



THE LEXICAL FREQUENCY ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS OF ENGLISH IN HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract - This research aimed to design a strategy based on the Lexical Frequency approach for acquiring vocabulary in the classroom. The scientific literature suggests that this approach helps in learning a language because students can understand the new words learned from a more dynamic approach and put them in a natural context according to the context in which they are going to develop. This study was carried out in Portoviejo, at the Raffaello Santi School, with a total population of 8 English teachers. The methodology applied was the concurrent mixed approach. The data suggests that the teaching staff of this institution do not apply the Lexical Frequency approach to vocabulary teaching, giving priority to others such as the communicative approach.

Keywords: Lexical Frequency approach, vocabulary acquisition, teaching-learning process.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary, and its acquisition, is one of the most important aspects of learning a language. It is, therefore, necessary to focus on vocabulary in the process of teaching a language and its use to the learner of a foreign language. It is also important to consider and define what vocabulary a student needs to prioritize in teaching, especially at the beginning. One needs to concentrate on the most frequently used vocabulary to achieve a greater understanding and expression in a foreign language. A focus on the lexical Frequency of a language is, consequently, crucial to achieving an efficient acquisition of a foreign language, as humans tend to learn through patterns and repetitions. The more the learner is exposed to a word and its different meanings and usages, the easier it is to acquire them [1].

Lexical frequency teaching has been implemented for many years in many parts of the world. Although, it has not reached the widespread use of other methodologies, notwithstanding its success when implemented. Perhaps one of the most significant meanings of a lexical linguistic approach has been [2]. Following the steps of Krashen and its natural approach, they established The Four Strands, presenting meaningful focused input and the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and the importance of lexical Frequency in the acquisition of vocabulary. The Four Strands of learning a



foreign language are meaning-focused input; meaning, focused output; language-focused learning; and fluency development [3].

According to Nation, throughout the various activities and exercises for each four strand, the teacher should focus on providing the student with enough opportunities and resources to acquire high-frequency words. Because high frequency words make up a great majority of the utterances in a language, they would be very helpful to understand it and consequently express oneself in the target language [4]. The role of the teacher in the acquisition of vocabulary should be more of a guide to using these resources, so they are used in autonomous learning, as well as to ensure they understand the meaning of these words and the meaningfully acquired [5].

Other authors and educators have tried to implement the concept of lexical Frequency into their foreign language lessons, in different ways but with significant results. For instance, [6] showed the effect of word exposure and context in acquiring new vocabulary through reading. In his study, target words were easily acquired the more they were present in the text, but also how informative its context was; high frequency words also need to be relevant and meaningful to be successfully integrated into the vocabulary. Previous studies of his also assessed the vocabulary size of ESL students in Hong Kong, finding a correlation between fluency in English with vocabulary size and that the vocabulary size was influenced by the exposure and focus on high frequency words and word families [7].

Similarly, [8] assessed the vocabulary depth and lexical exposure within the texts they read during their instruction in the English language. His findings expressed a significant gap between the actual lexical knowledge that the students had and the lexical Content of the textbooks and other resources they used in their classes. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the input resources of the students to help them achieve a more significant and more efficient acquisition of vocabulary according to each stage of learning. [9] and [10] mention using linguistic corpus databases as an essential resource for language teaching and learning, both for Spanish and English as foreign languages. [10] highlights the usefulness and relevance of a Spanish corpus to help create graded material adapted to students' vocabulary size and comprehension at every stage of their acquisition of Spanish. [9], on the other hand, proposes using corpus as a reference for language use and self-evaluation; students can check what the meaning of a word is, how a word is used in real-life examples of sentences and how they work as grammatical items.

Despite the importance of vocabulary as the building block of language competency, there has not been enough attention to the curriculum of foreign languages, particularly in Ecuador. The Ecuadorian curriculum for English teaching is based on Content and Language Integrated Learning aimed to provide students with situations in which they can develop the four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) with a communicative approach and aiming for language acquisition. Of these four skills, reading emphasizes vocabulary the most, as well as the use of study resources for students based on their current level of proficiency.

Nonetheless, the national curriculum does not mention lexical frequency resources to complement the use of reading material and achieve vocabulary acquisition [11]. It is then necessary to implement Lexical frequency teaching techniques and methodologies so the students can learn words they will be exposed to and use and increase their comprehension of the target language insignificantly. There has not been a widespread or systematic focus and attention to Lexical Frequency as the central part of foreign language learning.

More traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation method were used at first, and later, newer and more prevalent methods were introduced through reforms. For instance, The Communicative Approach, Task-Based Learning and Total Physical Response have been favored. English as a Foreign Language education has also been hampered by a lack of resources and training



for the teachers, as well as a general lack of interest in the language in the country, which has led the population to underperform in terms of English proficiency [12].

The teaching of vocabulary has not been part of the teaching-learning process because other areas like grammar or the development of linguistics skills are priorities in the classroom. For those reasons, the general objective of this study is to propose a strategy for teaching vocabulary, following a lexical frequency approach in the Raffaello Santi School, and the process of teaching-learning English as a second language

1. Materials and Methodoly

This study proposes a strategy for teaching vocabulary, following a lexical frequency approach in the Raffaello Santi School. The research was descriptive, with a concurrent mixed design, following the guidelines proposed by [13]. For carrying out the application of this design, there were two instruments for data collection, (1) a survey and a (2) interview to eight teachers from the English area at the Raffaello Santi School. Experts in language teaching validated both data collection instruments. In the case of the survey, the Cronbach's Alfa was 0.85, which means that the instrument's items were reliable for this research.

Data analysis

This section presents the results from the data collection instruments applied to the target group selected for this study.

2. Results and Discussion

Survey results

1. What methodologies do you use in your English lessons?

Graph 1

Methodologies applied



Source: survey applies to the English teachers.

In table 1, the results suggest that the most common methodologies in the institution are TPR (25%) and the Communicative Approach (25%); meanwhile, none of the teachers used the Natural approach or the Grammar translation.



This is in accordance to the methodologies commonly used in classrooms around the country of Ecuador, where the teachers tend to stick to various activities with specific objectives and that work with a certain skill in the language, and in situations that mimic what someone would encounter in the real world, so as to prepare the students in social interactions. It also coincides with the diagnosis made by [14] about the learning-teaching process of English as a foreign language in the country, where lessons are based around tasks that encompass a particular subject and in which it was found that although these activities require a particular level of communicative abilities, these are hampered by a deficiency in expression, cause perhaps by a lack of vocabulary from the students.

2. What aspect do you focus on during your English lessons?

Graph 2

Focus on English lessons



Source: Own

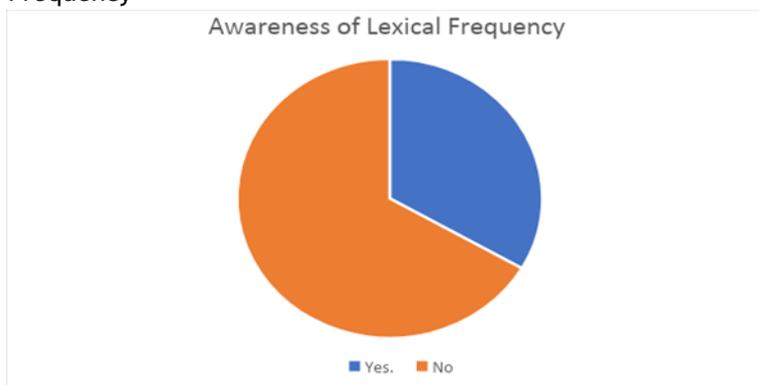
The data analysis reflects that most teachers focus on speaking and grammar. The rest of them concentrate the learning process on listening and writing skills. No one focuses on reading.

It can be said that the importance given to those particular skills in favor of the other ones pertains to the tendency of teachers and the school system to look for results that can express progress in the language, particularly grammar. As previously mentioned, the ability for students to perform well in everyday social situations is emphasized, therefore speaking becomes a crucial skill to develop in order to succeed in these contexts. This also coincides with the diagnosis. As mentioned by [15] the resources used by English teachers in Ecuadorian classrooms are, although mainly speaking-based, related to vocabulary. Nonetheless, the vocabulary presented in these resources is organized around specific and daily topics, and not around the frequency of use in English. In turn, this may oblige students to learn superfluous vocabulary that they can easily forget, instead of acquiring useful vocabulary for their communication needs.

3. Have you heard about Lexical Frequency?

Graph 3

Awareness of lexical Frequency



Source: Own



According to the data, most of the teachers have not heard about lexical Frequency. This can be assumed to be a result of lexical frequency not being mentioned explicitly in the national curriculum, or in the textbooks used by teachers in the Raffaello Santi School. As some mentioned in regards to this question, they have not been instructed on Lexical Frequency and how it can be implemented in the classroom during their professional training. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that as a concept, Lexical Frequency is still present albeit implicitly, as the teachers admitted to give preference to vocabulary that they perceive to be most useful because it is more in speech.

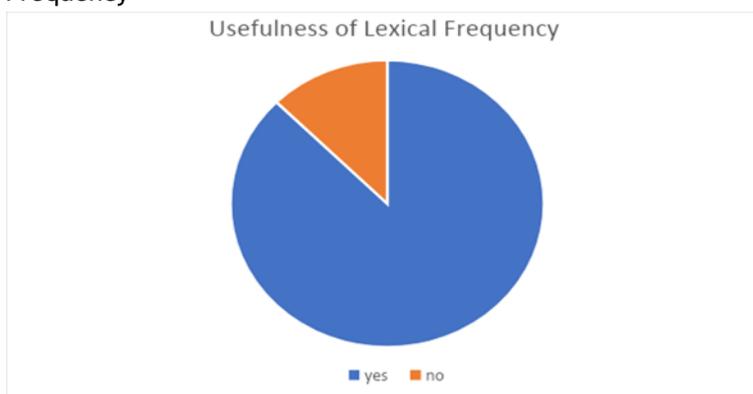
What do you think lexical Frequency implies? (open question)

Most teachers answered that they were unsure about lexical Frequency and assumed it was related to vocabulary. They also did not mention how lexical Frequency can be used in class or its effect on language acquisition. This coincides with the survey done by 1 where there is a lack of knowledge about the implication or concept of lexical frequency with teachers of English as a foreign language. Notwithstanding, the teachers surveyed were also aware that vocabulary is crucial to develop communication skills and subsequently proficiency in the target language. Therefore, teachers still use various resources to help students acquire vocabulary.

4. Do you think Lexical Frequency is helpful in the Language Teaching-Learning process.

Graph 4

Usefulness of lexical Frequency



Source: Own

87,5% of teachers agree that lexical Frequency may be useful for teaching-learning. Despite teachers not being sure what lexical Frequency is, they still think it could be useful. This might demonstrate that the teachers at the school are open to using new strategies in their classes, even if they do not have previous knowledge of the specific strategy. It might also demonstrate that they are dissatisfied with the strategies that they currently use in class.

This also tells the need for previous training for the teachers to implement Lexical Frequency in the classroom, as they have to understand what it means and how can they make their students use the concept in their autonomous instruction. According to [16], English teachers tend to be open and motivated to implement new methodologies and strategies that show potential in increasing proficiency in students, if they are properly instructed in the strategy in question.

Interview results

This section presents the analysis of the interview applied to the teachers of Raffaello Santi School.

All teachers agreed that the EFL teaching-learning process in Ecuador is precarious, and the methodologies are badly applied. Drawing from the perspectives presented by [17], as well as [14], from the English teachers in Ecuador, some opinions of discontent were expressed, for example; lack of preparation and proficiency from the teachers, and the inefficiency of some methodologies when applied in the classroom, Nonetheless, most teachers think that the situation has improved but that there are still some things that need to change in the national curriculum.



They also recognize the need to encourage their students to learn at home vocabulary autonomously, all the teachers agree that it is essential to pay attention to it during classes, although other teachers (think other aspects of learning are more important, such as grammar and speaking).

Most teachers (87,5%) agreed that a lexical frequency approach might be helpful in their classroom and their teaching-learning process. They also mention they would need to learn more about lexical Frequency and its influence on language acquisition. They expressed interest in implementing new techniques and strategies in their lesson.

Proposal

Justification and theoretical foundations of the proposal

Lexical Frequency has proven to be a useful technique for students in acquiring a language, providing many benefits. According to [10], the use of lexical Frequency in the teaching of any language provides benefits such as: being able to decide what to teach, offering us an objective guide of what and when to teach something, organizing lexical groups to be taught together, better choose the lexicon to be used in teaching materials. All these benefits are reflected when starting and carrying out the teaching-learning process by the teacher and the student.

Applying the lexical Frequency has already given specific results in the lives of his students. For example, a study by [7] compared the performance of language academies in Hong Kong. In this study, [7] analyzed the results and how these academies performed in their methodology. [7] found that the "best academies" focused heavily on vocabulary use, while the other academies neglected vocabulary by focusing on other things like grammar.

[18] talks about the areas that a student develops when the lexical Frequency is considered:

- The transformation of partial to precise knowledge;
- In-depth knowledge;
- Move from the receptive to the product dimension.

The transformation of partial knowledge can define a student's path when acquiring vocabulary. It begins with the student first recognizing certain words and common uses, then progressively becoming precise knowledge, with which the student knows many words with an extensive understanding of how and when they are used. Then we have in-depth knowledge, where the author tells us about the relationship that words have with their own lexicon. That is, if there is a paradigmatic relationship: a relationship between an element and others that could replace it in any part of the sentence in a chain of words; or if there is a syntagmatic relationship: the relationship that each linguistic sign maintains with some other part of grammar. Finally, the ability to move from the receptive to the productive dimension refers to understanding enough vocabulary to comprehend a variety of discourse and express themselves nuancedly on diverse topics.

Therefore, the use of the lexical Frequency in the classroom and a rigorous focus on vocabulary and its functionality has brought and can continue to bring significant advantages to the educational process. It makes the process more organic and efficient for both teachers and students. As [10] says, "it helps us to determine what and when to teach". The benefits to students are not few, however. First, it provides a useful vocabulary to the students, such as a Lexical Frequency dictionary and, in several cases, words necessary to maintain sentence structures. Likewise, it has been shown that acquiring a second language is more effective and gives better results when a focus on vocabulary is maintained, and the lexical Frequency is considered. On the contrary, when it is neglected, the results decline. We also learned how it affects us and what areas develop vocabulary focus and lexical Frequency positively in language development.

The lexical approach is a methodology based on the importance of Lexis in languages. This methodology brings with it many benefits for the learners, like:



- It helps with the acquisition of language: using the technique of "chunking" (connecting words) helps us "memorize" more words. This helps us also connect words that change meaning with other words, like "Hang on" or "hang in there".
- It is practical: Since it cares about the lexical Frequency of the target language, everything that students learn is practical and something that they would use in daily communication, which not only helps with language production but also motivates students to learn more, since what they learn they can go ahead and use it.
- It focuses on communication: Since it focuses on what is relevant in the language, it gives the students the tools they need to start as soon as possible to communicate in the target language.

Methodology of the proposal

This proposal strategy is divided into four stages (1) prevision, (2) analysis of student's needs (3) planning of the strategy, and (4) application of the proposal.

Stages of the proposed strategy

Stage 1: prevision

Before starting with the proposal, the English teachers from Raffaello Santi will have some training sessions to learn more about the Lexical Frequency approach: the theory, characteristics and pedagogical applications. The training session will last two days, and the participants will present their thoughts about how that approach works in the classroom.

Stage 2: analysis of the needs

In stage 3, the English teachers will tell the researchers the most common problems they face when they teach vocabulary. The researchers will guide the teachers to know the possible activities to apply with their students (chunking, word cards, graded readers, word parts, games like Simon Says, charades and 20 questions). This session will last one day.

Table 1
Activity 1 (Simon says)

| | |
|--|---|
| Activity name: Simon says | |
| Description: Students will play a game of Simon Says to practice already-learnt verbs. | |
| Level: A1-A2 | Subject/topic: food and cooking |
| Learning goal: Using a game like "Simon Says" students practice verbs and learn new ones through imitation. | Aim: Students learn relevant vocabulary Students can act said vocabulary |
| Performance expectation: Students will listen to the teacher and act on the verbs only when they hear "Simon Says". | |
| Guiding activities: 1) Introduce verbs with a game of "Simon Says" - The teacher will say a verb like "jump". - Students have to listen to said verb and have to be on the look out for when the teacher says "Simon Says" - If the teacher says "Simon Says" then the students will obey the command. - But if the teacher doesn't say "Simon Says" then the students just ignore it. | Student activities: 1) Students play a game of "Simon Says" - Students listen to the teacher. - If the teacher says "Simon Says" they do as the teacher commands. - If the teacher doesn't say "Simon Says" then students simply ignore. |

Source: Own



Table 2
Activity 2 (Chunking)

| | |
|--|--|
| Activity name: Chunking | |
| Description: Students will learn appropriate vocabulary about the kitchen, cooking and foods. | |
| Level: A1-A2 | Subject/topic: food |
| Learning goal: Using lexical-frequency approach, create a solid understanding on vocabulary relevant to the kitchen and actions done during cooking. | Aim: Students learn relevant vocabulary |
| Performance expectation: Students will hear about new verbs relevant to cooking, and proceed to associate said verbs with food items. | |
| Guiding activities: 2) Chunking: Show students new verbs that are appropriate to use in the kitchen and commonly- used connections like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To chop: a potato, a lettuce, an onion. - To boil: an egg, water, potatoes. - To fry: fries, beef, pork, fish. | Student activities: 2) Chunking: Students pay attention to the new vocabulary, and after a few examples brainstorm possible connections to the new vocabulary like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teacher mentions the verb "to grill": and students brainstorm things you could grill. - The teacher mentions the verb "to microwave": and students brainstorm things you could microwave. - The teacher mentions the verb "to steam": and students brainstorm things you could steam. |

Table 3
Activity 3 (Intensive reading)

| | |
|---|---|
| Activity name: Intensive reading | |
| Description: Students will learn appropriate vocabulary about the kitchen, cooking and foods. | |
| Level: A1-A2 | Subject/topic: food |
| Learning goal: Using lexical-frequency approach, create a solid understanding on vocabulary relevant to the kitchen and actions done during cooking. | Aim: Students learn relevant vocabulary Students can understand and re-interpret what they read. |
| Performance expectation: Students will read a short reading about cooking things, understand them, and present their own re-interpretation of the events read. | |
| Guiding activities: 3) Intensive reading: Students read a text describing how to cook a recipe, then reimagine it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students read and re-read (if necessary) the text. - Students draw scene by scene, as if it were a comic book. | Student activities: 3) Intensive reading: Students read a text describing how to cook a recipe, then reimagine it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students read and re-read (if necessary) the text. - Students will need to draw scene by scene the process of cooking. |

Source: Own



Table 4
Activity 4 (Charades)

| | |
|--|--|
| Activity name: Charades | |
| Description: Students will play a game of charades, where they pick a verb, interpret it, and other students have to guess what the verb is. | |
| Level: A1-A2 | Subject/topic: food |
| Learning goal: Using a game of charades, students will interiorize by doing the vocabulary | Aim: Students can understand and re-interpret the vocabulary they learn. |
| Performance expectation: Students will look at a verb, interpret it and expect their partner to understand and mention the verb. | |
| Guiding activities: 4) Students play a game of charades , where students have to guess actions of verbs like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chop - Grill - Microwave. - When the student sees the verb, the start interpreting a scene. - Other students will have to guess the verb. | Student activities: 4) Students play a game of charades , where students have to guess actions of verbs like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chop - Grill - Microwave. - When the student sees the verb, the start interpreting a scene. - Other students will have to guess the verb. |

Table 5
Activity 5 (Word-cards)

| | |
|---|--|
| Activity name: word-cards | |
| Description: Students will write in the front of a paper card the new word they learnt, then on the other side they will write a description of what it means. | |
| Level: A1-A2 | Subject/topic: food |
| Learning goal: Using word-cards students reinforce and integrate newly learnt vocabulary. | Aim: Students learn relevant vocabulary Students can revisit said vocabulary using their word-cards. |
| Performance expectation: Students will write the recently learnt verbs and their descriptions, and keep it in a word-deck. | |
| Guiding activities: 5) Students organize their word- cards , which consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One side with the new word. - The other side with the meaning of said word. | Student activities: 5) Students organize their word-cards , which consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One side with the new word. - The other side with the meaning of said word. |

Source: Own

Stage 3: planning of the strategy

In this stage, the teachers from Raffaello Santi School will design new activities to apply the Lexical Frequency Approach with their students, according to their needs. This session will last one day.



Stage 4: application of the proposal

In the following timetable, the teachers will have explained the times to apply the Lexical Frequency Approach. This part of the proposal will last one month.

Table 6
Timetables

| Weeks | Activity | Responsables |
|----------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Week 1 | Teacher's training about the application of the Lexical Frequency Approach | The researchers |
| | Knowing of the student's need in the classroom. | The researchers and the participants |
| | Presentation of the examples of activities based on the proposal Lexical Frequency Approach | The researchers and the participants |
| | Planning of new activities | |
| Week 2-6 | Application of the activities in the classroom | The participants The researchers |
| | Evaluation of the proposal | |

Source: Own

Validation of the proposal

For the validation of our strategy, we consulted 4 experts in the field of English teaching, to give us their opinions about it. They all work as English teachers in different schools in Portoviejo, Ecuador, and they have between 7-15 years of experience in English teaching.

The experts that were surveyed thought that the objective of the proposal was clear, that it fulfilled the needs of vocabulary development, and that the criteria for assessing the objective was adequate. Regarding the theoretical framework of the proposal, 80% agreed with the scientific background that confirmed that the use of lexical Frequency in the classroom was beneficial, while they also observed that we should provide more information about the advantages of lexical Frequency in other contexts. They mentioned that the proposal generally fulfilled both the students' needs for language learning, as well as the national curriculum guidelines.

As for the stages of the proposal, the experts 60% expressed satisfaction with the organization, number and sequence of the stages presented in the proposal, while the remaining 40%. The activities for the planning, execution and evaluation stages were thought to be ideal by 50% for their implementation in the classroom, while the other half thought it can be improved by the use we use variety of tasks, games and other activities for the stages.

In general, they showed interest in implementing these activities form the proposal, and that it can also be used in the teaching-learning process of other languages.

CONCLUSION

In the literature review, there was shown that the Lexical Frequency Approach, as a methodology for the acquisition of languages, has been researched and experimented in many different countries and has been proven to improve the communicational skills of language learners. It helps students acquire more useful vocabulary, which in turn helps them both express themselves better in the target language, as well as more easily comprehend input in said language.



In Raffaello Santi School, there is not a focus on vocabulary acquisition in their English teaching methodologies. Instead, they use other approaches such as TPR and the Communicative Approach. Despite the use of these methodologies, it seems to be that the students do not possess optimal knowledge and proficiency in the language.

As solution to the problem identify, there was a proposal strategy designed for the with a set of activities to train the English teachers with the application of the Lexical Frequency Approach. This proposal could be used not just for teaching English but also other languages.

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