Review on the Application of Lexical Chunks for English Teaching in China

Shi Lijun*
617269104@qq.com
School of International Business English
Jinzhong College of Information, China

Tuan Sarifah Aini Syed Ahmad
tsyaini@uitm.edu.my
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Anealka Aziz Hussin
anealka@uitm.edu.my
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Corresponding author*

ABSTRACT
There are a variety of approaches to teach English in China. One of them is by using lexical chunks. The lexical approach has been believed to be an ideal way for English teaching and learning. In order to provide some insights on how lexical chunks has been used in English teaching in China, this article aimed to review the application of lexical chunks for English teaching in China by using the qualitative method. The instrument employed was the comprehensive literature review. Only 10 relevant research articles published since 2018 were selected from the Google Scholar using selected keywords. All the studies reported positive impacts on the application of lexical chunks in teaching English in China, but only two of them covered the attitude, and one was related to motivation. Therefore, more studies can be done with respect to attitude and motivation. Since the research on the application of lexical chunks in the teaching of English in China is limited, it is essential for future research to focus on this area especially on motivation. Studies could be also done in the future on different types of samples and using different instruments.

INTRODUCTION

Lexical chunks have been applied in the teaching of various English skills such as speaking, reading and writing (Danyuan, 2019). A large number of researchers and scholars have conducted relative studies in the area. Jianwei (2021) also points out that the linguists and researchers in China have studied lexical chunks from different perspectives. They studied the effectiveness of lexical chunks on language acquisition or the second language acquisition, just as Addisu (2021) points out. For instance, Rahimi and Momeni (2012) conducted a study on how the application of lexical chunks influenced students' English language proficiency. The study employed a quasi-experimental as the instrument. They found that the adoption of lexical approach contributed to the improvement of students' comprehensive English language proficiency. Sadighi and Sahragard (2013) claim that a good command of lexical chunks can promote learners' reading abilities. Addisu (2021) also discovered that the lexical chunks were useful for vocabulary learning. However, all of those studies were in terms of the application of lexical chunks for one of the skills in language learning, they have not given a general review on how the lexical chunks were applied to English teaching in China, which can be revealed by Scopus after searching with key words of "lexical chunks" and "English teaching" and "review". Also, there has been no such studies in China. Thus, this research has been done to review the application of lexical chunks to English teaching in China.

This review is a systematic literature review because it is "a systematic way of collecting, evaluating, integrating, and presenting findings from several studies on a specific question or topic" (Ali et al., 2021, p. 1). It can limit bias by scientifically collecting, analyzing and synthesizing the data (Edoardo & Alan, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part, the lexical chunks and lexical approach, as well as studies on lexical chunks are introduced briefly.

The meaning of lexical chunk has been developed over time. Becker (1975), who is universally believed to be the first person proposing the meaning, regards lexical chunks as phrasal lexicons, a fixed or semi-fixed pattern between traditional grammar and vocabulary. Later, Lewis (1993) conceives lexical chunks as frequently used combinations of multi words with fixed structures and stabilized meanings. Moon (2002) believes that a lexical chunk is a multi-word unit comprising two or more inseparable words with semantic and syntactic meaning. Based on its definitions in the literature, a lexical chunk can be defined as a language unit of several words with lexical, grammatical and pragmatic meaning.

It was Lewis and his associates who came up with the lexical approach on the basis of the theory of chunks in 1993 (Jianwe, 2021a). Lewis (2002) states that the core part of the lexical approach applies multi-word prefabricated chunks rather than the traditional grammar and vocabulary comprised of language. In this sense, learners need to develop their lexical proficiency (Lewis, 1993). Richards and Rodgers (2008) claim that, "the primary components of language communication and interaction, according to a lexical model of teaching, are lexis, or word and

word combinations, rather than syntax, function, ideas, or any other part of lesson design" (p. 132). Lexis refers to "different kinds of multi-word chunks" (Lewis, 1997, p. 15). Thus, for language learners, it is crucial for them to bear in mind that the lexis is more significant than grammar, but it does not mean that grammar is not important.

Many studies have been conducted with respect to lexical chunks. The majority of them are related to the effectiveness of lexical chunks on language learning. Jie and Schmitt (2009) found that the student's ability, especially her reading competence, was improved with the application of lexical chunks. Wuyun (2011) asserts Lexical Chunk Theory can help with students' speaking abilities. Sadighi and Sahragard (2013) proved that the learning of lexical chunks were useful for students' reading skills. Juan and Yue (2014) discovered the application of lexical chunks had a positive effect on students' listening skill. Ma and Chunling (2016) point out that the application of lexical chunks contributes to the improvement of students' English vocabulary accumulation, reading speed, accuracy and fluency. Qinglinag (2017) discovered the enhancing input of prefabricated chunks would improve students' competence in interpretation. Rashidah (2022) demonstrated in a study that better performance of those learners in the experimental group proved the usefulness of lexical chunks in English learning for Arabic speakers.

It can be seen from the above articles that they all verified the usefulness of lexical chunks in the process of language acquisition. However, there are no studies giving a review on the application of lexical chunks in English teaching, which can be shown in Scopus after entering the key words of "lexical chunks", "English teaching" and "review". Also, there are not any such studies done in China. Due to this reason, this research will fill in the gap.

METHODOLOGY

This research targeted to give a brief review on the application of lexical chunks for teaching of English in China. To attain this goal, the author decided to use the qualitative method.

On the basis of above explanation, the research questions in this study are the following:
a. What is the status quo of how the lexical chunks have been applied to the teaching of English in China?
b. What is the future trend of studies in the field of the application of lexical chunks to the teaching of English in China?

The study employed a qualitative method using comprehensive literature review (CLR) as the instrument. According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016), CLR includes three phases which are: (1) exploration, (2) interpretation and (3) communication. The first stage consists of a variety of investigative steps. In the first stage, there are five steps: (1) exploring beliefs and topics, (2) initiating the search, (3) storing and organizing information, (4) selecting or deselecting information, and (5) exploring the search to include one or more MODES (media, observation (s), documents, expert (s) and secondary data). The first step requires the researcher to explore their belief systems, including their worldviews, research philosophical beliefs, discipline-specific beliefs and so on. In the second step, the most significant thing to do is to find the interested topic, database and key words for conducting literature search. Then, the researcher needs to select or

deselect papers obtained from the search. In addition, the search should be expanded by incorporating one or more of the five MODES. The second stage is made up of analyzing or synthesizing information. During the process, the reviewers interpret the selected information they obtained through the first five steps. In the last stage, the CLR report is presented.

In accordance with the steps, the area chosen was application of lexical chunks in China. Next, the search on Google Scholar was conducted with three key words: (1) "lexical chunks", (2) "English teaching" and (3) "China". Figure 1 summarizes the process of selecting the articles for the systematic comprehensive literature review of articles on the Application of Lexical Chunks for English Teaching in China.

First, 94 studies from Google Scholar were found. By removing 15 duplicated ones, there were 79 screened articles. As there were 30 records excluded, 49 articles were retrieved and assessed for eligibility. Finally, 18 articles which were not written in English, 38 articles without research methodology and findings, and 65 articles which were not accessible were removed. Therefore, only 10 articles were obtained for the qualitative synthesis. It should be noted that all those 10 studies have been published since 2018.

Next, the selected articles were analyzed from the aspects of research methodology, instrument, and level of education, English skill and learning impact. Finally, the results were presented in tables.
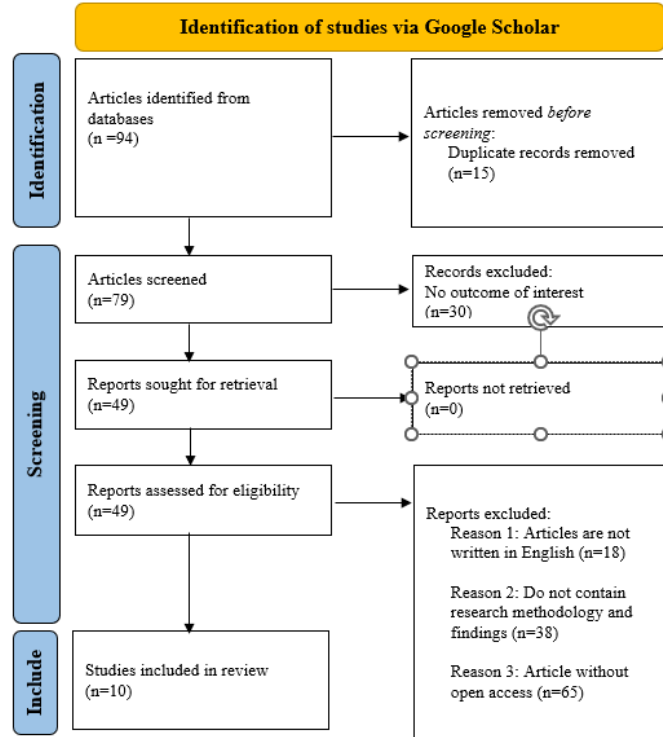

Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

After the author searched in Google Scholar using the key words of "lexical chunks", "English teaching" and "China", 10 articles were selected for further study. The results of the review are as follows.

Among all the 10 studies, there are four of them with respect to learners' writing ability, which are illustrated in the following. Jianwei (2021a) conducted a quantitative study in which the lexical approach was applied in an English class for art majors, and the instrument used was a quasi-experiment. The objective of the study was to explore the effects that the lexical chunks had on writing. The sample consisted of 68 art major freshmen (26 males and 42 females) aged from 17 to 20 years old. There were several major findings reported in the study. First, there was a tremendous improvement in the students' lexical ability through lexical approach. Second, the students' writing proficiency was positively correlated with the use of lexical chunks in writing. Finally, students' writing proficiency was enhanced.

Similarly, Jianwei (2021b) studied the effects of lexical approach on non-English majors' writing ability. In the study, a quantitative method was employed by using a quasi-experiment. There were 80 non-English sophomores who were involved in both the pre-test and post-test. The students were divided into two groups: 40 of them were in the control group, and the rest were in the experimental group. In each group, there were 15 males and 25 females. Based on the results of the experiment, the following findings were found. Students in the experimental group using lexical approach demonstrated greater improvement and higher composition scores on average than the students in the control group using the traditional teaching method. Moreover, participants in the experimental group made greater progress in writing proficiency after the instruction of lexical approach was applied. Finally, students who were taught with the traditional teaching method showed no significant progress in writing proficiency. Thus, it could be summarized that the lexical approach had positive effects on non-English majors' writing proficiency.

Parallel to the major findings of the above two studies, Xiangkui's study (2021) also proved the effectiveness of lexical chunks on students' writing ability. However, what is different is that learners were found to became more confident with the application of this method. In this study, the mixed method was used with two instruments of a quasi-experiment (a quantitative method) and an interview (a qualitative method). The author aimed to conduct a study on the application of lexical chunk approach for the teaching of writing. 86 junior high school students participated in the empirical study. The study revealed several findings. First, the lexical chunk teaching method was conducive to students' writing cohesion and coherence, as well as their writing efficiency. Second, using lexical chunks could help students to be more confident in English writing. Finally, students' grades in writing had a greater improvement.

Though the aim of Hua's research (2019) is different from that of the above three studies, it supports the positive relationship between lexical chunks and students' writing proficiency. Hua (2019) intended to verify the lexical cognitive neuroscience from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. In this study, he did not clearly state the number of participants in the sample, but he just explained that they were from a secondary vocational school. The method was quantitative, and the instrument was a quasi-experiment. He revealed that the application lexical cognitive

neuroscience was significant in promoting the English writing teaching in this secondary vocational school. In addition to that, Hua (2010) illustrated that lexical chunk greatly increased the writing speed due to it was conducive to memorizing and in line with the secondary vocational students' cognitive characteristics and could be accessed quickly.

Aside from the four studies concerning the positive impact of lexical chunks on students' writing achievement, Mingbo (2018) and Zhong and Suwanthep (2022) found their influence on students' reading ability. In the first place, Mingbo (2018) conducted a quantitative study using a quasi-experiment. He intended to see the impacts of the lexical approach on college students' ability of English reading in the minority areas. In the research, the experimental group was comprised of 37 students, whereas the control group consisted of 58 students. The students were from Chifeng College in Inner Mongolia ethnic minority area. Through the experiment, three findings were found. First, it was revealed that the lexical approach in English teaching was beneficial to students' English reading ability. Second, it was efficient for teachers in the ethnic minority areas to use the lexical chunk teaching method. Finally, with the method, students could make progress in their English learning ability.

Likewise, Zhong and Suwanthep (2022) verified the positive influence of lexical chunks on learners' reading performance, though the most different point is that it revealed the students' positive attitude towards the lexical chunks. The purpose of this study is to test the lexical approach impacts on English major students' reading comprehension ability as well as their opinions of this approach in China. In this research, a mixed method was used by employing the instrument of a quasi-experiment, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. To conduct a reliable study, the authors had 45 first-year undergraduate English major students who aged from 18 to 21 years old take part in. After the treatment, data collection and data analysis, the research came up with the following findings. In the first place, the results showed that the lexical approach helped students improve their reading comprehension ability. Besides, the students developed a positive opinion towards this method. Therefore, it was suggested that the lexical approach should be applied to the process of teaching and learning reading in English in higher education institutions.

Similarly, Xian (2018) found the active role that the lexical chunks play in learning spoken English. With an instrument of a quasi-experiment and a focus-group interview, Xian (2018) chose 60 non-English major freshmen from two universities as the participants in the quantitative study to investigate the impact of chunk memory on students' oral English fluency, accuracy and diversity. Through experiments, the research found that lexical chunk memory was useful to the fluency, accuracy and diversity of students' oral English. In addition, college students' understanding of lexical chunk memory needed further enhancement.

Although Liya (2021) did the research with a different purpose, she expresses assenting opinion about the important function of lexical chunks in the language acquisition. To design a revised lexical approach based on Data-Driven Learning (DDL) activities and Language Awareness Theory, Liya (2021) conducted a quantitative study with 158 non-English major participants from four parallel classes, whose ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. In the study, the quantitative data was obtained via two questionnaires and a university assessment survey to test the relationship between students' awareness of lexical chunk and their learning proficiency as well as their attitude toward the lexical teaching method respectively. With careful and detailed

study, this article had the following findings. It was revealed that the students increased their awareness of lexical chunks and developed positive attitudes toward lexical approach with DDL activities. Additionally, the new method had a positive effect on learners' overall English proficiency.

In both of the following two studies, a teaching methodology was designed based on the Lexical Chunk Theory. Danyuan (2019) conducted mixed-method research to investigate the potential use of sentence tree-structure combining the Schema Theory and Lexical Chunk Theory in college English grammar teaching. In this study, the participant were 32 students of mixed gender whose ages were from 17 to 19 years old, studying in a 2+2 programme. With the quasi-experiment, questionnaires and a focus-group interview, the study showed that the students' ability to analyze long complex sentences was improved. In addition to the first finding, the amount of their grammar errors while writing long and difficult English sentences was greatly reduced. Students' responses in questionnaires and interviews also indicated they were motivated and had positive perceptions towards the application of this new tool in their grammar learning.

Yanlin (2018) invited 60 students to participate in quantitative research with the instrument of a quasi-experiment and three questionnaires. In this study, the English teaching method of Points (of information), Sentence, Paragraph and Text (PSPT) was created based on the Lexical Chunk Theory, Consecutive Interpretation Process and the researcher's own interpretation experiences. The study aimed to see the teaching effect of this innovated teaching approach. The findings of the study included the following aspects. First, PSPT could ease the difficulty in recitation. Furthermore, it was good for retelling of texts in English learning. Hence, it could be concluded that this method could promote learning efficiency. Although those two studies are involved with different research methodology and language skill, both of them proved the effectiveness of lexical chunks.

The review of the selected articles is summarized according to five perspectives: methodology, level of education, instrument, skills and learning impacts, which is presented in the following tables.

Table 1 indicates the methodology used in the articles. Among them, six studies were conducted using a quantitative method, and only four studies used mixed methods. None of the studies were conducted using a qualitative method.

Table 1.
Methodology

Methodology	Number of articles
Qualitative	0
Quantitative	6
Mixed	4

Table 2 indicates that the instruments used to collect quantitative data were a quasi-experiment where nine out of ten articles reported using it, and five articles reported using

questionnaires. For the instrument to collect qualitative data, only one article reported using a semi-structured interview and three employed the focus group interview.

Table 2.
Instruments

Instruments	Number of articles
Questionnaire	5
Quasi-experiment	9
Semi-structured interview	1
Focus group interview	3

Table 3 indicates that the articles from Google Scholar studied different levels of education. Eight out of ten studies conducted research with respect to students from colleges or universities. There are two papers whose participants were selected from schools. However, none of the research focused on preschool.

Table 3.
Level of Education

Level of Education	Number of articles
Preschool	0
School	2
Tertiary	8

Table 4 shows the skill studied in those journals. According to the table, four out of ten articles conducted research on writing skill. For the skill in which the teaching of lexical chunks was applied, two of the articles centered on the reading ability of students. What followed reading skill is speaking, grammar, general English proficiency as well as reciting and retelling. Only one out of ten articles studied students' speaking skill, another one concentrated on grammar learning and one was about general English proficiency. In addition, it should be noted that none of the ten articles researched whether the lexical chunk teaching was conducive to students' listening skill improvement.

Table 4.
Skill

Skill	Number of articles
Reading	2
Writing	4
Speaking	1
Listening	0
Grammar	1
General English proficiency	1
Reciting and Retelling	1

Table 5 demonstrates the learning impacts of students after being taught with the application of lexical chunks. Apparently, all the studies showed positive results. The findings from previous research suggest that the application of lexical chunks in English teaching was useful for students' reading, writing, speaking, and grammar, reciting and retelling as well as general English proficiency.

Table 5.
Learning Impacts

Learning Impacts	Number of articles
Positive	10
Negative	0

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the CLR, it can be concluded that the majority of studies in this field used a quantitative method, the most frequently employed instrument was a quasi-experiment. Many researchers chose university or college students as the participants, and they conducted such studies on writing. Additionally, all of the studies presented that the application of lexical chunks was conducive to the teaching of English in China.

The review of the articles indicates that more studies should be conducted on the application of lexical chunks, especially in China. The first reason is that from the studies conducted earlier, it can be reflected clearly that all of the ten articles showed students' English speaking, writing, reading, grammar, reciting and retelling as well as general English proficiency could be improved after being taught through the new method of lexical chunks. However, the effect of lexical approach on students' listening, translation and interpretation has not been discussed yet. Thus, more research can be done in this field. In addition, the majority of studies focused on college or university students as their participants, so in the future there could be more

research on lexical chunks with different samples. Finally, all of the ten articles reported positive results of the application of this teaching method, but only two of them covered the attitude, and one was related to motivation. Therefore, more studies can be done with respect to attitude and motivation. The limitation of this review is that there are only ten articles from Google Scholar, so there could be some research with more articles to study from other databases.

In addition to the conclusion and limitation of this study, what follows next is the recommendations for future research. According to Creswell (2014), the way to extend the discussion includes incorporating new elements, replicating a study in new situations or with new participants. To begin with, as there are articles not associated with students' listening, translation and interpretation skills, future research could include those new elements. Furthermore, an abundance of studies took college or university students as subjects, so in the future, there could be more studies with new participants. Finally, there are only two articles discussing the students' attitude towards the lexical chunk teaching and one article on students' motivation. Hence, future research can be done with those new elements.

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Conflict of Interest

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