

Pedagogical Approaches to Lexical Bundles: Enhancing Iranian EFL Learners' Argumentative Writing

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ABSTRACT

The importance of learning lexical bundles for enhancing language proficiency is gaining increasing interest in the field of foreign language learning. Lexical bundles, commonly understood as recurrent word sequences in discourse, are crucial for developing fluency and comprehension across various linguistic domains. This quasi-experimental research was conducted at Danesh Language Institute, University of Zabol, enrolling 53 upper-intermediate-level students divided into experimental and control groups through convenience sampling. The experimental group received focused instruction integrating the identification and use of lexical bundles into their standard curriculum, while the control group received regular instruction. Pre-test and post-test assessments were administered to evaluate changes in vocabulary range and grammatical accuracy in argumentative writing. The results indicated that the learners in experimental group showed marked improvements compared to the control group. Implications include integrating lexical bundle-focused strategies into curricula to support learners' transition to advanced proficiency, with future research recommended to explore long-term effects and broader applications.

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Introduction

A surge in attention to lexical bundles (hereafter, LBs) or formulaic sequences in second language learning is evident, largely attributable to the growing influence of corpus linguistics (Meunier, 2012; O'Donnell et al., 2013). Theoretically, LBs are defined as recurrent, multi-word sequences that appear frequently in specific discourse contexts, functioning as pre-constructed or fixed units in language production and comprehension (Hyland, 2008). These sequences, such as "on the other hand" or "as a result of," are stored and retrieved holistically from memory rather than generated word-by-word, akin to an extensive vocabulary (Ellis, 2005). Operationally, this study adopts a broad definition of LBs, considering them as any grouping of two or more words that forms a meaningful, cohesive unit for language learners, aligning with phraseological knowledge (Kremmel et al., 2017). For example, in academic writing, phrases like "it is widely accepted that" or "in the context of" serve as LBs, enhancing fluency and coherence. While native speakers effortlessly employ these bundles, learners often struggle with their identification and appropriate application (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Salazar, 2014), highlighting a critical challenge in language acquisition.

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Parallel to this challenge, argumentative essay writing represents a cornerstone of academic discourse, particularly for undergraduate students across disciplines (Mei, 2006). Theoretically, an argumentative essay is a structured text that presents a clear claim, supported by reasoning, evidence, and counter-arguments, aiming to persuade the reader (Noroozi et al., 2016; Wingate, 2012). It differs from other genres due to its emphasis on logical argumentation over narrative or descriptive elements, though its characteristics vary across disciplines (Andrews, 2010; Samraj, 2005). Operationally, this study defines argumentative essays as written compositions produced by learners to articulate a stance on topics like “global warming,” incorporating a claim, supporting arguments, counter-arguments, and a conclusion. For instance, a high-quality argumentative essay might assert that “global warming should be regulated,” backing this with evidence and addressing opposing views. However, students frequently struggle to produce such essays, often lacking depth in argumentation or clarity in structure (Bacha, 2010; Cooper, 2016), underscoring a persistent pedagogical challenge.

Vocabulary learning has always been considered meaningful in second language acquisition, which requires the proposition of strategies for learning vocabulary units (Dinani & Chalak, 2024). In this regard, LBs play a crucial role in shaping vocabulary usage, which is fundamental to achieving language proficiency. Vocabulary usage refers to the range, appropriateness, and precision of lexical items deployed in writing (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012; Nation, 2022). LBs contribute to this by providing ready-made phrases that enrich expression and reduce cognitive load during production (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). Similarly, grammatical accuracy, defined as the correct application of syntactic rules and conventions (Cortes, 2013), benefits from LBs, as their fixed nature minimizes errors in structure and agreement (Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010). Despite their potential, Iranian EFL learners often exhibit limited vocabulary range and grammatical precision in argumentative writing, reflecting a broader issue in second language acquisition (Hatami, 2014; Myles, 2012). The current study posits that integrating LBs into instruction could address these deficiencies, yet empirical evidence on this approach remains scarce.

This study aims to investigate the effects of explicit instruction on LBs on Iranian EFL learners’ argumentative writing, focusing specifically on vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy. Despite the extensive research on LBs across various domains such as reading (Kremmel et al., 2017), speaking (Khodadady & Shamsae, 2012; Oberg, 2013), and writing (Appel, 2022; Ruan, 2017), a significant gap remains in understanding how explicit instruction of LBs, defined as targeted teaching that emphasizes recognition and application of these units (Boers et al., 2006), can enhance vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy in argumentative writing among Iranian EFL learners. The research problem is rooted in the persistent challenges these learners face in mastering these skills, exacerbated by their limited awareness and use of LBs (Wray & Fitzpatrick, 2008). The rationale for this study is driven by the critical role LBs play in achieving native-like fluency, as up to 80% of native discourse may be formulaic (Kashiha & Chan, 2015), and their documented processing advantages (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012; Wood, 2010), underscoring the need to explore practical pedagogical methods to address these issues in the Iranian EFL context (Dörnyei, 2009). Conducted at Danesh Language Institute, the University of Zabol, with 53 upper-intermediate-level students, the research seeks to fill the identified gap by testing a structured intervention. The objectives are twofold: (1) to determine whether explicit LB instruction enhances learners’ vocabulary usage, and (2) to assess its impact on grammatical accuracy in argumentative essays. The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Does explicit instruction on LBs have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary usage in argumentative writing task?

RQ2: Does explicit instruction on LBs have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in argumentative writing task?

Literature Review

LBs, defined as recurrent multi-word sequences in specific contexts, are fundamental to language processing and production (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012; Wood, 2006). Unlike isolated words, LBs are processed as coherent units, reducing cognitive load and facilitating fluency and accuracy in language use (Jeong & Jiang, 2019; Meunier & Granger, 2008; Salazar, 2014). Theoretical perspectives underscore their prevalence in native discourse—up to 80% of which may be formulaic (Kashiha & Chan, 2015)—and their role in embodying correct vocabulary usage and grammatical structures (Jeong & Jiang, 2019). For instance, bundles like “have an effect on” or “the only thing that matters” integrate vocabulary and grammar seamlessly, offering a scaffold for accurate language production (Cortes, 2013). However, defining LBs remains challenging due to the absence of a universal frequency threshold, with researchers relying on occurrence rates and contextual range (Hyland, 2008; Martinez & Schmitt, 2012; Meunier & Granger, 2008). This theoretical framework suggests that mastery of LBs could address the vocabulary and grammatical difficulties Iranian EFL learners face in writing, aligning with this study's focus.

Empirical research supports the theoretical significance of LBs in language development, particularly writing. Ellis et al. (2008) demonstrated that LBs are acquired incrementally across language learning stages, influencing processing efficiency. In writing-specific contexts, Kazemi et al. (2014) found that LB instruction significantly enhanced graduate students' writing quality, particularly in vocabulary usage and grammatical precision. Similarly, Saadatara et al. (2023) reported that LB instruction improved cohesion, coherence, and lexical resource use in IELTS writing tasks, suggesting a direct link to vocabulary enhancement. However, findings are not unanimous; Cortes (2006) and Jones and Haywood (2004) observed no substantial gains in writing skills following LBs instruction, indicating variability in effectiveness. These studies highlight LBs' potential to improve vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy—key concerns for Iranian EFL learners—yet underscore the need for further investigation into their application in specific writing genres like argumentative essays.

Argumentative Essays

Argumentative writing involves constructing claims supported by reasoning to articulate epistemic and affective stances (Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Pessoa et al., 2017). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) frames genre as a goal-oriented social process, emphasizing consistent linguistic patterns that achieve communicative purposes (Gardner, 2017). In argumentative essays, these patterns include lexical choices and grammatical structures that ensure textual cohesion and logical clarity (Schlepppegrell, 2006; Wingate, 2012). Mastering this genre is challenging for L2 learners, particularly Iranian EFL students due to limited vocabulary diversity and grammatical accuracy, which hinder effective stance articulation (Hirvela & Du, 2013; Lancaster, 2014). Theoretically, LBs could bridge this gap by providing pre-formed units that enhance vocabulary usage and grammatical precision, aligning with this study's research questions.

Corpus-based studies illuminate the linguistic demands of argumentative essays and the potential role of LBs. Taguchi et al. (2013) found that higher-rated L2 argumentative essays featured complex noun phrase modifications, suggesting a need for sophisticated lexical units like LBs. Weigle and Friginal (2015) compared native and non-native essays, noting differences in syntactic features such as verb categories and complement clauses, areas where LBs could enhance accuracy. Lancaster (2014) identified inappropriate lexical choices and poor cohesion in L2 argumentative writing, while Wingate (2012) highlighted difficulties in maintaining logical structure—issues that LBs might mitigate (Cortes, 2013). Although these studies do not directly test LB instruction, their findings suggest that LBs could address the vocabulary and grammatical challenges Iranian EFL learners face in this genre, warranting targeted empirical exploration.

Explicit or Implicit Instruction of Lexical Bundles

The debate over explicit and implicit LBs instruction centers on how to enhance learners' proficiency in vocabulary and grammar (Bagherkazemi & Rabi, 2024; Jones & Haywood, 2004). Explicit instruction, defined as targeted teaching that raises awareness and promotes application (Boers et al., 2006), is theorized to be more effective, particularly for advanced learners who may not naturally acquire LBs despite frequent exposure (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2017; Wood, 2009). LBs' deceptive simplicity often leads learners to overlook their utility (Biber & Barbieri, 2007; Cortes, 2006), suggesting that explicit methods could improve recognition and use. For Iranian EFL learners, explicit instruction could address their limited awareness of LBs (Wray & Fitzpatrick, 2008), directly supporting this study's aim to enhance argumentative writing skills.

Empirical evidence largely favors explicit LB instruction. Boers et al. (2006) found that 22 hours of explicit instruction significantly improved speaking fluency, with participants processing LBs as whole units, reducing cognitive effort—a principle applicable to writing. In writing-focused studies, Kazemi et al. (2014) reported enhanced vocabulary and grammatical accuracy post-instruction, while Saadatara et al. (2023) noted improvements in IELTS writing cohesion and lexical use. Conversely, Jones and Haywood (2004) found limited writing gains, suggesting context-specific variability. For Iranian EFL learners, these findings imply that explicit instruction could target their specific deficits in argumentative writing, though few studies have explored this population directly (Dörnyei, 2009). This gap underscores the need for the current quasi-experimental study.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative quasi-experimental approach, utilizing a pretest-posttest design to investigate the research objectives. Participants were non-randomly assigned to experimental and control groups, drawn from two preexisting classes, which precluded random selection—a hallmark of true experimental designs (Ary et al., 2019; Bachman, 1990). The quasi-experimental classification reflects this absence of randomization. Treatment sessions were administered to the experimental group, with data collected through pretests and posttests to assess outcomes. This design ensured a structured evaluation of the intervention while accommodating the practical constraints of the participant selection process (Ary et al., 2019).

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 53 Iranian students enrolled at Danesh Language Institute, the University of Zabol, located in Zabol, Iran. The participants aged from 18 to 40 years including 18 males and 35 females. All participants were at upper-intermediate proficiency level (B2). They were divided into two groups based on intact classes: the experimental group comprised 28 participants (10 males, 18 females), and the control group included 25 participants (8 males & 17 females).

Participants were selected via convenience sampling from two classes comprising 74 students at the institute. Their proficiency level was B1 and they were working toward achieving B2 proficiency. To ensure homogeneity in L2 proficiency, all participants completed the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a standardized assessment developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL. It was also a convenient method to assign the participants to a specific level of proficiency (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Only those scoring between 61 and 80, corresponding to the upper-intermediate (B2) level, were included in the study, resulting in the exclusion of 21 individuals. The OPT has demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha=0.87$), as reported by Hamidi et al. (2022), and its construct validity is well-established in the literature (Motallebzadeh & Nematizadeh, 2011; Wistner et al., 2009). This screening process ensured that the final sample was appropriately matched to the target proficiency level for the study.

Materials

The English writing assessment comprised pre- and post-test phases designed to evaluate vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy in argumentative essays, consistent with established methodologies (Bacha, 2010; Siyyari & GhorbanDaei, 2017). Participants were tasked with composing a five-paragraph argumentative essay, a structure selected to align with academic writing expectations for upper-intermediate (B2) EFL learners (Noroozi et al., 2016). Each essay required an introductory paragraph presenting a clear thesis statement, three body paragraphs (two addressing supporting arguments and one addressing a counter-argument), and a concluding paragraph summarizing the stance and implications. The essays, approximately 300–350 words in length, within a 60-minute time limit, balanced depth of argumentation with the time constraints and proficiency level of the participants (Bacha, 2010). The pre- and post-test prompts covered distinct but comparable themes to ensure consistency in task difficulty, focusing on contemporary issues relevant to the learners' context, such as "*the impact of social media on education*" for the pre-test and "*the importance of renewable energy*" for the post-test. These topics were chosen to encourage critical thinking and align with the argumentative genre's emphasis on reasoning and evidence (Wingate, 2012).

Both writing tasks were conducted in-class under controlled conditions to standardize the testing environment, ensure authenticity of responses, and reflect typical classroom assessment conditions at Danesh Language Institute. Two experienced raters, both PhD holders in Applied Linguistics with expertise in language testing, independently scored the essays, unaware of the research objectives to minimize bias.

Scoring of Writing Task

To ensure reliable and valid measurement, the evaluation process followed a rigorous framework, as outlined by Siyyari & GhorbanDaei (2017). The evaluation focused on two dimensions: vocabulary usage, encompassing the range, appropriateness, and precision of lexical items, including LBs such as "*on the other hand*" and "*it is widely accepted that,*"

and grammatical accuracy, assessing the correct application of syntactic rules, such as subject-verb agreement and tense consistency. Each dimension was scored on a 5–20 scale, with 5–9 indicating very poor performance, 10–13 relatively poor, 14–17 good, and 18–20 very good to excellent (Siyyari & GhorbanDaei, 2017). Raters specifically evaluated the presence and contextual appropriateness of LBs within the thematic content of the essays, ensuring alignment with the instructional focus. Inter-rater reliability was high (Cohen's Kappa = 0.83). This evaluation process, conducted post-intervention for the experimental group (after 12 weeks of LB-focused instruction) and control group (regular instruction), enabled a comparative analysis of writing proficiency gains in vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy.

Data Collection Procedure

This study followed a structured, step-by-step process to collect data and implement the intervention, focusing on the use of LBs to enhance writing skills among language learners. The procedure unfolded as follows:

1. Pre-Test Administration: At the start of the term, both the experimental (n=28) and control (n=25) groups completed an English writing assessment as a pre-test, conducted in-class at Danesh Language Institute. Participants were tasked with writing a five-paragraph argumentative essay on the topic “the impact of social media on education.” The task was completed within a 60-minute time frame under regular classroom conditions, with participants unaware of its evaluative purpose to ensure natural performance. The pre-test established a baseline for vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy, critical dimensions of writing proficiency (Biber et al., 2004).

2. Instructional Process for Argumentative Writing: The instructional intervention for the experimental group spanned 12 weeks, with two 90-minute sessions per week, totaling 24 sessions, integrated into the conventional curriculum at Danesh Language Institute. The intervention focused on explicit instruction of LBs to enhance argumentative writing skills, following a structured approach inspired by Boers and Lindstromberg (2012). The instruction was designed to raise awareness, identification, and application of LBs, with a specific emphasis on their role in argumentative essays. Themes covered during the instructional period mirrored those used in the pre- and post-tests, including “*the impact of social media on education*,” “*the importance of renewable energy*,” and “*the role of technology in reducing global warming*.” These themes were chosen to align with the argumentative genre’s demand for critical reasoning and evidence-based persuasion (Wingate, 2012). Each theme was introduced through model texts, which served as the basis for identifying and practicing LBs relevant to argumentative discourse, such as “on the other hand,” “it is widely accepted that,” and “as a result of.”

The instructional process comprised three components:

- **Awareness Raising:** Each session began with a 10-minute discussion introducing LBs, using examples from argumentative essays on the specified themes. For instance, model texts on “renewable energy” highlighted bundles like “a significant impact on” to illustrate their role in enhancing coherence and persuasion. Comparisons between Persian and English LBs reinforced their linguistic and cultural significance (Jones & Haywood, 2004).
- **Identification and Autonomy:** Learners practiced the “text plowing” technique, analyzing model argumentative essays and supplementary materials (e.g., academic articles on social media’s educational impact) to identify LBs. They underlined

bundles in class, reviewed them with the instructor, and recorded them in notebooks. Weekly homework assignments required to recruit 5–10 LBs in their argumentative writing related to the themes, reinforcing independent recognition.

- **Application:** Learners applied LBs in writing tasks tailored to the argumentative genre. For example, they composed single paragraphs (150–200 words) on subtopics like “the benefits of solar energy” or “challenges of social media in classrooms,” incorporating at least three targeted LBs. These tasks, completed both in-class and as homework, required a clear topic sentence, supporting evidence, and a concluding statement, mirroring the body paragraph structure of the assessed essays. Collaborative reviews in class ensured feedback on LB usage and argumentative coherence.

The control group followed the regular instruction, which included general writing instruction on argumentative essays but lacked explicit LB focus. Both groups received instruction on the five-paragraph essay structure (introduction, two supporting arguments, one counter-argument, and conclusion), ensuring comparability in task expectations. All writing tasks, whether in-class or homework, adhered to the 300–350-word count and 60-minute time limit for full essays, with shorter practice paragraphs (150–200 words) allocated 20–30 minutes to reflect their focused scope.

3. Post-Test Administration: At the end of the term, both groups completed a parallel writing assessment as a post-test, also conducted in-class under identical conditions to the pre-test. The post-test prompt required a five-paragraph argumentative essay on “the importance of renewable energy,” maintaining the same structural requirements as the pre-test (introduction, two supporting arguments, one counter-argument, and conclusion). The 60-minute time limit ensured consistency in task demands, allowing for a direct comparison of writing performance to assess the intervention’s impact on vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy.

Results

The results of language learners' writing tests were analyzed before and after the intervention, with the effect of explicit instruction on LBs on the experimental group's vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy in argumentative essay writing being determined. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics summarizing both groups' performance in vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy before and after the intervention.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Performance for the Experimental and Control Groups on the Pre-test and Post-test

		Type of Test	No.	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error of the mean	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental Group	Vocabulary Usage	Pre-test	28	12/36	2/83	0/53	7	18
		Post-test	28	15/32	3/46	0/64	10	20
	Grammatical Accuracy	Pre-test	28	13/25	3/52	0/66	6	21
		Post-test	28	16/25	3/73	0/70	10	24

Control Group	Vocabulary Usage	Pre-test	25	12/52	2/36	0/47	8	17
		Post-test	25	13/28	2/82	0/56	9	20
	Grammatical Accuracy	Pre-test	25	13/24	3/60	0/72	5	21
		Post-test	25	14/04	3/49	0/69	8	22

Analyzing the mean scores of both the experimental and control groups in the pre and post-tests reveals improvements in their vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy in writing. Now, it is crucial to assess the significance of the observed differences in vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy between the pre- and post-tests for both groups. To achieve this, two ANCOVA tests were employed.

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the ANCOVA test, which evaluated the significance of differences in vocabulary usage between the experimental and control groups on the post-test, with pre-test scores accounted for as a covariate. Notably, the pre-test scores showed no significant effect on post-test vocabulary usage ($p > 0.05$). Nevertheless, a substantial difference was observed between the experimental group ($M = 15.32, SD = 3.46$) and the control group ($M = 13.28, SD = 2.82$), with this disparity reaching statistical significance.

Table 2

ANCOVA Test Assessing the Effect of Explicit Teaching of Lexical Bundles on Vocabulary Usage

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	64/58	2	32/29	3/19	0/050
Intercept	581/16	1	581/16	57/47	0/000
Pre-test of Vocabulary Usage	9/54	1	9/54	0/94	0/336
Group	53/54	1	53/54	5/29	0/026*
Error	505/60	50	10/11		

* $0/05 < \alpha$

To assess the efficacy of explicit instruction in LBs on grammatical accuracy, another covariance test is employed. The findings of this test are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

ANCOVA Test Assessing the Effect of Explicit Teaching of Lexico-grammatical bundles

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	70/24	2	35/12	2/64	0/081
Intercept	927/39	1	927/39	69/78	0/000
Pre-test of Grammatical Accuracy	5/74	1	5/74	0/43	0/514
Group	64/56	1	64/56	4/85	0/032*
Error	664/46	50	13/28		

* $0/05 < \alpha$

As illustrated in Table 6, the pre-test failed to yield a significant effect on grammatical accuracy in the post-test ($p > 0.05$). Nevertheless, there was a significant difference in grammatical accuracy between the experimental group (mean=16.25, standard deviation=3.73) and the control group (mean=14.04, standard deviation=3.49) in the post-test.

In summary, the analysis of the writing scores acquired from both the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test reveals that the explicit instruction of LBs yielded a positive effect on enhancing the quality of vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy in argumentative essay writing. In the subsequent section, we will delve into these findings with further elaboration.

Observed Lexical Bundles in Student Writing

Analysis of pre- and post-test essays revealed distinct differences in LB usage between the experimental and control groups, reflecting the intervention's impact on vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy. In the experimental group's post-test essays on "*the importance of renewable energy*," vocabulary-based LBs such as "*it is widely accepted that*" appeared in 18 of 28 essays (e.g., "*It is widely accepted that renewable energy reduces carbon emissions*"), compared to only 3 instances in the control group. Similarly, "*for instance*" was used in 20 experimental group essays (e.g., "*For instance, solar panels reduce costs by 30%*"), enhancing example-based argumentation, versus 5 in the control group. Grammar-based LBs also showed marked differences. "*A significant number of*" was used correctly in 16 experimental group essays (e.g., "*A significant number of countries adopt renewable energy*"), reducing article errors, versus 2 in the control group. "*Can be attributed to*" appeared in 12 experimental group essays (e.g., "*Reduced emissions can be attributed to solar adoption*"), reflecting accurate passive voice use, compared to 1 in the control group. These findings, observed in post-test samples, align with the significant improvements in vocabulary usage ($M=15.32$, $SD=3.46$) and grammatical accuracy ($M=16.25$, $SD=3.73$) reported in Table 1, highlighting the efficacy of explicit LB instruction.

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of explicit instruction of LBs on the argumentative writing skills of Iranian EFL learners, focusing on vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy. The findings confirmed that explicit LB instruction significantly enhanced both dimensions, with the experimental group outperforming the control group in post-test scores for the vocabulary usage and the grammatical accuracy.

The significant improvement in vocabulary usage among the experimental group suggests that explicit LB instruction effectively expanded learners' lexical repertoires and enhanced their ability to deploy contextually appropriate phrases in argumentative writing. This improvement can be attributed to several factors embedded in the intervention's design. First, the explicit focus on awareness-raising and identification activities, such as "*text plowing*," enabled learners to recognize LBs like "*it is widely accepted that*" and "*for instance*" as cohesive units rather than isolated words (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). These activities likely reduced the cognitive load associated with lexical selection, allowing learners to incorporate sophisticated phrases that enriched their argumentative essays (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). For example, the frequent use of "*for instance*" in 20 of 28 experimental group essays (compared to 5 in the control group) facilitated clearer example-based argumentation, enhancing the essays' persuasive quality.

Second, the intervention's emphasis on repeated, meaningful application of LBs in writing tasks likely fostered internalization of these phrases, enabling learners to use them autonomously (Northbrook et al., 2022). The experimental group's exposure to model texts on themes like "*renewable energy*" provided contextualized examples of LBs, which learners

could emulate in their own writing. It can be claimed that explicit instruction of LBs may improve controlled learning which can give rise to automatic learning via repetitions. This aligns with Martinez and Schmitt's (2012) assertion that LBs, as pre-constructed units, streamline lexical production by offering ready-made expressions that enhance fluency and coherence. The statistical significance ($p=0.026$) underscores that these gains were not incidental but a direct result of the targeted instruction, suggesting that explicit LB teaching can address the limited vocabulary range often observed in Iranian EFL learners' writing (Hatami, 2014).

Practically, the 2.96-point increase in the experimental group's mean vocabulary score (from 12.36 to 15.32) reflects a meaningful shift from "relatively poor" to "good" performance on the 5-20 scoring scale (Siyari & GhorbanDaei, 2017). This improvement indicates that learners not only expanded their lexical range but also used LBs with greater precision and appropriateness, as evidenced by the increased frequency of bundles like "it is widely accepted that" (18 instances vs. 3 in the control group). For EFL pedagogy, this suggests that explicit LB instruction can bridge the gap between intermediate and advanced proficiency, equipping learners with tools to produce more native-like, persuasive texts. However, the modest standard deviation increase (2.83 to 3.46) suggests some variability in individual gains, possibly due to differences in learner engagement or prior exposure to formulaic language, warranting further exploration.

The experimental group's significant improvement in grammatical accuracy highlights the efficacy of LBs in embedding correct syntactic structures within learners' writing. LBs such as "a significant number of" and "can be attributed to" appeared frequently in the experimental group's post-test essays (16 and 12 instances, respectively, vs. 2 and 1 in the control group), reducing errors in article usage and passive voice constructions. This aligns with Simpson-Vlach and Ellis's (2010) finding that LBs, as fixed units, minimize syntactic errors by providing learners with pre-formed grammatical units. For instance, the correct use of "can be attributed to" in sentences like "Reduced emissions can be attributed to solar adoption" demonstrates how LBs scaffold complex structures, reducing the likelihood of errors in verb tense or agreement.

The intervention's structured approach, which included collaborative reviews and feedback on LB usage, likely reinforced learners' understanding of syntactic rules embedded within these bundles. This is particularly relevant for Iranian EFL learners, who often struggle with grammatical precision due to interference from their L1 (Persian) and limited exposure to complex structures (Myles, 2012). The 3.00-point increase in the experimental group's mean grammatical accuracy score (from 13.25 to 16.25) reflects a shift toward "good" performance, suggesting that LBs served as a scaffold for mastering challenging syntactic features like passive constructions and noun phrase modifications, which are critical in argumentative writing (Taguchi et al., 2013). The statistical significance ($p=0.032$) underscores the intervention's role in these gains, though the slightly higher standard deviation (3.73 vs. 3.52) indicates some variability, possibly due to differences in learners' baseline grammatical knowledge.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings advocate for integrating LBs into grammar instruction to address persistent accuracy issues in EFL writing. The practical significance lies in the potential for LBs to reduce cognitive load during production, allowing learners to focus on argumentation rather than grammatical correctness (Cortes, 2013). However, the control group's modest improvement (from 13.24 to 14.04) suggests that

general writing instruction also contributes to grammatical gains, albeit less effectively, highlighting the added value of explicit LB teaching.

The analysis of post-test essays revealed distinct patterns in LB usage that contributed to the experimental group's improvements. Vocabulary-based LBs, such as "*it is widely accepted that*" and "*for instance,*" were prevalent in the experimental group's essays, enhancing argumentative coherence and lexical richness. For example, "*it is widely accepted that*" appeared in 18 essays, often introducing authoritative claims (e.g., "*It is widely accepted that renewable energy reduces carbon emissions*"), which strengthened the essays' persuasive tone. Similarly, "*for instance*" facilitated clear transitions to evidence-based arguments, as seen in 20 essays (e.g., "*For instance, solar panels reduce costs by 30%*"). These bundles align with Hyland's (2008) observation that LBs signal discourse organization, making arguments more compelling and reader-friendly.

Grammar-based LBs, such as "*a significant number of*" and "*can be attributed to,*" reduced errors in complex structures. The former, used in 16 essays, minimized article misuse (e.g., "*A significant number of countries adopt renewable energy*"), while the latter, appearing in 12 essays, supported accurate passive voice usage. These findings suggest that LBs served as dual-purpose tools, enhancing both lexical precision and syntactic accuracy, as theorized by Jeong and Jiang (2019). The stark contrast with the control group's limited LB usage (e.g., only 2 instances of "*a significant number of*") underscores the intervention's role in fostering targeted, contextually appropriate phraseology.

The findings both corroborate and extend prior research on LB instruction in EFL contexts. The significant improvements in vocabulary usage align with Kazemi et al. (2014), who reported enhanced lexical resources in Iranian EFL students' writing following LB instruction, and Saadatara et al. (2023), who noted improved cohesion and lexical use in IELTS writing tasks. These studies emphasize LBs' role in enriching lexical repertoires, a trend mirrored in the current study's results. However, unlike Cortes (2006) and Jones and Haywood (2004), who found limited production gains from LB instruction, this study's significant outcomes likely stem from its longer intervention duration (12 weeks vs. 6-8 weeks in Cortes, 2006) and emphasis on practical application through writing tasks. The structured integration of awareness-raising, identification, and application activities amplify learners' ability to internalize and deploy LBs effectively, addressing the mechanical repetition critique raised by Cortes (2006).

The grammatical accuracy gains resonate with Ellis et al.'s (2008) assertion that LBs enhance processing efficiency across proficiency stages, as their fixed nature embeds correct syntactic structures. This contrasts with Cortes's (2006) finding of minimal syntactic benefits, possibly due to this study's focus on genre-specific LBs tailored to argumentative writing, a context where coherence and precision are paramount (Wingate, 2012). The success of explicit instruction over implicit learning aligns with Boers et al. (2006), who found that targeted teaching improved fluency and accuracy by raising awareness of LBs' utility. For Iranian EFL learners, this explicit approach addressed their limited awareness of formulaic sequences (Wray & Fitzpatrick, 2008), a factor less prominent in studies with advanced learners (Altenberg & Granger, 2001).

The study's focus on argumentative writing further distinguishes it from prior research, addressing a genre-specific gap noted by Lancaster (2014) and Wingate (2012). The experimental group's improved cohesion and logical structure, facilitated by LBs like "*on the other hand*" and "*as a result of,*" directly tackled the challenges of inappropriate lexical choices and poor coherence identified in L2 argumentative writing (Lancaster, 2014). This

suggests that LBs are particularly effective in genres requiring structured argumentation, extending the applicability of findings from general writing contexts (e.g., Kazemi et al., 2014) to a more targeted domain.

Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated the effects of explicit instruction on LBs on the argumentative writing skills of Iranian EFL learners, with a specific focus on vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy. The results demonstrated that such instruction significantly enhanced both dimensions in the experimental group compared to the control group. For vocabulary usage, the experimental group's post-test mean score improved to 15.32 (SD=3.46) from a pre-test of 12.36 (SD=2.83), achieving statistical significance ($F=5.29$, $p=0.026$), indicating a broader and more precise lexical repertoire. Similarly, grammatical accuracy rose to a post-test mean of 16.25 (SD=3.73) from 13.25 (SD=3.52), with significant differences ($F=4.85$, $p=0.032$), reflecting greater syntactic precision and fewer errors. These findings confirm the efficacy of explicit LB instruction as a targeted intervention, aligning with the study's objectives to address persistent challenges in EFL writing proficiency among upper-intermediate learners at Danesh Language Institute.

Theoretically, these results reinforce the role of LBs as pre-constructed units that facilitate language processing and production, supporting prior assertions that formulaic sequences reduce cognitive load and enhance fluency (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Martinez & Schmitt, 2012). They extend this framework by demonstrating LBs' specific utility in argumentative writing, a genre demanding lexical richness and structural coherence. Practically, the findings advocate for the integration of explicit LB instruction into EFL curricula, particularly for learners transitioning to advanced proficiency levels like B2. The structured intervention—comprising awareness-raising, identification practice, and application tasks—offers a replicable model for educators, potentially improving writing outcomes across similar contexts. By fostering autonomy and motivation, as observed in the experimental group's engagement, this approach also aligns with learner-centered pedagogies (Dörnyei, 2009), suggesting broader applicability in enhancing not only writing but also overall language proficiency in EFL settings.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that warrant consideration and suggest avenues for future research. The quasi-experimental design, reliant on convenience sampling and intact classes, limits generalizability beyond the 53 participants at Danesh Language Institute. Additionally, the intervention's duration, spanning one term, may not fully capture long-term retention or transferability of LB mastery to other genres. The broad definition of LBs, while practical, may also introduce variability in identifying pedagogically relevant bundles compared to stricter frequency-based criteria. Future studies could employ randomized controlled designs with larger, more diverse samples to enhance external validity. Longitudinal research tracking LB retention over extended periods, alongside investigations into their impact across varied writing tasks (e.g., narrative or expository), would further clarify their efficacy. Moreover, exploring the integration of technology, such as corpus-based tools, could refine LB identification and instruction, addressing the scalability of this approach in diverse EFL contexts.

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