



# A Corpus-based Approach to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Vocabulary

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This poster shows how we incorporated teaching and learning of the vocabulary of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in a BA program for business students.

In 2019, a clear mandate was given by the management of our University of Applied Sciences to increase the visibility of sustainability, as well as to incorporate the goals of the United Nations for Sustainable Development (UN SDGs) in our university operations. As the Competence Center for Business English, with responsibility for all Business English courses within the 10 business-oriented BA programs offered, we subsequently launched an action research project focusing on a lexical approach to learning. This instructional approach was implemented in first-semester lessons focusing on “business success” within our Tourism & Hospitality Management BA program.

- The goals of our action research were to:
- 1) Identify the most important target lexis to be able to understand and discuss the UN SDGs
  - 2) Find out how familiar students already were with the target lexis
  - 3) Observe whether a set of custom-designed learning activities aided vocabulary acquisition

## METHODOLOGY

### CORPUS

First, we created a corpus containing the UN SDG full text as well as numerous related articles in a wider context. Then, using the *Antconc* concordancer software tool\*, we analysed the text, generating keyword frequency lists, collocations, concordances, and various other items to create a database of common and important language. Vocabulary items were also categorized according to CEFR levels appropriate for our learners (B2+ - C2).

### PRE-TEST

Using the *Antconc* results, we designed a test for the students to gauge their familiarity with the target lexis. The test consisted of 23 questions of various types addressing receptive as well as productive knowledge of the target language. Students were not given any pre-test input or feedback after the test and were informed that it was part of a research project. In addition, no mention was made of the planned post-test.

### LEARNING MATERIALS

The target language was embedded in the course learning materials which included online vocabulary tools and a group research project where they were encouraged to use authentic texts. The teaching units comprised several synchronous and asynchronous sessions on the topic of “Can being good be good for business?”, where positive societal and business impacts of companies striving to reach SDG goals were addressed,

### POST-TEST

One month after the pre-test, students were given the identical test again and their scores on this test were compared to their individual performances on the pre-test.

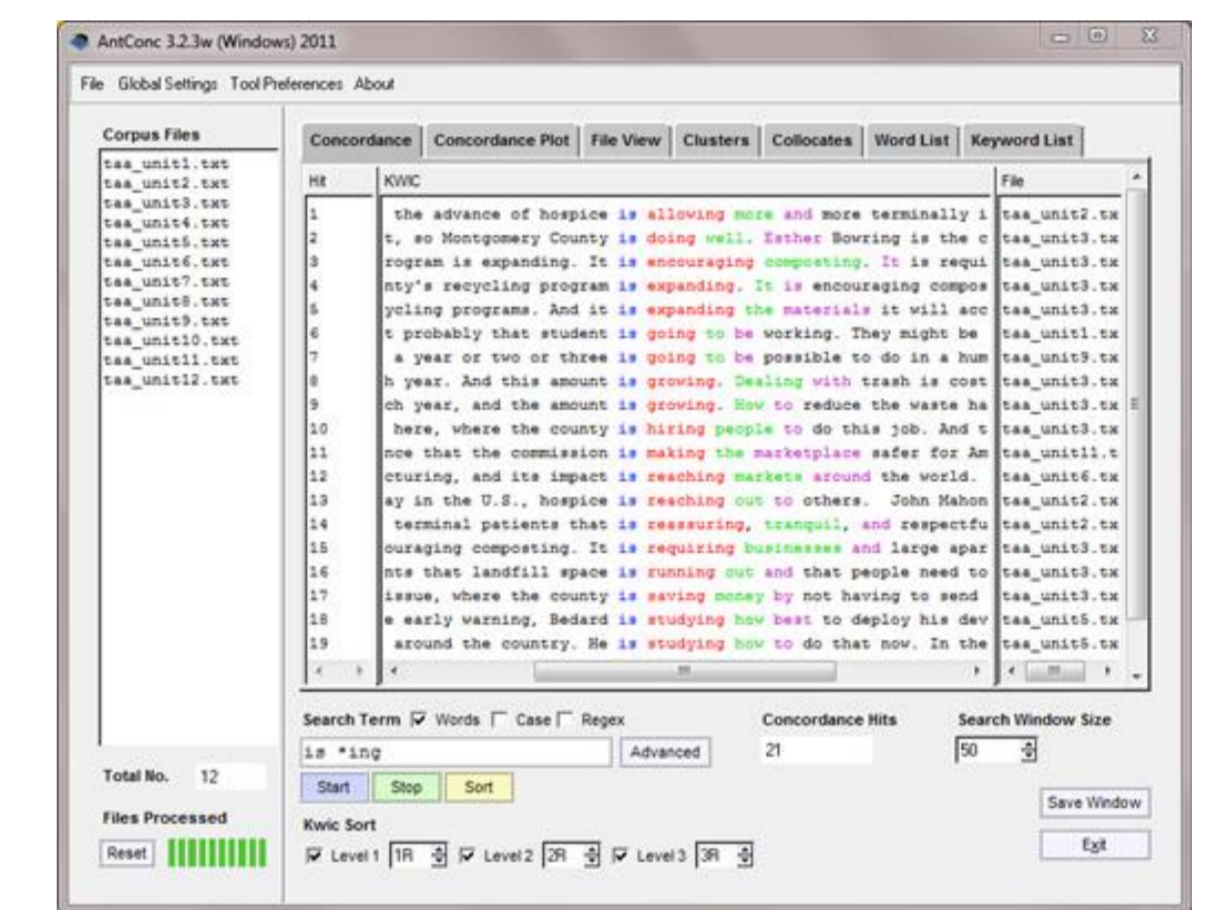
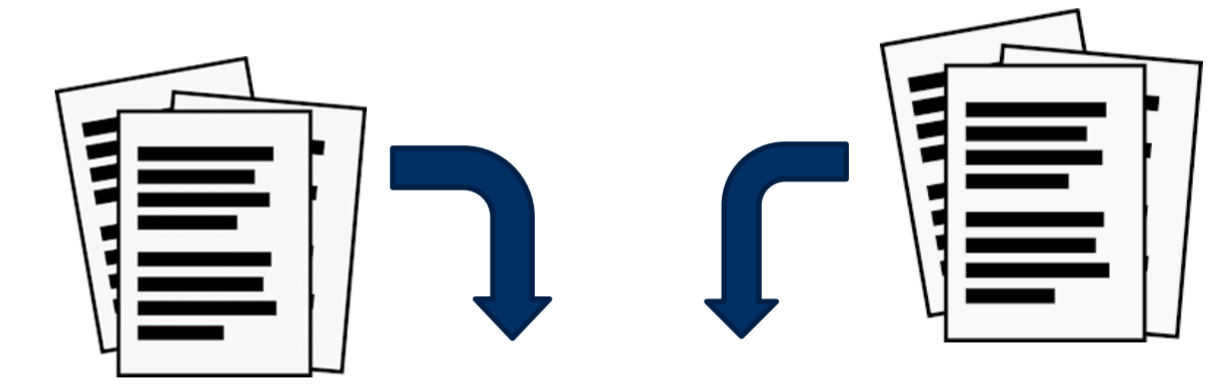


Illustration 1: Concordance lines produced by AntConc tool

## RESULTS

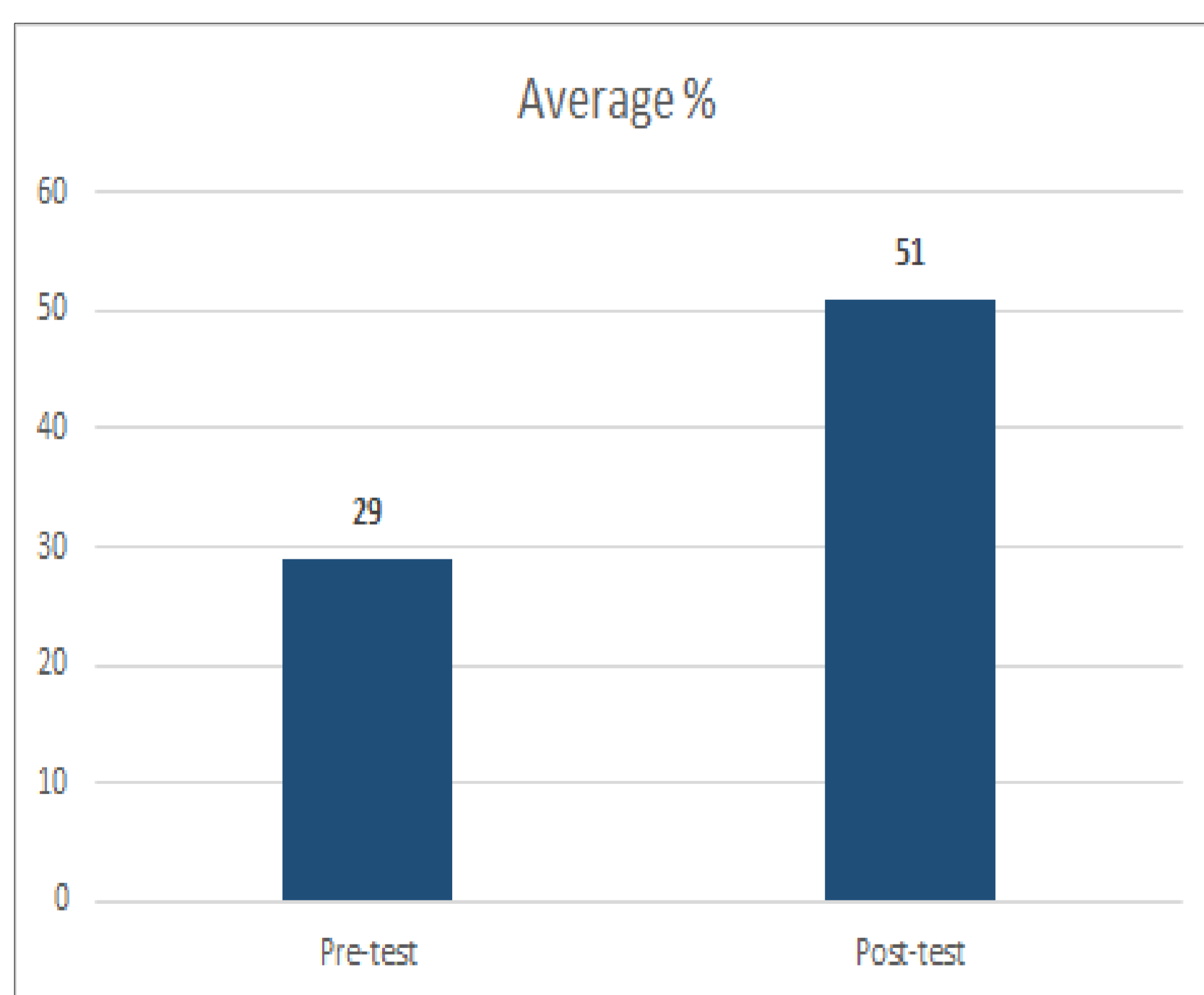


Figure 1: Percentage of correct answers on pre- and post-test results (n=47)

The compared results showed an increase of over 20% in the test scores.

## LIMITATIONS

- 1) As the pre-test and post-test were identical, test validity could be questioned, since the students were already familiar with the test items. However, in order to reduce this effect, students did not receive any feedback on their performance on the pre-test.
- 2) Our sample size of 47 students can be considered as relatively small as it represented only around 60% of students enrolled on the course.

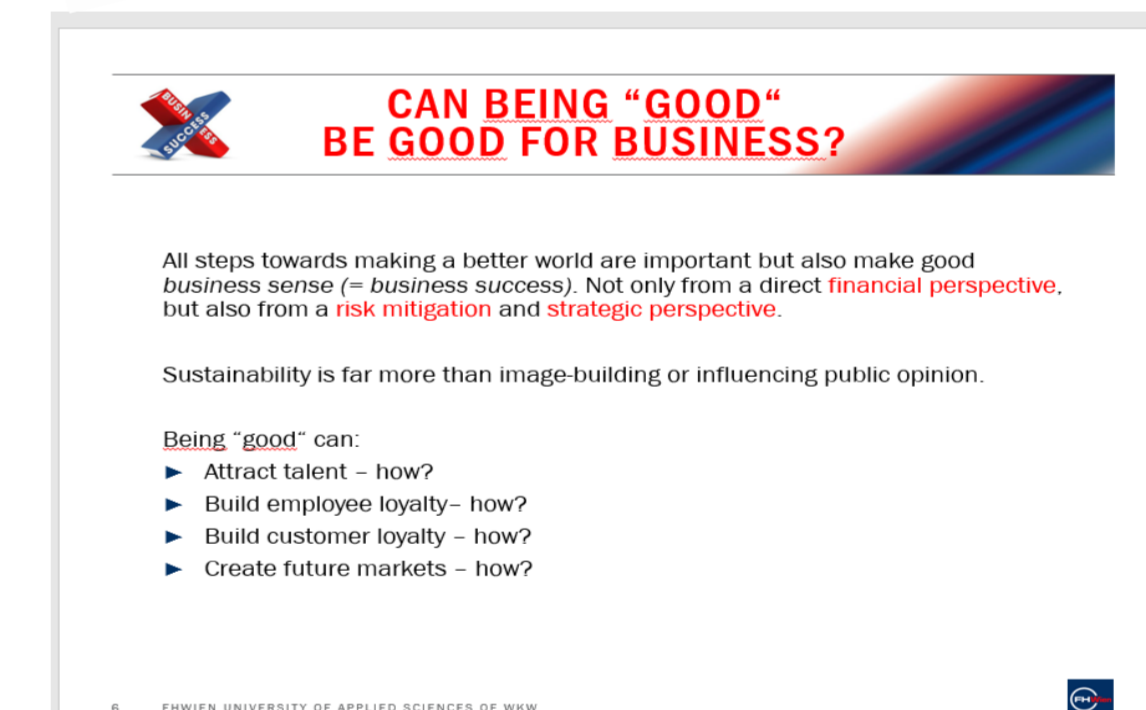


Illustration 2: Examples of learning activities

## CONCLUSION

Due to the very encouraging results of this action research project, it was decided to roll out the piloted learning activities in all first-year Business English courses of our BA programs.

## REFERENCES

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\* <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>