

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING LEXICOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
The development of communicative competence is one of the principal objectives of contemporary foreign language education. Within this process, lexical competence occupies a fundamental position because effective communication largely depends on learners' ability to recognize, understand, select, combine, and appropriately use lexical units in different communicative contexts. The study employs theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, pedagogical observation, methodological synthesis, and a competency-based interpretation of vocabulary learning. The findings demonstrate that traditional approaches based primarily on memorization and translation are insufficient for developing students' productive and contextual lexical competence. The study concludes that lexicology should be taught not as an isolated theoretical linguistic discipline but as a functional component of communicative language education.	Lexicology, lexical competence, communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, foreign language teaching, contextual learning, communicative approach, task-based learning, collocation, corpus-based learning, lexical awareness, interactive learning.

Introduction

The globalization of education, science, business, technology, and intercultural communication has significantly increased the importance of foreign language proficiency. Modern language learners are expected not only to understand grammatical structures and memorize vocabulary but also to communicate effectively in academic, professional, social, and intercultural environments. Consequently, the development of communicative competence has become one of the central priorities of contemporary language education.

Communicative competence is a complex construct that incorporates several interrelated dimensions, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, pragmatic, and lexical competence. Although these components function together, lexical competence has a particularly important role because lexical units constitute the principal means through which speakers express concepts, intentions, attitudes, emotions, and relationships.

A learner may possess sufficient knowledge of grammatical rules and still experience serious communication difficulties because of limited vocabulary. Conversely, learners with extensive lexical

resources may often communicate successfully even when their grammatical accuracy is not completely developed. This illustrates the central role of vocabulary in actual language use.

The teaching of lexicology is therefore particularly important in foreign language education. Lexicology provides learners with knowledge about lexical meaning, semantic relations, word formation, polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, phraseological units, collocations, lexical fields, and contextual variation. However, the pedagogical teaching of lexicology should not be restricted to the transmission of theoretical linguistic information. One of the main challenges in language classrooms is the gap between knowing a word and being able to use the word. Students may recognize a lexical item in a dictionary or translate it correctly but remain unable to use it naturally during spontaneous communication. This phenomenon demonstrates that lexical knowledge has both receptive and productive dimensions. For example, a learner may know the meaning of the verb *conduct*, but effective lexical competence also requires knowledge of combinations such as *conduct research*, *conduct a survey*, *conduct an experiment*, and *conduct an interview*. Similarly, knowing the meaning of *decision* does not automatically mean knowing that English commonly uses the collocation *make a decision* rather than *do a decision*.

Consequently, contemporary lexical instruction should focus on the relationships between words rather than on isolated vocabulary items. Learners need to understand not only what a word means but also how it behaves syntactically, semantically, stylistically, and pragmatically. Another significant issue is contextual appropriateness. Many lexical items have several meanings or can function differently depending on the communicative situation. The word *issue*, for example, may refer to a problem, a publication, or the act of officially producing something. Students who learn only one translation may encounter difficulties when the same word appears in a different context. Therefore, teaching lexicology should develop learners' ability to interpret lexical meaning dynamically. The increasing use of digital technologies has also transformed vocabulary learning. Online dictionaries, digital corpora, learning management systems, mobile applications, multimedia resources, and artificial intelligence tools provide students with opportunities to encounter vocabulary in authentic contexts. However, technology is effective only when integrated into a coherent pedagogical methodology. The relevance of this research is consequently determined by the need to develop methodological approaches that connect lexicological knowledge with actual communicative performance.

Literature review

The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and communicative competence has been widely discussed in applied linguistics. Wilkins emphasized the fundamental importance of vocabulary in language learning, arguing that insufficient lexical knowledge can seriously restrict learners' ability to communicate. This perspective remains relevant because communication requires speakers to select lexical resources appropriate to their communicative intentions. Nation conceptualized vocabulary knowledge as multidimensional. Knowing a word involves knowledge of its form, meaning, and use. This distinction is particularly important pedagogically because students may have receptive knowledge of a lexical item without possessing sufficient productive knowledge.

Schmitt also emphasized that vocabulary acquisition involves multiple dimensions and requires repeated encounters with lexical items. His work highlights the importance of explicit and incidental vocabulary learning as complementary processes.

Carter approached vocabulary from an applied linguistic perspective and emphasized the relationship between lexical meaning and actual language use. This perspective supports the idea that lexical instruction should incorporate contextual and functional dimensions.

Lewis proposed the lexical approach, emphasizing the importance of lexical chunks and word combinations. According to this perspective, language learners should acquire not only individual words but also frequently occurring combinations and fixed or semi-fixed expressions. The importance of collocation is particularly relevant to communicative competence. Native and proficient speakers do not construct every utterance by independently selecting individual words. They rely heavily on conventional lexical combinations. Consequently, teaching collocations can contribute to fluency and naturalness.

The communicative approach to language teaching, developed through the broader evolution of communicative language pedagogy, places meaningful interaction at the center of instruction. Richards and Rodgers describe communicative language teaching as an approach that prioritizes language as a means of communication rather than as an abstract system. Task-based language teaching extends this principle by organizing instruction around meaningful tasks. Ellis emphasizes that tasks provide learners with opportunities to use language as a tool for achieving non-linguistic or communicative objectives.

Corpus linguistics has introduced another important methodological possibility. Corpus-based vocabulary teaching enables students to investigate authentic patterns of language use. Instead of accepting lexical rules only from textbooks, learners can examine concordance lines and identify recurring patterns themselves. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages also conceptualizes language proficiency in terms of communicative activities and competences. From this perspective, lexical knowledge is meaningful insofar as it supports reception, production, interaction, and mediation. The literature therefore suggests a gradual movement from lexical knowledge as memorized information toward lexical competence as functional communicative ability.

However, there remains a need for an integrated methodological framework specifically connecting the teaching of lexicological phenomena with communicative competence. Many approaches focus either on vocabulary acquisition or on communicative activities, whereas the relationship between the two can be developed more systematically. This study attempts to address this methodological gap.

Materials and methods

The study adopts a qualitative methodological research design. It combines theoretical analysis of research on vocabulary acquisition and communicative language teaching with comparative pedagogical analysis and methodological synthesis.

The principal methodological approaches include:

- theoretical analysis;
- comparative analysis;
- pedagogical observation;
- competency-based analysis;
- contextual analysis;
- methodological synthesis.

The research does not claim to provide experimental statistical evidence. Instead, it develops a theoretically grounded methodological framework that can subsequently be tested through classroom-based experimental research.

Conceptualization of lexical competence. For the purposes of this study, lexical competence is defined as the learner's ability to recognize, understand, store, retrieve, select, combine, and appropriately use lexical units according to communicative context.

Lexical competence includes at least five interconnected dimensions:

1. form knowledge;
2. semantic knowledge;
3. collocational knowledge;
4. contextual and stylistic knowledge;
5. productive communicative knowledge.

These dimensions interact during actual communication.

Table 1. Structure of lexical competence and its communicative function

Dimension	Description	Example of learner ability	Communicative contribution
Form knowledge	Knowledge of pronunciation, spelling and morphological form	Recognizing and producing development	Accurate language production
Semantic knowledge	Knowledge of literal and contextual meanings	Distinguishing meanings of issue	Accurate interpretation
Word-formation knowledge	Understanding prefixes, suffixes and roots	Connecting educate—education—educational	Vocabulary expansion
Collocational knowledge	Knowledge of conventional word combinations	make a decision, conduct research	Natural and fluent communication
Stylistic knowledge	Awareness of formal, neutral and informal vocabulary	Choosing purchase vs. buy	Register-appropriate communication
Contextual knowledge	Understanding meaning in particular situations	Interpreting polysemous words	Context-sensitive communication
Phraseological knowledge	Knowledge of idioms and fixed expressions	Understanding break the ice	More natural interaction
Productive knowledge	Ability to actively use vocabulary	Using target words in speech	Expressive communication
Strategic lexical knowledge	Ability to overcome lexical gaps	Paraphrasing an unknown word	Communication continuity

The table demonstrates that vocabulary size alone cannot fully represent lexical competence. A learner may know a large number of lexical items but still experience difficulty in communication if contextual, collocational, or productive knowledge is insufficient.

Methodological principles. The proposed methodology is based on six principles.

Principle 1. Contextualization. New lexical material should be introduced in meaningful contexts rather than as isolated lists.

Principle 2. Functionalization. Students should learn vocabulary according to the communicative functions it performs.

Principle 3. Integration. Receptive and productive skills should be developed together.

Principle 4. Recycling. Previously introduced vocabulary should be repeatedly encountered in new contexts.

Principle 5. Interaction. Students should receive opportunities to negotiate meaning and use lexical items in communication.

Principle 6. Learner autonomy. Students should gradually develop strategies for independent vocabulary acquisition.

Results

The analysis indicates that contextualization should be regarded as a fundamental principle of lexicology instruction. When students encounter words within meaningful texts, they can infer meaning from surrounding information and observe how lexical units function in real discourse. For example, rather than presenting: issue = problem

a teacher can provide: “The government discussed the issue of unemployment.”

“I read the latest issue of the journal.”

“The company issued a public statement.”

Students can compare the examples and identify semantic differences. Such activities develop semantic flexibility and reduce dependence on one-to-one translation.

Teaching synonymy and lexical choice. Synonymy provides an effective opportunity to develop lexical precision.

Consider the following words: **important – significant – essential – crucial**

Although these words overlap semantically, their communicative functions and stylistic characteristics differ. Students can be asked to complete sentences and explain their choices. This approach encourages learners to recognize that vocabulary selection depends on context.

A productive task may require students to rewrite a paragraph using more formal vocabulary. For example:

“The problem is very important.” can be transformed into: “The issue is highly significant.”

This activity simultaneously develops vocabulary, stylistic awareness, and writing competence.

Teaching polysemy. Polysemy is another important component of lexical competence. Instead of teaching each meaning independently, teachers can encourage students to discover semantic relationships among different uses.

The word head, for example, can refer to:

- a part of the body;
- a leader;
- the top or front part of something.

Students can analyze contexts and identify the semantic extension underlying these meanings. This process develops cognitive flexibility and improves reading and listening comprehension.

Collocational teaching. The analysis indicates that collocation should receive greater attention in lexical instruction. Students frequently produce grammatically correct but lexically unnatural combinations because they have learned words individually. For example:

- do a decision instead of make a decision;
- powerful rain instead of heavy rain;
- make research instead of conduct research.

These errors demonstrate the difference between grammatical knowledge and lexical competence. Teachers can address this problem by presenting vocabulary in chunks. Instead of: research students should learn: conduct research carry out research research findings research methodology empirical research

This approach allows learners to develop lexical patterns rather than isolated vocabulary.

Communicative activities. Communicative activities provide opportunities to transfer lexical knowledge into actual language use.

The following activities are particularly effective:

Role-play. Students assume different roles and communicate according to a realistic situation.

Debate. Students use target vocabulary to formulate arguments and respond to opposing opinions.

Information-gap activity. Students possess different pieces of information and must communicate to complete the task.

Problem-solving. Students discuss a problem and negotiate a solution.

Interview. Students prepare questions and use target vocabulary during interaction.

Project work. Students research a topic and present their findings using newly acquired lexical resources.

These activities transform lexical learning from a receptive process into an interactive process.

Task-based teaching. Task-based learning provides particularly strong opportunities for lexical development because vocabulary becomes necessary for completing a meaningful task. For example, students learning business vocabulary can be given the task:

“Develop a marketing strategy for a new educational center.”

To complete the task, students naturally need vocabulary related to:

- target audience;
- marketing strategy;
- customer needs;
- competition;
- pricing;
- promotion;
- advertising;
- market research.

The lexical material is therefore learned through purposeful communication.

Corpus-based teaching. Corpus-based instruction can help students understand authentic lexical patterns. Students can investigate how frequently particular words occur with specific verbs, adjectives, or nouns. For example, a corpus-based investigation of the word strong may reveal combinations such as:

- strong argument;
- strong evidence;

- strong relationship;
- strong possibility;
- strong demand.

This method allows students to discover patterns rather than simply memorize them.

Interactive and collaborative learning. Collaborative learning can increase the amount of lexical interaction available to students. Pair and group activities create opportunities for learners to:

- explain vocabulary;
- ask for clarification;
- negotiate meaning;
- correct each other;
- paraphrase;
- provide examples;
- reuse lexical items.

Peer interaction can therefore reinforce both receptive and productive vocabulary.

Digital tools. Digital learning environments offer additional opportunities for lexical development.

Useful tools include:

- electronic dictionaries;
- digital flashcards;
- corpus platforms;
- online quizzes;
- vocabulary applications;
- learning management systems;
- multimedia resources;
- AI-supported language learning tools.

However, digital tools should not replace communication. Their primary function should be to provide additional exposure, practice, feedback, and opportunities for independent learning.

Table 2. Integrated methodological model for teaching lexicology

Stage	Teacher activity	Student activity	Expected result
1. Contextual exposure	Presents authentic text/dialogue	Encounters target vocabulary	Initial lexical awareness
2. Meaning discovery	Provides questions and contextual clues	Infers meanings	Improved contextual understanding
3. Lexical analysis	Explains semantic and structural relations	Analyzes words and combinations	Deeper lexical knowledge
4. Controlled practice	Provides exercises	Completes lexical tasks	Accurate lexical production
5. Communicative application	Organizes role plays, debates and tasks	Uses vocabulary interactively	Productive lexical competence
6. Feedback	Identifies errors and provides guidance	Reflects and corrects errors	Improved accuracy
7. Recycling	Reintroduces vocabulary in new contexts	Reuses lexical items	Long-term retention
8. Independent use	Assigns autonomous tasks	Uses vocabulary independently	Learner autonomy

The table presents a systematic, stage-based methodological model for teaching lexicology. The model views vocabulary learning not as a process of memorizing isolated words, but as a gradual process of contextual exposure, meaning discovery, lexical analysis, practice, communicative application, feedback, recycling, and independent use.

The final stage, independent use, is aimed at developing **learner autonomy**. At this stage, students are expected to use newly acquired vocabulary independently in written and spoken activities. Thus, the proposed model follows the principle of “**exposure → understanding → analysis → practice → communication → feedback → recycling → independent use**” and provides a systematic pathway for transforming lexical knowledge into practical communicative competence.

Discussion. The findings indicate that the development of communicative competence requires a broader understanding of lexical learning. Traditional vocabulary teaching often follows a relatively linear sequence: **word → translation → memorization → test**

Although this model can support short-term recognition, it does not sufficiently address the complexity of lexical competence. The proposed model changes the sequence to: **context → meaning → relationship → practice → communication → feedback → recycling → independent use**

This difference is methodologically important because it places communication at the center of lexical instruction. A key implication is that vocabulary should be taught as a network rather than a list. For example, the lexical item education can be connected with: **education → educational → educator → educate → higher education → educational institution → educational policy → quality of education**

This network-based approach increases the number of associations available to learners and facilitates lexical retrieval. Another important finding concerns the distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary. Students generally understand more words than they can actively use. Therefore, instruction should gradually move from recognition to production. For example: **recognize → understand → classify → combine → produce → communicate**.

Each stage represents a higher level of lexical processing. The discussion also confirms the importance of communicative pressure. Students often acquire vocabulary more effectively when they have a genuine communicative need to use it. If a task cannot be completed without particular lexical resources, learners are more likely to notice and retain those resources. Another important issue is error treatment. Not every lexical error should be corrected immediately. During fluency-oriented activities, excessive correction may interrupt communication. Teachers should therefore distinguish between accuracy-focused and fluency-focused stages. During controlled practice, precise correction is appropriate. During communicative tasks, delayed feedback may be more effective.

Pedagogical implications. The findings have several implications for teachers of foreign languages and lexicology. First, vocabulary should be presented through meaningful contexts. Word lists can be used as supplementary materials, but they should not constitute the primary instructional method. Second, teachers should systematically introduce collocations and lexical chunks. Third, semantic relationships should be exploited pedagogically. Synonyms, antonyms, polysemy, hyponymy, and word families can help students organize vocabulary into interconnected systems. Fourth, every new lexical unit should eventually be used productively. A vocabulary lesson should therefore include opportunities for speaking or writing. Fifth, lexical recycling should be systematically planned. Teachers should return to previously taught vocabulary in subsequent lessons. Sixth, assessment should measure not only vocabulary size but also contextual and productive use.

Recommended assessment framework. A communicative approach to lexical assessment can include five dimensions:

1. Lexical accuracy

Can the learner use the correct word?

2. Contextual appropriateness

Can the learner select the appropriate word for the situation?

3. Collocational accuracy

Can the learner combine words naturally?

4. Lexical flexibility

Can the learner use synonyms, paraphrases, and alternative expressions?

5. Communicative fluency

Can the learner retrieve and use vocabulary without excessive hesitation?

These criteria provide a more comprehensive assessment of lexical competence than conventional vocabulary tests.

Limitations and future research. The present study is primarily theoretical and methodological. Therefore, its conclusions should not be interpreted as statistical proof of the effectiveness of one particular teaching method. A future empirical study could test the proposed model through a controlled pedagogical experiment. For example, students could be divided into:

- an experimental group receiving integrated communicative lexicology instruction;
- a control group receiving conventional vocabulary instruction.

Pre-test and post-test measurements could then be conducted to evaluate:

- vocabulary size;
- productive vocabulary;
- collocational competence;
- speaking fluency;
- contextual lexical accuracy;
- writing performance.

Statistical methods such as the paired-samples t-test, independent-samples t-test, ANCOVA, or effect-size analysis could subsequently be used to determine whether observed differences are statistically and pedagogically meaningful. Future research could also investigate the contribution of artificial intelligence, corpus-based learning, mobile applications, and adaptive vocabulary platforms to lexical development.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that effective teaching of lexicology requires a shift from isolated vocabulary memorization toward contextualized, functional, communicative, and interactive lexical learning. Lexical competence represents a multidimensional construct that includes knowledge of form, meaning, word formation, collocations, stylistic variation, contextual appropriateness, phraseological units, and productive language use. Consequently, the number of words memorized by a learner cannot be regarded as the only indicator of lexical development.

The analysis confirms that contextual, communicative, cognitive, task-based, corpus-based, and collaborative approaches can complement one another in developing students' communicative competence. The integrated model proposed in this study consists of eight stages:

contextual exposure → meaning discovery → lexical analysis → controlled practice → communicative application → feedback → recycling → independent use.

This sequence provides a methodological bridge between theoretical lexicological knowledge and practical communication. The major pedagogical implication is that students should not merely be asked to remember what words mean. They should be encouraged to understand how words behave, what words they combine with, in which contexts they are appropriate, what stylistic meanings they carry, and how they can be used to achieve specific communicative purposes.

Thus, lexicology should be regarded as an essential functional component of communicative language teaching. Its effective integration into classroom practice can contribute to greater lexical accuracy, fluency, flexibility, contextual awareness, and learner autonomy.

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