



The Influence of Lexically-Based Language Teaching on Task Response and Coherence and Cohesion Aspects of Writing Proficiency of Iranian University EFL Learners

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Abstract

The current quasi-experimental research aimed at exploring the influence of Lexically-Based Language Teaching (LBLT) on task response and coherence and cohesion aspects of the writing proficiency of Iranian university EFL learners. The research sample of the study included sixty male and female university students (N = 60) attending two university classes. They were selected by using a convenient sampling procedure and were assigned to experimental and control groups. To ascertain the groups' homogeneity at the beginning of the study, the researchers gave two groups the Key English Test (KET). Prior to starting treatment, two groups took the pretest writing task. While the participants comprising the experimental group were instructed consistent with the lexical approach's underlying practices and activities, those constituting the control group were instructed based on conventional techniques applied to present essay writing in universities. At the end of the experiment, the posttest writing, identical to the pretest, was given to both groups. To compare the two groups' mean scores with respect to coherence and cohesion and task response aspects of post-test writing, One-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and independent T-test were drawn upon. Version 20th of the SPSS software was applied for this end. The attained results were indicative of a significantly positive influence of the lexically-based language teaching on both coherence and cohesion and task response aspects of writing proficiency. However, the attained improvement was greater in the task response aspect. The findings suggest some implications for English language teachers and university instructors.

Keywords: Coherence and cohesion, Lexically-based language teaching, Task response, Writing proficiency

Received: 04/08/2022 Accepted: 31/01/2023

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How to cite this article:

Ahmadian, M., & Momeni, G. (2023). The Influence of Lexically-Based Language Teaching on Task Response and Coherence and Cohesion Aspects of Writing Proficiency of Iranian University EFL Learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 42(1), 61-90. doi: 10.22099/tesl.2023.45219.3160



One of the most commonly agreed upon claims among leading scholars and researchers in language acquisition process concerns the pivotal role that knowledge of the words plays in the development and acquisition of both language comprehension and production since the greatest part of intended meaning can be expressed by words (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2014; Webb, 2020). The considerable contribution of vocabulary knowledge to the process of language actuation has been reported by numerous researchers and theoreticians specialized and engrossed in the domain of vocabulary learning and teaching (e.g., Alsowat, 2022; McCarthy & O'Dell 2020; Nation, 2013; Schmitt & Gonzales-Fernandez, 2020; Stahr, 2008; Stahr, 2009). From the 1990s on, following the inefficiency of communicative language teaching in attaining its intended purposes and the emergence of learning-based language teaching methods, vocabulary teaching has been given more consideration and attention (Lewis, 1997; Willis & Willis, 2006).

One of the indefatigable and ubiquitous challenges with which many intermediate and advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners constantly encounter is that they cannot put their knowledge of the words in actual use when they are required to express their intended meaning in productive language skills, that is speaking and writing. Furthermore, the problem gets more aggravating when it comes to using words and lexical chunks in written discourse among intermediate and advanced EFL university learners (Kazemi, Katiraei, & Rasekh, 2014). A number of justifications such as ineffective and obsolete techniques applied to teach vocabulary besides reverting to the hunches and intuitions of the curriculum developers, researchers, course trainers, and language teachers can be recommended to account for this limitation. Additionally, overlooking the findings of the well-documented and updated studies related to vocabulary teaching and learning along with assigning primary attention to forms-focused instruction can be alternative explanations for this drawback. Still, the possible gap between research-informed vocabulary teaching principles and teachers' enactment of these principles in the classroom in conjunction with a lack of awareness of the considerable contribution of vocabulary to the communication process has been proposed to explain that limitation (Bloch, 2009, as cited in Rahimi & Momeni, 2012). An instructively practical remedy recommended for teachers can be applying the lexical approach's underlying practices and activities. To highlight the importance of vocabulary knowledge in language acquisition, Richards and Rodgers (2001, cited in Thornbury, 2019) contend that, the most indispensable components in language teaching and interaction are no longer

language functions, linguistic forms, and concepts but, instead, lexis, meaning the patterns in which word appears along with its associations with other lexical items.

According to Nattinger and DeCarrico(19^{۹۲}), the most fundamental aspect of language acquisition is the ability to perceive, retrieve, and review these lexical patterns and phrases, commonly referred to as“ lexical chunks, providing the solid foundation and raw data by which learners produce patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar”(p. 133). Lexically-based language teaching distinguishes isolated words with a roughly fixed meaning and lexis refers to the word combination stored in the language user's mental lexicon as prefabricated patterns ready to be drawn upon for the possible use in productive skills. Accordingly, the lexical approach places more emphasis on presenting institutionalized utterances and expressions including collocations, lexical chunks, and idioms, necessary to acquire native-like competence and fluency in the desired language (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2014; Thornbury, 2019; Webb, 2020).

Lexical chunks recommended in lexically-based language teaching can be instructionally conducive to language development and language acquisition (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2014; Webb, 2020; Willis & Willis, 2006). They can be drawn upon to alleviate some burden put on EFL learners who are to compose different kinds of writing tasks. According to some researchers such as Mahvelati (2016), Kazemi et al. (2014), and Ghafarsamar, Shokrpour, and Nasiri (2018), proficiency in writing is considered one of the most challenging and controversial skills with which numerous, intermediate and advanced, EFL learners and university students grapple continuously. Nevertheless, this skill is conceived as one of the most essential skills and requirements for prospective intermediate and advanced EFL learners and university students since they are required to publish the results of their studies and articles in English (Baba Ahmadi & Babaie Shalmani, 2022; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Ghafarsamar et al., 2018; Kazemi et al., 2014; Mahvelati, 2016). Technically speaking, writing proficiency can be defined as the ability to compose a piece of paragraph replete with miscellaneous lexical items, grammatically accurate structures, and organizationally coherent and cohesive sentences. One of the most frequently used scoring criteria for writing tasks is the one currently used to rate writing task II of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), encapsulating four components: task response, lexical resources, cohesion and coherence, and grammatical range and accuracy,

There have been a bulk of experimental studies documenting that most of the writing samples created by intermediate and advanced EFL university learners in Iran suffer from some glaring shortcomings in a way that their writing tasks appear unnatural and defective

to the taste of those who are specialized in their intended genre (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, & Darvishi, 2012; Shamsabadi, 2017; Zahedi & Mirzadeh, 2010). Among these serious defections existing in Iranian EFL university learners' writing tasks, one can mention the problems with coherence and cohesion aspects. According to Menzel, Lapshinova-Koltunski, and Kunz (2017), in line with Halliday and Hassan's theory (1976), cohesion and coherence can be defined as follow:

Coherence first of all is a cognitive phenomenon. Its recognition is rather subjective as it involves text- and reader-based features and refers to the logical flow of interrelated topics (or experiential domains) in a text, thus establishing a mental textual world. Cohesion can be regarded as an explicit indicator of relations between topics in a text. It refers to the text-internal relationship of linguistic elements that are overtly linked via lexical and grammatical devices across sentence boundaries. (pp. 1-2)

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), there exist a number of cohesive devices at the disposal of the writers to create cohesion in the writing including two main categories of grammatical and lexical cohesive tools. While the former category includes co-reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction sub-categories, the latter consists of two main categories of collocation and reiteration. Having an adequate command of these cohesive devices can help establish cohesion in the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) contend that collocation is the most demanding dimension in creating and maintaining lexical cohesion.

To resolve this issue, some leading researchers in the domain of vocabulary teaching have recommended that EFL learners be provided with instruction on different lexical chunks related to specific words or themes (Duin & Graves, 1987; Gao, 2019; Lin, 2015; Nation, 2013; Shamsabadi, 2017, Shi & Qian, 2012). Therefore, providing instruction based on lexically-based language teaching can help improve the quality of the writing tasks in terms of task response and coherence and cohesion aspects.

One possible gap with available literature related to writing is that most of the studies conducted, with regard to the effect of lexical chunks, have assessed writing proficiency holistically. The result of searching the available literature by the authors of the current study indicated that there was a dearth of studies, both locally and internationally, which have taken a discrete-point approach to assess writing proficiency (Ghafarsmar et al., 2018; Shamsabadi et al.2017)). Furthermore, only a few of them took into account all lexical approach's underlying techniques, activities, and tactics for tentative application

in classroom use. To fill the afore-mentioned gap in the literature, the present study peruses a more detailed consideration of the lexical approach in conjunction with that of assessing EFL university learners' writing proficiency since it was conducted to examine the possible bearing of lexically-based language teaching on task response and coherence and cohesion aspects of writing proficiency among EFL university learners in Iran. The research attempts to answer the following questions:

Q1: Does lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) have any effect on the task response aspect of writing of Iranian EFL learners?

Q2: Does lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) have any effect on the coherence and cohesion aspect of writing of Iranian EFL learners?

The following research hypotheses can be set forth for the above-mentioned research questions:

H1: Lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) does not have any effect on the task response aspect of writing of Iranian EFL learners.

H2: Lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) does not have any effect on the coherence and cohesion aspect of writing of Iranian EFL learners.

Review of the Literature

It can be reasonably claimed that language learners who have, at their own disposal, a greater command of the miscellaneous lexical chunks can manifest a better performance in both productive and receptive uses of language (Nation, 2013; Webb, 2020; Willis, 1990). Despite the fact that grammatical knowledge is, also, of major importance in the acquisition and development of the target language, vocabulary knowledge can present a more comprehensive picture of language due to the fact that learners cannot communicate affectively without sufficient knowledge of vocabulary (Widdowson, 1993, as cited in Fu, 2016). A partially comprehensive review of the literature pertinent to the bearing of word knowledge on the development and acquisition of different language skills and components indicated that having adequate knowledge of different aspects of word knowledge and lexical phrases can make a considerable contribution to the facilitating of language acquisition. These studies approved and documented the facilitative role of vocabulary knowledge on the development of language skills including writing (Ebrahimi, Namaziandost, Ziafar, & Ibna Seraj, 2021; Johnson, Acevedo, & Mercado, 2016; Webb, 2020), listening (Stahr, 2009), reading (Hedge, 2008; Gass, 2015), and speaking (Nation, 2006; Stahr, 2008).

Vocabulary knowledge is a multi-faceted construct including knowledge of some sub-components such as knowledge of word's collocation, pragmatic along with semantic meaning, denotative and connotative meaning, words syntactic pattern (Nation, 2006, 2013; Schmitt, 2014; Thornbury, 2002). Apparently, one of the most comprehensive and instructionally practical frameworks related to the components involved in word knowledge is the one put forward by Nation (2013), including three main aspects and their corresponding subsections (Figure 1).

FORM	Spoken	[R] What does the word sound like? [P] How is the word pronounced?
	Written	[R] What does the word look like? [P] How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	[R] What parts are recognisable in this word? [P] What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
MEANING	Form and meaning	[R] What meaning does this word form signal? [P] What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concept and referents	[R] What is included in the concept? [P] What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	[R] What other words does this make us think of? [P] What other words could we use instead of this one?
USE	Grammatical functions	[R] In what patterns does the word occur? [P] In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	[R] What words or types of words occur with this one? [P] What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use	[R] Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word? [P] Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

Figure 1. Nation's (2013: 49) framework of the components involved in knowing a word.

In figure 1, the upper case letters R and P stand for recognition and production aspect of the word knowledge respectively.

According to Schmitt and Gonzalez-Fernandez (2020), the framework presented by Nation (2013) was a less exhaustive framework for vocabulary knowledge since it includes only three main components of form, meaning, and use at the expense of other components such as derivatives and forms-meaning interaction. In addition, the developed framework does not account for the relationship between the desired components. Therefore, they developed another more exhaustive and detailed model to characterize the components of word knowledge and their relationship (Figure 2).

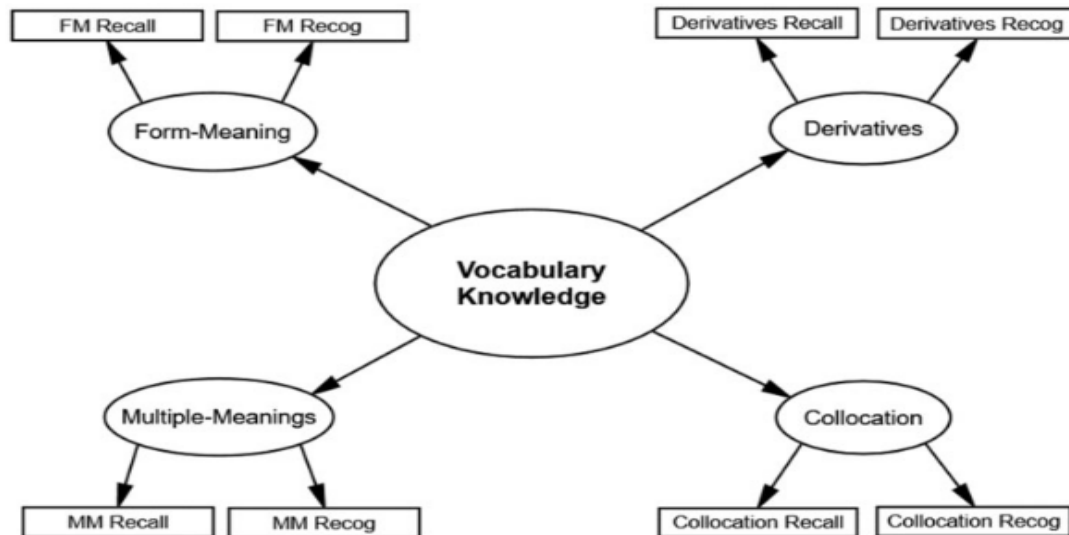


Figure 2. Schmitt and Gonzalez-Fernandez's (2020) model of relationships between word knowledge components

Based on the model proposed by Schmitt and Gonzalez-Fernandez (2020), knowledge of collocation is regarded as an indispensable component of word knowledge both for language comprehension and production. The essence of the lexical approach lies in the claim made by Lewis (1993, p. 89) that “language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar”. Put more simply, the statement denotes that language learning is far beyond the mastery of grammatical rules or memorizing isolated words but is the mastery of the ready-made multi-word combinations and chunks that are instructively conducive to language acquisition.

Unlike the traditional and still conventionally applicable techniques in vocabulary teaching that adhere strongly to presenting words in isolations in the form of glossary at the margin or end of the reading passages, lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) requires that words as building blocks of language learning and language teaching be presented in the form of the lexical chunks. Due to the fact that lexical phrases serve various functions in both written and spoken discourse, different categories of lexical chunks such as discourse organizers, fillers, idiomatic expressions, sentence frames, grammatical and lexical collocations, phrasal verbs, institutionalized utterances, proverbs, similes, ploy words, binominals, and trinominals have been advocated and recommended as instructively conducive structures in seminal books and papers of the

most leading scholars in this domain (e.g. Lewis, 1997; Nation, 2006; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). Touching upon the underlying reasons for classifications of different lexical chunks involves much comprehensive dealing that goes beyond the scope of this study. In the following sections, the bearing of lexical chunks on both receptive and productive skills along with vocabulary learning will be accounted for.

There exists a bulk of experimental studies which aim to investigate the pivotal and facilitative role of different categories of lexical chunks, as the backbone of lexical-based language teaching, on vocabulary learning (Rahimi & Momeni, 2012; Sewbihon-Getie, 2021), speaking proficiency (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018; Shooshtari & Karami, 2013), reading comprehension (Alsowat, 2022; Mehrpour & Rahimi, 2010), and writing proficiency (Ashouri & Mashhadi Heidar, 2015; Ghafarsamar et al., 2018; Kazemi et al., 2014). For instance, Debabi and Guerroud (2018) claimed that achieving a higher degree of fluency in language use is only attainable in the light of EFL learners taking advantage of teaching lexical bundles. One possible drawback concerning this study is that it did not provide a crystal-clear criterion to operationalize and measure linguistic fluency.

According to the findings conferred by Shamsabadi et al. (2017), within a university context, providing instruction based on lexically-based language teaching, in particular on lexical bundles, can exert a useful and contributory influence on improving the quality of writing proficiency among university students. Besides, their experimental study in English for academic purposes courses showed that teaching lexical bundles explicitly can increasingly expand learners' both productive and perceptive vocabulary knowledge. However, their study was merely restricted to teaching four-word lexical items frequently used in academic texts. Besides, their research participants were only chosen from among the master's university students whose major was Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

Ghafarsamar et al. (2018) found that providing instruction restricted merely to lexical bundles can remarkably enhance the EFL learners' performance in creating writing tasks only in light of the development attained only in the lexical resources aspect of writing proficiency. Surprisingly, their study showed that instruction on lexical bundles did not dramatically affect other aspects of writing proficiency including lexical resources, coherence and cohesion, grammatical range, and accuracy. The findings of numerous local and international studies (e.g. Azadnia, 2021; Hsu, 2007; Kazemi et al., 2014; Mahvelati, 2016; Mirzaei, Beyzaei, & Roohani, 2018; Mounya, 2010) lent good support to the very fact lexical chunks can play a significant part in improving the quality of writing task created from the part of EFL learners. In spite of the fact that these studies

reiterate the facilitative effect of instruction in lexical chunks on enhancing the quality of writing tasks assigned, some other studies reported somewhat different findings when the influence of lexical chunks on components of writing proficiency was concerned. The findings of experimental research conducted by Ashouri and Mashhadi Heidar (2015) among advanced EFL learners indicated that corpus-based teaching of the collocations improved merely two aspects of writing proficiency, meaning mechanics and vocabulary. Nevertheless, no remarkable and statistically significant effect was found as far as grammar and fluency components were concerned.

Given the substantial contribution of lexical knowledge in inferring the intended meaning in the reading process, it seems reasonable to assume that lexical chunks can exert a noticeable influence on the development of EFL learners' reading comprehension (Stahr, 2008). Surprisingly Kim and Bae (2012, as cited in Fasihzadeh, 2020) reported quite contradictory findings on the ground that instruction strictly following the intended practices and activities of the lexical approach, particularly collocations, cannot dramatically improve Korean EFL learners' reading comprehension. When it comes to the effect of collocation-oriented instruction on writing proficiency, considerable improvement was observed in the performance of EFL learner's writing. Apparently, the educational context and skill involved play a mediating role in moderating the possible contribution of teaching lexical bundles to language acquisition. However, the tentative impact of these prefabricated chunks in the process of language learning has remained an under-researched topic.

Other studies examined the influence of teaching these prefabricated lexical bundles on spoken productive use of language. According to Sadeghi and Panahifar (2013), EFL learners who tend to draw upon different categories of the collocations are, to the greatest extent, more fluent in using language compared to those who do not have an adequate command of these formulaic expressions. Nevertheless, having adequate knowledge of these expressions cannot provide compelling evidence that EFL learners will draw upon them in their actual use of language. One constraint with this experimental study lies in the fact that researchers did not consider the possible effect of other categories of lexical chunks such as discourse markers, institutional phrases, and idioms, to name just a few. In a similar vein, Mohammadi and Enayati (2018) demonstrated that dramatic improvement in speaking fluency of intermediate EFL learners can be observed following the instruction on the lexical chunks. Interestingly, the participants comprising the experimental group developed a positive attitude considering teaching lexical chunks.

Due to the fact that words can convey the greatest proportion of the intended meanings and messages (Wilkins, 1972), they are deserved to be given receive consideration in everyday teaching experiences. Presumably, presenting desired words by the dint of lexical chunks can increase the likelihood of their retention for future use. The findings of an experimental study by Rahimi and Momeni (2012) revealed that drawing upon lexically-based language teaching's instructional techniques and activities can remarkably enhance the chance of vocabulary retention among intermediate Iranian high school EFL learners. A similar finding was also attained by other studies, including Pakdaman and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2019); Khodareza and Ashouri (2016), which investigated the influence of teaching lexical chunks, more specifically lexical collocations, explicitly on increasing vocabulary command within an intermediate learning context

Writing has always been conceived as the most essential skill but, at the same time, one of the demanding skills for different EFL learners at intermediate, upper-intermediate, and even advanced levels (Amirian, Ketabi, & Eshaghi, 2013; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Kazemi et al., 2014). One of the most required skills for academic writing is that the created written samples should meet the “specifying textual requirements” of the intended genre otherwise that written task would seem unnatural and inaccurate (Connor et al., 2008, as cited in Amirian et al., 2013). To be regarded as communicatively competent in the discourse community, members specialized in that genre are required to produce and retrieve these determining textual features.

According to Amirian et al. (2013), one of these textual features is regularities in using specific linguistic forms and content, among which lexical bundles can be of paramount importance. Therefore, having adequate command and using the most frequent lexical bundles can considerably affect the overall quality of writing tasks. For instance, the findings of the most updated experimental study by Ebrahimi et al. (2021) yielded interesting findings with respect to the bearing of teaching formulaic expressions on enhancing the quality of the writing tasks composed by pre-intermediate EFL learners in Iran. It revealed that drawing upon a contrastive approach with regard to collocation teaching in which formulaic expressions and their Persian translation are simultaneously brought to the attention of learners can enhance writing proficiency. Hence the concept of formulaicity should receive more attention in teaching writing. By taking advantage of the corpus-based teaching of these lexical chunks, Pérez-Llantada (2014), claims that: “formulaicity is a key feature of the academic written register across language variables and that genre determines writers’ choice of formulaic sequences in terms of frequency,

structural constituency, semantic non-idiomaticity, syntax, and overall discourse style”(p. 92).

Presumably, the most updated study aiming to investigate the problems with Iranian EFL learners' writing performance is the one carried out by Mohseni and Samadian (2019) to analyze the cohesion and coherence aspects in writing samples of intermediate EFL learners in Iran. They found that ineffective handling of coherence and cohesion aspects in Iranian EFL learners' writing samples can impact their overall writing proficiency. Although there had been some cases of cohesive ties in their descriptive essays, learners were not able to provide cogent support and reason for including them in their writing performance.

Unfortunately, compared to other language skills, the effect of lexically-based language teaching on writing proficiency has not received enough attention and consideration from the part of researchers despite the fact that most of the aforementioned investigations done in the Iranian context turned to investigating the possible impact of limited classes of lexical phrases on wiring proficiency at the expense of other categories of lexical chunks. Furthermore, the participants constituting the research samples of these studies were chosen from among those learners who were not majoring in ELT. Moreover, the primary emphasis in these studies was merely placed on instructing collocations. The limitation of these studies, which provide sufficient incentives for the researchers to undertake this apparently similar investigation, is that the analytical approach to the assessment of overall writing proficiency, considering the components of the writing proficiency, has not been taken in these studies.

As far as rating writing tasks are concerned, a number of scoring criteria are commonly recommended by the leading figures in ELT. One of the most frequently used rating criteria is the one recommended to score Writing Task 2 of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), sometimes referred to as IELTS public band descriptors. It includes four main descriptors used to measure vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, the interconnection between sentences, and the stance the writers take regarding the assigned theme. According to Bagheri and Riasati (2016, as cited in Ghafarsamar, 2018, p.32), these criteria are called “lexical resources (LR), grammatical and accuracy (GRA), coherence and cohesion (CC), and task response (TR)”. According to Bagheri and Riasati (2016, p. 200), “TR demands that candidates develop a position or stand regarding the given input prompt”. Ghafarsamr et al. (2018, p.32) contend that the “CC aspect is concerned with the test taker's ability to join different parts of the

sentence(s) and paragraphs together to create unified text, for example, by using transition words”.

The most characterizing quality of the current study is that it attempts to suggest a brand-new approach considering the effect of teaching different lexical chunks on writing proficiency of the task response in conjunction with coherence and cohesion aspects among EFL university learners.

Method

Design

The research design drawn upon in this study was the design of the pretest-posttest quasi-experimental with control and experimental groups. Pretest and posttest were similar in format on the grounds that both of them required that the participants compose a piece of the descriptive essay since in an academic context descriptive essay tasks are more commonly practiced in writing courses (Mahvelati, 2016). The research design of the present quasi-experimental study is shown in figure 1.

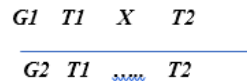


Figure 3. *Schematic Outlining of Current Research Design*

In the intended schematic representation of the study design, the upper case letters G1 and G2 represent the experimental and control groups, while those of T1 and T2 stand for the pretest and posttest, respectively. Eventually, X denotes the experimental intervention purported to be carried out, that is, presenting the writing course consistent with underlying principles and activities of lexically-based language teaching.

Participants

The research sample of the current quasi-experimental study included sixty female and male junior EFL university students (N=60) attending two university classes during the third term in a state university in the southwest of Iran. The participants' major was Language and English literature. They varied in age from 21 to 23 years old and were provided with the instruction associated with writing descriptive essay tasks from the very early sessions of the university's academic year. None of these students had received

instruction on IELTS writing tasks I and II nor had they previously taken any internationally administered tests such as TOEFL or IELTS. They were homogeneous respecting their overall proficiency in writing, as indicated in the results of the pretest. The researchers used a convenient sampling procedure to choose the research sample. Prior to introducing the experimental intervention, Key English Test (KET) was given to both classes to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Then, in the light of using the random assigning procedure, the desired classes were assigned to the control and experimental groups, each consisting of thirty learners (N=30).

Instruments

To garner the intended required data in a timely manner, some instruments including electronic pieces of software, tests, and course books were utilized. In what follows, the instruments used along with their accompanied short description are touched upon.

- **Key English Test, 2020:** One of the most frequently applied language proficiency tests by Cambridge University, mainly aiming to assess the test takers' command in both linguistic production and comprehension. The results of statistical analyses run by Poorahmadi (2012) confirmed the presence of satisfactory reliability coefficients for the pretest and posttest stages, .84 and .90 respectively. Drawing upon the Kurdar-Richardson-21 Formula, the researchers reported that the reliability coefficient of the KET was .96 in the current study.
- **Advanced English Collocations in Use, 2020:** A reference book developed and published by Cambridge University Press for easy reference by intermediate and advanced EFL learners. It accounts for different lexical and grammatical collocations along with the lexical phrases related to the intended theme. The covered themes were chosen from among the most common aspects of social life such as computer and technology, sports, investment, amusement, advertisement, pollution, education, stock market, and health.
- **Pretest and Posttest Writing:** These tests were given prior to and following the intended experimental treatment in order to determine the learners' proficiency in composing a piece of writing. The tests were mainly descriptive essay writing tasks requiring a minimum length of 300 words (Appendix 1). The rating criteria put forth by Bagheri and Riasati (2016) were utilized to assign numeric values to task response (TR) and coherence and cohesion (CC) aspects of created written tasks (Appendix 2). The created writing samples were supposed to meet the recommended requirements for an academic task as well. The researchers

requested the perspectives of two university instructors, who were taking essay writing courses within the university contexts, and held Ph.D. degrees in TEFL to determine the validity of the test. They approved content validity of the test as the test was a representative sample of writing tasks covered in the academic writing course. Eventually the researchers, by drawing upon the KR-21 reliability formula, computed the reliability of the pretest, .77 in this special case.

- **Concordancers:** According to Richards and Schmitt (2002, p, 14) concordancers are defined as “a software program that searches for words and displays the selected item or items in conjunction with their surrounding context”. Simply put, concordancers are, to a great extent, used to show words usually emerging on the left or right side of the intended lexical item. Furthermore, they report on the frequency with which the words appear in both spoken and written discourse (Richards & Schmitt, 2002). British National Corpus was the main concordancer consulted by the researchers in the current research. The researchers planned and presented detailed instructions for the experimental group on how to use and consult the concordancers and British National Corpus more effectively in the hope that they can elicit the most frequent and authentic patterns associated with each word or expression.

Procedure

Prior to commencing the instructional intervention, two university classes were chosen as the research sample by utilizing the convenient sampling procedure. They, afterward, gave the KET to both groups online to ensure that they were homogeneous as far as overall language proficiency was concerned. Having assigned the intact classes to the control and experimental groups, the researchers gave the groups the pretest writing prior to the introduction of the desired intervention. The test intended bore the greatest resemblance to IELTS, writing task 2. The intended instructional intervention, lexically-based language teaching in this case, was then embarked on for the experimental group. During some sessions of the treatment, students were asked to look up the lexical chunks associated with the intended words available in concordancers and British National Corpus. The commonly but still conventionally used techniques in academic writing courses such as constituting parts of the paragraph including, topic sentences, supporting sentences, cohesion, coherence, unity, and organization of paragraphs were implemented for the control group. The experimental intervention lasted for 14 instructional weeks during which the experimental group was exposed to and instructed on numerous

authentic reading passages related to different themes in the coursebook titled *English Collocations in Use, Advanced* (2020). It is worth noting that different lexical chunks in each lesson of the book were highlighted to raise learners' awareness of these chunks. Furthermore, the treatment required that the participants elicit the most frequent lexical chunks associated with the words commonly used in that theme by consulting accessible online dictionaries and COBUILD Dictionary. Moreover, they were requested to jot down those lexical chunks in their collocation notebooks so that they can draw upon them in their actual language use in the future. Lexical phrases included collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs, fixed expressions, semi-fixed expressions, sentence frames, proverbs, metaphors, and similes. Other supplementary activities including extensive listening, recycling activities, and comprehension-oriented activities, underpinned by a lexical approach, were also incorporated merely for raising awareness of lexical chunks along with their natural patterns. A number of output-based activities including paraphrasing the assigned reading passages and providing the summary of the assigned listening passages by the dint of using lexical phrases presented during the treatment were also planned for the experimental group. None of these activities were designed or provided for the control group since these activities are strictly underpinned by lexically-based language teaching per se.

Finally, the posttest writing task, in a format identical to the pretest, was given to both groups. Two trained raters who had been previously taught on rating the submitted writing tasks were invited to rate the created sample writing by rating merely two aspects of the overall writing, that is coherence and cohesion aspect in conjunction with task response one. They used scoring criteria commonly used to assign scores second writing task of IELTS. To ensure that the tests possess a satisfactory reliability coefficient, the researchers calculated inter-rater reliability for pretest and posttest writing tasks.

For data analysis purposes, one-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and independent samples t-test was conducted by taking advantage of SPSS software, version 20. In the current study, the grouping (assigning students to the control group and experimental groups receiving different types of instruction) was considered as an independent variable with just two levels. Pretest scores for task response and that for cohesion and coherence were regarded as covariates and, finally, equivalent posttest scores as the dependent variable. Before performing desired analyses, the assumptions which underlie ANCOVA were checked to make sure of their fulfillment in the study.

Results

Interestingly, the results of checking the underlying assumptions of one-way ANCOVA indicated that all of the underlying assumptions associated with ANCOVA were fulfilled in the current study.

As mentioned before, at the onset of the research project, the researchers administered KET to both groups to ensure that they were homogeneous concerning their acquired command of language. Figures obtained from running independent samples t-test lent credence to the roughly homogenous proficiency of the participants in two groups (Table 1.)

Table 1

The Results of Descriptive Statistics for KET

	Grouping	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
KET proficiency test	Experimental Group	30	73.1667	4.44183	.81096
	Control Group	30	72.9000	4.17174	.76165

Table 1 reveals that the attained mean score by the participants of the experimental group and control group are 73.16 (SD= 4.44) and 72.90 (SD= 4.17) respectively. An inference can be made that the observed disparity between the two groups' mean scores are not statistically different at the beginning of the research. Nonetheless, to make a compelling claim regarding the significant mean differences, the results of inferential statistics associated with KET should be consulted to ensure that the variances of the two groups are roughly equal. Levene's test of equality of the variances is commonly recommended for this purpose (Table 2).

Table 2

The Results of KET Significance Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
KET proficiency test	Equal variances assumed	.263	.610	.240	58	.811	.26667	1.1125	1.9603	2.4936
	Equal variances not assumed			.240	57.7	.811	.26667	1.1125	1.9605	2.4938

As Table.2 shows, the Sig value was found to be .811 ($df= 58, p>0.05$). Given the basic requirement for the significance value of Leven's test, requiring that obtained figure should be greater than the value of 0.05 to be regarded as significant, it can be deduced that the groups' variances were equal, confirming that they were equal with regard to language proficiency prior to the treatment. Moreover, the significance values reported in Levene's test, $p=.061$ along with that of F value ($F= .263, p>0.05$) provided further evidence of the equality of variance of the two groups. Now, the results of related to each research question should be explicated at length. It should be noted that in both research questions, the scores reported for task response and coherence and cohesion aspects in the pretest were considered covariates for final data analysis.

The first research question was associated with the effect of lexically-based language teaching on the task response aspect of essay writing among university EFL learners in Iran. The results of running one-way ANCOVA lent enough support to the disparity of the groups' mean scores on the post-test task response in favor of the experimental group (Table 3).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Posttest of Task Response Aspect

Grouping	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control Group	4.2333	.26207	30
Experimental Group	4.6500	.25931	30
Total	4.4417	.33309	60

As indicated in Table 3, participants comprising the control and experimental groups attained mean scores of 4.2333 ($SD=.26207$) and 4.6500 ($SD=.25931$) respectively. An inference can be made that the participants constituting the experimental group outdid those in the control group as far as the task response aspect of their writing task is concerned. Nevertheless, some part of the obtained difference might have resulted from the previously existing differences between the mean scores of the groups in the pretest. Thus, the influence of these differences in the pretest should be controlled for so that researcher can make a more convincing claim about the effect of lexically-based language teaching. Significance value and partial eta squared should be referred to for this purpose (Table 4).

Table 4

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects in Task Response Aspect

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
Corrected Model	3.969 ^a	2	1.984	43.886	.000	.606
Intercept	3.575	1	3.575	79.061	.000	.581
Task response1	1.364	1	1.364	30.177	.000	.346
Gro	3.849	1	3.849	85.136	.000	.599
Error	2.577	57	.045			
Total	1190.250	60				
Corrected Total	6.546	59				

The values reported in Table 4 demonstrate the p is 0.00(Sig=0.00<.05). Therefore, an inference can be drawn that the mean difference between the two groups is statistically significant. Furthermore, the desired value yielded in Partial Eta Squared (0.599) lends cogent credence to the claim that about sixty percent of the variance reported for post-test task response can be explained by the study's independent variable. If the guidelines recommended for the effect size of partial eta squared are referred to, an inference can be made that the obtained value is approximately large enough effect size. So, the claim can be made that the first research hypothesis stating that LBLT will not have any bearing on the task response aspect of writing tasks among university EFL learners in Iran is rejected.

The second question was concerned with the possible influence of lexically-based language teaching on writing proficiency of coherence and cohesion aspect among the university EFL learners. The results of descriptive statistics revealed a disparity between the two group's mean scores as far as the coherence and cohesion aspect is concerned (Table 5).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Coherence and Cohesion Aspect of Writing Task

Grouping	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control Group	4.1500	.28315	30
Experimental Group	4.5233	.29790	30
Total	4.3367	.34418	60

On the basis of the figures incorporated in Table 5, a claim may be made that mean scores of the participants in the control group, 4.15(SD=.28315) and the one related to the experimental group, 4.52(SD=.29), are apparently equal. To check if the resultant figures confirm the existence of a statistically significant difference between the two

group’s mean scores on the posttest, the figures reported for significance value and partial eta squared need to be interpreted (Table 6).

Table 6
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Coherence and Cohesion Aspect of Writing Task

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5.229 ^a	2	2.614	84.641	.000	.748
Intercept	.827	1	.827	26.775	.000	.320
Coh1	3.138	1	3.138	101.595	.000	.641
Gro	2.075	1	2.075	67.186	.000	.541
Error	1.761	57	.031			
Total	1135.390	60				
Corrected Total	6.989	59				

Table 6 manifests the F value equals 67.186 while the p-value is.00 ($p < .05$). Accordingly, an inference can be made that the obtained disparity between the two group’s mean scores is statistically significant if the influence of the pretest, covariate, in the posttest is removed. Moreover, the value reported for partial eta squared is indicative of the fact that about fifty-four percent of the variance in the posttest can be explained by lexically-based language teaching as the independent variable. Having consulted the guidelines put forward for the effect size of the partial eta squared index, it can be inferred that lexically-based language teaching has, to a greater extent, a large effect on the coherence and cohesion aspect of writing tasks. Therefore, the second research hypothesis stating that lexically-based language teaching exerts no influence on the coherence and cohesion aspect of the writing task is rejected. In other words, the coherence and cohesion aspect of writing tasks can be positively influenced by lexically-based language teaching.

For the last stage of analysis, paired samples t-test was run to compare the means of the experimental group in task response and coherence and cohesion aspects of the writing task, (Table 7).

Table 7
The Results of Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	TR1	3.3787	60	.33762	.04359
	TR2	4.4417	60	.33309	.04300
Pair 2	Coherence and Cohesion 1	3.4585	60	.27865	.03597
	Coherence and Cohesion 2	4.3367	60	.34418	.04443

As revealed in Table 7, the mean scores reported for the pretest task response (3.37) and that of the posttest task response (4.44) are, to a greater extent, different. Besides, the means reported for the pretest coherence and cohesion aspect (3.45) and the one related to the posttest coherence and cohesion aspect (4.33) are also statistically different. If taken into a more analytical perspective, the improvement observed for task response is a bit greater compared to that of coherence and cohesion. It proves that lexically-based language teaching had a greater influence on the task response aspect than the coherence and cohesion aspect of writing tasks.

Discussion

This study attempted to investigate the impact of lexically-based language instruction on the writing proficiency of task response and cohesion and coherence among Iranian university EFL learners.

The results of research question one is in lockstep with the fact that lexically-based language teaching can positively affect the task response aspect of writing task among university EFL learners in Iran. Definitely, the improvement and proficiency in this part can make a considerable contribution to the development of the writing task. This interesting result highlights the substantial effect that vocabulary knowledge, and the various lexical chunks advocated in lexical-based language instruction, may have on the establishment of writing competence among EFL students. In addition, it reaffirms that an adequate understanding of lexical chunks might be of utmost significance in expressing the desired meaning more efficiently; to the point that the constructed example writing work appears to be more native-like and natural to the ears of native English speakers and readers. Furthermore, it indicates that adequate command in different kinds of lexical chunks underpinned by lexical approach can help EFL learners to take a well-established position with regard to the task given to them. In this way, they can present and support their position in the task provided more effectively. This study's upshots are congruent with those proliferated in other international and pertinent local investigations, such as Kazemi et al. (2014), Mahvelati (2016), and Rahimi and Momeni (2012). These studies rightly signposted a considerably favorable impact of teaching lexical chunks on strengthening writing proficiency, language proficiency, and vocabulary learning. This important discovery might run counter to the findings unraveled by Ghafarsamar et al. (2018) since their experimental study revealed that instruction on lexical bundles can be merely beneficial to the lexical resources aspect of writing proficiency. The other three constituting components including task response, grammatical range and accuracy, and

cohesion and cohesion were not dramatically impacted by teaching lexical bundles. The most remarkable point of departure about the findings of the current study is that it was built on the findings and premises of other studies on the one hand, while, at the same time, it took a brand-new perspective on the grounds that it took advantage of different types of lexical chunks such as idioms, similes, collocations, and sentence frames, some aspects of the lexical approach that have remained under-researched in the Iranian context. In addition, an attempt was made to incorporate and benefit from, to the possible extent, all underlying practices and techniques associated with the lexical approach. The originality of this study's results mainly lies in the intersection that the findings are consistent with the results and grounded insights of other research findings reported by various researchers (e.g. Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Ghafarsamar et al., 2018; Shamsabadi et al., 2017). Besides, the study sophisticates a contemporary-found outlook by utilizing lexical chunks, including similes, collocations, sentence frames, and aspects of the lexical approach that have been research-satiated in the Iranian context. More specifically, every effort was undertaken to include and gain as much as practicable from the lexical approach's underpinning practices and approaches.

The results of research question two showcased the significant role that lexically-based language instruction has in enhancing the coherence and cohesiveness element of writing. Keeping in view the substantial importance of vocabulary knowledge in communicating the intended meaning and concept in foreign language production and understanding, the obtained outcomes showed credence to the assertion brought by some prominent figures, such as Lewis (2006), Nation (2012), Webb (2020), and Sewbihon-Getie (2021), that vocabulary knowledge alongside the knowledge of various lexical chunks, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, collocation, proverbs, sentence frames, and idiomatic expressions, are essential for increasing the quality of writing proficiency.

On the account that some categories of lexical chunks, including sentence frames, are utilized to build the relationship between paragraphs and sentences, the conclusion can be drawn that presenting instruction on different categories of lexical chunks plays some role in enhancing coherence and cohesion aspect. Furthermore, the attained results of the current investigation are consistent with Ashouri and Mashhadi Heidar's (2015) study, which manifested the positive impact of corpus-based collocation teaching on two dimensions of writing proficiency, namely vocabulary, and mechanics. Nonetheless, no significant positive effect was reported for grammar and fluency components of writing proficiency.

The findings obtained in the current study reiterate the propositions put forward in Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory, which underscored the important role of collocations in creating cohesion. Additionally, they contend that collocations are the most commonly used lexical ties drawn upon by the writers of the special task. However, the finding associated with the second research question is not consistent with the one yielded by Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati Samaian (2011) claiming that greater use of cohesive devices in writing does not necessarily mean the satisfactory quality of the writing task.

In the spirit of the important concern that some part of the instruction in LBLT involves consulting and reading concordancers lines available in online concordancers, the likelihood of including the available phrases to connect sentences by EFL learners increases dramatically. So, consulting concordancers line can make some contribution to the improvement of the coherence and cohesion aspect, on the one hand, and writing proficiency, on the other.

Analogous outcomes were acquired by related research in Iranian and international settings, including Khodareza and Ashouri (2016), Pakdaman and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2019), and Sewbihon-Getie (2021), highlighting the beneficial impact of lexical chunks in accordance with collocations on vocabulary retention and efficacy on the lexical resource facet of the global writing task. This result is indeed in agreement with the results of other comparable experimental investigations by Laufer and Nation (1995), Hilton (2008), Lin (2015), Staher (2008, 2009), Johnson, et al. (2016) on the contribution made by vocabulary knowledge, and knowledge of various types of lexical chunks in improving all language skills, both receptive and productive ones.

Although the attained results were indicative of the lexically-based language teaching's considerable contribution to the writing proficiency of EFL university learners in task response and coherence and cohesion aspects, the improvement observed in task response was greater. It denotes that lexical-oriented language instruction can make a greater contribution to the writers' taking a stance and expressing personal attitudes with regard to assigned writing tasks.

Conclusion

Consistent with the findings of this study, it can be concluded that lexically-based language instruction may significantly improve university students' general writing skills. Furthermore, it is possible to infer that adopting the underlying activities and principles indicated by the lexical approach can exert a positive influence on enhancing the task response quality and cohesion and coherence in the writing of university EFL students.

Interestingly, the gained benefit in the task response subsection will be greater compared to that of the coherence and cohesion subsection. Apparently, creating coherence and cohesion requires serious consideration from the part of course trainers. Therefore, EFL learners who are instructed on the basis of the lexical approach proved to be more competent in managing the position or stand they take with regard to writing tasks although they are able to improve the coherence and cohesion aspect of their writing. Hence, it can be contended that lexically-based language teaching can make a considerable contribution to the development of productive language skills, in this case, writing.

The current quasi-experimental investigation was a bid to probe into the effect of lexically-based language teaching (LBLT) on writing competency in terms of task response and coherence and coherence aspects among EFL university students in Iran. The study's findings imply a variety of instructionally supportive implications for various English language teaching stakeholders, including university writing course instructors, university students, and international test developers. Initially, in the future, university lecturers and instructors who will deliver writing coursework for university students, whether at an advanced or intermediate level, can devote a substantial part of class time to communicating concordancers, printed or online, and collocation dictionaries, in an attempt to provide the EFL university learners with sufficient exposure to and interaction with the most common natural settings of the words and are required to incorporate these trends in their writing. Meanwhile, syllabus designers and curriculum developers who are responsible for organizing writing classes for EFL university students should devote a portion of the writing classes to constructing vocabulary knowledge and lexical chunks attributed to each topic to make the students' written tasks appear more authentic and natural. Further, course trainers who train Iranian EFL learners, particularly those at the advanced and intermediate levels, can merit more consideration and coverage to teaching various types of lexical chunks, such as phrasal verbs, proverbs, idioms, and sentence frames, so that their trainees can employ them when taking internationally developed and administered tests, as these lexical chunks can start making their language outcome sound more natural and native-like.

Finally, those university students who aim to proceed with higher education studies can benefit from the findings of this study on the grounds that they can get rid of some undesirable problems with their writing tasks by receiving instruction on different types of lexical chunks which can make their writing tasks natural, coherent, and well-organized.

This study examined the influence of lexically-based language instruction on task response and cohesion and coherence in the writing of university EFL students. Additional experimental research is required to investigate the impact of teaching multiple kinds of lexical chunks on the listening comprehension, speaking ability, and reading comprehension of intermediate university students and advanced EFL students. Similarly, comparative-grounded investigations could also be executed in the interface of the use of different lexical chunks by MA students and Ph.D. candidates across different academic majors. In addition, the application of different lexical chunks in locally designed coursebooks for university students with those designed for international and commercial uses can be also investigated in future studies.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the editorial team of TESL Quarterly for granting us the opportunity to submit and publish the current paper. We would also like to express our appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their careful, detailed reading of our manuscript and their many insightful comments and suggestions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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APPENDIX I: A Sample of Writing Task Composed by a Participant

*Living in big cities includes both challenges and opportunities for everyone following a promotion in their lives . The challenges and opportunities are considered as follow:

As for challenges, we can say that the biggest challenge confronting the big cities is environmental threat. Rapid urbanization together with rapid growth of population followed by increased needs of people for more and more facilities pave the way for global climate change including flood, heat waves and epidemics. Another problem is that cities need more resources such as food, water and energy to be viable. They need environmental technologies which can cool and heat buildings as efficient as possible.

However, living in big cities is not as challenging as we think. Here are some advantages of living in a big city that some small cities may or may not have. The main benefit is of better job opportunities. There are plenty of jobs opportunities in big cities compared with small ones or villages and you can find any position related to what you have studied or your education. For example, over the past few years in big cities, employment has grown dramatically in metropolitan area. People in the area can have a variety of careers. Advanced transportation system is another good thing about living in big cities.

To sum up, living in big cities with all its challenges and benefits can be both interesting and challenging. challenges in big cities are inevitable and they are integral part of human life. On the other hand, urbanization, as said earlier, can be beneficial for human development.

Appendix 2: Criteria Used to Rate Pre-test and Post-test Writing Tasks

IELTS TASK 2 Writing band descriptors (public version)

Band	Task Response	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fully addresses all parts of the task presents a fully developed position in answer to the question with relevant, fully extended and well supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention skillfully manages paragraphing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sufficiently addresses all parts of the task presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sequences information and ideas logically manages all aspects of cohesion well uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings skillfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures the majority of sentences are error-free makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses all parts of the task presents a clear position throughout the response presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to overgeneralise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use presents a clear central topic within each paragraph 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a variety of complex structures produces frequent error-free sentences has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others presents a relevant position although the conclusions may become unclear or repetitive presents relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately uses paragraphing, but not always logically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication