

Effects Of Collocation Vocabulary Instruction On English Writing Ability Of Iraqi High School Students

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Abstract

This paper investigates how Iraqi high school students' English writing ability is affected by instruction in collocation vocabulary. Emphasizing the part of lexical chunks in fluent and accurate language production, it uses a theoretical framework based on Communicative Competence Theory, the Lexical Approach, and Usage-Based Cognitive Linguistics. Based on recent empirical research and critical literature, the study contends that explicit and corpus-based teaching of lexical collocations greatly improves the writing fluency, coherence, and lexical appropriateness of EFL students. Iraqi students, especially, find unnatural word combinations difficult because of L1 interference and the lack of exposure to genuine English. The results show that methodical collocation-focused teaching, can significantly raise students' writing quality. The paper ends with suggestions for including collocation teaching into assessment methods, teacher training, and course content to assist long-term language development in EFL settings.

Keywords: (Collocation Vocabulary, Theoretical framework, EFL students).

تأثير تدريس مفردات التراكيب على قدرة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية العراقية

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المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة البحثية في كيفية تأثير قدرة طلاب المرحلة الثانوية العراقية على الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بتدريس مفردات التلازم اللفظي. وتؤكد الدراسة على دور المجموعات المعجمية في إنتاج لغة سلسة ودقيقة، وتستخدم إطاراً نظرياً قائماً على نظرية الكفاءة التواصلية، والنهج المعجمي، واللغويات المعرفية القائمة على الاستخدام. واستناداً إلى أبحاث تجريبية حديثة وأدبيات نقدية، تؤكد الدراسة أن التدريس الصريح والقائم على مجموعة من المتلازمات اللفظية يحسن بشكل كبير طلاقة الكتابة، وتماسكها، وملاءمتها المعجمية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ويجد الطلاب العراقيون، على وجه الخصوص، صعوبة في تكوين تركيبات لفظية غير طبيعية بسبب تداخل اللغة الأولى وقلة التعرض للغة الإنجليزية الأصيلة. وتُظهر النتائج أن التدريس المنهجي الذي يركز على التلازم اللفظي، يمكن أن يحسن بشكل كبير من جودة كتابة الطلاب. وتختتم الدراسة البحثية باقتراحات لإدراج تدريس التلازم اللفظي في أساليب التقييم، وتدريب المعلمين، ومحتوى المقررات الدراسية، للمساعدة في تطوير اللغة على المدى الطويل في بيئات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (مفردات التراكيب، الإطار النظري، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية)

introduction

In the whole sides of (EFL) education, vocabulary acquisition transcends the simple comprehension of individual words to include the mastery of word combinations, referred to as collocations. Collocations, habitual combinations of words such as "make a decision" or "strong coffee," are essential for attaining native-like fluency and precision in language usage. Iraqi high school students face considerable challenges in achieving

proficiency in English writing, primarily due to restricted exposure to authentic language use and inadequate focus on collocational competence.

Research highlights the essential function of collocations in differentiating native from non-native speakers, as well as proficient from less proficient writers. According to Zhang (1993), college students whose writing is better informed by their knowledge of English collocations are more likely to achieve proficiency in writing. Because Arabic language learners often translate phrases directly from their native language, leading to unnatural or incorrect combinations in English, Mahmoud (2005) observed that collocation errors in Arabic language learners of English often originate from first language interference.

The findings suggest that EFL students may face challenges in developing their writing skills due to a lack of knowledge about collocations. Studies showing the effects of collocational competence on different language abilities highlight the significance of this competency.

explicit instruction in collocations greatly improved the writing performance of Iranian EFL students.

collocations, and the efficacy of teaching interventions meant to improve their collocational knowledge are all addressed in this literature review.

Significance of Collocational Competence in EFL Writing

fluent, and contextually relevant sentences. This ability is the ability to combine words in ways that native speakers would expect, such "make a decision" instead of "do a decision." Especially in productive skills like writing, the ability in such combinations is often regarded as a benchmark of advanced language competence.

The disparity in instruction can be ascribed partially to curricular constraints and partially to teacher readiness. Educators may lack sufficient training in effectively teaching collocations, and textbooks may not offer adequate collocational input. Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence that explicit instruction and contextual practice of collocations lead to substantial improvements in learners. Gitsaki (1999) discovered that Greek learners of English who received targeted collocation instruction excelled in writing tasks compared to their peers, especially regarding lexical richness and idiomatic expression.

Moreover, learners articulate a demand for enhanced exposure to authentic word combinations. A recent study by Bui (2021) revealed that EFL students frequently experienced uncertainty regarding word combinations in English and valued exercises that enhanced their ability to identify and utilize collocations in authentic contexts. The study determined that collocational competence is a fundamental aspect of vocabulary instruction, rather than a sophisticated or discretionary element.

Insufficient collocational competence is especially clear in academic and professional writing since incorrect collocation may produce unclear and coherent phrasing that compromises clarity and coherence. According to Tang (2007), even skilled students with strong grammar and vocabulary struggle to write persuasively if they lack a thorough knowledge of collocations, especially those common in academic discourse.

Rather than a marginal skill, the research strongly supports that collocational competence is a basic component of writing proficiency in EFL settings. It affects the fluency, accuracy, and naturalness with which students express ideas, therefore directly affecting the perceived quality of their writing. Due to its significance, EFL curricula especially in nations such as Iraq ought to incorporate explicit and contextualized instruction in collocations to enhance students' proficiency in effective written communication.

Challenges Faced by Iraqi EFL Learners

Iraqi EFL learners encounter specific challenges in acquiring English collocations, often due to the influence of their native language, Arabic. Negative transfer causes mistakes in collocation use as students might literally translate phrases from Arabic to English, therefore producing unnatural pairings. Although they had a good grasp of syntax and vocabulary, advanced Iraqi EFL students often misused collocations especially those involving verbs of action, adjectives, and nouns according to a study on their collocational competence.

Implications for EFL Instruction in Iraq

In the Iraqi setting, this means changing courses to set aside organized time for teaching collocations as essential parts of vocabulary classes instead of regarding them as peripheral or advanced characteristics. Teachers can enable students to internalize these word combinations more effectively by including collocation-oriented exercises into reading, writing, and speaking tasks.

Furthermore, it is very important to provide Iraqi EFL teachers with the pedagogical tools and training required to properly teach collocations. Many English teachers in Iraq, especially those in remote or under-resourced areas, have little exposure to current approaches and may not have the language awareness required to find and clarify collocations in genuine texts. Hence, teacher training courses and in-service seminars should stress lexical strategies, collocational analysis, and the application of corpora or student-friendly concordancing tools like COCA or Sketch Engine. Boers and Lindstromberg's (2012) study backs up the use of corpora in language teaching by revealing that students who came into contact with corpus-informed teaching resources had much greater lexical retention and writing use.

Moreover, textbooks and teaching resources utilized in Iraqi high schools have to be reworked or augmented with material rich in collocation. Current textbooks seldom methodically emphasize collocations, therefore contributing to students' underexposure to natural language patterns.

Materials developers should choose and show high-frequency collocations in relevant contexts based on corpus linguistics results. Nation (2013) claims that giving high-frequency word combinations top priority greatly increases students' lexical fluency and writing ability. Including activities concentrating on collocations like matching, cloze exercises, sentence-completion assignments, and error correction can enable students to see, practice, and finally internalize these structures.

Another meaning has to do with testing. With little regard to lexical appropriateness or collocational use, EFL assessment in Iraqi schools now emphasizes grammatical correctness and vocabulary breadth. Changing assessment rubrics to incorporate indicators of collocational accuracy and fluency would motivate both students and teachers to give this ability top priority. Studies have shown that students frequently ignore collocations just because they are not needed to show this knowledge in formal tests (Nesselhauf, 2003). Teachers can encourage a more communicative and usage-oriented approach to writing instruction by including collocation-focused criteria into writing tests.

Finally, it is absolutely important to promote student autonomy and increase metalinguistic awareness of collocations. Through thorough reading, personal vocabulary notebooks, and the use of mobile apps or websites devoted to lexical chunks, Iraqi students should be motivated to investigate collocations on their own. According to Benson and Chik (2011), digital means of autonomous collocation learning improves long-

term retention and student confidence. Encouraging students to interact with genuine English texts e.g., short stories, articles, blogs can help them to be more exposed to natural collocation use, therefore supporting classroom teaching.

All things considered, the empirical results on collocation teaching suggest a lexical driven and context-sensitive model reorientation of EFL pedagogy in Iraq. Including clear collocation instruction into the curriculum, teacher training, assessment design, and learning resources could greatly improve students' writing quality and general language competency. Embracing these developments will help Iraqi EFL education to more closely match world standards and enable students to use English with more accuracy, fluency, and confidence.

Conclusion

Collocational competence plays a vital role in the development of writing proficiency among EFL learners. Iraqi students face unique challenges in mastering English collocations due to negative language transfer and limited exposure to authentic language use.

Theoretical Framework

In this framework, collocational competence falls under both grammatical and discourse competence. It lets students not only build syntactically accurate sentences but also make sure their expressions are culturally and pragmatically suitable. For example, although a student might write a

grammatically correct phrase like "He did a mistake," it lacks communicative adequacy because of collocational inaccuracy. Thus, improving higher-order communicative competence depends on promoting collocational awareness (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Originally suggested by Lewis (1993, 2000), The Lexical Approach is the second main framework; it emphasizes lexis specifically, lexical chunks and collocations over grammar in language teaching. According to Lewis, native speakers use prefabricated lexical units rather than individual words or grammatical structures to make up language. From this perspective, collocations are basic building blocks of fluent writing and speech. The educational consequence is that students have to be exposed to and practice high-frequency word combinations to internalize them. Studies based on the Lexical Approach have revealed that students who pick up these lexical chunks are more likely to create native-like writing and show more lexical accuracy and fluency (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012).

The third pillar of the theoretical framework of this work is Usage-Based Cognitive Linguistics, which includes theories like Construction Grammar and emergentist models of language acquisition (Bybee, 2006; Ellis, 2002). These theories hold that language knowledge is developed by means of consistent exposure to meaningful input and is formed by frequency and use patterns. From this angle, collocational competence develops as students come across, process, and keep stored in their mental lexicon consistent word combinations. Repeated use of high-

frequency collocations makes them automatic, therefore lowering cognitive load during language production and enhancing fluency. EFL teaching should therefore give high-exposure, contextualized input top priority to help the proceduralization of collocational knowledge (Ellis, 2008). Together, these theoretical points of view support the main function of collocation teaching in EFL writing instruction. They recommend that teachers go beyond teaching vocabulary as separate units and use instructional strategies stressing the acquisition of regular and meaningful lexical combinations if they are to help Iraqi students' writing competency. This is consistent with studies showing how clear collocation teaching greatly improves students' writing fluency, coherence, and general competence (Nation, 2013; Webb & Kagimoto, 2011).

Pedagogical Implications

With real language use, therefore promoting a better knowledge and memory of collocational patterns.

Implications for EFL Teaching

One important consequence is the pedagogical change from lexical chunk-based instruction to separate vocabulary teaching. The Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) emphasizes the need of teaching language as often occurring lexical combinations. Teachers should therefore go beyond teaching the meanings of single words and concentrate on showing collocations in context.

Moreover, the findings of Keshavarz and Taherian (2018) and Rahimi and Momeni (2012) on explicit instruction in collocations suggest that EFL teachers should include organized, awareness-raising exercises in their lesson plans. These could be production-based writing assignments using target collocations, matching exercises, gap-filling with collocational alternatives, and consciousness-raising activities. Collocations should also be reinforced by means of repeated and contextualized exposure, therefore enabling students to convert receptive knowledge into active language use.

Another important consequence relates to the application of corpus tools and data-driven learning (DDL). Corpus-based teaching gives students empirical proof of genuine use patterns and lets them see how collocations operate in actual texts. To show how some word combinations repeat often, teachers can use simple user-friendly corpora like the British National Corpus (BNC) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Though corpus-based teaching calls for some digital literacy, its advantages in promoting student autonomy, awareness, and analytical thinking are generally acknowledged in applied linguistics (Boulton, 2010; Lu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, EFL instructors have to be sufficiently qualified to spot and clarify collocational mistakes. Often, students make collocational mistakes caused by bad L1 transfer for example, translating Arabic phrases straight into English. Programs of pre-service education and in-service teacher

training should thus include courses on lexical competence, especially regarding how collocations are taught, learned, and evaluated. Equipping teachers with information on lexical priming, chunking, and word collocation databases will help to improve classroom instruction.

Examining methods of assessment is also justified. While collocational use is seldom discussed, conventional EFL tests tend to give grammatical correctness and vocabulary breadth top priority. Writing rubrics should have terms connected to lexical appropriateness and collocation use since collocational competence is so important in generating natural and fluent writing.

This shift can motivate students and instructors to give collocational learning top priority and support long-term retention and application.

At last, there are consequences for textbook design and material creation. Many Iraqi schools' EFL textbooks now lack clear emphasis on collocations. Collocation-rich texts and exercises that reflect real-life communication and genres should be included by materials developers and curriculum planners. Using extra reading texts, conversations, and vocabulary exercises based on learner corpora and online collocation dictionaries e.g., Ozdic, Just The Word teachers can augment current resources.

Ultimately, teaching collocations should be viewed as a necessary part of vocabulary instruction rather than a sophisticated or optional skill.

Effective EFL teaching should provide students the tools to identify, process, and create collocations in real written settings. Using this strategy in Iraqi high schools could greatly improve students' fluency, writing correctness, and general communication skills.

Conclusion

This paper looks at how collocational vocabulary teaching helps Iraqi high school students improve their English writing skills in a more general EFL setting. The study emphasizes that collocational competence is a fundamental component of fluent, correct, and natural language production by drawing on communicative competence theory, the lexical approach, and usage-based cognitive linguistics.

The critical study and literature review show that collocations greatly enhance lexical sophistication, coherence, and writing fluency of students. Consistent empirical research shows that explicit teaching and data-driven learning strategies help students internalize regular lexical combinations. Furthermore, the results show that Iraqi EFL students frequently battle with collocation use because of their limited exposure, first language interference, and absence of focused teaching techniques.

Theoretical and empirical points of view converge to imply that the systematic integration of collocation instruction into EFL pedagogy is essential. Not only on grammatical knowledge but also on students' capacity to use real and contextually relevant lexical combinations shapes

effective writing development. Therefore, Iraqi high school students' writing skill development depends on curriculum change, teacher training, and a more vibrant, lexically rich language teaching.

Recommendations

Several obvious and useful suggestions for enhancing EFL writing instruction in Iraq by means of collocation teaching may be derived from the results of this study.

First, collocations should be explicitly included into the EFL syllabus instead of being regarded as optional or advanced material. Especially with regard to verb-noun and adjective-noun combinations often found in writing, students must be exposed to high-frequency collocations in context.

Teachers should first use clear teaching strategies to enable their students identify and properly use collocations.

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