Lexical Collocational Use by Thai EFL Learners in Writing

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Abstract

To achieve a high level of language fluency, learners need to possess sufficient collocational competence. However, collocation is considered a problematic area for many EFL learners, partly because of its arbitrariness. To gain more insight into the problems involving learners' productive collocational skills, the current study examines lexical collocational use by Thai EFL learners in their writing. The writing of 90 university students were analyzed to show the proportion of six types of lexical collocations. Some observations regarding the differences in the use of lexical collocations by three groups of learners categorized according to language proficiency levels were made. The results suggested that verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-verb collocations were most frequently produced by all the three groups of learners. Interestingly, the higher level of language proficiency, the higher number of lexical collocations produced. Regarding the differences in their collocational use, the results point to the likelihood that the high-proficiency group used a wider variety of lexical collocations when compared to the other two groups, and that low-proficiency group used more generic and unclear vocabulary and produced several mistakes in terms of word choice. Based on the study results, some suggestions

| | regarding how collocations could be taught more efficiently are presented. |

1. Introduction

In language learning, grammar and vocabulary used to be treated as two separate elements of language. Some teachers believed that students would acquire the language if they learn extensive vocabulary and then put those words together using their grammar knowledge. However, Lewis (2000a, p. 15) suggests

> Grammar enables us to construct language when we're unable to find what we want ready-made in our mental lexicons. But so much of the language of the effective language user is already in prefabricated chunks, stored in our mental lexicons just waiting to be recalled for use.

These prefabricated chunks are commonly known as collocations which are the main focus of this study.

When explaining how meaning arises from text, Sinclair (1991) presented two principles: the open-choice principle and the idiom principle. The former is also called a "slot-and-filler" model as it sees text as a string of slots that must be filled by a word that '*satisfied local restraints.*' In producing text, humans do not rely only on the open-choice principle but also the principle of idiom, which he uses to refer to the fact that "a language user has available to him a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments" (p.110). In the field of English language teaching, these "semi-preconstructed phrases" have received various other labels such as word combinations, prefabricated chunks, prefabricated units (or prefabs), phraseological units, multiword units, or formulaic sequences. Collocations are a type of prefabricated units which frequently occur in language. This essential element of language has attracted considerable interest from linguists and researchers (Cowie, 1981; Erman & Warren, 2000; 2005; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Meechai & Chumworathayee, 2015; Nesselhauf, 2003; Phoocharoensil, 2011; Phoocharoensil, 2013; Sridhanyarat 2018) and the following section will discuss some reasons why.

1.1 Significance of collocations in language learning

The knowledge of and the ability to use prefabricated units are essential for language learners for several reasons. First, previous corpus studies revealed that prefabricated units make up a large proportion of naturally occurring language, whether it be spoken or written (Nesselhauf, 2005; Renouf & Sinclair, 1991; Sinclair, 1991). This is in line with Erman and Warren's (2000) findings which reveal that a large number of multi-word combinations are found in both spoken (58.6%) and written language (52.3%). Second, knowledge about prefabricated units facilitates real time fluency in speaking and writing. Psycholinguistic evidence indicates that the availability of large numbers of prefabs stored in learners' brains reduces the processing effort and thus allows them to produce language fluently (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Nesselhauf, 2005). This is in complete agreement with Benson et al., (1997)'s notion that:

> ....if they (learners) wish to acquire active mastery of English, that is, if they wish to be able to express themselves fluently and accurately in speech and writing, they must learn to cope with the combination of words into phrases, sentences, and text. (p.ix)

Third, Lewis (2000b) also stressed the importance of collocations as he argues that in order for learners to move beyond the intermediate plateau to reach the advanced level of English, they should spend less time perfecting grammar and spend more time learning to use words they know already with a large number of collocations. Lending support to Lewis' assertion, James (1998) argues "adherence to the collocational conventions of a foreign language contributes greatly to one's idiomacy and nativelikeness, and not doing so announces one's foreignness" (p.152). It is clear that collocations are widely recognized as being crucial to learners' success in language acquisition. Thus, knowledge of collocational use by learners is essential in helping them master second language, which can be seen more in the literature review below.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions and Characteristics of Collocation

The term collocation has been used in many different senses in linguistics and language teaching. According to the frequency-based approach, collocation refers to words that co-occur more frequently than could be expected if words combined randomly in a language. (Nesselhauf, 2005). In this study, a phraseological approach has been employed. One of the main researchers who adopted this approach is Cowie (1981). To define collocations, Cowie (1981) delimit them from other types of word combinations (or prefabs) by putting "collocations" on a continuum with idioms on one end and free combinations on the other. Collocations are somewhere in between and to distinguish them from the other two categories, two criteria must be used: restricted co-occurrence (also called substitutability, selectivity, variability, combinability, or collocability) and semantic transparency.

The first criterion, restricted co-occurrence, delimits collocations from free combinations, which "are characterized by openness of collocability of each element in relation to the other or others" (Cowie, 1981, p. 226). In other words, free combinations "consist of elements that are joined in accordance with the general rules of English syntax and freely allow substitution (Benson et al, 1997, page ix)." Take *give a present* as an example. Nouns such as *pencils*, *money*, and *a document* are freely collocable with *give* and verbs such as *wrap, receive, and show* are freely collocable with *a present.* The composite units are easily replaceable following the grammar rules. For a word combination to be restricted, and to be considered as a collocation in this study, one element must determine or at least restrict the choice of the other (Erman & Warren, 2000). This is the reason why there are many cases in which a component of a collocation cannot be replaced with a synonym. For example, it is acceptable to say *commit an error* but not *commit a mistake**. Also, we can *tell a lie* but not *say a lie*.* The only explanation we can provide for this seemingly arbitrary nature of collocation is that *commit* collocates with error but not with *mistake* and that *lie* collocates with *tell* but not with *say*. To put it simply, *commit* determines, or restricts, the choice of the object that follows and *lie* determines, or restricts, the choice of the verb that precedes it.

The second criterion, semantic transparency, refers to whether the elements of the combinations have literal meaning. This distinguishes collocations from idioms whose meanings are not as transparent (as collocations). For instance, *to tie the knot* (which means to get married),

to cost an arm and a leg (which means to be extremely expensive), or *to cut corners* (which means to do something poorly or badly usually to save time or money) are considered idioms because the meanings of their elements are not transparent and a lot less literal compared to those in collocations. Therefore, they are not counted in this study.

To sum up, in order to be considered a collocation, a word combination as used in this study must be semantically semi-transparent, and the choice of its composite unit restricted.

2.2 Categorization of Collocations

In order to investigate Thai EFL learners' use of collocations, the present study adopted Benson et al., (1997) categorization approach: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations.

A grammatical collocation consists of a lexical word and a preposition or a grammatical construction such as an infinitive or clause. Eight categories of grammatical collocations include (adapted from Benson et al.):

1. adjective + preposition (e.g., interested in, passionate about)
2. preposition + noun (e.g., by chance, in return, in everyone's best interest)
3. noun + preposition (e.g., response to, compensation for)
4. noun + that clause (e.g., the idea that everyone is equal, the suggestion that they should stay)
5. noun + to infinitive (e.g., the ability to negotiate, the decision to close the mine)
6. adjective + that clause (e.g., necessary that we take immediate action, afraid that he would show up)
7. adjective + to infinitive (e.g., too scared to come out, too late to apologize)
8. verb + preposition (e.g., agree with me on what to buy, prevent her from postnatal depression)

Another type of collocation is a lexical collocation which consists of two lexical words that could be nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Adapted from Benson et al., (1997), six categories of lexical collocations are grouped as follows:

1. adjective + noun (e.g., sweeping generalization, heavy fine, intense competition, brisk business, strong tea (but not *mighty

tea), weak tea (but not *feeble tea), warmest regards (but not *hot regards), kind regards (but not *good regards). Also, a participle modifying noun will be included (e.g., leaked documents).

2. verb + noun (e.g., to draw an analogy, to balance the budget, to bend the rules, to cement friendships, to restore order, to issue a statement, to resist temptation, to achieve ambition, to make an estimate (but not *make an estimation), to commit treason (but not *commit treachery))

3. noun + verb (e.g., time passes, ideas flow, friendship grows, memories fade, face darkens, eyes light up)

4. noun + noun (e.g., business trip, peace activist, aisle seat, body odor, vehicle theft)

5. adverb + adjective (e.g., highly successful, brutally honest, fully/keenly aware)

6. adverb + verb (e.g., severely punish, vividly remember, vaguely remember, strictly forbid)

Lexical collocations, not grammatical collocations, will be used as a theoretical framework in this study for the following reasons. First, since lexical collocation errors can be more disruptive in communication than grammatical collocation errors (Bahardoust & Moeini, 2012). Second, by focusing on lexical collocations, this study would be beneficial in helping learners communicate their idea more effectively as Lewis (2000b) suggested that in order to communicate "precisely" and "concisely" in L2, learners need to acquire a certain quantity of lexical collocations. Third, according to the concept of continuum (Cowie, 1981) mentioned earlier, some categories of grammatical collocations are semantically transparent, and thus could be considered a free combination which is not the main focus of the present study. For example, any grammatical collocations which consist of prepositions indicating possession, time, place, or direction such as *of my brother, after lunch, into the water,* would automatically be a free combination.

2.3 Research on Collocational Use of L2 Learners

Previous studies that investigated ESL or EFL learners' use of collocations can be broadly categorized into three main types according to

their data collection methods: elicitation techniques, learner corpus analysis, and elicitation of free written production data.

First, elicitation techniques could be in the forms of multiple-choice tasks, gap-filling tasks, cloze tests, or translation tests. This category of research mostly required the participants to select or produce a word or a phrase that fits a given context. A major limitation of this elicitation method is the extent to which these tasks could reflect learners' actual performance in producing collocations because they required participants to only produce one or a few words or phrases. As for the multiple-choice tasks, participants assumed a receptive role as they were requested to only select a choice. Even though participants were able to choose a correct choice, it could not be guaranteed that they can actually produce correct collocations.

In addition, some studies compiled a large number of learners' writing samples in a corpus and used automatic extraction to identify collocations used by learners. However, the findings of such analyses should be treated with caution because although the use of corpus facilitates quantitative analysis, some qualitative insights could be neglected. Corpus analyses oftentimes allow researchers to focus only on the co-occurrence of words in a span of less than ten words and within the context of sentence; therefore, some important contexts may be overlooked.

Third, several studies (e.g., Fan, 2009; Phoocharoensil, 2014) examined learners' use of collocations in their writing. To collect the data, learners were asked to write an essay of 200-300 words in length based on a given topic. They were not allowed to refer to any kinds of references when completing the task. This type of data should, therefore, reflect learners' actual ability to produce collocations.

2.4 Research on Collocational Use of Thai Learners

In the last ten years, collocations have been of greater interest among Thai educators and researchers. Several studies (Boonyasaquan, 2006; Detdamrongpreecha, 2014; Meechai & Chumworathayee, 2015; Mongkolchai, 2008; Phoocharoensil, 2011; Sridhanyarat, 2018; and Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2013) have been carried out on Thai students' collocational competence. Following are some examples of relevant studies.

With an aim to provide some plausible explanations regarding collocational errors, Boonyasaquan S. (2006) investigated Thai EFL students' collocational violations in translation by asking thirty-two university students to translate a business news article from Thai into English. It was revealed that students' erroneous production of both lexical and grammatical collocations was caused by L1 interference and students' deficiency of collocational knowledge.

Moreover, Yumanee and Phoocharoensil (2013) investigated the collocational knowledge of 60 high school (Grade 12) students divided into two groups according to their General Aptitude Test, advanced (N=30) and basic (N=30). They utilized a 45-item multiple-choice test to gauge their receptive skills of collocation use and an 18-item Thai-English translation test to assess their productive collocational skills. The study analyzed their errors regarding six types of lexical collocations and three types of grammatical collocations. The results showed that, in both the receptive test and the productive test, native language transfer was a major source of collocation errors among the two groups of participants. Other possible sources of errors included learners' synonymy strategy, creative invention, false analogy, paraphrasing strategy, and limited knowledge of L2 collocations.

Some studies investigated a particular structure of collocations. For instance, Meechai and Chumworathayee (2015) compared the production of verb-noun collocations of Thai EFL undergrads in Thai programs and those in English programs. Each group, which consisted of 30 students, was asked to do translation and gap-filling tests. As revealed by the results, one attributable source of errors was L1 interference.

It should be noted that only a few studies have analyzed Thai EFL learners' use of collocations on the basis of a reasonable amount of free written production data. Thus, this research study aims to fill in this gap with the following questions.

3. Research Questions

1. Among the three groups of Thai EFL learners, which of the six types of lexical collocations are frequently used in their essays?
2. Are there any differences in the use of lexical collocations by the three groups of learners?

It is expected that an investigation into the number of collocations produced by learners with varying language proficiency will shed some light on how collocations should be taught in class.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Participants

The participants were 90 Thai EFL undergraduate students of the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy and the Faculty of Economics at a prestigious public university in Bangkok. They were selected by a convenience sampling technique. All of them were second-year students in the second semester of the 2019 academic year. Their native language is Thai and none of them had spent more than three months in an English-speaking country before. The participants were categorized into 3 groups according to the scores they earned when they took a foundation English course required for freshmen. The course focused on improving four language skills which were reading, listening, writing and speaking. The three groups include:

1) High Group consists of 30 students who attained a score of between 59-64 points (i.e. Grade A) in the course
2) Mid Group consists of 30 students who attained a score of between 51-54 (i.e. Grade B) in the course
3) Low Group consists of 30 students who attained a score of between 30-47 (i.e. Grades C+, C, and D) in the course

The collected data was representative of three language proficiency levels of Thai university students who have studied English for over 13 years. The ages of the participants were between 18-21 years.

4.2 Instruments

4.2.1 Prompt and Learners' Essays

With an aim to ensure the comparability of the data, the present studies established control over the topic of the essay. All the participants were asked to write an essay of between 250 and 300 words in response to the following prompt:

While many people think online learning has been one of the greatest revolutions in today's education, some people are still in favor of face-to-face learning. What do you prefer, online learning or traditional face-to-face classroom learning? Give reasons to support your opinion. Please type your essay in the space below.

The question in the prompt was deliberately open-ended so as to allow room for the participants to express their opinions using a variety of lexical resources they possessed and would in turn reveal several difficulties in language use learners encounter. The participants had 60 minutes to write the essay which consisted of either four or five paragraphs. The collected data was therefore related to the same topic and contained one essay type which was an opinion essay.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As the participants were completing the writing task, they were not allowed to refer to any kinds of resources, whether it be an online dictionary, a hard-copy dictionary, websites, mobile phones, tablets, etc. Nor could they consult anyone. This was done to ensure that the collected data could reflect the participants' actual collocational competence. The essays were typed on Google Forms and a total of 90 essays were collected. The participants were asked to provide confirmation that they did not consult anyone or any resources when completing the task. Since this writing task was not part of required assignments of any courses, there was little incentive for the participants to consult anyone or any resources to assist them in writing. The subsequent identification and coding of lexical collocations was manual. For reliability enhancement, a co-researcher was asked to act as an intercoder.

It should be noted that a lexical collocation was counted as valid even though some of them may have contained mechanical errors, i.e. capitalization, or punctuation, or grammatical mistakes. For instance, the articles *a/ an/ the* or the plural ending *-s* is missing. Also, all the tokens of lexical collocations were counted though the same pair of words appears. The number of each type of lexical collocation was then counted and compared to answer the first research question. As for the pairs of words that did not fit into any of the six categories of lexical collocations

presented previously in the Literature Review section, they were grouped under the 'others' category.

5. Results and Discussion

In this part, results and discussion will be presented in accordance with the research questions: Among the three groups of Thai EFL learners, which of the six types of lexical collocations are frequently used in their essays?

In general, the three groups of learners used all six types of lexical collocations as seen in the following table.

Table 1

The Number of Six Types of Lexical Collocations Used by High, Mid, Low Groups

Types of Lexical Collocations	High Group (Mean; SD)	Mid Group (Mean; SD)	Low Group (Mean; SD)	Total (tokens)
verb + noun	398 (13.3; 4.49)	325 (10.8; 3.30)	339 (11.3; 3.96)	1,062
adjective + noun	343 (11.4; 5.18)	265 (8.83; 4.68)	205 (6.83; 4.61)	813
noun + verb	254 (8.47; 4.19)	222 (7.40; 3.13)	200 (6.67; 3.82)	676
noun + noun	135 (4.50; 2.50)	110 (3.67; 2.51)	121 (4.03; 2.96)	366
adverb + verb	104 (3.47; 1.87)	82 (2.73; 1.82)	56 (1.87; 1.61)	242
others	2 (0.07; 0.25)	25 (0.83; 1.16)	27 (0.9; 1.35)	54
adverb + adjective	4 (0.13; 0.34)	3 (0.10; 0.30)	2 (0.07; 0.36)	9

Note. Each group consists of 30 participants.

The most striking result to emerge from the data is that of all six types of lexical collocations, verb-noun collocations were most frequently used by the three groups of learners, followed by adjective-noun, and noun-verb collocations respectively. Adverb-adjective collocations were least frequently used by the three groups of learners. This was probably

because verb-noun and noun-verb constructions are two basic and required components of an English sentence, whereas the adverb-adjective, adverb-verb, and noun-noun constructions are not. When completing the task which involves writing an opinion essay in response to an open-ended question, participants had to express their ideas and the simplest way to get their messages across is to form complete sentences.

Table 1 also reveals a striking difference among the three groups of participants in their use of all six types of lexical collocations. On the whole, the High Group produced the highest number of lexical collocations followed by the Mid Group and Low Group respectively. This finding seems to imply that the higher level of language proficiency, the higher number of lexical collocations produced. These results confirm what Laufer and Waldman (2011) found regarding the use of verb-noun collocations by advanced, intermediate and basic Hebrew learners in their argumentative and descriptive essays. Although the research design may be different as their study focused only on verb-noun combinations, what is worth noting is that the advanced learners produced more verb-noun collocations than the other two groups. Additional comparison revealed that the intermediate group produced the higher number of verb-noun collocations. In addition, Fan's (2009) work on Hong Kong ESL learners' and British students' use of collocations yielded similar results; the L2 learners used fewer (types and tokens of) collocations in describing one picture.

1. Are there any differences in the use of lexical collocations by the three groups of learners?

Several differences in the use of lexical collocations among the three groups can be observed. First, compared to the Mid and Low Groups, High Group used not only a higher number of lexical collocations but also a wider variety of lexical collocational resources as illustrated by Table 2 below.

Table 2

Examples of lexical collocations (in an alphabetical order) used by High, Mid, Low Groups

Adjective + noun	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
Adjectives used to describe 'online learning' or 'online class'	accessible adaptive beneficial comfortable convenient difficult (less) effective exciting flexible (not) lively personalized popular time-consuming time-saving (not) smooth (not) stable versatile virtual wonderful	accessible available beneficial comfortable convenient flexible interesting popular suitable unfamiliar	comfortable convenient easier effective (less) interactive popular proper

Table 3

Examples of lexical collocations (in an alphabetical order) used by High, Mid, Low Groups

Adjective + noun	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
Adjectives used to describe 'face-to-face learning' or 'face-to-face class'	(not) boring effective interactive (more) lively onsite real	affordable available effective feasible open productive	attractive easy proper suitable

This is in line with what Fan (2009) discovered; Hong Kong ESL learners produced a limited range of collocations, while British students used richer resources of collocations especially in their use of adjective-noun collocations.

Second, the low proficiency group seemed to use more generic and, in some cases, vague or unclear vocabulary and several mistakes in

terms of word choice could be found. Following are some excerpts from essays written by the three groups of participants.

Example 1 written by a participant in the Low Group

Finally, University and School have less expenditure for **giving facility** to student such as **opened air condition** in many rooms at the same time, **using something** cause more electricity bill whether it be showing slide on the projector for many student and **anything else.**

Example 2 written by a participant in the Low Group

Secondly, online learning helps students study easily. Because **online learning can record video** while teachers teach **which has the face** of the teacher, **the things that teachers teach** and step of the lecture. And then if I want to **repeat the reasons**, it very easily just **opens the video**. On the other hand, traditional face-to-face classroom learning can't do that. It can only just record the voice of the teachers, if I want to **repeat study** it **makes me difficult** to understand. And it doesn't have a step of the lessons.

Example 3 written by a participant in the Mid Group

Online meeting is the popular way especially at university. **Almost all subjects make an online class** via zoom, ms teams and blackboard. The greatest point that you can learn from everywhere and every time. You can **repeat video** again and again as much as you want. It make you understand the lesson well. And **the good one** is expense. You save your money for transporting and eating out.

Example 4 written by a participant in the Mid Group

Secondly, I believe that **someone** might be confronted with technical problems. For example, I couldn't **open my webcam and microphone** during the class or **someone** always shy to **open the webcam**, so the interaction between the teacher and the students is another issue of online classes. We cannot see the facial expressions of each person and that made the teacher might not know that the students are confusing about the materials.

Example 5 written by a participant in the High Group

Moreover, **online learning is more personalized**. I **strongly believe** that every student has different **learning paces** and **attention spans**. With online learning, I can **adjust the speed** of the video up to my preference and I can **pause it** when I feel like I can't concentrate anymore. Furthermore, I can **re-watch the video** and **go over the part** I don't understand. Contrarily, these mentioned **options are not available** in face-to-face classroom learning. Therefore, some students might find it difficult to catch up with others or stay focused in classes.

Example 6 written by a participant in the High Group

The advancement of technology in the past decade already made online learning possible; coincidentally, the outbreak of the **deadly virus** is now forcing schools and colleges around the world to **adopt this new method**. The first reason behind this method is the protection and prevention of the spreading of the coronavirus, as pandemic cannot continue if the people jeep (=keep) their distance. The second benefit is that students do not need to travel through traffic to **crowded university area**, as well as teachers, which could **save cost** tremendously. The last benefit is the possibility of **on-demand studying** from **recorded videos**, which emancipates student from the time table and let them study at their own pace.

As illustrated by the sample excerpts above, the participants from the Low and Mid Groups seemed to produce more generic and unclear collocations such as *using something* (Example 1), *anything else* (Example 1), *the things that the teachers teach* (Example 2), *the good one* (Example 3). In addition, Examples 1-4 provide some evidence of erroneous collocations produced by the Low and Mid Groups. The table below illustrates some instances of erroneous collocations in terms of word choice produced by the Mid and Low Groups. The intended meanings are also provided.

Table 4

Examples of erroneous collocations produced by Low and Mid Groups

Example No.	Collocations produced	Intended meaning
1	giving facility	providing facility
1	opened air condition	turned on air conditioner
2	opens the video	plays the video
2	repeat study	review lesson

3	repeat video	watch or play video again
4	open my webcam and microphone	turn on my webcam and microphone

The participants from the Low and Mid Groups attempted to convey some messages but clearly encountered difficulties. Deviant collocations such as *opened air condition*, *opens the video*, and *open my webcam and microphone*, showed that a possible cause of their collocational errors was L1 interference. This lends support to several previous studies on collocational use by Thai EFL students (Boonyasaquan, 2006; Mongkolchai, 2008; Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2013). Also, this is consistent with the results of the studies on collocational use by Hong Kong ESL students (Fan, 2009) and German-speaking university students (Nesselhauf, 2003). According to Nesselhauf, German students' verb-noun collocation mistakes were probably influenced by L1 transfer.

In contrast, the participants from the High Group were able to express their ideas with various lexical resources and more precise collocations. As seen in Example 5, instead of using erroneous verb-noun collocations like *open video*, *repeat study*, or *repeat video*, the participant was able to correctly produce *re-watch the video* and *go over the part (of the lesson or video).* Moreover, Example 6 shows that the participant in the High Group is more competent in collocational competence. Precise and clear collocations (which also fit the contexts) such as *deadly virus*, *adopt this new method*, *crowded university area*, *save cost*, *on-demand studying*, and *recorded video* were used.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Since the study used convenience sampling during the data collocation process, one limitation is that the findings can be generalized only to a population with the same characteristics. Since the three groups of participants were from a public university, the findings cannot be generalized to other Thai students in private universities or in international programs. Further replication studies with other populations could help confirm (or refute) the findings.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-verb collocations were most frequently used by all the three groups of learners. In addition, the comparison of the three groups reveals that the higher level of language proficiency, the higher number of lexical collocations produced. The further investigation suggests that the difference in their use of lexical collocations does not lie in the number of collocations produced only, but also in a variety of lexical collocational resources. The participants from the Low and Mid Groups produced a relatively limited range of collocations and some tended to use generic and unclear collocations in expressing their ideas.

Based on these findings, several recommendations for teaching will be discussed below.

1. These findings confirm the usefulness of teaching verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-verb collocations especially when the aim of the class is to develop learners' productive skills i.e. speaking or writing. Teachers should also be aware that these types of lexical collocations were the top three most frequently used patterns and that learners need to rely on these constructions when composing sentences or expressing ideas. As a result, these types of lexical collocations should be recognized as important and receive much attention in an EFL classroom.

2. This investigation provides empirical evidence that one linguistic tool that teachers can use to classify learners according to their language proficiency levels is lexical collocations. In other words, teachers can measure learners' lexical collocational knowledge when they would like to find out how competent a language learner is. This classification could be beneficial as teachers can provide instruction appropriate for their language ability.

3. To reflect the actual performance of learners, assessment tasks should call for free written production of collocations, not just a multiple-choice or gap-filling tasks.

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Appendix A
Examples of Lexical Collocations Used in the Study

Types of lexical collocations	Examples
1. adjective + noun	sweeping generalization, heavy fine, intense competition, brisk business, strong tea (but not *mighty tea), weak tea (but not *feeble tea), warmest regards (but not *hot regards), kind regards (but not *good regards), practical activities, stable internet connection Notes: 1. Participles modifying nouns were also included e.g. leaked documents 2. Both attributive and predicative adjectives were examined. 3. A noun and an adjective that have a linking verb in between should be counted. e.g. <u>Students</u> stayed <u>focused</u>.
2. verb + noun	to face a problem, to draw an analogy, to balance the budget, to bend the rules, to cement friendship, to restore order, to achieve ambition, make an estimate (but not *make an estimation), commit treason (but not *commit treachery) Notes: 1. Sometimes a verb can be found in a relative clause or a reduced relative clause e.g. the <u>questions</u> <u>left</u> in the chat box 2. Phrasal verbs + noun were **not** included e.g. to come up with solutions, to keep in touch with learners, to account for 10%, to put forward an argument
3. noun + verb	online learning plays a vital role, online learning saves my time, online learning requires devices, these courses offer alternative ways to …, benefits outweigh, time passes, ideas flow, friendship grows alarms go off, blood circulates, bombs explode Notes: 1. Noticeably, some collocations in this category are used metaphorically. 2. This includes a verb found in a relative clause or a participial phrase as well. e.g. <u>Technology</u> which <u>facilitates</u> online learning.

Technology <u>facilitating</u> online learning.
3. Such predictable combinations as teacher teaches, bakers bake, boxers box, or dancers dance were **not** included.

4. noun + noun	attention span, traffic congestion, education system, business trip, peace activist, aisle seat, vehicle theft, learning space, learning experience, learning pace, learning style, learning platform, studying environment Notes: The pattern *a/an/the + noun of + noun* were **not** included. e.g. the speed of the video, a sense of pride, a surge of anger, a herd of buffalo, a bouquet of flowers, a piece of information, an article of clothing
5. adverb + adjective	highly successful, brutally honest, fully/keenly aware, ridiculously expensive Notes: These also include an adverb and an adjective that are not adjacent to each other.
6. adverb + verb OR verb + adverb	severely punish, vividly remember, vaguely remember, strictly forbidden, study ahead of time, strongly believe, learn online, directly affect, communicate directly Notes: These also include an adverb and a verb that are not adjacent to each other.
7. others (This category consists of collocations which do not fit into any of the six categories. Most of them contain some wrong word forms.)	Teacher can <u>response</u> <u>easily</u>. (noun+adverb) You can <u>loss</u> concentrating on studying <u>easily</u>. (noun+adverb)

Appendix B
Items not Included in the Study

1. Lexical collocations found in the prompt:
    While many people think <u>online learning</u> is the <u>greatest revolution</u> in today's education, some people are still <u>in favor of face-to-face learning</u>. What do you prefer, online learning or <u>traditional face-to-face classroom learning</u>? <u>Give reasons</u> to <u>support your opinion</u>. Please type your essay in the space below.
    i.e. online learning (adj+n), great revolution (adj+n),
    greatest/great revolution (adj+n), face-to-face learning (adj+n),
    traditional learning (adj+n), classroom learning (n+n),
    give reasons/a reason (v+n), support opinion (v+n)

2. Indefinite pronouns:
    anybody, anyone, anything, everybody, everyone, everything, nobody, no one, nothing, somebody, someone, something

3. Verb to be, some delexical verbs or nouns which, when put in combination with another word, look more like a free combination (or weak collocations).
    e.g. thing, have (which means to own something), give (which means to provide something for someone)
    The collocations included in this study should be semantically semi-transparent to some extent. In other words, this study focuses on (relatively) strong collocations.

4. This or that which refers to the whole preceding sentence.

5. Impersonal "it" as in 'It's important to analyze.' 'It's hot in here.' 'It's now 7 p.m.'

6. Subject pronouns (I, we, you, he, she) and object pronouns (me, us, you, him, her)
    e.g. <u>I</u> prefer a traditional classroom.
    However, "it" or "they" which refer to a lexical noun were analyzed.

7. Modal verbs e.g. can, could, shall, should, will, need to, have to

8. Linking verbs e.g. look, seem, sound, stay, become, feel

9. Adverbs that modify a whole sentence (rather than a specific verb or adjective) or an adverb that functions as a discourse marker. e.g. <u>Firstly</u>, it's hard to participate online. <u>Contrarily</u>, these are not available in face-to-face classrooms.

10. Adverbs of time or adverb of frequency (because it is more like a free combination) e.g. read <u>every evening</u>, <u>sometimes</u> I skip, study <u>anytime</u>

11. Adjectives that are ordinal numbers e.g. first, second, third

12. Generic adjectives and adverbs e.g. good, better, well, very, more, less

13. Noun determiners e.g. several, many, a lot of

14. Proper nouns e.g. Coronavirus, Microsoft Team, BTS, MRT

15. Grammatical collocations, prepositions, and prepositional phrases e.g. students <u>all over the world</u>, customize <u>according to my desire</u>