaching is a most beneficial undertaking to support and improve learners' EFL performance.

Keywords: English language learning, lexical approach, student attitudes, Moodle, learner autonomy

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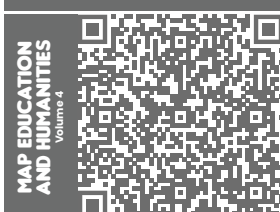
Volume 4

ISSN: 2744-2373/ © The Authors.
Published by MAP - Multidisciplinary
Academic Publishing.

Article Submitted: 20 July 2023
Article Accepted: 21 September 2023
Article Published: 22 September 2023



Publisher's Note: MAP stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

<https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2373.2023.4.65>

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Tinkel I. (2023). **The effects of a Lexical Approach-based EFL program using Moodle and student attitudes towards it**. MAP Education and Humanities, 4, 65-76.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2373.2023.4.65>



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1. Introduction

Foreign language learning is a complex and ambitious process that demands time, dedication and suitable learning strategies on the part of the learner, as well as the teacher, to succeed. According to Michael Lewis, the creator of the Lexical Approach, especially the area of lexical chunks (LC) is crucial to this learning process. And, although this part of language is known to be “potentially limitless, and heavily constrained by the learners’ experience” (Swain and Carroll 1987), it is also the basis for building any foreign language competence as, “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Wilkins 1972). Hence, building a wide range and extensive scope of vocabulary is paramount. Thus, it is essential to pay attention to the words themselves, to the co-text these words exist in, as well as the many meanings depending on the context in which they are used (Supasiraprapa, 2019).

Thus, LC – i.e. common word combinations – are an integral part of language learning and learners’ awareness of these should be raised. The increased usage and recognition of LC in the learning process can lead to better EFL performance, including grammatical structures. Lewis states that “a central element of language teaching is raising students’ awareness of, and developing their ability to ‘chunk’ language successfully” (Lewis 2012b). Educator Barbara Oakley supports this idea saying that all information is more easily retained and accessible if absorbed in chunks (Exeter, 2016). Recent research (Tinkel, 2022) sought to shed further light on how a teaching program designed with a special focus on teaching the theory of the Lexical Approach as well as extensive work with LC can influence English language learning development at a tertiary level. Results show that especially recognition of LC is influenced positively by enhancing learners’ ability to chunk language correctly.

In order to support this beneficial ability of chunking and, therefore, raising awareness of the Lexical Approach and giving learners practice of LC, Moodle can be used. Although not originally designed for language teaching, it provides many useful tools and activities to enforce engagement with LC (Silva et al. 2016 as cited in (Cabero-Almenara, Arancibia, and Del Prete 2019). Moodle quizzes and journals are excellent interactive learning tools that engage learners by simultaneously being game-like and informative (Urbonienė & Koverienė, 2013). Learners find such activities helpful due to the op-

tion of repetition of exercises, of providing a change from traditional tasks and the ability to ‘physically’ engage with the content by, for example, moving items on the screen (Deissl-O’Meara & Tinkel, 2021).

The current study aims at exploring in more detail the individual perceptions of participants regarding the usefulness of this Lexical Approach-based teaching program for their English language learning journey through the analysis of interviews conducted with several students who were exposed to the treatment. Furthermore, the relationships between the recognition and usage of LC fostered by the Lexical Approach-based teaching program and the semester the participants attend (2nd, 4th or 6th) and their mode of study (full- or part-time) were examined.

2. Research Questions

In order to explore the research problem of this study, four research questions were formulated.

RQ1: What are the personal perceptions of participants regarding the usefulness of the Lexical Approach for (English) language learning?

RQ2: What are the personal perceptions of participants regarding the usefulness of Moodle activities to support learning to work with lexical chunks?

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between the semester students attend and the usage and recognition of lexical chunks?

RQ4: Is there a statistically significant relationship between mode of study and the usage and recognition of lexical chunks?

3. Literature review

3.1 The Lexical Approach and its relevance for language learning and teaching

The Lexical Approach posits that “language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks” (Lewis 1997) and that acquiring a new language requires learners to make the new language their own and transfer concepts from their native language into the new language (Lewis, 2012b). This latter effort in particular qualifies the Lexical Ap-

proach as a deep learning strategy necessitating learners to make an increased cognitive effort to embed concepts deeply into the long-term memory (Sagarra & Alba, 2006) and, thus, make learning more sustainable. Various research (Abdellah, 2015; Debabi & Guerroud, 2018; Fahim & Vaezi, 2011; Falahi & Moinzadeh, 2012; Seesink, 2007; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009) has shown that explicit instruction regarding the Lexical Approach and LC, increases learners' ability to identify, record, remember and reuse these prefabricated units of language. Yet, explicit knowledge about the theoretical underpinnings of the Lexical Approach or on how to work with LC is often not readily accessible to learners (Abdellah, 2015).

Results of research focused on introducing learners explicitly to the theory of the Lexical Approach (Tinkel, 2022) showed that especially the area of recognition of LC was most positively influenced by a Lexical Approach-based program which led to a 2.29 increase in the mean score of the experimental group between pre- and post-test. Such an effect was also found by Falahi and Moinzadeh (2012) when an experimental group exposed to receptive tasks focusing on collocations was able to double its score between pre- and post-test. This shows that the mere presence of LC-oriented tasks in learning materials (Lewis, 2012a) does not automatically mean that learners are aware of and able to process these tasks efficiently and effectively. However, a teaching program, which focused specifically on building awareness of the Lexical Approach and working with LC, influenced participants' ability to recognize them positively (Tinkel, 2022). Equally Fan (2005) who conducted research on acquisition of verb-noun collocations found that participants taught about the Lexical Approach performed better in recalling LC and identifying them than those who only concentrated on memorization.

The area of usage of lexical chunks has also been shown to be affected positively by explicit focus on these items. Research (Tinkel, 2022) found that the experimental group also outperformed the control group in this area by 1.59 after being exposed to the Lexical Approach-based program. Especially the area of strong (very fixed) LC was observed to have been influenced most positively. This was also found in studies where participants given special collocation training outperformed those without such training in the use of strong collocations (Debabi & Guerroud, 2018). In the same vein, learners who were introduced to the Lexical

Approach increased the use of their strong LC with the treatment (Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015). Falahi and Moinzadeh (2012) and Webb and Kagimoto (2009) conducted studies including productive tasks focusing on specific verb-noun collocations to be used in cloze exercises. Both experiments revealed that these tasks targeting the production of LC did support the improvement of participants' overall knowledge of collocations.

All these studies confirm that "chunking is the mother of all learning" (Exeter, 2016) and that further investigation into the benefits of the Lexical Approach in language teaching is essential – not 'only' for the improvement of the language learning journey but also because the Covid-19 crisis has accelerated online education, forcing Universities of Applied Sciences to embrace learning management systems such as Moodle for English language teaching (Bozkurt, 2020).

3.2 Using Moodle to teach working with lexical chunks

Moodle has become the most widely used distance learning software employed by Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria (Moodle, n.d.). Although not originally made for language teaching, Moodle is a useful tool in the increasingly digital English language teaching environment, as it can foster (inter)active and flexible learning experiences (Silva et al., 2016 as cited in (Cabero-Almenara, Arancibia, and Del Prete 2019). 93% of a sample of 213 students enrolled in an English course using Moodle to support learning found the platform had a positive impact on their learning ((Suppasetseeree and Dennis 2010).

Despite its obvious benefits and the widespread use of Moodle for English language teaching, the topic of specifically employing it for teaching LC has not yet received much attention. Yet, 78.57% of students involved in a Lexical Approach-based teaching program found Moodle tasks were (very) beneficial for engaging with LC (Deissl-O'Meara & Tinkel, 2021). The activities used supported students' ability to extend their range of vocabulary and general language skills in an enjoyable fashion. This was accomplished through an increased awareness of LC supported by Moodle tasks. (Seesink 2007) also used Moodle with great success in her study exploring how to enhance the study of collocations in writing. Indeed, participants' texts featured more collocations after the language course supported by Moodle activities.

Another study examined individual modules and their popularity among learners and providing resources (67%), assignments (59%) and quizzes (57%) were most popular, whereas forums (28%) and chats (21%) were least popular (Urbonienė & Koverienė, 2013). This was partly confirmed by Deissl-O'Meara and Tinkel's (2021) study where quizzes were by far the most suitable activity for practicing LC, which is consistent with (Suppasetserree and Dennis 2010) who state that 97% of their participants rated quizzes as useful for language learning. Equally, (Gonzalez-Vera 2016) found 90% of participants appreciating the self-assessment quizzes offered through Moodle. Equally, the journal function used by students to collect LC outside the classroom resulted in more engagement which helped learners retain LC better and internalize the concept further (Deissl-O'Meara & Tinkel, 2021).

As can be seen, Moodle has been used successfully for English teaching and to support the teaching and practice of the Lexical Approach. Since all students are largely exposed to some online activities, it is necessary to explore possible connections between full- and part-time degree programs and the semester students are in and LC performance.

3.3 Mode of study and lexical chunks performance

It can be assumed that, in general, adults registering for a part-time study program will be well-established in work-life, while those choosing a full-time program will be younger and will possibly have graduated from school recently. This is valid for the data used in this study. Only 6 students were between 18 and 22, but 29 were between 23–33 among those who studied part-time. In contrast, among the full-time students, 59 participants were in the 18–22 age group compared to 15 in the 23–33 age bracket. In this regard, English performance – and LC performance, to a certain degree – can be tied to the age factor.

It is encouraging that, especially in the lexical domain, older learners may have an advantage over younger peers (Hellman, 2008) since all participants involved in this study are adults. Such 'lexical superiority' might be attributed to the more advanced cognitive maturation process and a better awareness and command of meta-linguistic abilities. Moreover, older learners may already have more learning strategies at their disposal (Burgo, 2006; Lichtman, 2013), having had more time to ex-

plore different options. It has been found that older learners seem to prefer deeper learning strategies which require active engagement with the language they are learning, while younger learners tend to favor shallower approaches such as mere memorization of lexical items (Schmitt, 1997). In extension of the sustainability related benefits of deep learning strategies, among which the Lexical Approach can be counted, (Lichtman 2013) discovered, while teaching an artificial language to adults and children, that both age groups benefitted from explicit instruction. (Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown 1999) state that the use of more elaborate strategies usually denoted higher lexical achievement. This aligns with the advantages of adult learners when it comes to cognitive abilities and meta-linguistic awareness. Furthermore, it supports results found by (Tinkel 2022) that participants in the older age range in the experimental group did outperform the slightly younger participants in the area of recognition of LC ($p = .001$).

In addition to the age factor, participants' status as "working" or "only studying" may influence their ability and/or willingness to engage with the Lexical Approach. Research (Cheng, 1995; Stern, 1997) has claimed that learners working part-time are more likely to achieve lower grades or even abandon their studies because increased working hours may affect academic achievement negatively. With relation to this study, it is assumed that most part-time students work full-time and, thus, this would indicate that the large number of hours dedicated to work could influence their performance quite negatively. This would be underlined by findings that state a negative impact of full time work affected 39% of the students examined (Furr & Elling, 2000). However, it has been suggested that part-time work could affect the performance of older learners less negatively than that of younger learners (Barone, 1993) due to the fact that coordinating work and academic studies requires learners to be more efficient and better organized in their learning (Dundes & Marx, 2006) – a goal that is also supported by knowledge of the Lexical Approach since this can enhance independent language learning. Therefore, I hypothesize: there is a statistically significant relationship between mode of study and the usage and recognition of lexical chunks.

In connection with their mode of study and the possible age-related influences, students' willingness to engage with LC as a new language learning tool might also be related to the semester

they are in when they were introduced to the Lexical Approach. Here, the age factor and the progression in language learning regarding length of exposure to English may also be relevant.

3.4 Semester attended and lexical chunks performance

When it comes to the influence of the semester that participants attend on their ability to use and recognize LC, research in the area of exposure to language becomes relevant. Of course, the aforementioned age-related factors contribute, as it may be assumed that in each program (part-time or full-time) students in higher semesters will be slightly older than learners in lower semesters. However, this must not be taken for granted and it has been argued that exposure to any language in an institutionalized environment may not be the most optimal indicator for achievement. This is supported by research such as DeKeyser (2000) who discovered that adult immigrants speaking Hungarian as their mother tongue did not reach the same language competence as learners who had arrived in the foreign country in childhood and went through school. Similar to this effect of age of first exposure, learners' use of English outside the classroom may also contribute significantly (60–70%) to their language competence as "large exposure to a language plays a significant role in English learning and teaching. It helps a lot in such cases where learners have a great opportunity to practice outside the classroom" (Tonoian 2014).

Thus, the semester attended by the participants in this study might not be an ideal indicator of their overall English competence but may still serve as a useful comparison factor when it comes to the specific skills of using and recognizing LC. In this vein, a study (Galiansa et al., 2020) among Indonesian students found a strong, significant and positive correlation ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$) between English language exposure and reading comprehension. In the context of this study, this competence would be related to the recognition of LC. Therefore, I hypothesize: there is a statistically significant relationship between the semester students attend and the usage and recognition of lexical chunks.

In connection with the use of lexical chunks a study by (Parina and Leon 2013) may support the hypothesis that more exposure to English will entail increased usage. It found that participants, who were exposed to English more often or had more access to language resources, were more confi-

dent in writing. Naturally, confidence in writing does not automatically relate specifically to the use of LC, but, given that practicing a language more will embed its phrases better in the long-term memory, those two variables could be connected. Numerous studies have confirmed the positive effects of increased exposure on language competence (Ellis, 2002; Politzer, 1965).

4. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to expand upon the research investigating the usefulness of the Lexical Approach in EFL teaching. The Lexical Approach has been incorporated into much of the available English learning and teaching material (Lewis, 2012b). Since learners are mostly not aware of how to use LC most effectively and efficiently (Abdellah, 2015), the unique focal point of this specially designed teaching program was the transfer of a basic theoretical knowledge of the Lexical Approach before working with LC extensively in- and outside the classroom. Through a comparative pre-post-test quasi-experimental design (McMillan, 2012) this study examined the relationship between the usage and recognition of LC and semester attended and mode of study. Guided interviews were conducted to investigate personal perceptions of participants in the experimental group regarding the perceived usefulness of the Lexical Approach as well as the Moodle activities used in the teaching program.

4.1 The participants

Participants of the study attended two Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria. All subjects took Business English classes as part of the 2nd, 4th or 6th semester of their Bachelor degree programs in economics and were either full- or part-time students. Since the groups were fixed, convenience sampling was employed, which is often the only feasible method in educational contexts to gain an insight into existing relationships (McMillan, 2012). Additionally, participation in the research had to be voluntary due to legal regulations.

Out of the 86 participants who gave information regarding semester attended and their mode of study, 45 were in the 2nd, 30 in the 4th and 11 in the 6th semester. 37 attended the full-time program and 49 were registered in the part-time program (Tab. 1).

Table 1.
Descriptive Analysis of Participants

Variable		n	%
Semester	2	45	52.3
	4	30	34.9
	6	11	12.8
	Total	86	100
Mode of study	full-time	37	43,0
	part-time	49	57,0
	Total	86	100

4.2 Qualitative method – guided interviews

In order to examine personal perceptions of participants exposed to the Lexical Approach-based teaching program, guided interviews were conducted online with four students. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant and then transcribed and approved by the participant. Interviews were done after the end of the semester and the release of the English grade in order to ensure maximum honesty and voluntariness of participation. The main questions investigated focused on the usefulness of LC for language learning (e.g. “Do you find the knowledge of lexical chunks helpful/not helpful for learning English?”) and on the effectiveness of Moodle activities for learning about and working with LC (e.g. “Did you find the Moodle activities helpful/not helpful to practice lexical chunks?”). All interview transcripts were coded and two categories were created – LC and their usefulness and Moodle activities and their usefulness. The LC category contained eight codes (e.g. LC create a positive feeling) and the Moodle activities category comprised three codes (e.g. activity types).

4.3 Quantitative method

4.3.1 Instruments and procedure

To explore the relationships between usage and recognition of LC and mode of study (full- or part-time) and semester attended (2nd, 4th or 6th), data was collected through an online questionnaire administered via Moodle before and after administration of the Lexical Approach-based teaching program. In the first part of the questionnaire participants provided information on biographical data (e.g. age, gender) and other variables (e.g. semester, mode of study).

In the next two sections participants were asked to, first, compose a short text on a given topic (covered in class) to provide a basis for assessing their usage of LC. Second, for the assessment of recognition of LC, participants filtered LC from a short text passage taken from ‘Collocations in Use Intermediate’ by (McCarthy and O’Dell 2017).

During the semester, participants in the experimental group were taught through a specifically designed program, featuring an introduction to the basic theory of the Lexical Approach and extensive work with LC through different task types used in class and via Moodle. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, classes were conducted exclusively online.

4.4 Data analysis

Data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26.0. Descriptive data was obtained through calculating frequencies, means and standard deviations. Before testing the hypotheses, the assumptions for the application of multivariate statistical procedures related to normality, linearity, homoscedasticity were tested and confirmed (Mertler & Vannatta Reinhart, 2016). The hypotheses were tested by employing, One-Way MANOVAs and, where appropriate, post-hoc Bonferroni tests.

4.4.1 Analysis of the lexical chunks usage task

A small learner corpus containing the texts written by the participants was created using the software AntConc (Anthony, 2019). All nouns, verbs and adjectives were filtered according to matches with the Oxford 3000 (Oxford, 2008) and all lemmatized collocates within 4 words left/right were computed. Only collocations with a minimum frequency of 3 were considered and included in the analysis of noun-adjective, noun-verb and verb-adjective collocations. These were compared to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2008) to assess whether they were “real and authentic” collocations. All matches were recorded and counted.

4.4.2 Analysis of the lexical chunks recognition task

The receptive task was analyzed manually according to the key provided in the source material – ‘Collocations in Use Intermediate’ by (McCarthy and O’Dell 2017). The collocations recognized

by participants were compared to the ones provided in the book and only the matching ones were counted and recorded.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Personal perceptions regarding the usefulness of the Lexical Approach

Research question 1 investigated the personal perceptions of the participants regarding the usefulness of the Lexical Approach for (English) language learning.

All participants agreed that the idea of LC is highly useful for English language learning. The benefits of LC were seen in various areas. Most dominant was the area of confidence and security when handling the English language. One participant explicitly remarked that they “learn a little bit easier and lexical chunks support me also in [...] English learning” and another stated that “they [LC] instill confidence”. This also became apparent in the statement, “I feel more comfortable when I write something [...] because I know that’s correct”. As indicated, the productive skills of speaking and writing were also found to be supported by knowledge of LC, confirming the results of research (Tinkel 2022). Here the experimental group fared better at retaining strong LC and at increasing their usage after the treatment when compared to the control group. The statement that, “with writing a text I pay attention to lexical chunks, so it makes the text way nicer and sound more professional”, is testament to this benefit of LC for writing. Speaking also received attention regarding the benefits of LC. Participants said that it provided them with security of expressing themselves properly and with more confidence. Therefore, as also found by (Rizvić and Bećirović 2017)), LC were also deemed useful for anxious learners as they provide ready-made language to rely on. One interviewee stated that “[Speaking] is easier because then they know lexical chunks [...] and [they] make them more confident”.

The positive effect of the Lexical Approach-based program on the recognition of LC was measured in research where the experimental groups’ mean scores rose by 2.29 between pre- and post-test, outperforming the control group by 1.92 (Tinkel, 2022). Similarly, interviewees confirmed that knowledge and awareness of such LC facilitates reading. One participant said that “I’m more aware of it [LC] because when I read something, I’m looking for these collocations, but I didn’t do that

before this semester”. Another even said that their “understanding of texts [is] much better than before.” This increased awareness of LC and the better processing of information ties in with range of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Interviewees confirmed that the program has supported them in this area by not learning just one word but “you learn a phrase and you can use it all the time [...] and you can keep it easier in your mind.” Equally, it was stated that if they had been aware of this concept sooner “I would have been better in English, and it would have been easier for me to learn new vocabulary.” Participants also picked up on the coexistence of grammar and vocabulary (Lewis, 2012b). One person stated this explicitly, saying, “You do learn grammar too. For example, I’m looking forward to meeting you. And the first thing was why to and then the ing-form? It makes no sense. So then you look it up then you make sure okay, it works.”

These statements do not only underline the proven usefulness of the Lexical Approach-based program but also confirm Barbara Oakley’s (Exeter, 2016) claim that chunking is probably the most effective way of learning. This statement is further underlined by the results obtained in the interviews where the benefits of the Lexical Approach for learning languages in general were mentioned several times, describing LC as “the way to go” after obtaining some basic knowledge of a language. Further confirmation of the usefulness of the Lexical Approach for English language learning was provided by one participant who stated that they would be using the concept in the future independently and that they had even started teaching it to their younger sibling who also found it very helpful.

It has been stated that the Lexical Approach is omnipresent in much of the teaching material available but that learners are often not aware of the underlying principles and, thus, cannot draw the maximum benefit from these exercises (Abdelah, 2015). In this vein, participants’ interviews also revealed that they appreciated the introduction of this “tool” so they have the opportunity to integrate it into their learning.

5.2 Personal perceptions regarding the usefulness of Moodle tasks related to lexical chunks

Research question 2 concerned itself with the personal perceptions of participants regarding the usefulness of Moodle activities to support learn-

ing to work with LC. Similar to the positive results related to the general usefulness of LC, the Moodle activities employed in the teaching program were also rated as beneficial and absolutely necessary to complete such a program. In accordance with previous research (Deissl-O'Meara and Tinkel 2021) it was shown that four main areas were positively influenced by the use of Moodle activities in the Lexical Approach-based program – “practicing lexical chunks, general feeling of support for language learning, increased motivation and engagement through gamification and the opportunity to increase their vocabulary size and scope.”

Quizzes were rated as the most useful by the interviewees with cloze and matching exercises being most popular. This was confirmed by statements saying that it was helpful to “find lexical chunks and to complete sentences with them.” Matching different parts of a LC was also well-received, as was the use of the journal activity outside the classroom. Learners’ task was to find LC and record them in their Moodle journals, which was “very important because you just sit down and rethink what have you learned, what have you used.” Further, the gamification of the learning process was also appreciated (Gonzalez-Vera, 2016; Urbonienė & Koverienė, 2013) because participants felt that online exercises provided a change to traditional exercises and were a good way to engage in a friendly competition with classmates, which also increased enjoyment and motivation. Participants also found that the activities were “always something new for the lexical chunks and you got to know new lexical chunks so it was really helpful and I really enjoyed it.”

In conclusion, it can be said that both the idea of lexical chunks as well as the Moodle activities employed to engage with them were received positively by the students. This confirms the usefulness of teaching the Lexical Approach and providing students with sufficient practice to integrate this new tool into their arsenal of learning strategies. This might be easier for some learners than for others and the reasons for this might be diverse. Two factors which might influence learners’ ability and/or willingness to engage with the Lexical Approach are the semester students are in and their mode of study.

5.3 The relationship between semester attended and lexical chunk performance

Research question 3 is focused on the investigation of the relationship between the semester students attend and the usage and recognition of LC. Consequently, the hypothesis proposed that there is a statistically significant effect of the semester participants were in (2nd, 4th, 6th) on the usage and recognition of LC. A one-way MANOVA was conducted to test this hypothesis.

Results revealed that there was a significant relationship between semester students attend and the usage and recognition of LC Wilks’ Lambda $\lambda = .878$, $F(4, 164) = 2.761$; $p = .029$, with a large effect size $\eta^2 = .63$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs confirmed the significant relationship between semester and the recognition of LC $F(2, 83) = .5.694$; $p = .005$; $\eta^2 = .121$. There was no significant relationship between semester students attend and the usage of LC $F(2, 83) = .061$; $p = .941$, $\eta^2 = .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for recognition of LC in semester 4 ($M = 10.23$, $SD = 3.49$) was significantly different to semester 2 ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 4.93$). Yet, semester 6 ($M = 8.36$, $SD = 4.32$) did not significantly differ from semester 4 or 2 in the recognition of LC (Tab. 2).

Table 2.
Recognition of LC & Semester Mean Scores

Semester	Adjusted M	Unadjusted M
2	6.73	6.73
4	10.23	10.23
6	8.36	8.36

This means that recognition of LC was particularly positively affected in semester 4. These numbers indicate that the ability and willingness to work with the Lexical Approach and use this knowledge effectively for recognizing LC increases with progression of the studies. This claim is supported by the fact that, although there were 45 participants in the 2nd semester compared to 30 in the 4th and 11 in the 6th, the participants from the higher semesters outscored 2nd semester students. This corresponds to findings stating that older learners perform slightly better than younger learners in the lexical domain (Hellman, 2008). Correspondingly, research (Tinkel, 2022) discovered that the older age group (23–33) outperformed the slightly younger age group (18–22) in the experimental group in rec-

ognizing LC. Their mean scores increased by 2.89 while the control group's score dropped by .38. Research focusing on Indonesian students also found a strong, significant and positive correlation ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$) between English language exposure and reading comprehension (Galiana et al., 2020). Similarly, (Al-Zoubi 2018) found that exposure to English had a positive correlation ($r = 0.228$, $p = 0.037$) with the development of all four language skills.

Concerning the usage of LC, mean values are relatively similar across all semesters, thus, there was no significant effect. Still, participants in the 4th semester topped the scores with 6.97 (SD = 3.56), followed, surprisingly, by semester 2, with 6.71 (SD = 5.06) and semester 6 with 6.45 (SD = 3.83). Despite the absence of a statistically significant relationship, the performance by semester 4 students can be regarded as partly supporting the conclusion that working with LC becomes easier as students progress in their studies. This relates to research by (Parina and Leon 2013) who found that learners, who were more exposed to English or had more access to language resources – here the duration of their studies – were more confident in writing. Granted, confidence is not necessarily an indicator for the usage of more LC. However, as has been stated by interviewees, LC do have the potential to support confidence building.

5.4 The relationship between mode of study and lexical chunk performance

Research question 4 is concentrated on exploring the relationship between mode of study and the usage and recognition of LC. Thus, the hypothesis proposed that there is a statistically significant difference in the usage and recognition of LC based on mode of study (full- or part-time). A one-way MANOVA was performed to test this hypothesis.

Results showed a significant effect of mode of study on usage and recognition of LC Wilks' Lambda $\lambda = .816$, $F(2, 83) = .9375$; $p < .001$, with a large effect size $\eta^2 = .184$. Univariate ANOVAs confirmed a significant effect of mode of study on recognition of LC $F(1, 84) = 17.723$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .174$ (Tab. 3). Contrarily, the effect of mode of study on usage of LC $F(1, 84) = .2304$; $p = .133$, $\eta^2 = .027$ was insignificant.

Table 3.

Recognition of LC & Mode of Study Mean Scores

Mode of study	Adjusted M	Unadjusted M
full-time	5.95	5.95
part-time	9.84	9.84

These results suggest that the program is more effective in strengthening the recognition of LC. Mean values showed that the part-time students outperformed the full-time students by 3.89, scoring 9.84 (SD = 3.20) compared to 5.95 (SD = 5.32). The fact that the part-time students did better with recognizing LC could be related to their higher age, contributing to their increased ability to process the theoretical information provided in the program. This corresponds to the possible advantages of more mature learners in the lexical area (Hellman, 2008; Tinkel, 2022) Full-time students tend to be younger and, therefore, might not yet be prepared for a new, meta-cognitive approach to language learning. These results support research that attributes a preference for more complex, deeper learning strategies, such as the Lexical Approach, to older learners, while younger learners lean towards shallower strategies (Schmitt, 1997). Waldvogel's (2011) study examining Spanish L2 learners in the U.S. Military confirmed this as higher scores corresponded to the use of more meta-cognitive learning strategies.

Regarding the usage of LC part-time students also outscored the full-time students despite the absence of a statistically significant relationship. The difference lay at 1.44 in favor of the part-time students whose score was 7.39 (SD = 4.52), compared to the full-time students with 5.95 (SD = 4.14). These findings also support the idea that higher age might positively affect the ability and willingness to employ the Lexical Approach. These results might also mean that students working part-time might be better at organizing themselves through strategies that support efficient learning (Dundes & Marx, 2006) and that older students suffered fewer negative consequences caused by working alongside their academic efforts (Barone, 1993).

In summary it can be said that studying part-time seems to be beneficial as the positive effects of the Lexical Approach-based teaching program can be realized and accepted – especially in the area of recognition of LC. Still, usage is affected positively and, thus, as was suggested by the positive relationship with a higher semester attended,

part-time students with assumed higher age, can draw significant benefits from being taught the Lexical Approach.

With regard to the limitations of this study, it must be said that, despite the beneficial effect of the Lexical Approach-based program on the recognition of LC in higher semesters and among part-time students, the exposure to the program (approx. 4 months) might be relatively short to firmly anchor this new “tool” in students’ minds. Yet, positive responses regarding the usefulness of LC in English language learning obtained in the interviews are encouraging and suggest that over a longer period of time, such “anchoring” could be achieved. Another aspect to be considered is the individual student’s motivation and willingness to consider adopting a new approach to language learning. Frequently, learners have become so comfortable with their established learning strategies that they do not readily engage in exploring a new and, at the outset, more cognitively demanding strategy such as the Lexical Approach. Still, as mentioned above, more exposure to the concept could lead to more adoption of the concept.

6. Conclusion

This research sought to dive deeper into learners’ personal perceptions regarding the Lexical Approach-based teaching program. Results showed the positive impact of the program on awareness and appreciation of the Lexical Approach among learners and the corresponding better recognition of LC. Likewise, benefits related to confidence in the areas of speaking and writing were pointed out. Furthermore, Moodle and a variety of activities have been shown to be highly useful for both, learners and teachers, when conveying knowledge of and practicing LC. The game-like nature of tasks and a change from the traditional exercises provided in the classroom were perceived as helpful to increase motivation and engagement with LC.

It can also be established that, while all participants profit from the Lexical Approach-based teaching program, part-time students in higher semesters seem to do so more. This might be due to their higher age, presumed longer exposure to the target language and slightly more advanced meta-cognitive abilities which allow them to process and embrace deeper, more complex learning tools better.

To conclude, it has been shown, in this research that the Lexical Approach is a highly useful learning “tool” to offer to learners in tertiary education so that they may take control of their learning in as efficient a way as possible. Thus, further research should focus on using the Lexical Approach-based program throughout the entire course of a degree program to ensure maximum exposure to LC and a higher likelihood that students will integrate this tool into their language learning toolbox. This would indeed fulfil Michael Lewis’ wish to teach learners how to chunk language correctly and, thus, learn more efficiently. And learners do seem to understand this importance, which was demonstrated by one interviewee summarizing the need for the Lexical Approach to be integrated explicitly into language teaching, “Why don’t teachers come up with such things if they know they exist? [...] if you learn a foreign language, you need the teacher to teach you how to do it, not just learn the words. Learning a language is much more than just putting one word after another.”

7. References

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