



## Teaching Collocations to Military Students Through Hybrid Teaching

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**Abstract:** One example of English for a Specific Purpose is military English. The goal of any military English course is to enable students to communicate effectively in a military environment, whether the communication is in correspondence or face to face engagements.

This study demonstrates an empirical research of explicit corpus-aided English collocation instruction in hybrid method and validates its efficacy in raising learners' collocation awareness, which in turn leads to a significant improvement in military students' communicative competence. A 20 – week-long intensive instruction of collocations was given to 20 military students learning English in the language training school of the Training and Military Education Command in Georgia. The data were collected and measured with qualitative and quantitative research methods in three phases. During the experiment, the participants received the pre-, mid-, and post-test on collocation competence answered a questionnaire at the end. The data from the tests and questionnaire collaboratively indicate that the corpus-based collocation instruction is proved to be more effective for intermediate level military students. The findings have pedagogical implications for military English instructors and students. The main objective of the study is for military English teachers to play a more active role in raising their students' collocation awareness through appropriate guidance which in its turn will significantly improve military students' communicative competence.

**Keywords:** corpus-aided pedagogy, military English, collocation awareness, collocation competence

### Introduction

In today's communication era when expressing one's opinion could lead to arising international integration, English language has become the Lingua Franca of business, media, technology, medicine, education and research, including military. The need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been growing rapidly, particularly in EFL countries where English is mainly used for instrumental purposes. ESP is a method to language instruction that focuses on meeting the learners' requirements. Richards and Rodgers (2001) note ESP as a movement that seeks to respond the language needs of learners who need English in order to perform specific roles (e.g. student, engineer, nurse) and who need to acquire content and practical skills through the medium of it rather than simply mastering the language. ESP learners are generally adults with some prior knowledge of English, who learn the language to communicate a range of professional skills and to perform certain work-related tasks. As Savignon (2002) asserts using English for a specific purpose refers to using it for real and immediate communicative purposes. Liu and Berger (2015) state that ESP students typically have an intermediate

or advanced level of English, but this is not always the case. Students have some knowledge of their professional field generally in their native language.

It is approved that military students are significant supporters who have decided to study this language for particular reasons. ESP is designed to enable them to use English to meet their needs in military context. Military students learn English not only to understand everyday language, but also to use the language in a specific context for career opportunities. Military English involves a specific linguistic corpus and emphasizes specific forms of communication in a specific context. For military students, oral and writing proficiency are of utmost importance. They need to learn how to communicate effectively in English at their workplaces. Attention is paid to specialized vocabulary, such as what words/phrases to learned, how to teach them, and how they might expand their lexical knowledge. Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (p. 55). Muliawati & Ismail (2017) state that in recent years English language learners have become aware of the importance of vocabulary learning as an indicator of communicative competence. Learning vocabulary implies not only gaining new words, but also the awareness of their function and applicability in different contexts and situations, since a large part of the vocabulary occurs in some kind of fixed expressions and is stored in the speaker’s mental lexicon. Woolard (2000) gives collocations a special emphasis „learning more vocabulary is not just learning new words, it is often learning familiar words in new combinations” (p. 31). Teaching lexical phrases promotes speaking and writing fluency because they change learners’ attention from individual words to broader discourse structures and the social aspects of the interaction. Jaén (2007) asserts that collocations are very significant part of knowledge of second language acquisition and they are necessary for non-native English speakers in order to speak or write fluently and accurately.

Military students also need to be aware of collocations in order to improve their receptive and productive skills for mastering fluent and accurate reading/writing skills. Collocational competence will help them produce word combinations automatically and avoid common lexical mistakes.

Teaching English military collocations to military students contributes to a better preparation for the service in professional army. If officers, non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers are aware of the military collocations typical for their specialty (land, air or naval force), they have the opportunity to communicate with their international partners in different kinds of trainings, joint exercises and multinational missions. On the basis of this, the present study aims to investigate Georgian military student’ knowledge of collocations, design corpus resources and enrich corpus-based pedagogy and military English teaching methodology in hybrid teaching format in Georgia. Moreover, it aims to encourage military students to master collocations and consequently develop their communicative competence.

### **Problem statement**

As English is considered the "language of communication", a large vocabulary is essential for effective communication. A learner's ability to comprehend language depends on familiarity with vocabulary that helps them understand the ideas being conveyed. This significance of vocabulary in language acquisition is supported by Folse (2004) as he states “... You can get by without grammar; you cannot get by without vocabulary” (p.2). Likewise, Karatay (2004) highlights the indispensable importance of the vocabulary “The ability of the four basic language skills to read, write, speak and listen, and to be able to use these skills actively is closely related to acquired vocabulary” (as cited in Baskin et al.,2017p.21) .

Mastering language vocabulary requires constant effort and practice both for EFL learners and military students. Military students sometimes have adequate knowledge of English vocabulary, but

still have serious problems using vocabulary in communication. They often struggle to find the proper collocation when making comprehensible speech. Lack of collocation comprehension in military students leads to stress and anxiety, which in turn discourages them from communicating and participating in the language learning process.

In order to have a complete understanding of a word, it is necessary to apprehend how it relates to other elements of vocabulary and how it combines with other words. Having real mastery of English language requires one to be aware of which words collocate with which words. Learning collocations as ready-made chunks is necessary since most collocations are arbitrary. There is no clear reason why we “make” mistakes but “do” homework. Similarly, Farrokh (2012) sees the absence of any logic why good chance, high probability and strong likelihood are acceptable collocations in English while strong chance, good probability and high likelihood are not. The Knowledge of collocational expressions can enhance collocational competence within the target language since military students can build a contextual background and improve their intuition to construct more accurate and effective discourse.

Another reason that makes it difficult to use collocations correctly is that military students learn words in isolation, without giving adequate consideration how those words relate to each other. They often memorize individual words by translating them into their mother tongue while the learners fail to use them accurately and figure them out in contexts. According to Schmitt (2010) one main reason for the failure of learners in reaching the target vocabulary size is the instruction focusing on individual words. Basic collocation related problems are as follows:

1. Military students may have intra-lingual problems.
2. Military students may make negative transfer from their mother tongue.
4. Military students' chances of using proper collocations decrease, when they learn words through definitions or in separation.
5. Military students may fail to make sense of collocations
6. Military students may not recognize collocations as meaningful phrases when reading text.

The other challenge for military students is the lack of knowledge of military collocations. They struggle to use the correct military collocations in their written or oral discourse. Military collocations tend to meet the expectations while achieving their goal to communicate fluently in their professional field. Being fluent in military English provides a better takeoff in their career paths and knowing military collocations helps them in implementing their plans in military environment. Moreover, lack of knowledge of military collocations in English language hinders them from communicating effectively and makes the students appear to be passive participants in language classrooms. E.g. It is a more natural way of military language to say „Impose a curfew „than „create a carfew’”.

It would be worthwhile to investigate the effects of vocabulary instruction through general and military collocations in Georgian military classes.

### Literature Review

As mentioned above, one of the most important aspects of defining military English communication skills is learners' collocational knowledge. It is very important in learning vocabulary and has yet to be exploited to its full potential to prepare military students to use right collocations later in their own performance. Motivating military students to reach communicative competence in English is essential.

For this reason Lee and Kim (2021) defined collocational knowledge for military students as the extent to which learners understand recurring but arbitrary combinations of words, such as ‘friendly fire’ or ‘surgical strike’ the current study was aimed to investigate if language educations for learners' collocational knowledge are overall effective. Furthermore, it aimed to understand how the identified

instructional features and learner factors influenced the effectiveness. Their study included 1,637 participants. The students in the experimental group underwent corpus-based instruction, which revealed to be more efficient than the traditional teaching of vocabulary.

Hsu (2010) examined the effects of collocation instruction on Taiwanese English majors' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The findings of his research showed that vocabulary learning was enhanced by collocation instruction. This outcome has been supported by the results of this research in that collocation teaching can be regarded as an effective method for improving vocabulary knowledge. Teaching words to the learners by their collocations did not result in better learning and retention.

Yazdandoos, AmalSaleh, and Kafipour (2014) investigated the relationship between collocation knowledge and reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in Iranian EFL learners. To assess their knowledge of collocations, 50 students participated in the study and took tests on lexical and grammatical collocations. The learners' proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening was then assessed using an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) sample test. The findings demonstrated that collocational knowledge can define all four language abilities. Moreover, individuals' speaking abilities were significantly impacted by their collocation knowledge. The study confirmed the significant role of collocation knowledge in essential language learning.

Keshavarz and Taherian (2018) investigated the impact of explicit teaching of collocations on the English proficiency of EFL learners. Continuous formative assessment was used to monitor learners' progress towards intermediate-level proficiency. The results of the study revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group implying that teaching collocations lead to improvement in language proficiency.

Suleman et al. (2020) reviewed the receptive and productive knowledge of collocations among the business students at COMSATS University Islamabad Vehari Campus majoring in English Studies. 100 students were applied both a questionnaire and two collocations tests. They discovered that 66.4% of the respondents gave the correct answers at the receptive level in contrast to only 33.7% at the productive level. This emphasizes the need to pay special attention to collocations when teaching speaking and writing.

### **The significance of collocations in ESP**

The ESP courses are designed to help students strengthen their skills and prepare to deal with everyday situations and interact with experts in many fields. The ESP course vocabulary is designed to the needs of the students, depending on the field of study. To enhance their ability to learn new vocabulary in ESP, students should recognize the importance of language learning strategies. One strategy is to allow military students to discover lexical phrases (whole expressions using the high-priority ESP vocabulary). This strategy is very important to develop the student's ability to recognize chunks. Besides, it involves learners in the process of recognizing and identifying lexical phrases, processing them orally or in writing, distinguishing between high frequency and low frequency lexical items. As Kavaliauskienė and Janulevičienė (2000) believes the language fluency and accuracy are primarily achieved through retrieval and combining ready-made language blocks. Therefore, one of the central points is to use activities in ESP training to encourage students identify the language elements of authentic materials. Another important point is that language units should be learned in context. Contextualized learning is preferable, because learning vocabulary is just about memorizing lexical phrases. It must be integrated into the student's language resources so that they are spontaneously available when needed. Using vocabulary is not the same as its knowledge. And it is the teacher's job to activate these elements in the classroom. This means that students have to process

the newly acquired vocabulary. Thus, a logical follow-up is a multi-stage process: 1) check comprehension of authentic passages 2) provide more practice 3) revision 4) reinforcement.

This research focuses on whether Georgian military students require taking appropriate English language courses to use the language efficiently during and after their studies. The concern addressed in this study relates to lack of collocation knowledge among military students which hinders them from to achieve effective communicative competence. The analysis is likely to help teachers identify the students' needs for learning the target language.

Military students are particularly keen to expand their vocabulary since they realized how difficult it is to learn a new language without a wide range of vocabulary acquisition. As Muliawati & Ismail (2017) state English language learners have recently realized the value of learning vocabulary as an indicator of communicative competence. The same belief is shared by McCrostie (2007) that having a large and diverse vocabulary is a sign of communicative competence and one of the key aspects of language learning. Military students have to learn high-priority lexis, which needs to be chosen and integrated into lesson plans and classroom activities. Teachers put a lot of effort to help them learn vocabulary that is relevant to their area of study. A language phenomenon with such a high frequency of occurrence deserves a considerable attention. Collocations are also highly common in ESP and combining them appropriately requires more effort. Owing to a lack of translational equivalence between the students' first language and the foreign language, certain types of collocations in ESP cause students to make mistakes. Bui (2021) recommends that collocations should be included in textbooks and other teaching materials so that the teachers and students can explore and absorb the collocations. Since collocations are difficult for military students learners to learn, English language teachers need to find the effective ways to instruct collocations and provide students sufficient practice to acquire collocations effectively.

### **The Study**

The study included 40 participants. The students in the experimental group received corpus-based instruction, which turned out to be more effective than the traditional method of teaching vocabulary. We came to the conclusion that learners' collocation knowledge is one of the most crucial factors in determining military students' English communication skills. This research was planned and carried out to raise military students' awareness of collocations and to determine their utility in an ESP context. The current study examines military specialty students' knowledge and attitude about collocations. It investigates how collocations affect their performance in the ESP context.

Due to lack of research in military context in Georgia, it is the responsibility of military instructors to find some innovative and creative ways of dealing with the ambiguity. Language learning in military classes should be based on military students' needs. The syllabus should be designed to introduce learners to English military collocations in order to improve their understanding of specialized terminology. To make the classes more engaging, there is a need to provide as more paper based and digital (internet-based) collocation activities as possible. The principal purpose of classes needs to make the military students interested in military language.

Naturally, with ESP students' potential range of specialists, what is available on the market will not always meet students' needs. In some cases specialized dictionaries do not have the information that students need. Because terms and terminological units are the lexical elements that convey specialized knowledge in a professional domain, they should be the focus of the vocabulary lessons for this student cohort. Compilation of military collocation glossary will obviously enhance the study process military students in ESP classes.

Learning English military collocations gives military students an opportunity to use them in their professional or private life. Military collocations can facilitate faster understanding of military language and steadily develop military students' English competency.

The study shows that teaching vocabulary through collocations really improved the vocabulary learning more than the classical vocabulary teaching methods. Based on the findings, we might suggest that language teachers should keep in mind the fact that students have to be aware of what "knowing a word" means. They should be aware that simply knowing a word's definition or its equivalent in their native tongue does not imply that they know it. To use a word in a context, they should know the collocations of that word. Students should be encouraged to create a vocabulary learning technique that will enable them to become autonomous vocabulary learners.

### **Methodology**

In teaching ESP vocabulary, the lexical approach is very suitable to the study of collocations. Within the Lexical Approach, special attention is directed to collocations and expressions that include institutionalized utterances, sentence frames and heads. As Lewis (1997) asserts, we deliberately try to assume collocations and to use these collocations in our expressions rather than individual words. We have a conscious effort to see things in larger, more holistic ways instead of trying to break things into ever smaller pieces.

In addition to that, another effective method that can be used in this era is a hybrid method. With the development and wide use of the computer and Internet, technology has supported and brought positive impact in teaching and learning process. This approach combines traditional classroom techniques with online digital material. This may include a face to face classroom combined with online instruction, blending online lesson with e-learning activities.

As confirmed by Bender cited in Ochoa Alpala & Roberto Flórez (2011), employing blended learning encourages students to take an active role in their education, feel more technologically empowered and able to learn whenever and wherever suits their schedules.

Indah (2015) discovers that integrated computer-assisted media (ICAM) can raise pupils' vocabulary proficiency. ICAM is more pleasant, effective, and efficient than single media at teaching English vocabulary, especially in regard to new terms. Pardede (2012) emphasizes blended learning as it provides EFL students with recording devices, video players, newspapers, and language laboratories. To encourage the learners to practice communicative language, a variety of activity types with group and pair work, collaborative learning, and autonomous learning could be used.

### **Research goals**

The current research was focused on collecting and analyzing data of collocational instruction in military students' groups at the language training school in training and military education command. The experiment was held during the academic year 2021-2022. At the training and military education command, language training school English is taught in two steps: general English (A2 for some students, although National Admission exams suppose that all school graduated possess B1 level, but in reality it is not always so → B1 → B2 level, during 1-2 semesters, depending on the student's initial level) and professional (military English (B2 level, during 1 semester). Students, whose English level is already B2, can directly take military English.

The aim of this study was investigating the impact of teaching collocations on language competence based on the inquiry of the military students specializing in military English. The research determined the further steps and recommendations in order to promote collocation teaching in English language groups.

**Research questions:**

The aim of this study is to answer the following research question:

- Do the military students have difficulties to comprehend the context even if they know the meaning of the separate words?
- Does the intensive teaching of collocations help military students of EFL achieve their Communicative Competence?
- Are collocations actively taught to military students while mastering English language?
- Is the suggested model of hybrid collocation teaching more effective than the traditional teaching model?

**Research Methods:**

A mixed-method approach was used in the research integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine students' collocation knowledge. The data were collected from both groups in three phases. The same format of pre, mid and post-tests questionnaire were administered as two qualitative research instruments. To begin with, the analysis was made using data from the pre-test, mid- test and post-test scores to determine military students' level of knowledge and an effectiveness of vocabulary hybrid learning strategies. The pretest was administered just before presenting the collocation instruction in order to investigate the collocational comprehension of the learners. The each test consisted of four kind exercises. 1. Multiple choice 2. Gap - filling 3. Matching exercise 4. Guess proper collocation. After 10 week intensive instruction, the mid test was administered to investigate the effects of collocation instruction on learners' vocabulary retention. At the end post -test was given to the experimental group to examine whether there was any impact for the vocabulary learning strategies used by the military students on their performance within the ESP context. Therefore, the descriptive statistics were performed on the pre-test, mid test and post-test scores using SPSS in order to quantitatively analyze the impact of collocations on students' performance. In addition, percentages and standard deviations were then calculated for the pre-test, mid- test and post-test scores as well as the standard deviations of the tests were compared. The data were analyzed by the SPSS software.

The research was conducted in the academic year 2021-2022 at the training and military education command, language training school in order to get the relevant findings and results. The total amount of the participant students was 40 intermediate English learners from six groups randomly divided into experimental and control groups. Gender was not a variable in this study, for the limited number of female students. The research participants were predominantly male military specialty students between the ages of 20 and 40. At the end of the experiment Likert-scale questionnaire (composed in English) was administered to the experimental group to assess participants' general attitude to the teaching of collocations. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed and the findings were interpreted to learn more about military students' attitude to collocation teaching.

**Procedure and Instruments**

The experimental group received corpus based instruction that means that military specialty students have five 50 -minute English lessons per week and on average 10-15 minutes a day are dedicated to teaching collocations. Students in the experimental group are provided both 8-10 general and military collocations and various collocation activities designed and selected by research developers in hybrid/blended format (live and online activities on web – based platforms like Quizlet,

Genial.ly, Padlet, etc.). This study investigated the effect of collocation activities on Georgian military students' intermediate vocabulary knowledge in order to solve their vocabulary problems.

The control group received traditional method of vocabulary instruction. Hugh Dellar Hugh's (2016) methods of teaching and learning collocations had been applied. The following procedure could help students to acquire collocations:

1. meaning comprehension or translation– translate the whole unit of meaning, rather than just single words.
2. Hear/see language patterns in context
3. Repeat language in chunks or collocations.
4. Observation on the language and its features
5. Usage of language patterns / lexical units anyhow
6. Following these steps repeatedly

The instrument for measuring the vocabulary knowledge of the students is a 100 item pretest, mid test and final test (general and military collocations) based on the collocations of their course book skillful. To check validity, the tests were confirmed by a couple of experienced language teachers at the training and military education command, language training school. Then, they were administered to the participants. The test evaluated the collocational knowledge of EFL learners. The objective of the study was to find correlations between learners' collocational knowledge and their general English proficiency.

At the end of the research the online questionnaire was administered to a total of 20 students in experimental group to measure their attitude to teaching collocations.

#### **Pretest**

To measure the existing knowledge of participants at the very beginning of the study, a web-based test was developed by the researcher.

#### **Mid test**

The mid test was administrated in the middle of the course to both the experimental group who attended the treatment sessions and the control group in order to evaluate the collocation knowledge of participants.

#### **Post test**

Posttest was administrated at the end of the course to both the experimental group who attended the treatment sessions and the control group to measure the collocation knowledge. The time span between the pretest and posttest was 20 weeks.

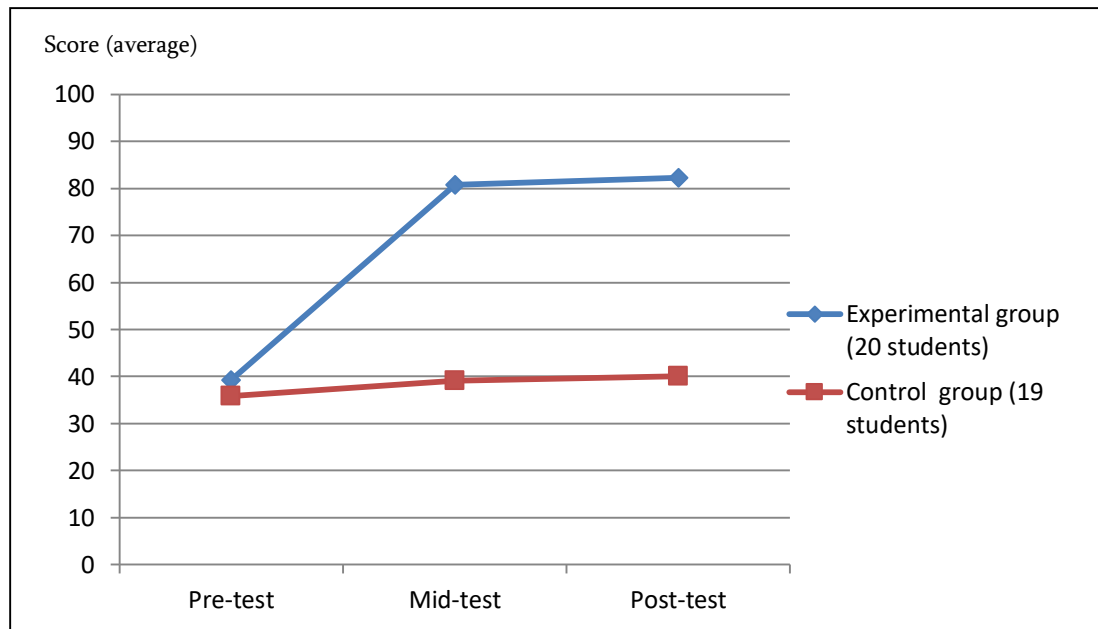
#### **Results and Recommendations:**

As ESP is thought to be goal-oriented and designed for the specific learners in accordance with learners' academic and professional needs. ESP uses different teaching methods, environments, and content than general English does. Many ESP researchers claim that in an ESP context it is essential to recognize the learners' unique needs in relation to their academic and professional fields.

The present study aims at investigating the effectiveness of an ESP program with collocation teaching by an military English teacher by measuring how much progress military students have made over a one-semester intensive course. It also aims to compare the English achievement between an experimental group and a control group. Additionally, it compares the English proficiency between the experimental group and the control group. The results obtained by this experimental research revealed that teaching military vocabulary through collocations results in a better vocabulary learning

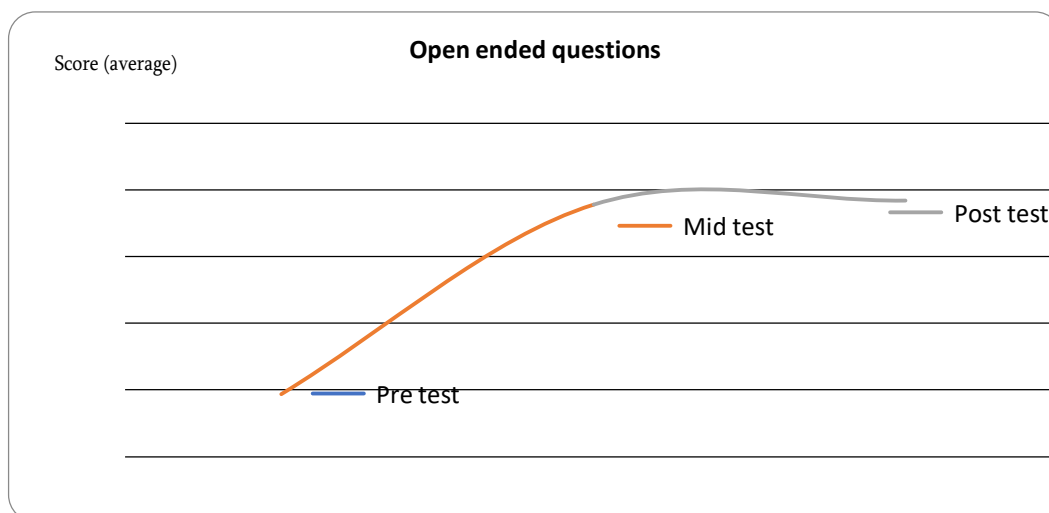


approach. The findings of the study showed that collocation activities significantly increased participants' vocabulary knowledge. Mid- and Post-tests results indicated that the learners in the experimental group developed proficiency rather than in the control group in regard to vocabulary knowledge. The test scores revealed a notable improvement of collocation competence during one intensive term. The participants with intermediate English proficiency gained a double improvement in their performance of collocation tests. It indicates that corpus-based English pedagogy is more effective for English learners. The test results are displayed in figure 1:

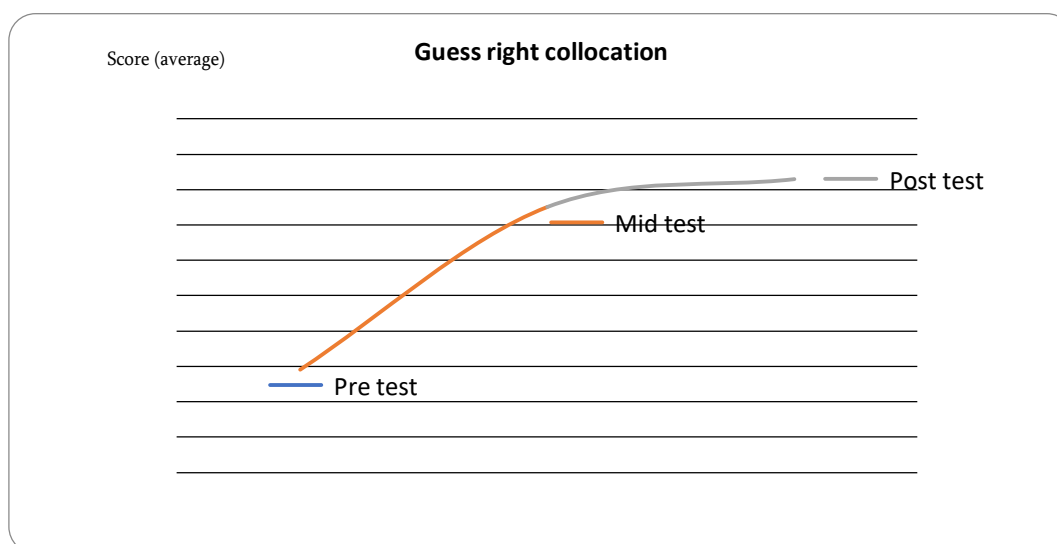


**Figure1.** Results (average scores) of the experimental and control groups for pre, mid- and post-tests

Obviously, the ESP program was successful in fostering students in the experimental group to realize the importance of English learning. While comparing the experimental group with the control group by the test results, the Experimental group showed a significant difference in progress. In addition, if we quantify the collected data from the questionnaire survey, the results found that the experimental group had a higher mean than did the control group. This reflects that the experiment with teaching collaboration has a positive influence on learners' motivation; i.e, students are much more motivated toward English learning by the end of the academic semester. Participants of the experimental group had a significant progress in open-ended questions, as well as in the activities focusing on guessing the right collocations. Though during the pre-test the results of the these activities showed small scale, it was significantly changed during the mid- and post- tests. Test results are shown in figures 2 and 3.



**Figure 2.** Improvement of scores (average) in the open ended questions



**Figure 3.** Improvement of scores (average) in guessing the right collocation

### Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study it is suggested that:

- 1) Particular attention should be paid to the teaching of all types of collocations
- 2) Collocation teaching should be started at an early stage
- 3) Non-translatable collocations without their direct equivalence in native language should be realized in drills and tasks
- 4) Teachers should compose activities that boost the involvement of learners in the process of recognition and production of collocations.

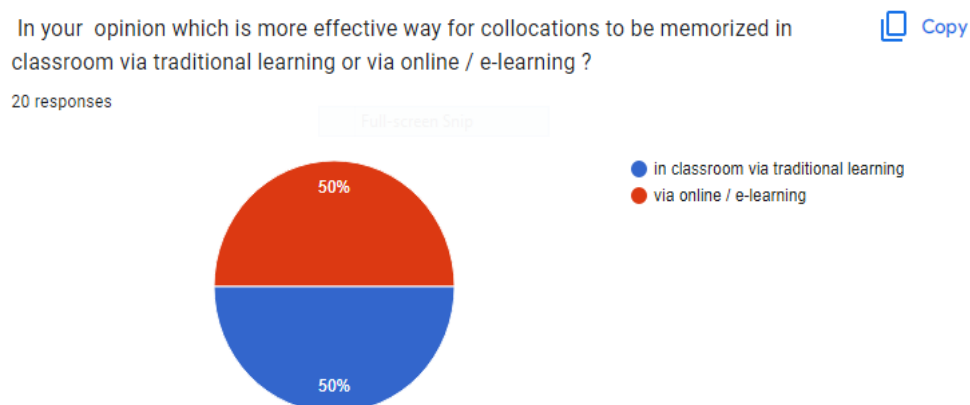
Accordingly, the research has pedagogical consequences since it allows teachers to learn more about their students' knowledge levels and preferences for vocabulary learning strategies. Information on vocabulary learning may assist teachers in using relevant teaching strategies in the EFL classrooms, which would result in the achievement of both students' and teachers' objectives.

Collocations should be included in the teaching of vocabulary or language acquisition. It is the responsibility of English teachers to place emphasis on collocations while teaching vocabulary since learners' communication and language skills are closely related to their knowledge of collocation. For

example, Siyanova and Schmitt (2008) advice teachers should make fundamental changes in their vocabulary teaching pedagogies by focusing on phrasal elements rather than individual words.

The foreign language teachers should develop activities to raise students' collocating awareness of the strategies they use by helping them become aware of the language chunks in the input they receive and the output they produce. Acat (2008) states that mechanical vocabulary learning, just memorizing new vocabulary word by word without interaction with existing knowledge, does little to enrich students' vocabulary.

This study can contribute to foreign language vocabulary learning research, curriculum and materials development, pedagogical practice, and self-study methods. EFL teachers should help their learners overcome their learners' problems by designing instruction methods to focus on what they need. It is useful for teachers to present the activities that include teaching collocation into their lessons, all designed to help their learners develop collocational proficiency. Teachers should use appropriate live and online activities for teaching collocations. The findings are shown in figure 4.



**Figure 4:** 50 % participants of the experiment consider traditional (face-to-face) teaching style appropriate for mastering collocations in language classes while the rest of 50% support the online teaching style to be relevant for this task.

Teachers should teach learners useful learning strategies that will help them to independently develop their collocational knowledge beyond the classes. Therefore, collocations should be paid enough attention particularly in ESP programs. The idea that collocates of words should be taught when presenting new vocabulary is still worth considering.

In order to improve EFL learners' knowledge of collocations, teachers should adjust their curriculum to incorporate the instruction of collocations into their teaching methods. Besides, teachers should design proper-based and online vocabulary learning activities to help students work towards the goal autonomously and enjoyably. There definitely will be a steady increase in the development of ESP programs in EFL contexts. Consequently the study will comprise various ESP program assisting military students achieve a higher level of personal needs. The study will definitely accumulate scholars and researches' attention towards the problems and aspects of collocation learning/teaching process. At the pedagogical level, the results of this study and the collocation activities which are going to be used in this study can serve as efficient guides and existing techniques in the cognitive processes of foreign language vocabulary learners.

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