

# Lexical Learning to Enhance Vocabulary Knowledge Among Different Age Group of Students

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## ABSTRACT

In Indonesian context, there is a very popular non-formal school named community learning center (PKBM) which is greatly utilized as an alternative school by those who do not take formal school. The students at PKBM are varied in terms of their educational background, age, gender, etc. The most appeared difference is in the range of the students' age. In one classroom, the range of the students' age is strictly different, but they have the same goal in learning that is to be able to take computer-based national exam (UNBK). Since the variety of students' age is an important factor to determine teaching strategy, this study is aimed at investigating the current issue of how lexical learning can enhance the students' vocabulary knowledge. Forty-one students of Paket B (equal to Junior High School level) of PKBM Bahtera Dua Kota Blitar are exposed to the lexical learning experience as teaching strategy to enhance their vocabulary knowledge. They are given a pre-test and post-test before and after being treated using lexical learning strategy. The result of pre-test, then, is compared to the result of post-test by using paired t-Test statistical procedure. From the result, it appears that lexical learning could be considered as an effective teaching strategy to enhance the students' vocabulary knowledge. Accordingly, it is recommended that English teacher considers lexical learning as teaching strategy to help the students to acquire rich vocabularies which will ease them in learning English subject.

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## 1. Introduction

In Indonesian country, there are at least three forms of education; formal, non-formal, and informal education. One which is greatly attended by the Indonesian citizens who do not take the formal school is non-formal education called community learning center (PKBM). PKBM serves the community who wants to take the equality of education with three main

programs to choose that are Paket A (equal to elementary school), Paket B (equal to Junior High School), and Paket C (equal to Senior High School). The objectives of the practices of PKBM are to develop the Indonesian citizens who have deeper knowledge and also good life skills to support their live (UPI: 2012).

The legal foundations of the practice of PKBM are stated clearly in Indonesian Constitution year 1945, the UU. No. 20 year 2003 about the education system, and government regulation PP. No. 19 year 2005 about standard of national education. The decree of Ministry of Education and Civilization No. 0131/U/1994 about Paket A and Paket B Program, the decree of Ministry of Education No. 0132/U/2004 about Paket C Program, and the regulation of Ministry of Education No. 20 year 2016 about the equality of education (Tristanti: 2104). All of these legal foundations set the practices of PKBM from its aim to its standard operational system to serve the community.

As the development of the times, PKBM now is not only an alternative school for those who have 'problems' in attending the formal school. This age, it has been becoming the chosen school for those with special condition. The equality of education which is provided by PKBM is in fact able to attract the community to fulfill the 9-year of learning obligation planned by the government. There are many students of PKBM who has been working as the State Civil Apparatus (ASN). There are also many students who have been working in certain field then they have an interest to study higher and they choose PKBM as an alternative education to get the legal diploma. However, it cannot be denied that the students also come from those who have a problem when they attend formal school.

Currently, there are no many researchers have been interested in studying the PKBM although it serves huge contributions for Indonesian education (UPI: 2012). PKBM as the center for community learning has many students with a wide variety in terms of educational background, cultural and social background, age, gender, etc. It should be a good target for research as the research will provide many contributions for the improvement of PKBM itself and for the development of Indonesian education at whole. Therefore, PKBM should not be neglected anymore and there should many researches using PKBM as their object of the study.

As aforementioned, the students of PKBM are varied and the most appeared variation is in the range of the students' age. In one classroom in Paket B, for example, the range of the

students' age is strictly different from teenagers to adult learners. As the students characteristics is very important in designing the lesson (Harmer, 2007:157), the different age group of the students in PKBM is also crucial in determining the strategy of teaching.

One big problem faced during the English instructions is that how to enrich the students' vocabulary knowledge for the students with wide characteristics as seen in the Paket B class. The teacher has an obligation to facilitate the students to study English joyfully. One of the chosen strategies is lexical learning strategy. Lexical learning is proposed firstly by Michael Lewis (1993) with the main focus of learning that is helping the students acquire the vocabulary as much as possible (Lewis, 1993: 95).

The lexical approach is based on the idea that important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, or chunks, and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought as grammar (Lewis, 1993:95). That is why, very basically, a lexical approach to teaching means the primary focus is on helping students acquire vocabulary. Moreover, in reality teacher can use any methodology with a lexical approach from grammar translation to task-based learning. What changes is just the linguistic focus of the lesson.

Wilkins, a suporter of the lexical approach, was the first to stress the importance of the role of vocabulary in language teaching and learning. He states '*without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed*' (1992:11). Sinclair (1995) also agrees with Wilkins's view and points out '*A lexical mistake often causes misunderstanding, while a grammar mistake rarely does*' (cited in Lewis, 1997:16).

In his advocacy of a new role for lexis, Lewis (1993) proposed the following major ideas (cited in Olga, 2000:1):

1. Lexis is the basis of language
2. Lexis is misunderstood in language teaching because of the assumption that grammar is the basis of language and that mastery of grammatical system is a prerequisite for effective communication.
3. One of the central organizing principles of any-meaning-centered syllabus should be lexis.

4. The key principle of a lexical approach is that language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar.

Zimmerman (1997, p. 17) suggests that the work of Sinclair, Nattinger, DeCarrico, and Lewis represents a significant theoretical and pedagogical shift from the past. First, their claims have revived an interest in a central role for accurate language description. Second, they challenge a traditional view of word boundaries, emphasizing the language learner's need to perceive and use patterns of lexis and collocation. Most significant is the underlying claim that language production is not a syntactic rule-governed process but is instead the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory.

Nevertheless, implementing a lexical approach in the classroom does not lead to radical methodological changes. Rather, it involves a change in the teacher's mindset. Most important, the language activities consistent with a lexical approach must be directed toward naturally occurring language and toward raising learners' awareness of the lexical nature of the language.

Moreover, the main idea of lexically based language teaching which has to be kept in mind is that the teacher has to teach language in chunk, the words are not introduced individually, and the words are frequently used so that students has a chance to study and receive lots of words input implicitly by the facilitation given by teacher. From the explanation above, it can be highlighted that the purpose of lexically-based language teaching is emphasizing on the teaching and learning of vocabulary to lead the classroom activities so that the students have the ability to produce the language for communication.

Referring to the background above, the study is aimed in adapting the lexical learning approach to teach the students of Paket B of PKBM Bahtera Dua Kota Blitar to help them enrich their vocabulary knowledge, as they are still categorized as low leaners in mastering the vocabulary as a key in learning English language.

## **2. Literature Review**

Teaching is one of the main components in language learning. In conducting teaching activities, teacher must always employ certain teaching method, approach or strategy. In choosing the method of teaching, teachers are always influenced by how they define language itself.

For decades, teaching language is done under a theory that language consists of a set of rules. It implicates on the use of grammar as determination for planning language learning. Ones may know that mostly syllabus used in teaching language is structural syllabus. It is basically the implication of the theory of language learning as afore described.

However, the new theory of language learning arouses around 1990s when language is highlighted as a means of communication. Language is used to communicate one to another. The basic principle in effective communication is to understand of meaning instead of grammar.

The lexical approach to second/foreign language teaching has received interest in recent years as an alternative to grammar-based approach (Moudraia, 2001). It is the proponents of communicative approach and the opponents of grammar approach. Lexically-based language teaching basically is teaching activities conducted based on the lexical approach brought by Michael Lewis in 1993. The lexical approach concentrates on developing learners' proficiency with lexis, or words, and word combinations.

It needs to highlight that lexical in this case is called as approach rather than method. In English language teaching, methods are systems from structuring lessons, while approaches are less concerned with how the lesson is structured and more concerned with the general focus of instruction (Lackman, 2002:2). In brief, method of teaching refers to how teaching is conducted while approach refers to why. An approach provides principles to decide what kind of content and what sorts of procedures are appropriate.

The lexical approach is based on the idea that important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, or chunks, and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought as grammar (Lewis, 1993:95). That is why, very basically, a lexical approach to teaching means the primary focus is on helping students acquire vocabulary. Moreover, in reality teacher can use any methodology with a lexical approach from grammar translation to task-based learning. What changes is just the linguistic focus of the lesson.

While one might think paradigm shift away from teaching grammar structures towards teaching individual words, the linguistic focus of the lexical approach is really in between grammar and what we traditionally think of as vocabulary. What it focuses on are structures

made up of words, meaning that the actual paradigm shift was away from individual words to clusters of words, or lexical chunks as they are commonly referred to. Grammar has been the focus of language teaching for centuries, yet it is vocabulary, or more specifically, lexis, which learners need to negotiate meaning.

Though the term lexis and vocabulary are often stated in the same context and mostly treated as synonyms, there exist a difference in meaning between these two and they are not one and the same.

*The entire store of lexical items in a language is called its lexis.*

(Wikipedia)

*Lexis refers to strings of words which go together.*

(Lewis, 1997:213)

*Lexis is a more general word than common vocabulary. Vocabulary is often used to talk of the individual words of language; lexis covers single word and multi-word objects which have the same status in the language as simple words, the items we store in our mental lexicons ready for use.*

(Lewis, 1997:217)

*Lexis includes not only the single words but also the word combinations that people store in their mental lexicons.*

(Olga, 2001:1)

Lewis (1997) suggests the following taxonomy of lexical items:

1. Words e.g., book, pen.
2. Poly words e.g., by the way, upside down.
3. Collocations of words partnership e.g., community services, absolutely convinced.
4. Institutionalized utterances e.g., I'll get it, We'll see, That'll do, If I were you, Would you like a cup of coffee?.
5. Sentence frames and heads e.g., That is not as... as you think, The fact suggestion was..., and even text frames e.g., In this paper I'll explore..., Firstly, Secondly, Finally.

From the explanation above, it can be highlighted that the purpose of lexically-based language teaching is emphasizing of the teaching and learning of vocabulary to lead the classroom activities so that the students have the ability to produce the language for communication.

The main idea of lexically based language teaching which has to be kept in mind is that the teacher has to teach language in chunk, the words are not introduced individually, and

the words are frequently used so that students has a chance to study and receive lots of words input implicitly by the facilitation given by teacher.

The previous studies related to the use of lexical learning as teaching strategy has been employed by Steve Majerus *et.al* with their study entitled 'Lexical Learning in Bilingual Adults'. The study found out that the lexical learning has very strong connection with long term memory of the students. Another study related to the lexical learning was also conducted by Dominique Cardebat (2004). She found out that there is improvement on the student's ability in English after being taught using lexical learning. Moreover, the study conducted by Hossein Nassaji (2006) found out that lexical learning resulted in depth of vocabulary knowledge of language learners. The study also revealed the fact that construction process is significantly influenced by the richness of the learners' semantic system. The study by Ying (2009) found out the empirical evidence about the relationship between L2 learners' use of lexical chunk and their language production. She also stated the implication of lexical learning toward the learner ability in producing language if teacher can facilitate the learner with adequate teaching methods to promote lexical learning in the classroom.

Being motivated by the advantage of lexical learning for enriching vocabulary knowledge of the students, this study investigates whether lexical learning can enhance the students' vocabulary knowledge especially by implementing gap filling strategy. The current research is different to the previous research in terms of the research setting and also the research methodology used.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed quantitative pre-experimental research design with one group pre-test post-test to investigate whether or not the lexical learning can enhance the students' vocabulary mastery. This method is generally aimed at knowing the effect of manipulations on the dependent variable (Ary *et.al.*, 2010:265). By employing this research design, the study investigated the potential effect of lexical learning on vocabulary mastery of students of Paket B PKBM Bahtera Dua Kota Blitar.

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The population in this study was the students of PKBM Bahtera Dua. In addition, the samples were the students of Paket B. In taking the samples, the researcher applied purposive sampling technique when it was not possible to apply random assignment for experiment. The samples of the study were class Paket B which consisted of 41 students.

### **3.3 Instruments**

In collecting the data, the instrument used by the researcher in current study were tests. Test is used to collect data of students' vocabulary knowledge. Arikunto (2006: 150) states a test is a set of questions, exercises, or other instruments which are used to measure skill, knowledge, intelligence, and aptitude of an individual or groups.

There were two types of the test. Pre-test to measure the students' vocabulary mastery undertaken on March 18 2024, before the students were being taught using gap-filling as teaching activities in lexical learning strategies. Meanwhile, the post-test to measure the students' vocabulary mastery was employed on April 1 2024 after the students were being taught using gap-filling as teaching activities in lexical learning strategies.

Both pre- and post-test consisted of 30 questions in the form of multiple-choice tests which were tested beforehand to ensure the validity and reliability of the test. Since the test were in the form of multiple choices test with had one right answer, the test of reliability was using split-half Reliability KR-20 with the result of calculation showed the value of reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) was near 1 which means that the test was reliable and was able to result the reliable data. Meanwhile, the validity of the test was also ensured since the test items consisted of test which were used to measure the students' mastery in vocabulary.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

Technique of analyzing data used in this current study was inferential analysis using statistical software SPSS version 23. However, it was a must for researcher to test the normality and homogeneity of the data as they were the requisite test before the researcher went on the data analysis. Normality test was conducted in order to know whether the sample distributes normally or not, while homogeneity test was aimed to know whether the

data were homogeneous or not. Lilliefors test was used to examine the normality test.

Meanwhile, Barlet test was used to examine the homogeneity test.

The statistical procedure used in this study was paired-samples T test. The procedure of calculating the data were:

1. Open the SPSS version 23.
2. Go to Variable View; type before after under the column 'Name'.
3. Go to Data View and input the score before and after.
4. Click analyze > compare means > paired-samples T Test, and

After the data were analyzed using paired-samples T-test, the researcher must see on the result of the p-value. If p-value was smaller than the significance level  $\alpha = 0.005$ , then the null hypothesis ( $H_0 : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2$ ) which means that the mean of post-test is smaller than or equal to the mean of pre-test could be rejected. It consequently accepted the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1 : \mu_1 > \mu_2$ ) which means that the mean of the post-test is greater than the mean of the pre-test.

#### 4. Findings

In the following descriptions, it will be presented the research findings which are obtained from pre-test and post-test. However, before analyzing the data using the paired samples T-test to test the hypothesis, the distribution of the sample must be normal and homogeneous. The following are the computation and the result of normality and homogeneity test as requisite for hypothesis testing.

##### 4.1. Normality Testing

Normality test is aimed to know whether a population is in a normal distribution or not. In this research, *Lilliefors* test is used to compute the normality of the data. If  $L_o$  ( $L$  obtained) is lower than  $L_t$  ( $L$  table) at the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$  on *Lilliefors*, then it can be concluded that the data are in a normal distribution. The summary of Normality test using *Lilliefors* can be seen in table 4. 17. The formula used in testing the normality is:

$$z_i = \frac{x - \bar{x}}{s} \text{ where } s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2}{n-1}} \text{ or } \sqrt{\frac{\sum x^2 - \frac{(\sum x)^2}{n}}{n-1}} \text{ or } \sqrt{\frac{\sum x^2}{n-1}}$$

**Table 1.** The summary of Normality test using *Lilliefors*

No	Variables	Number of Data	$L_o$	$L_t$	$\alpha$	Status
1	Vocabulary Score of the Students before being taught by using lexical learning	41	0.134	0.148	0.05	Normal
2	Vocabulary Score of the Students before being taught by using lexical learning	41	0.056	0.148	0.05	Normal

Table 1 shows the summary of normality test using *Lilliefors* that all of the values of  $L_o$  are lower than  $L_t$ . Consequently, it can be concluded that all of the samples are in normal distribution.

#### 4.2. Homogeneity Testing

The homogeneity test is done to check whether the data are homogeneous or not. This test is important as homogeneity of the data shows that the population is well-formed. In this research, the homogeneity testing is conducted by using Bartlett formula.

Considering the result of the homogeneity test, it shows that the score of  $\chi_o^2(1.36)$ . According to the table of Chi-Square distribution with the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , the value of  $\chi_{t.95(3)}^2(7.81)$ . Because of  $\chi_o^2(1.36)$  is lower than  $\chi_{t.95(3)}^2(7.81)$  or  $\chi_o^2 < \chi_{t.95(3)}^2$  ( $1.36 < 7.81$ ), it can be drawn the conclusion that the data are homogeneous.

#### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

As said earlier, the data are analyzed using paired sample T-test. Before we go on to the analysis of data, the hypotheses of this study are:

$H_0: \mu_1 \leq \mu_2$  which means that the mean of post-test is smaller than or equal to the mean of pre-test.

$H_1: \mu_1 > \mu_2$  which means that the mean of the post-test is greater than the mean of the pre-test.

The significance level of the study is 5 percent,  $\alpha = 5\%$ . Then, the score derived from pre- and post- test are listed in table 3 below:

**Table 2. The Students Pre-test and Post-Test Scores**

Student	Student's Score	
	Pre-test	Post-Test
1	62	67
2	65	78
3	68	72
4	69	72
5	60	68
6	61	68
7	60	68
8	64	72
9	67	78
10	68	75
11	72	78
12	73	78
13	73	77
14	65	73
15	61	72
16	66	74
17	73	78
18	67	75
19	64	73
20	60	72
21	64	69
22	74	72
23	65	70
24	60	70
25	73	73
26	65	72
27	67	74
28	68	74
29	72	79
30	68	75
31	67	77
32	68	75
33	60	64
34	65	68
35	65	70
36	66	70
37	58	66
38	67	70
39	67	70
40	68	73
41	60	64

n=41

\*Significant (at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

The data above then are calculated using statistical procedure with the help of statistical software SPSS version 23.

The results of the statistical calculation using paired samples T-test are shown below:

Paired Samples Correlations			
	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Before treatment & After Treatment	41	,728	,000

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Before treatment	65,98	41	4,287	,669
Pair 1 After Treatment	72,27	41	3,918	,612

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference								
				Lower	Upper							
Pair 1 Before treatment - After Treatment	-6,293	3,043	,475	-7,253	-5,332	-13,239	40		,000			

From the result of the calculation, the output confirms that the means of the students' score before and after the treatment are respectively 65.98 and 72.27. The result of T test also reveals that the t-value is -13.239, with the df is 40. The p-value (shown is column sig. 2 tailed) is 0.000. Since the direction of the study has one-tailed test, the result of p-value must be divided into two.

To reject the null hypothesis, the p-value must be smaller than the significance level. The result 0.000/2 is equal to 0, and it is smaller than the number of  $\alpha = 0.005$  ( $0 < 0.005$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis which is saying that mean after treatment is smaller than or equal to the mean before treatment is rejected. It automatically accepts the alternative hypothesis saying that the mean after the treatment is bigger than the mean before treatment.

Then, the conclusion of the data analysis is that the lexical learning is effective in fostering the students' mastery in vocabulary knowledge. In other words, the students'

achievement in mastering vocabulary proved by their score is rising after given the treatment that is lexical learning.

## **5. Discussion**

This research is an experimental research conducted to find out the effectiveness of using lexical learning approach to teach vocabulary among the different age group of students. Based on the findings of the research above, it is found that lexical learning could foster the students' vocabulary knowledge.

Lexical learning is more effective than teaching vocabulary using traditional method where vocabulary is taught solely. Teaching method is one of the external factors in determining the success of learning. The selection of the appropriate teaching method implemented in the teaching learning process determines the better result on students' writing skill in the classroom.

Lexical learning which mainly focuses on 'chunking' and collocations are proved to be effective to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. As Harvey (2015) found lexical learning approach offers students and teacher a basis to collect and learn new vocabulary, this current study also proved of the benefits of lexical learning approach in teaching vocabulary.

Learners could learn vocabulary better through chunking or learning word which is in relation with other words. Lexical chunk is an umbrella term which includes all other term. Therefore, teaching vocabulary in pair or in group of words is done through the learning process.

As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) pointed out, the ability to use lexical phrases will help to be better in fluency. They found lexical chunking as the basic unit for speaking fluency, and this current study also has revealed that learners could learn the vocabulary better by understanding the co-text of the words being learned.

Vocabulary learning through lexical approach also gives opportunity for students to learn the grammar implicitly. Through repetition or using vocabulary in chunk or collocation will help the students to be familiar with the grammar pattern and indirectly store both words and grammar in their mind due to the wide exposure to the language which is used frequently during classroom instruction.

Lexical learning offers many benefits for foreign or second language learners. Learners not only being taught on so many vocabularies but also they have given chance to accept the language input including sentence patterns as well as the habit of using dictionaries as a learning resources in order to maintain their ability in mastering the second or foreign language.

## 6. Conclusion

Answering the research question of the current research about the effectiveness of using lexical learning approach in teaching vocabulary, it comes to a conclusion that lexical learning can enhance the students' vocabulary mastery. Using lexical learning in teaching vocabulary is effective for students with different age group such as in PKBM Bahtera Dua Kota Blitar.

In this research, the significance effect was proved by the students' post-test mean score (72.27) which was greater than the mean score of pre-test (65.98). The result of t-test also reveals that t value is smaller than the value of  $\alpha = 0.005$ , that was  $0 < 0.005$ .

Consequently, the null hypothesis which is saying that mean after treatment is smaller than or equal to the mean before treatment is rejected. It automatically accepts the alternative hypothesis saying that the mean after the treatment is bigger than the mean before treatment.

Then, the conclusion of the current research is that the lexical learning is effective in fostering the students' mastery in vocabulary knowledge. In other words, the students' achievement in mastering vocabulary proved by their score is rising after given the treatment that is lexical learning approach. It, then, confirms that using lexical learning approach is able to give positive effect on enhancing the students' vocabulary knowledge.

Though the effect of lexical learning in this current study shows encouraging results, there are a few limitations that should be considered and critically take into account when interpreting the results of this study. Foremost, in terms of the time frame of the study, the study was conducted for only five weeks due to the researcher's concerns of students' limited time available as their busy schedule that include their time for taking national computer-based examination. Therefore, it is recommended that a longer experimental period of at least one semester be carried out for future research.

Nevertheless, the study resulted that lexical learning is effective in enhancing the students' vocabulary mastery. It appears that the teacher could use lexical learning as an approach that lead the activities of English instructions in the classroom in order to enhance the students' vocabulary mastery to some extent.

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