USING COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS TO TEACH SYNONYMS FOR IRAQI COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT:
　　It is challenging to help EFL students learn and use synonyms in Iraq. This study investigates the challenges faced by Iraqi learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in understanding and using synonyms. By employing Langacker's cognitive linguistic theory of domains, the research aims to enhance Iraqi EFL learners' synonym knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. The study utilizes a descriptive analysis technique, with a pre-test and post-test design, involving fifty first-year students at the University of Baghdad's College of Languages, Department of English. The findings reveal that the domain theory significantly improved students' comprehension and application of English word semantics. Prior to the intervention, students had limited knowledge of the domain approach and struggled with recognizing and producing lexical features. After five weeks of treatment, students demonstrated increased abilities to define different types of domains and their properties, as well as understanding the literal and conceptual meanings of words. The study concludes that implementing the theory of domains can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition among Iraqi EFL students and emphasizes the importance of teaching synonyms with a focus on sense relations.
Keywords:　　Lexical Concept, Cognitive Linguistics, Synonyms, Theory of Domain

INTRODUCTION

　　English is considered the global language of communication and is widely used in various fields such as science, education, and commerce, making it an essential language for non-native speakers to learn (Abbasian & Biria, 2017). The goal of teaching English as an International Language (EIL) is to expose students to the diverse ways in which English is spoken worldwide, which can broaden their understanding of the language (Saito, 2021). One of the significant challenges faced by EFL students is the vast number of English terms

that have multiple meanings due to the language's extensive use and borrowing from other languages. Synonyms are an essential tool for EFL students to develop their vocabulary and comprehend word meanings. However, Iraqi EFL students often struggle with choosing the appropriate synonym due to a lack of knowledge regarding the denotative and connotative meanings of words (Al-Hebaishi, 2020).

To address this issue, cognitive linguistic theory has been used to improve EFL students' synonym knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. Langacker's (1987) theory of domains emphasizes the importance of understanding the semantic relationships between words, making it an effective tool for teaching synonyms (Khalaf, 2019). By focusing on identifying words with similar meanings, the domain theory can help students expand their vocabularies and develop a deeper understanding of word meanings (Jalilifar et al., 2018).

Research has shown that EFL students' lack of familiarity with English vocabulary affects their reading comprehension, writing ability, and overall academic performance (Ahmed & Al-Ali, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for EFL teachers to utilize effective strategies to improve their students' synonym knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. For example, teachers can use technology-assisted approaches, such as online vocabulary games and flashcards, to make vocabulary learning more engaging and interactive (Soleimani et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers can create an environment that fosters active learning, such as incorporating group activities and discussions that require students to use new vocabulary in context (Al-Hebaishi, 2020).

EFL teachers in Iraq can benefit from implementing cognitive linguistic theory, such as the theory of domains, to improve their students' synonym knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. Utilizing effective strategies and creating an engaging learning environment can also enhance students' vocabulary learning and improve their overall academic performance.

Aims of the Study

This research attempts to diagnose and analyse the challenges encountered by Iraqi EFL students when employing synonyms to identify the most prevalent errors.

Research Questions

1. How will do Iraqi EFL students use a foreign language to induce patterns or differentiate between synonyms?
2. Where do Iraqi EFL learners run into trouble when trying to find appropriate synonyms?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the improvement of EFL Iraqi students' synonym knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. The study provides insights into the use of the cognitive linguistic theory of domains as an effective tool for teaching synonyms and expanding students' vocabulary. This is particularly relevant in the context of Iraq, where English is widely used in various fields, and there is a need for students to develop a strong command of the language.

The findings of this study can also inform EFL instructors in Iraq and other contexts about effective teaching strategies for vocabulary acquisition and synonym knowledge. By emphasizing the importance of closed-domain lexical elements and their associations, instructors can help students develop a deeper understanding of the semantic networks underlying lexical features.

Furthermore, this study highlights the significance of providing EFL students with knowledge of denotation and connotation concerning synonyms to fully grasp their role and significance in the learning process. This is consistent with recent research that emphasizes the importance of teaching vocabulary in context and using real-world examples to promote better retention and understanding of words (Nation, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

What are Synonyms?

Students in Iraq, where English is often studied as a second language, use the four linguistic competencies to increase their word power due to the English language's extensive lexical resources (writing, reading, speaking, and listening). Nasser (2019) argues that these abilities are fundamental for pupils' success.

In diverse contexts, different synonyms might describe different nuances of meaning (Arnold, 1986). This means that synonyms offer a new means of expression to their users. Said synonyms represent a class of semantic links between words. It can be demonstrated by the interchange of two or more language formulations in which their denotative meanings are unaffected, such as (healthy, well, sick, and ill). It's easy to see why those words are synonyms: they have many of the same characteristics.

Words and sentences that share the same language are called synonyms; this is according to Kazaal (2019). It signifies that there are different forms of the same word in English. To fulfill the necessary academic criteria, Iraqi students at the University of Baghdad learn English only for a specific educational purpose (Nasser, 2019). Therefore, it is challenging for students of English as a foreign language to grasp the proper usage of these words. According to

Krebs (2017), synonyms are "words that have the same meaning," and this is "a ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon" that occurs throughout the entire linguistic system. According to Saeed (2003), synonyms are a particular sense link between words with the same core meaning.

Edmonds and Hirts (2002) classify words as either "full synonyms" or "partial synonyms." Complete synonyms share the same meaning and may be used interchangeably, while partial synonyms share only some of the same connotations. Furthermore, words' meaning only occurs in a monolingual or multilingual context. Therefore, partial synonyms do not arise in either. For whatever reason, it has been observed that EFL students have trouble using appropriate synonyms (Liu & Zhong, 2014; Liu, 2013; Yeh et al., 2007). This demonstrates the importance of studying synonyms when acquiring a second language. Specifically, Alanazi (2017) claims that in his experience as an English instructor, the use of synonymy by Arabic-speaking students is wholly overlooked.

Kazaa (2019) argues that using synonyms can aid students in some ways, including expanding their vocabulary, enhancing the vividness of their writing, encouraging them to consider other expressions of the same idea, and facilitating their ability to persuade through their words. Using synonyms, she argues, improves clarity, makes writing more engaging, makes it easier to skim over soft material, and fosters better interpersonal communication. To avoid overusing the exact words when writing or speaking English, students of English as a foreign language in Iraq often resort to using synonyms, making acquiring synonyms essential. The meanings of words used by Iraqi EFL students learning English as a foreign language were muddled because they used words with similar meanings but distant semantic connections.

According to Afghan and Khayatan (2017, p. 122), a synonym is a word with the same or a similar meaning to another word. Recognizing and using synonyms is likely to be crucial while acquiring English as a second language, given that the English language contains many words that can be deemed synonymous. When learning English as a second language, it's essential to have a vast vocabulary. Like in Figure 1 below, Lyon (1996, p. 194) assumes several classes for synonyms.
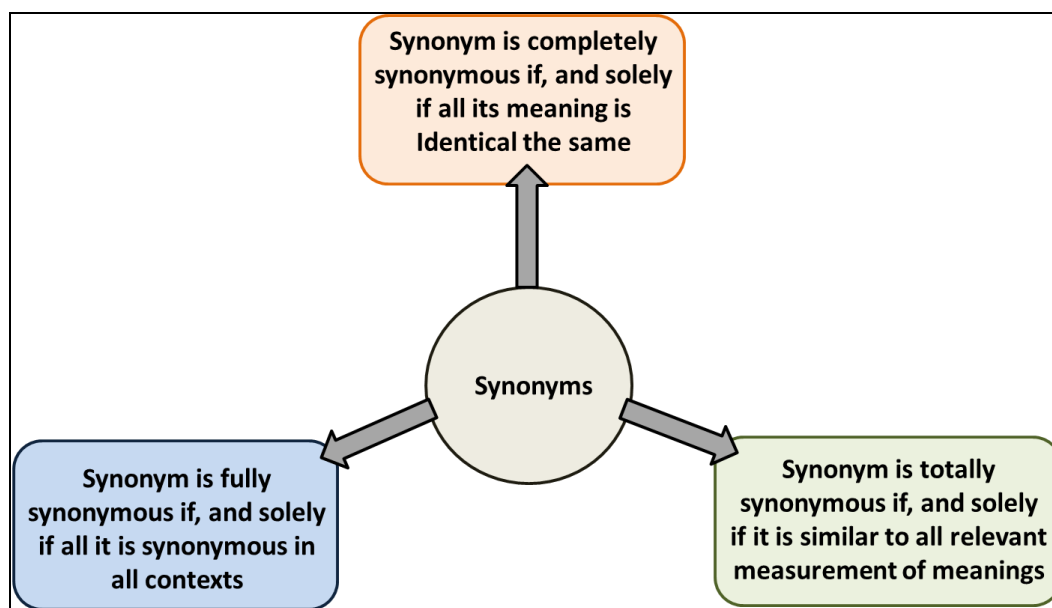
According to Lyons' classification, the categorizations of synonyms are shown in Figure 1, which was created by the researcher (1996, p. 194).

Extending Cognition to the Domains

Cognitive linguistics (CL) is the foundational field that studies how language serves its users and what they understand from it. According to Nasser (2020)CL has demonstrated a pedagogical grasp of second language instruction. In his domain theory, the notion of Frame Semantics by Fillmore is taken into account by Langacker (1987). Students' capacity to expand their vocabularies and establish connections between new and previously learned words is bolstered by an understanding of semantics. Langacker, whose work was influenced by Fillmore's Frame Semantic theory, first coined the term "Domain" in 1987. According to Evan & Green (2006), p. 230, Fillmore's and Langacker's theories rely on the assumption that meaning is encyclopedic and that lexical sense may be detected based on broader knowledge information Langacker calls domains.

Domains are " cognitive entities: mental experiences, representational spaces, concepts, or conceptual complexes," as defined by Langacker (1987, p. 147). This description is based on how language is conceptualized in the human mind. This demonstrates that knowledge building can be classified as a domain if it contains the context against which a lexical notion can be understood and realized in language.

Intuitively helpful in discerning meaning in both the source and target languages, this notion of the domain is a natural fit for the linguistic realities of the world. According to Lowe (2008, p. 1), the domain has the potential to improve language proficiency.

According to Azad and Mustafa (2018), a domain denotes the mental awareness-based context of a body of information. Additionally, the domain deals with the premise that meaning is encyclopedic, encompassing a broad range of information. Appropriate words are used to describe each component. It is impossible to verify lexical images or concepts outside the contexts of the various areas of thought in which they are entrenched. The words pleasant, joyous, and glad come to mind. Thus, the emotions of happiness, joy, and gladness have their own unique words to describe them. In addition, pupils won't have a firm grasp on how to properly employ these concepts unless they have some familiarity with the realm of experiencing pleasure. Taylor (2002, p. 439) elaborates on the breadth of this definition, noting that domains might be any knowledge arrangement that provides the setting for conceptualizing a semantic unit. Assumed by Hamawand (2011, p. 46) is the idea that the content of a domain is knowledge acquired via personal experience. The foundation of the Domain is the concept of meaning as an encyclopedia that can hold a wide range of information in exquisite depth. Several factors go into making a domain. Every detail is related to some overarching concept and belongs to some domain. The right words can be used to describe any aspect. It follows that words can't be deciphered outside the contexts of thought in which they are used.

According to Evans (2007, p. 61), a domain's primary purpose is to provide a cohesive fixed-knowledge background in contrast to which additional conceptual elements can be recognized. The temperature range must be specified when describing cold, hot, and lukewarm temperatures.

In his theory of domains, Langacker (1987) considers four variables. One is the conventional arrangement of topics that composes important lexical notions. The notions are being applied to a matrix, which is a particular domain. Matrix is "the set of domains which offer the context for the full understanding of morpheme," as defined by Hamawand (2011, p. 48). As demonstrated in Figure 2, commonsense knowledge of the word cat includes the cat's life cycle, activities, shape, and physical substance.
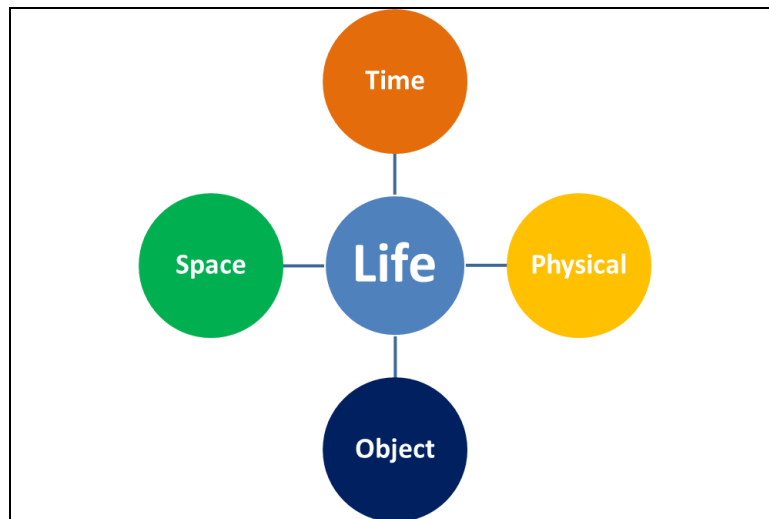
Figure 2. The figure is established by the researcher and depicts the domain matrix for the term "cat."

Most lexical chunks can be mapped to a domain matrix, but only a tiny fraction can be mapped to a single domain. Earn, save, spend, make, waste, paper, coins, finances, and invest are all fields associated with the lexical idea of MONEY (see Figure 3).
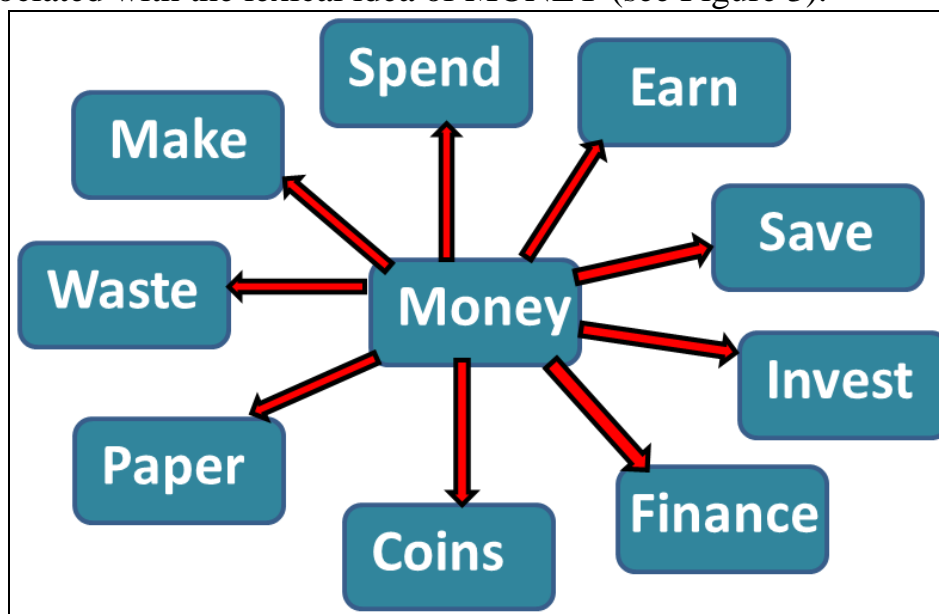

Figure (3), which illustrates the Matrix Domain of the Word Money, was established by the researcher.

Langacker (1987) identified a second factor, which has to do with the difference between the concrete and the abstract. To the extent unclear in Frame Semantics theory, he clarifies the conceptual organization that underpins it. The concept of experimental anchoring or embodiment distinguishes between concrete domains like geography and time and more nebulous ones like love, hate, marriage, etc. According to Aajami (2019), "fundamental domains are generated from our sensory-perceptual experience with nature," but the relationship between human experience and cultural norms is more

nuanced in abstract domains. In other words, realizing an abstract environment requires higher self-awareness, expertise, and interconnectedness (Kadhum 2017). For instance, without prior exposure to situations involving commerce and transactions, it may be impossible to comprehend the meaning of the word "sell."

Third, Langacker tries to set up a hierarchical structure to make sense of the domain. It demonstrates that a given the word or phrase involves a field either lower on the hierarchy or higher up. When we think of a school, we automatically think of classrooms with teachers and students, books and homework, rules and tests.
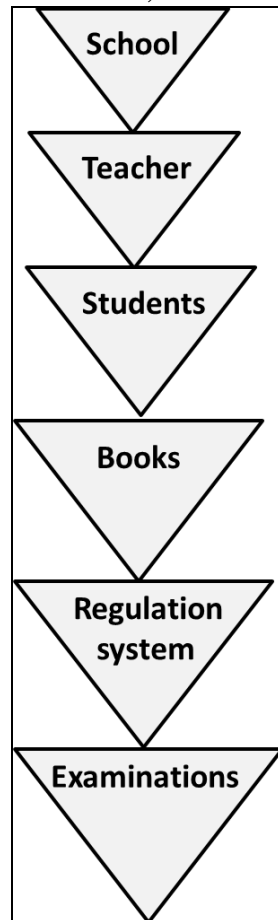

Figure (4), created by the researcher, and illustrates the hierarchical model of domains

Therefore, the conceptual ontogeny that Langacker addresses in his theory of domains is concerned with the form of control of knowledge in terms of the connections and understandings between concepts. According to Evans & Green (2006, p. 232), "fundamental domains" cannot be explained in terms of other domains.

Preceding Efforts

A vast amount of word meanings analysis has been gathered to further the semantic goals of making word meanings and connections clearer.

The importance of vocabulary acquisition for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has been a focus of numerous studies in recent years. One such study by Cao Wangru (2016) explored the application of semantic field theory in expanding EFL students' vocabularies. This theory links existing language to the creation of new terms by contrasting their meanings, with building blocks such as synonymy, homonymy, meronomy, hyponymy, and antonymy. Wangru emphasizes the significance of word learning for linguistic competency, noting that acquiring synonyms in English is particularly challenging due to the range of language areas involved, including lexical, semantic, and syntactic knowledge. The study concludes that a thorough understanding of semantics may aid EFL students in mastering linguistic competence.

Another study by Majed Alanazi (2017) focused on the production of synonyms by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. This study surveyed forty Saudi EFL students to determine their ability to use English synonyms in writing, while also considering the influence of varying levels of English fluency on synonym generation. Alanazi used a translation exam to assess the students' capacity to produce contextually appropriate synonyms in English sentences. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the relationship between language fluency and synonym acquisition for EFL learners.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the importance of developing effective vocabulary acquisition strategies for EFL learners. Semantic field theory and an understanding of language fluency are two key factors that can aid in this process, with implications for both teaching methods and student outcomes.

Models Of Appraisal

In other words, this research was conducted through actual experimentation. Specifically, we'll employ a descriptive analysis technique to conduct the investigation. Students' diagnostic pre-and post-test scores will be used to compile data. The control group for this study consisted of fifty students. The researcher can draw connections between words with similar meanings by looking at how often each word appears in different contexts within the same domain. The researcher used a game to teach the fundamentals of the theory via a Telegram chat group, thus accomplishing the study's stated goal. Words like "woman," "education," "peace," "college," "drive," etc. are among those she sends along. Students respond to these words by

providing single words related to the meaning of the words being forwarded.

The researcher developed a pretest to investigate the use and significance of repeated words and phrases. The students are tasked with providing a variety of interpretations for the matrix domain. The researcher also developed a follow-up test to investigate the contrasting parts of meaning associated with the same lexical component in its two contexts. The linguistic feature of the ball is "the boy buys a ball" and "the boy plays with a ball," for instance.

METHODOLOGY

Fifty college-aged student participated in the study as the control group. The experiment was the first time they had heard of the theory of domains. The researcher used the following methods to accomplish the goals of this study:

Students were given a pretest to gauge their knowledge of domain theory at the outset; b. The researcher presents PowerPoint slides in class outlining domain theory's fundamental ideas and characteristics.

c. Following this, they receive a report that delves deeply into the notion.

The class was broken up into five sections. d. Ten students were split up into two groups. Each team will put up significant effort to compete with the others.

The researcher uses telegram groups to collect a large sample size. To help students determine the primary meaning and examine the contexts in which it is used, the researcher provides them with at least two phrases that contain lexical features. They are given a set of domains and asked to figure out how everything fits together.

f. Students are instructed to identify and name the sentence's domains and sub-domains before being asked to evoke the parts that those terms belong to; g. SPSS was used to analyse the pre- and post-there-names (Statistical program) quantitatively.

Pre-Test

The definitions of "woman," "education," "peace," "college," and "driving" will be covered on the exam, and the student's abilities to explain and research them will be evaluated. Students have been proven to lack the linguistic awareness necessary to determine the meaning of the preceding lexical items. When examining the specialized fields linked to each lexical feature, they fall short. They also struggled with recognizing and producing lexical features and differentiating between different facets of the same linguistic component in other sentences. Pretest results show that every student has at least rudimentary familiarity with domain theory and related methods. Iraqi students' ability to express the ideas or functions

related to the lexical component is determined by their level of awareness at the outset. There was a widespread failure on the part of students to distinguish between the concrete, conceptual, and logical groups.

Treatment

The therapy phase started when the preliminary examination results were tallied. The focus words appeared in several different contexts. The words' occurrence in many contexts illustrates the breadth of their meaning. Students were tasked with analysing each lexical feature and determining the contexts in which it is most commonly used. The students had to decipher each verbal component and recognize its direct and indirect synonyms. Studying the meanings of terms helped the author have more control over introducing new vocabulary. Learners' understanding of the domains of any lexical aspect is enhanced when they can extract that aspect from a given image and explain its context. Therefore, the first step in the semantic analysis of this method is to identify the type of domain involved. Students worked both independently and in groups during class time, with each group conceptualizing a different lexical element that aids in the identification of domains and their attributes. After deciding whether the linguistic features were abstract, essential, or domain matrix, they were asked to describe the domains' dimensions and configuration. They also categorized the degree to which the meanings of different domains were intertwined. The students participated in activities that needed them to draw. After that, they had to look into the drawing's domains or matrix domains; for instance, participants were handed worksheets with a partially completed rabbit picture and asked to finish it the best way possible based on their knowledge. They then had to elaborate on the drawings in a series of questions or a short description. Individuals were tasked with completing a project that relied on a specific lexical feature. Each activity was created with the express intention of getting students actively involved and uncovering the hidden meanings of the words. This research aimed to assess domain theory's contribution to understanding how domains and vocabulary development are intertwined. Participants were allowed to take the post-test after five weeks of treatment.

Post-Test

The theory of domains was discussed for a total of five weeks. The researcher spent this period thinking about ways to spot lexical features independently and in context. One linguistic part must be identified in two different contexts. During this time, students collaborated in small groups to provide concrete examples and thorough explanations. The student participants were shown diagrams (Lowe model analysis was utilized to determine the domains of the

linguistic aspects in the charts) and were tasked with providing descriptive information about the lexical ideas depicted. They prepared for the test by working independently, albeit their efforts were identical. Improved verbal exploration and meaning discrimination were two areas that stood out on the post-test. The students' ability to define different kinds of domains and their properties was impressive. They also have a good grasp of the words' literal and conceptual meanings. This talent manifests in their ability to perform these words in various contexts. Even the matrix domain was found and classified by them.

DISCUSSION

SPSS was used to examine the data collected pre and post-testing. These grades are not written in any security zone. By defining the scope and nature of each assessment, it is possible to compare student performance across groups. The results of the pre-and post-test are summarised in the Table 1 below.

Table 1:
Paired Sample Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test	7.04	50	4.58907	0.6484
Post-test	14.72	50	4.16516	0.58950

Paired Sample Correlations

	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test Post-test	50	0.78642	0.0005

The study is considered invalid if the differences between the two tests are less than 0.5 and considered legitimate if the differences are more significant than 0.5.

Fifty students were surveyed, and their pre-and post-test averages are shown in Table (1). The pre-test average was 7.04, and the post-test average was 8.01. (which is 14.72). Overall, the students improved (14.72 vs. 7.04 = 2.09). Since the standard difference between the pre-and post-tests was more significant than 0.5, the study can be considered legitimate.

The results of the two exams demonstrated that the domain theory could significantly improve students' grasp and application of English word semantics.

Limitations of the Study

Fifty freshmen between 18 and 19 participated in the study. At the University of Baghdad's College of Languages – Department of English, the research was done. The 2020–2021 school year was the timeframe for this research. The scope of the study was limited to the instruction of writing skills as outlined in Dorothy E. Zemach and Lisa A. Rumisek's 2003 textbook, Academic Writing from Paragraph to Essay.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's results indicate that the domain theory is a useful approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among Iraqi EFL students. The theory emphasizes the importance of closed-domain lexical elements and their associations, which encourages students to explore words with similar meanings, examine their contexts, and understand the semantic networks underlying lexical features. Prior to the intervention, students had limited knowledge of the domain theory and its features. However, they were able to develop their understanding by generating ideas or applications related to lexical concepts.

Other recent studies have also explored the effectiveness of different approaches for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. For instance, a study conducted by Al-Jabri and Al-Busaidi (2021) found that the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools can enhance EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition by providing them with more opportunities for exposure to new vocabulary and interactive learning activities. Additionally, a study by Farvardin and Farvardin (2020) explored the effectiveness of concept mapping as a tool for promoting vocabulary acquisition among Iranian EFL learners. The study found that concept mapping can enhance learners' ability to comprehend and retain new vocabulary words.

While these studies highlight the effectiveness of different approaches for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, the domain theory offers a unique approach that focuses on identifying words with similar meanings and understanding the semantic networks underlying lexical features. This approach can be particularly useful for students who struggle with recognizing and producing lexical features and differentiating between various aspects of the same linguistic component in different sentences.

In brief, the domain theory offers a valuable approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among Iraqi EFL students. As students' progress through the theory, they will gain a deeper understanding of the semantic relationships between words and improve their ability to choose suitable synonyms and comprehend word meanings. Future research could explore the effectiveness of

combining the domain theory with other approaches, such as MALL or concept mapping, to enhance vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

The theory of domains is a promising approach to enhancing vocabulary acquisition and improving synonym knowledge among EFL students in Iraq. By focusing on identifying words with similar meanings and understanding the semantic networks underlying lexical features, students can expand their vocabularies and develop a deeper understanding of word meanings. The implementation of the domain theory requires additional effort and analysis, including sentence drawings and graphs, for students to grasp each domain fully. However, the benefits of this approach are evident in the improved academic outcomes of students who engage with the theory of domains. It is important to note that recent studies have also demonstrated the effectiveness of other approaches to teaching vocabulary and synonyms, such as using games, multimedia resources, and authentic materials. Therefore, incorporating a variety of methods and techniques can further enhance students' learning experiences and help them develop a more diverse range of vocabulary and synonyms.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that the context and cultural background of EFL learners play a significant role in their language development. Therefore, incorporating cultural aspects into the teaching of vocabulary and synonyms can provide a more meaningful and engaging learning experience for students. Additionally, addressing students' individual learning styles and preferences can also help maximize their learning potential. In conclusion, the theory of domains, combined with a variety of teaching methods and techniques that address students' cultural background and individual learning styles, can effectively enhance EFL students' vocabulary acquisition and synonym knowledge. By providing students with a deeper understanding of the meanings of words and their relationships, they can develop stronger language skills and improve their academic outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, teachers can benefit from incorporating the domain theory into their teaching practices when teaching vocabulary acquisition and synonyms to EFL students. Teachers can help students understand the relationships between words by using closed-domain lexical elements and their associations. In addition, teachers can provide students with additional materials, such as sentence drawings and graphs, to ensure their comprehension of each domain. Teachers can also encourage students to conduct

research on terminology and usage to help them develop a deeper understanding of the semantic networks underlying lexical features.

Furthermore, teachers can provide students with ample opportunities to practice using synonyms in different contexts. This can be achieved through a variety of activities, such as sentence completion exercises, synonym matching games, and group discussions. Finally, teachers can provide feedback to students on their use of synonyms and encourage them to revise their work. This can help students improve their understanding of synonyms and develop more sophisticated vocabulary. Overall, incorporating the domain theory into teaching practices can lead to improved vocabulary acquisition and synonym knowledge among EFL students.

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