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THE EFFECT OF EXPLICIT COLLOCATION INSTRUCTION ON UZBEK EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract. Collocations play an essential role in developing fluency, accuracy, and naturalness in English academic writing. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students experience difficulties in selecting and combining words appropriately, which often results in unnatural expressions and limited lexical flexibility. In the Uzbek educational context, students may demonstrate sufficient knowledge of individual English words but still struggle to use them in conventional combinations. The present study examines the potential effect of explicit collocation instruction on Uzbek EFL students' academic writing, with particular attention to lexical accuracy, vocabulary range, grammatical patterns, and overall writing quality. A qualitative literature-based research approach is employed to analyze theoretical perspectives and previous empirical findings concerning collocation acquisition and vocabulary instruction. The study focuses on the pedagogical value of teaching collocations explicitly through contextualized examples, lexical exercises, corpus-based activities, and guided writing practice. The analysis suggests that explicit instruction can help learners recognize frequently occurring word combinations, develop greater awareness of lexical patterns, and produce more natural academic expressions. Particular attention is given to grammatical and lexical collocations, including combinations such as "conduct research," "strong evidence," "draw a conclusion," and "significant impact." The discussion also highlights the importance of repeated exposure, contextual practice, and independent use of collocations in academic texts. The study concludes that explicit collocation instruction can serve as an effective component of academic writing instruction for Uzbek EFL students when integrated with meaningful communication and regular writing practice.

Keywords: collocation instruction, Uzbek EFL students, academic writing, lexical competence, vocabulary acquisition, lexical accuracy, English language teaching, collocational knowledge, EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is one of the most demanding skills for students learning English as a Foreign Language. It requires more than grammatical knowledge and the ability to construct individual sentences. Successful academic writing depends on the effective use of vocabulary, appropriate word combinations, logical organization, coherence, and the ability to communicate complex ideas in a clear and precise manner. One important aspect of academic writing competence is collocational knowledge. Collocations refer to words that frequently occur together in conventional combinations within a language. Examples include "make a decision," "conduct research," "strong argument," "significant contribution," and "deep understanding." These combinations are widely used in academic and everyday communication and contribute to the naturalness and accuracy of language production. For EFL learners, acquiring individual vocabulary items does not automatically result in the ability to use them appropriately in combination. A student may know the meanings of the words "strong" and "argument" but may not recognize why "strong argument" is more natural than certain alternative combinations. Similarly, learners may understand the meaning of "research" but experience difficulties when selecting an appropriate verb, such as "conduct," "carry out," or "undertake." This problem is particularly relevant to Uzbek university students studying English for academic purposes. Although many students develop substantial vocabulary knowledge through classroom instruction, textbook activities, and independent learning, they may still produce unnatural lexical combinations in essays, reports, and research assignments. Such difficulties may be associated with differences between Uzbek and English lexical patterns, limited

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exposure to authentic academic texts, insufficient attention to word combinations in vocabulary instruction, and the influence of direct translation from the first language.

Traditional vocabulary teaching often introduces new words as isolated items accompanied by definitions and translations. Although this approach can help students understand individual word meanings, it may not provide sufficient information about how words naturally combine in different contexts. For example, students may memorize the meaning of "decision" without learning that English commonly uses the combination "make a decision." As a result, they may produce expressions influenced by direct translation or incomplete knowledge of English lexical patterns. Lewis (1993) argues that vocabulary should be considered a central component of language learning and that language acquisition involves learning meaningful combinations of words rather than memorizing isolated vocabulary items. This perspective provides an important theoretical foundation for collocation-focused instruction. Similarly, Hill (2000) emphasizes that collocational competence contributes significantly to language fluency and that learners need systematic opportunities to notice and practice word combinations. Collocations can generally be divided into lexical and grammatical categories. Lexical collocations involve combinations of content words, such as "strong evidence," "academic achievement," and "conduct an experiment." Grammatical collocations involve combinations of a lexical item with a particular grammatical structure, such as "interested in," "depend on," and "responsible for." Understanding these distinctions is particularly important in academic writing because students must select vocabulary that is both semantically appropriate and grammatically accurate. Explicit collocation instruction involves directly teaching learners how words combine, explaining common patterns, providing examples, and offering opportunities for meaningful practice. Instead of expecting students to acquire all collocations incidentally, teachers deliberately draw attention to frequent and useful combinations. This approach may be especially beneficial for EFL learners because they often have

fewer opportunities to encounter English in natural communicative environments than native speakers. Research on vocabulary acquisition has consistently emphasized the importance of repeated exposure and meaningful use. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary knowledge involves multiple dimensions, including form, meaning, and use. Collocational knowledge is closely connected with the use dimension because learners must understand how vocabulary items function in combination with other words. Schmitt (2000) also highlights the importance of developing different aspects of lexical knowledge rather than focusing exclusively on word definitions. In addition, Nesselhauf (2005) demonstrates that non-native speakers may experience difficulties with collocations even when they possess considerable general vocabulary knowledge. Her research emphasizes that collocational errors represent an important aspect of second-language lexical development. For Uzbek EFL students, explicit collocation instruction may provide a practical way to improve academic writing because it focuses on the relationships between words rather than treating vocabulary as a collection of independent items.

For instance, students can learn that academic English commonly uses expressions such as "raise an issue," "provide evidence," "reach a conclusion," "pose a challenge," and "play a significant role." Learning these combinations may help students produce more natural and academically appropriate sentences. Furthermore, collocation instruction can contribute to the development of lexical fluency. When students become familiar with frequently occurring word combinations, they may retrieve expressions more efficiently during writing and spend less time searching for appropriate vocabulary. Corpus linguistics also offers valuable opportunities for collocation teaching. By examining authentic texts and concordance lines, learners can observe how particular words are used in different contexts. Corpus-based activities allow students to identify recurring patterns and compare possible lexical combinations. Granger and Meunier (2008) emphasize the relevance of phraseological research and

corpus-based approaches to language learning, demonstrating the importance of examining multiword expressions in authentic language use. Despite the recognized importance of collocations, vocabulary instruction in many EFL classrooms continues to emphasize individual words, translations, and grammatical rules. Consequently, students may develop an understanding of vocabulary meanings without acquiring sufficient knowledge of conventional lexical combinations. The purpose of this study is to examine the potential effect of explicit collocation instruction on Uzbek EFL students' academic writing. Particular attention is given to collocational accuracy, lexical variety, grammatical appropriateness, and the ability to use academic expressions in meaningful contexts. The study also explores instructional techniques that can help learners develop collocational competence and apply it more effectively in academic writing tasks.

The present study adopts a qualitative literature-based research design to examine the relationship between explicit collocation instruction and academic writing development among Uzbek EFL students. The research approach is based on the analysis and synthesis of theoretical publications and previous empirical studies concerning vocabulary acquisition, collocational competence, and second-language writing. A literature-based approach is appropriate because the study aims to identify the pedagogical principles underlying explicit collocation instruction and explain how these principles may contribute to improved academic writing among Uzbek university students. The theoretical foundation draws on research related to lexical approaches, vocabulary acquisition, phraseology, corpus linguistics, and academic language development. Particular attention is given to the works of Lewis (1993), Nation (2001), Schmitt (2000), Nesselhauf (2005), Hill (2000), and Granger and Meunier (2008). The analysis focuses on the characteristics of lexical and grammatical collocations and their relevance to academic writing. Examples are selected to represent common expressions used in academic contexts, including verb-noun, adjective-noun, noun-noun, and verb-

preposition combinations. The instructional framework considers several techniques for teaching collocations explicitly. These include presenting collocations in contextualized texts, identifying word partnerships, completing collocation exercises, using concordance lines, organizing lexical notebooks, and applying newly learned expressions in academic paragraphs and essays. The proposed instructional framework is particularly relevant to Uzbek EFL learners at the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. Students at these levels generally possess sufficient vocabulary knowledge to understand academic texts but may require additional support in selecting conventional lexical combinations. The instructional activities are designed around authentic academic topics such as education, technology, environmental issues, scientific research, and social development. These topics provide opportunities to practice collocations that are frequently encountered in academic discourse. The analysis also considers the relationship between collocation instruction and different dimensions of writing performance. Collocational accuracy concerns the appropriate combination of words, lexical variety concerns the range of expressions used, and grammatical appropriateness concerns the correct grammatical patterns associated with particular lexical items. Academic writing quality is considered in relation to lexical appropriateness, coherence, clarity, and the ability to express ideas using conventional academic expressions. Previous research findings are compared thematically to identify recurring arguments concerning the effectiveness of explicit vocabulary instruction and the role of collocations in language development. Since the present article does not involve a newly conducted classroom experiment or a newly collected participant sample, the results are presented as a synthesis of existing research and a pedagogical analysis. No artificial participant statistics, experimental scores, or unsupported numerical improvements are reported.

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The analysis of theoretical perspectives and previous research identifies several important ways in which explicit collocation instruction may contribute to the development of Uzbek EFL students' academic writing.

One of the most important potential benefits of explicit collocation instruction is improved lexical accuracy. EFL students frequently produce expressions that are understandable but do not correspond to conventional English word combinations. Such errors may result from direct translation, incomplete vocabulary knowledge, or insufficient exposure to authentic English usage. For example, learners may write "do a research" instead of "conduct research" or "make an experiment" instead of "conduct an experiment." Although the intended meanings may be recognizable, these expressions demonstrate limited knowledge of conventional English collocations. Explicit instruction can help learners recognize these patterns by presenting common combinations as meaningful units. When students learn "conduct research," "collect data," "analyze results," and "draw conclusions" together, they develop a clearer understanding of how academic vocabulary functions in context. This approach may also reduce inappropriate word combinations because learners become more familiar with conventional lexical patterns. Another important advantage is that collocation instruction encourages students to pay attention to the relationships between words. Rather than memorizing individual vocabulary items, they begin to recognize that certain words regularly occur together. This awareness may contribute to more accurate lexical choices in academic essays and research assignments.

Another important dimension of academic writing is lexical variety.

Students who have limited collocational knowledge may repeatedly use general expressions such as "very important," "big problem," and "good result." Although these expressions are understandable, excessive repetition may reduce the academic quality of their writing. Explicit collocation instruction can introduce more precise alternatives, including "highly significant," "major challenge," and "positive outcome." Students can

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also learn expressions such as "considerable attention," "substantial evidence," "effective strategy," and "valuable contribution."The development of these combinations may expand students' lexical resources and provide additional ways of expressing ideas. However, lexical variety should not be understood as the use of as many sophisticated expressions as possible. Effective academic writing requires appropriate vocabulary selection rather than unnecessary complexity. Therefore, collocation instruction should emphasize meaning, context, frequency, and communicative purpose.

Collocational knowledge is also closely connected with writing fluency.

When learners are familiar with conventional word combinations, they may retrieve expressions more quickly during the writing process. This can reduce the cognitive effort required to construct individual sentences. For example, a student who has learned the combination "play a significant role" may use it as a familiar expression when discussing the importance of education, technology, or social institutions. Similarly, familiarity with expressions such as "take into consideration," "provide an explanation," and "reach a conclusion" may support more efficient sentence construction. Hill (2000) emphasizes that a substantial part of fluent language production involves knowledge of word combinations. This supports the importance of teaching vocabulary through collocational patterns. In academic writing, such knowledge may help students focus more effectively on developing arguments and organizing ideas rather than continuously searching for individual words.

Collocation instruction may also contribute to grammatical accuracy because many word combinations involve specific grammatical patterns. For example, students need to learn that "interested" is commonly followed by "in," "depend" is followed by "on," and "responsible" is followed by "for." Similarly, academic expressions such as "an increase in," "a decrease in," and "an effect on" involve particular grammatical relationships. Explicit instruction can help students understand these patterns and

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reduce errors involving prepositions and grammatical structures. The relationship between vocabulary and grammar is particularly important because lexical and grammatical knowledge are not completely separate aspects of language competence. By teaching collocations in meaningful contexts, teachers can help students develop a more integrated understanding of English vocabulary and grammar.

Collocations may also contribute to the overall coherence and academic style of written texts. Academic writing frequently involves conventional expressions that help writers introduce arguments, explain relationships, and present conclusions. Examples include "the findings indicate," "the results suggest," "it is widely recognized," and "further research is needed." These expressions provide students with useful linguistic resources for organizing information and communicating academic ideas. Explicit instruction can help learners understand the function of such expressions and use them appropriately in different sections of an academic text. As students become more familiar with academic collocations, they may develop greater confidence in writing introductions, discussing research findings, and constructing conclusions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these expressions depends on their meaningful integration into the text. Memorizing academic phrases without understanding their functions may lead to repetitive or unnatural writing.

The analysis also highlights the importance of contextualized learning.

Teaching collocations through isolated word lists may help students memorize individual combinations, but it does not necessarily ensure that they can use them independently. For this reason, collocations should be presented within meaningful sentences, paragraphs, and authentic academic texts. For example, students may examine how the expressions "strong evidence," "conduct research," and "significant findings" are used in a short research-oriented passage. They can then identify similar combinations in other texts and apply them in their own writing. Corpus-based activities may strengthen this process by allowing learners to examine real examples of English

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usage. Through concordance analysis, students can observe the words that frequently occur around a particular lexical item and identify differences between apparently similar expressions. This approach encourages students to develop independent vocabulary learning strategies and greater awareness of authentic academic English.

The findings of the literature-based analysis suggest that explicit collocation instruction can play an important role in improving the academic writing competence of Uzbek EFL students. One of the central arguments is that knowledge of individual vocabulary items is insufficient for effective academic communication. Students must also understand how words combine in conventional patterns and how these combinations function in different contexts. This position is consistent with Lewis's (1993) lexical approach, which emphasizes the importance of multiword expressions in language acquisition. From this perspective, vocabulary learning should involve the development of knowledge about lexical combinations rather than focusing exclusively on isolated words. The importance of collocational competence is also supported by Nesselhauf (2005), whose research demonstrates that non-native speakers may experience difficulties with collocations even when they possess relatively advanced general language proficiency. These difficulties are particularly relevant to academic writing because inappropriate word combinations can reduce clarity, precision, and naturalness. For Uzbek EFL students, such problems may be influenced by differences between English and Uzbek lexical patterns. Students may attempt to translate expressions directly from their first language, resulting in combinations that are grammatically possible but lexically unnatural in English. Explicit collocation instruction may help address this problem by drawing attention to conventional English expressions and providing opportunities to practice them in context. Another important issue concerns the relationship between collocational knowledge and lexical fluency. When students become familiar with frequently occurring word combinations, they may process and produce academic language more efficiently. This supports Hill's

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(2000) argument that knowledge of collocations is closely associated with fluent language use. The findings also suggest that explicit collocation instruction can support academic vocabulary development. Rather than memorizing isolated academic words, students can learn expressions such as "raise awareness," "provide evidence," "address an issue," and "achieve significant results." Such combinations provide learners with practical linguistic resources that can be applied across different academic subjects. However, it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of explicit instruction depends on the quality of teaching activities. Simply presenting a list of collocations and asking students to memorize them may not lead to meaningful language development. Collocations should be introduced through contextualized examples, repeated exposure, communicative practice, and independent writing activities. The role of corpus-based learning is particularly relevant in this respect. Authentic texts allow students to observe how collocations are used by proficient English writers. This can help learners distinguish between conventional expressions and combinations that are grammatically possible but less natural. Granger and Meunier (2008) highlight the importance of phraseological approaches to language learning and the value of examining recurring lexical patterns. Furthermore, explicit collocation instruction should be integrated into the broader process of academic writing development. Students need opportunities to apply newly learned expressions in introductions, body paragraphs, discussions, and conclusions. The relationship between collocations and writing quality is therefore not limited to vocabulary selection. It also concerns the ability to construct meaningful sentences, develop arguments, and organize academic information. Nevertheless, several factors may influence the effectiveness of collocation instruction. Students' initial proficiency, motivation, frequency of practice, exposure to authentic English, and individual learning strategies may affect the extent to which they acquire new combinations. Teachers should therefore avoid assuming that all learners will develop collocational competence at the same rate. In general, the

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literature supports the integration of explicit collocation instruction into EFL academic writing courses. However, further empirical research involving Uzbek university students is necessary to determine the precise extent of its effects on measurable writing performance.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have important implications for English language teaching in Uzbek higher education institutions. First, vocabulary instruction should place greater emphasis on collocations rather than presenting words exclusively as isolated items. Teachers can introduce common academic word combinations alongside definitions, translations, grammatical information, and contextual examples. Second, students should be encouraged to maintain personal collocation notebooks. These notebooks may include frequently used expressions, example sentences, grammatical patterns, and information about appropriate academic contexts. Third, corpus-based activities can be incorporated into classroom instruction. Students may use authentic academic texts and digital concordance tools to identify common word combinations and examine how they function in different contexts. Fourth, collocation practice should be integrated into regular writing assignments. Students can be asked to use newly learned expressions when writing argumentative essays, research summaries, reports, and academic discussions. Finally, teachers should provide feedback not only on grammatical errors but also on inappropriate lexical combinations. This can help students understand that accurate vocabulary use involves selecting words that naturally and appropriately occur together. These practices may contribute to the development of more independent and confident academic writers.

The present study has several limitations. First, it is based on a literature review and theoretical analysis rather than a newly conducted classroom experiment involving Uzbek EFL students. Second, the effectiveness of collocation instruction may vary according to learners' English proficiency, educational background, and previous

exposure to academic vocabulary. Third, collocations differ in frequency and usefulness across academic disciplines. Expressions commonly used in scientific research may not be equally relevant to students studying literature, business, or social sciences. Another limitation concerns the measurement of academic writing quality. Collocational accuracy is an important indicator, but writing performance also involves grammar, organization, argument development, coherence, and critical thinking. Future empirical research should employ pre-tests and post-tests, writing portfolios, classroom observations, and interviews to examine how explicit collocation instruction influences actual student performance over time.

Further studies could also compare explicit collocation instruction with traditional vocabulary teaching to identify differences in lexical accuracy, writing fluency, and academic language development.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the potential effect of explicit collocation instruction on Uzbek EFL students' academic writing through an analysis of theoretical perspectives and previous research. The findings suggest that collocational knowledge represents an important component of academic writing competence. Students need to understand not only the meanings of individual words but also the conventional combinations through which academic ideas are expressed.

Explicit collocation instruction may help Uzbek EFL students improve lexical accuracy, expand vocabulary variety, develop grammatical appropriateness, and produce more natural academic sentences. The analysis also emphasizes the importance of contextualized learning, repeated practice, corpus-based activities, and the integration of collocations into authentic writing tasks. However, effective collocation acquisition requires more than memorization. Students should understand the meanings, grammatical patterns, and communicative functions of the expressions they learn. In conclusion, explicit collocation instruction can serve as a valuable component

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of academic writing education in Uzbek universities. Its systematic integration into EFL curricula may help students overcome common lexical difficulties and develop greater confidence in producing clear, accurate, and academically appropriate English texts. Further empirical research is recommended to establish its measurable impact on Uzbek EFL students' writing performance.

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