



The importance of the learner-centred approach in vocabulary development

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ABSTRACT

This research article discusses opportunities to develop lexical competencies in learning English of the students of higher education institutions majoring in language based on a learner-centred approach. The pedagogical experiment was conducted at three higher education institutions in Uzbekistan: Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute, Termez State University, and Uzbekistan State University of World Languages of the 1st and 2nd year of the bachelor's degree. A number of 463 students from the three higher education institutions participated in the experiment. In the first point, the study used a questionnaire developed by the author to collect information about the students' approaches to the process of language learning at universities in Uzbekistan. The survey helped to determine the extent to which students in all groups developed autonomous, independent learning skills and the formation of self-critical assessment skills. The averages collected through the survey were analyzed using inferential statistical methods. Students in the experimental group used lesson plans developed by the author during the academic year. The result of the statistical analysis showed that the experimental work carried out to determine the level of effectiveness of the experiment was effective.

Keywords: learner-centred approach, lexical competence, autonomous learning

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, researchers have been analyzing various aspects of the development and enhancement of phonetic, grammatical, and lexical competencies in the study of language competencies. It is impossible to understand or communicate a language without mastering the vocabulary of the language being studied. By the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, it became clear that both scholars and teachers recognized that vocabulary was paramount in communication, and that language learners recognized the importance of vocabulary in communicative competence.

Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999) explain the lexicon as a process of efficient formation of words and mental inventory. Moreover, they state that it includes not only words but also phrases and multi-word phrases. In learning vocabulary, people need to consider not only the formation of words but also its meaning. Then, what does knowing a word mean? Thornbury (2002) claims that knowing the word does not mean everything. It's a complex concept. It is recommended that the most important thing when learning a new word is to pay attention to the meaning and form of the word. When it comes to the meaning of a word, it is emphasized that it is necessary to study not only its definition/translation, but also the words it is associated with, the connotations, style, and cultural specificity of the word. As Negi and Scott (2000) point out knowing a word implies knowing a lot of information about the word i.e., the literary meaning of the word, its various connotations, correct spelling and origin, and correct pronunciation. For

example, if a student knows the verb “say”, it means that the past tense and past participle form is “said”, and how it is pronounced. The learners also know when and how the verb can be used with various auxiliary verbs, and in some cases can function as a noun or present progressive tense.

Ways of long-term, effective learning and memorization of new words in foreign language learning are highlighted by Thornbury (2002) who quotes Rivers: “You can't teach a new word. It can be presented, it can be explained, it can be some other exercise ... but in the end, it is learned only if the person wants to. The task of teachers is to arouse interest in language learners. We, teachers, can help students with ideas on how to learn, but each has a personal choice.”

Below is an analysis of how successful students learn new words using some strategies. First of all, they pay attention to the form of words, that is, the composition of words, their spelling, pronunciation and word stress. They also pay attention to the meaning of the word, i.e., semantically similar or different, the connotations of the word, the style, and the associations of the words. They can guess well, to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words based on form and context. They are not afraid of making mistakes, so they can learn the language successfully. They know how to organize their learning and mastering methods (using dictionaries, and memorization techniques). The latter strategy indicates that students' ability to learn independently is well-developed. Nevertheless, it is advisable to guide them.

A number of scientists and researchers (Riddell, Thornbury, Akar, Harmer, Ur, Hopkins, Nicoll) recommend that students and language learners should be taught effective and practical ways of learning new words based on their characteristics. One example is the use of mnemonics in learning new words. Mnemonics that have visual elements and are created by the language learner (not taken or derived from anything else) are considered the most effective. Keyword technique mnemonics in the study of vocabulary are the most effective in research by scientists, although it requires some time and knowledge. For example, a student will usually have to come up with an image that connects the pronunciation of a word in the language being studied with the meaning of the word in their native language. According to Yunusova (2019), the use of mnemonics in foreign language lessons increases students' motivation and develops students' independent learning skills. In addition, students' memory improves.

Henriksen (1999) suggests several ways to help students guess the meanings of new words from the context: by defining or interpreting words (are/is known as, are/is described as, are/is defined as); by restating, i.e., expressing difficult words through other words or phrases (in other words, that is, and that is to say); using examples (such as, like, for example, for instance); by comparison, showing differences (but, even enough, yet, despite); by similarities (similarly, just as, in the same way) and so on.

A lot of studies have been done in this field but do not particularly analyze the implementation of a learner-centred approach in developing lexical competencies in Uzbekistan. Specifically, this study aims to describe the importance of developing students' autonomous learning and independent study skills by using some strategies in foreign language learning, particularly in vocabulary learning. The purpose of this pedagogical experiment was to conduct research, based on the results of the practice of language aspects - to collect reliable data on the teaching of communicative vocabulary modules by implementing learner-centeredness in a classroom, by increasing students' autonomy in learning vocabulary.

METHOD

The pedagogical experimental work is aimed at achieving an effective and positive result by testing the idea put forward in the dissertation in a real situation. Pedagogical experiments were conducted in three language higher education institutions: Termez State University (TerSU), Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute (JIZDPI), and Uzbek State University of World Languages (UzSWLU) on the 1st and 2nd-year bachelor's degree students in foreign languages and literature (English) department.

The purpose of the pedagogical experiment was to teach the module of communicative vocabulary in the field of language practice, to determine the conditions as well as to test it which

was carried out through the stages of diagnosis and forecasting (in 2019); organizational preparation (in 2019); experimental test (2020-2021 academic year); summary (in 2021).

The purpose of the diagnostic and forecasting phase is to gain knowledge in the experimental areas, determine the goals and objectives of the experiment based on identifying existing problems, and form methodological support topics. The first task of this stage was the analysis of qualification requirements, science and curricula, and textbooks.

A training system has been identified to achieve the intended goal. Programmatic theoretical and practical resources at the initial stage of teaching the communicative lexicon module played a key role in the development of the materials of this system, and the following tasks were identified; conducting questionnaire analysis and controlling the level of knowledge of students to study the general state of the approach to the development of lexical competence and approach to the process of language learning in the initial stage of the bachelor's degree in foreign languages and literature (English); identifying experimental methods and development of experimental materials; organizing preparatory work and creation of conditions; developing methods for recording experimental results; considering additional factors, i.e., external conditions; identifying impact and selection of additional materials; organizing and conducting experimental training; summarizing the results of experiments and results; formulating general and specific conclusions.

Lesson processes were observed using the method of scientific observation. At the same time, students' knowledge of English, the level of development of their language aspects practice (communicative vocabulary), and typical errors and difficulties encountered in the study of communicative vocabulary were analyzed.

At the stage of diagnosis and prognosis (prognostic), based on knowledge in the identified experimental areas, identification of existing problems, experimental goals and objectives were identified, and methodological support topics were formed. The first task of this stage was the analysis of qualification requirements, science and curricula, and textbooks.

The method of written questionnaire from auxiliary methods helped to determine the extent to which students in all groups developed autonomous, independent learning skills and the formation of self-critical assessment skills. A total of 325 students of 511400 foreign languages and literature (English) in all universities were identified in the survey among students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the survey, the study identified the following results:

Q1: Can you learn English autonomously?

The purpose of this question was to determine to what extent the 1st and 2nd-year students are able to learn independently a foreign language. In this case, 245 (75%) students answered that they could learn the language independently, and as the main reason for this, 70 (28.5%) students showed high interest in language learning, 65 (26.5%) students had a basic knowledge of English, 59 (24%) students had the skills and abilities to work independently, 41 (17%) students said there are sufficient resources for independent language learning with them and 10 (4%) of them indicated a variety of other reasons (see figure1).



Photo 1. A diagrammatic representation of the answer to whether students can learn English independently.

There are 80 (25%) students who stated that they could not learn a foreign language independently and 33 (41%) students said that the reason was not enough knowledge of English and that it was difficult to learn the language independently. Then, there are 30 (37.5%) students who are indicated having low self-confidence, while 10 (12.5%) of them stated that they could not achieve the result alone, and 7 (9%) students indicated other reasons (see Figure 2).

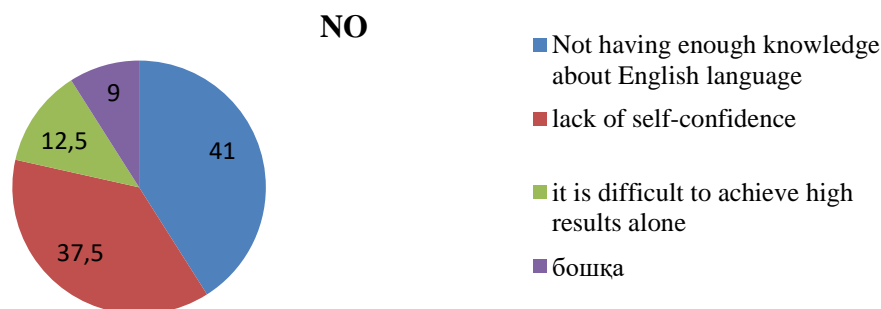


Photo 2. Diagram view of the answer "NO" to the question "Can you learn English independently?"

Question 2 discusses how much time students spend outside of class learning a language. There are 252 (77.5%) students who spend 1-2 hours every day, 28 (9%) students have 1-2 hours per week, 11 (3%) students have extracurricular activities and 34 (10.5%) students do not spend time learning a language at all. And other, they responded by saying that they spend 3 to 6 hours a day.

Question 3 reflects the importance of independent learning in learning a foreign language and out of a total of 325 students, 289 (89%) students considered it very important and 36 (11%) of them considered it moderately important.

Question 4 was about what textbooks or resources are most effective in language learning. The answers showed that most students prefer the Internet and electronic programs, and Cambridge University Press (Cambridge University Press) publishing books on language learning.

Questions 5-6 ask students to rate their language skills in the foreign language they are learning and the reason for the language skills marked as weak. Among the language skills that students considered to be the weakest, the majority of students identified speaking (writing - 79 students, 24.3%) and writing (writing - 66 students, 20.3%) skills. Lack of vocabulary and lack of experience have been cited as major factors in the weakness of these language skills. Vocabulary in the next place with -53 students or 16.4% (the main causes of weakness: insufficient exercise, improper time-management, memory impediments, lack of communication); listening comprehension -50 students or 15.4% (main causes of weakness: insufficient exercise, time- management problems); pronunciation - 44 students or 13.5% (main reasons for the weakness: not paying attention to the pronunciation of the words in the process of learning them, the influence of the native language on the foreign language being studied, insufficient communication); grammar - 19 students, 5.8% (the main reasons for the weakness: the abundance and confusion of grammatical rules, insufficient practice and lack of time); and reading comprehension was determined by 14 students or 4.3% (main causes of weakness: lack of vocabulary, insufficient time to engage).

Question 7 asks students to identify methods that have been effective in developing vocabulary in English (which students consider effective), and students can identify one or more of the six options given. The analysis of the results showed that the most common methods - learning vocabulary in context (learning vocabulary in context) by 215 out of 325 students and learning words by examples, 214 students indicated as effective. The next place shows the use of synonyms and antonyms of words (132 students), the study of the word about something, objects

or situations (104 students), and the study of pictures (93 students); the least common method is learning new words through various diagrams and charts (19 students). In addition to the data, students cited the constant repetition of words, the use of video and audio materials, and their practical application in developing vocabulary as effective.

In essence, Question 8 asks students to name the main difficulties that hinder the development of vocabulary in learning a foreign language. Based on the student's answers, the following main difficulties were mentioned, inability to apply the learned words in practice (303 students); difficulty in remembering words, low memory (225 students); laziness, lack of responsibility (108 students); difficulties in pronunciation of words (83 students); no difficulties (3 students).

Question 9 asks how the difficulties mentioned in Question 8 are being overcome or what they think can be overcome. The students made the following suggestions; spend more time learning words and working on self; more communication in a foreign language; find a target partner and study together; use of appropriate and interesting resources; using the help of qualified and experienced teachers.

From the answers to questions 8 and 9, it can be concluded that it is important to increase student autonomy. The answers cited and the proposed solutions suggest that students need to allocate time properly, develop the ability to work independently themselves, and reduce their sense of dependence on the teacher. The mastery of various strategies that help to increase vocabulary (for example, mnemonic devices- to improve memory) also contributes greatly to the effectiveness of students' language learning.

Question 10 asks students what aspects of the word to focus on when learning a new word, and of the four answers given, 173 (53.2%) students marked only one answer. Of these, 68 indicated using a new word in practice, i.e., using a new word in a sentence or text, 60 students only memorizing a word, 25 students paid attention to word spelling while learning a word, and 20 students paid attention to word pronunciation; however, the number of students who marked all the answers was 9, or 2.8%. Of the four answers given, 83 (25.6%) were students who marked two and 57 (17.5%) were students who marked three, and the number of different answers was 3 (0.9%). As can be seen, it is necessary that students pay attention to the meaning and form of the word when learning new words. When it comes to the meaning of a word, it is necessary to study not only its interpretation, but also the words it is usually associated with, the connotations, style, and cultural specificity of the word. [Thornbury.S, 2002 p.15]. As mentioned, knowing a word means knowing a plenty of information about the word i.e., the literary meaning of the word, its various connotations, correct spelling and origin, correct pronunciation and so on.

Unfortunately, in many cases, students are limited to memorizing the word, resulting in difficulties such as not being able to use the word in practice or making mistakes in pronunciation and spelling. This reduces the student's self-confidence and promotes a lack of motivation to learn.

In the organization of practical lessons, it would be expedient for teachers to develop and improve students' skills of independent work through a variety of methods and strategies that are useful in language learning.

It is also important for our research to determine how learner-centred English lessons are, in other words, teachers' learner-centeredness towards students. A questionnaire for teachers was developed to compare the information received from teachers with the answers of students. 118 teachers from three selected universities participated in the survey. Teachers' responses were analyzed in the questionnaire according to the evaluation criteria below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for evaluating the results of a survey of teachers

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Evaluation criteria	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points
10-20 points	You need to improve your attitude towards students. As a teacher, you need to show more concern about student advancement. With a little more effort, you can become a “learner-centred” teacher.				
20-30 points	You have a moderately learner-centred approach. You need to develop it further.				
30-40 points	Your learner-centred approach is good and you work well as a teacher as well				
40-50 points	You have a perfect learner-centred approach toward students. Well done!				

Of the teachers surveyed, 32 (27.1%) scored in the 40-50 score range, 75 (63.6%) scored in the 30-40 score range, and 11 (9.3%) teachers scored in the 20-30 score range. The purposed-means and pace of teaching in the classroom should be shaped so that in that course, students will learn and master the language at different speeds, using their methods, depending on their characteristics.

By the scientific and methodological requirements for the organization of pedagogical experiment work, at the organizational-preparatory stage, the experiment test sites and participants and the description of the pedagogical process were identified, and methodological and organizational support was developed. Three educational institutions in Uzbekistan, UzSWLU, TerSU, and JizSPI have served as pilot areas. A total of 463 students of foreign languages and literature (English) faculty in all designated universities: 177 students of TerSU, 179 students of JDPI, and 107 students of UzSWLU took part in the experiment.

Table 2. The amount of experimental selection during the pre-test process

year	UzSWLU		term		JizSPI		Total		
	*EG	**CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	
1-year	28	29	47	47	47	44	122	120	242
2-year	27	23	44	39	43	45	114	107	221
Total	55	52	91	86	90	89	236	227	463

***experimental groups**

****control groups**

During the practice phase of the experimental work, the work stored in the program to determine the level of development of students' lexical competence, was conducted in a written way. The control case was rated on a 100-point scale in which rated 86 to 100 points is excellent, 71 to 85 points is good, 55 to 70 points is fair, and 54 to 0 is poor. According to the results of preliminary work, the level of lexical competence of students in English in the control and experimental groups is almost close.

After the pre-test in the selected groups, in the lessons of the experimental groups, the subject of language aspects practice, lesson plans designed for the communicative lexical module, and an electronic program designed for independent extracurricular activities were used. Daily classes were held in the control groups. After the experimental training, both the post-test and the pre-test were carried out.

At the generalization stage, the results of the experimental work were analyzed and the efficiency indicator was determined and the results were summarized. At the end of the pedagogical experiment, it became clear that there was a significant difference in the performance of students in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, practical skills and abilities in the communicative lexical module.

Based on the obtained results, the average mastery of the results of experiments to determine the level of effectiveness in the development of lexical competencies in English was analyzed using the student's mathematical-statistical method.

Based on the results obtained, the N_1 hypothesis, which shows the effectiveness of student learning in the experimental and control group, and the N_0 hypothesis, which contradicts it, are selected.

Table 3. The level of effectiveness in the development of students' lexical competencies in English at the beginning of the experiment

Groups	The number of students	Levels of mastery in numbers and percentages			
		excellent	good	satisfactory	unsatisfactory
In experimental groups	242	66=27,3%	67=27,7%	56= 23,1%	53=21,9%
In control groups	221	64=29%	55=24,9%	49=22,1%	53=24%

From this table, we obtain the following statistically grouped variation series by assigning mastery indicators in the experimental group and the number of students in the control group according to Xinyi and similar control group by $Y_j m_j$, respectively, as well as excellent level with 4 points, good level with 3 points, satisfactory level with 2 points and the unsatisfactory level with 1 point.

Indicators of learning in the experimental group:

$$\begin{cases} X_i & 4; & 3; & 2; & 1; \\ n_i & 66; & 67; & 56; & 53; \end{cases} \quad n = \sum_{i=1}^4 n_i = 242$$

Indicators of learning in the control group:

$$\begin{cases} Y_i & 4; & 3; & 2; & 1; \\ m_i & 64; & 55; & 49; & 53; \end{cases} \quad m = \sum_{i=1}^4 m_i = 221$$

The diagram corresponding to these selections looks like this:

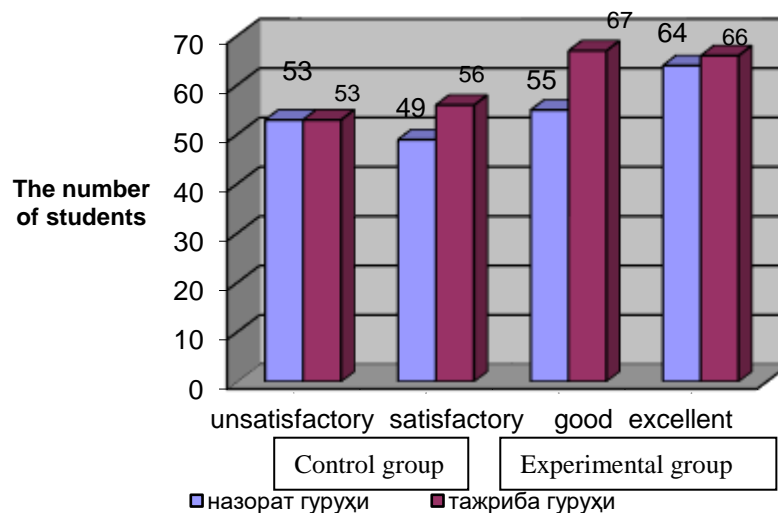


Photo 3. At the beginning of the experiment.

The average mastery of students in the experimental and control group was $(65 - 64.8) = 0.2$. This, in turn, is equal to. This is a very low figure for an effective output. The diagram shows that no efficiency was achieved at the beginning of the experiment.

Let us now consider what results were obtained at the end of the experiment (see Table 4).

Table 4. At the end of the experiment, the level of effectiveness in the development of students' lexical competencies in

Groups	The number of students	Levels of mastery in numbers and percentages			
		excellent	good	satisfactory	unsatisfactory
In experimental groups	242	95=39,3 %	67=27,7%	65=26,8%	15=6,2%
In control groups	221	60=27,1 %	50=2,6%	64=29%	47=21,3%

In contrast to Table 3, at the end of the experiment, the level of effectiveness in the development of students' lexical competencies in experimental groups was higher, whereas the results remain almost the same in the control group.

We enter the definitions above and have the following.

Mastering indicators in the experimental groups:

$$\begin{cases} X_i & 4; & 3; & 2; & 1; \\ n_i & 95; & 67; & 65; & 15; \end{cases} \quad n = \sum_{i=1}^4 n_i = 242$$

Mastering indicators in the control groups:

$$\begin{cases} Y_i & 4; & 3; & 2; & 1; \\ m_i & 60; & 50; & 64; & 47; \end{cases} \quad m = \sum_{i=1}^4 m_i = 221$$

The diagram corresponding to these selections follows:

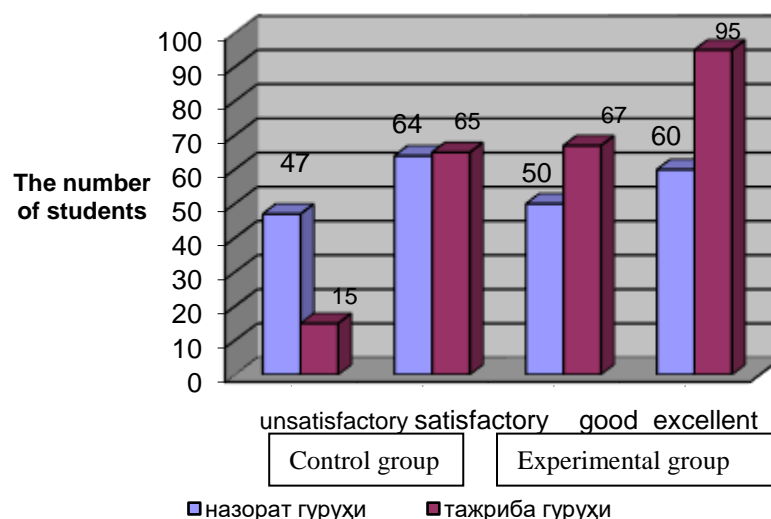


Photo 4. At the end of the experiment.

DISCUSSION

As a result of the research experiment it is essential to indicate the following discussions: One of the important directions in the teaching of foreign languages and the development of foreign language competencies of future foreign language teachers is a learner-centred approach.

The purpose means, and pace of teaching in a course should be shaped so that the students will have the ability to learn and master the language at different speeds, using their methods, depending on their characteristics. Moreover, it is very important to develop students' independent learning skills. Before assessing the information acquired in student-independent learning, teachers should prepare students on how to be autonomous on their own. Because studying at universities is very different from school, and a student can waste time ineffectively. In addition to teaching and developing language competencies in English, students need to develop independent learning skills in the course process, as this will help language learners to succeed and master their learning more easily. Ekmekçi and Yaman (2014) explain that new methods, strategies, and techniques have emerged with the proliferation of research related to vocabulary learning and teaching. Some of these strategies include context-guessing meaning, mnemonic tools, developing dictionary notebooks, teaching the origin and structural analysis of words, and semantic mapping. They also recognize the tremendous contribution of information technology to the development of lexical competence through a learner-centred approach. When students' attitudes are analyzed to independent learning of words using online programs, they respond positively, and again, the best aspect of learning words online is that the student learns based on their speed and time of learning, i.e. flexibility. In addition, the variety of exercises, visual aids, thematic exercises, and coverage of word pronunciation point to words as useful features for learning through online applications. The main goal of developing independent learning skills is to teach students to be independent in language learning without being dependent on teachers and to make the learning process more autonomous.

Ghazal (2007) explains that teaching students to use strategies in learning new words through a learner-centred approach develops their independent learning skills. This teaches students to manage their learning as well as take responsibility for learning. Not only that, it also increases self-confidence, skills and student participation. Gu and Johnson (1999 as cited in Ghazal (2007)) described the strategies used to learn new words in a foreign language as metacognitive (strategies for learning and choosing which words are important for understanding a text), cognitive (strategies such as guessing the meaning of a word, using a dictionary skillfully, and note-taking), memory (repetition and coding strategies, i.e., coding mean word associations, word image, visual and word structure, etc.) and activation (using new words in different contexts). *In this research* independent learning skills in vocabulary learning as guessing the words from context, being able to use learnt words in context and being able to evaluate their learning were in focus as core self-study skills in enhancing lexical competence. Moreover, we also designed our activities so that students develop critical thinking, creativity... for example, while students are using these words to create a new story or text, and autonomous skills such as students' creativity are developed. These aspects were also factored into the exercises in pre-and post-tests as the criteria for assessing student self-study skills in vocabulary learning.

As Jalolov (2012) mentions, the vocabulary of modern Indo-European languages is up to half a million words, and foreign language learners need 400-500 words to communicate, an educated person needs 3000-5000 words in oral and written speech, during listening and reading one can know more words. Thornbury (2002) estimates that if an educated person knows about 20,000 words in their native language, users of the language as a foreign language will need about 2,000 words to communicate. This is the number of words used in one-day communication in one's native language, the amount of vocabulary determination in dictionaries, and the number of words most actively used in English. In addition, while some researchers argue that 3,000 words are needed for communication, others suggest that they recommend learning 5,000 words.

To discuss the question of how many words/language units should future foreign language teachers have, analyzing the standards in Uzbekistan, according to the State Standards of Continuing Education in Foreign Languages "Requirements for the level of preparation of graduates of all stages of foreign language education" (№124 08.05.2013), it is stipulated that the requirements of higher education institutions specializing in language are C1 (Proficient user). From this it is assumed that s/he should know about 7500-8000 words when they graduate. To be precise, by the end of the year, students are expected to reach the B1 level, while year 2 students

need to achieve the B2 level according to CEFR. From the research, it is figured out that year 1 and year 2 students could achieve target levels.

So, learner-centred learning, that is, taking into account the interests and needs of students, is central to teaching English, to increase their motivation to learn the language. The role of teachers in the development of independent working skills in students is also invaluable; these skills are important and useful not only for students but also as life skills for any person. Teachers should encourage and motivate students to develop skills such as guessing from the context, using the new words in context and evaluating their progress in learning vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion above, the study comes with some conclusions. Firstly, based on the calculations, it is obvious that the average mastery of students in the experimental and control group increased by 11%. This, in turn, means more than twice as much. In this case, the efficiency was achieved after the experiment. The statistical analysis showed that the experimental work with students of the "English language and literature" faculty to determine the level of effectiveness in the development of lexical competence was effective. Moreover, survey results also indicate that these test instruments have clear guidelines for scoring and a clear relationship between the discussed subject matter and the evaluation instrument. Students should also be involved in selecting topics to be discussed in the lesson, as this will allow the lesson process to take place more efficiently.

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