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## **Corpus-Assisted Analysis of Discourses on EFL Teaching Approaches**

### **Abstract**

This study explicates the lexico-semantic features of the discourses constructed by EFL student teachers regarding language teaching approaches and methods. Utilizing corpus linguistics methods, the research explores a specialized corpus comprised of reflective essays produced by forty-one EFL student teachers in the context of Ukrainian teacher education. Techniques such as keyword analysis, n-grams, collocations, and KWIK (key word in context) were sequentially applied to complement the data.

The keyword profile of the corpus enabled the extraction of the main semantic fields, including approaches and methods, education and instructional processes, agents, linguistic aspects, language skills, and techniques. The n-grams analysis further detailed that the participants were familiar with a repertoire of approaches and methods. Evidence garnered from collocations and concordance analyses substantiated that the respondents self-identified with current language teaching approaches and believed in the utility of principled eclecticism. Nevertheless, a minor segment of respondents gave precedence to traditional language teaching. Despite a lexically rich representation of the semantic field of EFL approaches and methods, the related semantic field of techniques was underrepresented in the corpus, indicating challenges associated with the procedures underlying specific approaches in the instructional process. This highlights the need for guided training in the application of contemporary language teaching principles.

*Keywords:* corpus linguistics, discourse, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), approach, method, semantic field

Language teaching has been framed through the lens of approaches and methods for a substantial part of its existence (Drożdźiał-Szelest, 2013; Richards, 2001). Given this, the extent and variety of discourses about their nature and

place in language education are unsurprising (Arikan, 2006; Bastidas, 2022; Bell, 2007; Hall, 2019; Ur, 2013). For Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), a method represents “a coherent set of links between the actions of a teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions” (p. 20). Richards and Rodgers (2014) further conceptualize a language teaching method in relation to an approach, where the former is determined by a design, and practically realized in procedure (p. 22).

Spanning the periods from the search for a universal method to post-method thinking, their role has seen dramatic transformations (Hall, 2019; Kumaradivelu, 2006). The notion of methods came under attack owing to its weak theoretical validity and practical utility. Disappointment with methods eventually gave rise to the post-method condition, construed as “a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method (Kumaradivelu, 1994, p. 29). However, those making the case for it did so more for political reasons than language pedagogy, attempting to “liberate teachers and learners from the tyranny of methods” (Curtis, 2017, p. 219). Parallelly, in response to the above criticisms, the concepts of eclecticism (Prahbu, 1990) or principled eclecticism (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) emerged as a pluralistic approach to language teaching, advocating the use of diverse language learning activities with varying characteristics to meet the specific needs of learners (Alharbi, 2017; Cushing-Leubner & Bigelow, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

While some scholars go so far as to proclaim the demise of methods (Brown, 2002), others argue that they persist under the guise of related terminology and classroom practices (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Tarnopolsky, 2018). Research has evinced that teachers continue to think in terms of methods as available tools to attain instructional objectives (Bell, 2007; Curtis, 2017; Lőrincz, 2023; Weseley et al., 2021). Indeed, without a sound understanding of the theories informing teaching practice, eclecticism—whereby the choice from the available alternative methods occurs—risks turning into “a methodology without orientation, unsystematic and uncritical, practiced by teachers with precarious or poor professional training, incapable of creating an informed eclecticism and who only compile a package of techniques originating in various Methods that do not make sense together” (Cehan, 2014, p. 28). Bastidas (2022) cautions against devaluing the construct of methods for language teachers who might mistakenly infer that knowledge of methods and the ability to implement them in language courses and lessons are irrelevant. Therefore, research into language teaching approaches is as pertinent as ever, since contemporary methodology still relies on the notion of methods, even if viewed pragmatically as options in addressing context-bound instructional needs (Bell, 2007; Tarnopolsky, 2018).

Previous studies into teachers’ views about language teaching approaches primarily utilized surveys to elicit and analyze data, including questionnaires, interviews, observations, diary studies (e.g., Farrell & Guz, 2019; Golombek,

2015; Weseley et al., 2021), or discourse analysis (e.g., Kapranov, 2020; Clarke, 2008). Steering away from the mainstream research tradition, this study employs methods associated with corpus linguistics to analyze the discourses related to language teaching approaches and methods. In this text, the term discourse is used to denote “different types of language use or topics” (Baker, 2023, p. 3). Since corpus analysis has been widely applied in the study of discourse (Baker, 2023; Flowerdew, 2013; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019), it is believed to be a robust methodology capable of revealing the prevalent themes in EFL teachers’ professional discussions.

Guided by these considerations, the present study aims to analyze the lexico-semantic features of discourses related to language teaching approaches and methods constructed by EFL practicing teachers. The analysis is based on a corpus of reflective essays (17,454 tokens) written by 41 EFL student teachers. In particular, the study attempts to answer the following research question: How do the lexico-semantic features of discourses mirror EFL student teachers’ views on language teaching approaches and methods?

## **Literature Review**

Research into language teaching approaches and methods has a long-standing tradition, shaped by its eventful history of a quest to devise a universal method, a kind of magic wand capable of catering the best possible teaching and learning experiences (Curtis, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Inspired by this belief, researchers conducted experimental studies to prove the viability of methods proclaimed as revolutionary (Hall, 2019; Drożdżał-Szelest, 2013; Ur, 2013). For instance, there were attempts to establish the superiority of the cognitive approach over audiolingualism (Smith, 1970; Chastain, 1970). However, the like investigations were to only one effect: consistently failing to “demonstrate clear, lasting superiority in terms of student performance” (Swaffar et al., 1982, p. 28). In fact, the differences in implementing various methods were not always observable in actual practice. Teaching that adhered to one method often resembled teaching with another, making it difficult for observers to identify the method applied in any given instance (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Richards, 2001).

Unwittingly, this preoccupation with the idea of the universal method fed on the negative attitude toward language teachers’ ability to guarantee effective instruction. Driven by this distrust in teachers’ competence, researchers periodically came up with new methods (Bell, 2007; Richards, 2001). Nevertheless, these individual methods fell short in addressing the contextualized needs of language

instruction, nor could they prove their superiority in experimental settings (Bastidas, 2022; Andon & Leung, 2014). Disillusioned, some researchers hastily concluded that methods were irrelevant to language teachers and teacher education, leading literature to largely shun their discussion (Thornbury, 2017).

To make amendments, the research focus shifted to the role of language teachers as active decision-makers, which assumed the recognition of their own “contextually-based reflections and understanding for their professional development” (Hall, 2019, p. 2). This cognitive turn placed language teachers’ own perspectives in the spotlight. Basic frameworks for investigating teacher cognitions concern their beliefs, knowledge of language teaching approaches (pedagogical content knowledge) (Bell, 2007; Lőrincz, 2022), and attitudes towards them (Sun et al., 2020). Comparative studies also emerged, looking into the alignment between language teachers’ beliefs and practices (Berger et al., 2018; Farrell & Guz, 2019; Lőrincz, 2023; Weseley et al., 2021).

Within the first framework, discussions principally focus on the underlying reasons for language teachers’ instructional practices. A frequent target is EFL teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards traditional and contemporary language teaching, which is especially prolific. Here, an additional explanation should be in situ. On its face value, the distinction between traditional and current language teaching is readily apparent. The underlying belief is that the former relies mainly on language analysis, while the latter favors language use. Indeed, throughout their history, the newly sprung methods gravitated alternatively between the opposite sides, likened by Celce-Murcia (2001) to a swinging pendulum. However, around the 1970s, with the spread of the communicative approach, the tenet that language is a means of communication laid a solid foundation for all subsequent developments in language teaching.

The communicative approach remained surprisingly stalwart due to its loose interpretation. Compared to its strong or classical version of its earlier period (1970–1990), its present-day weak version is open to wide construal by educators ascribing to different traditions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2005). Curtis (2017) concludes that this flexibility is one of the key strengths and the main reasons for the widespread popularity of communicative language teaching (CLT). At the same time, it has also become one of its caveats, “as it has created situations in which almost anything that is not explicit grammar teaching, or anything that involves speaking, can be and has been referred to as CLT” (Curtis, 2017, p. 75). Advocates of CLT “may weigh the value of fluency and accuracy in different ways” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 81). It is at the discretion of those implementing CLT to provide or not to provide learners with explicit instruction in form, rely on translation when deemed necessary, or on drilling, as long as communicative competence remains central to the instructional process. If so, the difference between current and more traditional

language teaching grows less distinct and is best viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

As summarized by Richards (2005), “communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals [...]” (p. 22). In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2013) introduces the term principled communicative approach on the ground that different variants of CLT are loosely related to each other and are open to broad interpretation. Recent extensions of CLT based on its core principles include task-based learning, content-based instruction, or content and language integrated learning, among others (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), referenced by some as post-communicative language teaching (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Nagy, 2019).

It leads us to the point when disambiguating the terms communicative, post-communicative language teaching, eclecticism, or even post-method pedagogy is no longer straightforward. The reasoning behind each rests on understanding the dynamic nature of language teaching, the complexity of the instructional process, language teachers’ professional expertise and empowerment, contextual factors, and learner-centeredness. Moreover, communicative competence is the overarching tenet of the above (Scholl, 2017). A question arises whether they are disparate phenomena to the degree of incompatibility or a case of terminological overlap.

Overall, studies reveal positive attitudes towards contemporary approaches across various national contexts. Thus, Weseley et al. (2021) conducted a survey to uncover world language teachers’ beliefs about language teaching methods in the USA. They found that language teachers “identified as adhering to one main teaching approach” (p. 1). Their participants predominantly used such methods as comprehensible input and teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling. The authors concluded that because teachers regularly reflected on and reexamined the applied methods based on the instructional context, they could be characterized by post-method thinking.

In the study by Sun et al. (2022), Chinese EFL teachers’ preferences for CLT over traditional language teaching (TLT) were observed using an implicit association test. Their principal finding was the disparity between language teachers’ explicit and implicit attitudes, that is, what the participants openly stated did not always coincide with their actual thoughts. Nikian (2014) also found that Iranian EFL teachers advocated for CLT and demonstrated awareness of its underlying principles. Nevertheless, the participants reported struggling with several challenges hindering the implementation of CLT, such as language proficiency, time and curriculum constraints, lack of resources, overcrowded classes, and low learner motivation. As a result, learners and teachers encountered difficulties in terms of language teaching and acquisition.

In their study, Rahimi (2014) showed that language teachers in Iran held favorable views about CLT, particularly group-work. While the participants did not consider the implementation of this approach in language classes overly difficult, they pointed out that the educational system created obstacles to organizing lessons according to CLT principles, such as grammar-based entrance examinations. The results of this correlational investigation revealed that teachers with positive attitudes towards CLT experienced fewer problems caused by learners' low language proficiency, lack of motivation to participate in class discussions and develop language competence. Likewise, they did not think that reluctant learners hindered the implementation of CLT. Nevertheless, a note of caution is warranted due to the inferences made on low effect sizes.

The second research framework is best epitomized by Basturkmen's (2012) assertion that what teachers believe (implicit beliefs) does not immediately translate into what they do (espoused beliefs) (p. 283). As a corollary, there tends to be a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices (Berger et al., 2018; Fajaro, 2013). Several studies have focused on comparing language teachers' beliefs about teaching approaches and their implementation in the classroom (Coskun, 2011; Lörincz, 2023; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Tang et al., 2012). Notably, most studies to date have evinced that despite language teachers' explicit advocacy for CLT, their performance often fails to consistently follow its principles.

Lörincz (2023) found that EFL student teachers self-identified with contemporary language teaching across several categories, including instructional orientation and language focus, target language use, group work organization, and language education goals. In contrast, there was no statistically significant difference between classroom procedures and techniques characteristic of traditional or contemporary teaching, nor a preference for student-centered over teacher-centered instruction. The participants reported utilizing current approaches and methods, demonstrating cognizance with their repertoire. Yet, a comparison between self-reported data and observation of their performance in the classroom revealed only a partial alignment.

A longitudinal study into EFL teachers' beliefs and practices was conducted by Tang et al. (2012), aiming to uncover how preservice teachers experimented with recent language teaching approaches and methods learned at the university. Interestingly, in their first year at the university, the students expressed a preference for CLT. However, after exposure to long hours of methodological input in the teacher education program, they did not hold a strong conviction in the effectiveness of CLT. Moreover, during their classroom placements, they began teaching using traditional approaches. Even though the preservice teachers' beliefs differed regarding the expediency of language teaching approaches, their performance was comparable and failed to reflect their actual beliefs.

In this respect, Farrel and Bennis (2013) found that less experienced language teachers demonstrated a greater discrepancy between their beliefs and practices about language teaching approaches than their more experienced counterparts. The latter tended to base their beliefs on the experience gained over the years in the profession. By contrast, novice language teachers experimented with approaches and techniques, adjusted their beliefs accordingly. While both experienced and less experienced participants advocated for communicative approach to teaching grammar, their classroom practices diverged. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) rightfully remark that in order for teachers to change their language teaching methods and improve language learning outcomes, they should regularly engage in examining and questioning their beliefs.

A concomitant recent scholarship looks into the utility of current language teaching approaches and methods. In contrast to its forerunner, it does not aim to experimentally establish the superiority of one approach or method over the other. Instead, such studies spell out their effectiveness within a specific context. The case for content-based instruction (CBI) is made in the volume edited by Cammarata et al. (2016), including a collection of pertinent studies. The researchers explored the potential of CBI in providing effective language learning experiences, produced empirical evidence of improvements in instructional quality, and suggested strategies for organizing language programs using CBI. In addition, the authors included the description and illustrations from language programs that experimented with this approach. Task-based learning (TBL) has also garnered copious attention, with Plonsky and Kim (2016) reviewing 85 empirical studies to synthesize their foci and methodological features. Their analysis highlighted that there was a preference for examining aspects like “grammar, vocabulary, accuracy, and features of L2 interaction” (p. 73). An overview of empirical research into storytelling was undertaken by Lucarevchi (2016). The researcher noted that most studies attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing learners’ language proficiency and motivation. However, the analyzed articles often lacked clarity in specifying how the impact of storytelling was measured. Interest in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has surged recently, making it cumbersome for individual researchers to analyze its main trends and impact. To address this challenge, Chen et al. (2021) conducted a bibliographic study using a topic modeling analysis on 1295 articles published until 2020. The most widely discussed areas in this respect were mobile-assisted language learning, project-based learning (involving technology), and blended learning. The authors concluded that language teachers are integrating diverse technologies into various educational settings.

Even from these selected publications, it is obvious that EFL teaching has grown highly sophisticated. Common are the observations that as methodologies continue to be refined, so do the demands placed on language teachers’ competence (Bacus, 2021; Lőrincz, 2022), who are tasked with the need to navigate

a range of methodological solutions to address contextual and learner-specific exigencies. In order to understand how language teachers juggle the demands of implementing contemporary language teaching approaches and classroom realities, it is worthwhile exploring the discourses constructed by them regarding their teaching preferences. Existing scholarship obviates that the problem of implementing language teaching approaches is amply represented in the studies based on survey and experimental research designs. However, there remains a gap in the analysis of the discourses on language teaching approaches using corpus linguistics methods, particularly among EFL teachers. Moreover, little is known about how Ukrainian EFL practicing teachers articulate their views about language teaching approaches and methods in academic writing. Hence, the novelty of this study resides in uncovering lexico-semantic features typical of discourses taken up by EFL student teachers who have undergone teaching practicum.

## **The Present Study**

### **Context and Participants**

The investigation is contextualized in a university program in English language and literature in Ukraine's western part. It runs on the BA and MA levels, offering extensive theoretical and practical preparation in EFL pedagogy. Concerning the course content, students are trained in the principles of contemporary approaches, which encompass a variety of methodologies, including but not limited to CLT, task-based learning, content-based instruction, eclecticism, to name a few. The BA program targets the problems of teaching EFL in schools in Ukraine from grades 1 to 11, while the MA program offers preparation in English linguistics. Therefore, the students enrolled in these programs undergo teaching practicum at different educational levels, working with young and adolescent language learners.

In total, 41 student teachers consented to participate in this study. Of these, 31 individuals were in their final year of the BA program, and 10—in the MA program at the time of research. Among the MA students, four entered this program with prior teaching experience ranging from one to five years. When the study occurred, the BA students had completed the main phase of their teaching practicum in the current academic year, lasting four weeks. Before this, they had several sessions of observation and guided teaching practicum of varying duration each year (one session at the end of the first year and two sessions in the second and third years each semester). The participants were



non-native speakers of English, with their native languages being Ukrainian, Hungarian, or both. Many were compound bilinguals who acquired two languages simultaneously as children (Saville-Troike, 2016). The respondents were assigned codes ranging from S1 to S41.

## Method

This study adopts a corpus-assisted methodology to examine the discourses of language teaching approaches represented in a corpus of reflective essays written by EFL student teachers. Corpus linguistics is the empirical investigation of natural language use utilizing corpora, which are typically large digitalized collections of texts. Though both quantitative and qualitative approaches come with their respective limitations, one advantage of corpus-assisted discourse analysis is its ability to reduce some of the methodological weaknesses associated with qualitative content analysis. By reducing the subjectivity of human findings, corpus analysis lends more rigor to discourse interpretation owing to computerized procedures of data analysis (Baker, 2012; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). Traditionally, discourse analysis involved “the close-reading (that is, qualitative analysis) of single texts or a small number of texts in an attempt to highlight both textual structures and also how meanings are conveyed” (Partington et al., 2013, p. 216). However, it has lately begun to draw extensively on corpus linguistics (Baker, 2023; Flowerdew, 2013; Friginal & Hardy, 2020; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019).

There is ample evidence in the literature suggesting that linguistic features of texts can reveal speakers’ understanding and perceptions concerning a given communication domain (Brezina et al., 2015). Specifically, identifying keywords, collocations, and n-grams with their further analysis in concordance lines is crucial in semantic research and discourse analysis (Brezina, 2018). In this study, the lexico-semantic features of the specialized corpus of essays were examined through corpus techniques. The LancsBox X software package was used for data analysis. Techniques such as keywords, collocations, and n-grams were utilized to analyze the quantitative characteristics of the corpus. Subsequently, the KWIK tool was applied to look into the data qualitatively.

Keyword and collocation analyses are standard procedures to reveal the aboutness of a corpus or prevalent themes (Gabrielatos, 2018). Keywords refer to lexical items salient in a corpus of interest compared to a larger reference corpus. Collocations are defined as “combinations of words that habitually co-occur in texts and corpora” (Brezina, 2018, p. 67). Collocation analysis is applied to expand the results of keyword analysis. N-grams are syntagmatic lexical units whose analysis can disclose lexico-grammatical units, as well as multiword expressions appearing in a corpus (Friginal & Hardy, 2020).

## Procedure

The procedure followed these steps. First, the participants were requested to write a reflective essay with the following instructions: Write a reflective essay of approximately 300 words: “My favorite language teaching approach(es)/ methods.” Consider addressing the following questions: What language teaching approach(es)/methods do you favor and why? Which of them do you base your teaching on? What activities do you use in teaching?

The participants were assured that their names and provided information would remain confidential and only be used for research purposes. The assignment was not grade-bearing, and the opinions expressed would not influence their future grades in any way. The desired writing style was academic English. Essays could be typewritten or handwritten and were to be prepared at home at a time convenient for the students. The collected essays were compiled into a corpus comprised of 17,454 tokens. The average length of the essays was 425.7 words.

The analysis of the essays commenced with the identification of keywords. The reference corpus used was BNC 2014, specifically the sub-corpus of academic prose. The choice of the given reference corpus was justified by the availability of a sub-corpus in the same genre as the target corpus. The Word technique in the LancsBox provided data on the relative frequency of lemmas per one million words in the target and reference corpora, SMP (simple maths parameter), Log Likelihood, percentage difference between the target and reference corpora, and Log Ratio. No minimum frequency cut-off points were set. The top fifty keywords were then subjected to further analysis.

The collocation parameters were set as follows: span: 5–5, statistic name—Log Dice and MI, statistic value threshold—5.0, minimum collocate frequency—5, minimum collocation frequency—5. The n-grams were extracted following the procedure identical to the keyword analysis. The top twenty-five 3-grams were included in the analysis. This specific number was chosen because many names of approaches and methods include a combination of three words (e.g., task-based learning, content-based instruction, total physical response).

Finally, the KWIK technique was applied to analyze the keywords and most frequent adjectives in context since it can reveal respondents’ positive or negative attitudes to the mentioned language teaching approaches and methods. Looking at keywords and n-grams out of context is ambiguous for several reasons. Participants might discuss either the benefits or caveats of particular approaches or techniques. However, out of context, it is unclear whether they endorse or disapprove of specific methods. As a result, their statistical values can be high for disparate reasons.

Results

Table 1 showcases the results of the keyword analysis, ordered by their statistical significance. After extraction, the keywords were clustered into semantic fields, taking into account their semantic relatedness rather than their denotative meaning (see Table 2). The term “semantic field” refers to a cohesive relationship among words with shared meanings belonging to a specific domain. Lexemes can be grouped into a semantic/lexical field based on their thematic relatedness, conceptual similarity, or even usage patterns (Lőrincz, 2025; Reimer, 2016).

Table 1  
*Results of the Keyword Analysis*

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
1	teaching	11 229.02	105.43	55.15	1 452.75	10 551.09	6.73
2	language	15 496.04	292.68	39.72	1 636.96	5 194.62	5.73
3	communicative	3 817.87	13.65	34.47	614.85	27 861.29	8.13
4	students	12 127.34	287.45	31.56	1 187.11	4 118.98	5.40
5	lessons	3 817.87	26.95	30.86	530.38	14 064.95	7.15
6	grammar	3 200.27	22.59	26.92	444.61	14 068.22	7.15
7	lesson	2 751.11	22.99	23.18	366.67	11 864.61	6.90
8	learning	7 579.59	268.82	20.82	637.98	2 719.59	4.82
9	tasks	3 424.85	97.15	17.88	314.27	3 425.24	5.14
10	eclectic	1 628.21	2.64	16.84	300.98	61 587.22	9.27
11	learners	2 021.22	41.67	14.97	207.47	4 750.20	5.60
12	skills	3 256.41	129.43	14.63	261.53	2 415.87	4.65
13	method	6 961.99	400.33	14.11	472.81	1 639.04	4.12
14	clt	1 347.48	2.64	14.10	241.76	50 951.49	9.00
15	tried	1 684.35	31.37	13.58	178.74	5 269.49	5.75
16	teacher	2 414.24	85.58	13.55	203.25	2 721.05	4.82
17	classes	2 133.51	76.54	12.65	178.75	2 687.29	4.80

Table 1 continued

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
18	try	1 796.64	54.72	12.26	160.52	3 183.46	5.04
19	speaking	1 684.35	45.99	12.22	156.76	3 562.63	5.19
20	translation	2 133.51	100.50	11.14	159.13	2 022.85	4.41
21	exercises	1 179.05	14.87	11.13	140.76	7 827.79	6.31
22	audiolingualism	1 010.61	0	11.11	252.34	Infinity	46.52
23	grade	1 403.63	36.14	11.04	133.43	3 783.83	5.28
24	classroom	1 347.48	31.83	10.98	132.06	4 133.94	5.40
25	english	3 031.83	188.01	10.87	198.29	1 512.59	4.01
26	communication	2 245.80	129.38	10.23	152.38	1 635.76	4.12
27	vocabulary	1 122.90	20.15	10.18	120.58	5 472.37	5.80
28	approach	6 007.52	544.69	9.47	318.24	1 002.92	3.46
29	reading	2 133.51	137.81	9.39	136.66	1 448.15	3.95
30	approaches	2 470.38	181.72	9.12	147.66	1 259.47	3.76
31	learn	1 347.48	62.13	8.93	101.47	2 068.85	4.44
32	listening	1 066.76	35.48	8.61	92.11	2 906.61	4.91
33	methods	4 098.59	393.48	8.51	209.59	941.62	3.38
34	activities	2 526.53	224.66	8.09	135.43	1 024.61	3.49
35	topics	954.47	31.01	8.05	83.18	2 977.57	4.94
36	grades	786.03	12.39	7.88	87.89	6 246.57	5.99
37	games	898.32	26.85	7.87	80.83	3 245.53	5.06
38	interactive	842.18	21.27	7.77	80.62	3 859.84	5.31
39	student	1 628.21	125.27	7.67	94.93	1 199.73	3.70
40	teach	786.03	20.46	7.36	74.44	3 742.98	5.27
41	practice	3 098.59	463.66	6.68	145.75	668.03	2.74
42	audiolingual	674.59	15.38	6.58	69.23	4 285.76	5.51
43	behaviourist	731.46	18.48	6.57	70.98	3 857.48	5.30
44	role	1 734.50	141.58	6.38	68.35	1 124.13	3.63
45	skills-based	618.45	15.25	6.33	64.35	3 955.74	5.33

Table 1 continued

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
46	fluency	730.74	21.47	5.66	60.36	3 302.84	5.04
47	behaviors	562.30	16.52	5.35	51.80	3 303.51	5.04
48	community	1 291.62	146.52	5.18	50.52	781.69	2.95
49	context	1 066.76	148.64	4.38	39.06	617.65	2.69
50	errors	674.59	94.98	4.32	34.63	610.15	2.68

Table 2  
*Grouping of Keywords into Semantic Fields*

Semantic Field	Lemma
Approaches/methods	communicative, eclectic, method, CLT, audiolingualism, approach, interactive, audiolingual, behaviourist, skills-based
Education and instructional processes	teaching, lessons, learning, classes, grade, classroom, learn, grades, teach, practice, role, behaviors, community
Agents	students, learners, teacher
Language skills	grammar, skills, speaking, vocabulary, reading, listening, topics, fluency, errors
Linguistic aspects	language, english, communication, context
Techniques	tasks, translation, exercises, activities, games

The outputted statistical values signal that participants frequently reference language teaching approaches and methods, the instructional process, and its agents. As evident from the data in Tables 1 and 2, the most salient lemmas in the semantic field of approaches and methods include “communicative,” “eclectic,” “method,” “CLT,” “audiolingualism.” This suggests that the participants give precedence to CLT and eclecticism, a hypothesis that requires further verification through additional analysis.

Regarding language aspects and skills, the student teachers discussed “grammar,” “speaking,” “vocabulary,” “reading,” and “listening.” Notably, writing and pronunciation do not appear to be prioritized. Additionally, lemma “fluency” is more prominent than “errors.” At the same time, lemma “grammar” is also highly significant and appears more frequently than “speaking.” These lexical choices will be examined further in the subsequent section of this paper.

The findings of the n-grams analysis, presented in Table 3, not only corroborate, but further elaborate on the results obtained through keyword analysis. Moreover, the n-grams results are more revealing in the sense that they shed light on a broader range of language teaching approaches and methods taken up by student teachers in their essays.

Table 3

*Results of 3-grams Analysis*

Key n-grams	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014-academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
<b>communicative language teaching</b>	2,021.22	0	21.21	504.68	Infinity	47.52
<b>I tried to</b>	898.32	1.17	9.87	171.54	76 847.18	9.59
<b>grammar translation method</b>	673.74	0	7.74	168.23	Infinity	45.94
<b>computer assisted language</b>	617.60	0	7.18	154.21	Infinity	45.81
<b>task based language</b>	561.45	0	6.61	140.19	Infinity	45.67
<b>an eclectic approach</b>	505.31	0	6.05	126.17	Infinity	45.52
<b>I try to</b>	505.31	1.52	5.96	84.09	33 083.47	8.37
<b>I had to</b>	505.31	3.76	5.83	69.33	13 352.76	7.07
<b>the communicative approach</b>	449.16	0	5.49	112.15	Infinity	45.35
<b>a foreign language</b>	449.16	0.86	5.44	80.84	51 952.50	9.02
<b>in the future</b>	561.45	30.35	5.07	39.28	1 749.69	4.21
<b>language teaching CLT</b>	393.02	0	4.93	98.13	Infinity	45.16
<b>total physical response</b>	393.02	0	4.93	98.13	Infinity	45.16
<b>the eclectic method</b>	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94
<b>real life communication</b>	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94
<b>affective humanistic approach</b>	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94

Table 3 continued

Key n-grams	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014- academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
group discus- sions and	336.87	0.46	4.35	63.94	73 641.05	9.53
the diverse needs	280.73	0.25	3.80	56.24	110 511.57	10.11
the direct method	280.73	1.02	3.77	45.11	27 552.89	8.11
from various methods	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
interactive learn- ing environment	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
language teach- ing TBLT	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
reading and storytelling	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
direct and situational	168.44	0	2.68	42.06	Infinity	43.94
fluency and accuracy	168.44	0	2.68	42.06	Infinity	43.94

As displayed in Table 3, the most salient n-grams related to approaches are “communicative language teaching” and “grammar-translation method.” Similar to the preceding findings, eclecticism also features strongly, as evidenced by n-grams “an eclectic approach,” and “the eclectic method.” Among the frequently referenced approaches are the computer-assisted language learning, task-based language learning, total physical response, affective-humanistic approach, the direct method, reading and storytelling, and situational approach. N-grams like “I tried to,” “I try to,” and “I had to” reflect the participants’ efforts to examine their teaching experiences and experiment with language teaching approaches. However, the n-gram “I had to” also suggests some constraints or challenges caused by their implementation.

Additionally, high values for the n-grams “real life communication,” “group discussions” and “interactive learning environment” highlight the participants’ emphasis on communication and engaging students in communicative tasks. The n-gram “from various methods” could signal that students consider making instructional choices rather than relying on a single method.

To complement the previously derived data, the lemmas “approach” and “method” were subjected to collocation analysis, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.





As seen in Figure 2, among the strongest and most frequent collocates of the node “method” are “grammar,” “translation,” “teaching,” “direct,” “communicative,” “language,” “approach,” “audiolingualism,” “eclectic,” “reading,” and “best.” It appears that student teachers often consider the “grammar-translation” and “communicative language teaching” as the main options. As such, they deserve further qualitative analysis, which was performed by means of a KWIK technique.

Figure 3 sets out the concordance lines produced for the search term “communicative language teaching.”

**Figure 3**  
*Communicative Language Teaching: Concordance Lines*

Left	Node	Right
communication and application. I utilize	communicative language	teaching methods that prioritize meaningful
the classroom I prefer using	communicative language	teaching, because I believe that
grammar-translation for foundational understanding,	communicative language	teaching for real-world application,
methods. From grammar-translation to	communicative language	teaching, and from total physical
the students. When using the	communicative language	teaching method, the teacher creates
my heart leans towards the	communicative language	teaching approach. Still, I recognize
journey, I lean towards the	communicative language	teaching approach. It focuses on
find myself drawn to the	communicative language	teaching (CLT) approach, which places
language teaching I prefer the	communicative language	teaching method over other. The
definitely in favour of the	communicative language	teaching. Based on my experiences,
resonates with me is the	Communicative Language	Teaching (CLT) method, emphasizing communication
a genuine affinity for the	communicative language	teaching approach. This methodology resonates
on the set goals, so	communicative language	teaching, reading aloud and short
and experience. Personally, a prefer	Communicative Language	Teaching (CLT) that aims to
to base my teaching on	communicative language	teaching because it promotes active
I base my teaching on	communicative language	teaching, incorporating activities such as
predominantly based my methods on	communicative language	teaching. This approach emphasizes real-
I tried to focus on	communicative language	teaching. The students were flexible.
put as much emphasis on	communicative language	teaching as possible. I integrated
worked best for learners of	Communicative language	teaching. The best teaching methods

The analysis yielded 36 hits in the target corpus. Of these, 35 lines indicated positive evaluation, with one line remaining unclear. Therefore, it can be inferred that the participants strongly favored CLT.

**Figure 4**  
*Grammar-Translation: Concordance Lines*

Left	Node	Right
accustomed to traditional methods like	grammar-translation.	The method posed difficulties, as
unique strengths. A balance between	grammar-translation	for foundational understanding, communicative language
example, I was inspired by	grammar translation,	cognitive approach and affective- humanist
this. I partially use the	grammar-translation	approach, audiolingualism, reading, and story-
relied on most was the	grammar-translation	method, we were mostly speaking
methods, I focused on the	grammar-translation	method, but not too much –
I've planned. I used	grammar-translation	method in my teaching because
language use and collaborative learning.	Grammar-Translation	Approach: Revisited foundational grammar concepts
involved a flexible integration of	Grammar-Translation,	Reading Method, Audiolingual Method, Affective-
words and grammar. I used	grammar-translation,	reading-story-telling, and also
I have used mostly the “	grammar-translation”	method. When teaching students, we
despite my personal disapproval of	Grammar-Translation	Method, I have incorporated some
for children, those approaches are:	Grammar-Translation	method: Introduced basic grammatical concepts
sufficient results. Mostly I used	grammar-translation	technique while teaching students. This
learners, you can add the	grammar-translation	method, because they are can
elements from various methods. From	grammar-translation	to communicative language teaching, and
communication. Take the old-school	grammar-translation	method, for instance. It&#39;s like
Recognizing the limitations of the	Grammar-Translation	Method, I shifted towards a
the best method was the	grammar translation	method, because it was easier
was good with them the	grammar-translation.	They also liked games, so
based learning, the communicative method,	grammar-translation,	and the audio-lingual approach.

As shown in Figure 4, there were 26 hits comprising “grammar-translation” as a node. Qualitative analysis of the concordance lines revealed that the attitudes to this method were more reserved. Nevertheless, 12 participants endorsed it, while four expressed criticism. Even among those in favor of grammar-translation, some viewed it as an alternative rather than the only viable method. To further understand what descriptors the participants applied in reflecting on the approaches and methods, the most frequent adjectives appearing in the target corpus were extracted (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Adjectives Ordered by Frequencies*

Adjective	Value Hits
communicative	57
different	52
real	30
eclectic	28
effective	22
new	22

Table 4 continued

Adjective	Value Hits
best	22
good	21
various	20
difficult	19
important	19
possible	17
practical	17
english	17
diverse	16
direct	15
interactive	15
meaningful	14

Among the adjectives, “communicative” topped the list, with “eclectic” as the runner-up, emerging as a significant descriptor. Both adjectives refer to respective teaching approaches. The data’s further examination revealed that the student teachers frequently employed the lemmas “different,” “various,” and “diverse.” Their contextualized usage showed that the participants applied them in relation to learners, classes, age categories, approaches, methods, and techniques. Below are some examples:

Each learner and each class is different. There are no universal methods or approaches that can be equally beneficial to everyone (S1).

I have been able to try my hand at teaching different age groups, so I have been able to use a variety of methods (S35).

I have used several different approaches to be able to conduct the best lessons I could manage (S19).

I tried using different methods in the lessons, but I didn’t stick to one in particular. Such flexibility allows me to adapt lessons to diverse learning styles and combine the strong points of different methods (S24).

I believe that a combination of approaches is necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners (S9).

Additionally, adjectives such as “effective,” “new,” “best,” and “good” primarily appeared in the context of instructional choices made by the student teachers to provide effective learning experiences, as illustrated below:

Their communication skills are good, so I favored communicative language teaching. Story-telling was also a good method for them (S39).

If an approach does not work for our learners, we should try something else till we find the best and the most effective one (S7).

As no two classes are the same, different approaches should be considered to use everywhere, one that would suit both the teacher and the students the most effectively (S14).

The lemma “difficult” featured prominently in the context of implementing approaches and methods, dealing with low learner motivation and discipline issues, engaging students with instructional material and in communication, for example,

However, I encountered challenges in the application of CLT, particularly in classrooms where students were more accustomed to traditional methods like grammar-translation. The method posed difficulties, as some students initially struggled with the shift from rote memorization to spontaneous communication (S23).

It can sometimes be difficult to ensure that all students are actively participating and using the target language effectively (S30).

Students are growing up with technology, I think technology is the best way to engage and reach them. Of course, this is a very difficult and tiring task (S36).

The adjectives “real,” “interactive,” and “meaningful” often appeared in contexts showing the participants’ emphasis on engaging learners in authentic communication. This concern is illustrated in the following examples:

Personally, I prefer the Communicative approach because its major purpose is to become a tool for real-life communication (S10).

Our studies are meaningless unless we learn how to apply vocabulary or grammatical structures in real-life circumstances (S4).

Role-playing, group discussions, and interactive tasks were prominent features of my lessons (S13).

## Discussion

The study explored the lexico-semantic features of discourses on EFL teaching approaches and methods constructed by student teachers in Ukraine. Methodologically, the study was guided by the premises of corpus linguistics. A specialized corpus comprised 41 reflective essays of EFL student teachers was compiled. The research procedure included quantitative and qualitative phases to ensure data triangulation.

The keyword profile of the corpus exposed its prevalent semantic fields. Expectedly, the participants constructed narratives related to language teaching approaches and methods, education and instructional processes, its agents, language skills, linguistic aspects, and techniques used by them in teaching EFL. While the semantic field of approaches and methods was lexically dense, the related field of techniques was somewhat underrepresented. The participants indicated endorsing a variety of approaches and methods; however, only three keywords (“tasks,” “translation,” and “games”) specified these. The semantic field of language skills was also lexically rich, with student teachers regularly discussing the issues of “grammar,” “speaking,” “vocabulary,” “reading,” and “listening.” Commendably, the high statistical value of the lemma “fluency” reflects the participants’ focus on their learners’ communicative competence, aligning with contemporary language teaching principles.

The findings of the n-grams analysis enabled further clarification of the referenced semantic fields. In particular, it generated a detailed list of approaches and methods appearing in the corpus. It also provided additional evidence of the participants’ endorsement of the premises of recent approaches by placing communication in the limelight. Moreover, the results unveiled a preference for eclecticism among student teachers.

The results of the collocation analysis of the lemmas “approach” and “method,” complemented by the KWIK technique, yielded concordance lines with their contextualized use, revealing the participants’ overall preference for CLT over TLT. Nevertheless, the thinking underlying TLT featured strongly in the narratives, as indicated by the frequent reference to the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods. Accordingly, the respondents consider both CLT and TLT approaches as viable alternatives, with many not excluding the possibility of applying more traditional approaches and techniques. By analyzing the salient adjectives, the descriptors utilized by the participants were uncovered. Their choices predominantly mirrored student teachers’ contemplating on effective language teaching practices and an emphasis on communication.

Overall, the obtained findings align with the available research in many respects. Thus, the participants in this study predominantly identified with recent methodology. They demonstrated both a positive attitude towards and

an awareness of its basic principles, including the role of communication and the necessity to organize authentic speaking tasks, echoing the findings by Althagafi (2023), Lőrincz (2023), Rahimi (2014), Sun et al. (2022).

When reflecting on language teaching approaches and methods, the participants referenced a plethora of such, including CLT, grammar-translation, TBL, audiolingualism, direct method, CALL, among others. Nevertheless, the associated techniques were not detailed enough. This suggests that while the participants were conversant with the disciplinary knowledge, its practical implementation posed a serious challenge for prospective teachers who were just learning to teach. As previously observed, knowledge about language teaching does not translate immediately into an ability to apply it in practice (Levrints, 2022; Richards, 2011). Lőrincz (2023) similarly documented discrepancies between EFL student teachers' beliefs about approaches and practices, attributing them to a lack of knowledge of practical application.

The study also disclosed that EFL teachers in Ukraine, like their counterparts in other national contexts, think in terms of methods when planning and organizing instruction (e.g., Arikan, 2006; Bell, 2007; Weseley et al., 2021). Therefore, it would be premature to dismiss the study of methods as irrelevant content in EFL teacher education (Bastidas, 2022; Hall, 2019). Instead, the programs offered to EFL student teachers should provide adequate preparation in both theory and more enhanced training in the practical aspects of organizing instruction based on contemporary approaches. Thus, the ubiquitous gap between theory and practice plaguing teacher education worldwide is present in the context of methodological preparation of EFL teachers in Ukraine.

Importantly, the participants demonstrated a genuine concern for providing effective language teaching experiences personalized to learners' characteristics and needs, as signaled by their lexical choices. Specifically, they considered the selection of appropriate approaches and methods and reported experimenting with them, expressing a strong belief in eclecticism. The salience of lemmas such as "eclecticism," "different," "effective," "best," and "good" underscores the respondents' embrace of post-method thinking, which reprises previous research (Arikan, 2006; Bell, 2007; Weseley et al., 2021).

At the same time, while the participants predominantly supported recent approaches, a minority still preferred traditional teaching, as referenced by the lemmas "grammar-translation," "audiolingualism," "reading" (method). Concomitant research suggests that, despite exposure to modern language teaching approaches in teacher education programs, many prospective teachers tend to revert to the methodologies they experienced as language learners (Tang et al., 2012). Even highly proficient students are no exception, with some viewing grammar-translation as the most effective method (Lőrincz, 2023). Yet, certain elements of a traditional language classroom have seen renewed recognition for their utility (Scheffler, 2012). Explicit grammar instruction, translation,

and meaningful drills have recently seen a comeback as instructional tools within a balanced teaching approach. Scheffler (2013) found that Polish learners of English described translation and language analysis as a welcome alternative to “communicatively-oriented consciousness raising” (p. 24). That said, while incorporating some aspects of TLT can be beneficial, fully replacing current approaches with these methods is not advisable. Overreliance on traditional teaching principles may point to gaps in initial teacher preparation, calling for increased awareness of the benefits of selecting methodologies in a complementary and context-sensitive manner.

## Conclusions

The present study aimed to uncover the principal discourses surrounding EFL teaching approaches by examining the lexico-semantic features of a corpus of reflective essays. The study was positioned at the intersection of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and language pedagogy, whose amalgam could offer a new vantage point on the researched issue.

To analyze the target corpus, several techniques associated with corpus linguistics were employed sequentially and complementarily. Each technique produced comparable findings that built upon the data outputted in the preceding phases of the research. As a result, the main semantic fields were exposed based on the keyword profile of the corpus and provided a detailed list of the approaches and methods discussed by the participants through n-grams analysis. Further analysis of collocations, adjectives, and concordance lines revealed the participants’ attitudes towards the given approaches and methods.

In all, the findings indicate that Ukrainian EFL student teachers self-identify with current methodological thinking and embrace the notion of principled eclecticism. Even though they mostly advocated for contemporary approaches, some participants also valued more traditional teaching approaches. A precarious result of the analysis was the participants’ familiarity with a wide array of language teaching approaches and methods but limited knowledge of their practical implementation, a common situation in most teacher education contexts (Lőrincz, 2023).

Though the study is insightful in many respects, it is not without limitations. One such limitation is the small scope of the corpus, which restricts the possibility to generalize the findings to the entire country. Another issue is the study’s being based on self-reported data provided by the participants. Unfortunately, the explicitly expressed opinions do not always reflect their actual opinion, increasing the risk of bias. However, the researcher addressed this

by ensuring the anonymity of the respondents and clarifying that the essays would not affect their academic records or have other consequences.

Arguably, an implication this research holds for teacher education consists in the need to provide prospective language teachers with extended training to align knowledge about language teaching principles with knowledge of their application in actual classrooms. Furthermore, the utilization of the corpus linguistics methods in the like investigations of discourses has proven to be a sound methodology. Hence, this approach deserves wider adoption alongside mainstream research methods targeting respondents' views.

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