RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPACT OF LEXICAL COLLOCATION COMPETENCE ON THE WRITTEN PERFORMANCE OF EFL LEARNERS

MONA MAGZOUB MOHAMMED[1], Dr. ALI MUHAMMAD ABDALLA[2], Dr. AMIR MOHAMMED ALBLOLY[3]

[1]Kassala University, Sudan (ommohammed.moneeb@gmail.com)
[2]Associate Professor of English Language, Red Sea University, Sudan (dr.aliabdalla56@gmail.com)
[3]Assistant Professor, University of Kassala, Sudan (alblolyamir83@gmail.com)

Dr. ALI MUHAMMAD ABDALLA

Dr. AMIR MOHAMMED ALBLOLY

ABSTRACT

This research article was mainly conducted to identify the impact of lexical collocation competence on EFL learners' written performance. To begin the investigation, (100) students majoring in English and linguistics at the University of Kassala (Faculty of education) were selected, and then were split equally into two groups; the first one included (50) students who studied in the 3rd year, and the second group included also (50) students studied in the 5th year. The two groups were regarded as one experimental group. Besides the experimental group, a random sample was selected whose number included (50) EFL university teachers with different teaching experience. The descriptive analytical, the experimental and the quantitative methods were used depending on two instruments to obtain the data of the study: The first tool was pre and post test tried out on the experimental group, and the second one was a questionnaire distributed to the university teachers to identify their attitudes and perceptions. The SPSS program was utilized in the analysis of the data which have revealed very significant and positive impact that the lexical collocation competence was capable of bringing about in the written performance of ELF learners in addition to promoting their command of learning the English language.

Key words: Lexical collocation competence, written performance, EFL learners

Introduction

One of the most important aspects of learning a language is learning the vocabulary of that language and its appropriate use .i.e. it is not possible to learn a language without its vocabulary. It is obvious that words do not have independent meanings. Every word gets some layers of meaning from "the set of other words in the same phrase or sentence." It has been discovered that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), despite having a large number of words in the second language (L2), are not fully capable of putting words together in a way that native speakers naturally do i.e. EFL learners lack collocation competence in L2. As such, it is natural to focus on the word as the primary unit when discussing vocabulary knowledge and that

dictionaries help to reinforce this focus. It is beyond doubt that knowing many words is an advantage for all language learners. However, certain learner categories need to attain native-like command of an L2.

To know a language you must know not only its individual words but also how they fit together." Thus, in order to be able to communicate effectively, in addition to knowing many words and their more frequent, core meanings, learners must also acquire knowledge about the combinatory potential of those words in relation to other words in the language.

Identifying the impact of the lexical collocation competence on the EFL learners' written performance will be the major purpose of this article in addition to achieving the following objectives:

1. Determining the problems that EFL learners experience in using collocation.
2. Finding out the causes of collocation problems use in English language learning.

Statement of the Problem

Collocations run through the whole of the English language. No piece of natural spoken or written English is totally free of collocations. They have recently received increased attention in applied linguistics studies; however, still relatively little is known about the way in which collocations are used by speakers of a foreign language. Thus, several researchers proposed that teachers should increase EFL learners' collocation knowledge through raising EFL learners' awareness of collocations. The present study attempts to identify the impact of lexical collocation competence on EFL learners' written performance.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The major objective of this study is to pinpoint the impact of lexical collocation competence in EFL learners' written performance. In order to pursue the purposes of this article, the following questions were phrased below:

1. To what extent the lexical collocation competence affects the written performance of EFL learners?

2. What are the most problematic categories of lexical collocation for EFL learners in writing?

In the light of the above questions, the two hypotheses were formulated. Hence, the statistical results of the study would either support or reject these hypotheses.

H1: Most EFL learners lack the knowledge of English lexical collocation.

H2: All categories of lexical collocations are equally problematic for EFL learners in their written performance.

Review of Related Literature

The nature of collocation begs an integrated multilevel description incorporating syntactic, semantic, lexical, and pragmatic criteria. That is why it is difficult to be captured in terms of one coherent linguistic theory; the researcher then needs to look at the different approaches that explain the habitual co-occurrence of words.

3 Various Definitions of Collocation and their Taxonomy

In recent years, one of the fields that have attracted increasing attention is phraseology, the study of word combinations or collocations. It is difficult to form a precise definition of collocations since the definitions are not clearly stated. Different scholars have tackled the concept in many different ways.

Nesselhauf, (2004) attributes the divergent use of the term 'collocation' to the fact that it has been used by researchers working in many different fields, and that the aims and methods of their investigations have governed the various definitions given. The term 'collocation' has its origin in the Latin verb 'collocare' which means 'to set in order/to arrange'. According to Singleton (1999) "collocation comes from two Latin words, the word cum 'with' and the word locus 'place'. Words which form collocations are repeatedly 'place with' each other in speech and in written texts".

According to Palmer, (1933), the word 'collocation' itself can be traced as far back as the 17th century, when it was used by Francis Bacon in his' Natural History' from (1627), but not as a linguistic term. Palmer (ibid) argues that "supposedly, the first time it was used as a linguistic term was more than a century later in (1750), by Harris, who used it to refer to the linear constellation of words". It was first introduced by Firth (1957), who considered that meaning by collocation is lexical meaning "at the syntagmatic level". The syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations isf lexical items can be schematically represented by two axes: a horizontal and a vertical one. This theory is known as the contextual theory of meaning.

Sinclair (1991) defines collocations as "items that occur physically together or have strong chances of being mentioned together". According to Lewis (1997), collocation is defined as "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in the natural text with greater than random frequency". He also claims that "the occurrence of collocation is statistically significant.

There seems to be no general consensus as to an exhaustive and uniform definition of collocation. Definitions widely vary from one linguist to another depending upon their orientation and upon the paradigm to which he/she subscribes. The only common denominator to these definitions is the explicit statement of the syntagmatic relationship of words. Nesselhauf, (2005) points out that the only consensus among researchers is that the term collocation refers to 'some kind of syntagmatic relations of words.' For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopts Carter and McCarthy's (1988:32) definition of collocation, 'How words typically occur with one another'. But, before more detailed discussion can take place, one important characteristic of collocation needs to be presented, that is that collocation operates on the syntagmatic rather than on the paradigmatic relationships.

The Importance of Collocation in EFL/ESL

During the last two decades, the importance and value of collocations has been underscored by a number of linguists who identified the benefits of learning collocations, in order to increase EFL learners' language competence and enhance their communicative competence (e.g.Brown, 1974; Nattinger, 1988); the development of L2 vocabulary (Laufer, 1988, Aghbar, 1990); improving communicative competence (Yorio, 1980; Cowie, 1998 Lewis, 2000); and enhancing language fluency towards the level of a native speaker (Fillmore, 1979; Howarth, 1998; Nation,2001).

Benson and IIson (1997) highlight the importance of collocation as all Learners of whether English as a foreign or second language, like learners of any language, have traditionally devoted themselves to mastering words, their pronunciation, forms, and meanings. However, if they wish to acquire active mastery of English, that is, if they wish to be able to express themselves fluently and accurately in speech and writing, they must learn to cope with the combination of words into phrases, sentences, and texts.

The significant role of collocations in the development of EFL learners' communicative competence is underscored also by Yorio (1980). Yorio claims that conventionalized language forms, including collocations, "make communication more orderly because they are regulatory in nature" Additionally, Cowie (1998) maintains that lexical phrases and collocations serve communicative needs and allow learners to reuse and produce the institutionalized units. Cowie (1992) also stresses the importance of collocation in ESL/EFL settings. In his words, 'It is impossible to perform at a level acceptable to native users, in writing or speaking, without controlling an appropriate range of multiword units (i.e., collocations).

Lexical Collocation Types

The first theory of lexical collocations which should be presented is Benson's (1986), even if it is not the first chronologically because its classification is the strongest and is the basis with which other theories can be compared. Benson classified collocations into two groups: lexical and grammatical collocations. "A grammatical collocation, in contrast to a lexical collocation, is a phrase that consists of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or grammatical structures such as an infinitive or clause". Lexical collocations consist only of lexical words: nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs. They normally do not contain prepositions and other structures. Lexical collocations usually not only appear in one sentence but often their positions are right next to each other. If a more detailed explanation or specification is given to one of the collocates, there can be words in between them, for example, the dog which wanted to run without his lead started to bark. The words dog and bark are collocates, even if there are nine words between them (large span). This research is based on this definition. Therefore, the terms collocations or lexical collocations are used interchangeably.

According to Müller (2008), there are seven possible combinations. L1:verb (which means creation/action) + noun/pronoun/prepositional phrase e.g. come to an agreement, launch a missile. L2: verb (which means eradication/cancellation) + noun e.g. reject an appeal, crush resistance. L3: (adjective + noun) or (noun used in an attributive way + noun) e.g. strong tea, a crushing defeat, house arrest, land reform. L4: noun + verb naming the activity which is performed by a designate of this noun e.g. bombs explode, bees sting.

IJELR
www.ijelr.in

L5: quantifier + noun e.g. a swarm of bees, a piece of advice. L6: adverb + adjective e.g. hopelessly addicted, sound asleep. L7: verb + adverb e.g. argue heatedly, apologize humbly. Lexical collocations between verbs and nouns are often fixed expressions, i.e. the synonymy of both collocates is restricted. To illustrate, Müller (2008) gives the example "One can say hold a funeral, but not *hold a burial" (8). The collocates of an adjective-noun collocation usually occur right next to each other because the adjective describes the noun directly and therefore its position is in front of the noun, for example, rich imagination. One can say rich imagination but not * wealthy imagination. The span of verb-adverb collocation can also be enlarged. But, there is no synonymy substitution, for instance, one can say affected deeply but not* affected extremely (with exception deeply hurt). The adverb also, directly, describes the adjective and any synonymy substitution leads to an unusual combination such as bitterly cold but not * hardly cold or * bitterly frosty.

Collocational Competence

Learning a language is the result of many competencies grouped together; hence, ones should work on these competencies to achieve the learning objectives. The researcher tries to use communicative and linguistic competence but "collocational competence" is usually an unfamiliar phrase. This concept is coined by Lewis (2000) who said: "We are familiar with the concept of communicative competence, but we need to add the concept of collocational competence to our thinking". Collocational competence is "the ability to accurately combine chunks of language thus enabling the production of fluent, accurate and stylistically appropriate speech." (Heikkila, T and T, 2005). Without this competence, students are facing many problems in writing their assignments. One of these problems is grammatical mistakes as "students tend to create longer utterances because they do not know collocations which express precisely what they want to say" (Hill, as cited in Lewis. (2000).

Heikkila, T, and T, (2005) also claimed that collocations "differ greatly between languages, and provide a major difficulty in mastering foreign languages''. Therefore, they need help in the classroom to pass over collocational problems. As a result, to overcome the problem of word associations, collocational competence needs to be developed in order to achieve fluency and proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) generally and Foreign Language writing particularly. The development of students' collocational competence would result in the improvement of communicative competence. Consequently, proficiency in the foreign language would increase as far as the learners' competencies are developed. Writing as well as speaking would be more fluent, accurate and meaningful since the learner knows language would increase as far as the learners' competencies are developed. The most common collocations that enable him/her to speak and write more efficiently. So, knowing collocations means knowing the vocabulary, which facilitates the task for the learner to perform better in the foreign language**.**

Collocations and Communicative Competence

Within Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), Chomsky (1965) has identified two main concepts: competence and performance. The former is what the learner knows about the language whereas the latter is what s/he does with the language. (Nunan, 1988). Hymes, D (1971) criticizes the Chomskian "theory of competence" for its ignorance of the "sociocultural dimension" that may interfere in the description of the language. He rather introduces the concept of "Communicative Competence" to highlight "the sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors governing effective language use" (Coady, J, and Huckin, T. N. 1997). claims that competence used by Chomsky represents knowledge of grammar; however, it is used by Hymes to indicate communicative competence. Communicative competence is the basis of the communicative approach that represents a radical breakthrough with the traditional approaches that were based on "habit formation". Under the communicative syllabus, the aim is fluency rather than accuracy. Here is a comment of Heikki on the constituents of communicative competence: "communicative competence is a highly complex ability. It includes grammatical accuracy, intelligibility, and acceptability, contextual appropriateness and fluency" (ibid) According to Partington (1998) the use of collocations manifests the native speaker/writer's communicative competence. A native speaker has the ability to decide which collocation is normal in that context. However, if s/he uses an unusual collocation s/he will aim at "surprise, dramatic, or humorous effect" (ibid). Unlike foreign learners, natives have what Firth labels "expectancies" of the collocational fields that a word has. Thus, if we

like to teach collocations to non-natives we have to develop their "expectancies" of the words which tend to occur within the same field of a specific word.

The Skill of Writing

Frith, J, (2009) stressed that learning English requires an integration of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. The latter is a necessary skill that has to be developed since it is a manifestation of the learner's performance in a foreign language. Therefore, teachers have been always looking for effective methods and approaches to teach writing so that Learners' written production could be improved. In this chapter, the researcher is going to introduce the skill of writing and concentrate on the most common approaches to teach it. The purpose is to gain knowledge about the best way writing could be taught on one hand, and to investigate whether collocations have gained any interest over history, on the other hand. After that, the researcher is going to explore the concept of "miss collocations" which are widespread in learners' writing. Overcoming this problem may help them to write appropriately if it is realized by teaching collocations explicitly. Directions to do so are explained in this chapter and followed by the materials that facilitate the process of building learners' awareness of the most common collocations.

Finally, the roles of both teachers and learners are discussed. Writing is a difficult skill learner have to master, both native and non-native speakers may lack the competence necessary to make them good writers because learners could not express their ideas effectively without this competence. Within this scope, Tribble (as cited in Frith, J, 2009) argues that; it is through the mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in an intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs but also in the expression of ideas and arguments". Thus, foreign language learners are struggling to write correctly since they face many obstacles toward a correct English composition. Writing necessitates, at least, a basic knowledge of grammar, lexis, and vocabulary, and the ability to express ideas in an appropriate English language unaffected by the mother Learning English requires an integration of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. The latter is a necessary skill that has to be developed since it is a manifestation of the learner's performance in a foreign language. Therefore, teachers have been always looking for effective methods and approaches to teach writing so that Learners' written production could be improved. In this chapter, the researcher is going to introduce the skill of writing and concentrate on the most common approaches to teach it. The purpose is to gain knowledge about the best way writing could be taught on one hand, and to investigate whether collocations have gained any interest over history, on the other hand. After that, the researcher is going to explore the concept of "miss collocations" which are widespread in learners' writing. Overcoming this problem may help them to write appropriately if it is realized by teaching collocations explicitly. Directions to do so are explained in this chapter and followed by the materials that facilitate the process of building learners' awareness of the most common collocations. Finally, the roles of both teachers and learners are discussed. Writing is a difficult skill learner have to master, both native and non-native speakers may lack the competence necessary to make them good writers because learners could not express their ideas effectively without this competence. Within this scope, Tribble (as cited in Frith, J, 2009) argues that "It is through the mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in an intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs but also in the expression of ideas and arguments". Thus, foreign language learners are struggling to write correctly since they face many obstacles toward a correct English composition.

Writing necessitates, at least, a basic knowledge of grammar, lexis, and vocabulary, and the ability to express ideas in an appropriate English language unaffected by the mother tongue. What the learners ought to reach in writing is proficiency, which is used by some writers to replace "competency" or what to "do with the language". Nunan. (1988). agrees with Richards on the fact that proficiency is "the ability to perform real world tasks with a pre-specified degree of skill". (ibid). Lewis (2000), further considers proficiency as a term that refers to three characteristics: accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Firstly, the researcher has to consider accuracy versus fluency; under the communicative approach, accuracy is not the main interest as far as it does not hinder the communication of meaning. What is aimed at is not the form but rather the meaning? The communicative approach does favor fluency, whereas the audio-lingual and grammar translation approaches

favor accuracy. Hence, considering the 'accuracy/fluency' question from the view point of teaching approaches and methodologies is somewhat problematic. Thus, the teacher would better encourage the learner's fluency first, and then accuracy would follow at the end of the writing process. Secondly, "complexity" is, according to Lewis (2000), the improvement of students' writing especially at advanced levels. It indicates "the writer's ability to construct noun phrases which are high in informational content". He gives the example of noun phrases joined by of, for instance, nature of time, a construction of our minds….etc. He further comments that noun phrases are neglected in contrast to verb phrases that are the focus of traditional grammar. (ibid). As a result, the accuracy/fluency dichotomy has to be replaced with an endeavor to direct our students towards the complexity of the language. This may lead to both fluency and accuracy. Hence, proficiency in foreign language writing will increase to a degree that it could challenge natives' proficiency especially if students are taught the most common collocations that improve their writing style and make it more natural.

Miss-collocations in Foreign Language Writing

Nesselhauf, N. (2005) claimed that; it is widely observed that foreign language learners face a major problem in writing. Although they have the ideas and storm their brains to find the words, they do not know which words could be joined together to form correct expressions. Thus, their essays include a wide variety of miscollocations. This is due to their lack of collocation competence because they have received an instruction that is "grammar focused" where there is no direct instruction of vocabulary. They have learned vocabulary through the other subjects, and most of the time they have discovered only individual words. Yet, the majority of learners do not know even what collocations are. To overcome this problem, the teacher should attract his/her learners' attention towards collocations because teaching grammar and individual words are not sufficient. Once the learners notice which words co-occur together, they start to guess the meaning of each word according to its 'company' so that they could use it when they are asked to write. Consequently, learners find difficulties in identifying collocations when they read a text. So, they could not know which words go together from free reading. As a result, reading could not solve the problem unless it is directed by the teacher.

Furthermore, the unlimited number of collocations may confuse the learners who wonder how they could acquire this massive input. Since acquiring a language requires learning its vocabulary, the teacher should simplify the learning task by advising the learners to start with the most common collocations that are frequently used by native speakers. Then, they could enrich their knowledge of collocations through an extensive teaching with the help of collocation dictionaries such as Oxford Collocation Dictionary for Students of English. The main reason of teaching collocations is helping the learners to overcome possible mids-collocations in writing and achieve fluency as claimed by Nesselhauf, N. (2005) "prefabricated units are essential for fluency in both spoken and written language it has been known that whether or not L2 production is fluent crucially depends on the learner's control over a large repertoire of prefabricated units".

As a general comment, teaching the most common collocations is the key towards overcoming the problem of mids-collocations in Foreign Language Writing. Hence, each teacher has to believe in the necessity of developing the learners' collocational competence, and the importance of grammar as well as vocabulary.

Methodology

Method and design of the study

To achieve the aim of the article, the descriptive analytical, the experimental, and the quantitative methods were used. These methods can be used to obtain pertinent and precise data about events, phenomena, and practices that are available for a study and accessible for measurement without the interference of the researcher. According to Alagha (2002), the researcher can interact with them, namely by describing and analyzing the recorded information. The research design is most a quantitative type and was highly structured and set to measure the impact of lexical collocation competence in EFL learners' written performance.

Subjects

The subjects of the present article are (100) students of EFL and (50) EFL university teachers. The students are affiliated to the Department of English language and linguistics, from the faculty of education, at

the University of Kassala according to the academic calendar (2015-2016). Their whole number composed of (100) students divided into (50) students from the third year, and (50) students from the fifth year selected purposively and were treated as one experimental group. They are aged between (17-22) and study English as a foreign language. Students under investigation were homogenous in terms of their linguistic, educational system, the field of study and age. However, the justification behind the choice of third and fifth-year students comes from the fact that 3rd-year students have finished one paragraph writing course where as 5th-year students have finished two paragraph writing courses, as a part of their BA English program. These courses have positively provided appropriate materials which enabled students to use collocations competently.

The second targeted participants of this article are English language teachers at different universities. A total of (50) EFL university teachers, males, and females of different experience participated in this article. They responded to the questionnaire as they have different teaching experience ranged from (2) to (40) years.

Instrumentation

This article used two data collection instruments. Test and questionnaire. The test includes six major types of lexical collocations selected and adapted carefully to suit the proper level of the students. It consisted of five sections. Section one is multiple choice, whereas, in section two, there is sentence completion, section three is to correct the underlined verb, section four is to matching, and the last section (5) is to underline the collocations. Under each section, there is the number and the page of exercise. The pre-test was administered to the students before teaching collocations. The post test was administered to the same group of EFL students.

Procedure

Test and questionnaire were used as tools for data collection. The researchers followed particular procedures and steps in collecting the data. In order to check the validity of the test, the researchers, three copies of the test were handed over to three EFL teachers. The teachers wrote down their comments, suggestions, at the end of the test as requested by the researchers. According to their comments, suggestions, notes, and advice, the number of the questions were reduced from seven to five. The test consisted of (55) items, it administered to the students during the academic year (2015-2016) at Faculty of Education department of English language and linguistics. It took about (90) minutes for all the subject to finish. After they finished, the test materials were collected and stored by numbers. For the experiment, it took four weeks- three hours session per week. During the experiment, the researcher taught fifty students in two groups, the experimental group (receiving lexical collocations instruction). In a three hours weekly class, the researchers gave experimental group students a series of lectures on lexical collocations. During treatment, lectures and activities elaborated to raise students' awareness of lexical collocations. Treatment lecture was selected from English collocations in use advanced (2008). The students were encouraged to explore different ranges, providing them with topic-related and word-related collocations. With regard to the questionnaire, it was distributed to fifty (50) University EFL teachers, to identify their views in teaching collocations in general and lexical collocation in particular; and its impact on EFL students written performance.

Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was handed for six Assistant professors of English language teaching; they commented on the face and the content validity of the questionnaire. Their advice and modifications were followed. They noted that the questionnaire is valid for the purpose of the study.

Alpha Cronbach formula is used to compute the reliability of the questionnaire. The value of reliability lies between 0 and 1. The reliability increases according to an increase of alpha value up to 1. In general, if the alpha value more than or equal 0.5 the reliability is considered. Cronbach formula is:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1}\left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k} \sigma_{y_i}^2}{\sigma_x^2}\right)$$

Where:

$k \equiv$ Items number

$\sigma_{y_i}^2 \equiv$ Variance for each single item

$\sigma_x^2 \equiv$ Variance for total of items

IJELR
www.ijelr.in

For this research, we found that $\alpha = 0.94$, and this means the questionnaire has a high reliability.
Validity is the square root of reliability. In our case is SQRT(0.94) = 0.97 (there is very high validity in the questionnaire).

Data analysis

Several statistical methods were used to analyze the article's data. These tools are frequency, percentage, one sample t-test, paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test and Alpha Cronbach formula for the reliability of the questionnaire using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) in the analysis of the data obtained by the designed instruments.

The results of the both tests and responses from the teachers' questionnaire have been collected and counted in order to measure the results that may help the researchers to detect the impact of collocation competence on the EFL learners' written performance.

Testing the Hypotheses of the Study through the Test

H1: *"Most EFL learners lack the knowledge of English lexical collocation".*

One sample t-test for the first hypothesis

Expected mean	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
6	3.46	1.47	-12.19	49	0.000

The above table showed that the p-value equal (0.000) less than the significance level (0.05), and that means there is a significant statistical difference between the expected and the actual means. When the actual mean (3.46) is less than the expected mean (6) this verified the truth of the first hypothesis that *"Most EFL learners lack the knowledge of English lexical collocation".*

paired Sample T-test for Performance of Subjects`

Skill	Test class	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
3rd class						
Total	Pre	16.44	2.681	-8.30	49	0.000
	Post	21.06	2.853			
5th class						
Total	Pre	13.80	1.829	-12.75	49	0.000
	Post	14.45	1.867			

The table above clearly showed that p-values are zero for pre-post tests. Pre means is less than post means, that means the performance of students improved in the post test after they have been taught lessons on lexical collocation. Consequently, this progress supported the researchers' first hypothesis that *"Most EFL learners lack the knowledge of English lexical collocation".*

H2: "*All categories of lexical collocations are equally problematic for EFL learners in their written performance".*

One sample T-test for the second hypothesis

Expected mean	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
3	1.72	0.70	-12.91	49	0.000

The above table showed that the p-value equal (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05). And that means there is a significant statistical difference between the expected and the actual means. When the actual mean (1.72) is less than the expected mean (3), this strongly confirmed the second hypothesis which was *"All categories of lexical collocations equally difficult for Sudanese university students majoring in English in writing".*

Paired sample t-test for the performance of subjects

Skill	Test class	Mean	St.d.	t-value	d.f	p-value
3rd class						
Verb+ Noun(V+N)	Pre	3.72	1.126	-4.30	49	0.000
	Post	5.30	1.843			
Adjective + Noun(Adj + N)	Pre	3.66	1.287	1.54	49	0.130
	Post	3.32	1.039			
Noun +Verb(N+V)	Pre	3.08	1.152	-5.20	49	0.000
	Post	4.31	1.544			
Noun+ Noun(N+N)	Pre	2.34	1.081	-4.18	49	0.000
	Post	3.32	1.421			
Adverb + Adjective & Verb + Adverb Adv + Adj &V+ Adv)	Pre	3.69	.796	-6.74	49	0.000
	Post	4.61	.837			
5th class						
Verb+ Noun(V+N)	Pre	7.32	2.065	-8.34	49	0.000
	Post	10.22	2.150			
Adjective+ Noun(Adj + N)	Pre	3.76	1.222	-1.06	49	0.297
	Post	3.94	1.018			
Noun +Verb(N+V)	Pre	5.68	1.671	-4.65	49	0.000
	Post	7.24	1.779			
Noun+ Noun(N+N)	Pre	2.78	.910	-4.06	49	0.000
	Post	3.56	1.445			
Adverb + Adjective & Verb + Adverb Adv + Adj & V + Adv)	Pre	4.27	1.440	-6.45	49	0.000
	Post	7.02	2.385			

The above table indicated that p-value is zero for both pre and post tests in each lexical category which denotes that the means' value is less than post means' value. According to the means' value, the performance of students enhanced after they have received lexical collocation input. As shown above, the table clearly reflected how the categories of lexical collocation have been problematic for the students according to their performance in the pre test, where as the students' performance was enhanced in the post test by virtue of the lexical collocation input they have received which in its turn was reflected in their written performance. As a result, these statistic outputs positively proved the truth of the second hypothesis which is ""*All categories of lexical collocations equally difficult for Sudanese university students majoring in English in writing*".

The Analysis of the Questionnaire in relation to Hypotheses

S1: "Writing is the most difficult skill for EFL university students to master**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	10	20.0
Agree	36	72.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	4	8.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' responses displayed in the table above showed that 20% strongly agreed with the statement, and 72% agreed, whereas 8% disagreed. Thus, the teachers almost unanimously agreed that writing is the most difficult skill for EFL university students to master. The teachers' unanimity is in line with the second hypothesis of the which read: *"All categories of lexical collocations equally difficult for Sudanese university students majoring in English in writing".*

S2: "EFL university students writing's competence can be developed through teaching vocabulary**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	14	28.0
Agree	36	72.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' responses as displayed in the above table showed that 28% strongly agreed with the statement, and 72% agree, whereas 10%. Thus, the teachers almost unanimously agreed that they EFL students writing competence can be developed through teaching vocabulary. This absolute unanimity on the part of the teachers signified the importance of vocabulary in developing EFL students' writing competence and therefore these results in such away verified the impact of lexical collocation on developing the lexical collocation competence of EFL students.

S3: "EFL university students awareness of using collocations will reflect their writing proficiency**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	23	46.0
Agree	24	48.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	3	6.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' attitudes were grouped in the above which showed that 46% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement, 48% agreed, and, 6% disagreed. The results indicated that the agreement by the teachers is almost unanimous, 94% (46% strongly agreed, 48% agreed); 6% disagreed. These results signified the necessity of students' awareness of using collocation to enhancing writing proficiency.

S4: "Intensive exercises are the suitable technique for students who fail combine words when they write**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	23	46.0
Agree	26	52.0
Neutral	1	2.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' answers as shown by the above table that 46% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement, 52% agreed, 2% of the teachers were neutral. As such, the teachers' agreement with this statement is completely unanimous, 98% (46% strongly agreed, 52% agreed, and 2% were neutral) agreed on this statement. Thus, these rates are in favor of the impact of lexical collocation competence on developing EFL students' written performance.

S5: "Some of the EL teachers are interested in using collocations to help their students to write English proficiently**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	19	38.0
Agree	27	54.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	4	8.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' views as reflected in the table above showed that 38% strongly agreed with the statement, and 54% agree, whereas 8% disagreed. Thus, the teachers almost unanimously agreed that they interested using collocations to help their students write English proficiently. This absolute unanimity on the part of the teachers is of significance for lexical collocation competence impact in enhancing EFL students' written performance.

S6: "EFL university students face problems in choosing appropriate lexical collocations to express their ideas through writing**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	18	36.0
Agree	31	62.0
Neutral	1	2.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' opinions as revealed in the table above illustrated that 36% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement, 62% agreed, 2% of the teachers were neutral. Thus, these results showed that this statement has unanimously been supported, 98% (36% strongly agreed, 62% agreed, and 2% were neutral). As such, these responses on the teachers' part verified the second hypothesis that: *"All categories of lexical collocations are equally problematic for EFL learners in their written performance"*.

S7: "Teaching collocations to EFL advance level is beneficial for learning language**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	18	36.0
Agree	26	52.0
Neutral	1	2.0
Disagree	5	10.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The table above showed 36% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement, 52% agreed, 2% of the teachers were neutral, 10% disagreed. The results indicate that this statement has highly, if not sharply, pushed the teachers' opinions towards the fact that the mastery of collocation is determined the absolute learning of language.

S8: "Some of the EFL university students cannot express their ideas because their knowledge of combining words together is partial**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	14	28.0
Agree	36	72.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' responses as indicated by the above table that 28% strongly agreed with the statement, and 72% agreed. Thus, the teachers 100% unanimously agreed that the lack of the knowledge of the lexical collocation undermines EFL students' ability to combine words together in writing. Consequently, the first hypothesis was strongly proved as the teachers' attitudes revealed above.

S9: "Most of the EFL teachers encourage students to combine lexical items appropriately**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	21	42.0
Agree	25	50.0
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	4	8.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' views as in the table above showed that 42% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement, 50% agreed, and 8% disagreed. Thus, the teachers' agreement with this statement is highly unanimous, 92% (42% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 8% disagreed) agreed about the statement. As a result, the teachers' views supported the objective of the article which revealed the impact of lexical collocation competence on enhancing the EFL university students' written performance.

S10: "Consciousness-raising activities are the best way which enables students to easily retrieve lexical Collocations**".**

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	13	26.0
Agree	35	70.0
Neutral	1	2.0
Disagree	1	2.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

The teachers' responses displayed in the table above, showed that 26% strongly agreed with the statement, and 70% agreed, whereas 2% were neutral. Thus, the teachers entirely agreed unanimously that if consciousness raising activities were well used by the students, they would be lexically competent to easily use collocation in their written performance.

In conclusion, it was clear that all the above-discussed statements and hypotheses are in favor of the track of the article that successfully reflected the impact of lexical collocation competence in EFL Learners' Written performance.

Discussion

The reported statistics revealed the better performance in the final post test in which they outperformed their scores in the pre test. According to the comparison made between scores in the pre test and the post test, and the teachers' attitudes in responding to the questionnaire, it has been supposed that the lexical collocation competence would be more effective in promoting and enhancing not only EFL students' written performance, but also offering students the access to retain authentic inputs that create competent EFL learners.

All the subjects in both groups have had the same amount of exposure to teaching materials of lexical collocation during the experiment and all of them have studied English as the main discipline. Therefore, their judge to be almost at the same level of language proficiency, however, their competence was determined via implementing pre and post proficiency test. They were (100) students split into two groups equally as one experimental group. It was concluded that lexical collocation competence promoted EFL university students' written performance beside their knowledge of vocabulary use and finally their command of learning English as a foreign language. Based on the above-mentioned points, the two hypotheses were proved as there was a significant difference between the students' performance before and after implementing the experiment.

Conclusion

The observable deficiency in students' language competence renders this article necessary to examine the causes of this deficit and suggest remedies for it. Despite the fact that much works have already been written on this subject, because of its importance, more exploratory researches are required since researchers have yet commenced developing a comprehensive formula to deal with the promotion of learners' lexical collocation competence; as collocation is one of the areas that generally considered to be problematic for EFL learners.

The present article was an attempt to identify the impact of lexical collocation competence on Sudanese EFL learners' written performance. Moreover, the differences between the impact of the two implemented tests and their relationship to the` promotion of the learner's written performance were discussed so as to reflect the effect of lexical collocation competence on the written performance of learners.

Based on the results of data analysis done above, the impact of lexical collocation competence on Sudanese EFL university learners was confirmed. According to the statistical results obtained by the two tests and the questionnaire, it can be concluded that subjecting EFL learners to lexical collocation input led to significant results:

EFL University learners' problems lie in choosing appropriate lexical collocations to express their ideas through writing, some of the EFL university students cannot express their ideas because their knowledge of combining words together is partial.

Finally, the written performance of learners was different before and after the experiment was tried out due to the impact of their lexical collocation competence that enabled them to surmount these difficulties.

The article recommended the following:

- Collocation must be taught in advanced level as it is beneficial for learning the language.
- Teachers should teach students how to combine lexical items appropriately and help them overcome the problems in choosing appropriate lexical collocations to express their ideas through writing.
- Intensive exercises should be given to students who fail combine words when they write.
- The last but not the least, If EFL university students knowledge of collocations use is increased, It would be reflected in their writing proficiency.

References

1. Aghbar, A.A.(1990). Fixed expressions in written texts: Implications for assessing writing sophistication. In: Paper Presented at a Meeting.
2. Benson. M. Benson, E. &Ilson, R. (1997).The BBI Dictionary of English word combinations (2nd edition). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
3. Benson. M (1986). Lexicographic Description of English. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.
4. Brown, H.D.(1974). Advanced Vocabulary Teaching: The Problem of Collocation. In RELe Journal Vo15.
5. Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. C:.lIl1hridgl:. MIT Press.
6. Coady.J and Huckin, T, N. (1997). *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition: A   Rationale   for Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Cowie. A. P. (1998). Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and applications. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. Cowie. A. P. (1992). Multiword lexical units and communicative language teaching. In Arnaud P. J. L. &Bejoint H. (Eds.), *Vocabulary and applied linguistics* (pp. 1-12). London: Macmillan.
9. Fillmore. C. (1979). On fluency. In Fillmore, C., Kempler, D.& Wang, W. S. Y. (eds). Individual differences in language ability and language behavior. New York: Academic,pp.85-101.
10. Frith, J. (2009).*A Process Genre Approach to Writing Transactiona lLetters.* Retrieved August 24, 2009, from http://www. Developing teachers.com/articles._teacher training/processgenre1_james.Htm.
11. Firth. J.R. (1957). Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951. London. Oxford University.
12. Heikkilä, T., and T. (2005). The Significance of the Inclusion of Sociopragmatic and Collocational Competence in Immersion Education Programmes. 21st Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics, NTNU, Trondheim, June 1-4.

13.   Hill, J. (2000). Revising priorities: from grammatical failure to collocational success. In Lewis, M. (Ed.), *Teaching collocation* (pp. 28-46). Hove: Language Teaching Publications.

14.   Howarth, P. 1998a. Phraseology and Second Language Proficiency. *Applied Linguistics* 19(1). 24-44.

15.   Howarth, P. 1998b. The Phraseology of Learners' Academic Writing. In Cowie, A.P. (ed.), *Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and applications*, 161-186, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

16.   Hymes, D. H. (1971). *On Communicative Competence.* Philadelphia: Henry, A and Roseberry, R.L. (1998)*. An Evaluation of a Genre-Based Approach to the Teaching of EAP/ESP Writing.* The TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 1998). PP: 147-156.

17.   Laufer. B. (1988). The concept of "synforms" (similar lexical forms) in vocabulary *acquisition.Language and Education.*2.113132.

18.   Lewis. M. (2000). Teaching collocation: Further developments in the lexical approach. London: Language Teaching Publications.

19.   Lewis.M. (1997). Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting Theory into Practice. Hove: Language Teaching Publications (LTP).

20.   Müller, Yvonne. (2008). Collocation - A linguistic view and didactic aspects. Munich: GRIN Verlag Publishing OHG.

21.   Nation, I.S.P. 2001. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge.

22.   Nesselhauf, N. (2005). Collocations in a learner corpus. Amsterdam! Philadelphia. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

23.   Nesselhauf, N. (2004). The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching. *Applied Linguistics,* 24(2), 223-242.

24.   Nunan, D. (1988). The learner-centered curriculum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

25.   Palmer, H. 1933. *Second interim report on English collocations*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.

26.   Partington, A. 1998. *Patterns and Meanings: Using Corpora for English Language Research and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

27.   Singleton, D. 1999. *Exploring the Second Language Mental Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

28.   Sinclair, J. M. (1991). Corpus, concordance, collocation . Oxford: Oxford University Press.

29.   Yorio. C. A. (1980). Conventionalized language forms and the development of communicative competence. *TESOL Quarterly,* 14(4),433-442