

## Chapter 9

# Teaching Collocations through Web-Based Concordancing: A Corpus Informed Quasi- Experimental Study

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### ABSTRACT

*With the advent of language corpora and concordancing activities, teaching collocations knowledge of which is considered significant for appropriate and fluent language use has gained new dimensions within the context of technology enhanced language learning. The present study investigates the impact of web-based concordancing activities on EFL learners' achievement and retention of verb-noun collocations compared to paper based-activities. A total of 62 EFL learners participated in the study by taking a pre-test and an immediate and a delayed post-test. Results indicated that learners in experimental group outperformed the control group making significant improvement in their knowledge of verb-noun collocation immediately after the web-based practice. Although both groups regressed later, final performance of the experimental group was still better than that of control group. This study, therefore, suggests that EFL practitioners craving for creating variations in their instructional settings employ web-based concordancing activities to raise collocational competence of learners.*

### INTRODUCTION

Considered as a complex process involving acquisition of a various types of knowledge, acquiring vocabulary is a crucial part of language learning. One aspect of vocabulary acquisition is collocations which, in its general sense, are defined as arbitrarily restricted word combinations (Nesselhauf, 2005). Although once treated as a peripheral issue in language studies, collocations have recently been ac-

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knowledge that they play a major role in both receptive and productive language processing (Schmitt & Carter, 2004). Insights from corpus linguistics have reinforced this understanding by providing evidence for a number of significant functions identified for collocations. Accordingly, collocations function as the basis for the development of creative language in first language acquisition (Wray, 2002). Another important function is that knowledge of collocations contribute to fluency in both spoken and written language (McGuire, 2009). And finally, collocational competence expedites comprehension process (Hunston & Francis, 2000).

When these functions of collocations are considered in the context of second language acquisition (SLA), knowledge of and ability to use collocational units prove doubtlessly to be important for language learners as well, and now there is a wide consensus that teaching collocations should have a pivotal role in the study of vocabulary for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (Nation, 2001). Although a number of studies mostly within the field of corpus linguistics have been designed to investigate the use of collocations in learner English (Durrant, 2008; Nesselhauf, 2003; Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010), the review of the relevant literature points out gaps regarding teaching collocational units to EFL learners (Nesselhauf, 2005). Two basic questions still dominate the area. (1) What are the appropriate ways to teach collocations? Major concerns are pertaining if collocations should be learned implicitly through exposures in different contexts and meaning-focused receptive language instruction (Nation, 2001) or explicitly with direct formal instruction (Lewis, 2008). (2) How could one decide on which collocations to teach to the language learners (Nesselhauf, 2005; Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010)?

Drawn from the corpus linguistics and data driven learning (DDL) which make the theoretical framework of the present study, this study sets out to contribute to the answers of the questions above by empirically testing the use of web-based concordancing as a way to teach verb-noun collocations. To decide on which collocations to include, this study has made use of “three dimensional model of selecting collocations to teach” developed by Nesselhauf (2005) within a corpus informed context.

More specifically, this paper aims to find answers to the following questions:

1. Do web-based concordancing activities have any impact on collocation learning of EFL learners in comparison with the paper-based activities?
2. Is there any difference between the retention of collocations of students who received concordance based instruction and of students who received paper-based instruction?

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Technology Applications in Turkey in Language Learning and Teaching: An Overview**

Recent years have witnessed an explosion of interest in using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in language teaching and learning. While the use of ICT in language classroom was of concern to a small number of practitioners a few decades ago, the proliferation of various ICT tools along with the pedagogical developments now enable increasing number of language teachers to fully incorporate ICT tools into language teaching process (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Major advantages of integrating ICT tools in language classrooms have been stated in the relevant literature including effective learning environments where the rigidity of time and space requirements from the delivery of

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