

EFL Lexical Chunk Teaching in Chinese Senior High School: Current Practices and Challenges

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Abstract—The ability to effectively use vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language learning, and the development of this skill requires extensive exposure to idiomatic words and expressions. Previous research has shown that the main difference between intermediate and advanced English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is the size of their mental lexicon rather than their knowledge of grammar. In fact, the key to language learning progress is not the understanding of individual words or grammar, but the ability to assimilate the dynamic connections between different words. The use of lexical chunks has been identified as a key characteristic of proficient language learners (Schmitt, 2000). However, in the teaching context of this study, the use of lexical chunks has not been effectively emphasized in EFL education. In order to explore the reasons for this lack of emphasis, this qualitative study will interview three in-service EFL teachers to examine their teaching methods and identify potential factors that may contribute to the underutilization of lexical chunk instruction. The findings of this study will provide insight into ways to improve the teaching of lexical chunks and ultimately enhance the language proficiency of EFL learners.

Index Terms—vocabulary, lexical chunks, Chinese EFL learners, senior high school

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning and has gained renewed attention as a means of facilitating fluency in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Webb & Nation, 2017). However, vocabulary acquisition can be challenging, as learners may struggle to assess their progress in acquiring different skills (Webb & Nation, 2017). To improve language learners' skills, it is necessary to provide them with exposure to idiomatic words and expressions. Lewis (2000) argued that the main distinction between intermediate and advanced EFL learners lies in the size of their mental lexicon, rather than their mastery of grammar. Therefore, the key to language learning is not simply acquiring the meanings of individual words or understanding grammar, but rather understanding the dynamic and inherent connections between separate words.

Numerous studies have used corpus-based approaches to investigate authentic discourse (e.g., Alenberg, 1998). For example, Alenberg (1998) found that over 80% of the words in the corpus were part of recurrent word combinations in one way or another, supporting the idea that chunks are restored in languages. Lexical chunks, as defined by Schmitt (2000), are "long sequences of the words...recur frequently enough to be treated as units in their own right" (p. 400). Since Lewis (1993) introduced the concept of the lexical approach, lexical chunks have been recognized as crucial to productive language use and an important characteristic of proficient learners (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Lewis, 1993; Read, 2000; Thornbury, 2002; Webb & Nation, 2017).

As a current college teacher, who previously worked in senior high school context for about ten years, the author of this paper often finds that many of the EFL learners she has taught, when writing, their expressions are inappropriate and incoherent due to lack of lexical chunks. The author and her colleagues are always confused why Chinese college students, who used to spend much time studying English in senior high school, often struggle with vocabularies or lexical chunks when doing communicative tasks such as writing and speaking, even though they are able to spell individual words correctly. To better understand the current practices and challenges of EFL lexical chunk teaching in senior high school, a qualitative study is conducted by interviewing three in-service teachers from a local senior high school. This paper will examine how lexical chunks are taught by teachers and explore potential factors that may contribute to the underutilization of chunk teaching in senior high school. The study will begin by providing a description of the author's teaching context where lexical chunks are emphasized. This will be followed by a review of relevant literature, research questions, participant information, research methods, and a discussion of the findings and their implications. The paper will conclude with a summary of the analysis based on senior high school context.

II. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Since 2009, the author has been teaching at a senior high school in my city. This school is a public municipal school, and its students are intermediate English learners. Most of the EFL learners here are able to gain admission to undergraduate colleges after the college entrance exam with hard work and the help of their teachers. In addition to teaching, most in-service English teachers at this school are frequently involved in various tasks, including mandatory teaching conferences, checking students' homework, designing assessment tasks, and grading students' academic

performance. English, which accounts for 150 points in the college entrance exam, is one of the major subjects that both teachers and students struggle to excel in. This exam-oriented context often makes it difficult for the English teachers to maintain a balance between preparing for exams and incorporating occasional curriculum innovations. Despite the challenges, teachers are still trying to find ways to combine both in order to achieve our desired teaching outcomes.

In 2018, a new curriculum standard for ordinary secondary schools was released in China. Unlike previous curriculum innovations, it proposes that students should develop "core literacy," including integrated language skills, learning ability, thinking quality, and cultural awareness (Ministry of Education, 2018). It is clear that language ability is central to core literacy and will have significant implications for English as a foreign language (EFL) and English language teaching (ELT) in Chinese secondary senior schools. The Chinese Ministry of Language (2018) specifically emphasizes the importance of students' language ability to understand and express meaning in a social context through listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and particularly highlights the need to develop learners' awareness of lexical chunks in discourse to enhance their fluent and accurate output (Ministry of Education, 2018).

After studying the new curriculum standard, the author and her previous colleagues attempted to understand and discuss how to teach lexical chunks. However, they were disappointed to find that the curriculum standard does not provide a definition of "lexical chunk" or offer any specific guidance on effective chunk teaching. It merely advises teachers to focus on presenting lexical chunks and helping students pay attention to collocations and expressions (Ministry of Education, 2018). This suggestion leaves teachers with little guidance on how to effectively teach lexical chunks. Some teachers have tried dictating collocations from our supplementary material, but they were disappointed with the results when they assessed students' productive performance.

Vocabulary knowledge can be divided into "receptive" and "productive" categories (Nation, 2001, p. 24). Receptive knowledge is required for listening or reading, while productive knowledge is needed for speaking and writing. For a long time, both teachers and students have been accustomed to traditional vocabulary teaching methods, such as presenting translations from the second language (L2) to the first language (L1) or dictation. While students may have acquired sufficient receptive knowledge, they often struggle to retrieve the appropriate words when it comes to productive knowledge. This is where the challenge of teaching lexical chunks lies in this context. Thus, this paper will focus on finding out what are the potential factors for the ineffectiveness in EFL chunk teaching and what teachers can do to improve teaching lexical chunks in senior high schools.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Knowing a Word*

The concept of what it means to know a word has been widely explored in various studies (Badger, 2018; Carter, 2001; Nation, 2001; Read, 2000; Thornbury, 2002). According to Thornbury (2002), knowing a word involves both its form and its meaning, but simply understanding the meaning of a word from a dictionary is not sufficient because a word is closely linked to other words, such as collocations and connotations. Thornbury (2002) also notes that receptive knowledge often exceeds productive knowledge, as we often understand more words than we produce and tend to understand them before proficiently producing them. Thornbury (2002) argues that this is particularly true for second language (L2) learners due to the increasing amount of word knowledge and learning time, leading to a "state of initial fuzziness" (p. 16) during the vocabulary learning process. In short, Thornbury (2002) suggests that knowing a word involves both receptive and productive understanding of its form and meaning. Nation (2001) contends that knowing a word involves three layers of receptive and productive word knowledge, including "form, meaning, and use" (p. 27). In terms of form, learners need to be aware of a word's pronunciation and spelling. For meaning, learners need to understand a word's "form and meaning, concept and referents, and associations" (Nation, 2001, p. 27), while use requires learners to be familiar with a word's "grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use (register, frequency...)" (Nation, 2001, p. 27). Both Thornbury (2002) and Nation (2001) acknowledge that productive knowledge is more challenging than receptive knowledge and that there are two types of word knowledge: receptive/productive meaning and form. However, Nation (2001) further expands on the concept of knowing a word by including word use in addition to form and meaning. In addition, Nation (2001) breaks down both the form and meaning of a word into three categories: "spoken, written, and word parts" (p. 27) and "form/meaning, concepts/referents, associations" (p. 27), respectively. This is consistent with the idea that knowing a word involves receptive and productive understanding of its "spoken and written contexts of use; its patterns with words of related meaning as well as with its collocational partners; its syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse patterns" (Carter, 2001, p. 43). Without a thorough understanding of a word, learners may struggle to fully grasp receptive knowledge and may struggle even more with productive knowledge. Given that knowing a word is closely tied to word knowledge, the following section will examine vocabulary learning.

B. *The Process of Learning Vocabulary*

There has been much discussion in the literature on how vocabulary is learned in a first language (L1) or a second language (L2) (Takač, 2008; Thornbury, 2002; Webb & Nation, 2017). For instance, children typically acquire vocabulary in their L1 through processes such as "labeling, categorizing, and network building" (Thornbury, 2002, p. 18). In contrast, L2 learners already have "conceptual and semantic systems linked to the L1" (Takač, 2008, p. 8). This can make it difficult for L2 learners to connect new English words to their existing knowledge, as they may instead

associate these words with their native language or other non-native languages (Badger, 2018). Moreover, L2 learners must build a "second mental lexicon" (Thornbury, 2002, p. 18) and develop new conceptual systems, as word associations in the L1 may differ from those in the L2. L2 learners often rely on direct transfer from L1 to L2 equivalents, which may be influenced by their perceptions of linguistic and cultural distance (Takač, 2008, p. 9). The challenge of acquiring L2 vocabulary may be compounded by the fact that "the associative links in the second language lexicon are usually less firmly established than mother tongue links" (Thornbury, 2002, p. 18). Acquiring L2 vocabulary can be a lengthy process, and it is important for teachers and students to understand the conditions that can facilitate vocabulary learning (Webb & Nation, 2017). These conditions may include repetition, noticing, retrieval, varied encounters, and varied use and elaboration (Webb & Nation, 2017). These conditions are based on two critical elements: repetition and the quality of attention at each encounter (Webb & Nation, 2017). Repetition refers to the number of times learners are exposed to a word, while the quality of attention can be either incidental or deliberate. According to Thornbury (2002, p. 24), a word is more likely to be remembered if it is encountered at least seven times over spaced intervals. However, repetition alone is not sufficient for vocabulary learning; learners must also pay attention to the words they encounter, either incidentally or deliberately. This may involve noticing new words and trying to retrieve them from memory when needed (Badger, 2018). However, it is important to note that vocabulary learning involves more than just noticing and retrieval; it is a cumulative process that involves a range of aspects of knowledge (Nation, 2001, p. 4). Vocabulary learning is characterized by "creative and personalized use" (Thornbury, 2002, p. 31) and the acquisition of "memorized sequences of lexical items that serve as a pattern on the basis of which learners create new sequences" (Takač, 2008, p. 16). When organizing L2 words, L2 learners often combine L2 words that are equivalent to their L1 counterparts based on the sequences of their semantic knowledge. However, this may not always make sense, as "combinations that are idiomatic in one language often sound awkward when translated word-for-word into another, even when both languages are closely related" (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009, p. 1). To help L2 learners produce native-like language in various contexts, it is helpful to introduce them to lexical chunks such as collocations and lexical phrases, or "chunks," which are "pre-patterned and stored in long-term memory" (Takač, 2008, p. 16). These chunks can help learners produce language more fluently and accurately. These chunks generally refer to many lexical-grammatical structures "which are pre-patterned and may therefore be used in a formulaic rehearsed way" (Carter, 2001, p. 46). Given that these prefabricated chunks are beneficial to L2 proficiency in language output and capacity (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Takač, 2008), definitions about lexical chunks and relevant researches about their effect on language learning will be discussed in the following section". "Lexical chunks" refer to prefabricated, lexical-grammatical structures that can be used in a formulaic, rehearsed way (Carter, 2001, p. 46). Research has shown that these chunks can improve second language (L2) proficiency in language production and capacity (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Takač, 2008). In the following section, we will explore definitions of lexical chunks and the impact of these chunks on language learning. These chunks generally refer to many lexical-grammatical structures "which are pre-patterned and may therefore be used in a formulaic rehearsed way" (Carter, 2001, p. 46). Given that these prefabricated chunks are beneficial to L2 proficiency in language output and capacity (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Takač, 2008), definitions about lexical chunks and relevant research on their effect on language learning will be discussed in the following section.

C. Definitions of Lexical Chunks / Learning and Teaching Lexical Chunks

There have been numerous efforts to clarify the definition and concept of lexical chunks, which are a type of formulaic sequence (Lewis, 2002; Wray & Perkins, 2000; Wray, 2002). Formulaic sequences are defined as "a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated" (Wray, 2002, p. 9). In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching, terms such as "chunks, multiword units, idioms, and collocations" (Wray & Perkins, 2000, p. 3) are often used to refer to formulaic sequences. However, there is still no consensus on a precise definition of lexical chunks, possibly because "chunks can come in a variety of forms and fulfill a variety of functions" (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009, p. 3). In a recent study, Hou et al. (2018, p. 149) suggested that lexical chunks "can be defined according to grammatical structure, function, or degree of conventionalization or a combination thereof," while Lewis (2002, p. 3) argued that "language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks." These multi-word prefabricated chunks include "words, collocations, fixed expressions, and semi-fixed expressions" (Lewis, 2002, pp. 8-11) and are characterized by inherent semantic associations and syntactical functions. In this paper, we will use Lewis' (2002) taxonomy of lexical chunks, which refers to fixed multi-word phrases that cannot be separated (e.g. "in this way," "bread and butter"), combinations of words that frequently occur together in authentic discourse (e.g. "attend school," "have a good time"), and expressions with special pragmatic functions in language (e.g. "Merry Christmas!" "you can't always burn a hole in your pocket"). These lexical chunks, or multi-word units, can be saved in memory and retrieved automatically in daily speech (Richards & Rodger, 2001; Wray, 2002). In other words, learners can improve their proficiency in a language by focusing on these multi-word units as a whole rather than analyzing each individual word in a lexical chunk. This requires less cognitive effort (Schmitt, 2000, p. 400) and allows learners to more easily process new words (Carter, 2000). Lexical chunks can be learned or taught either incidentally or explicitly. Webb et al. (2013) found that collocations can be learned incidentally through repeated encounters in reading and listening, a finding supported by research showing that reading alone can also facilitate the learning of collocations (Sanchez, 2017). As for explicit

methods, Webb and Kagimoto (2009) found that both receptive (e.g. reading sentences and memorizing them) and productive tasks (e.g. completing a cloze activity) can help learners acquire collocational knowledge. Productive tasks were found to be more effective for advanced learners, while receptive tasks were more suitable for lower-level learners (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009). In a study by Zhang (2017), it was found that students can more effectively learn collocations through a combination of receptive tasks (e.g. reading L2 collocations with their L1 translations, understanding sentences with L2 collocations in bold) and productive tasks (e.g. creating new sentences using given collocations) compared to those in the receptive or productive groups alone. The positive effects of lexical chunks on language learning have been demonstrated in numerous studies within the EFL context. In the following section, we will explore several recent research findings on the implications of lexical chunks for teaching and learning.

D. Related Studies on Lexical Chunks in EFL Contexts

In recent decades, a number of studies have examined the relationship between lexical chunks and EFL students' proficiency, specifically whether non-native speakers can produce lexical chunks fluently and accurately. These studies have used various terms such as lexical bundles or collocations, which all refer to "fixed or semi-fixed lexical phrases, usually units longer than a single word" (Hou et al., 2018, p. 149). As lexical chunks are essential for functional language knowledge (Schmitt, 2000), more attention has been paid to the role they play in language acquisition. Hou et al. (2018) measured chunk coverage and average chunk length in a study of advanced EFL learners, and found that more proficient writers used more chunks. Despite little progress in students' overall writing scores, the researchers suggested that developing learners' use of chunks could promote them to a higher level. However, a study by Huang (2015) argued that using a large quantity of lexical chunks does not necessarily equate to good quality. Rather than focusing on the frequency and type of lexical bundles used by L2 learners, as Hou et al. did, Huang (2015) analyzed the accuracy of lexical bundles in the writing of Chinese college students of different English proficiency levels. The senior students, who had studied English for longer and used more lexical bundles, did not show significant improvement in the quality of their bundle use. To achieve a balance between fluency and accuracy, it is important for students to use lexical bundles with both quantity and quality in mind, and to receive training in both top-down and bottom-up approaches to help them use lexical bundles accurately and appropriately (Huang, 2015). A similar study by Pan et al. (2016) used a corpus-based approach to compare the structural and functional patterns of lexical bundles used by native and non-native English writers in academic papers. The results showed that native writers were more likely to use phrasal bundles, while non-native writers (Chinese speakers) primarily used clausal bundles. Additionally, there were functional differences in the use of lexical bundles between native and non-native writing. This aligns with the argument that non-native writers struggle to use collocations that are less frequent or closely connected, as used by native speakers (Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). Non-native writers also made mistakes in the use of certain lexical bundles in their professional writing (Pan et al., 2016). As a result, Pan et al. (2016) emphasized the need to help L2 academic students use lexical bundles appropriately and in context, with the correct structural patterns. The findings of Huang (2015) and Pan et al. (2016) suggest that the use of lexical chunks can affect language production, but teachers need to help students become aware of the appropriate use of these chunks, rather than simply focusing on the number used in production.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

Obviously, learning and using lexical chunks is not an easy matter. Teaching lexical chunks is no exception. Most of previous research about lexical chunks is done quantitatively among EFL advanced learners. Relatively little research has been conducted on how lexical chunks are effectively taught in Chinese EFL senior high schools. To address this issue, the present study will set out to investigate the ineffectiveness of teaching lexical chunks in the author's context in a qualitative way. To clarify why teaching lexical chunks hasn't achieved desired effect in the author's context, she is going to identify possible factors accounting for this dissatisfaction, though raising students' awareness of lexical chunks is articulated in the latest curriculum standard. So, the following research questions (RQ) will be addressed:

RQ1: Do English teachers in my context really teach lexical chunks as required by the curriculum standard?

RQ2: What beliefs about teaching lexical chunks do teachers hold in senior high school?

B. Research Method

It is not convenient for the author to observe how vocabulary is taught in EFL classrooms due to some objective reasons. As such, the author decides to interview the three in-service EFL teachers by enquiring their practice, puzzles in vocabulary instruction, and their perceptions on teaching lexical chunks. Conducting such an interview is "a known communication routine that the method works so well as a versatile instrument" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 134).

The foregoing literature reviews illustrate that lexical chunks, if well instructed, can make a big difference to students' language development and skills. Weighing up the understanding of the author's previous teaching context, several questions on my puzzles are intended to allow teachers to contemplate the process of teaching lexical chunks in real classroom and whether their students can form the awareness of lexical chunks thus facilitating their vocabulary learning. Before doing interviews with the three in-service teachers, the author has done a pilot study with another

teacher. To guarantee the quality of the interview questions, the author has deleted some of the questions that seemed overlapped or opaque. Real interview questions can be seen in Appendix I. To make the interviews smoothly, the real interview was conducted in Mandarin, audiotaped, transcribed and later translated into English.

C. Participants

The three participants have already taught in senior high school since they graduated from college. All of them have a bachelor degree. For sake of clear depiction, they will be labeled as Teacher 1 (male, 5 years of teaching), Teacher 2 (female, 25 years of teaching), Teacher 3 (female, 15 years of teaching). In their daily teaching, they are expected to deal with vocabulary teaching in our textbook or in other supplementary materials. Before the author interviewed them, she told them her intention to interview them and they readily accepted her request and signed the consent form. The author also told them she will put their names anonymously and keep the recordings undisclosed. At the end of each interview, she had a follow-up discussion with teachers to gain more insight to their beliefs and expectations on vocabulary teaching.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Derived from the interview data, several prominent factors will be ascribed to temporary ineffectiveness of lexical chunk in our context. In this section, in-depth explanation for the current situations of lexical chunks will be presented to address the research questions.

A. Teachers' Perceptions and Knowledge About Vocabulary and Lexical Chunks

The interviewees all considered that vocabulary played an important but challenging part in EFL learning, paralleling the argument that "in all stages of our education, vocabulary is central to learning context" (Webb & Nation, 2017, no pagination). They also regarded lexical chunks essential to improve students' language ability and advantages of learning lexical chunks (see their answers to Questions 4). Strikingly, all the three teachers were outspoken about the effect of lexical chunks on learning and teaching, such as facilitating proficiency and authenticity in production (see their answers to Question 4). The role of lexical chunks in learning English, from their perspectives, is in accord with the notion that "good chunk knowledge does contribute to proficiency in L2 as well as in L1" (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009, p. 38). However, there is little concordance in their understanding of what can be categorised as lexical chunks (see their response to Question 3). As is mentioned earlier, 'lexical chunks' is noted by the latest curriculum standard, however, no more information are not presented clearly enough for the teachers to learn about the theoretical knowledge about lexical chunks, needless to say, to teach lexical chunks effectively.

Question 4: What do you think of the role of lexical chunks in English learning?

T1: Important. Since lexical chunks mean not a simple single word, but many words together. If students can grasp a multiword unit in classroom, they may not have difficulty when they communicate in English. Lexical chunks make it convenient for students to well organize language in brain. Lexical chunk teaching is important to EFL teaching in our senior high schools, because students may need lexical chunks to improve their writing ability like using some structural sentences

T2: I think lexical chunks are useful and beneficial. If students can apply lexical chunks in their learning, their English level will impossibly be a load of crap. At least, they can have a good sense of language. Learning lexical chunks allows them to understand the language knowledge better and convey the meaning more native like without interference by our mother tongue.

T3: Actually, now I have begun to realize lexical chunks can be indeed termed as the core of vocabulary learning and teaching

Question 3: How much do you know about lexical chunks?

T1: Lexical chunks, from my point of view, words together with certain meaning like phrases and collocations, sentence structures and idioms

T2: Unlike idioms, lexical chunks can be typical collocations, but their connection between words may not be as fixed or close as idioms.

T3: Lexical chunks can be something like verb phrase + preposition. For example, take in, take out, turn around...etc. Similar to something in our L1, English lexical chunks are like some expressions serving as clues...when we don't finish our speech, the listeners can slightly predict what is going to be said next.

B. Teachers' Approaches of Teaching Lexical Chunks

From the account of the participants' hands-on vocabulary teaching in classroom, another finding is that all teachers are under top-down pressure, such as the exam-oriented context and the innovated curriculum standard. Their hands-on teaching vocabulary turned out to be a little different (see their answers to Question 2). To meet the demands of required tasks, Teacher 1 chose a more conventional and explicit approach, i.e. teaching all the knowledge of the given words in each unit of the textbook before dealing with relevant tasks about these words. Similarly, Teacher 2 also adopted in an explicit way out of the needs proposed by her students, but indeed she felt immensely resistant to do in this way, which she thought could impede students' language development. Rather than teach words isolated from discourse, Teacher 3

preferred to teach vocabulary implicitly by asking her students to guess, infer and understand words contextually.

Question 2: How do you usually teach vocabulary?

T1: I still take the traditional way of teaching vocabulary. Ask the students to follow the word-list in each unit of the textbook...teach them one by one. Then I teach them the knowledge of this word, like form and meaning.

T2: Well, actually, I am resistant to the conventional way, like teaching all the words before we begin to deal with a text! Students can't learn effectively in this way. Only by discourse will they take the text as a whole and isolate the meaning of each word they meet. However, sometimes I don't have choice but to give in to students' requirement because they tend to prefer the old way.

T3: I strongly disagree that students are taught all the target vocabularies before they meet these words in discourse. I often teach these words in discourse, guiding them to guess and understanding from the context.

When further asked how they really teach lexical chunks (see their answers to Question 5), they did take this responsibility through incidental and receptive approaches like asking students to notice useful lexical chunks in reading and then record in notebooks for future study. In this regard, their action on chunk teaching showed that they really took the responsibility for students' learning by "being more proactive in pointing out useful language and getting learners to record it is an essential role of the teacher" (Lewis, 2000, p. 18). Teacher 3 also underlined the great necessity to instruct students to become an autonomous learner.

Question 5: How do you usually teach lexical chunks?

T1: Well, I think students can be guided to underline, memorise and understand lexical chunks in reading. Through these underlined collocations, I can enhance their ability to recognize chunks. In my opinion, we can design some activities like giving students a text with some blanks and fill in the blanks with some collocations. However, our time is limited, so I seldom do this.

T2: I don't teach lexical chunks especially for a certain lesson. Mostly, I lead the students to pay attention to some collocations with patterns like "noun + verb" (realize/achieve one's dream). While analysing some reading texts, I often ask the students to pay attention to these native like chunks.

T3: Firstly, I think we need to tell the students not to memorise word by word, and in careful reading, we can discuss with students about which lexical chunks they think might be important and then underline, and advise students to accumulate these on their notebook. We can also use jigsaws and students in each group can exchange their ideas. In this process, students can gradually form the habit rather than feel pushed to do this by us. Besides, we can design some interesting activities, word puzzles or brainstorm to map their prior knowledge. Therefore, students can gain awareness. Dictation is the worst way of teaching.

However, depending solely on teachers' instructions to notice chunks as an intervention tends to be "insufficiently effective" (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009, p. 54), and "rich vocabulary is not necessarily a consequence of having inference skills" (Takač, 2008, p. 18). Incidental acquisition of chunks through reading, especially in EFL context, is considered as impracticable in that "most chunks occur relatively infrequently" (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009, p. 42). In addition, less autonomous learners would be less likely to output the recorded chunks in their notebooks without some recycling activities requiring students to "reconstruct the main content of the text, or parts of the text, using the collocations as prompts" (Lewis, 2000, p. 26). Only "by making frequent use of lexical bundles or other variations of formulaic sequences" (Huang, 2015, p. 21) can learner's fluency in speaking and writing be optimised. Taken together, the most notable feature of chunk teaching in my context seems anchored in receptive approaches instead of integrating some productive approaches. Coupled with teachers' nebulous concepts of lexical chunks, such consistent approach is another reason for the failure of chunk teaching.

C. Teachers' Schooling and Working Experiences

According to Wedell and Malderez (2013), teachers' previous experiences can be influential to the EFL classroom to some extent. During the interviewees' schooling, scant attention was paid to teaching lexical chunks, and Teacher 2 was just tangentially exposed to lexical chunks in reading instruction (see their answers to Question 8). Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 said that they were taught vocabulary in a conventional way during their schooling, so lexical chunks seemed an unexplored domain before they worked as EFL teachers.

Question 8: As an advanced English learner and teacher, have you ever been trained to use lexical chunks for productive tasks, like speaking and writing?

T1: No. In my memory, most of my English teachers often followed the word-list, required us to follow to read aloud before we dealt with the text reading in each unit.

T2: Yes, but a little bit. When I was in Junior or senior middle school, our English teachers generally taught so traditionally. Every day, we had a word dictation as a quiz...teacher read a word in the list...and we wrote down and needed to spell correctly with L1 equivalents attached ...even though I could spell individual word correctly, I found my output at that time far from satisfaction. As for lexical chunks, I remembered one of my teachers asked us to underline some chunks like collocations or fixed sentence structures which they thought seemed useful and highly frequent in a reading text.

T3: No, never.

While talking about their experiences in teaching (see their answers to Question 9), Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 reported they had never been observed some shared lessons relevant to lexical chunks, while Teacher 1 said he had once watched

a class where a teacher guided students to write a composition by the given lexical chunks concerning a topic. Interesting as the class was, Teacher 3 showed his concern that students may be at a loss next time they are given another topic without the prompts of lexical chunks.

Question 9: Have you ever watched live lessons relevant to chunks for language production?

T1: Yes, but only a few, only in those writing classes. I have once observed a classroom where the English teacher presented a series of lexical chunks relevant to the writing topic. It turned out to be interesting, creative and successful. However, I wonder whether it always functions well, especially when the students encounter another writing task about an unfamiliar topic in the exam.

T2: No, never.

T3: No, it seems that lexical chunk belongs to a new domain in our teaching context.

In this sense, little access to chunk teaching seems to reside in “the minimal extent to which trainers themselves have been helped to make sense of the new curriculum” (Grassick & Wedell, 2018, p. 260). In default of accessible training supported by the top-down policy makers, it can be safely confirmed that most teachers in my context are more inclined to teaching vocabulary in an old way and this will definitely bring chunk teaching to a standstill.

D. Limited Variety of Materials and Exam-Oriented Factors

Currently in senior high school, lexical chunks in classroom are commonly used to be presented in the form of two-word collocations. Regarded as by-products of a target word to teach, lexical chunks remain “useful, but peripheral” (Lewis, 2000, p. 27), despite increasing awareness of chunks as aforementioned. In the textbook, there scatter a limited amount of receptive exercises related to collocations, such blank filling or matching.

When asked what kind of materials can be used to teach lexical chunks (see their answers to Question 11), Teacher 1 hoped that he can learn more from some instructive resources like shared lessons. Teacher 2 expected technological corpus to help teachers and students to select frequent chunks occurring in the exam, so we can improve the efficiency of preparing lessons. While there is a widespread assumption that “what goes into a course book will be maximally useful” (Koprowski, 2005, p. 330), Teacher 3 considered some of the lexical chunks in the current textbook not so useful to learners, and she insisted that students’ textbook be upgraded soon. Teacher 3 also advocated native reading materials and collocational dictionary can be complemented. Though Teacher 3’s priority goes to exam-oriented exercise materials, she often found those chunks not so native-like.

Question 11: What kind of top-down support do you expect to get? (e. g. teaching resources)

T1: I hope there will be more shared and recommended lessons about chunk teaching, like some shared lessons online. It is a quick way for us to follow chunk teaching.

T2: I would expect we can teaching lexical chunks with the help of technology and corpus. If those highly frequent chunks in students’ exams can be listed out, we teachers don’t have to spend so much time selecting lexical chunks, and thus improve the teaching efficiency.

T3: Our textbook needs upgrading. It has been used for a long time. Some of the expressions are not so useful to our students. Besides, it would be more convenient if students can be allocated a collocational dictionary, but this seems difficult to realise. Most of the time, I would prefer to teach chunks by making use of our supplemented materials concerning our exam, but those chunks are also not authentic in that those articles are not written by native speakers. The last point I want to say is our text. You know, if lexical chunks are taken as one of the rubrics in our test, like writing, our teachers will not take it seriously. I think teaching lexical chunks will be more effective and successful once they are compulsorily required in our tests.

In senior high school, exam results still remain the only yardstick of a school’s performances. Under such circumstances, asking teachers to try something new required by the curriculum standard seems threatening and “represents a huge risk for any teacher’s professional self-image and status” (Grassick & Wedell, 2018, p. 261). Despite this, all the participants in this study all showed their interest in exploring more about lexical chunks, though the exam-oriented system hasn’t been fundamentally reformed. It is noteworthy that Teacher 3 believed that lexical chunks will be taken seriously by teachers only when lexical chunks are explicitly required as one of the rubrics in students’ test. In a teach-to-test environment, limited diversity of materials and disagreement between curriculum and exams can also account for the widespread ignorance of lexical chunks in senior high school.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

There are several implications for vocabulary teaching in senior high school based on the findings of this study. First, teachers should increase lexical awareness and consciously help students develop sensitivity to lexical chunks. Before introducing lexical chunks to students, teachers should consider whether they will be useful and relevant for their students. Classroom activities can be utilized to improve students’ ability to recognize and use lexical chunks. Without awareness of lexical chunks, students may struggle to understand texts with complex semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Therefore, it is important for teachers to analyze and scaffold challenging lexical chunks for students to promote language proficiency.

Second, teachers can make use of the 24 topics in the syllabus to help students accumulate relevant chunks and complete communicative tasks. By identifying and acquiring lexical chunks related to each unit’s topic, teachers can

ensure that both curriculum content and high-stakes exams are well-integrated. This approach also allows teachers to improve chunk teaching receptively and productively using materials available to every student.

Finally, teachers should revolutionize the way they address students' vocabulary errors. For a long time, students' spelling and handwriting have been overemphasized, particularly in writing practice and tests. However, this can discourage autonomous students from attempting to use lexical chunks. According to Lewis (2000), students' collocational mistakes provide teachers with an opportunity to effectively expand and organize learners' lexicons. Instead of spending a lot of time correcting students' spelling or grammatical errors, teachers can focus on collecting common collocational mistakes and using them to teach lexical chunks more effectively. It's important for teachers to recognize that these mistakes are valuable for chunk teaching, and it can be counterproductive to overly focus on surface errors.

VII. CONCLUSION

Lexical chunks, which incorporate grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, are a central focus in a lexical approach to language learning and teaching (Thornbury, 2002). These chunks have been shown to enhance authentic language input, memory, retention, and output. However, EFL students often struggle to produce chunks naturally, due to a lack of guidance from teachers and insufficient exposure to English (Lewis, 2000; Takač, 2008). The interview data in this study suggests that teachers in senior high school may only be superficially teaching lexical chunks, but this does not necessarily mean that the teachers are to blame. Instead, the contextual factors in my context make it difficult for teachers to strike a balance between introducing new concepts and preparing students for exams. Vocabulary learning is a challenging and ongoing process that students must undertake on their own, with teachers assisting through "careful planning and well-directed teaching" (Nation, 2003, p. 150). While teaching can be organized in a linear fashion, learning is more complex and non-linear (Lewis, 2000). Therefore, it is important for teachers and policymakers to recognize that a strict adherence to certain rules and regulations may not align with the nature of learning. To address the challenges of chunk teaching in this context, we must consider the underlying causes and work towards a more effective implementation of lexical chunks in EFL classrooms.

VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this study, the current state of chunk teaching was investigated through interviews with teachers. The findings reveal certain aspects of teachers' knowledge, learning experiences, and teaching strategies related to vocabulary. However, it should be noted that there are limitations to this study that were not addressed due to time and word constraints, and it would be inappropriate to generalize the responses of the three interviewees to all teachers. To further explore potential issues in chunk teaching, future research could include observations of actual classes or gather students' perspectives to supplement and potentially confirm the data obtained through interviews.

APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. Could you please talk about your views on vocabulary teaching?
- Q2. How do you usually teach vocabulary?
- Q3. How much do you know about lexical chunks?
- Q4. What do you think of the role of lexical chunks in English teaching?
- Q5. How do you usually teach lexical chunks?
- Q6. When designing classroom activities for receptive or productive lexical chunks, what factors should teachers consider to raise students' awareness of lexical chunks?
- Q7. What materials do you often choose to optimize teaching lexical chunks?
- Q8. As an advanced English learner and teacher, have you ever been trained to use lexical chunks for productive tasks, like speaking and writing?
- Q9. Have you ever watched live lessons relevant to chunks for language production?
- Q10. Will you try to explore more about teaching lexical chunks in your future teaching?
- Q11. What kind of top-down support do you expect to get? (e. g. teaching resources)

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