

# The Effect of Using Input Enhancement Technique on Collocation Learning of Iraqi EFL Students

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## Abstract

Collocation can be defined as two or sometimes more than two words that often go together for example, *impose punishment*, *do homework*, and *save money*. This study is an attempt to explore an effective method to improve collocations presenting in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Learning collocation is of fundamental importance in both written and spoken English communications. The reason behind selecting collocation is that collocation is a vital constituent of English vocabulary.

Two groups were involved in this study. The experimental group that followed the input enhancement technique received short passages whose 40 collocations were printed in boldface type. While the control group received a text with the same list of collocations represented without enhancement. The study adopted a quantitative research method utilizing a non- randomized experimental design, which involves conducting pretest, and posttest with experimental and control groups. The findings of this study showed that the input enhancement technique can assist in teaching collocation.

**Keywords:** collocation; input enhancement technique; vocabulary, highlighting

## Introduction

Collocation, from Latin collocatus, which means located together, is one kind of multi-word units. The father of collocation, Firth (1957), defined collocation as the companionship that words preserve. Collocation has been a subject of much interest in teaching English language to native speakers of other languages. Collocation awareness is important to English language learners due to their frequent use in conversation and written language.

The problem with EFL students is that they are unable to differentiate between the uses of synonyms. For example, they always write \* *make damage*. Boers et al. (2014) clarified this type of error by saying: *make* collocates with *a mess* but not with *damage* and *do* collocates with *damage* but not with *a mess*. This

error might occur because of the limited exposure to the second language in EFL contexts. The problem that this study addressed was that many researchers have previously sought to determine the best way of introducing and teaching collocations. Those researchers suggested that using enhancement methods can help EFL students learn collocations. However, other researchers showed that enhancement methods do not have any positive effect.

These methods have not been very effective. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether presenting collocations with the use of highlighted (bold) collocations, one of the enhancement techniques, can facilitate the learning of collocations in a more effective manner compared to the method that depends only on presenting collocation in a text without any enhancement that can attract students' attention to the collocative words. Therefore, the following research question was posed:

Is there a statistically significant difference in students' success rate of learning collocations between the use of highlighted (bold) technique and non-highlighted (text only) technique?

## Literature Review

A great deal of research has been conducted on teaching collocations, especially those using list of words with their collocated words. A highly important contribution to the research literature in this context is from Rahimi and Momeni (2012). They attempted to investigate the effects of teaching collocations on the proficiency of English language. They concluded that one of the most important factors that might be the key to the fluency is decreasing the errors of collocations.

Students who learn words in individual way need more time and effort to speak fluently than students who learn words in chunks. Due to the emerging idea of improving the learning of EFL students through collocation, researchers have turned towards building dedicated lists of collocation to enhance the learning process of EFL students. Durrant (2009) examined the viability of 1000 two-words of frequent collocations, which are very common items. He mentioned that the most frequent use of word lists is Coxhead's Academic Word List, which contains 570 academic words. Al-Shormani and Al-Sohbani (2012) identified three broad categories as semantic errors in thirty essays written by Yemini EFL students at the university level. One of these errors was using collocations, the other two being lexico-grammatical and lexical categories. The findings demonstrated that collocation errors have considerable impact on the expressive abilities of students. Fan (2009) stated that collocation has been marked in different ways, such as, prefabs and multi-word units. It is also defined in a variety of manners in both the systematic study of language and language teaching.

Hashemi, Azizinezhad, & Dravishi (2012) pointed out that collocation is a much-neglected aspect in teaching and learning EFL. In their opinion EFL's make unacceptable collocations because of the effect of their native languages. Hashemi *et al.* (2012) pointed out that it is very significant to find out an effective method to teach collocation, because learning collocation greatly improve learner's speaking,

listening, and reading. Goudarzi & Moini (2012) regarded collocation as one of the most challenging subjects in English learning. They examined the purport of applying three different kinds of collocation on Iranian EFL university students. The teacher presented the same list of collocations in three different conditions. Three groups of students were involved in this study. Each group included 20 Iranian EFL university students. Participants in the first group read three texts with highlighted collocations, participants in second group read three texts with non-highlighted collocations. Participants in the third group read three texts provided with their native language. The outcomes showed that participants in the first group achieved better results in both learning and retaining than their peers in non-highlighted groups.

Durrant & Schmitt (2009) studied the extent to which foreign writers make use of collocations by comparing between native to non-native writing. This study demonstrated that non-native writers depend heavily on frequent collocations, however, native writers use both frequent and infrequent collocations. Akpınar & Bardakçı (2015) determined the role of collocations by classified them based on: a word that serves as a key, topic related, and grammatical aspect on retention of collocation. They reported that when collocations are presented based on keyword and a specific topic, the gains are not significant. Daskalovska (2015) said that one of the most helpful methods of learning collocation is by using concordance. Concordances allow students to look for collocation and generate several authentic examples in different contexts.

Assaf, Al-Jamal, and Rababeh (2020) conducted a study to find out whether Jordanian EFL tenth grade student benefit from an electronic collocation-based instructional program on collocations learning. Two groups of 50 students were involved in this study: the experimental group learned collocations through Quizlet while the control group was instructed to memorize a list of collocations without any instruction. The findings showed that students who followed Quizlet learned collocations better than their peers in the control group.

According to Pirmoradian and Tabatabaei (2012) input enhancement provides a way of teaching collocations in a more effective way. Input enhancement means highlighting the target words to increase students' attention by using various formatting techniques such as bolding, italicizing, capitalizing, and underlining. In this study, highlighted (bold) techniques was applied (Lim, 2007).

Fakhrzadeh & Yazdanjoo (2020) conducted a study that focused on teaching collocations using the input enhancement technique. Sixty intermediate English proficiency level between the ages of 15 and 23 were chosen and divided into control ( $n = 30$ ) and experimental ( $n = 30$ ) groups. A regular type of instruction was used to teach the control group, while the instruction under enhanced input was chosen to teach the experimental group. The results showed that using input enhancement technique to teach collocation resulted in a better outcome compared to the control group with no instruction.

Namaziandost, Rezvani, and Polemikou (2020) conducted an experimental study explaining how input enhancement plays an essential role in teaching

collocations. They compared four groups of 92 Iranian intermediate-level students; three experimental groups learned collocations through three kinds of input enhancements, i.e., visual, semantic, and flooding. However, the control group of learners were instructed to learn a list of collocations without any enhancement. The outcomes showed that students who followed input enhancement techniques to learn collocations achieved better results than their peers in the control group.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Hypothesis**

There is a statistically significant difference in EFL students' success rate of learning collocations between the group of students exposed to a textual enhancement technique and the group of students who did not expose to any kind of enhancement technique.

### **Experimental Design**

Two groups of participants were involved in this study: control and experimental. The participants in both groups were exposed to the same collocations. Students in the control group got all of the collocations in bold, while students in the experimental group have no bolded collocations.

### **Selection of Collocations**

Recently, verb-noun collocation like *do my best, tell lies, have a breakfast* has got considerable recognition as a subject of research on second language acquisition (SLA) (e.g., Meunier & Granger, 2008; Wood, 2010). Verb-noun collocations used in this study which can be seen in Appendix A were selected from several published literatures. Deciding on the specific collocations to include in test instruments in this study followed these two steps:

Step 1: According to Nesselhauf (2003), verb-noun category of collocations is the most used kind of collocation. Therefore, this study extracted a number of verb-noun collocations that appeared in other previous research: it resulted in 50 collocations.

Step 2: The current study recognized the frequently used of verb-noun collocations from the collocation dictionary. This step reduced the number of collocations to 40 from the previous 50 collocations in first step.

### **Description of tests**

Two tests were administered over the course of this study.

1. Pretest: 30 minutes were given for each group to work out possible meanings of the collocations in context. The teacher did not help with unknown meanings of the collocations.
2. Posttest: At the end of the treatment, which was two months, the two groups were tested to find out if input enhancement of the collocations promote students' noticing.

### **Validity and Reliability of the tests**

1. The researcher taught the two groups, so the possibility of an “instructor effect” threat to internal validity was eliminated.
2. Time for the control and experimental groups was the same between testing and retesting.
3. The researcher had no prior knowledge of the students in either group, so no selection bias could have occurred.

### **Population and Sampling**

The participants in this experiment consisted of 40 Iraqi EFL students enrolled in English department at college of basic education/university of Diyala during the summer of 2020. There were twenty students, twelve females and eight males in the experimental group and twenty students of which eleven females and nine males in the control group. They were with an average of nineteen to twenty years old. First grade students were selected in this study. The benefit of selecting low-level students to learn collocations was to “make productive use of the language without having to know a lot of vocabulary or grammar” (Nation, 2008: p. 118). Therefore, it is practical to simulate that by learning verb-noun collocations, first grade students will be able to express themselves better than learning individual words.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Both experimental and control group have the same curriculum, the same professor, the same number of students, and they spent an equal amount of time learning verb-noun collocation. Both groups were tested on their knowledge of verb-noun collocations before the treatment. The pretest comprised of two tasks: multiple choices and filling the gaps exercise. Students were informed that there was an experiment going on to measure their knowledge in using collocations. For the purpose of confidentiality, the names of students kept secret. Success in the test of collocations which was part of writing class was the incentive for their performance. At the end of the study which lasted one month, scores in the tests were used to assess the students’ development in using collocation. The information gathered from the collocation test was scored as correct or incorrect since all items were well structured to allow a single answer. Blank answers were considered as incorrect one. The scoring process was done separately, therefore, there was no subjective decision could interfere with the score.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The correct pretest percentage between students were compared with the posttest percentage for the 40 collocations. The pretest includes 40 total items on collocations, each one being a multiple-choice sentence and fill-in-the-gaps requiring the main meaning of the collocations. Multivariate analysis of variance

(MANOVA) was used to analyze data, because the study aimed at comparing the means of two separate groups (experimental and control) according to the performance on collocation test's scores which is regarded as the continuous variable. SPSS was used to calculate the results.

Table 1. *Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
pretest collocation	.033	1	38	.856
posttest collocation	.827	1	38	.369

Levene's test of homogeneity of variance in Table 1 indicated that both groups had equal variance and group size.

Table 2. *Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

Measure:

MEASURE\_1

Transformed Variable: Average

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.	Partial Eta squared	Noncent parameter	Observed power
Intercept	349536.800	1	349536.800	1764.540	.000	.979	1764.540	1.000
Group	369.800	1	369.800	1.867	.180	.047	1.867	.265
Error	7527.400	38	198.089					

a. Computed using alpha = .05

Table 2 showed that there was a statistically significant effect of using input enhancement in teaching verb-noun collocations,  $F(1.867)=180$ ,  $p=.05$ , with the experimental group having higher mean score ( $M=68.250$ ) than the control group ( $M=63.950$ ). In sum, through statistical analysis, the findings identified statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the posttest.

Therefore, this result aligned with previous studies by Fakhrazadeh, & Yazdanjoo (2020), Goudarzi & Moini (2012), -Namaziandost et al., (2020), and Pirmoradian and Tabatabaei (2012), who stated that input enhancement technique enhances students' learning of collocations.

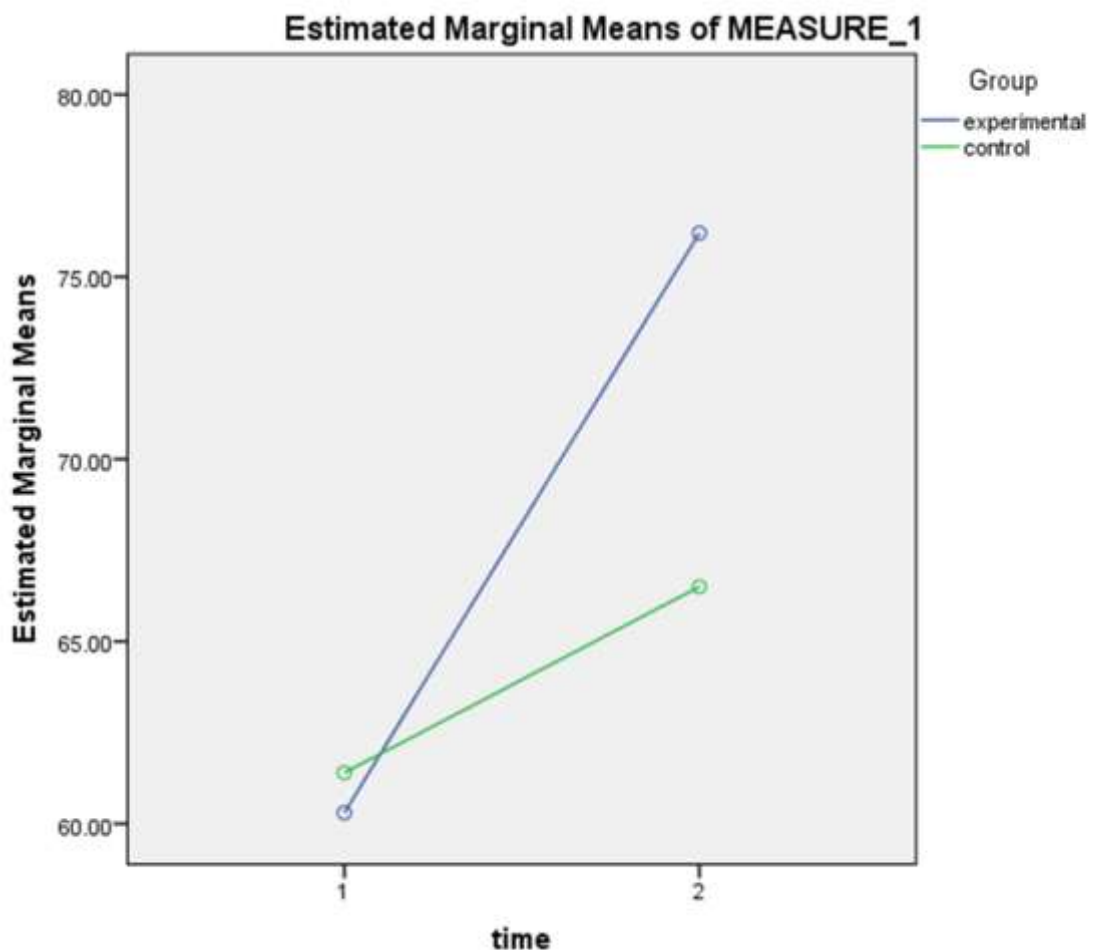


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrated that the experimental group scores were higher than the control group. It verified the hypothesis that the experimental group was going to be developed in this skill more than the control group.

### Limitation of the Study

1. The researcher used one type of collocation which is verb-noun collocation. However, there are several other kinds of collocation that need more investigation.
2. The participants were limited to the students at the first stage. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized.

## Conclusion

On the whole, the aim of the study, which was evaluating the effect of the input enhancement method in presenting collocations, was achieved. Quantitative comparative analyses of pretest-posttest revealed that EFL first grade students who followed the input enhancement method which as a way of presenting collocations was significantly better than the method that did not include enhancement.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the findings of the current study may play a significant role in assisting EFL teachers and researchers in using the input enhancement technique for presenting collocation.

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## أثر استخدام تقنية إبراز المدخلات في تعلم المتلازمات اللفظية للطلبة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة اجنبية

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### المستخلص

يمكن تعريف التلازم اللفظي على أنه كلمتان أو في بعض الأحيان أكثر من كلمتين تأتيان سوية مثل يفرض عقوبة، يؤدي الواجب البيتي، و يدخر مالا. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى إكتشاف طريقة فعالة لتدريس المتلازمات اللفظية في اللغة الإنكليزية في محيط ناطق للغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية. ان السبب في اختيار هذا الموضوع يكمن في كونه موضوعا حيويا في تكوين مفردات اللغة الإنكليزية المهمة في الكتابة و الكلام. شاركت مجموعتان في هذه الدراسة: المجموعة التجريبية و المجموعة الضابطة. تلقت المجموعة التجريبية و التي اتبعت تقنية إبراز المدخلات قطع قصيرة تحتوي على ٤٠ متلازمة لفظية مكتوبة بحروف بارزة . بينما تلقت المجموعة الضابطة نفس القطع والتي تحتوي علي نفس قائمة المتلازمات اللفظية المختارة لكنها كتبت بحروف اعتيادية. اعتمدت الدراسة أسلوب البحث الكمي باستخدام التصميم التجريبي غير العشوائي، والذي يتضمن إجراء الاختبار القبلي والبعدي مع المجموعات التجريبية والضابطة. أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن كتابة الكلمات بحروف بارزة يمكن أن تساعد في تدريس المتلازمات اللفظية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المتلازمات اللفظية: تقنية تحسين المدخلات، المفردات، تسليط الضوء.