THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG COLLOCATION KNOWLEDGE AND LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING PROFICIENCY OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

The current research was to explore the relationship among knowledge of collocation and reading, writing, speaking and listening proficiency of Iranian EFL students. To this end, 50 students involved in the study took a test of both lexical and grammatical collocations to measure their collocational knowledge, first. Then, an IELTS sample test (IELTS Practice Plus Pearson Education Longman University, Version two) was administered in order to find the students' reading, writing, speaking and listening proficiency. Pearson correlation coefficient and regression model were used to analyze the data. Pearson correlation coefficient illustrated a significant correlation between knowledge of collocation and reading (P=0.724), writing (P=0.724), listening (P=0.706) and speaking (P=0.885) proficiency. Regression model was conducted to find the exact contribution between variables. It indicated that knowledge of collocation can be a predicator for all four language skills. In addition, knowledge of collocation has the greatest impact (R^2=78.3%) on participants' speaking proficiency. Based on the above mentioned results, knowledge of collocation proved to be a prerequisite for successful language learning. This research confirmed the influential role of collocation knowledge in essential language learning.

Key words: *Collocation, Proficiency, English as a Foreign Language*

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary and its appropriate use play a crucial role in second language learning and teaching. Learning a language without vocabulary acquisition is impossible. Moreover, vocabulary learning is one of the most important aspects of language learning; therefore, more attention should be paid to it. According to Widdowson (1989), Vocabulary is an essential component of successful communication**.** However, the importance of vocabulary has long been ignored in EFL education. Traditionally, many researchers thought that the focus of language teaching should be on grammatical competence, and language has been defined as lexical grammar.

Grammar was represented just as structures, for example, the present simple, passive and active voice, direct and indirect speech, etc., whereas vocabulary was viewed as "being secondary in value serving to explain the meaning and scope of the grammar". (Sinclair & Renouf 1988, p. 140). Structuralism believed that by acquiring the grammatical system of a language, learners would be able to make correct sentences.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, some researchers began to acknowledge the importance of EFL vocabulary acquisition naturally. And they accentuated the instruction of vocabulary in second language teaching (Lewis 1993; Nation 1990; McCarthy 1984; Channell 1981; Nattinger 1980). Among them, Lewis (1993) who proposed the lexical approach to second language teaching put emphasis on developing the learner's proficiency with lexis. He strongly claimed, "Lexis is the basis of language" (Lewis 1993, p. 95). He believed, "language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (p. 6). Lexical approach believed, "an important part of language mastery is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, or "chunks" and that these clunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar" (Lewis 1993, p. 95). In other words, this approach differentiates between vocabulary that

was in fact previously defined as collection of single words with a constant meaning and lexis that incorporates both individual words and word combinations that has been stored in our mind.

The most important type of lexical chunk is collocation, which has been introduced by Firth (1968). The origin of the term collocation is “in the Latin verb collocar that means to set in order to arrange”. (Martyńska 2004, p.2). Collocations have a significant role in EFL teaching and learning that is why lexical approach gives special attention to teaching and learning collocation. According to Firth (1968), “collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word” (p. 181). Collocation has been considered as the way in which words typically occur with each other, i.e. combinations of words in natural speech with a certain frequency. Furthermore, Lewis (2002) believes, “although collocation is not determined by logic or frequency, but it is arbitrary, decided only by linguistic convention” (p. 29). Some collocations are fixed, it means that it allows no variation at all, such as "*to catch a cold*," "*rancid butter*," and "*drug addict*," while others are free combinations and can be completed in a relatively small number of ways. According to Lewis (1997) “collocations co-occur, but not all words which co-occur, are collocations” (p.44). Lewis (1997) maintained, “instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations, and to present these in expressions. Rather than trying to break things into ever smaller pieces, there is a conscious effort to see things in larger, more holistic ways” (p. 204). She encourages teachers, “to raise students' awareness of collocations and to initiate their own action research to make sure the changes they make are of benefit to students”. (Lewis 2000, cited in Farrokh 2012, p. 56). Woolard (2000) claimed, “Collocation has emerged as an important category of lexical patterning and it is fast becoming an established unit of description in language teaching courses and materials” (p. 28). Furthermore, Bolinger (1976) argued, “we learn and memorize words in chunks and that most of our "manipulative grasp of words is by way of collocations” (p. 8).

A number of linguists and language teachers who recommend the teaching and learning of collocations in the L2 classroom have underscored the importance of collocations for the development of L2 vocabulary and communicative competence. Many researchers acknowledged that acquisition of collocation would lead to attain fluency in language production and accuracy in language use (Nattinger 1980 & Lewis 2000). According to Hill (2001), 80% of a written text could contain collocation. Therefore, a crucial part of native speakers comprises collocations. Collocational knowledge could help learners to turn passive words into active ones; thus, learners can acquire a creative language system. (Durrant 2008). In addition, knowledge of collocation can assist learners’ memory and develop second language learners’ mental lexicon (Forquera 2006). Jaén (2007) proposed that in order to write and speak fluently and accurately, non-native speakers of English have to acquire a vast knowledge of collocation. Knowledge of collocation differentiates native speakers and non-native speakers (Shei & Pain 2000).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

According to Al-Zahrani (1998), one of the problems that adult second or foreign language learners have to come up is learning collocations. Thus, collocations are undeniably an important part of language knowledge that can lead learners to their communicative competence. Most of the studies, conducted so far, have shown strong relationship between knowledge of collocation and language proficiency, but little empirical research has been taken to determine on which of the four main skills, knowledge of collocation has the greatest impact. Moreover, all other studies have focused only on one language skill, but the current study has focused on main four language skills. The present study attempts to determine the relationship between learners’ knowledge of collocation and their language skill performances. Moreover, it is going to find out if Iranian EFL students’ knowledge of collocation predicts their four language skills performance.

1.2. Objective of the Study

Whereas the importance of this area of research has already been displayed in many studies, the aims of this study are: a) To investigate if there is a significant relationship between Iranian FFL learners' knowledge of collocation and four language skills consist of reading, writing, speaking and listening; b) To identify the contribution of collocation knowledge to the learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening proficiency.

1.3. Research Questions

There are two research questions supporting the objectives of the present study:

1) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of collocation and their language proficiency including reading, writing, listening and speaking?

2) Does collocation knowledge predict the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Collocation is one of the most important overlooked aspects of language learning and teaching. It is the combination and co-occurrence of single words. Many linguists have acknowledged the importance of collocation in the improvement of L2 vocabulary and communicative competence. Wray (2002) pointed out collocation can enhance accuracy as well as fluency. Hill (2001) claimed, "learning collocations facilitates learners' thinking, leading to more fluidity when communicating in spoken and written language" (pp. 54 – 5) while Nation (2001) noted, "by having chunks of language in long-term memory, language reception and language productions are made more effective" (p. 321).

Knowing the importance of collocation in learning four language skills is advantageous in finding new ways and strategies to improve the student's language ability. Therefore, the findings of the present study may help learners to be aware of the role and significance of collocation to improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Also the results of the study will direct teachers' attention to focus on collocations, and it will present useful ways for teachers to implicate a better understanding of the nature of English collocations and their effect on four language skills. In addition, by investigating the dominant parts of problems in applying collocations, the researcher can decide on how to incorporate appropriate collocations into EFL curriculum in Iranian language institutes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite different definitions of collocation provided by different scholars, it seems to be still some disagreement over its definition. One of the regular definitions of collocation is the strong propensity of one word to co-occur with another word in a particular context (Aghbar 1990; Al-Zahrani 1998; Gitsaki 1999; Nation 2001; Nesselhauf, 2003). According to Sinclair (1991), a collocation is "either a recurring combination of words that is often arbitrary, or just a recurring combination of a few words without emphasizing its arbitrariness" (p. 123). Jacquemin (2001) argued that collocation is "recurrent combinations of words that co-occur more frequently than it would be expected just by chance and that correspond to arbitrary word usage" (p. 58). Cruse (1986) defined collocation as "sequences of lexical items which habitually co-occur." (p. 40). According to Aghbar (1990), "a collocation refers to two words or more that recurrently co-occur together in the memory of native speakers and are used together with some frequency in both written and spoken discourse. For example, in the sentence "His album come out in the spring", "noun", "album" recurrently co-occurs with the verb "comes out". Crystal (1997) stated, "They are a type of syntagmatic relation that is predictable to a greater or lesser extent (e.g., the bond between *spick* and *span* is stronger than that between *letter* and *pill-box*)".

2.1. Classification of Collocation

Many scholars have acknowledged the importance of collocations in SLA and TEFL. However, each one of them has divided collocations according to different aspects. Therefore, there are different categories. The most common types are discussed below:

Idiomatic Combinations: idiomatic combinations are also known as fixed combinations or frozen expressions. They are a group of words whose meaning is not predictable from the individual parts. They have fixed patterning. For example, the idiom "kick the bucket" means to die, which has no relation to the meanings of the words "kick" or "the bucket".

Non-idiomatic Combinations: Non-idiomatic combinations are classified to free and restricted combinations. According to Aisenstadt (1981), "Free collocations are combinations of two or more words with free commutability within the grammatical and semantic framework of the language. They are the vast majority of collocations in the language" (p. 59). Free collocations are known as "the least cohesive type of word combinations. The noun 'murder', for example, can be used with many verbs to analyze, condemn, and discuss (etc.) a murder." (Bahns and Eldaw 1993, P. 102). Restricted collocations are the second type of non-idiomatic combinations. They are expressions whose meanings can be predicted from the meanings of the individual words. "They are used frequently, spring to mind readily, and are psychologically salient (as opposed to free combinations)" (Bahns and Eldaw 1993, P. 102).

Benson et al. (1986) arranged restricted collocation into two major classes, lexical collocation and grammatical collocation. Grammatical collocation consists of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive or a clause. Lexical collocations consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

2.2. Studies on Collocation

This part discusses some up-to-date empirical studies particularly targeting EFL/ESL learners' collocational knowledge.

Mounya (2010) conducted a study to find the role of teaching collocations in raising foreign language writing proficiency. The sample was composed of two groups, which were chosen randomly. It consisted of forty-eight students whose native language was Arabic and their second Language was French. The experimental group received the treatment while the control group did not. The researcher administered a pre-test to examine students' use of collocations. It indicated that participants had a limited knowledge of collocations and a wide range of "mis-collocations". Analysis which was conducted after treatment showed that the participants' writing proficiency was raised significantly through a clear instruction of collocation. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between using collocation and writing proficiency.

Alsakran (2011) explores the productive and receptive knowledge of lexical and grammatical collocations among advanced Arabic-speaking learners of English. Furthermore, he investigates whether the language environment (ESL or EFL) has an influence on the acquisition of collocations. He also explores whether there is a significant difference between participants' performances on verb-noun, adjective-noun, and verb-preposition collocations. The participants of the study were 38 Saudi students at the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and 30 Arab students in the Intensive English program at Colorado State University. Three gap-filling tests were used to measure the participants' productive collocational knowledge. In order to measure their receptive collocational knowledge, Alsakran used an appropriateness judgment test. Statistical analysis indicated that participants' learning environment has a strong effect on the acquisition of L2 collocations. The ESL learners had significantly higher scores than the EFL learners. Furthermore, the study revealed a significant difference between the participants' productive and receptive knowledge of collocations. The participants' productive knowledge of collocations lagged far behind their receptive collocational knowledge. The results also showed a statistically significant difference between the three types of collocation. The participants performed better on the verb-noun collocations test than on the adjective-noun and verb-preposition collocations tests. Finally, the findings revealed that Arabic-speaking learners of English demonstrated poor knowledge of collocations on all four tests.

In another study, Rahimi and Momeni (2012) investigated the effect of teaching collocations on English language proficiency. The participants of the study were sixty Iranian pre-university students, who were majored in the field of mathematic. Convenient sampling was used to choose the groups from six classes in pre-university centers in a small town in the west of Iran. The researcher divided

the participants into control and experimental groups arbitrarily including 30 students in each group. Pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was applied in this study. The researchers taught the words of the reading comprehension passages of a book during 16 weeks to experiment group through using concordances and corpus-based activities. A traditional instruction of new words such as translation, explanation and definition of the new words was given to control group. The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group had a better performance than the control group. Finally, it was reported that teaching collocations has a positive effect on students' language proficiency.

Namvar (2012) investigated Iranian male and female postgraduate students' use of collocations by analyzing the learners' written work based on multiple-choice tests and a writing task. The samples' first language was Persian and their foreign language was English. Their level of proficiency was identified as intermediate and above. The researcher used a multiple-choice test of collocation, which consisted of 50 items selected from the *Oxford Collocation Dictionary*. The test included both lexical and grammatical collocations. The findings of the study revealed that since L1 transfer had a strong effect on the participants' collocation production, learners had problem with both lexical and grammatical collocations in their writing. Finally, the researcher found a significant correlation between the participants' language proficiency and their knowledge of collocation.

Another study conducted by Movahediyan Attar and Allami (2013) examines the relationship between teaching collocations and speaking proficiency of EFL Iranian Learners, the relationship between the subjects' knowledge of collocations and their use of collocate, and students' attitude towards teaching collocations. A total 80 intermediate students took part in this study. They were divided into experimental and control group. A collocation test including 30 items and a collocation interview was administered to all participants as a pretest and posttest. Then, *Collocation in Use* was treated to the experimental group. A collocation posttest and interview revealed that the experimental groups' speaking proficiency developed in the posttest. The results also showed that the experimental group had a better performance in interview after the instruction of collocation. Furthermore, the students had positive attitudes towards explicit instruction of collocations.

Kiaee, Moghaddam, & Hosseini (2013), conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the effects of collocation instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Two intact classes were randomly selected as the experimental group and two other classes were selected as the control group. 30 collocations selected from each reading text were taught to the students in the experimental group. Results of paired-sample t-test indicated that the students in the experimental group performed better than the control group in reading comprehension. In fact, teaching collocations could play a significant role in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension.

In sum, as the above review indicated, collocation plays an important role in the process of language learning and teaching. It is very important for EFL learners to improve their fluency, and enhance their communicative competence. Knowing the importance of collocation in all four language skills is advantageous in finding new ways and strategies to improve the student's language proficiency. As shown above, much research has been conducted on the impact of collocation on EFL/ESL learners' language learning; some of them are conducted to find common collocaional errors that language learners make; some other studies have been conducted to focus on the relationship between collocations and language proficiency; however, to the best of the researchers' knowledge little empirical research has been conducted on its contribution to four language skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The data for the study were drawn from 50 male and female Iranian graduate students of different fields of study in DNI English language institute in Shiraz, Iran. They were studying English as a foreign language. Their ages ranged from 20 to 30. They were selected through multistage sampling. In the first stage, convenient sampling was used to select 50 students. Then, in order to screen the students with high knowledge of collocation, a collocation test was administered. After scoring

collocation test papers, 30 students who obtained highest scores were selected. Therefore, out of 50 people attending the test 30 students who met the criteria were chosen by judgmental (purposive) sampling. All participants enrolled for IELTS preparation classes at the institute. These participants were chosen because the participants were at upper intermediate level; therefore, it was expected that they have already learned a certain number of collocations.

3.2. Instruments

To gather data, two instruments were employed in this study. To elicit the subjects' knowledge of collocation, a multiple choice collocation test that consisted of thirty items was administered to all subjects. The test was selected from *Oxford Collocation Dictionary* revised by Namvar (2012). However, its validity and reliability were tested again by the researcher. The collocation test was made up of both lexical and grammatical collocation which proposed by Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997). The test was divided into three parts. The first part consisting of 10 items dealt with (noun+verb) collocation, the second part of 10 items covered (adjective+noun) collocation and the third part again consisting of 10 items dealt with (noun+preposition) collocation.

The second instrument was an IELTS sample test (IELTS Practice Plus Pearson Education Longman University, Version two) which was administered to all students to identity their proficiency level in four language skills including reading, writing, listening and speaking.

3.3. Procedure

At first, fifty upper intermediate students studying IELTS were selected. In order to screen the students with high knowledge of collocation, at the end of the term, a thirty item multiple-choice collocation test which was composed of both lexical and grammatical collocation was administered to students immediately before their IELTS sample test. They had 20 minutes to answer the questions. After that, the IELTS sample test was administered to all students by the institute itself. The IELTS test was lasted 2 hours and 45 minutes. After scoring all collocation test papers by the researchers, the participants whose grades were below fifteen were excluded from the study, since their knowledge of collocation were found to be low. Thirty students were identified with scores above fifteen. The students' grades in speaking, listening, reading, and writing of the IELTS exam were obtained from institute.

All data were computed by Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version16. At first, Pearson correlation coefficient was adopted to determine the relationship between knowledge of collocation and reading, writing, speaking, and listening proficiency of the learners. Finally, the regression analysis was employed in four separate steps to find the contribution of participants' knowledge of collocation to their reading, writing, speaking, and listening performance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question, Pearson Product moment correlation analysis was used to identify the relationship between the students' knowledge of collocation and the students' proficiency in speaking, reading, writing and listening. The results of analysis were reflected in the following table.

Dependent \ **Independent**		**Collocation**
Speaking	Correlation	0..885
	Sig.	0.000
Reading	Correlation	0.724
	Sig.	0.000
Writing	Correlation	0.724
	Sig.	0.000
Listening	Correlation	0.726
	Sig.	0.000

Table 1: Correlation between knowledge of collocation and speaking, reading, writing and listening proficiency of Iranian EFL learners

As depicted in Table 1, P value for all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) is 0.000 ($P<0.05$). It shows that there is a significant correlation between all four language skills and collocation knowledge.

As was stated, the current study found a significant correlation between collocation knowledge and four language skills. This finding is congruent with Hsu's (2010) study. He conducted a study to examine the effects of direct collocation instruction on Taiwanese college English majors' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. He found that direct collocation instruction developed the participants' vocabulary learning and advanced retention. Moreover, like the present study, he proposed that collocation instruction could be useful to explore as a teaching option. The current study in line with Kiaee, Moghaddam, and Hosseini (2013), concluded that teaching collocations could play a significant role in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Moreover, Hsu's (2007) findings showed a strong relationship between students' frequency of lexical collocations and their online writing scores; as well as a strong relationship between the participants' variety of lexical collocations and their online writing scores. In another study, Mounya (2010) found the same result. He conducted a study to find the role of teaching collocations in raising foreign language writing proficiency. The participants' writing proficiency was raised through a clear instruction of collocation. The effective role of knowledge of collocation on speaking proficiency was also confirmed by different researchers such as Sung 2003; Chiu 2008; Movahediyan Attar & Allami 2013 that are all in line with the results of the present study. However, few studies such as Hsu's (2002) didn't find any significant relationship between the subjects' quantity of collocations and their speaking performance.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, few empirical studies have been done on the relationship between knowledge of collocation and listening proficiency. As an example, L. Hsu's (2005) found that collocation instruction had a positive effect on participants' listening. He found that (a) the students preferred collocation instruction; (b) they were interested in lexical collocation; and (c) they believed "their listening fluency can be improved as a result of instruction of lexical collocations" (p. 63)

To answer the second research question and find out the contribution of collocation knowledge to language proficiency of students, multiple regression analysis was conducted as represented in Table 2.

variable	F	T	Beta	B	Std. error	Adj. R^2	R^2	Sig.
Reading	30.8	5.55	0.724	2.827	2.16	0.507	0.524	0.000
Writing	30.5	5.05	0.718	2.536	2.18	0.501	0.504	0.000
Speaking	101.2	10.06	0.885	3.007	1.45	0.776	0.783	0.000
Listening	27.9	5.28	0.706	3.243	2.21	0.481	0.499	0.000

Table2: Regression analysis for the contribution of collocation knowledge to four language skills

According to Table 2, the beta (β) value shows the contribution of knowledge of collocation to reading proficiency (β= 0.724, T= 5.55, Sig. T= 0.000). Statistically significant contribution exists between collocation test scores and reading proficiency scores for the subjects at $p < 0.05$ level. This circumstance reveals that once knowledge of collocation adds up by one unit, the students' reading proficiency enhances by 0.724 units. The R square value in Table 2 (R^2= 0.524) is indicative of a correlated level and contribution between knowledge of collocation and reading proficiency. The P-value or level of significance is 0.00 (Sig= 0.00).

Furthermore, the beta (β) value shows the contribution of knowledge of collocation to writing proficiency (β= 0.718, T= 5.05, Sig. T= 0.000). Significance level is 0.00 which is lower than 0.05. This indicates that once knowledge of collocation adds up by one unit, the students' writing proficiency enhances by 0.718 units. The R square value in Table 2 (R^2= 0.504) is indicative of a correlated level and contribution between knowledge of collocation and writing proficiency. Hence, knowledge of collocation can act as a predicator to measure writing proficiency.

Moreover, the beta (β) value and p<0.05 shows the significant contribution of knowledge of collocation to speaking proficiency. (β= 0.885, T= 10.06, Sig. T= 0.000). This circumstance reveals that once knowledge of collocation adds up by one unit, the students' speaking proficiency enhances by 0.885 units. The R square value in Table 2 (R^2= 0.783) is indicative of a correlated level and contribution between knowledge of collocation and speaking proficiency. In sum, as it is evident from Table 1 and 2, the strongest correlation and contribution can be found between collocation test scores and speaking proficiency. Therefore, it can be concluded that knowledge of collocation could be the strongest predictor of the students' speaking proficiency.

Referring to table 2, the beta (β) value and P<0.05 shows the contribution of knowledge of collocation to listening proficiency. (β= 0.706, T= 5.28, Sig. T= 0.000). This statistics shows that once knowledge of collocation adds up by one unit, the students' listening proficiency enhances by 0.706 units. The R square value in Table 2 (R^2= 0.499) is indicative of a correlated level and contribution between knowledge of collocation and listening proficiency. The results revealed that knowledge of collocation could be a predictor to measure the students' listening proficiency. However, collocation knowledge was a weaker predictor for listening proficiency of the learners in comparison with other language skills.

In summary, the statistics in Table 1 and 2 revealed that knowledge of collocation can predict the students' performance or proficiency in all four language skills.

Similar to the present research findings, Hsu (2002) examined whether collocation instruction would improve Taiwanese college EFL learners' development of the knowledge and use of collocations, as well as promoting language proficiency. He suggested that the instruction of collocation has a strong effect on learning new collocations in written and spoken discourse, and the knowledge of lexical collocation would develop students' language proficiency. Therefore, he concluded that explicit collocation instruction is very effective and suggested that it should be integrated into EFL classrooms. Moreover, Rahimi and Momeni (2012) emphasize on the effectiveness of teaching collocations to improve students' proficiency.

The present study, unlike the findings Mohammad Al-Amro (2006) which reported that there was no significant correlation between the subjects' overall knowledge of collocations and their actual collocational usage found that there is a significant correlation between knowledge of collocation and language proficiency. In other words, the collocational knowledge from the collocational test did not correlate to the use of collocations in the essay-writing task. Al-Amro stated that the negligence of the lexical approach in the foreign language teaching and learning environment was the reason for EFL learners' lack of collocational use. "When the teaching of collocations is overlooked learners focus mainly on single-word units while disregarding all the important associations of the word or its partners. Moreover, the overemphasis of using synonyms in dictionaries to find a particular meaning of a word has resulted in the misconception among learners that conceptual equivalence involves distributional equivalence".(Alsakran 2011, p. 48)

5. CONCLUSION

The present study showed the contribution of knowledge of collocation to all four language skills while collocation knowledge mostly contributed to the speaking, reading, writing and listening respectively. Therefore, learning vocabulary, especially collocations plays an important role in second language learning and four language skills (Ellis 2001; Fillmore 1976; Hakuta 1974; Lewis 1993; Pawley & Syder 1983). Similar to the studies conducted by Ellis 1997; Lewis 1997; Nattinger & DeCarrio 1992; Hinkel (2004) concluded that "Stock grammatical and lexical chunks can become an efficient means to expand L2 writers' arsenals particularly when learners are also taught how to substitute discrete elements appropriately and in practical ways" (p. 38).

The findings of this research mainly imply the necessity of developing knowledge of collocation to improve language skills by Iranian EFL students. Based on the results of this research, collocational knowledge would lead to the learners' receptive and productive skills. In other words, students can learn the word better if it associates with other words since students can remember the word with its associations or collocations. When learners memorize collocations, they can be aware of lexical restrictions, helping them to use collocations as pre-packaged building blocks. In addition, the importance of collocations should be stressed both in vocabulary learning and teaching. Many scientists asserted that one of the important factors in English language learning is to raise awareness of collocations (Brown 1974; Conzett 2000; Fox 1998; Hill 2001; Lewis 1997a; Lewis 2000; Murphy 1983; Woolard 2000). Seal (1991) regards collocations as "a vital characteristic of vocabulary knowledge and states that what should be offered to students is collocational knowledge not individual words" (cited in Ebrahimi Bazzaz & Abd Samad 2011, p. 161). EFL/ESL teachers should give importance to learning collocations because it is necessary for designing suitable teaching resources and for the methodology of classroom instruction.

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