

A Survey of Issues, Practices and Views Related to Corpus-based Word Lists for English Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

Word lists have been recognized as a valuable pedagogical resource that can be used by language teachers and learners, materials developers and syllabus designers to identify vocabulary that needs attention. The increase in the accessibility of electronic corpora and the recent advances in corpus software tools has led to a proliferation of various types of corpus-based word lists informed by frequency counts, in some cases combined with other measures. However, there is a lack of research into how word lists are used in real pedagogical contexts. This exploratory study explores current practices and views related to the exploitation, construction, and evaluation of corpus-based word lists for English language teaching and learning purposes. The survey results indicate that word lists are used for a variety of purposes and in different settings, and that the context and goals for use of the word list should determine the nature of the list. Furthermore, while word lists are thought to be useful, several factors need to be considered to ensure successful implementation of lists into pedagogical contexts. Finally, the survey captured misuses and misconceptions of word lists that practitioners need to be aware of.

Key words: Corpus-based Word List, Frequency List, Pedagogical Purpose, Attitude, ELT

INTRODUCTION

The use of language corpora for compiling lists of important vocabulary items to be focused on in the language teaching and learning process has a long tradition that can be traced back to Thorndike's (1921) Teacher Word Book (Fries & Traver, 1950). Criteria for the selection of words have been largely biased towards frequency counts in a corpus (Nation, 2016; Schmitt, 2010; Webb & Nation, 2017) based on the assumption that the more frequent a word is, the more important it is (Nation & Waring, 1997).

Word lists play a vital role in curriculum design, the setting of learning goals, in assessment, materials development and research (Nation, 2016). Recent advances in corpus software tools have led to a proliferation of various types of corpus-based word lists informed by frequency counts, sometimes combined with other measures (Schmitt, 2016). While there is a growing number of corpus-based word lists, the problem is that there is a lack of research on how they are used in real pedagogical contexts and how they are perceived by L2 practitioners and learners (Folse & Youngblood, 2017). The present study aims to address this shortcoming by exploring current practices and views related to the exploitation, construction, and evaluation of corpus-based word lists for English language teaching and learning purposes. It is intended that the results of the study will inform the development of pedagogical word lists in

future, and their implementation for language teaching and learning purposes.

Burkett addressed this gap to some extent in his preliminary study (2015) and Ph.D. research (2017). He investigated how university intensive English programs utilize word lists. However, his focus was on the uses of word lists in English for General Academic Purposes. The current study differs in that it explores how the broad English language teaching (ELT) community uses and views word lists for different pedagogical purposes, and in different contexts. The research sample includes practitioners, language learners, and researchers in different ELT contexts (e.g., schools, language institutes, and so on) regardless of their experience of word lists. It seeks to identify the reasons for using word lists as well as the reasons for not doing so.

Throughout the paper, the term *corpus-based word list* (or *word list* for short) is used to refer to a list of word-like items in a corpus representing a discourse domain selected and ranked either quantitatively or qualitatively or both. The word-like items refer to single and multi-word units and they may include general vocabulary, general academic vocabulary, or specialized vocabulary.

The paper starts with a literature review that opens with a brief overview of corpus-based word lists that have been produced for pedagogical applications. It then discusses the uses of word lists for pedagogical purposes, the challenges they pose, and issues related to making word lists focusing

on counting words, corpus design, and compiling criteria. From there, the paper presents the methods, the survey results, and a discussion. The paper, then, finishes by acknowledging the limitations of the study and reaching a general conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corpus-based Word Lists: An Overview

Early word list development involved intuitive judgments of important words (such as Ogden's Basic English, 1932), or manual counting of word frequency in a corpus (e.g., Thorndike's Teacher Word Book) in the early 1890s (Fries & Traver, 1950). Two word lists stand out as the most influential in terms of their methodological development and impact. The first is West's (1953) General Service List of English Words (GSL) which has been widely used in vocabulary research and instruction (Dang & Webb, 2016a). The GSL's target was to identify the basic vocabulary that beginner language learners should learn first (Nation, 2016). West made it clear that his GSL was not rigorously a frequency list, and that factors such as learning difficulty, necessity, and style were taken into account while compiling the list (Schmitt, 2010).

In the sixty years since its development, there have been several attempts to update the GSL, on the grounds that it was outdated and based on intuitive judgments rather than empirical evidence (Nation, 2016). Those attempts include Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA, Brezina and Gablasova's (2013) New General Service List (New-GSL1), Browne, Culligan, and Phillips's (2013) New General Service List (New-GSL2) and more recently the Essential Word List for Beginners (EWL) by Dang and Webb (2016b). The New-GSL1 is a strictly statistical list while the BNC/COCA and the New-GSL2 are based on large corpora following West's criteria. The EWL is a combination of four lists, namely, GSL, BNC2000, BNC/COCA2000, and New-GSL1. Those lists' impact on vocabulary research has not been extensively explored in the literature. On the other hand, the GSL is still one of the most significant word lists, and this has been attributed to its developmental strategy (Nation, 2016).

The other highly influential word list and the first computerized corpus-based one is Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL). The AWL focuses on general academic vocabulary that exist across a wide range of academic disciplines. It consists of 570 word families outside West's GSL selected according to their frequency and range in an academic corpus of university textbooks and reading materials (Coxhead, 2000). For more than a decade, the AWL has served as a valuable resource for book writers, curriculum designers, testers, and many language teachers and learners.

A more recent general academic word list is the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) by Gardner and Davies (2013) aimed to address problems with the AWL, namely that it was based on a previous list, the GSL, and that the unit 'word family' was used to group words into the list. Another recent addition is the New Academic Word List (NAWL) by Browne et al. (2013). The list was developed as an update of the

AWL, which was based on the GSL to fit with an updated GSL, the New-GSL2, developed by the same researchers. Recently, the Academic Spoken Word List (ASWL) of Dang, Coxhead, and Webb (2017) was also compiled to help L2 students in English medium universities regardless of discipline and proficiency level to understand academic speech.

While developers of such lists support a generic approach to academic vocabulary, other researchers (e.g., Durrant, 2014, 2016; Hyland & Tse, 2007) question whether such lists can ever be equally useful to all L2 students irrespective of their discipline. Based on analyses of the AWL in different academic and specialized corpora, they concluded that academic vocabulary is not equally distributed across different disciplines, and even if it were, it would vary in meaning and collocation.

In response, several specialized word lists have been developed. For example, Vongpumivitch, Huang, and Chang (2009) compiled a list of specialised terms in applied linguistics, Valipouri and Nassaji (2013) in chemistry, Martinez and Schmitt (2012) in agriculture, Yang (2015) in nursing, and Lei and Liu (2016) in medicine. These lists include "words and phrases that are closely related to the ideas covered in a particular subject area" (Nation, Coxhead, Chung, & Quero, 2016: 146). Some lists include specialized (also technical) vocabulary exclusive to a specific discipline (Nation, 2001), while other lists include general academic vocabulary specific to a particular discipline. Further information on corpus-based word lists representing different types of vocabulary and their development can be found in Folse and Youngblood's (2017) summary of 100 years of word list production.

Corpus-based Word Lists in Practice

The literature (e.g., Nation, 2016) highlights the vital role word lists play in informing language teaching and learning. Nation (2016) provides an overview of the pedagogical uses of word lists, including course design, language teaching, and learning, graded readers programs, vocabulary load of texts and testing. However, little attention has been given to the role word lists play to direct the process of vocabulary acquisition and how they are used in different ELT contexts. Nation (2016), for instance, notes that even though word lists are primarily made for course design, research on how word lists inform curriculum design is still uncertain.

To the researchers' best knowledge, Burkett's work on word list uses is the only one exploring this gap empirically. In 2015, Burkett conducted an exploratory survey to investigate the uses of word lists in university intensive English programs. The online survey was completed by 95 programs around the world, and a follow-up interview was conducted with staff from four of them.

The results showed that even though 90% of the programs surveyed believe that word lists are useful, only 60% formally use them. Burkett explains that a range of factors may have constrained the use of word lists in the study context, such as: the limited duration of the program; word lists being suggested but not imposed; and lack of teacher experience. It was also reported that classroom teachers and students use word lists more than course designers and testers.

However, details of how they are used were not obtained. Another interesting finding is the predominance of the AWL in these institutions which echoes Nation's (2016) comment about the status of the AWL among other lists. Finally, different opinions on how to use word lists emerged in the study, which could be due to the diverse nature of the programs surveyed, and which suggests that it is not possible to create an all-purpose word list that will satisfy all needs.

In his Ph.D. thesis (2017), Burkett further investigated the uses of word lists by interviewing practitioners in five university intensive English programs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Based on Nation's (2016) book and through analysis of the interviews, Burkett investigated four categories of the uses of word lists in pedagogical contexts as shown in Table 1: course design; teaching and learning; testing; and materials development.

It was reported that the most common purpose of using word lists is to establish vocabulary learning goals for both language programs and specific courses. Word lists provide curriculum designers with data about what words need to be learned and at what stage of proficiency to ensure that learners get the best return for their learning effort (Webb & Nation, 2017). Burkett (2017) found that four of the five programs surveyed used the AWL or their adapted lists to set learning goals for the programs.

According to Burkett's analysis, the five programs used word lists for teaching and learning. The lists were mainly used for day-to-day practical activities, for designing material for intentional learning and for checking the level of the reading texts and other materials. Furthermore, word lists are used for developing vocabulary size and proficiency level tests. An example is the Vocabulary Levels Test by Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham (2001) based on Coxhead's (2000) AWL (Chen, 2011; Nation, 2016). Four of the five programs surveyed used word lists for vocabulary assessment.

Table 1. Pedagogical purpose of word lists

Purpose	Description
Course design	Setting short term (course) learning goals
	Setting long term (program) learning goals
Teaching and learning	Selecting a material that includes the target vocabulary
	A resource for intentional vocabulary learning activities
	Selecting vocabulary from texts to focus on
	Analyzing the vocabulary load in a text
Testing	Modifying the level of vocabulary in tests
	Selecting words for vocabulary size and proficiency tests
	Testing list vocabulary in context
	Test results inform teaching and learning
Materials development	Setting the vocabulary level of materials
	Creating vocabulary focused class teaching materials
	Creating vocabulary focused class independent study resources

Finally, word lists are used to inform the nature of language learning materials. A famous example of using word lists for material development is Coxhead's AWL, which has been the basis of many books such as the Inside Reading 1 Student Book Pack: The Academic Word List in Context by Burgmeier and Zimmerman (2007). In Burkett's (2017) study three of the programs used their word lists to develop vocabulary forced teaching material while only two used their lists to set the level of the teaching material and create materials for independent learning. More recently, word lists have inspired software makers to make programs that would aid L2 learners in developing their lexical knowledge (Wadden, Ferreira, & Rush, 2016). Finally, it is important to note that while the field is inundated with different types of word lists, materials and software based on published and well-developed word lists are still in short supply (Nation, 2016).

Challenges of Using Word Lists

An enormous number of corpus-based word lists have been published during the last decade for different purposes and they present different types of vocabulary. This presents practitioners and language learners with a huge challenge in selecting the list that can offer maximal usefulness for their use and context. To judge the pedagogical usefulness of the list, several elements need to be considered. As Brezina and Gablasova (2017) observe, learners' needs, proficiency level, age, personal aims, academic disciplines, and receptive versus productive knowledge are factors that are not transferable across various contexts. What might be useful in one context is not necessarily useful in another. In fact, it is often difficult to find a list that takes into account the characteristics of the target audience and the intended purpose of use and context (Brezina & Gablasova, 2017; Nation, 2016).

Other challenges of using word lists for language teaching and learning purposes which may have hindered the use of word lists have been discussed in Nation (2016) based on his experience in word list development and ELT. Sorell (2013) reviewed these in his Ph.D. research about general English vocabulary. Practitioners surveyed and interviewed in Burkett (2015; 2017) perceived similar issues. Those challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Word lists usually contain over a thousand words, and it is difficult to implement this large number of words into a course and ensure that learning has occurred;
- Word lists are lists of isolated words, but context is needed for meaningful learning;
- There is a lack of teaching materials and resources based on published lists;
- Access to potentially useful lists, particularly discipline-specific ones is limited;
- There is a lack of support and guidance on using the lists and research related to word lists that targets the practitioner.

Nation (2016) suggests that the best way to tackle those problems is to adapt the lists to the target purpose and audience's needs.

Issues Related to Word Lists Development

Instead of selecting potentially useful lists and adapting them to the target context, Kwary (2017) suggests that practitioners should make their own word lists based on their teaching materials taking into account the needs of their students. This is a task which with the recent advances of technology has become relatively easy. Burkett's (2015) survey indicated that some language intuitions develop their own specific word lists, taking into account the cultural background and needs of students, and they use those lists to structure the program and set assessment measures. As such, the quality of the list depends on whether the needs of the target population have been considered when making decisions related to (a) what counts as a word, (b) how to develop or select the corpus from which the list will be derived and (c) how to count and order word into the list (Jones & Durrant, 2010; Nation, 2016). Those three important elements of word list construction are discussed below.

Counting words

Determining what counts as a "word" is a complicated decision that affects the quality, the size and usefulness of a word list (Gardner, 2007; Nation, 2016). Different terms have been used to refer to the different ways of counting words. The term "type" refers to each sequence of letters separated by space or punctuation counted once (Nation, 2013). For example, *predict* is one word while *predicts* is another, and so on. A "lemma" (e.g., *PREDICT*) refers to a headword *predict*, together with its inflected forms *predicts*, *predicted*, and *predicting* (Dang et al., 2017) up to eight members representing the eight inflectional forms in English, as well as reduced (n't) forms (Nation, 2013). A more inclusive version of the lemma is the "flemma" (family lemma) which includes different parts of speech for the same lemma. For example, the noun *walks* and the verb *walks* belong to the same flemma (Nation, 2016). Unlike the lemma, in addition to the inflectional forms, a "word family" adds closely related derived forms of its headword (Nation, 2013). Many of the more influential word lists have been developed using the word family as the counting unit, (e.g., Coxhead, 2000; West, 1953) as well as some specialized word lists (e.g., Yang, 2015). Recent lists (e.g., Brezina & Gablasova, 2013; Gardner & Davies, 2013; Lei & Liu, 2016), have used the lemma.

Gardner (2007) argues that the question should not be whether counting types, lemmas or word families is the best, but which unit is suitable for the potential uses and users of the list. For example, counting types for specialized word lists may be more beneficial than word families since one type could be a technical word, whereas a word family might include both technical and general items. The word type *patient* is a technical word in the Nursing discipline, while *patience* is not, even though they both belong to the same word family (Coxhead, 2018). Furthermore, for developing receptive vocabulary (i.e., listening or reading), word lists based on word family would be more appropriate. This is because we can guess the meaning of the inflected form (e.g., *businesslike*) while reading or listening if we know the meaning

of the base *business* (Nation, 2016). However, when we produce language, we need to know the appropriate form for use, and knowledge of one word in a family does not necessarily imply the successful production of other words in that family (Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002). Therefore, Schmitt (2010) argues, the word type or lemma would be more appropriate than word families for lists targeting productive vocabulary.

Learner proficiency level and prior morphological training may also guide decisions on the chosen unit of analysis for a word list (Miller, 2012). In terms of proficiency level, Dang and Webb (2016b) argue that the lemma or the flemma is more appropriate for L2 beginners since they usually lack sufficient morphological knowledge that allows them to recognize members of a family and lemmatized word lists would introduce them to high-frequency words only unlike word families.

Corpora for word lists

The nature of the list produced depends on the texts from which the words were selected, that is, the corpus (Nation & Sorell, 2016). Those texts could include textbooks or textbook chapters, journal articles, literary texts, graded readers, teaching materials, audio-recorded conversations or lectures or movies, among other texts. A word list can be said to be good if it is based on a corpus that represents the actual or potential language the target audience will likely encounter. However, it is not possible to collect all instances of the target language. Consequently, we must rely on a sample that represents, as closely as possible, the language used by the target population. For example, if the intended audience for the list is young children, then the list should be based on a corpus of texts that those children are likely to encounter.

There has been a strong preference towards large corpora in order to achieve representativeness (e.g., Sinclair, 1991), yet the size of the corpus depends very much on the purpose of the resulting list and other practical considerations. Small specialized corpora have been compiled in recent years for specific research or pedagogical purposes such as the 826, 416 word corpus from which the Agricultural Word List (Agrocorpus List) was derived by Martínez, Beck, and Panza (2009). Thus, the purpose of the corpus design could be seen as an answer to how large a corpus could be. In fact, the more domain-specific the research interest is, the smaller the corpus could be (Hunston, 2002; Weisser, 2016). Another example is when developing a list based on the teaching materials in a particular teaching context. In this case, a small pedagogic corpus of less than a million words based on the teaching material would result in a reliable and useful list (Coxhead, 2018).

Other practical issues that may constrain the size of the corpus include the following:

- Size limits set by some commercial corpus software.
- Spoken corpora tend to be smaller than written corpora since collecting and transcribing spoken texts is time-consuming. According to O'Keefe, McCarthy, and Carter (2007), over a million words of speech is

considered a large corpus, whereas anything under five million words of written text is quite small.

- Published texts may be limited by what you can obtain permission from the copyright holder.

Reviewing the literature on published word lists, it was found that consideration of the context, target audience and purpose was vaguely practised. While statements about the unit of counting or how the corpus was compiled are made, seldom are justifications for these decisions provided. There may be practical issues or technical constraints that have led to those decisions. Nevertheless, those limitations should always be noted. The purpose of the list and target audience are usually not mentioned.

Approaches to making word lists

Corpus-based word lists are typically developed by identifying and ordering words from a corpus following specific criteria, namely:

- (a) Strictly using a statistical criterion or a combination.
- (b) Using statistical criteria then adjusting the results subjectively (e.g., West's efficiency criteria).
- (c) Using qualitative data/subjective judgments.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach, but the criteria have to be evaluated against the purpose and context.

Word lists based on statistical measures are claimed to be more reliable and accurate than those based on intuition (Szudarski, 2018). Nation notes that a large truly representative corpus is often impossible and that most corpus software tools are still limited. Therefore, to produce useful pedagogical word lists, it may be necessary to use subjective criteria combined with statistical measures (Nation, 2016) taking into account the target audience, context, and purpose. In fact, many corpus linguists (e.g., O'Keeffe et al., 2007) highlight the equal importance of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Szudarski, 2018) especially if the purpose is to make a useful word list suitable to the learners. The GSL is the most common example of adjusting statistical results subjectively in an attempt to make the list as efficient and complete as possible to the target users. Despite its age, the GSL still achieves high lexical coverage in different corpora (Dang & Webb, 2016a).

It is important to note that identifying different types of vocabulary may require different criteria. For example, specialized word lists may require different input, such as the judgment of a specialist informant. The important point is that the criteria are formalized and applied consistently.

The purely qualitative approach authorizes an expert native speaker or a dictionary to judge a word's importance (Brezina & Gablasova, 2017). Corpora, nevertheless, could be used qualitatively to inform word list development (Coxhead, 2018). Word selection could be made by analysing students' annotations in their textbooks and reading materials based on the assumption that students annotate words that are important or problematic to them (e.g., Ghadessy, 1979); consulting concordance lines to examine meaning and collocation (e.g., Hafner & Candlin, 2007); or using surveys, interviews and questionnaires to

gather information about the importance of words from the teachers' perspective (e.g., Coxhead, 2012). For examples of lists following the qualitative approach, refer to Coxhead (2018). Published word lists that follow the expert-based approach are limited. It is important to note that lists developed by teachers drawing on their experience and using their teaching materials follow this approach. Though those methods take into account the experience of practitioners, they may lead to unreliable judgments and inconsistent results influenced by teachers' years of experience, students' proficiency levels and/or personal preferences (Schmitt, 2010).

The above review suggests that word lists have been a well-established feature of vocabulary research and instruction since the 1920s. The number of corpus-based word lists has grown, particularly with new publications in the last twenty years and the composition of these lists reflects debates on how word lists are best compiled. So far, research has focused on the technical and theoretical aspects of word list construction. Little attention is given to questions regarding the use and perceptions of word lists in pedagogical contexts. In light of this, the current study poses the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. To what extent do ELT practitioners, researchers, and language learners use corpus-based word lists for pedagogical purposes, and how?
2. What are the different uses of corpus-based word lists for practitioners, researchers, and learners involved in L2 teaching and learning?
3. What are the perceptions of practitioners and learners in ELT towards word lists?
4. What are the different methods of making corpus-based word lists?
5. What are the measures for a useful word list for ELT practitioners and language learners?

METHODS

Participants

Seventy-four practitioners involved in English language teaching and learning, as well as language learners, completed an online survey. The inclusion criteria were as follows: respondents should be aged 18 or over; involved in English as a second language (ESL) teaching and learning, including English as a foreign language (EFL).

Figure 1 shows the roles of the respondents divided into two groups: users of word lists and non-users. As can be seen from Figure 1, there were no course/program coordinators, materials developers nor testers among those respondents who reported not using word lists.

As for their context, almost third of the respondents were involved in settings where they either teach or learn Academic and/or (78.4%) Specialized (40.5%) English at the university level. More than forty percent were focusing on general English for adults and/or school students. Two

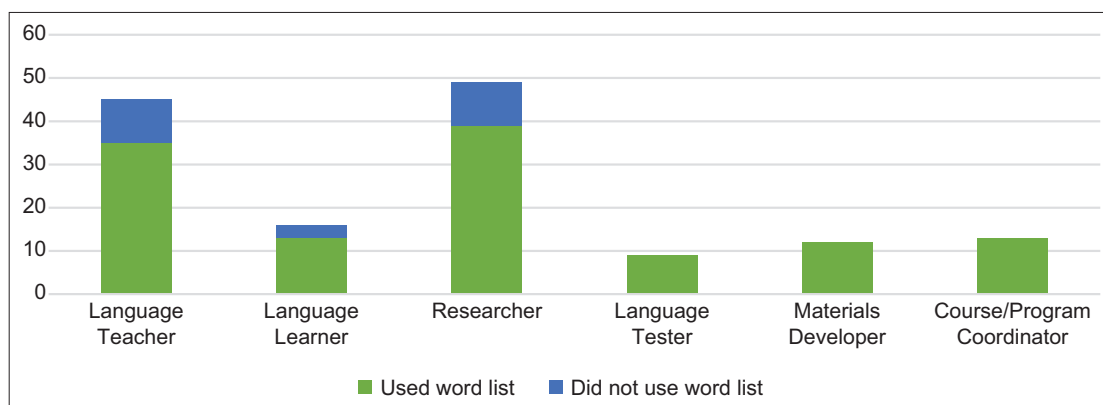


Figure 1. The roles of the respondents

respondents further reported that they were teaching English for professional training.

The second inclusion criterion was that they should be using word lists for language teaching and learning. Of the 74 completed questionnaires, 59 (79.7%) reported that they had used word lists for language teaching and learning purposes, while 15 (20.3%) reported that they had not. Those who reported not using word lists were asked about the reasons, and then the survey ended for them.

Procedure

The researchers identified and recruited respondents via email lists (such as English Language departments, university language institutions, and English language postgraduate email lists) as well as direct email contacts (searching profiles online, for example, those of publishers of corpus-based word lists and language teachers accessible to the researchers). The recruitment email explained the purpose of the study, and it contained a link to the questionnaire, which had detailed information about the research, the Consent Form and the Respondent Information Sheet (both approved by the University of Birmingham's Research Ethics Committee). The recruitment email invited respondents to circulate the invitation to potential respondents who might have been interested in the study. At least 117 respondents opened the survey link, and 74 completed it, representing a response rate of 63%.

Those who indicated that they have used word lists and completed the survey were invited (at the end of the survey) to a follow-up interview for further discussion of their responses; out of the 59 only 30 agreed to be contacted, and four of these were interviewed. The interviews lasted for approximately 15 minutes, where responses related to how they use word lists, how they select the list they used, and what they think about their experience were discussed.

The Questionnaire

An online questionnaire consisting of 13 open- and close ended questions was designed for the exploratory goals of the current study and administered via Qualtrics. The first

Table 2. Pedagogical purposes of corpus-based word lists

	<i>n</i>	%
Language teaching	30	50.8
Language learning	24	40.6
Language testing	16	27.1
Materials development	16	27.1
Course design	12	20.3
Research purposes	12	20.3
Total	59	

part of the survey aims to find out the kind of ELT community surveyed (i.e., role and context) if they use word lists, and if not, what the causes of not using word lists are. The second part of the survey is displayed to those who reported using word lists. It investigates the purposes of using word lists, the type of word lists used and for each type, questions are displayed on how they are used, the measures for selecting words, problems related to using word lists and the effectiveness of using word lists as perceived by those who use them. Names of word lists and other resources used along the list were also surveyed.

RESULTS

Who use Word Lists and for What Purposes

The first research question explored to what extent practitioners and researchers involved in ELT as well as language learners use corpus-based word lists for language teaching and learning purposes. Almost 80% of the respondents used word lists; Table 2 presents those purposes. It is clear from Table 2 that language teaching (50.8%) and learning (40.6%) are the most common uses of word lists. Interestingly, eight language teachers who used word lists noted that those lists were not related to classwork; students were expected to learn words from the list, in some cases independently, and then be tested on them.

Research purposes ranged from comparing existing lists, investigating the coverage of lists in a corpus, list development for different purposes, to measuring proficiency and examining the order of vocabulary acquisition.

On the other hand, the 20% who did not use word lists explained that they have not considered doing so (n=8). Some thought that word lists are useless (n=3), while others reported that they did not know what word lists are or were not aware that ready-made lists like the AWL exist (n=2).

How Word Lists are used

The main aim of this study was to explore how word lists are used. Table 3 shows the types of word lists used by the ELT practitioners, learners, and researchers surveyed. It is clear from Table 3 that respondents tend to combine published and self-made word lists to achieve their goal. Others prefer to use ready-made lists, while in some cases word lists are self-made. It is important to note that five respondents added notes to state that they thought that “combining” meant using both types in different contexts and for various purposes.

Those who combined published and self-made lists thought that there were different word lists for their purposes and situations; hence, they had to combine two or more lists to come up with an efficient one. This is done mostly due to dissatisfaction with published word lists (n=16) which can be summarized through the following observations:

- Most lists target receptive vocabulary development.
- Lists with both single word and multi-word units are limited.
- Words in the list do not match the students’ needs and levels.
- Most lists are based on a frequency, not a thematic approach.

For those who decided to take the ready-published list, the main factors for using ready-made published word lists are as follows:

- The suitability of the word list to the purpose and context (84.2%).
- The popularity of the list (52.6%).
- Availability in electronic form (21%).
- Being imposed on them by authority (15.7%) and/or suggested by a colleague (10.5%).

Interestingly, two respondents explained that they selected a list based on the unit of counting that was suitable for the target learners. In terms of how they used those word lists, unexpectedly, the majority of those used them as they were (84.2%) except for three who decided to delete (n=1) or add (n=2) items to make the list suitable for their purpose and context.

If a published list is not suitable for the purpose and context, respondents indicated that they made their lists. Other reasons for self-making word lists were related to lack of validity and reliability of the published lists, the lack of

documentation of how some lists are made, or no access. One of those respondents further added that he/she made their list as an update of a published old list. Two respondents added that making a list was a good learning activity. Another decided to make a list for a course where words occur in different contexts, but not repeated.

Making Word Lists

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of six criteria commonly used to compile word lists with a room for further explanation (namely, frequency, range, dispersion, intuitive judgment, qualitative methods, and duplication of previous lists). There was an insignificant difference between the criteria which could be due to the small number of respondents (n=12). Generally, statistical measures were considered more important, though the importance of consulting an expert was stressed to be used in line with statistics; in the comments throughout the survey. Organizing words alphabetically and according to necessity were reported as criteria for selection and ranking of words in lists.

When asked about the justification for their approach to making word lists, it was found that respondents generally use the criteria of a published researcher, sometimes with modification or the criteria provided by the software they used. However, one respondent reported developing his/her own set of criteria.

What Word Lists are used

In terms of the word lists used, one question asked respondents to name the list(s) they used and provide a brief description if they were not published. Fifty-three out of the 59 responded to this question. Table 4 presents the names of the lists reported; some respondents used more than one list. The AWL (n=19) was highly cited, and about half this number used the AVL (n=9). The BNC/COCA, GSL, and New-GSL seem to be equally used. Brezina and Gablasova’s (2013) New-GSL1 was referred to once, Browne, Culligan, and Phillips’s (2013) New-GSL2 three times, and it is not clear which one it was in two instances.

Other un-named lists seem to fall into the four categories:

- Word lists for English for General Academic Purposes - 29 (58%). There is a predominance of EGAP word lists. Some of these lists are specific to an institution based on their teaching materials, while some were made for developing the academic vocabulary necessary for writing.

Table 3. Types of corpus-based word lists

	<i>n</i>	%
A combination of published and self-made word lists	32	47.5
Ready-made published	19	32.2
Self-made	12	20.3
Total	59	

Table 4. Names of word list reported

	<i>n</i>	%
Academic Word List (AWL)	19	38
Academic Vocabulary List (AVL)	8	16
BNC/COCA	6	12
The General Service List (GSL)	6	12
New- General Service List (New-GSL)	6	12
New- Academic Word List (New-AWL)	3	6

- There were lists self-made for specific purposes that were not published 18 (36%). Those include lists for particular courses, lists of reporting verbs, and lists for personal use such as communication purposes or new vocabulary. Unfortunately, respondents did not provide information about the development of those lists.
- Word lists for English for Specific Academic Purposes - 12 (24%). Those are lists developed for a specific discipline, such as engineering or accounting and management. Some of the mentioned lists were published but were reported once.
- Word lists for General English Purposes (n=9).
- Three respondents reported using lists of other languages and/or translation purposes.

Resources for using Word Lists

With regard to the resources used with word lists, out of the 59 respondents, only 34 reported using other resources besides word lists to achieve their goal. Eight did not respond to the questions while 13 reported not using resources. A variety of resources were reported, but three stand out:

- Websites or online exercises for practice.
- Concordances or teaching texts to identify the context of the target word.
- Other concordancing software and vocabulary profiling software were also reported.

Measure of a Good Word List

As for selecting word lists, Table 5 shows the measures list users thought to be important. Topic relatedness appears to be the most important measure. Half of the respondents (n=30) indicated that word lists should be based on corpus evidence. Roughly equal numbers of respondents thought that being based on subjective judgments (n=22) and statistical measures (n=21) are important for word selection and ranking when making or selecting word lists, which has been confirmed in the comments.

Some of the measures that were pointed out in the open-ended comments and interviews include the following:

- Suitability of the list to the purpose and the situation was emphasized and elaborated into discipline-relatedness, students' needs, the proficiency level of the words, pedagogical relevance, and no interference.
- The theme of the context of the words in the list has emerged throughout the survey.

Table 5. Measures of good word lists

	<i>n</i>	%
Topic related	38	64.4
Based on corpus evidence	30	50.9
Based on subjective judgments for selection and ranking.	22	37.3
Based on statistical measures for selection and ranking.	21	35.6
Small in size	19	32.2

Attitudes towards Word Lists

One of the main goals of this exploratory study was to shed light on attitudes towards word lists for ELT purposes. Though the majority of the respondents thought that word lists are useful (n=45), a sizeable number were negatively disposed towards word lists: 11 doubted the usefulness of word lists while 3 thought that word lists are useless.

When asked about the problems of using word lists, 11 reported that there were none, two did not respond, while the rest thought there were problems. The size was the most challenging part of dealing with word lists (n=32), followed by a lack of explanation (n=22). Other problems included format (n=6) and access (n=5).

Other problems mentioned by respondents in the open-ended comments part seem to fit the following themes:

- Word lists lack context.
- Validity and inconsistency issues in making word lists.
- Lack of supplementary materials based on word lists. Word lists are not related to classwork.
- Rote memorization and lack of motivation to learn from lists. Word are not retained after learning.
- The definition of the word.
- The lack of time and resources for making word lists.

In the interviews, two respondents were asked to elaborate on their experience of using words lists, which triggered contrasting views:

- The first was a language teacher at a university pre-sessional English language program. They argued that word lists were felt to be useless as words needed to be in context and students need to be exposed to the word seven times to learn the words. Consequently, the program coordinators had decided to stop using word lists, and the focus of developing vocabulary has been changed to be based on assessment results.
- The other was a researcher, who found word lists useful to design the research, in particular to "decide on the vocabulary appropriate for the level of the sample" but they thought that there was something lacking. The researcher used the AWL "to select the vocabulary to be included [in the flashcards] to judge the usefulness of the intervention (intentional learning), but [...] had to provide an explanation of the terms, part of speech and an example sentence."

DISCUSSION

Using Word Lists in ELT

It is evident from the findings that corpus-based word lists are widely used for various pedagogical purposes and in different contexts. The survey results indicated that word lists do largely inform language teaching and learning. They are also used for assessment and materials development purposes, but less than expected for course design. This in accordance with Burkett (2015) who found that language teachers and learners use word lists more than program coordinators and materials developer in contrast to Nation's (2016) note that word lists are primarily made for course design. A possible explanation could be that word lists lend themselves more obviously for

use in the classroom or independent learning. This, however, does not necessarily result in successful learning, according to some respondents. On the other hand, there were no program coordinators, materials developers nor testers among those respondents who reported not using word lists. This could be due to the small sample size, but it might also indicate that word lists are essential for those purposes.

Even though the survey targeted the broad ELT community, the survey results shows that corpus-based word lists are largely used to focus on general academic (50%) and specialized (40%) English at the university level. This could be attributed to the significant nature of academic English, the centrality of needs analysis in determining course content, and the level of flexibility in designing those programs compared to school education. This finding must be interpreted with caution, however, as there might have been sample bias towards academics whom are accessible to the researchers.

The dominance of the AWL is, thus, as anticipated ($n=19$). Almost half this number also mentioned using the AVL and other un-named lists for general academic English which surpassed the number of different types of word lists ($n=29$). It is important to note that the AVL was not mentioned in Burkett (2015), due to the relatively recent release of the list at the time of the survey. In his 2017 study, Burkett attributes the absence of the AVL in the UAE context to the fact that many published materials, software and tests are already based on the AWL which was a breakthrough in EGAP, thus, using the AWL could be due to what is available and what has been practised in the past.

Attitudes towards Word Lists

One of the aims of the current study was to explore attitudes towards word lists. Generally, word lists are thought to be useful for the various language teaching and learning purposes surveyed (76.2%). The open-ended comments and interviews suggest that respondents found word lists useful for independent vocabulary learning and setting teaching goals, and serve as a valuable resource for book writers and lexical development research. Nevertheless, they noted some deficiencies of word lists. Those points are in line with those raised by Burkett's participants in both studies:

- Word lists present items in isolation
- Words are not related to classwork
- There is a lack of supplementary material
- There is little guidance to the practitioner and learner on how to use them and on what research they are based.

Furthermore, the survey captured evidence of negative attitudes and misuses of word lists. Teachers are misusing word lists by giving them to students and asking them to learn the list. Nation (2016) warned that word lists are not to be handed to the learner but should be used to direct practitioners towards the most important words. Furthermore, word lists are still mistakenly associated with rote memorisation, which could be attributed to two factors that came up in the comments and interviews:

- Words are presented in isolation.
- Word lists are not related to the teaching material.

Those issues are similar to those raised by Burkett (2015)

and Sorell (2013). This does not mean that word lists are useless, but that the misuse of word lists, using the wrong list or simply differences in learning styles may have contributed to this negative perspective. In fact, the growing number of word lists developed and published is evidence of an increasing interest in word lists.

Selecting Word Lists for Use in ELT

There seems to be an agreement that the applicability of the list to the purpose is strongly associated to decisions about the selection and development of word lists. Practitioners select word lists for use based on their purpose. However, due to dissatisfaction with the lists available, most practitioners prefer to combine word lists to achieve their goal. A possible explanation might be related to the complex nature of the pedagogical contexts. As observed by Brezina and Gablasova (2013), learners' characteristics and needs, the goals of the program and the purpose of using the list are unlikely to be the same across pedagogical contexts and hence the idea of a list of words suitable to all learners is an unachievable aspiration.

Measures of a Good Word List

Regarding the measures considered when selecting or making, there was a standard agreement that statistical measures (i.e., frequency, range, and dispersion) based on corpus evidence are essential, but there should be room for the expert's subjective modification to tailor the lists to the needs of the users. This confirms with Nation's suggestion that experts' judgment taking into account the purpose, context, and characteristics of the learners with whom the list will be used is important to make a good word list. However, contrary to their statement, most those who use published word lists use them as they are. This could be due to lack of experience in adapting resources or difficulty in dealing with lists of words.

In fact, reviewing the literature, it was found that despite acknowledgment of taking account of the purpose and target audience, this is little done in practice. For example, word selection criteria and rationale for the unit of counting were not discussed by Browne et al. (2013). This could be attributed to the fact that those researchers' focus, as stated by them, was on making pedagogical tools that would serve L2 learners rather than publishing academic papers for research purposes (Browne, 2016).

LIMITATIONS

The major limitation of the current study is the small sample size to represent the larger ELT community, and a potential bias towards practitioners in academic contexts who were accessible to the researchers. Another source of limitation on the generalizability of the research might be the lack of responses from those who do not use word lists. Due to the design of the survey, which did not prompt the respondents for any further responses after they had stated that they did not use word lists, further information was not obtained. Finally,

using questionnaires as the main source of data ought to be validated with interviews or observation to ensure that practitioners and learners are doing what they report.

CONCLUSION

Word lists have long been an essential resource for vocabulary research and instruction. However, research on how they are used to inform language teaching and learning processes has not kept pace with the explosion of word list production in the field. As a first step towards determining how word lists can be judged to be potentially effective for ELT purposes, a survey has been conducted on the uses and views of word lists for English language teaching and learning purposes, and the uses and attitudes of word lists from the point of view of practitioners, learners and researchers have been explored. The survey found that word lists are used widely for different purposes and contexts, but there seems to be greater interest in general and specialised academic English word lists to be used for teaching and learning than for general language word lists. The study also reported that there is a general agreement that it is important to take into account both purpose and context when making or selecting word lists. Generally, the increase in word list production reflects faith in the usefulness of word lists, yet indicates that misuse of them could lead to negative attitudes and misconceptions that practitioners should be aware of. What is needed now is clearer guidance on how to evaluate word lists, and the development of a framework for doing this, that can be used by teachers, learners, materials developers, course designers and language testers.

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