



DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2020-0019

## **The perceptions of intermediate EFL learners to the lexical instructional intervention**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the perceptions of high school EFL learners to the lexical instructional approach intervention in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar. Besides, an attempt was made to explore what difficulties the participants encountered during the experimentation. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using a one-sample t-test, and the results showed that the estimated sample perception mean score was significantly higher than the hypothesized population perception mean score. This implies that EFL learners had positive perceptions towards the lexical instructional approach in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar. The data collected through interviews were analyzed qualitatively and the findings showed that students enjoyed and were interested in learning vocabulary and grammar through the lexical instructional approach. Students realized the importance of lexical chunks in learning vocabulary and grammar. In this regard, the interview results corroborated the results obtained from the questionnaire. Students encountered difficulties like lack of lexical awareness, lack of clear and adequate instructions on some activities, the lack of deliberate attention from some students during discussions, the lack of making some activities more interactive and engaging, and some classroom managerial problems. Finally, it was recommended that EFL teachers at high school should design their lexical approach-based activities systematically by considering their students' interests, feelings, perceptions, levels, norms, cultures, and psychological setups.

**Keywords:** lexical instructional approach intervention; perceptions; vocabulary components; grammar components; difficulties encountered

### **1 Introduction**

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in the English language has created a huge demand for teaching this language around the world. Millions of people today take different opportunities such as formal instruction, study abroad, media, etc. to improve their command of the English language. From these

opportunities, the first one is highly required to target an enormous ultimatum for quality language teaching and language teaching materials (Richards, 2006). Concerning formal instruction, there are different teaching approaches and methods which have been used to teach the English language in different contexts and settings. For instance, from the grammar-translation method to the communicative approach, there had been situations in which many English language teaching methods and approaches have been used in EFL/ESL classrooms. The lexical approach is one of the communicative approaches that is being practiced these days.

There have been theoretical reasons that clearly show how the lexical approach becomes real in ELT world. Firstly, the development of corpus linguistics theory, for instance, different corpus-based pieces of evidence began to state the major role of lexis in languages. These computer-based research findings also began to show how to treat lexis and grammar together in ESL/EFL contexts. Some innovative developments took place in lexicography which involved, as Carter (2001, p. 43) puts it, “extensive corpora of spoken and written language and the creation of sophisticated computer-based access tools for such corpora” in the late 1980s and 1990s. Examples of such developments are the Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD) project at the University of Birmingham, UK, in the late 1980s which influenced all other subsequent researches in EFL lexicography, Cambridge International Corpus, British National Corpus, etc. There are rich examples of authentic, natural language use with which corpora provide us evidence of what native and non-native speakers of English use the language. Besides this, these corpora show an effectual description of the English language to be the basis of the lexical syllabus. The empirical data offered by these corpora studies enabled researchers to study the behaviour of words and expressions which in turn led them to question the traditional notions about the primacy of structure in language and language pedagogy.

Secondly, there is a good psycholinguistic basis for believing that the mind stores, retains, and processes lexical chunks as individual wholes; there is less demand on cognitive capacity when lexical chunks are processed (Schmitt & McCarthy, 2000; Nation, 2001; Nation, 2005; Junying & Xuefei, 2007; Lewis, 2008; Bircan, 2010; Tremblay et al., 2011). These psycholinguistic assumptions, stating on the role of chunks to process information with fewer efforts, were examined through practical interventions. Thus, based on the theories of corpus linguistics and psycholinguistics, the notion of the lexical approach became a groundbreaking issue worldwide. Then, the dominance of structure and/or the relegation of words was highly opposed by Lewis (1993) who put forward his lexical approach--focusing on developing learners' lexical proficiency as an alternative to grammar-based approaches that focus on structures. Briefly speaking, the lexical approach, in second language acquisition, is an approach that concentrates on the role of lexis

in English language learning rather than a focus on structure (Lewis, 1993; Barcroft, 2004). Lexical approach as an approach considers the use of chunking and collocations at the center of language teaching; it assumes that students learn bundles of words and collocations to improve their language proficiencies (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Scrivener (2011) points out that this approach also emphasizes that learners need to have more exposure and experimentation with the language rather than following the more traditional methodology of “Present-Practice-Produce paradigm” (p. 32). This does mean that with the combination of chunking, exposure, and experimentation students can improve their target language through lexical items, for example looking at groups of words instead of individual word meaning (Scrivener, 2011).

What is more, the Lexical Approach introduced a new paradigm for second language education, claiming that language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar (Lewis 1993). More clearly, grammaticalized lexis refers to a word grammar approach in which the learner moves out from a word to discover its collocations and dominant grammatical patterns. For example, take this utterance: My mother holds very strong views on the subject of marriage. From this sentence target language learners notice that we can ‘hold a view’ that ‘a view can be strong’ and the word view is followed by the preposition ‘on’. This leaves the learner with a chunk of a language: to hold very strong views on (something). Grammaticalized lexis which is sometimes referred as Word grammar approach tends to dissolve the strict dichotomy that we draw between grammar and vocabulary. Whereas, lexicalized grammar refers to the traditional ‘slot and filler’ approach in which prominent structures such as the tenses are highlighted. For example, in a typical lesson on the present perfect tense, the target language is presented with: I have been to ..., but I haven’t been to ...yet. Here, the learner is encouraged to complete this frame with suitable vocabulary items. For example, I have been to America, but I haven’t been to Italy yet. Thus, the lexicalized grammar which is sometimes referred to as the slot and filler approach enables the target language learner to produce huge amounts of grammatically well-formed language.

Generally, as Lewis (1993, 2008) indicates, Lexical Approach emphasizes grammaticalizing language from words to sentences which is a reaction to the traditional grammar-based approach (structural syllabus). From a lexical theory point of view, in our contexts, we believe that the current grade nine EFL textbook and the methodology lack the notion of grammaticalizing lexis (Addisu, 2020). According to the findings he obtained, the Ethiopian grade nine EFL textbook and the syllabus were devoid of the features of lexically-based teaching and learning. The no attention paid from the part of material developers, syllabus designers, educators, etc. for the lexical chunks including collocations, lexical grammar, colligations, or in general word grammar shows how the English language is

viewed and taught unnaturally in Ethiopian contexts, as the findings of the preliminary study demonstrate. Arising from this gap, we assert that it needs to prepare lexically-based teaching material and implement it so that to examine the perceptions of EFL learners towards the lexical instructional intervention. Thus, this study intends to study the perceptions of learners towards the lexical instructional intervention in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar and the difficulties that learners would probably encounter during the intervention. In Ethiopia, we believe that studies on perceptions of learners to the lexical approach in relation to teaching language skills need to be accustomed because this instructional approach is a novel way of teaching language. In line with this, provided that the notion of lexical chunks has been established in theories of language and second language acquisition, empirical research into the most effective ways of teaching formulaic sequences/chunks remains limited (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). Studying the perceptions of EFL learners towards the lexical instructional approach is not paid due attention as well. This means, although lexical chunks are recognized in second and foreign language contexts, studies were not carried out on the roles of the lexical chunks and their teaching could contribute to students' English language learning and what perceptions learners would have towards the instruction in the Ethiopian contexts. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to bring a new paradigm shift in terms of viewing and teaching language in general and vocabulary and grammar in particular.

The paradigm shift might be a remedial action to EFL learners' problems as regards lexis and grammar. In this regard, therefore, different scholars state that grammar and vocabulary are not emphasized in EFL/ESL classrooms, particularly in unison as per the theory postulates. For instance, Nunan (1989) reveals "the status of grammar in the curriculum was rather uncertain for some time after the rise of CLT" (p.13). Again, Lewis (1993) describes, "There have been changing trends - from the grammar-translation to direct method to the communicative approach - but none of these has emphasized the importance of learners' lexical competence over structural grammatical competence" (p. 115). Lewis reveals that functions without lexis are no better than structures without lexis. Harmer (2001) shows "Activities in CLT typically involve students in real communications, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than the achievement of the communicative task they are performing" (p.85). Likewise, Schmitt (2000) explains that the communicative approach focuses on message and fluency rather than grammatical accuracy; it also gives little guidance about how to handle vocabulary.

Therefore, we argue that the way grammar and vocabulary are treated is not enough in communicative approaches. For instance, Burn (2009) indicates that CLT downplays the role of grammar in language learning-it is dangerous to teach grammar. Norris and Ortega (2000) also indicate that a focus on meaning alone is

not sufficient; instruction that includes a focus on form is required too. In communicative approach, vocabulary and grammar are not yet treated in the required manner. In relation to this, Meara (1980), for example, called vocabulary a neglected aspect of second and foreign language (L2/FL) learning. Yet in recent research in various types of ESL classes, Folse (2010) concluded that vocabulary is indeed still neglected by many teachers, as the amount of “explicit vocabulary focus in a week of classes he observed was surprisingly low” (p. 139). The advocates of the lexical approach state that the central basis of language is lexis, so there needs to raise in the awareness of learners concerning the importance of lexical chunks; nevertheless, in the case of Ethiopian EFL classroom contexts, this is not the reality (Addisu, 2020). Because of this, we claim that Ethiopian EFL learners have lexical and grammatical problems in their receptive and productive skills. This might have come from the distorted perceptions of learners to the instruction. Even though not from lexical approach perspective, previous local studies on vocabulary (e.g. Minda, 2003; Hailu, 2007; Ismael, 2007; Gebreegizabiher, 2016) and grammar (e.g. Kidist, 2007; Abebe, 2013; Bayissa, 2013; Yemeserach, 2015) reported that EFL learners do have the lexical and grammatical problems.

However, internationally, there are research works that were conducted on the impact of lexical approach/lexical chunk instruction on the learners’ vocabulary and grammar knowledge. For instance, to mention some of them, Seyedrezaei and Ghezelseflou (2015) found out that collocational instruction had significant effects on learners’ vocabulary learning and retention. Furthermore, Reza and Ashouri (2016) reported that teaching vocabulary through collocations could improve learners’ vocabulary learning. Again, Xu et al (2012) and Rahimi and Momeni (2012) reported that using lexical approach and collocations (respectively) have positive effects on learners’ English language proficiency in general. Therefore, what makes the current study different from the international studies is that it intends to examine the perceptions of EFL learners to the lexical instructional approach intervention regarding learning vocabulary and grammar components and the difficulties that learners probably encounter during the intervention that would be conducted at Fasilo General Secondary and Higher Education Preparatory School found in Bahir Dar City, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Likewise, this research work is dissimilar from local studies on its perspective (i.e. from lexical approach outlook). To the best of our knowledge, there is no research work conducted on this area in Ethiopia, and it is the first reason why we became motivated to investigate our study on it.

The second reason that inspired us to do our work in this area is because of different research findings that previous international researchers found so that the issue is still unsettled. For instance, Rahimi et al (2012) conducted their experimental study on the impact of lexically-based language teaching on Iranian

high school students' achievement in learning English as a foreign language, and they found that there is a significant difference between the two groups' achievement in favour of the experimental group in learning vocabulary and reading but not in grammar. Besides this, Yu (2013) investigated from memorized chunks to rule formation: a study of adult Chinese learners of English, and found out that the participants in the memorization groups had difficulty in inducing rules successfully based on the initial memorization of unanalyzed chunks in contrast to their counterparts in the instruction group. On the other hand, Hyun-Jeong (2013) implemented the lexical approach to teach grammar for Korean students, and the findings show that there is a positive effect of the Lexical Approach on Korean L2 learners' grammar learning. The third reason that pushed us to focus on this topic is the scholarly suggestions which come from known vocabulary expert, Nation. He added that: "From a vocabulary learning point of view, we need research into collocation to tell us what the high-frequency collocations are, to tell us what the unpredictable collocations of high-frequency words are, to tell us what the common patterns of collocations are where some examples of that pattern would need special attention but where others could be predicted based on this previous attention, and to provide dictionaries or information for dictionaries that help learners deal with low-frequency collocations" (Nation, 2001, p. 529).

Thus, even if the Lexical Approach plays a part in enhancing target language learners' vocabulary and grammar acquisition, it is not known and investigated yet in Ethiopia. Then, we understand that conducting a study on the perceptions of learners to the lexical instructions in the contexts of teaching and learning the lexical and grammatical components of the English language, like the case of the current research work, may alleviate the problems that EFL learners have. In this regard, theorists in CLT advocated that using lexical items as a starting point and then "showing how they need to be grammatically modified to be communicatively effective" is vital (Widdowson, 1989, p. 95). The lexical approach is the middle ground for what the communicative approach lacks or gives less value for vocabulary and grammar (Lewis, 2008). Thus, the present research work intends to examine how the lexical instructional approach intervention affects the perceptions of EFL learners towards learning the vocabulary and grammar components.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 General overview of the lexical approach**

During the 1990s there was an increased interest in vocabulary teaching and learning. Vocabulary teaching aspects like meanings uses, and forms (spoken and written) were considered (Nation, 1990, 2001). At the same time, the advent of corpus linguistics and the COBUILD project of John Sinclair (1987) gave new

impetus to theories on language acquisition. The studies then put forward a theory that is almost contrary to Chomskyan theory of language which holds the view that native speakers have a capacity of creating and interpreting unique sentences which they have never heard or produced previously. Moreover, Chomskyan theory believes ... "linguistic competence consists solely in the ability to deploy an innate rule-governed sentence-making capacity" (Thornbury, 1998, p. 8).

However, with the advent of corpus-based analyses, many linguists departed from the Chomskyan view to uphold the new theory of language i.e. lexically-based instruction. According to Lewis (1993), the lexical instructional approach focuses on developing learner's proficiency with lexis, or word and word combinations. The Lexical Approach as a way of teaching language is devised by Lewis who views that language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks. His idea is that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases in such unanalysed 'wholes' – chunks (any pairs or groups of words which are commonly found together or in close proximity). If the lexical approach is all about lexical chunks and/ or collocations, it is better to elaborate on the meanings of such concepts. Many attempts have been made to define lexical chunks. A chunk is "...a unit of memory organisation, formed by bringing together a set of already formed chunks in memory and welding them together into a larger unit" (Newall, 1990, p. 124-125). Becker (1975) defines lexical chunks as a particular multiword phenomenon and presented in the form of formulaic fixed and semi-fixed chunks.

Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) describe them as chunks of the language of varying length and each chunk has a special discourse function. Biber et al (1999) define them as "recurrent expressions regardless of their idiomaticity and regardless of their structural status" (p. 990). Yet again, Wray (2000, p. 465) added a mental explanation to the definition saying that: "a lexical chunk is a sequence of prefabricated words that are stored and retrieved as a whole from memory at the time of use." It is possible to put and generalize all these definitions as lexical chunks are a group of word combinations that frequently occur in a language with special meaning and function. As to Lewis, language is first about meaning, and meaning is primarily connected with the lexis. His term – lexical chunk – covers all the other terms connected with parts of language: words, collocations, fixed expressions, prefabricated phrases, multi-word phrases. Lewis's theory follows from the language research that was based on the large computer-based corpora (collections of natural written and spoken text).

## **2.2 Lexical approach to teaching vocabulary and grammar**

Lewis (1993) states in his book that the lexical approach aims to cultivate target language learners' communicative competence, the same as the communicative approach. Hence, the advocates of the lexical approach argue that



a large proportion of language is composed of meaningful lexical phrases that, when combined, produce coherent and idiomatic texts (Pawley & Syder, 1983). As to them, the lexical approach focuses on developing learners' proficiency through lexical chunks. Consequently, EFL/ESL teachers should concentrate on fixed or semi-fixed expressions that occur frequently in the language. From a lexical approach perspective, learning and teaching lexical chunks can cultivate the sense of language and improve language skills. Lexical chunks play central roles in language acquisition and teaching; lexical chunk instruction is beneficial to raise the students' vocabulary learning efficiency and strengthening their grammatical knowledge (Lewis, 2008).

What is more, lexical chunk teaching has always been one focus of this study, as Lewis (1993) put forward the so-called "lexical approach" centered on vocabulary, he argues that the emphasis should be put on such multi-word chunks as collocation, fixed expressions, and sentence builders, etc. and advocating the direct teaching of prefabricated lexical chunks in the classroom. Yazdandoost et al (2014) reveal that knowledge of collocation, for instance, can be a predictor for all four language skills; it is proved to be a prerequisite for successful language learning. Tenets of the lexical approach indicate that lexical chunks/lexical items play central roles in the teaching of vocabulary and grammar. Gries (2008 cited in Ziafar, 2015) maintains that corpus linguistics, from which the lexical approach has been based, refutes the separation of syntax and lexis, i.e. syntactic and lexical development are not as independent from each other; they are connectively treated.

### **2.3 The interconnectedness of vocabulary and grammar**

Different studies show the unions between vocabulary and grammar since they are inseparable by their nature. There are arguments for this. For example, corpus studies, based on large collections of authentic text from a range of different sources, have provided massive evidence for the interdependence of lexis and grammar (or vocabulary and syntax). These studies have demonstrated that two areas that have traditionally been kept apart, both in language pedagogy and in linguistic theory, are inseparable. The study of large-scale language corpora, for example for the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English by Biber et al. (1999), has revealed that syntax and the lexicon should not be regarded as independent components. Empirical investigations of large amounts of texts have shown that particular structures of English grammar tend to co-occur with restricted lexical classes because both the structures and the lexical classes serve the same underlying "communicative tasks or functions" (Biber et al., 1999, p. 13). As an example illustrating their point, they show that say and other verbs from the same semantic domain (such as declare, recall, note, or warn) introducing reported speech, in particular, occur with that clauses.



Furthermore, as far as linguistic theory is concerned, “there are two opposing views concerning the relationship between syntax and the lexicon” (Rome & Schulze, 2009, P. 70). The first group, formal, post-structuralist approaches, generative grammar in particular (of Chomskyan tradition), regard the vocabulary and grammar as different and separate components of the language faculty. Even, in the standard version of generative grammar (i.e. Minimalism), grammar and lexicon are strictly distinguished: grammar consists of principles and rules that account for the systematic or general properties of language, whereas the lexicon contains all idiosyncratic information, i.e. information that cannot be derived from general rules (Chomsky, 1995, 2000).

The second group, cognitive linguists working in the various offshoots of construction grammar propose a syntax-lexicon continuum. This group argues that words and complex constructions are both combinations of form and meaning and differ only in internal symbolic complexity. In this concern, Construction-based theories have abandoned the categorical division between lexicon and grammar (Langacker, 1987a; Goldberg, 1995). Since both words and grammatical constructions are considered symbolic units (i.e. form-function pairings) they are uniformly represented in this approach. Specifically, grammar is seen as a continuum ranging from isolated words to complex grammatical assemblies (Langacker, 1987a). Idiomatic expressions are part of the grammar-lexicon continuum; in fact, idioms (one of the fixed expressions in the lexical approach) have played a key role in the development of this conception of grammar (Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor, 1988). According to Halliday (1966), language is organized in terms of lexicogrammatical features, rather than independent lexis or grammar. This perspective emphasizes the idiomatic nature of language, especially the dependent relationship between vocabulary and the grammatical system. Vocabulary items are not always single items or simply ‘Content words’. They can involve multiword units, such as idioms, clichés, or fixed expressions that have both consistency of form and meaning (Cruse, 1984).

From the perspective of lexicographers, it is indicated that dictionaries do not only provide grammatical information at the level of individual entries in the form of part of speech specifications, but especially pedagogical dictionaries also include information on phrasal verbs, idioms (and other set phrases), and above all, collocations. Grammatical information is particularly relevant in English learners’ dictionaries. Thus, all the aforementioned ideas support the notion of Lewis who claims that the grammar/vocabulary dichotomy is invalid: much language consists of multi-word chunks. Depending on this view, we would generalize that it is better to teach both vocabulary and grammar in unison rather than as presented in traditional course books.

## 2.4 The needs to chunking

The concept of chunking has played a major theoretical role in cognitive psychology (Miller, 1956). This scholar introduced the concept of 'chunking' in his paper entitled "The magical number seven, plus or minus two". Chunking refers to a strategy for making more efficient use of short-term memory by breaking down large amounts of information into smaller chunks. Chase and Simon (1973 cited in Moeller et al, 2009) suggested that the capacity of short-term (working) memory is limited to seven items or chunks that are the formula  $7 \pm 2$ . Yet, chunking had been used to model a wide variety of memory phenomena (memory organization); however, in recent years, chunking has also been proposed as the basis for a model of human practice (Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981; Rosenbloom & Newell, 1987a).

Mainly, Newell and Rosenbloom (1981) changed this concept into a model of practice by describing how performance could be improved by the acquisition of chunks that represent patterns of objects in the task environment. Even though it is believed that short-term memory is limited to seven items only, the notion of vocabulary items or chunks varies. According to Moeller et al (2009), chunking can mean both the breaking down of large amounts of information as well as grouping small chunks into larger categories. The main reason for the need for chunking vocabulary items is that the ability to break large language chunks into smaller ones and to group small chunks into larger ones extends the process of retention of information and allows for greater compression of information in working memory (Kalivoda, 1981).

## 2.5. Major approaches for the chunking

There are three major approaches to help learners chunk known components of words and word combinations (Nation, 2001), including *chunking through fluency development*, *chunking through language-focused attention*, and *memorizing unanalyzed chunks*. To explain each briefly, the first and most important strategy is to help students develop the skills and knowledge that make it more efficient for them to chunk language items in larger units. This fluency development is likely to some degree skill specific so that learners would need to have fluency practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Schmidt (1992) presents a comprehensive survey of a wide range of theories which can be used to explain fluency development. The most accessible theory that describes the development of chunking through fluency development is McLaughlin's (1990) *restructuring theory*. The second major approach to help learners to chunk is through deliberate language-focused attention. This attention can involve practice in chunking text containing familiar items, and the deliberate teaching and learning of collocates of known items. This can include "the use of concordances, matching activities, and the development of collocation tables" (Nation, 2001 p. 542). The third one that Nation (2001) indicates is memorization of unanalysed

chunks which is an important learning strategy. This strategy can be applied to both regularly formed and irregularly formed chunks.

## **2.6 The relationships between an instructional approach and students' perceptions**

The concept of perception can be defined by different scholars in different ways. For instance, the Collins Essential English Dictionary (2006) describes perception as an insight or intuition and/or it is a way of viewing. According to Woolfolk (1995), perception can be defined as "an interpretation of sensory information" (p. 245). She elaborates that the word perception is defined as an opinion or belief which is held by people on how they view something; this means that people can have different perceptions based on their individual views. Perception is the process by which the sounds of language are heard, assimilated, and understood (Allotte, 2001). According to this expert, advanced research studies in cognitive neuroscience show that what our eyes see and what our brain interprets of that sight are entirely two different things. The Merriam-Webster Online Thesaurus (2009) defines the word perception as it is the ability to understand inner qualities or relationships. Besides this, it defines the concept of perceptions: it is the knowledge the individuals gained from the process of coming to know or understand something. Therefore, it can be generalized that perception is a uniquely individualized experience towards something.

Therefore, from all these, perception can be explained as the sensory experience of the world and it involves both the recognition of environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. In the context of this study, perception can be defined as the students' opinions, beliefs, feelings, and understandings about the lexical instructional intervention. Language acquisition or learning happens through the efficient efforts made and by imbibing data through different perceptions Allott (2001). It is a known fact that the teaching approaches and methods can affect the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of EFL learners positively or negatively. If they influence the learners' perceptions positively, for instance, learners may like to learn the required language components in a good manner since their interests and motivations are already increased. If the opposite exits, the learners may not like to learn. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following two research questions and one hypothesis:

**Q1:** What perceptions do EFL learners have towards the lexical instructional approach intervention as regards learning vocabulary and grammar?

**Q2:** What difficulties do EFL learners encounter concerning learning vocabulary and grammar through the lexical instructional approach intervention?

**H0:** There is no statistically significant difference in the perception mean score of students to the hypothetical value.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Mixed methods design

We adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which consisted of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2012). In the context of the current study, the first research question was answered with the questionnaire and the second research question was answered with the interview. Because we placed a priority on quantitative data (QUAN) collection which was followed by the qualitative data (qual) and analysis (Creswell, 2012), an explanatory mixed methods design was the best fit. As was the case in the current study, the intention of using the qualitative data was to refine the results obtained from the quantitative data; this refinement results in exploring a few typical cases, probing a key result in more detail, or following up with outlier or extreme cases (Creswell, 2012). More elaborately, the qualitative data (i.e. gathered through an interview) were employed to explore the experiences of the experimental group on the lexical instructional approach during the intervention. By taking nine student samples from the treatment group consisted of 48 students, the participants' perceptions, problems they encountered, and their overall suggestions on the intervention were probed. The overall procedures of using the explanatory mixed methods design is displayed in the following figure.

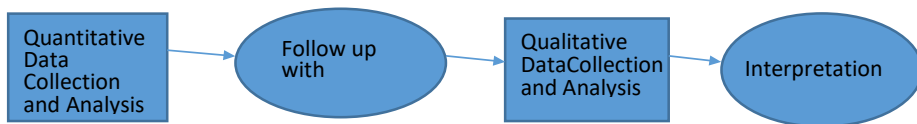


Fig. 1: Explanatory Sequential Design (adapted from: Creswell, 2012)

#### 3.2. Research setting and participants

The study was carried out at Fasilo General Secondary and Higher Education Preparatory School, found in, Bahir Dar City, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. The participants of the study were at intermediate level (grade nine), Amharic native speakers. Their ages ranged from 15-19. The number of participants of the study consisted of 48 students. Concerning the process of choosing the participants, there were 16 sections for grade nine students at this school. From these sections, two sections (Section H and Section F) were selected by using a simple random sampling technique. However, the participants of this study were only one section (Section H) which was randomly assigned to the experimental group after we checked the homogeneity of the two sections with pretests. Then, this group was the exclusive group exposed for the intervention. The control group (Section F) was not considered in this study because it did not receive the treatment. This

group was not instructed through the lexical instructional approach intervention, so it was excluded from this study. Thus, this study emphasized on investigating the students' perceptions towards learning vocabulary and grammar through the lexical instructional approach and the difficulties that the treatment group encountered during the experimentation.

### **3.3 Data gathering instruments**

To collect data for the study, a questionnaire and interview were employed. A questionnaire was administered at the end of the treatment to have the participants' perceptions towards the lexical instructional approach. Such a tool is common in investigating both the attitudes, motivations, and perceptions or beliefs of a certain group towards something. In this regard, Mackey and Gass (2005) indicate that questionnaires are commonly used in language learning research to investigate perception, beliefs, and motivation concerning classroom instruction from a large number of participants. This questionnaire was prepared after critically looking at the literature related to this topic. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items. It was prepared by systematically adapting procedures from Jiemin (2006). Even though it was adapted from this researcher, reliability analysis was conducted. It was found that the Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.762. The items were formulated as statements about English language vocabulary and grammar teaching and learning through lexical instructional approach, and respondents (i.e. the experimental group consisted of 48 students) were requested to respond to the statements using a Likert Scale comprising from 1 to 5 which means 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Regarding to the nature of the student questionnaire, the items included in it were detailing about what the respondents' experiences looked like on the lexical approach instructional intervention during the experimentation. The items requested the respondents to put a tick on one scale from the given five ones (scales). These items were about the perceptions that the participants held regarding lexical approach intervention provided during the experiment. The questionnaire prepared in English language was translated into the students' native language that is Amharic for the sake of avoiding the linguistic barriers that the respondents possibly face.

Another data gathering tool was an interview. Interview is a bilateral conversation initiated by the interviewer for particular purpose of obtaining relevant information for research objectives (Cohen et al., 2005). It involves data gathering through direct verbal interaction between researcher and informants, usually serving three purposes. It could be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives by providing access to measure what a person knows, likes or dislikes, and thinks; to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones, or to help identify variables and

relationships; and to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do (Cohen et al., 2005).

We employed a semi-structured interview. We conducted such an interview in order to gain a deeper understanding of issues that the questionnaire may not investigate in detail. Therefore, the data gathered through student interviews were supposed to complement the questionnaire and to obtain more in-depth information on the students' (experimental group's) views of the experiences of learning vocabulary and grammar through the lexical approach. In using a semi-structured interview, a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts are used, but the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised (Dornyei, 2007). We had reasons for using a semi-structured interview. The first reason was that this kind of interview offered participants the opportunities to freely elaborate their perceptions and feelings. The second reason was that it enabled us to supplement the designed interview guides with various inquiries so that rich and deep information about the issue under investigation would be obtained. Thus, for an interview purpose, nine students were randomly selected from the experimental group which consisted of 48 students. Such types of selected students were interviewed to know their perceptions on the lexical instructional approach (i.e. implemented during an intervention and the difficulties they encountered).

### 3.4 Preparation of intervention material

We prepared the intervention material with the viewpoint of the lexical approach. The material prepared for the intervention reflected the pedagogical importance of chunks in EFL/ESL classrooms. According to Lewis (1993), pedagogical chunking should be a frequent classroom activity, as students need to develop an awareness of language to which they are exposed and gradually develop ways, "not only assembling parts into wholes but also identifying constituent bits within the whole" (p.195). We adapted and incorporated different activities from Lewis (2008) such as *intensive and extensive listening and reading in the target language; first and second language comparisons and translation--carried out chunk-for-chunk, rather than word-for-word--aimed at raising language awareness, and repetition and recycling of activities*.

Besides this, we focused on the activities like *guessing the meaning of vocabulary items from context, noticing and recording language patterns and collocations, working with collocation dictionaries and other reference tools, and working with concordance programs created by the teacher for use in the classroom or accessible on the Internet*, etc. while preparing the intervention material. The primary purpose of incorporating such activities in the teaching material was to raise students' awareness of lexical chunks, rather than teaching different ways of constructing sentences. We depended on different sources to prepare the material

like: *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward* by Lewis (1993), *Teaching collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach* by Lewis (2000), *Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting Theory into Practice* by Lewis (2008), *Rules, Patterns and Words: Grammar and Lexis in English Language Teaching* by Willis (2003), *Oxford Collocations Dictionary: for Students of English* (2003), *Teaching lexically: Principles and Practice* by Dellar & Walkley (2016), etc.

### 3.5 Intervention

The intervention lasted for sixteen weeks. The experimental group students were instructed by using the new teaching method (the lexical instructional approach). The intervention was carried out starting from October 14, 2019 - February 8, 2020. The time taken for one session was about 45 minutes and four days in a week. After we trained the teacher experimenter about the techniques how to implement the newly designed intervention material, the intervention went on. To avoid artificiality and bias, we believed that the teacher experimenter was the best fit to conduct the intervention. To proceed with the intervention, the teacher experimenter together with us prepared lesson plans. Unlike the PPP (Present -Practice -Produce) teaching methodology which is being practiced in the conventional teaching method, the study followed the OHE (Observe -Hypothesize- Experiment) teaching methodology. Thus, the teacher experimenter was advised in the training to follow the observation-Hypothesis-Experiment model which was adapted from Lewis (1993). The diagram is designed as shown below.

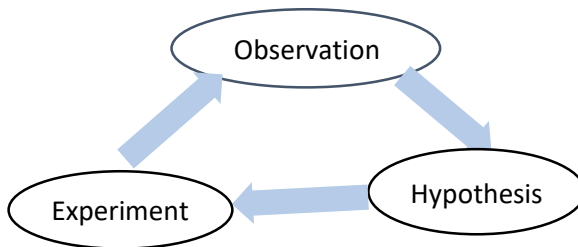


Fig. 2: Intervention Framework (Lewis, 1993)

To describe each of the phases, in the observation stage, students were presented with oral and written input. In the second phase students compose a hypothesis about principles based on the perceived linguistic behavior, and in the experiment phase, learners test their theories in a communicative context.



#### **4 Findings**

In this section, the data collected through student questionnaires and interviews were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively respectively. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items with a five-point Likert Scale rating system as Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. Following the completion of the lexical approach instructional intervention, the questionnaire was administered to the experimental group only since it was this group that was taught the vocabulary and grammar lessons lexically or with the lexical approach-based teaching. The questionnaire took 45 minutes to complete. Then, the data gathered through the questionnaire were transformed from Likert Scale Data type to Continuous Data type. Since presenting the results of the data collected through this tool (i.e. questionnaire) with frequencies and percentages could not help us to statistically infer something from the overall population, the categorical data (a five-point Likert Scale) were transformed into continuous data.

There are arguments between experts about the necessity of converting the Likert Scale Data into Continuous Data. The first group argues that as ordered categories, the intervals between the scale values are not equal, any mean, correlation, or other numerical operation applied to them is invalid. Thus, according to this group, the only opportunity that researchers can do is to conduct non-parametric statistics on Likert scale data (i.e. Jamieson, 2004). Whereas, the second group argues that while technically the Likert scale item is ordered, using it in parametric tests is valid in some situations. In this regard, Lubke and Muthen (2004) indicate that it is possible to find true parameter values in factor analysis with Likert scale data, if assumptions about skewness, number of categories, data distribution normality, etc., are met. Furthermore, this group rationalizes that the fact that Likert or ordinal variables with five or more categories can often be used as continuous without any harm to the analysis the researchers plan to use them in (Norman, 2010; Sullivan & Artino, 2013; Zumbo & Zimmerman, 1993). Therefore, the present researchers hold strong views in that converting Likert scale data into continuous ones is an enabling technique to generalize something arising from the given findings. Following the transformation of Likert Scale data into continuous data, the one samples t-test was an appropriate analysis technique to run. While researchers were doing this, all the assumptions of the t-test were taken into account. Thus, the purpose of transforming Likert Scale data into continuous data was to examine whether or not there were statistically significant differences between the estimated sample mean and the population mean concerning the perceptions of EFL students toward the lexical approach as an instructional intervention.

However, there are no research works which could show the population mean on perceptions of EFL/ESL students towards the lexical instructional approach in the contexts of vocabulary and grammar learning. That means, the population

mean was not known, but we postulated it depending on literature. The procedures of hypothesizing the population mean were as follows: The rating system of the five-point Likert Scale included Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. Then, each of the scales were computed and divided by the number of scales (five) which results in  $(5+4+3+2+1) \div 5 = 15 \div 5 = 3.00$ . Therefore, the population mean was hypothesized as 3.00. Considering this, the following tables show the one sample t-test results of the analysis of the questionnaire.

Before the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire, the assumptions of one sample t-test were checked. The first assumption, sample drawn from the population should be random, was considered based on the nature of the design of this study. From the 16 sections of grade nine students at Fasilo General Secondary and Higher Education Preparatory School, two sections (Section H and Section F) were selected using a simple random sampling technique even though the respondents of this study were the experimental group students (Section H) only. Thus, the assumption was met. The second assumption of one sample t-test was that the dependent variable should be continuous. In the case of this study, the perception scores ranged between 20 and 100 were obtained by multiplying the total number of the items of the questionnaire (i.e. 20) by the minimum (i.e. 1) and the maximum (i.e. 5) scales that the participants tick respectively. Hence, the assumption was met. The dependent variable should be normally distributed, was the third assumption of the one sample t-test. Concerning the perception score distribution, the following table shows tests of normality.

Tests of Normality					
	descriptives			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Skewness	kurtosis	Statistic	df	Sig.
Perception score	-0.301	-0.342	0.982	48	0.657

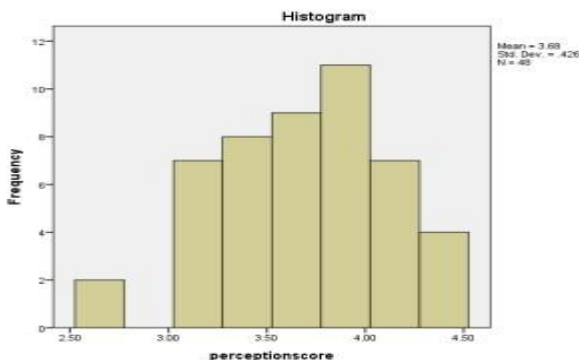
Tab. 2: Tests of normality for one-sample t-test results of the Questionnaire

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

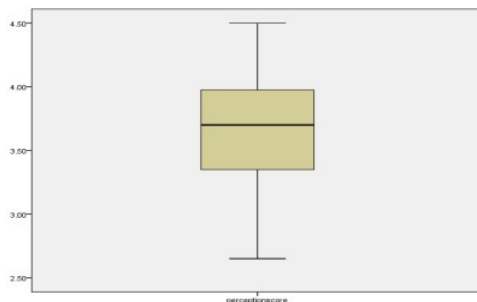
As shown in the above table, the values of skewness and kurtosis were -0.301 (SE = 0.343) and -0.342 (SE = 0.674) on students' perception scores respectively. The Shapiro-Wilk results of tests of normality showed that the distribution of students' perception scores were not significant (i.e. df = 48,  $p >$

0.05) with the p-value of 0.66 approximately. Furthermore, data (perception scores) were inspected by using the following histogram.



Graph 1: One sample t-test, test of normality of the distribution for the students' perception scores on questionnaire

As the above graph shows, the distribution of students' perception scores seemed to be normal, and the shapes of the curve was approximately symmetric and normal. Therefore, the assumption was not violated. The other assumption of one sample t-test, there should not be outliers, was checked using the following boxplot.



Graph 2: Checking the t-test outliers for the students' perception scores on questionnaire

The boxplot illustrated in the above indicates that there were no significant outliers and extreme scores located. Thus, the assumption, there should not be outliers, was met. After checking all the assumptions, one sample t-test was run in order to analyze the data gathered through the questionnaire so as to answer the first research question: *"What perceptions do EFL learners have towards the lexical instructional approach intervention as regards learning vocabulary and grammar?"*

The results obtained from the student questionnaire concerning the perceptions of the students were presented by using table 3 below.

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception score	48	3.6771	0.42614	0.06151

Tab. 3: The descriptive statistics results of student questionnaire

One-Sample Statistics table in above indicates that the students ( $N = 48$ ) approximately registered the mean and standard deviation of 3.68 and 0.43 respectively in terms of the perception scores. The perception score mean (i.e. 3.68) was mathematically higher than the hypothesized population mean (i.e. 3.00). However, the descriptive statistics results obtained from student questionnaire could not show us whether there were statistically significant differences between the population mean hypothesized and the sample mean so that one sample t-test was performed to verify this. The table below illustrates this.

One-Sample Test					
	Test Value = 3.00				
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
					Lower Upper
Perception score	11.008	47	0.000	0.67708	0.5533 0.8008

Tab. 4: The one-sample t-test results of the student questionnaire

As presented in table 4 above, the perception score was statistically significantly higher than the hypothesized population mean score, with  $t(47) = 11.008$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000. Therefore, from this, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the estimated sample mean and the hypothesized population mean concerning students' perceptions scores. The participants had higher perception scores which impliedly meant that their perceptions were positive, or they had positive

perceptions towards the lexical instructional approach through which they were taught vocabulary and grammar.

Likewise, the data gathered through the semi-structured interview from nine participants were analyzed qualitatively. The interviews were performed in Amharic with the interviewees' presence one by one. On average, each of the interviews lasted about 12 minutes. Regarding the process, the interviews were audiotaped, transcribed for further analysis, translated into English versions and then put thematically. During the process, follow-up questions were asked in order to gain more insights into participants' responses (Lai et al., 2016). Students from the experimental group were interviewed how they experienced the lexical approach intervention like how they perceived the instruction provided, whether it was interesting for them, and if they have brought about a change due to their exposure for the instruction. What is more, they were interviewed on what difficulties they encountered while they were learning and so on. For the sake of clear understanding, the interviewees were simply designated as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, Student 4, Student 5, Student 6, Student 7, Student 8, and Student 9.

Concerning the interview question, "How do you perceive the techniques that you have been taught vocabulary and grammar (during the experiment)?" student1 (she) was opinionated that the techniques that she has been taught these language components were better and interesting for her. As she explained, she herself could search for things like grammar components from texts and dialogues as well as new lexical chunks without much help of the teacher in recently implemented techniques unlike the previous classes in which she had expected much from her teacher. Impliedly, the way vocabulary and grammar lessons presented for the students seemed to be practical for them to learn independently. Therefore, an independent learning appeared to be reflected in their EFL classrooms during the delivery of the lexical instructional approach. However, in the recent classes (i.e. during the experiment), this student revealed again that there were some shortcomings from the teacher side; for instance, the teacher did not pay due attention for all students. This student intended that the teacher experimenter did not catch the attention of those students who were poor in their achievements.

Student 2 (she) believed that the techniques were interesting since she has been taught vocabulary and grammar lessons with examples and texts. What is more, when she was discussing the activities in the group, she was happy and were not afraid of saying something. However, corresponding to what student 1 revealed, student 2 (she) confirmed that some students were not paying attention to the lessons while the teacher was teaching them. At that time, the teaching was not participatory because only some actively participating students were engaged. As to her, even though the teaching techniques that she has been taught vocabulary

and grammar were interesting for her, she claimed that the teacher looked ignorant to manage and enable all the students to be engaged. Likewise, another interviewee (she) replied: The language components have been presented for us in a good manner, and they have been interesting (student 3). This student seemed to have no clear idea on the instruction provided vis-à-vis the previous ones.

For the same question, how the participants perceive the teaching techniques that they have been exposed for, Student 4 (he) thought that the techniques were likable for him; for example, the more he learned plenty of words, the more his lexical knowledge became expanded. This participant believed that learning vocabulary and grammar in this manner helped him to express himself like what he speaks in Amharic, without serious difficulties. He affirmed that he has been taught plenty of typical vocabulary and grammar examples during the instruction. He elaborated his ideas in that the teacher gave the students much time to identify grammar points and collocations from the texts based on a certain context. As he stated, unlike the previous classes, in which the teacher spent all the time without providing the students with the opportunities to discuss activities in group and individually, the presently implemented methods (i.e. carried out during the experiment) helped him to discuss and share ideas and understand the lessons easily. Indeed, the implication of the idea stated by this student (4) was that the teacher had seemed to practice the teacher-centered method before the implementation of the lexical instructional approach. However, as he explained, the student-centered method was being practiced during the experiment.

Similarly, student 5 (she) perceived that the teaching techniques were interesting and she liked them because she learned important vocabulary lessons (e.g. collocations). She replied that she has understood how to combine words to make collocations in the current classes (during the experiment) whereas, in the previous classes, she did not learn such things, but she was learning words by looking for their definitions simply from dictionaries. Student 6 (he) confirmed that the techniques that the teacher employed to teach them (i.e. participant students) vocabulary and grammar were somewhat new. He assured that the techniques used by the teacher in EFL classrooms helped him to learn better than the previous ones, so he found them more important. Another participant (student 7) revealed that the instruction as interesting for her because the examples given could help her to understand the vocabulary and grammar points easily. As to her, there were no such techniques used in the previous lessons. The ways that vocabulary and grammar lessons presented were understandable and retainable (student 8), and they were interesting. He was probed to explain more about the understandability and retainability of the lesson by comparing the instructions with the previous ones as: *"I mean, I can now retain words which I have learned in chunk/collocation forms, but I cannot remember words which I had learned before this (before the experiment began), words in isolation. The reason I said this is that I*

*can remember the word which can co-occur with other words, I think. However, I think the grammar lessons we learned (during the experiment) using texts was difficult, but the grammar lessons that we were taught in accordance with what is presented in the textbook were easy for me because they were in sentence forms. Sentence forms could be good to save time” (student 8).*

Thus, concerning vocabulary lessons, this participant has similar feelings to what other participants replied. Nevertheless, he believed that exploring grammar components from texts depending on certain contexts was difficult for him. Basically, teaching grammar in isolation seemed to be suitable for him since he was perhaps accustomed to learning grammar in sentence forms which lacks contexts. The reason why this participant preferred learning grammar in isolation (like what he had been taught in the previous classes) seemed to be because the teacher deviated from this practice and focusing on the context-sensitive grammar teaching by using texts as has been delivered during the experiment. Like other participants, student 9 explained that the techniques, which were used in the lexical instructional intervention, were interesting for her. She perceived that the techniques enabled her to understand the vocabulary and grammar lessons easily.

The student participants were asked whether they thought they have brought about a different change due to the instructional intervention they have been exposed to and they responded almost similarly. For instance, student1 revealed that she has brought a change to her knowledge in terms of different collocations. She elaborated that she realized how to chunk, group, and associate words with one another because of learning through these techniques. Besides, this student explained that she found the grammar lessons better than the previous ones since the lessons were presented with texts and examples. Therefore, this student participant viewed the vocabulary and grammar lessons as peculiar since she had not been taught the lessons in this manner, and she seemed to be aware of what she learned during the experiment. Student 2 responded that the instruction was more helpful than ever before, and she brought about a change in terms of how to chunk/combine words. She was also requested to explain more about the uses of combining words in general, and she supposed that chunks might help her understand any text written and/or spoken in English. As she said, when she wrote something in the English language, she believed that the chunks/collocations would be important to get her writing interesting. This student told that the truth that she did not learn such things before and that is why she said she brought about a change in her collocational awareness

For the same question, about whether student 3 thought she brought about changes due to her exposure to the new instruction, she responded to it by contrasting with the previous instruction as: *“Yes, there has been a change in my understanding. When I was learning through the recently used techniques (i.e. to mean, during the experiment), I realized grammar components and different*



*collocations. Besides, these techniques enabled me to read more and understand how grammar and chunks were used in the texts. The vocabulary and grammar lessons were presented for us in a better way than what had been presented in our textbook."*

This student became conscious of identifying the ways how she had been taught vocabulary and grammar before the implementation of the new method. Following the exposure the student got from the new instruction, she appeared to be clear on how to identify lexical chunks and grammar components from texts and examples, along with becoming clear about the practices how to chunk them. Student 4 illustrated that he got learning experiences, particularly in retaining words by noticing the nearest words that could go together with them. What he supposed as a change, brought about owing to the opportunity he got to learn with this instruction, was in terms of developing his vocabulary knowledge. With the same insight, student 5 explained the change he brought about in terms of being able to identify, for instance, tense types from texts and examples. In addition, she replied that her vocabulary knowledge developed since her awareness about how to combine words to make collocations and/or chunks was raised, during the experiment. However, student 6 expressed that there was no particular change he brought about, but he got good understandings of how to use words simply. He seemed to be not clear on the differences between the previous and present instructions that he learned the vocabulary and grammar components with. Because the ways the lessons presented were understandable, I would not forget them, and I can now use them without difficulties (student 7). Therefore, this expression indicated that she viewed the change in terms of retention and usage. Similarly, student 8 assured that the techniques with which he was taught vocabulary and grammar components enabled him, at least, to do his home works without the help of others, unlike the previous experiences. He looked not clear with the change. Student 9 again explained the same thing. She could not reveal the importance of the lessons she learned. She only confirmed that she knew a lot of things as a result of learning vocabulary and grammar through this instruction.

Generally, the responses given by the student participants indicate that the newly implemented method (in this case the lexical instruction) was practical. Even though the extent differs from participant to participant, the lexical approach-based teaching enabled the students to have awareness concerning the importance of lexical chunks including grammar. They seemingly recognized the role of collocations and/or chunks in English language teaching and learning contexts. As their replies witnessed, except student 6, student 8, and student 9, the vocabulary and grammar lessons that the students were taught during the experiment enabled them to develop their lexical competence. Since their lexical awareness became growing as a result of the exposure, as they confirmed, it is fair to say that the lexical approach looked to be feasible and practical for the targeted group that is intermediate level, as the case of this study. However, the

forementioned three students deemed that the lessons they learned with this instruction were interesting and easily understandable, but they could not explain the type of change and/ or improvement they made because of the lexical instruction they were exposed to. The lack of ideas about the role of the lexical instruction, which was implemented during the experiment, for their language component developments might occur on account of different factors, as the responses of these participants show.

It is known that difficulties might arise during the teaching-learning process. The difficulties that students might encounter have their roles for hindering students not to grasp the required knowledge appropriately. Based on this conception, participants were asked what difficulties they faced while learning vocabulary and grammar lessons (i.e. during the experiment). They were requested to reply to what difficulties they encountered while learning vocabulary and grammar during the experiment and they gave almost similar responses. For example, student 1, student 4, student 5, student 7, and student 9 were asked what difficulties they encountered while learning vocabulary and grammar with the lexical instruction, and they replied that they were sometimes in a position not to understand the meanings of some words. Lexical difficulties arose when students were reading a certain text.

Besides, these participants seemed to be in a difficulty to be clear about the collocates and even about the nodes; for example, student 4 (he) confirmed that he couldn't understand the definitions of some words when he tried to look for collocates for the main word and vice versa. For the same question, student 1 explained that the teacher paid less attention to all students while he was teaching. The teacher did not sometimes give sufficient explanation (student 2); what is more, student 7 confirmed that there were the lack of possible explanations from him. The other difficulties that participants faced were the lack of giving attention to their lessons (as witnessed by student 3, student 5, and student 6), unable to listening one another in group discussions (student 3), and not capable of understanding the lessons or the given activities at the time (student 8).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that there were factors which affected students not to learning the lexical and grammatical components of the language during the experiment. For instance, the lack of adequate and reasonable explanations from the teacher experimenter might have led students to be less attentive in their classes. In addition, the teacher paid less attention for non-participating students, as the participants perceived. This in turn, maybe, led some students to be not deeply interested to learn. The other factor that affected students to learn vocabulary and grammar through texts and chunks was, possible to say, lack of awareness on some lexical items.

## 5 Discussions of the results

This study aimed to examine what perceptions that EFL learners had towards the lexical instructional approach intervention, carried out for 16 weeks, in the contexts of vocabulary and grammar learning. It mainly aimed at answering two research questions and one research hypothesis. The first research question was to find out what perceptions that EFL learners had towards the lexical instructional approach intervention which was done in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Another way of expressing this in terms of the null hypothesis was that there was no statistically significant difference in the perception mean scores of students to the hypothetical value. The second research question was on what difficulties that EFL learners encountered while learning the vocabulary and grammar components during the experimentation. To answer the two research questions, a questionnaire and interview were employed. The purpose of using the interview was to answer the second research question and to complement the questionnaire so that to obtain in-depth insights. More succinctly, the first research question (Q1) "What perceptions do EFL learners have towards the lexical instructional approach intervention as regards learning vocabulary and grammar?" was checked by using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive Statistics results indicate that there was a big mathematical difference between the hypothesized population mean (in this case, 3.00) and descriptive statistics (3.68) in terms of perception score, as stated under the findings section, table 2. Besides, the one-sample t-test results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the hypothesized population mean (i.e. 3.00) and the estimated sample mean (i.e. with a mean difference of 0.68 approximately) in their perception scores. Students' ( $N = 48$ ) perception scores were statistically higher, with  $t(47) = 11.008$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , than the hypothesized population mean score. This impliedly indicates that the students, who were exposed to the lexical instructional approach intervention, had positive perceptions towards learning vocabulary and grammar components during the experiment.

Therefore, it is fair to say that the lexical instructional approach intervention was positively perceived by the students in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar since the sample mean obtained from one sample t-test was significantly higher than the population mean hypothesized. Again, the null hypothesis stated in above was rejected since a statistically significant difference was found between the hypothetical value and the estimated mean. This conversely meant, the alternative hypothesis was accepted. These results, the quantitative data, were substantiated with the other results obtained from student interview, qualitative data, which was actually beheld during the processes of the intervention carried out during the experiment.

The qualitative results demonstrated why and how the perceptions of students tended to be positive towards the intervention. The results obtained from

interview corroborated the results found from the analysis of the data gathered through questionnaire. The students perceived the lexical instructional approach intervention positively as the findings of the interview show. For instance, almost all the participants were happy, as they replied, with learning vocabulary and grammar components through the lexical instructional approach intervention. They liked the mode of teaching that the teacher implemented during the experimentation, and they raised the salient insights they beheld from the intervention. To mention some of the benefits they got, as they affirmed, from such instructional intervention that the teacher experimental delivered, the teacher provided the students with plenty of examples taken from authentic texts which enabled students to learn the lexical chunks and/ or collocations and grammar components independently, without much efforts exerted from the teacher part. Furthermore, in contrast with the previous teaching techniques that their teacher had implemented, the newly delivered modes of teaching were much helpful for students as they claimed. The way vocabulary and grammar were taught for students during the experiment was interesting and participatory for them since they thought they learned such language elements lexically which they believed new and novel. Because of learning vocabulary with chunk forms and grammar with plenty of texts, as they made certain in the interview, students' retainability and understandability improved. Again, the interviewees assured that learning the language components through authentic texts develops their independent learning which resulted in fearlessness for some introvert students. As the informants' replies indicate, they became aware of the importance of collocations and /or chunks to learn words. Additionally, their awareness was raised in terms of how to look for collocates for the key words and vice versa, and their learning strategies on how to explore grammar components from texts were raised, according to their responses. Generally, all these fruitful points that the informants mentioned were important elements to complement and triangulate the data gathered through a questionnaire.

Also, some difficulties arose as factors which influenced the students negatively, which means, not to learn the selected language components, vocabulary and grammar, properly. This leads us to the second research question (Q2), "What difficulties do EFL learners encounter concerning learning vocabulary and grammar through the lexical approach intervention?" and some factors were found in this regard, as the interviewees witnessed. Therefore, the first difficulties that the participants claimed as factors were lexical problems. Lexical difficulties, like not able to understand the meanings of some words, occurred while learners were trying to look for collocates for a given word and keywords for a certain considerable collocates. Again, the lack of lexical awareness as difficulties arose when the students were exploring lexical and grammatical components from the texts. The second factor that hindered students not to learn the referred language

components sourced from the teacher part. The teacher sometimes gave inadequate and non-reasonable explanations for students during the experiment which led them to be sometimes less interested. The other factor that affected students sourced from the peers. Some students sometimes give less attention for their group and individual discussions. This might occur due to the managerial problem arisen from the teacher experimenter. The other factor was the lack of making the activities more engaging from the teacher part to enable learners more attentive, as the responses given by interviewees' confirmed.

The findings of this study were in congruent with some previously conducted relevant studies and the theories as well. Jiemin (2006) did research on the attitudes of university students, in China, toward teaching and learning as well as strategies used to discover and consolidate phrases and expressions, which provides a practical and meaningful experience to lexical teaching. This researcher found out that the two semesters experiment on a new lexical approach prove satisfactory and fruitful. According to this researcher, the most successful aspects of the lexical project are that students' positive attitudes toward lexical learning comes to form after nearly two semesters of training and they gradually gain good awareness of the importance of a lexical approach. Besides, Norman (2017) conducted his study on the impact of a lexically-focused approach in comparison to a more traditional grammatical one and the teachers' attitudes towards lexically-focused teaching. He found out that the lexically-based instruction helped students make more progress than the control group instructed through the traditional grammatical one, and the teachers' attitudes, though not from learners' point of view, to lexically-focused teaching were explored and a mix of opinions was found, with most regretting a perceived paucity of grammatical focus. Mousavi and Heidari (2018) investigated the effect of collocations as language chunks on Iranian female intermediate English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing skills. One of the intentions of the study was to find out the attitude of learners towards writing skills after collocations were taught. The results obtained from an attitude questionnaire showed that the learners' attitude boosted in the course of this experiment, indicating that using collocations had a significantly positive impact on the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners towards writing skills. Therefore, the findings of this study were in line with the present study although these researchers focused on one element of the lexical approach. However, the results obtained from the current study did not confirm earlier findings of the study by Dokchandra (2019) who carried out the collocational competence of undergraduate students of English at a university in northeastern Thailand and their perceptions of collocational difficulty and found out that the participants perceived collocations as fairly difficult.

Philosophically, different theories and/or approaches assure the relevance and efficiency of teaching vocabulary and grammar lexically, as is the case of the lexical

approach-based teaching. For instance, a corpus linguistics theory states that there needs to treat vocabulary and grammar components in unison not individually, which is also the focal point of the lexical instructional approach (Sinclair, 1991; Hoey, 2000; Hunston, 2002; Lewis, 2008; Romer & Schulze, 2009). Furthermore, the Cognitive Linguistics approach to vocabulary learning promises to be a worthwhile complement to what is established practice in the matter of helping learners remember words (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). Therefore, there are reasons why there need to focus on the teaching of words and phrases, that is, on adopting a lexical approach (Lewis 1993) including phrase-teaching (Boers and Lindstromberg 2005 as cited in Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). Another approach which is compatible with the lexical instructional approach, which has distinctive features for texts, is the text-based approach. The social purposes of texts, according to this approach, is to focus on the analysis of lexico-grammar which is also the emphasis of lexical approach (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). Besides, text-based approaches are of importance in providing co-textual information, allowing learners to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar grammatical items, words, and word-combinations from the co-text; everything in language, from lexical items and grammatical constructions to whole texts, has evolved to express very specific discourse functions, in the form of situational 'registers', the lexico-grammatical resources (Firth, 1957; Martin, 2001; Lewis, 2008).

## **6 Conclusions and recommendations**

Based on the discussions of the results obtained from the questionnaire and interview, it was possible to draw some conclusions. To begin with, the results obtained from the questionnaire, the statistical analysis indicated that the learners' perceptions (i.e. sample mean score) was significantly higher than the hypothesized population mean. This indicates that EFL learners had positive perceptions to the lexical instructional approach in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar. The findings of the study demonstrated that EFL learners enjoy learning the referred language components during the implementation of the lexical instructional approach. The implication is that their positive perceptions in turn could encourage them to learn more independently. Besides, students' awareness about the importance of learning vocabulary and grammar with chunks and/or lexical approach-based activities was raised because of the intervention they were instructed with. As the results obtained from student interviews indicate, students liked the mode of teaching that the teacher experimenter implemented during the experiment, and they became interested to know more about how to combine/chunk words which could go together by consulting collocation dictionaries. Learning the vocabulary chunks and grammar points from texts was helpful for students to promote their independent learnings as well. Therefore, all these interview results were supplementary indications that

could complement and confirm as the learners positively perceived the lexical instructional approach intervention. According to the interview results found, there were some difficulties that students encountered during the intervention. To concisely mention some of the main difficulties arisen during the intervention, the first ones were the lack of lexical awareness particularly on how to look for collocates for some words which resulted in lexical difficulties. The second was the lack of adequate and reasonable explanations from the teacher experimenter part on some lexical chunks in some activities which caused students to misunderstand some elements. Thirdly, the lack of deliberate attention from some students during individual and group discussions affected students' not to learn the selected lexical and grammatical components fully. Fourthly, the incapability of the teacher to make some activities more interactive and engaging in the classroom even though he was trained how to implement the newly practiced mode of teaching was another problem. Last but not least, some managerial problems from the teacher part arose during the intervention. Thus, all these causes affected the teaching-learning process during the intervention.

Based on the conclusions arrived at, it was recommended that EFL teachers should be given the opportunities to participate in awareness-raising trainings in terms of the importance and roles of the lexical instructional approach in EFL teaching and learning contexts. Then, they should systematically design their own lexical approach-based activities by considering their students' interests, feelings, perceptions, levels, norms, cultures, and their psychological setups. Besides, students could promote their independent learning by using electronic devices like mobiles and computers which can be helpful for them to identify both lexical and grammatical patterns. It was better suggested that collocation dictionaries should be uploaded to students' electronic devices so that learners can enhance their autonomous vocabulary learning. Also, investigations of the impacts of teaching writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills through the lexical instructional approach need to be conducted to gain more insights regarding the efficiency and the appropriateness of the lexical approach for Ethiopian EFL learners at all levels. Because the present study was conducted on a small scale context, with only 48 students, investigations should be carried out on a large scale nature, a large number of participants, with the same type of topic so that a big picture can be made.

## **7 Limitations**

This study has some limitations. The first limitation is concerning the duration of the intervention provided. As the study lasted for sixteen (16) weeks only, we admitted the insufficient time. We claim that it needed, at least one year, to carry out the lexical instructional approach intervention because of its vastness. The second limitation is relating to the nature of the sample. In this study, the size of



the sample taken was quite small and thus, the reliability of the findings might be limited too. The participants of this study were taken from only one high school which could not lead it to represent all schools found in the city. Thus, a large sample of participants should have been considered for the study to obtain more factual data. The other limitation of the study was that it was conducted on EFL learners' perceptions of the lexical instructional approach interventions in the contexts of learning vocabulary and grammar so that it could not inform the readers about the perceptions of learners to the instruction concerning learning the other language skills.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Student Questionnaire

Dear Students:

This questionnaire is designed to gather information about your perceptions towards the learning of vocabulary and grammar through the lexical approach. Therefore, you are kindly requested to critically read and indicate your appropriate responses for both parts. Your answers should be based on what you practically did in learning English as a foreign language vocabulary and grammar during the experiment. The worth of this study completely depends on how true and factual answers you provide in terms of what you feel and know with regard to learning vocabulary and grammar.

I would like to inform you that the information you provide is completely confidential and is used by the researcher only. Thus, **do not** write your names. Thank you for your cooperation!

**Direction:** Please read the following statements about your perceptions of learning vocabulary and grammar through lexically-based instruction during the intervention. Then, on the following pages, mark with a tick (✓) what your opinion is with respect to every statement **ONLY** one of the five spaces.

**Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.**

- If you strongly agree to the statement, mark with a tick (✓) the fifth space (**Strongly Agree**)
- If you agree to the statement but not strongly, mark with a tick (✓) the fourth space (**Agree**)
- If you have no opinion on the statement, mark with a tick (✓) the third space (**Undecided**)
- If you do not agree to the statement, mark with a tick (✓) the second space (**Disagree**)
- If you do not agree to the statement but strongly, mark with a tick (✓) the first space (**Strongly Disagree**)

### Items on students' experiences on learning vocabulary and grammar through lexically-based instruction

No.	Item	Scales				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Un decided	Dis agree	Strongly Disagree
1	How I do perceive the learning of vocabulary and grammar with lexical instruction now (i.e. given during the experiment)?	5	4	3	2	1
1	I like the way our English teacher taught us mainly how to explore grammar from text examples during the experiment.					
2	Our English teacher often asked us to repeat lexical chunks/phrases after him during the experiment.					
3	I am now clear to use chunk for chunk translation in and out of English classrooms.					
4	My ability to chunk English language lexically and grammatically improved after my English lessons (after the experiment).					
5	The way our teacher got us to make use of language chunks from the reading passages was very interesting during English lessons.					
6	My English improves more quickly if I practice grammar by using lexical chunks like what our teacher taught us.					
7	I think I can now learn from my lexical and grammatical mistakes/errors I probably make while producing and comprehending something in the target language.					
8	What I learned during the experiment helped me to like and learn more grammar rules from chunks, examples, and texts in my English class.					
9	My vocabulary and grammar knowledge develops easily if our teacher teaches us with lexical chunks from onwards now.					
10	Using chunk for chunk translation from target language to mother tongue and vice					

	versa in English lessons ( like what our teacher taught us during the experiment) does not help me learn the English language better					
11	Learning vocabulary grammatically and learning grammar lexically helped me acquire both simultaneously during the experiment.					
12	Learning vocabulary and grammar as we did during the experiment is boring for me.					
13	I like using English word chunks rather than single words while comprehending and/or producing something in and out of English classrooms.					
14	I understand that learning grammar lexically (like what I learned during the experiment) is less helpful than learning it structurally.					
15	Learning words by grouping with other words, for example, looking for the nodes for the given collocates and vice versa (like what our teacher taught us) in English has helped me acquire them more easily in the English lesson.					
16	I don't like to learn vocabulary and grammar in a way our teacher taught us during the experiment.					
17	Mostly, I realize that learning English means learning lexical chunks construction/collocations.					
18	Learning English language vocabulary and grammar lexically (like our teacher taught us) is waste of time.					
19	I like the way our English teacher reformulated the errors we made while we were learning vocabulary and grammar during the experiment.					
20	I think I will be effective in learning grammar without analyzing the rules (e.g.					

	like the teacher taught us by using chunks) in my English class.					
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### **Appendix B: Interview Question Guidelines**

1. How do you perceive the techniques (i.e. lexical instructions) that you have been taught vocabulary and grammar during the lexical instructional intervention (experiment)?
2. Do you think you have brought about a different change due to the lexical instructional intervention you have been exposed to? Why?
3. What difficulties did you encounter when you were learning vocabulary and grammar (during the experiment)?