

LEXICAL AND DISCOURSE-BASED APPROACHES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi implementasi dan kontribusi pedagogis dari Pendekatan Leksikal dan Pendekatan Berbasis Wacana dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris (ELT). Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, artikel ini mensintesis data dari jurnal akademik, buku teks metodologi pengajaran bahasa, dan laporan observasi kelas melalui tinjauan pustaka sistematis dan analisis dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Pendekatan Leksikal yang dikemukakan Lewis (1993, 1997) secara signifikan meningkatkan kefasihan berbicara dan kepercayaan diri komunikatif peserta didik melalui internalisasi kelompok leksikal, kolokasi, dan urutan formulaik. Sebaliknya, Pendekatan Berbasis Wacana mempertajam kesadaran kontekstual, kompetensi pragmatik, dan keterampilan organisasi teks tingkat makro dengan memaparkan peserta didik pada wacana autentik dan analisis genre. Meskipun kedua pendekatan menghadirkan tantangan pedagogis termasuk tuntutan hafalan yang tinggi dan beban kognitif bagi pembelajar pemula keduanya berfungsi sebagai kerangka kerja yang saling memperkuat. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi yang disengaja antara unit leksikal dan navigasi wacana tingkat makro menciptakan ekosistem pedagogis yang seimbang untuk memaksimalkan kompetensi komunikatif nyata peserta didik.

Kata kunci: Pendekatan Leksikal, Pendekatan Berbasis Wacana, Kompetensi Komunikatif, Unit Leksikal Tetap, Materi Autentik.

Abstract

This study examines the use and teaching benefits of the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach in English language teaching (ELT). Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study combines data from peer-reviewed academic journals, language teaching books, and classroom observation reports through a careful literature review and document analysis. The findings show that the Lexical Approach, as introduced by Lewis (1993, 1997), significantly improves learners' speaking fluency and confidence through the internalization of ready-made word combinations, collocations, and set phrases. On the other hand, the Discourse-Based Approach enhances learners' awareness of context, practical skills, and overall text organization by exposing them to real language use and genre analysis. While both approaches have their teaching challenges, such as high memorization demands and cognitive overload for beginners, they can support each other. The study concludes that combining lexical elements with overall discourse strategies creates a balanced teaching environment. This approach maximizes learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations, preparing them for meaningful interactions in various social and academic settings. Keywords: Lexical Approach; Discourse-Based Approach; Communicative Competence; Lexical Chunks; Authentic Materials; English Language Teaching

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, English Language Teaching (ELT) has experienced substantial theoretical and pedagogical transformations. Contemporary language education has progressively moved away from traditional instructional models that prioritize

History:

Received : 30 May 2026

Revised : 1 June 2026

Accepted : 9 June 2026

Published : 12 June 2026

Publisher: Horizon Edukasi Prima Indonesia

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grammatical accuracy and isolated language forms toward approaches that emphasize meaningful communication and authentic language use. Current perspectives in language pedagogy recognize that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for successful communication; learners must also develop the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in diverse social and contextual settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2021). Consequently, modern ELT increasingly promotes communicative, contextualized, and learner-centered approaches that reflect the realities of language use beyond the classroom.

Within this evolving paradigm, the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach have emerged as influential frameworks for enhancing learners' communicative competence. The Lexical Approach emphasizes that language proficiency is largely built upon the acquisition and retrieval of lexical patterns, collocations, formulaic expressions, and lexical chunks rather than solely through the mastery of grammatical structures. Recent studies have demonstrated that the systematic teaching of lexical chunks contributes significantly to learners' fluency, vocabulary development, and speaking proficiency because these prefabricated units facilitate faster language processing and more natural language production (Albelihi, 2022; Deissl-O'Meara & Tinkel, 2021; Sewbihon-Getie, 2021). Furthermore, lexical competence has been identified as a critical component of communicative competence, particularly in helping learners achieve greater accuracy and fluency in authentic communicative situations.

At the same time, the Discourse-Based Approach extends language instruction beyond individual words and sentences by focusing on how language functions within broader communicative contexts. This approach views language as a socially situated phenomenon and emphasizes learners' ability to construct coherent texts, interpret communicative intentions, and participate effectively in various discourse communities. Recent scholarship highlights the importance of discourse competence in enabling learners to understand genre conventions, maintain textual cohesion, and adapt language according to contextual demands (López Ferrero et al., 2022; Mamadaliyev, 2022). Moreover, discourse-oriented instruction utilizing authentic materials and genre-based activities has been shown to improve learners' communicative effectiveness and contextual awareness in both spoken and written communication.

The growing recognition of both approaches has generated increasing interest in their potential complementarity. While the Lexical Approach primarily addresses micro-level language development through the acquisition of lexical chunks and collocations, the Discourse-Based Approach focuses on macro-level communicative processes involving coherence, genre awareness, and contextual interpretation. Together, these approaches address multiple dimensions of communicative competence, including linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. Contemporary studies suggest that learners benefit most when vocabulary knowledge is developed within meaningful discourse contexts rather than through isolated lexical instruction (Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Jin, 2023). This integrated perspective reflects current understandings of language learning as a dynamic process involving both linguistic resources and contextualized language use.

Despite growing scholarly interest in each approach individually, relatively limited research has explored how the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach can be systematically integrated within ELT classrooms, particularly in secondary and higher education settings where communicative demands are increasingly complex. Much of the existing literature focuses on the effectiveness of individual approaches without examining how their combined implementation may support holistic language development. This gap is particularly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners often require both lexical fluency and discourse competence to participate successfully in academic and real-world communication.

Therefore, this article seeks to address this gap by synthesizing contemporary theoretical and empirical perspectives on the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) examine the theoretical foundations of both approaches within contemporary ELT methodology; (2) analyze their pedagogical applications and contributions to language learning outcomes; and (3) develop a rationale for integrating both approaches as complementary strategies for enhancing learners' communicative competence. Through this analysis, the study contributes to ongoing discussions concerning effective language pedagogy and offers practical implications for teachers, curriculum developers, and language education researchers seeking to promote more comprehensive and communicatively oriented English instruction.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in systematic literature review methodology. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for studies that seek to provide a comprehensive summary and interpretation of existing scholarship on a particular phenomenon, rather than generating primary empirical data (Patton, 2020; Tisdell et al., 2025). The adoption of this design reflects the study's aim to synthesize, analyze, and critically evaluate the existing theoretical and empirical literature on the Lexical and Discourse-Based Approaches, thereby producing an integrative account of their pedagogical contributions and practical implementations.

Data Sources

The study draws on a purposefully selected corpus of primary and secondary sources, including: (1) peer-reviewed academic journals in the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and language pedagogy; (2) foundational and contemporary textbooks in ELT methodology; (3) classroom-based observational reports and case studies documenting the implementation of lexical and discourse-focused instruction; and (4) seminal theoretical works in linguistics and communicative language teaching. Sources were selected on the basis of their scholarly rigor, relevance to the research objectives, and representativeness across different theoretical traditions and geographical contexts.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a systematic three-stage process. In the first stage, a comprehensive literature search was conducted using academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ERIC, employing search terms such as "Lexical Approach ELT," "Discourse-Based Approach," "communicative competence," and "lexical chunks." In the second stage, retrieved sources were subjected to a relevance screening process, resulting in the selection of sources directly pertinent to the research objectives. In the third stage, relevant data were extracted from the selected sources using a structured thematic coding framework designed to capture theoretical positions, pedagogical implications, and empirical findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a four-phase thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The first phase involved familiarization with the data through repeated, close reading of selected sources. The second phase entailed the systematic identification of recurring themes and patterns across the literature. The third phase involved the categorization and comparison of identified themes, distinguishing between theoretical claims and empirical evidence, and examining points of convergence and divergence between the two approaches. The fourth phase produced an integrated interpretive account, translating analytical findings into pedagogically meaningful conclusions and practical recommendations for ELT practitioners.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *The Lexical Approach: Pedagogical Implementation and Learning Outcomes*

A growing body of contemporary research continues to demonstrate the substantial contribution of lexical-oriented instruction to the development of learners' communicative competence. Recent empirical investigations have consistently reported that explicit exposure to lexical chunks, collocations, formulaic expressions, and multiword units facilitates significant gains in speaking fluency, vocabulary depth, communicative confidence, and overall language performance (Albelihi, 2022; Sewbihon-Getie, 2021; Xue, 2021; Deissl-O'Meara & Tinkel, 2021). From a psycholinguistic perspective, language users process a considerable proportion of spoken and written discourse through prefabricated lexical sequences rather than by generating utterances through grammatical construction alone. Consequently, the acquisition of lexical chunks enables learners to retrieve language more efficiently, reducing cognitive processing demands during real-time communication (Wood, 2020).

The literature highlights several major benefits associated with lexical-based instruction. First, learners demonstrate increased communicative confidence because formulaic language reduces the cognitive burden involved in speech production. As learners become familiar with frequently occurring lexical patterns, they can focus more effectively on meaning negotiation and interactional goals rather than on constructing language word by word (Albelihi, 2022). Second, lexical instruction promotes more natural and idiomatic language use, enabling learners to employ collocationally appropriate expressions that

resemble authentic native-speaker discourse (Vartanova et al., 2020). Third, mastery of lexical chunks accelerates speech processing and enhances interactional fluency, allowing learners to respond more spontaneously in communicative situations (Sewbihon-Getie, 2021).

In classroom practice, the Lexical Approach is implemented through diverse pedagogical techniques designed to foster lexical awareness and contextualized vocabulary acquisition. Corpus-informed activities, concordance analysis, lexical notebooks, phrase-matching exercises, collocation grids, and task-based communicative activities provide learners with repeated exposure to target lexical patterns in authentic contexts (Xue, 2021). Furthermore, digital learning environments have expanded opportunities for lexical instruction through data-driven learning platforms, corpus tools, and learning management systems that facilitate learner autonomy and repeated lexical encounters (Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Deissl-O'Meara & Tinkel, 2021).

Despite these advantages, several challenges remain. The extensive quantity of lexical items that learners must acquire often creates substantial memory demands, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Research indicates that without systematic recycling, retrieval practice, and contextual reinforcement, newly acquired lexical patterns may not be retained effectively over time (Albelihi, 2022). Additionally, excessive emphasis on formulaic language without adequate attention to grammatical flexibility may restrict learners' ability to manipulate language creatively in unfamiliar communicative contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2021). Therefore, lexical instruction requires careful pedagogical balance between lexical fluency and structural competence.

3.2 The Discourse-Based Approach: Classroom Applications and Educational Outcomes

Parallel to developments in lexical pedagogy, discourse-oriented approaches have gained increasing prominence in contemporary English language teaching. Rather than focusing exclusively on sentence-level accuracy, discourse-based instruction emphasizes learners' ability to interpret, construct, and negotiate meaning across extended texts and authentic communicative events. Recent studies suggest that discourse competence plays a fundamental role in enabling learners to participate effectively in academic, professional, and social communication (López Ferrero et al., 2022; Mamadaliyev, 2022).

Research examining discourse-based pedagogy has identified significant improvements in learners' genre awareness, pragmatic competence, contextual sensitivity, and communicative effectiveness. Through exposure to authentic discourse, learners develop a deeper understanding of how language choices are shaped by audience expectations, communicative purposes, and sociocultural contexts (Paltridge, 2021). Furthermore, genre-based instruction enables learners to recognize and apply organizational structures characteristic of specific text types, thereby improving both comprehension and production skills (Rahmadhani et al., 2022).

The educational benefits of discourse-based instruction extend across multiple dimensions of communicative competence. First, learners develop enhanced abilities to infer implicit meanings, interpret communicative intentions, and understand contextual nuances within spoken and written discourse (Mamadaliyev, 2022). Second, they acquire greater awareness of pragmatic features such as politeness strategies, discourse markers, interactional norms, and conversational management techniques (Jin, 2023). Third, discourse-oriented instruction supports learners in mastering genre conventions and rhetorical structures that are essential for successful participation in academic and professional communities (López Ferrero et al., 2022).

Classroom implementation typically involves authentic materials, discourse analysis tasks, genre-based instruction, role-play activities, simulations, project-based learning, and collaborative text construction. Such activities expose learners to real-world language use while simultaneously developing analytical and productive language skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2021). Moreover, advances in digital technology have enabled discourse-based learning through multimodal resources, online communication platforms, and social media-integrated learning environments that provide authentic opportunities for discourse engagement (Jin, 2023; Qassrawi et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, discourse-based instruction also presents several pedagogical challenges. Authentic discourse frequently contains complex linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural features that may overwhelm learners with limited proficiency levels. The analysis of discourse requires learners to process multiple layers of meaning simultaneously, including lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and contextual dimensions. Consequently, effective implementation demands careful scaffolding and substantial teacher expertise in selecting and adapting authentic materials appropriate to learners' developmental needs (Paltridge, 2021).

3.3 Integrating the Lexical and Discourse-Based Approaches: Toward a Holistic Model of Communicative Competence

A synthesis of contemporary literature suggests that the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach should be viewed as complementary rather than competing pedagogical frameworks. Each approach addresses distinct yet interconnected dimensions of communicative competence. While lexical instruction primarily develops learners' fluency, vocabulary repertoire, and formulaic language knowledge, discourse-based instruction enhances contextual awareness, pragmatic competence, and genre-specific communication skills. Together, these dimensions contribute to a more comprehensive model of language proficiency capable of meeting the communicative demands of contemporary global contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2021).

Recent scholarship increasingly supports integrated pedagogical models that combine lexical development with discourse-oriented learning experiences. Studies indicate that learners acquire lexical knowledge more effectively when vocabulary is presented within meaningful discourse contexts rather than in isolation (Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Jin, 2023). Similarly, discourse competence becomes more attainable when learners possess sufficient lexical resources to express meanings appropriately across various communicative situations. Consequently, the integration of both approaches creates a mutually reinforcing learning environment in which lexical knowledge supports discourse production, while discourse contexts facilitate meaningful lexical acquisition.

In practical terms, integrated instruction may begin with the exploration of lexical chunks and collocations characteristic of a particular genre, followed by discourse analysis activities that examine how these lexical resources contribute to textual organization and communicative purpose. Learners can subsequently engage in guided production tasks requiring the application of target lexical patterns within authentic discourse contexts. Such pedagogical sequencing allows learners to develop fluency, accuracy, contextual appropriateness, and communicative effectiveness simultaneously.

Ultimately, the integration of lexical and discourse-oriented pedagogies provides a balanced framework for language teaching that addresses both micro-level linguistic competence and macro-level communicative performance. By combining lexical fluency with discourse awareness, educators can better prepare learners to function as effective communicators in academic, professional, and intercultural settings. This integrated

perspective aligns with contemporary understandings of communicative competence as a multidimensional construct encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and intercultural dimensions of language use.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that both the Lexical Approach and the Discourse-Based Approach constitute valuable pedagogical frameworks in contemporary English language teaching. The Lexical Approach emphasizes the acquisition of vocabulary, collocations, and lexical phrases as essential building blocks of communication, enabling learners to develop greater fluency and produce language more naturally. In contrast, the Discourse-Based Approach focuses on the use of language within authentic social and communicative contexts, fostering learners' ability to interpret meaning, maintain coherence, and apply appropriate pragmatic strategies in various situations. The analysis suggests that each approach contributes to different dimensions of communicative competence, with the Lexical Approach strengthening linguistic fluency and lexical knowledge, while the Discourse-Based Approach enhances contextual understanding, discourse awareness, and communicative effectiveness. Consequently, integrating these two approaches offers a comprehensive and balanced framework for English language instruction, as learners are provided with opportunities to simultaneously expand their lexical repertoire and develop discourse competence in meaningful communicative contexts.

Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications can be proposed. English language teachers are encouraged to incorporate both lexical and discourse-oriented activities into classroom instruction to promote holistic language development. The use of authentic materials, including conversations, articles, videos, podcasts, and other real-world texts, should be regularly integrated into teaching practices to expose learners to natural language use and contextualized communication. Furthermore, students should be given ample opportunities to practice lexical chunks and formulaic expressions within meaningful communicative situations rather than learning vocabulary in isolation. Finally, teacher education and professional development programs should place greater emphasis on discourse analysis, lexical pedagogy, and the effective integration of these approaches to equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to foster communicative competence in diverse language learning contexts.

5. ACKNOWLEDGE

The authors express sincere gratitude to the academic community of the Magister of English Language Education Program at Universitas PGRI Silampari Palembang for the intellectual environment and scholarly support that contributed to the development of this research.

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