

*Arab EFL Learners' Collocational Competence:
Errors, Challenges, and Teaching Implications*

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Abstract

This study investigates the collocational competence of Arab foundation program students, addressing the lack of systematic analysis of ESL learners' lexical and collocation errors. Understanding how ESL learners construct fixed expressions is crucial for achieving native-like proficiency, a key goal of foundation programs. A cohort of 38 foundation learners took a 60-item collocation test focused on verb-noun and adjective-noun structures to assess their collocational competence and identify specific errors. Results indicated that students were more familiar with verb-noun combinations but struggled with adjective-noun collocations. A significant disparity in scores between these two structures was observed. The primary challenges stemmed from the influence of the learners' first language (L1), particularly in their selection of collocates, as many answers reflected their inability to differentiate between synonyms absent in their L1. Additionally, non-exposure to certain collocations and the degree of L1-L2 differences were highlighted in surveys. Instructor interviews corroborated these findings, emphasizing the students' limited exposure to collocations and insufficient English proficiency, alongside L1-L2 discrepancies. The thematic analysis revealed that enhancing students' exposure to collocations and addressing their linguistic challenges could improve their performance. Overall, the study's findings contribute valuable insights for language pedagogy, suggesting effective strategies for teaching collocations to ESL learners.

Keywords: Collocational Competence, EFL Learners, Collocations, Language Learning, Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

Proficient use of collocations is seen as a defining characteristic of advanced English fluency and communicative competence for language learners. A student's collocational knowledge plays a pivotal role in determining their academic and professional success and acquiring vocabulary in phrasal units, rather than in isolation, may accelerate the second language learning process. Mastery of collocations is viewed as a critical indicator of overall language proficiency and a strong predictor of positive outcomes for students seeking to reach a higher level of English language skills (Hill, 2000; Howarth, 1998).

The investigation of EFL learners' interlanguage could greatly contribute to the teaching of English as a foreign language and the development of teaching materials. Despite the importance of collocations in language proficiency, collocational competence is one of the most neglected areas in language studies, especially second language teaching. Acquiring collocations is quite challenging and problematic to non-native English speakers. Nevertheless, it is widely noticed that collocations are still underestimated in different EFL contexts, which may hinder English learners' fluency in speaking and writing.

The present study aimed to raise awareness of the most common errors and challenges Arabs face when they learn collocations. In addition, this study investigated the collocational competence and knowledge of English learners with Arabic L1 backgrounds and different proficiency levels. The first part of the study deals with the types of collocations and the most common errors Arabs face while using collocations. The study then presents the challenges Arab students and EFL instructors face while teaching collocations. The last part includes a number of recommended activities that English language instructors can implement in their classroom. The paper is thus helpful to both researchers and language instructors as it sheds light on pertinent areas for research and recommends useful activities for teaching collocations.

Definition and Types of Collocations

The term collocation has been defined by different scholars. Collocation was first introduced by Firth (1957) to refer to a combination of words associated with each other. Meanwhile, Sinclair (1991) defines collocations as "items that occur physically together or have strong chances of being mentioned together". Furthermore, according to Lewis (1997), collocation was defined as "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency". In addition, collocation is defined as a predictable combination of two or more words which produce a specific meaning (Cowie, 1999; Hill, 2000). Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997) categorized collocations into two types which are grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. Grammatical collocations consist of a dominant word and a grammatical word, whereas lexical collocations do not include function words. For this study, lexical collocations which are categorized into six types were used: adverb + adjective; adjective + noun; noun + noun; noun + verb; verb + noun; verb + adverb.

Although it may not be common to use these combinations of words, it will be highly effective in conveying messages in a more appropriate sense. Even though it is possible to use other word combinations, understanding collocations will definitely help English learners improve their fluency and communication skills (Hill, 2000).

Challenges in Using Collocations

Several past studies investigating second language acquisition of English collocations have shown that EFL learners' problems are due to different factors (Fan, 2009; Huang, 2001). One of the major reasons for collocational errors is the native language influence (Bahns, 1993; Koya, 2003; Nesselhauf, 2003). Learners' native language (L1) has an impact on their subsequent learning of L2 collocations (Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005). Learners' reliance upon their L1 collocational knowledge may represent their assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between L1 and L2 collocational choices. Fortunately, where there is an exactly identical match between collocations in both languages, transfer from learners' mother tongue could result in positive, satisfactory production (Ellis, 2008). For instance, the combination in reality appears to be possible in both Arabic and English. As a result, it is very likely that Arab learners will become successful in transferring this particular collocation from L1 Arabic to L2 English. On the other hand, some researchers have also found that learners depend on certain learning strategies, such as synonyms (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Mongkolchai, 2008), repetition and overgeneralization (Granger, 1998; Howarth, 1998).

Earlier Studies on Collocations

Mahmoud (2005), revealed in his study that EFL learners produce 'unnatural' word combinations. 61% of the incorrect combinations could be due to negative transfer from Arabic. The fact that post-intermediate and advanced students of EFL have a relatively large stock of vocabulary might have motivated interlingual transfer in the belief that it would be easy to find the EFL equivalents of the Arabic lexical items.

In a study conducted by Shammass (2013) on the assessment of comprehension and production of collocations of MA students from four Arab universities, the results of the study showed that the overall performance of the students was unsatisfactory and below what was expected from MA students. Four factors were mentioned that influenced students' weakness in understanding and using collocation which are: 1) the lack of knowledge of the collocations in question 2) shortage of dictionaries that include collocations 3) lack of consciousness of the role of collocations in expressing meaning as intended in context and 4) lack of concentration on collocations in EFL classes at Arab universities.

Another study by El Dakhs (2015) examined the collocational competence of Arab undergraduate students who study English in a foreign language (EFL) environment. The study focused on lexical collocations. The study showed that the collocational competence of learners was notably unsatisfactory despite the fact that English is the medium of instruction at the University. It was also found that collocational competence improves with increased language exposure but at a slow rate.

Likewise, Alsulayyi (2015) analyzed grammatical collocations through students' essays to examine their production of collocations. Examining the writing of 10 Saudi undergraduate students majoring in English, he found out that the learners studying in the United Kingdom produced fewer grammatical collocation errors than those studying in Saudi Arabia despite their similar IELTS score ranging between 5.5 and 6.

Consequently, Habtoor (2019) examined the familiarity of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Najran University with English collocations and the strategies being used when translating them into Arabic. The participants' familiarity with English collocations was

measured by means of a two-part test adopted from Gyllstad (2007). The study concluded that EFL learners' knowledge of collocations was unsatisfactory and below what was expected from them as English language major students. The results of the Pearson correlation test indicated a positive relationship between the learners' familiarity with English collocations and their ability to translate them into Arabic using different translation strategies.

Similarly, Osman (2019) investigated English language postgraduates' knowledge in using English collocations by examining M.A English language students' awareness of using English collocations in both lexical and grammatical forms. The descriptive analysis showed that M.A students were not sufficiently aware of using English collocations because university syllabi do not sufficiently cover English collocation. It was recommended that collocations should be integrated in university syllabus to raise students' awareness in using collocations and that students should practice collocations seriously to master the language.

Collocational Competence and English Proficiency

Several studies linked students' collocational competence with proficiency levels. Hua and Azmi's (2021) study supports this idea and exclaims that high language proficiency level can be reflected through collocational competence. In the same way, Bagherzadeh Hosseini and Akbarian (2007) whose study delved on language proficiency and collocational competence underscored that there is a correlation between a student's general proficiency and collocational competence. Furthermore, he mentioned that collocational knowledge is 25% of a person's general proficiency, exclaiming that rest include "vocabulary knowledge, grammatical knowledge, knowledge of discourse, an understanding of how texts are organized, skill in reading, writing, etc., and fluency" (p. 15).

Most of the previous research studies mentioned above focused on one single group of EFL learners, particularly those with high proficiency. Hardly do such studies reflect a true picture of how learners' collocational knowledge has been developed through time. To put it another way, there has been little research to date examining learners' errors in the total interlanguage system with respect to collocation learning. It is for this reason that the present study was undertaken to bridge the gap, i.e. to scrutinize the collocational competence of high-proficiency and low-proficiency Arab learners of English.

Statement of the Problem

Given the EFL context in Saudi Arabia and the importance of collocations in achieving native-like proficiency among students, this research aimed to investigate the overall collocational competence of Arab foundation students in Saudi Arabia. This objective was further explained and explored through the following questions:

- 1) What are the lexical errors that students make?
- 2) What are the challenges that students encounter when they form collocations?
- 3) What is the overall collocational competence of the students?
- 4) Does students' collocational competence progress with proficiency?

Significance of the Study

Results of this study shed light on the existing challenges that Arab ESL learners face as they use collocations. Furthermore, this study shall help instructors in designing activities that

help students strengthen their collocational competence, as having strong collocational competence is highly associated with native-like proficiency. In this way, students' oral and written skills using the target language may be improved (Alotaibi & Alotaibi, 2015). Lastly, this study will benefit syllabus designers because this research will guide them on the extent in which collocations have to be included in the syllabus and the frequency in which collocations have to be introduced in an English course.

Method

Research Design

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative designs. For the qualitative end, this research used descriptive qualitative research as reflected through the thematic analysis that was used to get the recurring patterns from both the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

For the quantitative end of the research, statistical treatment was used to interpret the scores from the collocational test. Students were given a 60-item test in order to determine their overall collocational competence. Scores of the test underwent statistical treatment to identify whether the students' collocational thresholds are acceptable.

Participants

The participants of the study were a total of 38 foundation program students from the Effat English Academy. These students were chosen through purposive sampling. The criteria in choosing the students were based on the following: 1) students should be part of the foundation program 2) students should be studying collocations in their respective levels 3) students should be at least from the intermediate level. Students who are part of the foundation program undergo intensive English courses in order to improve their language skills prior to entering college. Of the 38 chosen students, 19 were upper intermediate level students, while 19 were intermediate level students. The students' levels were determined by the university's placement test, Cambridge's Linguaskill test.

Data Collection

The study used the triangulation method to collect data in order to cover many aspects, such as tests, interviews, and surveys to arrive at more grounded answers. The primary data for this study came from the Collex and Collmatch collocation tests which were adopted from Gyllstad (2005). A total of 60-items were administered to students, 20 items from the Collex test, while the other 20 items were taken from the Collmatch test. 12 items prompted students to combine words to form collocations, whereas the remaining 8 items were part of a fill-in-the blank test.

The test was administered once since the aim of this research was to know the collocational competence of students along with the challenges they face as they use collocations. The instructors who proctored the students during the administration of the test were the same instructors who were interviewed.

The secondary data came from the survey that was administered to students. The survey focused on the challenges that students face when dealing with collocations and the

frequency of their exposure to collocations which can serve as support to the results of their collocation test. The survey was administered a day after the test, so students can have ample time to reflect about their overall performance and feedback about the test.

Meanwhile, additional secondary data in the form semi-structured interview was administered to the instructors handling the students. Gathered data from the interview supported the findings of the test. In addition, instructors' perspective proved important in improving pedagogical practices and syllabus revisions that would benefit students in the future. The semi-structured interview was done two days after the administration of the test to give instructors time to gather their thoughts in terms of teaching collocations in the classroom context and their observations while proctoring the students during the administration of the test.

Data Analysis

To arrive at a more comprehensive answer to each of the research questions raised in the earlier section of this paper, the data analysis will comprise four stages as shown in Figure 1. The first stage of data analysis focused on the statistical treatment of the collocation test scores. Since the tests were administered to two different levels, B1 and B2 respectively, unpaired t-Test was utilized to compare the means from the two levels. Meanwhile, taking the average of both levels would prove sufficient to know the collocational competence of the students. The second stage deals with the identification of common errors made by the students when they took the collocation test. This proved effective in determining the words they chose to pair with a collocate. In addition, examining students' choice of collocates gave justification as to how their L1 influences their word choice in L2. The third stage centered on the analysis of the raw data from the survey guided by the Likert scale. Finally, in order to support the results of the test and students' answers from the survey, qualitative coding was used to get the common patterns or themes present in the interview transcripts of the instructors teaching these students.

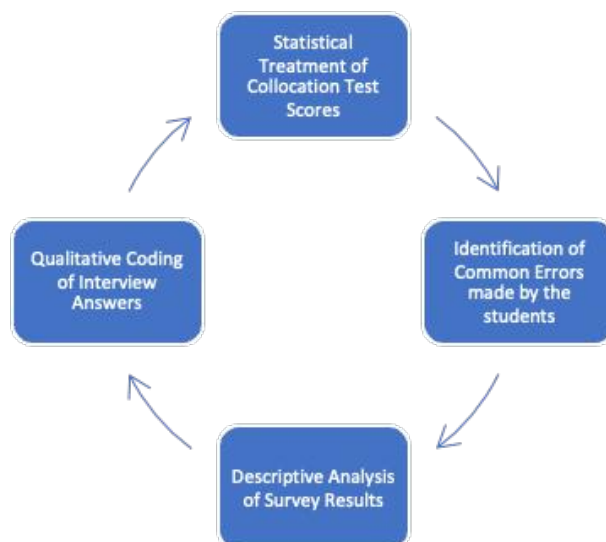


Figure 1: Stages of Data Analysis

Results

1. What are the lexical collocation errors that students make?

Analysis of the collocation test revealed that students had difficulties with lexical collocations. For the specific collocation structures, students were only tested with verb+noun structure in the form of Collex and Collmatch tests, and adjective+noun structure in the form of a matching type test and fill-in-the-blank test. Based on the overall performance of the students in the test, they scored higher in the verb+noun structure than in the adjective+noun structure. Several mistakes were observed in the adjective+noun structure, hence students got the lowest scores in the matching type, which required them to pick a word from each box to form collocations.

To illustrate, Table 1 shows the common mistakes that students made when they formed the adjective+noun structure. Only the most frequent combinations were included in the table below.

Table 1: Common Lexical Errors of Students Test 3

Unusual Combinations (formed by the students)	Expected Combinations
effective version	effective treatment; online version
close issue	close relationship; global issue
high information	high standard; basic information
classic achievement	classic example; academic achievement
active relationship	active participation; close relationship

Looking at the common lexical errors made by students from Test 3, it can be seen that students chose inappropriate adjectives to pair with their preferred nouns. For instance, instead of combining the adjective “effective” with treatment, most students chose to pair it with the noun version. On the other hand, the adjective “close” was paired with the noun “issue” instead of pairing it with the adjective “global”. Another unusual pair of collocation that emerged from the test was “high information”. Although high is not used with information, students might have chosen this adjective to mean that the information is important. Classic achievement was also formed by a number of students. Classic from the options must be paired with example, while achievement should have been paired with academic. However, this unusual combination may be interpreted to mean a type of achievement that most people accomplish (e.g. finishing high school and obtaining a college diploma). Lastly, instead of forming “close relationship” some students answered “active relationship” which to them could mean in constant communication with a friend or a relative. Overall, occurrences of unusual collocation combinations were due to the fact that students needed to depend on their actual collocational knowledge unlike the Collex and Collmatch tests which already provided students with two collocations that they have to choose from.

Table 2: Common Lexical Errors of Students From Test 4

Unusual Combinations (formed by the students)	Expected Combinations
heavy tire	flat tire
flat coffee	instant coffee
fair insurance	medical insurance
fair traffic	heavy traffic

Unlike Test 3, which prompted students to choose an adjective and a noun to form a collocation, Test 4 only required students to choose an adjective to pair with an existing word in each number. Regardless, the students still faced difficulties choosing the correct collocates. These combinations are common in books, movies, and even everyday conversations, however, very few students got these expected combinations correctly.

2. What are the challenges that students encounter when they form collocations?

One of the major aims of this study is to identify the challenges that Arab EFL students face as they use collocations. Through the questionnaires administered, the participants mentioned five major challenges which are: 1) unfamiliarity to words 2) level of difficulty of word combinations 3) inability to use collocations in communication (writing and speaking) 4) correct combinations of collocates and 5) influence of L1 on L2.

Unfamiliarity to Words

Students' inability to recognize words was one of the recurring answers from the questionnaire. To be specific, S1 mentioned that "I don't know a lot of words", while S37 wrote "I don't know which words to use." Students unfamiliarity with words could be heavily influenced by their limited vocabulary repertoire which is vital in using collocations. Limited vocabulary leads to poor usage and understanding of collocations. In addition, students' inability to understand word meanings contributed to their difficulty in using collocations. Several students mentioned that they do not understand the meaning of words, hence their poor usage of collocations.

Difficulty of Collocations

Another challenge that emerged from the thematic analysis of the questionnaire was the level of difficulty that students encounter when dealing with collocations. This finding is parallel to a number of studies done previously which stated that students found word combinations extremely challenging and confusing. S8, for instance, said that collocations are "difficult and we must understand it more". Another participant, S30, wrote "it is very difficult to understand".

Inability to Use Collocations in Communication (Writing and Speaking)

The third challenge of using collocations in sentences is related to the students' productive and receptive knowledge of lexical collocations. This answer is supported by the result of the collocation test. Students scored better when they were given two collocations and only had to choose which the appropriate combination was. However, students struggled with the tests which required them to combine words themselves. Given their difficulty in combining possible word combinations, it will significantly impact their ability to produce collocations

on their own when writing sentences. In addition, aside from students having difficulty producing collocations when they write, they also struggle using collocations when communicating with others. In fact, several students mentioned that even pronouncing collocations was a problem for them.

Correct Combinations of Collocations

Correct combinations of collocations require good proficiency in English. Hence, collocational competence, as revealed by recent studies, has been linked to English proficiency. With the current study, students mentioned that one of the challenges they face is the way words collocate and added that it was difficult for them to choose which word is the correct collocate of another. This was due to not having been exposed to many activities in class and not having enough avenues for exposing oneself to practice using collocations, as some students mentioned that they rarely use collocations because their family and friends always speak Arabic.

Influence of Students' of L1 on Their L2

Another major challenge that students face is the influence of their first language on their ability to understand the meaning of words. Through the questionnaire administered, students mentioned that it was difficult for them to figure out the meanings of the words and their combinations because there are certain words in English that do not have a direct counterpart in Arabic. Furthermore, the students' L1 was revealed to have influenced their ability to choose the correct words because Arabic, unlike English, does not use several synonyms. Hence, words like “fast” and “quick” only have one counterpart in Arabic which is “سريع”.

3. What is the overall collocational competence of the students?

Collocational competence has always been deemed important in improving one's language skills, as one's ability to use collocations and understand collocations promise not only native-like proficiency level, but also a more effective way to communicate with others. After a rigorous analysis of the data, the study reveals that students from both levels have poor collocational competence. In fact, the overall performance of the students was below average. Table 3 shows a detailed representation of the average of both levels in each of the tests.

Table 3: Overall Performance of All Students

Participants	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Overall Average
L3 and L4 students	48%	58%	25%	42%	45%

Looking at the overall performance of all the students across all tests, the highest average obtained was 58% from the Collmatch test, followed by 48% from the Collex test, then 42% from the fill-in-the-blank test, and 25% from combining collocates. In a more detailed representation, Table 4 and 5 show students' performance in each test including the percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Table 4: Detailed Performance of Students in Tests 1 and 2

Participants	Collex			Collmatch			Overall Percentage
	P	M	SD	P	M	SD	
L3 and L4 students	48%	10	2.5618	58%	12	1.929	53%

Table 5: Detailed Performance of Students in Tests 3 and 4

Participants	Matching type			Fill in the blank type			Overall Percentage
	P	M	SD	P	M	SD	
L3 and L4 students	25%	3	1.6214	42%	3	1.3677	33.5%

Based on Tables 2 and 3, it can be seen that among the tests administered, the highest performance was observed from the Collmatch test with an overall performance of 58% and a mean of 12 out of 20, which is still below average. For the Collex test, students' overall performance was 48% with a mean of 10 out of 20. 2 points lower than the Collmatch test which indicates below average as well. However, students' performance in both tests 1 and 2 may be considered better when compared to their performance in tests 3 and 4, which required them to form the most appropriate collocations from boxes containing adjectives and nouns and fill in the correct collocates by choosing an adjective from a series of adjectives inside a box, respectively. These results show that the collocational competence of the students is below average because they performed better in tests (1 and 2) which already provided them with collocations and all they had to do was to choose which was the appropriate one. Meanwhile, in tests that required students to form collocations on their own, they got much lower scores that indicate the students' difficulty using collocations on their own. Hence, matching type test and fill-in-the-blank type test proved to be very challenging.

4. Does students' collocational competence progress with proficiency?

As earlier studies revealed, collocational competence was strongly linked with proficiency. Based on the data that underwent statistical treatment, the findings reveal that the collocational competence of students from levels three and four do not progress with proficiency. Table 6 shows the overall performance of each group in the collocation test.

Table 6: Overall Performance of Students Based on Proficiency Levels

Level of Students	Overall Average
Intermediate Students (L3)	48%
Upper Intermediate Students (L4)	43%

Looking closely at the overall performance, L3 students performed better when considering the overall average of the tests. Ideally, L3 students' entry score is 140, while L4 students' entry score is 155. With the big difference between the two entry scores, it was expected that L4 students should score higher than L3. However, the difference between the two levels was not that much to be able to show a significant difference between their performances using the t-test.

Table 7: t-Test Result Comparing the Performance of L4 and L3 Students

Participants	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	T-Value	Critical Value
Intermediate Students (L3)	28.5789	19.6122	4.4286	1.7063	2.028
Upper Intermediate Students (L4)	26	23.7895	4.8774		

Based on the results of the t-test in Table 7, the calculated t-value is lower than the critical value ($1.7063 < 2.028$), hence the means are not significantly different. To put simply, the means of Group 1 and Group 2 are not significantly different at $p < 0.05$. This finding reveals that given the variation in terms of levels and target CEFR scores, there is no significant difference between how both levels performed in the collocation test. This result opposes results of some earlier studies that show students' collocational competence progresses with their proficiency level.

Discussion

Developing students' collocational competence is crucial for language learning, as exposure to recurring word combinations significantly impacts second language acquisition (Snoder, 2019). This study addressed the challenges English learners face, emphasizing the need to help them achieve native-like proficiency.

Analysis revealed that students were more familiar with verb+noun combinations, supported by significant score differences in the Collex and Collmatch tests. This finding aligns with El-Dakh's (2015) study, which showed that students demonstrated less command of adjective+noun patterns. Errors in unusual word combinations were common, particularly due to students' reliance on their mother tongue when selecting adjectives for nouns. Habtoor (2019) noted that such unnatural combinations often result from this reliance. Instructor interviews confirmed that confusion over synonyms was a major issue, particularly in reading and speaking contexts.

The study also identified several challenges students encounter with collocations, including unfamiliarity with words, difficulty with combinations, and the influence of their first language (L1) on their second language (L2) use. Students' vocabulary repertoire and exposure to correct collocations play significant roles in their understanding and usage, paralleling Shammass's (2013) findings regarding master's students' lack of awareness of collocation usage in context.

Collocations containing unfamiliar words hinder students' ability to distinguish correct combinations, impacting their overall proficiency. This aligns with Shammas's (2013) research on master's students and the claims of Farrokh (2012) and Zughoul (1991) that collocates vary by language, complicating comprehension for Arabic speakers.

Textbook limitations were also noted, as they often lack sufficient scaffolding and practice with collocations. Although they cover eight topics, many chapters provide only a few collocations, insufficient for enhancing students' lexical repertoire. Rogosic (2023) found considerable inconsistencies in the coverage of collocations across textbooks, echoing Suarez and Natal (2017) and Eid and Al-Jamal (2023)'s observations that single words are prioritized over collocations. Regarding the influence of L1, 56% of participants acknowledged that Arabic affects their collocational use. This aligns with Sun and Park (2023), who emphasized that L1 transfer can impede L2 collocational acquisition.

Overall, students' collocational competence was below average, with the highest average score of 12 out of 20 (58%) on the Collmatch test, indicating challenges with productive use compared to recognition. This reflects findings from El-Dakhs (2015) and Gaballa and Al-Khayri (2014), which noted poor collocational knowledge among Arab learners. Interestingly, while there was no direct link between collocational competence and proficiency, intermediate learners outperformed upper-intermediate peers, contrasting with studies suggesting advanced learners achieve near-native collocational use (Abdullah and Noor, 2013). Overall, the study supports Halim and Kuiper (2018), who found that students across proficiency levels struggle with producing appropriate multi-word units.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine foundation year students' collocation errors, investigate challenges that students face when using collocations, and identify the collocational competence. Findings reveal that students had difficulties with lexical collocations and scored unsatisfactorily in both tests. Between the verb+noun and adjective+noun structure, students scored better when tested the former. Having said this, the overall collocational performance of students was below average given the overall performance of 45% combining the results of upper intermediate and intermediate students. However, one key finding from this study is that the intermediate students scored better than the upper-intermediate ones. Looking deeply into the challenges that students face when dealing with collocations, unfamiliarity with words, difficulty of collocations, inability to use collocation in communication, correct combination of collocations, and the influence of L1 on L2 have emerged through the interviews and surveys conducted. These challenges affected the students' collocational competence and their ability to use collocations inside and outside the classroom setting, some of which support earlier studies. In this study, interestingly, the proficiency levels of the learners do not progress with their proficiency levels. The result of the t-test revealed that there is no significant difference between the means of both upper intermediate and intermediate students. Therefore, although there is a huge difference in their proficiency levels, their scores in both tests did not show any.

Recommendations

This study is limited to upper intermediate and intermediate students, focusing only on verb+noun and adjective+noun structures. Future research should include all proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced, to provide a fuller picture of Arab students' collocational

competence, encompassing both lexical and grammatical collocations. Additionally, exploring the impact of translanguaging on teaching collocations could enhance understanding, as pedagogical practices significantly influence students' development in this area.

Given the specific challenges identified, it's crucial to emphasize early exposure to collocations to raise awareness among students. The findings suggest a greater focus on developing collocational competence in language instruction, including direct teaching, bilingual glossaries in EFL textbooks, and bilingual collocation dictionaries.

Current textbooks often inadequately cover collocations, so more explicit, scaffolded teaching is necessary to address learners' specific challenges. This should include a broader range of collocational patterns and tackle issues like synonym confusion and first language reliance. Furthermore, collocation instruction should be tailored to proficiency levels, as intermediate learners sometimes outperform upper-intermediate students. Addressing both receptive and productive collocational knowledge is essential. Integrating these elements into language curricula could significantly enhance students' overall collocational competence.

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