



# Reinforcing Students' Collocational Competence in EFL Classrooms

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**Abstract:** Relevant research studies show an outstanding effect of the collocational competence on reinforcing the language proficiency of students learning a foreign or second language (Ellis, 2001). Students' awareness of word combinations enables them to produce language with native-like accuracy and increases their ability to use different levels of formulaic language, idioms, and fixed expressions. The argument of Firth (1957) that "a word is known by the company it keeps" implies that knowing how words are combined facilitates using them efficiently. This entails dedicating more time and effort to increase students' awareness and acquisition of collocations. However, as argued by Chan and Liou (2005), explicit teaching of collocations is not given the deserved attention in language classes possibly because of the difficulty of teaching them in a way that facilitates their storage and retrieval. It is also due to the shortage of user-friendly materials that could be utilised for teaching collocates. In addition, it could be rendered to native language interference and the nature of interlanguage. This study explores how apt undergraduate Arab students are in using collocation in written works. It also analyses the very common errors they make in written activities. This study concludes that students' ill-formed expressions are a shared responsibility between them and language teachers. It proposes a tri-polar model for enhancing students' use of collocation. They are elicitation, fixation, and creation. This study eventually provides pedagogical implications that facilitate addressing collocation in language classes.

**Keywords:** Collocational competence; communicative competence; collocational errors; elicitation, mnemonic strategies; teaching collocation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discussions on language proficiency have focused on the multidimensionality nature of the concept indicating it is the result of a number of interrelated competencies grouped together. Hymes (1972) coined the term "*Communicative Competence*" to encompass these abilities that make up a fluent speaker of a foreign language. He argued that speakers of a foreign language need to have more than the linguistic competence (grammatical knowledge) in order to communicate effectively in a foreign language. They should have a sociolinguistic competence to gain knowledge of how a language is used by the members of a speech community to enact social purposes. The communicative competence then goes beyond the traditional focus on grammar forms; it includes the collocational competence and the ability to use a repertoire of fixed expressions and formulaic language as it is used by native speakers of it. Unlike non-native speakers of English, native speakers spontaneously use expressions like *white wine*, *red hair*,

*black mood*, *blue movie*, and *trenchant criticism* with few hesitations or redundancies. A foreign speaker of English may say "his disability is forever" which a native speaker can substitute with "*he has permanent disability*". Such examples indicate that the collocational competence enhances the communicative competence. It is necessary herein to elaborate on these terms: communicative competence, collocation, collocational competence, and productive skills.

Hymes (1972) defined the communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. Thus, the sociolinguistic perspective is not disconnected from the linguistic view of competence. Canale & Swain (1980) posited a model of communicative competence covering four components. The first is the grammatical competence or the knowledge of the language code



including grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc. The second is the sociolinguistic competence or the mastery of the sociocultural code of language use including appropriate application of vocabulary, register, politeness and style in a given situation. The third is the discourse competence or the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive texts like political speech and poetry. The last one is the strategic competence or the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which enhance the efficiency of communication and, where necessary, enable the learner to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur (ibid: 7). Sometimes a slight distinction is made between language competence and language performance or proficiency in which the former refers to the monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of the language; whereas the latter refers to the processes, functions, and actual use of language fluently in real situations (Celce-Murcia *et al*, 1995).

Improving the communicative competence of language learners attracted an increasing attention to phraseology and the study of word-combination or collocation. Etymologically, collocation is derived from the Latin word "collocare" which means putting or placing together. Lexically, collocation refers to the process of putting or using words together in a certain word order to express a certain meaning. According to McIntosh *et al* (2009: 6), "a collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together". It is also "the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance". In the terms of Firth (1957: 181), the father of collocation and the developer of the traditional lexical approach of this phenomenon, "collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word". His frequently-cited phrase "a word is known by the company it keeps" reflects both the lexical and semantic aspects of collocation. Robins (2000: 64) as well argues that collocation is "the habitual association of a word in a language with other particular words in sentences". Halliday and Hasan (2001: 317), in addition, argue that collocation is "the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other typically associated with one another, because they tend to occur in similar environments". Students learning English can easily identify the meanings of words like "fast, quick, car, food, glance, meal, blonde, hair, etc." However, they might enquire why they should say "fast car" but not "quick car", "fast food" but not "quick food", "quick glance" but not "fast glance", "quick meal" but not "fast meal" although "meal" and "food" have the same connotation, and "blonde hair" but not "blonde car" even if the car has the same blonde colour. The words that

collocate with "do" and "make" are also confusing for English language learners who cannot justify why to say "do homework" but not "make homework" and "make an effort" but not "do an effort". Within the semantic approach, linguists study the features of these collocations and why English words collocate with certain other items and not with others.

Knowing that "strong tea" is a good example of collocation but not "powerful tea" and that "powerful engine" is an authentic expression rather than "strong engine" even though "strong & powerful" are synonyms is an indication of a collocational competence. This term is coined by Lewis (2000) who says "we are familiar with the concept of communicative competence, but we need to add the concept of collocational competence to our thinking (ibid: 49). Partington (1996: 18) argues that the collocational competence refers to "the knowledge of what is normal collocation in a particular environment". This covers both the knowledge of formulaic language, fixed expressions, and collocations and also the knowledge of prepositional collocations or colligation. Heikkila (2005) defines the collocational competence as "the ability to accurately combine chunks of language thus enabling production of fluent, accurate, and stylistically appropriate speech". Expressions like "launch a missile", "express admiration", "serious consequences", "great expectations", "deadly serious", and "apologize humbly" are all examples of accurate collocations. McIntosh *et al* (2009) divide the grammatical collocations or colligation into fourteen different types signaled in the table below.

Unlike the receptive skills of listening and reading, the productive skills are speaking and writing because they are the mediums through which a language is produced. They are known as active skills in comparison with the passive skills of listening and reading. Passivity here does not mean absence of cognitive processing of data absorbed through listening to or reading a written text. Otherwise it refers to the internal processing and manipulation of data before producing them via speaking or reading. According to Ur (1991: 48), "speaking is the productive aural/oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning". It is not disconnected from the listening skill since accuracy in acquisition of phonemes, morphemes, and full words and utterances leads indirectly to perfection and fluency in producing them. Speaking also depends on mastery of sub-skills listed by Nunan (1989: 32) which include "the ability to articulate phonological features of the language comprehensively, expertise on stress, rhythm, intonation patterns, an acceptance degree of fluency, transactional and interpersonal skills, skills in talking short and long speaking turns, skills in the management of interaction,



and using appropriate formulae and fillers". Writing, on the other hand, is an active skill through which an individual puts down his thoughts into a meaningful form using pen and paper. It is used as a means of taking actions like writing public signs or product labels. It is also used for disclosing information in newspapers and magazines or even for entertainment purposes as in writing comic strips, novels, or newspaper features. Reinforcing this skill is recently getting more

significance in the TESOL landscape. It is used as a substitute of the explicit assessment of grammar and vocabulary since students' awareness of these components can be identified through exposition of simple writing activities. Nunan (1999: 275) asserts this attitude as he argues that "writing displays a variety of features which can be observed within the sentence at the level of grammar, and beyond the sentence at the level of text structure".

Table 1: Types of Collocation

NO.	Type of Collocation			Example
1	Adjective	+	Noun	bright, harsh, intense, strong light
2	Quantifier	+	Noun	a bean, ray of light
3	Verb	+	Noun	cast, emit, give, provide light
4	Noun	+	Verb	light gleams, glows, shines
5	Noun	+	Noun	a light source
6	Preposition	+	Noun	by the light of the moon
7	Noun	+	Preposition	the light from the window
8	Adverb	+	Verb	choose carefully
9	Verb	+	Verb	be free to choose
10	Verb	+	Preposition	choose between two things
11	Verb	+	Adjective	make, keep, declare something safe
12	Adverb	+	Adjective	perfectly, not entirely, environmentally safe
13	Adjective	+	Preposition	safe from attack
14	Adverb + Verb + Adjective + Noun + Preposition + Noun			seriously affect the political situation in the country

## 2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Importance of Teaching Collocation

In traditional language classes, reinforcing students' awareness of word-combinations or collocations is rarely addressed by teachers and is not explicitly presented to students. The ultimate focus is mostly given to the acquisition of grammar forms and memorisation of long lists of vocabulary for using them in writing and exam purposes. Acquisition of vocabulary is limited to knowledge of orthography and parallel meaning. Students who are not exposed to authentic listening and reading scripts can hardly identify that "powerful motorcar" collocates better than "strong motorcar" and that "rancid butter" and "addled egg" cannot be substituted with "rancid egg" or "addled butter" without changing the meaning. As proposed by Richard (1985: 183), mastering a word goes beyond knowledge of its orthography and literal meaning; it includes knowing the frequency of the word in oral and written language, knowing the grammatical patterns of the word (colligation), and knowing its associated network with other words (collocation). Collocation is not only a necessary language element but a significant feature that makes language used in spoken and written discourse straightforward, specific, and correct. There are some reasons why knowledge of collocation is important.

Hill (1999) argues that knowledge of collocation is the key to fluency. What distinguishes native speakers from non-native speakers is they have met with more examples of the language and are accordingly able to speak at a relatively fast speed because "they are calling on a vast repertoire of ready-made language in their mental lexicons" (ibid: 4). Adequate command of collocations leads to producing good English. It makes students' speech and writing "sound much more natural, more native-speaker-like, even when basic intelligibility does not seem to be at issue" (McIntosh *et al*, 2009, vii). Eliciting the meaning of a core word or "nod", moreover, is facilitated by the words that surround or combine with it. McIntosh *et al* give an example of the word "handsome" that has different meanings based on the context. A "handsome man" is a good-looking man, a "handsome woman" is a physically strong woman, a "handsome reward" is a large amount of reward, and a "handsome present" is a generous present (ibid: vii). The meaning of "handsome" is therefore realised through noticing the specific collocates with this word in a given context. Lackman (2011: 5) indicates that enhancing the lexicon of students with more words does not necessarily improve the overall communicative competence unless accompanied with the knowledge of how to combine these words in an appropriate way. In order to bring



foreign language learners up to the native speaker level of articulation, teachers do not need to teach them more words but teach them to combine the words they already know instead. It is only through knowledge of collocation that the meaning of delexicalised words can be revealed. Students can identify the meaning of “catch” with a “ball” but using it with “a bus or a cold” does not give the same literal meaning of it (ibid: 5).

McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) list three other reasons why students should learn word-combinations as used by the native speakers of English. First, it gives them the most natural way to say something like saying “*smoking is strictly prohibited*” that is more natural than “*smoking is strongly prohibited*”. Second, it gives them more alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colourful, expressive, and precise. Instead of saying “*it was very cold and very dark*”, an alternative can be “*it was bitterly cold and pitch dark*”. Third, it improves their style in writing like using “*poverty breeds crime*” instead of “*poverty causes crime*” and “*I had a substantial meal*” instead of “*I had a big meal*”. Wray and Perkins (2000: 23) also claim that collocation affects fluency and that poor use of collocation disrupts communication. Adults and children, whether they learn the language naturally or through classroom-based instruction, need to accumulate abundant set of formulaic language and survival phrases that help them achieve basic socio-interactional functions. Having gained this store of expressions, they notably move to a period of relative interactional stability. All these hints boost the idea that teaching collocation is important to improve students' style of writing, make their speech sound more natural, shorten communication barriers, increase their range of English vocabulary, and understand the philosophical implications underlying a statement. A statement like “*there is no place like Rome*” does not address “*Rome*” as a city yet it has an allusion and could possibly mean “*There is no place like home*”.

## 2.2 Difficulties of Teaching Collocation

Combining words in English for having appropriate collocations is not always within the linguistic ability of many foreign language learners. They tend to join words that are semantically compatible, but this does not necessarily produce acceptable collocations from the viewpoint of a native speaker of English. These difficulties can be rendered to some reasons. The first is related to native language interference and interlanguage problems. Martelli (1998) believes that the mother tongue interference accounts for the generation of wrong collocations. Students subconsciously transfer the appropriate collocation they use in their native language. Arab students often say “He is knocking on the door” instead of saying “He is knocking at the door”. “He is

making his homework” is also a common mistake rather than “He is doing his homework”. This challenge is very common which Crystal (1987) renders to the significant differences between languages that represent a major difficulty in mastering foreign languages.

The discrepancy between a native and foreign language is not the only challenge students have when selecting the appropriate collocates; features of the intralanguage are also influential. Not all synonyms can be used interchangeably with the same meaning. While “many and several” are synonyms, native speakers normally say “*many thanks*” rather than “*several thanks*” probably due to some semantic connotations that the word “several” may have. Native speakers also use different verbs with vehicles. They use “ride” with a horse or a bike, “drive” with a car, and “fly” with a plane; none of the verbs can replace the others. Anderson and Naggy (1991) argue that “You can say set forth a valid argument, but cannot in any normal situation say set forth a warm greeting; you can say grant him permission, but you cannot say grant him a shove (1991: 698)”. Another feature that characterises the intralanguage is that the same word or “nod” may have different connotations or specific meaning in particular collocations and overusing it distorts the meaning. An “abnormal or exceptional weather” means being hot more than the usual rates; however an “exceptional child” does not necessarily mean an “abnormal child”. Students' lack of awareness of the unique meanings of a word and other words and the same “nod” in other situations leads to producing malfunctioned expressions that look opaque from the viewpoint of native speakers of English. Overgeneralisation is another trap which foreign language learners do not give much attention. They tend to extend the use of a grammatical rule or lexical item beyond its accepted uses. In other words, they generalise the use of a word in a correct collocation for producing other expressions that have wrong collocations. They overuse the verb “commit” in “commit a crime” in expressions like “commit a murder” or “commit a theft” which are both non-authentic examples of word combination.

Collocations moreover cannot be translated into other languages word by word. Doing this distorts the meaning and spoils communication. Collocation simply has criteria that characterize it which foreign language learners need to realise. First it has a **non-compositionality nature**. Compositional phrases have explicit meaning that can be predicted from its parts. Alternatively, non-compositional phrases have their idiomatic or fused meaning that cannot be predicted from its components. “Hot dog” is a distinctive example of this non-compositionality since it cannot be translated to the

individual words of “*hot*” and “*dog*”. Fixed expressions and idioms are the most common examples that have non-compositionality nature. Collocation also has a **non-substitutability nature**. Synonyms used with other words cannot give an equal meaning from the viewpoint of a native speaker of English. “*He has a black mood*” can hardly be substituted with “*He has a dark mood*” though “*black*” and “*dark*” give the same connotation. Moreover, “*pretty flower*” and “*handsome car*” cannot be substituted with “*pretty car*” and “*handsome flower*” although “*pretty*” and “*handsome*” have equal meaning. Collocation, in addition, has a **non-modifiability nature**. Any part of the fixed expression cannot be changed from positive to comparative or superlative degrees, for example. “*White wine*”, for instance cannot be modified to “*whiter or whitest wine*”. “*Mother-in-law*”, “*kick the bucket*”, and “*a piece of cake*” cannot be modified to “*mother-in-laws*”, “*kick the buckets*”, and “*pieces of cake*”. Appropriate use of collocation needs sufficient awareness of these criteria.

### 2.3 Students' Awareness of Collocation

Many EFL learners including the Arab ones characterize knowledge of a lexical item in their ability to recall it in spoken and written discourse. While this represents the basic knowledge of vocabulary acquisition, Harmer (2001) lists four deeper aspects of vocabulary recognition. They include knowledge of its meaning (appropriate meaning in a context), its usage (collocations, metaphors, level of formality, connotations, and the associations the word might have), its formation (spelling, pronunciation, and derivations), and grammar (grammatical form). The limited knowledge of words and focusing primarily on their literal meanings or learning them in isolation of their context can create what Moats (2001) labels as “*word poverty*” even if the store of vocabulary they know exceeds the 1,000 academic words they are expected to learn in the initial stages of language learning. The issue is not related to the number of vocabulary to be retrieved

by learners but how these items are acquired in their appropriate authentic context with their variations, derivations, and collocations. Nation (2006: 79) shows an analysis of the variations of words used in an article and finds that the first 1,000 words cover between 78% - 81% of written text and between 81% - 84% of spoken text; whereas the 10<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> 1,000 words only constitute less than 1% of written text and less than 0.5% of spoken discourse. What makes the difference between fluent and non-fluent users of English is the knowledge of how the first 1,000 words are used in different contexts along with their frequent collocations and derivations.

The question herein is what prevents learners from using the lexical items they learn with their appropriate collocations? Harmon *et al* (2000) render this to the traditional approaches to vocabulary instruction which present the glossary of words isolated of their contexts. Teachers tend to focus on the dictionary definition of them with little consideration of the different meanings some words could have in different contexts. Schmitt (2000: 146) also relates this to the traditional approaches to vocabulary teaching which focus on activities for the explicit study of vocabulary. They include matching words with their definitions and filling in the blank spaces which all rely on students' memorisation of vocabulary items. COXHEAD (2011) mentioned the nod “*respect*” as one of the active words in the Academic Word List (AWL) which students know its literal meaning. However, by using the British National Corpus software for exploring the corpora and concordances of “*respect*”, the results were 60,401 collocates with this nod. Table two shows a number of these collocates. Students can easily understand the direct meaning of “*respect*” in a sentence like “*We should respect the culture of other people*”. However, expressions like “*in respect of*”, “*with respect to*”, and “*lose respect for*” often go beyond their superficial understanding of the word.

**Table 2: A Sample of collocation (The British National Corpus, 2014)**

Pre-collocates	Nod	Post-collocates
<i>represents the level of</i>	<b>respect</b>	<i>and trust for the leader</i>
has the same <i>rights in</i> that	<b>respect</b>	<i>as the residuary ordinary shares</i>
which <i>in</i> every	<b>respect</b>	<i>corresponds to the upper one</i>
originally, it <i>was a term of</i>	<b>respect</b>	<i>denoting a godparent</i>
<i>in</i> this	<b>respect</b>	<i>English local government differs from</i>



Table 3: Students' Common Collocation Errors

Projects	Taxonomy of Collocation Types														Total Errors
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1	1		1			2	1		2	2	1		1	2	13
2		1	1		2		2	1		1	1	1	2	1	13
3	2			1		2	1	1		1	2		1	1	12
4	1	1		1		2	1		2	2		1		1	12
5			1		1		2	1		1	1		1		8
6	1			1		1			1	1		1		2	8
7		1		1		2	2	2		1		1	1		11
8	2		1		1		1		1		1		2	2	11
9		1		1		1		1		1	1				6
10		1		1		1	2		1	1		1		1	9
11			1					1		1	1		1		5
12	1		2		2	2			2			1	1	2	13
13	2			1			2	1		2	2		1		11
14		2		1		1	1	1	2	1	2			1	12
15			1		1	2	1		2			2		1	10
16	1		2			1			2	1	1		1		9
17		1		1			2	1				1	1	1	8
18	1		1			1	1		1	2	1		1		9
19		1			1		1	1	2	1		1			8
20	1		1			1	1			1	2		1	1	9
Total	13	9	12	9	8	19	21	11	18	20	16	10	15	16	197
%	6.59	4.56	6.11	4.56	4.11	9.64	10.64	5.58	9.13	10.15	8.12	5.1	7.61	8.12	10.64

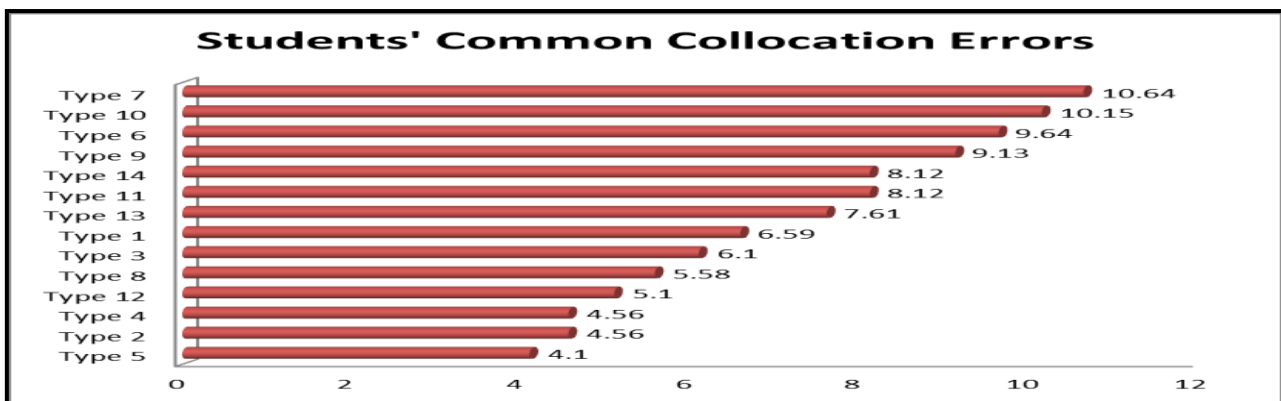


Figure 1: Students' Common Collocation Errors

Table 4: Collocational Errors and Their Corrections

Students' Collocation Errors	Possible Corrected Collocation Forms
I'd like <del>to discuss about</del> globalisation.	A <i>discussion about</i> globalisation.
The OAI <del>accused</del> the student <del>for</del> plagiarism.	The OAI <i>accused</i> the student <i>of</i> plagiarism.
We are <del>accustomed</del> <del>for</del> the hot weather.	We are <i>accustomed to</i> the hot weather.
Obese people have <del>to get rid from</del> bad habits.	Obese people have <i>to get rid of</i> bad habits.
Children have no <del>interest for</del> reading.	Children have no <i>interest in</i> reading.
The meals are <del>composed from</del> starchy food.	The meals are <i>composed of</i> starchy food.
They can <del>borrow</del> the book <del>in</del> the library.	They can <i>borrow</i> the book <i>from</i> the library.

### 3. METHOD

In order to have sufficient understanding of students' difficulties with collocation, twenty written works were collected from a group of undergraduate Arab students who study an English course (Writing Academic English) as a part of the university requirements before proceeding to major courses. Students are asked to write assignments and essays and make projects that all need adequate knowledge of language register and genres. While essays and assignments are often done in class under the supervision and orientation of instructors, the researcher favoured to collect twenty projects randomly from students since they are submitted for direct marking with no prior review of constructive feedback from instructors. Each project is composed of around 1,000 words written on a certain topic chosen by the student for discussing a certain problem and suggesting solutions of it. Students' projects address general topics like pollution, obesity, road accidents, globalisation, etc. Hence, they are the raw materials produced by students based on their knowledge of word families, collocations, and colligation. The written works were coded and analysed to find the collocation errors the Arab students often have.

### 4. ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITTEN WORKS

Based on the taxonomy of collocation types suggested by McIntosh *et al* (2009) (see table 1); table 3 shows the frequency of students' collocation errors extracted from the written works they produced in the writing academic English course. The data shown in table 3 and figure 1 display that students have significant shortage in their understanding of collocation. The highest portions of errors were made in types 7, 10, 6, 9, and 14. These types are about the use of prepositions either in the form of phrasal verbs like "*look up*" or while using them before and after nouns and verbs. The percentages of the five highest types are 10.64% for type 7 (Noun + Preposition), 10.15% for type 10 (Verb + Preposition), 9.64% for type 6 (Preposition + Noun), 9.13% for type 9 (Verb + Verb), and 8.12% for type 14 (Adverb + Verb + Adjective + Noun + Preposition + Noun). Table 4 shows examples of students' non-

collocation expressions as quoted from their written projects.

### 5. DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Mnemonic Strategies for Teaching Collocations

While the area of collocation within lexis represents a particular importance to master a target language, acquisition of it is still a problem for many language learners. Not less challenging than grammar acquisition, "the generation of collocationally compatible strings in a foreign language has always plagued even advanced students" (Sadeghi, 2014: 8). Improving collocational awareness is considered a shared duty of both learners and teachers. McCarthy and O'Dell (2005:8), for example, argue that students should take initiatives to improve awareness of collocation through some steps. They should practise what they learn in meaningful contexts and learn collocations in groups to help fix them in their memories. The expression "*I have given Mark a lift to the airport*" seems more authentic than "I have taken Mark to the airport". Sadeghi (2005) finds that teachers have an invaluable duty in raising students' consciousness of collocations. They should not restrict the teaching and learning of English lexis to formal traditional course books. Lexical matching and networks can be used as additional resources to allow students for more exposure to the natural collocations as they occur in impromptu discourse and fluent speech. Teachers also should encourage extensive reading activities of literary works that involve variety of authentic expressions as used by both elite and public people. This offers them a change to acquire not only the eloquent expressions used in formal settings, but to identify the collocations used by ordinary people in natural discourse contexts. Sadeghi also finds that teachers should warn students not to fall in the trap of having identical translation of certain expressions from their native language into the target language. Ann (2014: 2) argues that teachers should explicitly teach "collocation" to allow students understand from the beginning that not all words can be combined and give equal meaning. While teaching a



reading text, a teacher can signal the salient collocational expressions and highlight them for students to notice and practice in language activities. They can also list the most confusing minimal pairs of collocations like those words used with “do and make” and allow students form sentences using them either through controlled matching exercises or through free writing activities. These principles of teaching collocation underlie the model I suggest for teaching collocation in EFL classes.

### 5.2 Template of Teaching Collocation in EFL Classes

This argument indicates that less attention is paid to teaching collocation in EFL classes. The inappropriate teaching techniques negatively affect students' interlanguage and limit their ability to use formulaic language, fixed expressions, and collocation. This can be boosted through the explicit teaching of vocabulary and students being provided with genuine audio and written texts produced by native speakers of English. In this regard, I think reinforcing the collocational competence of students can be done through a three-stage process which I call “*Elicitation – Fixation – Creation*” (*EFC*). The initial *elicitation* stage means both awareness and noticing from the parts of teachers and students. A teacher should be aware that “learning more vocabulary is not just learning new words, it is often learning familiar words in new combinations” (Woolard, 2000: 3). They should not teach vocabulary in isolated lists that are void of real or relevant context. Instead, they should present them in their natural context in which these words are used. Teachers should also decide from the beginning of a lesson what word-combinations they will address every time. Students, on the other hand, should be aware that words of English are not linked randomly with each other. The very common sentence developed by Noam Chomsky “*colourless green trees sleep furiously*” is a syntactic structure that is grammatically correct but semantically nonsensical. If students are not aware of the potential combinations of an item, they will continue to struggle in listening and reading and more so in speaking and writing.

Increasing students' awareness of the different types of collocations encourages noticing them. For instance, when students identify that adjectives are preceded by adverbs, they will notice the kind of word that follows a particular adverb. Similarly, when they study the types of verbs used with the different sports, they will notice the types of sports that come with “*do, play, and go*”. Awareness necessitates explicit instruction of word-combinations and the most frequently-used expressions by students in oral and written discourse. The examples under appendix one are extracted from McCarthy and O'Dell (2005: 56) showing how teachers could raise

students' awareness of the verbs used with different sports. These examples allow students to know that “*going judo*” or “*doing cycling*” seem bizarre from the viewpoint of a native speaker of English and that “*going to judo*” implies going to a class in this sport rather than doing it. A teacher can extend the awareness process to empowering students with the very common expressions used in the area of sport, for instance, as given in examples two and three in appendix one. Expressions like “*set a new world record, tackle an opponent, or take a penalty*” can be peculiar for some students and giving more attention to them in a language class increases noticing them.

The *fixation* stage normally follows students' awareness of collocational expressions. It aims at reinforcing the acquisition of new collocational expressions. It emphasizes the accuracy and the ability to produce the correct word-combinations. It is a controlled practice phase often initiated by teachers and takes the forms of drills, multiple-choice exercises, gap-and-cue exercises, matching exercises, expression formation exercises, etc. It is a stage which involves learners producing the language previously focussed on in a restricted context. It helps them to practise saying or writing the acquired expressions correctly. The teacher's role is to direct the activities, provide positive feedback to students, correct mistakes and model the correct expressions. In order to check students' understanding of the verbs used with different sports, a teacher can gauge their knowledge of these expressions through exercises developed for this purpose as given under appendix two. The fixation stage is not less important than the elicitation one. Whereas elicitation permits them to identify the frequent combinations of a word, fixation enables them to store these collocations in their cognitive system and create an organised lexical notebook. Exercises three and four in appendix two enrich students' knowledge of the different collocates of “*do and make*”.

The third *creation* stage is supposed to develop fluency in using the acquired expressions in oral and written discourse in addition to the ability to use the language naturally as used by native speakers of it. A teacher can either direct this stage to creating a mutual dialogue between students using the target content freely. He also can encourage open discussions among students and reward the one who uses a greater number of collocations and fixed expressions. This stage is best favoured after teaching different groups of collocations for measuring retrieval of these expressions.





## 6. CONCLUSION

Reinforcing the collocational competence of students necessitates collaborative work from teachers and students. Teachers can utilize the daily teaching materials to signal the salient word combinations given in listening or reading scripts. However, students should be driven to be more autonomous and independent in enhancing their store of lexical items and fixed expressions. One way to do this is by providing bilingual dictionaries on word collocation since translation can be one of the keys to dealing with collocation. The “*Oxford Collocations Dictionary for students of English*” can be a reference in the classroom library for easy consultation. The “*English*

*Collocations in Use*” for McCarthy and O’Dell is of a high value to students. It addresses different genres and shows how words work together for fluent, natural English. It is equipped with extensive explanations and enough exercises on many topics. It is developed for self-study and independent classroom use. Another strategy is to encourage students to make a section in their vocabulary notebooks for listing the daily expressions they study at school. These strategies become less beneficial unless teachers and students are motivated to explore this discipline and value the impact of collocational competence on reinforcing the overall proficiency of students.

### Appendix One: Common Sporting Collocations with do, play, and go.

#### Example 1:

#### **Do, play and go**

The table below gives examples of common sporting collocations with *do*, *play* and *go*.

You <b>do</b>	gymnastics, judo, weightlifting, aerobics, yoga, wrestling, circuit training, archery, athletics
You <b>play</b>	games, badminton, billiards, hockey, bowls, rugby, golf, (table) tennis, cricket, baseball, chess, darts, cards, dominoes
You <b>go</b>	fishing, skiing, bowling, cycling, skateboarding, surfing, snowboarding, hang-gliding, climbing, hill walking, sailing, jogging, swimming

You can also say you **go to aerobics/judo/yoga/karate** – this means that you go to a class in this sport.

#### Example 2:

#### **Winning and losing**

Sportsmen and sportswomen want to **win matches**, not **lose matches**. But you can’t win all the time! Sometimes a team or player **deserves to win**, but gets **narrowly defeated/beaten**.

Before they **go in for / enter a competition**, athletes **train hard**. They probably **attend/do** at least five **training sessions** a week. They are likely to **put up a fight to gain/get a place** in the next **stage/round of the competition**. Of course, a sportsperson’s ultimate aim is to **break the world record** in their sport. If they succeed, they **set a new world record** and become a **world record holder**. They are sure to **come up against fierce/intense competition** as they try to **achieve their ambitions**. Sometimes they are satisfied if they just **achieve a personal best**.

Some sports people so **desperately want to win** that they take drugs to **enhance their performance**. This will be discovered when they **fail a drugs test**.



### Example 3:

## Football

You can **play** or **have** a (football) **match** / **game** (of football). It might be a **home** or an **away match** depending on whether you're playing on your team's **home ground** or not.

The aim is to **score** a **goal**. Players may **tackle** an opponent to try to **take possession** of the **ball**<sup>1</sup>. If you tackle in an illegal way, you **foul** your opponent. This will lead to the referee **blowing his whistle** and an opponent **taking a penalty** or **taking a free kick**. If someone isn't playing very well the manager may decide to **drop the player** from the team or **bring on a substitute**<sup>2</sup>. Both teams hope that they will have **taken the lead**<sup>3</sup> by half-time.

### Appendix Two: Controlled Exercises on Sporting Collocations with *do*, *play*, and *go*.

#### Example 1

Look at A. Complete the sentences with *do*, *play* or *go* in the correct form.

## New Sports Club Opening Next Week

You can ..... judo!

You can ..... badminton!

You can ..... swimming!

You can ..... weight lifting!

You can ..... circuit training!

You can ..... table tennis!

You can ..... skateboarding!

You can even ..... darts!

In fact, you can ..... almost any sport you can think of. So join now!



#### Example 2

Complete the collocations in this report of a rugby match.

Cambridge were happy to (1) ..... their last match 6:0. Oxford, the opposing team, put up a good (2) ..... and some people thought they (3) ..... to win. They were fearless in (4) ..... their opponents, but every time they took (5) ..... of the ball, Cambridge managed to win it back. Cambridge have now (6) ..... a place in the next (7) ..... of the competition. They will undoubtedly come up against some fierce (8) ..... . However, they have already managed to (9) ..... an interesting world record by having four members of the same family in their winning team!



**Example 3**

Choose the correct collocation, *do* or *make*.

- 1 Did the fire *do / make* much damage to the factory?
- 2 I hate *doing / making* my homework at the last minute.
- 3 You must *do / make* an effort to work harder.
- 4 Did you *do / make* any work at the weekend?
- 5 We are trying to *do / make* improvements to the system for registering.
- 6 Do you think it would *do / make* any harm if I cut some leaves off this plant?

**Example 4**

You are designing a questionnaire for your school magazine. Complete each question with *do* or *make*.

*How NICE are you?*

- 1 Do you always ..... your best to be on time when meeting a friend?
- 2 Do you ever ..... the cooking at home?
- 3 Do you ..... excuses if someone asks you to ..... a big favour for them?
- 4 Do you ever ..... negative comments about your friends' hair, clothes, etc?
- 5 Do you find it easy to ..... friends?

ALWAYS    SOMETIMES    NEVER

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Give yourself three points for 'always', two for 'sometimes', one for 'never'. Turn the page to find out how nice you really are.

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