



***FACTORS AFFECTING THE IRAQI EFL
LEARNERS' COLLOCATION
APPLICATION***

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العوامل التي تؤثر على استخدام المتصاحبات اللغوية من
قبل المتعلمين العراقيين



Abstract

The primary goal of this research is to study Iraqi EFL learners' collocation performance at Al-Iraqya University/ College of Arts/ English Department. Those learners encounter barriers using collocations in their English texts (written and spoken contexts) on the two phases; recognition phase and production phase. Not being aware of the sufficient skill to use collocations in a context when their existence is necessary to deliver the exact meaning could cause misunderstanding of some or even whole material. Thus, the study utilizes the Bandura's theory (1986) 'theory of planned behavior'. The survey is of the type of a self-administered questionnaire, which is the major method for the data collection. The questionnaire has two parts; the demographic part that supports a general background of the students, and the other part is subdivided into two parts: the first branch asks questions that investigate the theoretical part of the study like their interest in observing English contexts and the time they consume per week on such practice. The other branch contains 40 multiple-choice questions (MCQ) of English collocations. The participants of the study were 48 Iraqi students at the fourth stage at the English Department. The findings exposed that the learners who show more efficiency English collocations appear to have longer experience in surfing the net and watching English texts whether visual, audio, written, or a combination of two or more of such aspects. In addition to the importance of the current study to the literature, it grants a pedagogical contribution to the academic fields.

المستخلص

الهدف الأساسي من هذا البحث هو دراسة أداء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة العراقية / كلية الآداب / قسم اللغة الإنجليزية المتصاحبات اللغوية. حيث تشكل هذه الظاهرة عوائق عند كتابتهم للنصوص الانكليزية. و في كلا المستويين التمييز و الانتاج. إن قلة الإدراك لهذه الناحية اللغوية المتعلم للمهارة الكافية ممكن ان يسبب سوء فهم لبعض او كل النص. وهكذا ، تستخدم الدراسة نظرية باندورا (1986) "نظرية السلوك المخطط". الاستبيان المستخدم هو ذاتي ، وهو الأسلوب الرئيسي لجمع البيانات. يحتوي الاستبيان على جزأين ؛ الجزء الديموغرافي الذي يدعم الخلفية العامة للطلاب ، والجزء الآخر ينقسم إلى جزأين: الفرع الأول يسأل أسئلة الجزء النظري من الدراسة مثل اهتمامهم بمراقبة السياقات الإنجليزية والوقت الذي يستهلكونه أسبوعياً هذه الممارسة. يحتوي الفرع الآخر على 40 سؤالاً متعدد الاختيارات (MCQ) عن عمليات ترتيب اللغة الإنجليزية. شارك في الدراسة 48 طالبا عراقيا في المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. كشفت النتائج أن المتعلمين الذين يظهرون المزيد من الفعالية في في هذه الناحية اللغوية يبدو أنهم يتمتعون بخبرة أطول في تصفح الإنترنت ومشاهدة النصوص الإنجليزية سواء المرئية أو الصوتية أو المكتوبة أو مزيجاً من اثنين أو أكثر من هذه الجوانب. بالإضافة إلى أهمية الدراسة الحالية للدراسات السابقة ، فإنه يمنح مساهمة تربوية في المجالات الأكاديمية.

INTRODUCTION

Collocations appeared to be a difficult part of language EFL learning than it had originally been thought, and this was extensively reflected in the EFL performance while trying to deal with English collocations. Collocation application has branched into many other fields of study that began to appreciate the crucial role of collocation awareness, which seems to have relations in a way or another to various fields. For example, some of the fields are like politics, military, sociology, economics, and others that demand accurate selections of words combination. Hence, collocations play a significant role in people's everyday usage. That because they constitute a fundamental issue that affects people accuracy level of their EFL communication.

The collocation application by Iraqi EFL learners is a subject to a number of factors, which can be shown clearly in the usage of their English written and spoken contexts. As being an EFL University lecturer, the researcher interviewed a number of the Iraqi EFL learners asking them about the method they follow in extensive reading (i.e. extra English studying other than their homework) and their motivation to learn English. The researcher obtained two primary factors that affect their collocation accuracy usage. The first factor is '**Observing English contexts**' and the second factor is the '*frequency*' of online chatting with native speakers of English language. To explain further, learners who showed good skill in collocation application have a certain method of chatting with other English speaker. While those who showed poor collocation applications have less or no method of chatting with any of English speakers. Accordingly, two factors are nominated in this study, which are Observing English contexts factor and the 'frequency' of chatting with English speakers. Both factors are going to be tested as independents variables in relation to the collocation performance as the dependent variable in the current study.

The aim of the current study is to figure out the effects of both; Observing English contexts and frequency of language usage (Frequency of exposure). Accordingly, the current study is adopting Bandura's theory (1986) (Theory of Planned Behavior). The study tested 30 EFL Iraqi students majored in English at the Al-Iraqia University. SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) and SPSS programs were utilized to analyze the factors to test the relationships among those factors.

Iraqi Educational system

The current research tries to highlight the factor the influencing the collocation usage. Thus, one primary factor is the in most of the EFL learners to influence such issues is the educational system of a country. For this end, the Iraqi Educational system is to be reviewed. All Iraqi generation have been submitting

to the, relatively, the same method of education concerning English language learning. This method has been providing poor efficiency of collocation users. However, this issue has rarely been tackled in relation to the Educational system of Iraq. In order to shed light on the primary elements of the Iraqi Educational system, they are briefly listed as the following:

a. Teaching materials

Teaching materials are seen as the tools that the people who are possible for the teaching process use in order to reach the desired results in the learners skills. Since the diversity of the teaching materials are of great value to achieve the desired aims (Court and Ghai, 1974), they can be varied as CDs, slides, work books, teachers' guides, maps, books, pictures, as well as many other varieties of other aids which can assist the learning process.

b. Teaching methods

There are many teaching methods that teachers prefer to follow throughout the process of teaching. Each of these methods has its own pros and cons. Some primary methods are; Communicative teaching method, Direct method Grammar translation method, Audio-lingual method, and other methods which teacher have been applying in getting the desirable changes in the English language skill in teaching the foreign and second languages (Freeman and Anderson, ٢٠١٣). A struggle is faced by the Arab countries because they kept adopting the more classical methods (Hamadat, 2009). These countries do not have some kind of regulatory technique that is clearly recommended by the most contemporary techniques. One study by Saeed (2015) showed that 80% of the intermediate language teachers whose major is in English confessed that they are in need to take more training courses techniques in language teaching. Saeed concluded that the average of those teachers who are concentrating primarily grammar reaches 70% or even more. This part of teaching comes at the expense of some other language skills.

c. EFL teacher's role

Teachers perform the basic role in the educational context. They are believed to be the most powerful element in the context of classrooms (Edge, 1999). Their tasks are to create and ensure an appropriate environment for those learners to help them progress their language skills. Most of the responsibilities that are considered to be vital in deciding learners who are qualified to pass to the next stage than those who are not is taken by teachers. Such responsibilities consist of evaluating learners and constructing the tests. As a result, teachers have to be skilled organizers and know the most convenient method that is estimated to be productive for the expected objectives. Furthermore, teachers should be good prompters to the learners (Wang, 2008) to positively motivate them overcome any barrier in the education process. Dweik (1986) investigated the phenomenon

of motivation in the Arabic Jordanian intermediate school. those English teacher had low level of motivation to result in a friendly atmosphere for their learners. The study concluded that, certain types of a friendly atmosphere could encourage learners' interaction in English and turn those learners to be better effective learners.

The so far mentioned habits and circumstances show the effects of producing either qualified or unqualified learners through moderating the motivation level of the learners. To sum up, learners who are motivated tend to dedicate more effort to English learn via spending an extra duration of time in reading and listening to ethical English contexts.

Problem statement

Collocation is the subject that covers a wide range of linguistic peculiarity mental and intuition. Thus, the common point of view is that language teaching can obtain further gain from the collocation studies; in addition to that, the mastery of a good amount of collocation ranges establishes a greater deal to the mastery of other foreign languages. The current study is going to hypothesize that the issue of collocation difficulties (whether grammatical or lexical) poses an actual problem to the most of Iraqi EFL learners in general and was diagnosed by the researcher with the Iraqi EFL learners in the English Department/ college of Arts/ Al-Iraqia University. the most important factors behind the problem are the following:

- 1) Lack of transnational equivalences between the first language the target language.
- 2) Overgeneralization, that leads to an excessive deal of wrong collocation.
- 3) Negligence on both sides, the teacher and learner.
- 4) Experience shortage in the target language that happens as results of exposure shortage to the actual target language through online data, T.V. programmers, magazines, newspaper etc.

The current study is an extensive inspection of the previous studies of collocation pursued by a full portrayal of the test and an examination of results. The outcomes demonstrates that the performance of the students at the recognition level is more efficient than their actual performance. Then, the study reaches to a conclusion that is derived from both the empirical and theoretical parts of the study to give some tips of pedagogy for the academic field.

In Iraq, teaching English language is instructed from the primary stage in which students who go to college are expected to be as experienter of English language due to their exposure to English throughout twelve years. However, it was found out that those learners have a great gap in the English accuracy level. This gap has been the aftereffect of committing distinctive timeframes of English perusing which has been devoted to lesser exposure to English language.

This study aims at highlighting and filling the gap by identifying the EFL learners' collocation performance at the Al-Iraqia University. Furthermore, this study aims at checking observational learning factor that might have a direct effect on the collocation acquisition. Accordingly, the current study applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to assess its applicability to explain the factor under study.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Investigate the effect of students' observational learning on the collocation performance.
2. Investigate the effect of students' frequency of exposure to English on the collocation performance.

Research Questions

This study has two questions, which are:

1. What is the effect of students' observational learning on the collocation performance?
2. What is the effect of students' frequency of exposure to English texts on the collocation performance?

Hypotheses of the study

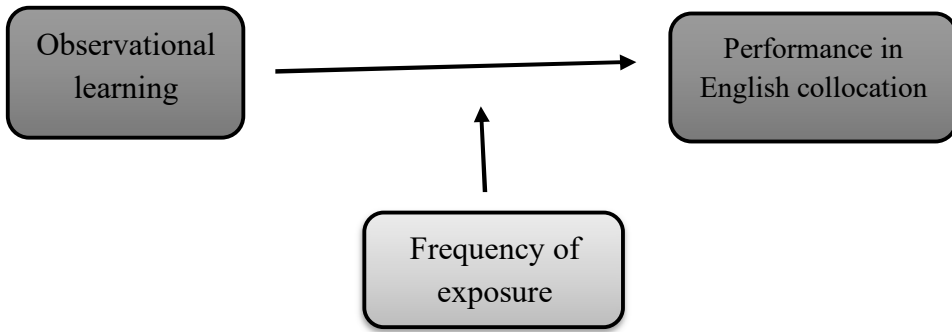
1. There is a positive relationship between the Iraqi EFL learners' observational learning on the collocation performance.
2. There is a positive relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' frequency of exposure to English texts on the collocation performance.

Significance of the Study

The present study is directed to support valuable keys for the EFL learners to follow a more effective method of English learning. The study will draw the curriculum developers' attention to develop a better design of syllabus in the pedagogical field following the observational learning

Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

The factors, which are adopted from Bandura, A. 1986 (theory of planned behavior), constituted the conceptual framework of the current study. These factors are observational learning and frequency of exposure, which act as the Independent Variable (i.e. observational learning) and moderator variable (i.e. frequency of exposure) of the framework. On the other hand, the students' performance in collocational task is the Dependent Variable of the conceptual framework. The following is an illustration of the conceptual framework



The conceptual framework of the study

Literature Review

Bandura (2001) refers to the importance of frequency of exposure in any learning context after a certain period of time (i.e. frequency of exposure). Thus, the frequency of exposure is an operative aspect in the process of learning through observation. To this end, Kovecses & Szabco(1996) confirm the fact that the same cognitive operations that individuals use to make sense of other general experience can be also used to make sense of language. Thus, observational learning is linked to the language learning. Consequently, in observational learning, the observational learning (frequency of exposure) takes the role of a ‘moderator variable’. This variable may increase or decrease the effect of the independent factor (i.e. Frequency of observation factors) and the dependent factor (i.e. performance in collocation) (Cameron 1996: 58).

The current study is going to investigate Bandura’s theory factor of observational learning to examine this factor which undergoes different ‘frequency of exposure’ of chatting with native speakers of English language some way (primarily online) which acts as a moderator variable of English context on the collocation performance in English. In turn, the author might argue that the above two factors are both subjects to the personal attitude of the observer towards English learning. To explain further, any frequency of exposure is linked in amount to the attitude of people towards certain behaviour. E.g. positive attitude towards any behaviour leads to higher frequency of exposure. And the vice versa is when people hold a negative attitude towards behaviour when they lose interest to expose to that particular behaviour.

Bandura, (1986) refers to the significant role to the frequency of exposure in the learning process. He claimed that the repeated exposures to behaviour are essential to acquire the modeled behaviour. To paraphrase, the higher amount of time ratio a learner consumes in exposing to a target model the higher accuracy in performance in the same field he/she obtains. in a concord to the Bandura’s (1986) finding, Blandin, et al (1994) declare that the continuous increasing number of the frequent exposure is reviewed as an effective factor in the process

of learning through observation. Furthermore, their finding is on the same line with Fakhir's study (2015). In his study, he which studies the undesirable level of performance of Iraqi EFL learners. The study shows that the frequent exposure to the foreign language is a decisive factor that causes a deference between poor performance in relation to efficient performance by Iraqi EFL learners.

Al-Murade (2005) inspected the English collocations in the process of teaching. He claimed that language teaching could have much to gain through collocation studies. In addition, being efficient in collocation helps institutes a great deal of the EFL mastering. The hypotheses of Al-Murade's study involves that collocation, whether lexical or grammatical, poses a great barrier to the Iraqi EFL students. He also found that the reasons that stand behind such problem are diverse. On the top of them are: Lack of transnational equivalence that exists between the first tongue and the foreign language, overgeneralization which leads to a high amount of incorrect collocation, negligence of the issue by both the teacher as well as learner, Lack of experience in the English language which is a result of the inadequate exposure to newspaper, T.V. programmers, magazines , etc. The results reveal that the learners' recognition performance is much better than their actual performance. Bahns (1993) studied the difficulty that collocations pause as an issue of vocabulary learning. He claimed that there was a growing awareness of the significance of lexical collocations for the field of vocabulary learning as affected by the method of teaching. One of the main problems to teach lexical collocations in a systematic way, according to his study, was their huge number, which expanses to tens of thousands. In his study, it is highlighted that this enormous learning and teaching load can be red decreased by a certain contrastive approach to the concept of lexical collocation. One exemplary German-English contrastive analysis of noun + verb and verb + noun collocations displays that there is a direct translational equivalence. Like those lexical collocations do not appropriately have to be taught. The teaching of lexical collocations in EFL have to concentrate on items for which there is no direct translational equivalence in English and in the learners' respective mother. In English as in other language there are many identifiable, fixed, non-idiomatic constructions and phrases. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations or collocations. The authors support the example of murder term and its collocates. When using this noun people immediately recall from their memory the verb 'to commit' and the exact phrase 'to commit a murder'. It is in a later step that some other verbs such as 'to investigate', to witness or to describe appear. 'To commit a murder' is a far fixed collocation than those with the other verbs, which are three. Relative fixedness is an actual characteristic of collocations. Another characteristic is their non-idiomaticity. In spite of the fact that idioms are another class of fixed sequences, their meaning is habitually non-combinatory. In other word, it cannot

be decoded from the meanings of their constituents; on the contrary, the meaning of collocations is constantly transparent.

Thus, as to the above studies, there is a certain difficulty paused by the vocabulary collocations particular when the issue comes to the non-English speaker communities (like the Iraqi community of the current study). Accordingly, this study is hoped to contribute to the target issue and present some recommendations to help reduce the number of barriers faced by those who are concerned.

METHODS

This current study employed the quantitative method design in order to investigate the collocation application task of the Iraqi University students whose major is in English. The population of the study are the students who enrolled in Al-Iraqia University (N= 30), residents of Baghdad, Iraq.

INSTRUMENT

This study applied self-administered questionnaires; to measure the two factors (observational learning and frequency of exposure) that are expected to affect the students' general performance in English collocations. The entire items of questionnaire were measured via a five-point Likert-type scale for the demographic part of the questionnaire. The student's task is simply a multiple choice questions, in which a student has to choose the right item that collocate with the given word in the items. Thus, the questionnaire includes two parts as follows: The demographic part that is designed to obtain general actual and historical background about the sampling of the study. The second part includes 40 questions that are all put in Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) structure. Taking the decision regarding the grades of the students' performances is decided to be 50% in order to count it as a passing mark. consequently, the mark 49% is regarded to be failure.

3.4.1 Validity and Reliability

To make sure that the validity and reliability are within the acceptable average, the researcher tested the questionnaire ahead of time before the final submission. The beginning is with the Face validity, which refers to the case whether items on a questionnaire seem to be appropriate to the issue being tested and measured and being easily understood (Creswell, 2012). The content and face validity of the questionnaire were evaluated via a panel of judges whose major is in the target field of the current study at the English Department/ Al-Iraqia University. The judges' remarks and suggestions were appreciated and taken into consideration by the researcher. Hence, the questionnaire was refined to match the judges' suggestions. Reliability analysis was collected by counting the Cronbach's alpha. The output analysis of the pilot study shown that the constructs' items achieved an acceptable reliability with Cronbach's alpha (0.73) observational learning, and (0.87) frequency of exposure.

Data collection Procedure

The beginning of the data collection process started with obtaining a permission from the English Department of those participants to gather the study data. The technique that was utilized to the data gathering was the survey design according to the quantitative method which followed other previous studies. As the instrument was mainly MCQ, the time that the participants needed to complete the questionnaire was 25-45 minutes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The current study utilized SPSS software, which is recommended by many previous studies. It is sophisticated software that is used by professionals and social scientists for the statistical analysis (Coakes & Steed, 2009). Concerning the regression testing, the regression measurement is between the accuracy level of the observational learning and Performance in collocation, which is mediated by the frequency of exposure. From the participants' answers, the study revealed that the majority of the students agreed concerning the presence of the relationship between the two factors the First relation is between the observational learning and performance which yielded ($\beta = .229$), with a significant level at (.000). According to the SPSS software, this statistics means that observational learning has an actual positive relationship with performance in English collocation. The relations of the factors are illustration of the following statistics can be shown in the below table.

Table 4. 1: Results of Regression Analysis

Model	MP		
	(β)	R Square	Sig
observational learning	.228	.053	.000
frequency of exposure	.104	.012	.030

CONCLUSION

The research examined the factors that affect the acquisition of the English collocations at Al-Iraqya University/ Collage of Arts/ English Department. The study shows that (which is the answer of the study) students who practiced Observational Learning for a longer period. Correspondingly, the participants who obtained low scores are those who have been devoting less time on observing English context and directed their attentions to more classical method

of learning English like 'Grammar Translation Methods'. Furthermore, the Observational Learning proved to be significant method specifically in the academic fields.

IMPLICATION

The present study implies that the Observational Learning is a fruitful factor for advancing and improving the general level of proficiency in English language especially for difficult areas of language like collocation learning. What makes the Observational Learning more effective is the extra amount of exposure to English contexts. Accordingly, this research motivates learners to be more aware of the fact that longer frequencies of observing English context constitute vital benefits for the EFL learners. In addition, the productivity of observational learning is higher than other means of learning since it is a kind of recreational learning. To paraphrase, learners would spend joyful times observational learning because surfing the net and watching varied videos are meeting the general taste of people in general and younger generations (i.e. primary school students, secondary school students, and university students). This study indicates that the observational learning factor should be urged by people who are in the responsibility for designing and developing the learning process. To put it in other words, from time to time, the academic curricula should be revised to cope with the most recent pedagogical studies like this current one to fill the gap in the present curricula.

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