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Understanding academic vocabulary learning in higher education: challenges, strategies, and pedagogical implications

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***Abstract.** This study analyzes the theoretical and practical aspects of acquiring academic vocabulary in higher education institutions. In particular, it examines the main challenges students face in mastering academic vocabulary, such as lexical deficiencies, decontextualized learning, and the incorrect use of collocations and terms. Furthermore, the study highlights strategies for the effective acquisition of academic vocabulary, including contextual teaching, corpus-based work, a focus on collocations, and the development of a system of communicative exercises. According to the research findings, integrative and communicative approaches are paramount in developing lexical competence, as they help form students' skills for the appropriate and effective use of vocabulary in academic discourse.*

***Keywords:** academic vocabulary, vocabulary, lexical competence, higher education, foreign language teaching, communicative approach, collocation, corpus linguistics, teaching strategies, academic discourse.*

Понимание освоения академической лексики в высшем образовании: трудности, стратегии и педагогические импликации

***Аннотация.** В данном исследовании анализируются теоретические и практические аспекты освоения академической лексики в учреждениях высшего образования. В частности, рассматриваются основные трудности, с которыми сталкиваются студенты при овладении академической лексикой, такие как лексические дефициты, деконтекстуализированное обучение, а также некорректное употребление коллокаций и терминов. Кроме того, в работе освещаются стратегии эффективного усвоения академической лексики, включая контекстуальное обучение, использование корпусных методов, акцент на*

коллокациях и разработку системы коммуникативных упражнений. Согласно результатам исследования, интегративные и коммуникативные подходы играют ключевую роль в развитии лексической компетенции, поскольку способствуют формированию у студентов навыков адекватного и эффективного использования лексики в академическом дискурсе.

Ключевые слова: академическая лексика, словарный запас, лексическая компетенция, высшее образование, обучение иностранному языку, коммуникативный подход, коллокация, корпусная лингвистика, стратегии обучения, академический дискурс.

Oliy ta'limda akademik lug'atni o'zlashtirishni tushunish: muammolar, strategiyalar va pedagogik ahamiyat

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqotda oliy ta'lim muassasalarida akademik lug'atni o'zlashtirishning nazariy va amaliy jihatlari tahlil qilinadi. Xususan, talabalarning akademik lug'atni egallash jarayonida duch keladigan asosiy muammolari, jumladan, leksik yetishmovchiliklar, kontekstdan uzilgan holda o'rganish, shuningdek kollokatsiyalar va terminlardan noto'g'ri foydalanish holatlari ko'rib chiqiladi. Bundan tashqari, akademik lug'atni samarali o'zlashtirish strategiyalari, jumladan kontekstual o'qitish, korpusga asoslangan yondashuv, kollokatsiyalarga e'tibor qaratish hamda kommunikativ mashqlar tizimini ishlab chiqish masalalari yoritiladi. Tadqiqot natijalariga ko'ra, integrativ va kommunikativ yondashuvlar leksik kompetensiyani rivojlantirishda muhim ahamiyat kasb etadi, chunki ular talabalarda akademik diskursda lug'atdan to'g'ri va samarali foydalanish ko'nikmalarini shakllantiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: akademik lug'at, so'z boyligi, leksik kompetensiya, oliy ta'lim, chet tilini o'qitish, kommunikativ yondashuv, kollokatsiya, korpus lingvistikasi, o'qitish strategiyalari, akademik diskurs.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern globalization, one of the primary demands on the higher education system is to train specialists who are competitive, capable of independent thought, and can operate effectively in the international scientific and professional arena. This, in turn, requires the development of not only students' general language skills but also their academic discourse competence. As a vital component of academic discourse, academic vocabulary is of particular importance, as it is the primary instrument for scientific thought, logical expression, and professional communication.

METHODOLOGY

Today, the methodology of foreign language teaching focuses primarily on communicative and competency-based approaches, which stipulate that the language learning process must be organized in harmony with real-life speech situations. The problem of mastering academic vocabulary is especially urgent for students in non-linguistic fields[1]. While they often know general, everyday vocabulary, they are frequently unable to sufficiently use the terminological and functional units required in scientific and academic discourse. As a result, they face difficulties in understanding scientific texts, preparing independent written works, and articulating clear ideas in oral speech. Furthermore, the process of acquiring academic vocabulary is based on complex psycholinguistic and

cognitive mechanisms[2]. This process requires students not only to memorize new lexical units but also to comprehend their meanings, usage features, and stylistic and pragmatic aspects. Otherwise, the words remain at a passive vocabulary level and are not used effectively in practical speech.

Moreover, modern research indicates that for the effective acquisition of academic vocabulary, it is necessary to study it in context, pay attention to collocations, leverage the potential of corpus linguistics, and implement interactive teaching methods. Concurrently, organizing the educational process in stages (receptive, reproductive, productive, and integrative) serves to systematically develop students' lexical competence[3].

The purpose of this research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the process of acquiring academic vocabulary in higher education institutions, identify the main problems within it, and develop pedagogical recommendations based on effective teaching strategies. To achieve this goal, the concept of academic vocabulary, its structure, and its functions will be studied; the difficulties faced by students will be analyzed; and ways to overcome them will be proposed based on modern methodological approaches. In this regard, the findings of this research will be of significant theoretical and practical importance for improving the methodology of foreign language teaching, particularly for developing academic discourse competence among students in non-linguistic fields.

Academic vocabulary is a collection of general scientific and specialized terms, stable phrases, and speech patterns used in scientific and educational activities. It consists of two main layers:

- general academic vocabulary (for example: analyze, evaluate, approach);
- specialized terminological vocabulary

Academic vocabulary for students:

- understanding scientific texts;
- writing written works (essays, articles, reports);
- participation in presentations and discussions is the primary linguistic tool necessary

for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Acquiring Academic Vocabulary (Expanded)

Modern research shows that the process of acquiring academic vocabulary among higher education students is complex and multifaceted, determined by linguistic, psycholinguistic, and didactic factors. This process is particularly challenging for students in non-linguistic fields, as they are required to master both the language and their specialized subjects simultaneously. As a result, the following main problems arise:

1. Lexical Deficiency. Although students may possess a general vocabulary sufficient for daily communication, the lexical units necessary for academic and scholarly activities are often underdeveloped. This is especially evident in challenges related to both general academic vocabulary (e.g., analyze, interpret, evaluate) and field-specific terminology.

This situation creates difficulties for students in understanding academic texts, as they cannot fully comprehend the key concepts necessary to grasp the main idea. Furthermore, this problem limits their ability to express thoughts clearly and logically in written and oral communication.

2. Learning in Isolation from Context. In many cases, students attempt to memorize new words individually, that is, disconnected from their context. Such an approach hinders a full understanding of the true meaning, scope of use, and stylistic features of lexical units.

As a result, even though students may know the dictionary definition of words, they struggle to use them correctly and appropriately in various speech situations. This leads to the functional underdevelopment of lexical competence.

3. *Lack of Collocational Knowledge.* In academic discourse, natural word combinations, i.e., collocations, are of great importance. However, students often learn words in isolation, without considering how they combine with other words. For example, not knowing standard collocations like "conduct research" (instead of "do research") or "draw a conclusion" (instead of "make a conclusion") disrupts the naturalness of speech. This situation causes students' speech to appear unidiomatic and awkward, and it

4. *The Transfer Problem (Interference).* The influence of one's native language (interference) is also one of the serious problems in acquiring academic vocabulary. Students often attempt to translate words and expressions directly from their native language, which leads to semantic and pragmatic errors.

For example, native language patterns are retained in grammatical constructions, word order, or lexical choice. This negatively affects the naturalness and accuracy of speech in the foreign language.

5. *Difficulty in Active Use.* In many cases, students recognize lexical units passively, meaning they can understand them while reading or listening. However, they face difficulty when it comes to using these words independently in their own speech.

This situation is primarily due to a lack of practice, insufficient communicative exercises, and a limited linguistic environment. Consequently, although students possess lexical knowledge, the skill to use it effectively in active communication is not sufficiently developed.

Additional Factors. In addition to the main problems above, the following factors also influence the acquisition of academic vocabulary:

- low motivation;
- the use of traditional (and ineffective) methods in vocabulary instruction;
- a lack of authentic materials;
- underdeveloped independent learning skills.

Thus, the problems that arise in the process of acquiring academic vocabulary are complex, and overcoming them requires a systematic, communicative, and contextual approach. An in-depth analysis of these problems provides the foundation for developing effective teaching strategies.

The following pedagogical conclusions can be drawn from teaching academic vocabulary:

- Lexical competence must be developed systematically and sequentially;
- A communicative and pragmatic approach should be prioritized in the teaching process;
- Teaching vocabulary in context enhances effectiveness;
- It is crucial to utilize interactive and innovative methods;
- It is necessary to develop students' skills for independent work.

To organize this process effectively, it is first necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the problems encountered in acquiring academic vocabulary. Identifying these problems and scientifically substantiating their causes creates an important theoretical foundation for improving educational content and methodology. At the same time, relying on modern pedagogical approaches such as the principles of communicativeness, contextuality, integration, and individualization significantly enhances educational effectiveness.

Furthermore, implementing a phased system (receptive → reproductive → productive → integrative) in teaching academic vocabulary allows for the systematic development of students' lexical knowledge. Through this approach, lexical units are first comprehended, then reinforced, and subsequently brought to a level of fluent use in active speech. As a result, the transition from passive to active vocabulary proceeds effectively for students.

Moreover, using innovative and interactive methods in the educational process including authentic materials, digital resources, elements of corpus linguistics, and communicative tasks further increases the efficiency of academic vocabulary acquisition. This also develops students' skills in independent learning, analysis, and critical thinking.

As a result, students who have effectively mastered academic vocabulary will possess important competencies, such as:

- a deep understanding of scholarly texts;
- the ability to express their thoughts clearly and logically;
- active participation in professional communication;
- the capacity to be competitive in the international academic environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, mastering academic vocabulary is one of the most crucial components in preparing students for scholarly and professional activities within the higher education system. It is precisely this academic lexicon that enables students to comprehend complex scholarly concepts, articulate them logically, and participate effectively in various academic and communicative situations. In this sense, lexical competence is not just an indicator of language proficiency, but also a key determinant of a student's intellectual and professional potential.

Thus, improving the teaching of academic vocabulary serves not only to enhance the language learning process but also to raise the overall quality of education. This fully aligns with the strategic goals of the modern higher education system and prepares students to operate effectively in the global knowledge space.

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