

## *Appropriation-Based Syllabus and Speaking Ability: Evidence from Iranian EFL Context*

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### **Abstract**

The impetus for performing this study came from Thornbury's (2005) approach to teaching speaking in which he claimed that awareness-raising techniques and appropriation strategies facilitate the developing speaking skill. Accordingly, this study explored the impact of an appropriation-based syllabus to teaching speaking by using chunks-on-card activities based on quasi-experimental method. To do so, 30 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected from four classes in a language institute and the classes were randomly allocated to two groups: an experimental and a control group. To observe the effect of the treatment, the participants underwent pre- and post-tests on speaking skill. They participated in 14 treatment sessions in which the experimental group practiced the chunks-on-card approach through drilling while the control group practiced the conventional approach. The findings of the Independent-Samples T-test as well as the Paired Samples T-test revealed significant differences among the pre- and post-tests scores of both groups. Thus, the hypothesis of the study which postulated that the appropriation-based teaching of lexical chunks had a significant impact on these intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills was confirmed.

**Key Word:** Lexical Chunks, Appropriation, Speaking Skill, EFL Learners, Collocation.

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### *Introduction*

As the most challenging of the four language skills (Nunan, 2003; Zhang, 2009), speaking is claimed to be an interactive process of meaning-making (Brown, 2007) in which combination of various processing mechanisms, constituents, and efforts are involved in putting the words to speak fluently and accurately (Pawlak, 2011). Highlighting the significance of speaking ability, Namaziandost, Abdy Saray, and Rahimi Esfahani (2018) held that for the majority of individuals, the ability to speak a language is equivalent to knowing that language. Given the influential role of speaking in learning other skills, the teaching and learning of speaking are assumed as a crucial part of any language education classroom. The development of speaking skills would facilitate the teaching of other skills since it affords opportunities for learning as the main communicative medium of the classroom. Moreover, teaching speaking is a fundamental part of syllabus content (Goh & Burns, 2012). According to McCroskey (1992), several factors including lack of or less exposure to language use, poorly developed listening skills, improper teaching methods, and poorly developed repertoire of vocabulary might lead to students' unsatisfactory performance in speaking. Recognizing the prominence of vocabulary knowledge in speaking, Carter & McCarthy (2014) reiterated that communication would happen with little knowledge of grammar,

whereas without vocabulary knowledge, communication cannot occur. In the past decades, the center of attention in vocabulary teaching has changed to lexical chunks (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008) as the studies had demonstrated that the acquisition and exploitation of these expressions are both beneficial and challenging among natives and non-natives speakers (Cortes, 2004). Richards (2009) suggested that there are various factors contributing to the naturalness of speech and claimed that one significant factor is the number of multi-word chunks the learners exploit along with the conversational routines or fixed expressions. Similarly, Widdowson (1991) emphasized the role of chunks in improving communicative competence by proposing that knowing pre-assembled and prefabricated structures and chunks improves learners' communicative ability efficiently.

### *Research Background*

**Lexical Chunks: Definition, Significance, and Classification.** Lexical chunks are commonly defined by considering two viewpoints, namely psycholinguistics and corpus linguistics. According to the former viewpoints, lexical chunks are stored and retrieved as continuous strings of words (Wray, 2000), while in the latter viewpoint, they are phrases that are exploited with high frequency (Lin, 2010). The integration of teaching chunks in routine teaching approaches has been remarkably

influenced by the Lewis Lexical Approach (1993), which could suitably be called a 'chunk-noticing approach'. Lewis' recommendation for instructors is to ground classroom tasks on extracting lexical patterns from language input, thereby focusing on lexical phrases instead of individual words. In this approach, the conventional difference between vocabulary and syntax is abandoned and substituted by an integrative perspective toward language in which patterns are integral in language segments. By the same token, language is perceived as grammaticalized lexis rather than lexicalized grammar (Lewis, 1993). In addition, McCarthy and Carter (2002) emphasized the point that a vast number of chunks are as regular as or more common than the single word. The reason that chunks are so prevalent is due to the fact that they could be stored and retrieved more rapidly and the mind can keep these prefabricated chunks in the long term memory to be used later (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008).

Lexical chunks are particularly important for the processing of language under "real-time" conditions, because they can be retrieved from memory as ready-made word sequences without the necessity for parsing (Skehan, 1998; Kuiper, 1996). According to Conklin and Schmitt (2008), a great proportion of resources (long-term memory) are used by the mind to store a number of ready-made chunks that can be employed in language production, thus compensating for a restricted

resource (working memory), that can possibly be encumbered when generating expressions from distinct lexis and syntactical rules.

Highlighting the pragmatic values of lexical chunks, Conklin and Schmidt (2008) reported that they are frequently exploited to achieve repeated communication needs. Pawley and Syder (1983) also reiterated that a small proportion of speech clauses are novel and that prepared chunks in memory support the majority of the speech of daily conversations. Foster, Tonkyn, and Wigglesworth (2000) stated that the more proficient speakers are those individuals who can keep track of more complex micro-units; that is, who can quickly access multiple chunks when speaking.

Regarding the classification of lexical chunks, Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), and Lewis' (1993) classifications are the most widely accepted. The proposed classification of chunks by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) embraces four types, including poly-words (fixed and short lexical phrases playing various types of functions), institutionalized expressions (phrases which have comparative length as a sentence with slight inconsistency and play specific social functions in conversation), phrasal constraints (short to average length chunks associated with various functions), and sentence builders (expressions in which the substitution of a structure is possible to express various ideas).

In Lewis' (1993) classification of lexical chunks, some types of

chunks overlap with the previous classification proposed by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992). As Lewis (1993) put forward, poly-words, collocations, sentence frames, and institutionalized expressions are the four types of chunks. Accordingly, poly-words refer to predetermined combinations of words in which the substitution of one part with another might change the meaning; collocations include pairs of words that are typically used together; sentence frames are employed to control features of written text with definite pragmatic functions; and institutionalized expressions are typically used in oral interaction which has the same feature as sentence frames (Lewis, 1993). As indicated above, the nature of these two classifications is the same, though different terminologies are employed to denote two similar concepts.

Thornbury's Approach towards Speaking Instruction Thornbury (2005) proposed an approach for teaching speaking which embraces three stages: awareness-raising, appropriation, and autonomy. He explained that learners receive new knowledge and get familiar with it during the awareness-raising stage, the newly received knowledge is integrated into the existing repertoire during the appropriation stage, and the knowledge is used in real-life situations without extraneous help in the autonomy stage. As the emphasis in this study is on the appropriation stage, this section presents a detailed explanation of the concept.

According to Billett (1998), the appropriation of knowledge is employed in Vygotskian and Piagetian inspired educational research to denote a process in which people reproduce rather than inherit knowledge (Leontyev, 2009). Appropriation includes an explanatory assessment and production of knowledge by individuals, instead of being an authentic representation of externally-derived stimuli (Billett, 1998). Throughout the appropriation stage, as Thornbury (2005) put forward, learners are provided with a supportive framework in which they can practice control over their speaking skill. In this stage, the learner might make mistakes but he/she is supported throughout the stage. The major purpose of practicing control is to boost the appropriation of the target language. According to Thornbury (2005, p. 63), “[...] learning a skill is not simply a behavior (like practice) or a mental process (like restructuring) [...]”.

In this respect, Brown and Palincsar (1989) observed that students who watched their teacher in think aloud modeling of text comprehension strategies indicated an improved level of performance, although not significant. With respect to L2 learning and teaching processes, this modeling outlook has encouraged teaching strategies that concentrate largely on drilling the learners on the appropriate use of language. Sometimes, such modeling is labeled as explicit teaching (Cazden, 1993), including teacher-led instruction of formal

language structures as in the grammar-translation method. It has been noted that the degree of appropriation relied on the correspondence of a novice learner's prior experiences, values, and goals with those of more skilled or influential individuals of a community, like teachers (Cole, 1995; Wertsch, 1991).

In the appropriation stage, the active role of learners is of paramount significance (Leontyev 1981; Wertsch 1991). Learners recreate the knowledge they are internalizing via the process of appropriation, therefore converting both their notion of the knowledge and, in turn, that knowledge as it is interpreted and used by others. Cazden's (1988) viewpoint of performance before competence is valuable to the perception of the concept of appropriation as it stresses the role of active engagement as a means of becoming competent in social practices.

In terms of activities in speaking, Thornbury (2005) distinguished eight appropriation activities, including practiced control, drilling and chants, reading aloud, writing tasks, assisted performance, dialogues, communicative activities and tasks repetition. These activities are included in the drama, role-play, and simulation as proposed by Thornbury (2005). Learners can benefit from utilizing real-life language use, practicing a greater range of register, and exercising formal language in the classroom. In addition, simulation practice may improve certain learners' self-

confidence. Students who feel uncomfortable because of limited comprehension of spoken English will feel anxious when engaging in activities and performing in front of their peers (Thornbury, 2005; Harmer, 2015). In appropriation activities, the focus is on constructing language through collaboration (Thornbury, 2005).

### *Practical Studies*

The significant and facilitative roles of chunks in the process of learning a second /foreign language have attracted scholars' attention. In this respect, the significance of using these phrases in two Japanese learners' spoken language was investigated in a study performed by Leedham (2006). Each non-native speaker's interactions were recorded and transcribed for five months. Analyzing the transcripts demonstrated a rise in the amount of speech with chunks and a decrease in the exploitation of wrong chunks. Learners, provided with the awareness-raising instructions, were required to identify chunks in the transcription. The study highlighted that the number of chunks employed increased after the instructions.

Likewise, Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer (2006) studied the efficacy of raising learners' awareness of the benefits of formulaic sequences to their oral proficiency. Two groups of EFL upper-intermediate to advanced Dutch learners participated in the study. In one group, the detection of formulaic sequences along with

collocations and fixed expressions was practiced; in the other group, the same procedures were followed except that formulaic sequences were not practiced. The study revealed that the proficiency and fluency of the group practicing formulaic sequences developed significantly. In addition, a correlation was observed between oral proficiency scores and the frequency of formulaic sequences used by learners.

In an effort to explore the correlation between speaking proficiency and exploitation of lexical collocation, Hsu and Chiu (2008) performed a study with Taiwanese EFL learners. The study demonstrated that the mastery of collocations was correlated with speaking proficiency. However, there was no significant correlation between learners' exploitation of collocations and their speaking ability. In addition, no significant correlation was observed between the learners' knowledge and employment of collocations.

Using communicative practice and dialogue memorization strategy, Taguchi and Iwasaki (2008) examined the efficacy of grammatical chunks instruction on Japanese EFL learners' speaking fluency development. Accordingly, one group practiced chunks using conversation activity while the other group did not receive such instruction. The study found that conversation activity led to the exploitation of a greater number of grammatical chunks and the higher level of fluency at the discourse level.

In another study, Shen (2015) examined the effectiveness of chunks input on Chinese English-major learners' oral production. Oral exams were administered prior to and following the treatment. Chunk input was employed in the treatment group. The results substantiated the significant role of chunks input in boosting Chinese English-major learners' speaking proficiency. The speaking posttest illustrated that the fluency and accuracy of learners in the treatment group had developed greatly during this period. Despite the improvement in participants' speaking ability in the control group, their performance was not as significant compared to participants in the treatment group.

In an attempt to test the premise that children depend on chunks in language learning more heavily than adults, McCauley and Christiansen (2017) conducted a study in which computational modeling was used to discover the efficacy of chunks in speaking. They observed that chunks played a supportive role in language learning; however, adult learners might use fewer numbers of chunks in their speech than children do in learning a first language. In addition, they established differences in the procedure by which the two groups learned the chunks.

McGuire and Larson-Hall (2017) investigated the impact of explicit focus on formulaic sequences on ESL learners' fluency. To present authentic English, a task-based approach to speaking and listening was

employed in one group, while the same procedure coupled with chunk noticing tasks were emphasized in the other group. According to results, the group practicing chunk noticing tasks used more formulaic sequences and developed higher level of fluency than the group which did not follow that procedure. It was observed that formulaic sequences and explicit instruction had a beneficial effect on teaching.

In Iranian EFL contexts, attempts have also been made to shed light on the efficacy of explicit instruction of various categories of lexical chunks in developing learners' listening (Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012; Mohseni, Marzban, & Keshavarzi, 2014), reading (Sadat Kiaee, Heravi Moghaddam, & Moheb Hosseini, 2013; Sadighi & Sahragard, 2013), and writing skills (Araghi, Yousefi Oskuee, & Salehpour, 2014; Ranjbar, Pazhakh, & Gorjian, 2012; Shamsabadi, Ketabi, & Eslami Rasekh, 2017). Regarding the impact of lexical chunks instruction on speaking ability, Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, Tahriri, and Dobahri Bandari (2015) studied Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To do so, two groups of participants attended pre/posttest interview sessions and treatment sessions. Both groups practiced the same content and skill with the exception that one group practiced how to use chunks. The study showed a correlation between the rate of chunks exploitation and speaking fluency. Furthermore, participants' fluency in the group

which received instruction on how to use collocations enhanced significantly.

In similar vein, Bakhshizadeh, Rahimi Domakani, and Rajaei (2015) examined the impact of explicit/implicit teaching of formulaic sequences on Iranian lower- intermediate EFL learners' oral proficiency. The participants attended interview sessions prior to and after the treatment sessions. In one group, the regular instruction focusing on analytical grammar rules and discrete vocabulary was practiced, while explicit, formulaic sequences-based instruction through readings was used in the other group. The results revealed that oral proficiency of the group practicing explicit formulaic sequences-based instruction significantly improved in comparison to the other group, substantiating the effectiveness of formulaic sequences instruction.

Mohammadi and Enayati (2018) also explored the impact of lexical chunks teaching on EFL intermediate learners' speaking fluency. Accordingly, the two groups were interviewed first and then attended the treatment sessions in which the experimental group received instruction on lexical chunks and the control group practiced the conventional approach. Following the treatment sessions, both groups participated in the interview session. The findings demonstrated that the learners' fluency in the experimental group was significantly improved after receiving treatment. Also, learners in the experimental group

demonstrated positive attitudes toward the explicit teaching of lexical chunks.

### *Rationale for the study*

Although speaking is considered an effortless task, it is indeed a cognitively demanding process because it includes the use of several simultaneous processes (Goh & Burns, 2012). The communicative competence theory (Nunan, 2004) encouraged suggestions for the development of communicative syllabuses, and recently for task and text-based syllabuses and methodologies (Thornbury, 2011) that as is claimed, should inform approaches to teaching speaking that range from direct to indirect ones (Thornbury & Slade, 2006; Brown, 2007; Richards, 2009). Additionally, it has been reiterated that if the teaching instruction focuses on appropriate activities, speaking can raise learners' motivational levels and make the language classroom an attractive place to be in (Nunan, 1999; Celce-Murcia, 2001). Besides the emphasis on adopting appropriate tasks for teaching, a plethora of studies conducted on lexical chunks have highlighted the pivotal role they play as a production strategy for language learners (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Underwood, Schmitt, & Galpin, 2004; Wood, 2006; Wray, 2005; Wray & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Along with the pervasiveness of lexical chunks in language, their role as the components of a coherent discourse, genre, and discipline (Biber, Conrad, & Cortes, 2004;

Hyland, 2008; Jalali, Eslami Rasekh & Tavangar Rizi, 2008), as well as their influential impacts on production and comprehension (Biber, 2006) have attracted the attention of scholars. Reviewing the literature would indicate that the majority of the studies focused on awareness-raising strategies, while the appropriation of such knowledge has been neglected. Taking into account these two viewpoints coupled with few studies conducted in the Iranian EFL context, this study attempted to delve into the efficacy of providing learners with a supportive activity i.e., chunk-on-card activity, in developing the speaking skill. Therefore, the following research question and hypothesis were formulated:

RQ: Is there a difference in participants' English speaking skills after receiving treatment with chunk-on-card activities?

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a difference in participants' speaking skills after receiving treatment with chunk-on-card activities.

### *Methodology*

#### *The Design of the Study*

A quasi-experimental design was followed in the study. As Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2013) pointed out, quasi-experimental design is one of the most widely employed designs in which intact classes are randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. This study used a convenience sample because the sample was selected from a conveniently available group of learners. The participants

were intermediate EFL learners recruited from four classes in a private language institute who had already been assigned to the classes based on their performance on the proficiency test they took prior to the course. Due to institute policy, rearranging the class condition was impossible; therefore, intact classes were selected. The proficiency level was assessed using a quick placement test. All the groups participated in the speaking pretests, 14 sessions of treatment, and a posttest.

### *Participants*

Four classes with a total number of seventy participants were selected from Rasta Language Institute in Tonekabon, Mazandaran Province, Iran. Of the initial seventy, sixty participants were at intermediate level based on their scores (24 to 40 out of 60) on the quick placement test (QPT). This test is the Oxford Quick Placement Test which is ordinarily employed by Iranian universities in their experimental studies on language to estimate proficiency. Each group involved 15 participants with the age range from 16 to 20.

### *Instruments*

Two instruments, including a QPT and speaking test, were used in the study. The QPT was employed to choose a homogenous sample and the speaking tests were used to identify the impact of treatment prior to and after the treatment.

### *Quick Placement Test (UCLES, 2001)*

The paper and pen version of QPT was employed to determine the proficiency level of the participants. This test is the Oxford Quick Placement Test which is ordinarily employed by Iranian universities in their experimental studies on language to estimate proficiency. The test includes 60 multiple-choice items assessing learners' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. As mentioned in the manual presented for interpreting the scores, those who scored between 24 to 40 out of 60 are considered as intermediate level learners. These scores are roughly equivalent to a B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

### *Speaking test*

To assess participants' speaking ability, speaking pre- and post-tests were administered. The test followed the IELTS speaking test procedure and the IELTS scoring rubric was utilized for scoring participants' speaking ability. Each speaking test took about 10 to 15 minutes. In the first part of the test, some general questions were asked, including questions about family, home, and hobbies. In the second part, a topic was assigned to the participants and they were told to talk about it. In the third part, further questions about the topic mentioned in part two were asked. The topic selected for part two was selected from the course book used in the classroom.

### *Procedure*

This study was conducted in a language institute in Mazandaran province. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher sent a request letter to the principal seeking his approval for conducting the study in the institute. When the approval was granted, the experiment began. The QPT was conducted among 70 participants in order to select a homogenous sample. The 60-item QPT assessed participants' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar through multiple-choice items. The participants were required to answer the test in 30 minutes. In line with the rubric proposed for interpreting the scores, 60 participants from four intact classes were selected and allocated to control and experimental groups.

Prior to commencing the treatment sessions, the learners in control and experimental groups participated in a speaking test which followed the IELTS speaking test format. The speaking test took about 15 minutes in which the participants were required to talk about a general topic and a particular topic assigned by the examiner. For assessing the speaking ability of the participant, IELTS scoring rubric was followed.

After conducting the pretest, the treatment sessions began. The participants in each group attended 14 sessions in which they received relevant instructions on speaking. The course book utilized in the groups was *Four Corners* written by Richards and Bohlke (2012). The book interestingly focuses on

four language skills and prepares participants to use English for effective daily communication. In addition, *English Collocation in Use* written by O'Dell and McCarthy (2008) was employed in the experimental groups to teach collocation. According to Thornbury (2005) and Chun-Guang (2014), collocation is classified as prefabricated language chunks made up of pairs or groups of words that frequently co-occur in a natural text. The book includes 60 units covering various topics by presenting topic-related collocations. For the purpose of the current study and due to time limitations, only ten topics were randomly selected and were taught in the experimental group. In each lesson, the participants were required to do the exercises after they studied the explanation and sample examples for each collocation.

In each session, the teacher selected ten collocations and wrote them on the board so that participants could prepare their own cards. Drilling as an appropriation activity proposed by Thornbury (2005) was followed in the experimental groups. Thornbury (1999) emphasized that drills might facilitate the atomization of language chunks in the hope that language fluency would be enhanced. Accordingly, participants were asked to use the chunks in a sentence. Then the entire class repeated what they heard. Participants were also encouraged to apply the chunk in different sentences. The use of drilling would help participants

concentrate on accuracy and fluency by intensive practicing of structures. It would also provide participants with immediate feedback on their production, a secure environment for practicing the newly learned structure. It also expedites the process of memorizing the information. In the control group, the conventional approach to teaching speaking was followed.

After the 14 sessions of treatment, the participants did a posttest of speaking to establish the success of the treatments. The format of the speaking posttest was similar to the pretest and similar scoring procedure was followed.

**Methods of Analyzing Data**

In order to analyze the collected data, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used. First, an Independent Samples T-test was performed on the posttest scores of the groups to

see whether there was a difference in participants’ speaking skill posttest means after receiving the treatment. Next, two Paired-Samples T-tests were performed between the pretest and posttest of speaking in each group.

**Results**

The results obtained regarding the research question are presented in this section. Before analyzing the data, homogeneity of the scores was analyzed and after confirming this, parametric tests were used in the study. As mentioned earlier, the research question of the study attempted to detect any differences in English speaking skill posttest means of all participant groups. Therefore, the Independent Samples T-test was performed. The findings are as follows:

As is indicated in table (1), there is a significant difference between the two groups’ speaking skills post-test scores,  $t(28)=7.247, p<.05$ .

**Table 1- Independent-Samples T-test results of the study**

|          |                         | t-test for Equality of Means |    |                 |
|----------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----------------|
|          |                         | t                            | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Speaking | Equal variances assumed | 7.247                        | 28 | 0.000           |

T critical = 2.000

As is indicated in table (2), the mean for the pre-test scores of the experimental group was smaller than the post-test mean score. As for the standard deviations obtained for the posttest scores of the experimental group, there

seems to be less variability among the scores than the scores in the pretest of the experimental group. This may give an image of the participants’ scores being more varied after conducting the treatment of the study.

**Table 2- Descriptive results for the experimental group of the study**

|        |             | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|-------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | Pretest EX  | 16.0667 | 15 | 0.88372        | 0.22817         |
|        | Posttest EX | 17.5333 | 15 | 1.24595        | 0.32170         |

**Table 3- Descriptive results for the control group of the study**

|        |              | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|--------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 2 | Pretest CON  | 14.0667 | 15 | 1.57963        | 0.40786         |
|        | Posttest CON | 14.2667 | 15 | 1.22280        | 0.31573         |

As is indicated in table (3), the mean for the pre-test scores of the control group was smaller than the post-test mean score. As for the standard deviations obtained for the posttest scores of the control group, there seems to be less variability among the scores than the scores in the pretest of the control group. This may give an image of the participants' scores

being less varied after conducting the treatment of the study.

As is indicated in table (4), there is a statistically significant increase in speaking test scores from pretest to posttest,  $t(14)=8.876$ ,  $p<.05$ . For the control group, the increase in speaking test scores is not statistically significant from pretest to posttest,  $t(14)=1.382$ ,  $p>.05$ .

**Table 4- Paired-Samples T-test results for the experimental and control groups of the study**

|        |                          | Mean    | Std. Deviation | t     | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|--------------------------|---------|----------------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | Pretest Ex-Posttest Ex   | 1.46667 | 0.63994        | 8.876 | 14 | 0.000           |
| Pair 2 | Pretest Con-Posttest Con | 0.2000  | 0.14475        | 1.382 | 14 | 0.100           |

T critical = 2.042

The hypothesis of the study postulated that there is a difference in participants' speaking skills after receiving treatment with chunk-on-card activities. According to the results, the hypothesis was retained. There are two pieces of evidence for retaining the hypothesis: first, the findings in table (1) indicates that the difference between the posttest

scores in the experimental and the control group of the study has been significant since the observed t value was shown to be higher than the critical t. Second, as for the findings in table (4), the observed t is significantly higher than the critical t in the experimental group, which is indicative of a noticeable difference between the pretest and the posttest of the group while

there is a lower observed *t* value than the critical *t* in the control group which indicates an opposite result.

### *Discussion and conclusion*

As mentioned in the literature, previous studies conducted to determine the usefulness of chunks mostly focused on fostering learners' knowledge of such phrases. Highlighting the significance of an awareness-raising approach to learning, the current study attempted to delineate how an appropriation-based syllabus could help learners take control of their learning. The analysis of data for the hypothesis of the study demonstrated significant differences in the posttest scores of the four groups. As the results indicated, the learners' mean scores in the experimental group differed significantly from the control group. The results further showed that chunks teaching through an appropriation-based syllabus significantly improved learners' speaking skill from pretest to posttest.

The results of the study are substantiated by several previous studies which have demonstrated that teaching lexical chunks is a valuable method to develop learners' speaking skill as it facilitates the learning process and it has a continuing effect on memory retention (Attar & Allami, 2013; Boers et al., 2006; Hsu & Chiu, 2008; Huang & Normandia, 2007; Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Shoostari & Karimi, 2013;

Zaferanieh & Behroozi, 2011). In the present study, it was found that the groups that practiced chunk-on-cards outperformed the control groups. The results confirm the findings of Mohammadi and Enayati's (2018) study which reported that participants' speaking ability developed as a result of receiving instruction on chunking. Similarly, Zafarghandi et al. (2015) suggested that mastery of chunks could help learners expand their fluency in speaking English. According to Lewis (2008), teaching lexical chunks is a major factor which increasing learners' exposure to the target language and the lack of exposure to such chunks might bring about deficiency in learners' fluency. The significant impact of teaching chunks on speaking could be justified by what Chambers (1997) and Wood (2006) claimed in their studies. They reported that lexical chunks employed by L2 learners provided them with the opportunity to boost the speech speed by organizing sentences and enhancing the length of their speech. Moreover, they recommended that learning a great number of chunks and automatic retrieval of such chunks facilitates native-like fluency. However, the findings of the current study are in contrast with those of Zarei and Tondaki (2015), who found no difference between modes of practicing chunks on learners' speaking skill. The inconsistency in the findings of these studies might be due to different techniques that were employed.

The result of this study follows those in the study conducted by Asaei and Rezvani (2015). In the study on the impact of implicit/explicit teaching of collocations on Iranian learners' exploitation of collocations, they observed that the groups performed considerably differently in the posttest. They found that the group practicing explicit methods of teaching collocations surpassed the other group. In addition, the findings are endorsed by Wood's (2010) study that formulaic sequences have great impact on speech fluency development.

This current study proposes some implications to be used by various stakeholders in the classroom. The first implication is that raising awareness of lexical chunks along with practicing control over the process of learning are significant factor affecting learners' process of expanding speaking skill. An important point to be considered is that vocabulary and chunks knowledge build incrementally (Schmitt, 2000); therefore, the repeated exposures and ample opportunities to practice such knowledge in classrooms could facilitate the process of acquiring such knowledge. The second implication is that maximum encounters with chunks would guarantee learners' development in the speaking skill as it reduces the time of processing the sentences and improves the fluency and accuracy of the speaker. For that reason, teachers should devise or employ activities that encourage learners to develop their mastery of lexical chunks.

Teachers could benefit from using explicit and attention directing activities to accentuate lexical chunks in the input. Intentional and explicit learning of chunks should be promoted in the classroom to facilitate the learning process. This is in line with what Schmidt (2001) proposed in the Noticing Hypothesis that target language items need to be noticed in order to be acquired.

In addition, teachers should encourage learners to take control of their learning process by introducing various types of activities in the classroom, which provide the learners put their knowledge into practice to determine whether they have good command over their knowledge. In doing so, teachers and material developers could provide the learners with materials enriched with target lexical chunks and appropriate activities for practicing the chunks. This would enhance learners' exposure to such phrases; hence, increase the knowledge of such chunks. Teachers could benefit from authentic corpora or creative list of chunks to be employed in the classrooms. However, it is recommended that teachers carefully consider the factors such as range, usefulness, prevalence, and learnability of such chunks to ensure that the learners benefit the learning of such phrases. It is suggested that if such expressions are not considered in the actual syllabus, teachers should incorporate these items into the classroom use and teach their students to distinguish, practice,

and produce the expressions effortlessly .

As an implication of this study, it is suggested that teachers introduce the chunks within a topic framework. Put it differently, chunks pertinent to specific topics should be introduced to help the learners better grasp the function, meaning, and appropriate use of such expressions in various contexts. Subject-related chunks are stored and retrieved easier than those that are introduced haphazardly. This kind of strategy may facilitate the process of memorization and practicing lexical chunks.

The study provided some valuable insights regarding the impact of teaching chunks on learners' speaking ability; however, it suffered from some limitations. First, in selecting the chunks for classroom only collocations were selected. There are other categories of lexical chunks that could affect learners' language skills. Concerning the appropriation approach to teaching speaking, only drilling was used in the study. Other techniques such as chants, writing tasks, reading aloud, assisted performance and scaffolding, dialogues, communicative tasks, and tasks repetition proposed by Thornbury (2005) could be employed to enhance learners speaking skill. Finally, the study used a small sample size. A larger sample size would provide more robust results and would improve the generalizability of the findings of the study.

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