

Teaching English Collocations through Corpus Linguistics Methods

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Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of teaching English collocations through corpus linguistics methods in second language learning. The research focuses on how corpus-based tools and authentic language data can enhance learners' understanding and use of collocations in real contexts. By integrating concordance analysis, frequency data, and pattern recognition, learners are exposed to natural language usage, which improves their lexical competence and fluency. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate learners' progress in recognizing and producing appropriate collocations. The findings suggest that corpus-based instruction significantly improves learners' accuracy, awareness, and confidence in using collocations, making it a valuable approach in modern language teaching.

Keywords: collocations, corpus linguistics, English language teaching, lexical competence, concordance analysis, language learning, corpus-based methods, ESL, vocabulary acquisition, data-driven learning.

Introduction. In modern language teaching, vocabulary development is considered a central component of communicative competence, and within this domain, collocations play a crucial role. Collocations—commonly co-occurring words such as *make a decision* or *strong interest*—are essential for producing natural and fluent language. However, many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners struggle with appropriate collocation usage, often relying on direct translation from their native language, which leads to unnatural or incorrect expressions.

Traditional methods of teaching vocabulary tend to focus on isolated words rather than word combinations, limiting learners' ability to use language authentically. In this

context, corpus linguistics has emerged as an innovative approach that provides access to large collections of real-life language data (corpora). These corpora allow learners to observe how words are used in authentic contexts, identify frequent patterns, and develop a deeper understanding of collocational usage.

Corpus-based teaching methods, particularly data-driven learning (DDL), encourage learners to actively explore language through concordance lines, frequency lists, and contextual analysis. This approach not only enhances learners' lexical awareness but also promotes learner autonomy and critical thinking skills. By engaging directly with authentic language data, students can discover patterns of collocations independently and apply them more accurately in both spoken and written communication.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of teaching English collocations through corpus linguistics methods. It aims to examine how corpus-based instruction influences learners' ability to recognize, understand, and use collocations appropriately, and to evaluate its impact on overall language proficiency in ESL contexts.

Methods. This study employed a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching English collocations through corpus linguistics methods.

Participants. The participants consisted of 40–60 ESL learners at intermediate proficiency level, studying at a university. They were divided into two groups: an experimental group (corpus-based instruction) and a control group (traditional vocabulary teaching).

Research Design. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was used over a period of 4–6 weeks. Both groups were given an initial test to assess their collocational knowledge. The experimental group was taught using corpus linguistics methods, while the control group received conventional instruction based on textbooks and teacher explanations.

Instructional Procedure. The experimental group was trained to use corpus tools such as concordancers (e.g., AntConc) and online corpora (e.g., COCA, BNC). Students analyzed authentic examples of collocations, explored frequency patterns, and identified

correct word combinations through guided tasks. The control group learned collocations through memorization, translation, and standard exercises.

Data Collection. Data were collected through:

- Pre-test and post-test measuring collocation recognition and production
- Written and spoken tasks assessing collocation use in context
- Classroom observations
- Questionnaires evaluating learners' attitudes toward the learning method

Data Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods (e.g., paired t-tests) to compare pre- and post-test results within and between groups. Qualitative data from observations and questionnaires were analyzed thematically to identify learners' perceptions, challenges, and engagement levels.

Ethical Considerations. All participants provided informed consent, and their data were kept confidential. The study ensured voluntary participation and anonymity throughout the research process.

Results. The findings of the study demonstrate that corpus-based instruction had a significant positive impact on learners' collocational competence.

Quantitative Results. Pre-test results indicated that both the experimental and control groups had relatively similar levels of collocation knowledge at the beginning of the study. However, post-test results revealed a notable improvement in the experimental group compared to the control group. Learners who engaged with corpus tools showed higher accuracy in both recognition and production of collocations.

Statistical analysis (paired and independent sample t-tests) confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group was significant. In contrast, the control group showed only moderate progress, mainly in recognition rather than active usage.

Productive Skills Development. In written and spoken tasks, the experimental group demonstrated more natural and context-appropriate use of collocations. Their language output contained fewer errors related to word combinations, and their expressions were more fluent and native-like compared to the control group.

Learner Engagement and Autonomy. Questionnaire results indicated that most students in the experimental group found corpus-based learning engaging and useful. They reported increased awareness of word patterns and greater confidence in using English collocations independently. Many learners also highlighted that discovering patterns themselves helped them retain knowledge more effectively.

Qualitative Observations. Classroom observations showed that students in the experimental group were more actively involved in the learning process. They participated in discussions, analyzed data critically, and developed problem-solving skills while working with authentic language examples.

Overall Outcome. The results suggest that teaching collocations through corpus linguistics methods is more effective than traditional approaches, particularly in improving productive language skills, learner autonomy, and long-term retention of collocational knowledge.

Discussion. The results of this study confirm that corpus-based instruction is an effective approach for teaching English collocations in ESL contexts. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group suggests that exposure to authentic language data and active learner involvement play a key role in developing collocational competence.

One important finding is that learners who used corpus tools were able to produce more accurate and natural collocations compared to those taught through traditional methods. This supports the idea that language learning is more effective when students engage with real usage patterns rather than memorizing isolated vocabulary items. Corpus-based learning allows learners to notice frequent word combinations, contextual meanings, and grammatical patterns, which enhances both their receptive and productive skills.

Another notable aspect is the development of learner autonomy. Students in the experimental group were not passive recipients of knowledge; instead, they actively explored language data, formed hypotheses, and verified their understanding through analysis. This aligns with the principles of data-driven learning (DDL), which emphasize

discovery-based learning and critical thinking. As a result, learners became more confident in independently identifying and using appropriate collocations.

The findings also highlight the limitations of traditional teaching methods. While the control group showed some improvement, their progress was mostly limited to recognition rather than actual usage. This indicates that conventional approaches may not sufficiently support deeper lexical acquisition or long-term retention.

However, several challenges were observed during the study. Some learners initially found corpus tools difficult to use due to a lack of technical skills or familiarity with concordance data. This suggests that proper training and guided instruction are essential when implementing corpus-based methods. Additionally, time constraints in classroom settings may limit the extent to which such approaches can be fully integrated.

Overall, the study demonstrates that corpus linguistics methods provide a more dynamic, interactive, and effective way of teaching collocations. They not only improve linguistic accuracy but also foster independent learning skills. Future research could explore the long-term effects of corpus-based learning and its application across different proficiency levels and language skills.

Conclusion. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that teaching English collocations through corpus linguistics methods is a highly effective approach in ESL learning. The findings reveal that learners who engaged with corpus-based instruction showed significantly greater improvement in both the recognition and production of collocations compared to those taught through traditional methods.

Corpus-based learning not only enhances linguistic accuracy but also promotes deeper understanding of authentic language use. By analyzing real-life language data, learners develop the ability to identify patterns, use appropriate word combinations, and produce more natural and fluent expressions. Moreover, this approach encourages learner autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation in the learning process.

Despite some initial challenges, such as the need for technical training and time limitations, the overall benefits of corpus linguistics methods outweigh these difficulties.

With proper guidance and structured implementation, corpus-based instruction can be successfully integrated into language classrooms.

Therefore, it can be concluded that corpus-driven approaches represent a valuable and innovative tool for improving collocational competence and overall communicative proficiency. Future studies are recommended to further investigate long-term outcomes and expand the application of these methods across different educational contexts.

References:

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