

# **The Effects of Differential Instruction on Korean Middle School Students' English Collocation Acquisition**

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This study examined whether explicit or implicit teaching is more efficient in improving Korean middle school students' English verb-noun collocation knowledge. Forty Korean EFL middle school students participated in the study and they were assigned to either the explicit instruction or implicit instruction group. The participants' English verb-noun collocation knowledge was measured through pre-, immediate post-, and delayed post-tests over the 5-week experimental period, and a survey of participants' opinions on the instruction they received was carried out. The results showed that the students who received the explicit collocation instruction displayed better learning outcomes, suggesting the immediate influence of the explicit instruction, and more importantly the sustained initial advantage. That is, the explicit group students did retain the target items significantly better than the implicit group students. The responses from the two groups also indicated the positive effects of the explicit collocation instruction. The explicit group students were mostly satisfied with the instruction and showed increased confidence in acquiring English collocations while the implicit students did not. This study provides L2 teachers with valuable information on how to teach L2 collocation more effectively.

**Key Words:** explicit instruction, implicit instruction, L2 collocation

## **I . INTRODUCTION**

Over the last a couple of decades, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of collocations in second language (L2) learning (Ellis, 1996; Hyland, 2008; Lewis, 2000; Nation & Webb, 2011; Pei, 2008; Pishghadam, Khodaday, & Rad, 2011; Produromou, 2003). The acquisition of collocations enables L2 learners to communicate more fluently and effectively since there are a large number of collocations in every different language and native speakers heavily rely on them in their language production (Ellis, 2001; Lewis, 1993, 2000; Nation, 2001; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Schmitt, 2004). Furthermore, previous research has suggested that the use of collocation knowledge could enhance L2 learners' accuracy as well as fluency (Nation & Webb,

2011; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Wray, 2002). Lewis (2000) insists that developing L2 learners' knowledge of collocations be the way of improving their overall L2 proficiency, saying "The reason so many students are not making any perceived progress is simply because they have not been trained to notice which words go with which. They may know a lot of individual words which they struggle to use, along with their grammatical knowledge, but they lack the ability to use those words in a range of collocations which pack more meaning into what they say or write" (p. 14).

Despite the significance of collocation knowledge for successful L2 development, many L2 learners (even advanced ones) have struggled with acquiring and using collocations and displayed lack of knowledge of them (Bahns, 1993; Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Howarth, 1998; Kim & Ma, 2011; Lee, 2005; Lim, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003). This is partly because L2 learners, in many cases, combine words according to their isolated meaning alone not considering the constraints on the correct use of words which involve collocation knowledge and partly because learners tend to refer to their first language (L1) corresponding word sense when they process L2 word combinations.

Considering the importance and difficulty of learning collocations, aspects of collocations need to be taught to L2 learners in instructional settings, rather than leaving them to acquire that knowledge for themselves. That is, collocations should become a part of organizing principles in L2 teaching and it is time to ask which instructional type is more effective for L2 learners to develop their collocation knowledge. Although much research has been devoted to investigating the effectiveness of diverse teaching methods on individual words acquisition in L2 learning, relatively few studies have actually addressed the issue of the effectiveness of specific instructional types on developing L2 collocation knowledge. Thus, the present study is to examine whether explicit or implicit teaching, two representative ways of teaching L2, is more efficient on improving L2 learners' collocation knowledge.

## **II . LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Concepts of Collocations**

Although an increasing number of studies have focused on collocations, the concept of collocations still appears a bit hazy and researchers define collocations in a slight different way according to the needs of their research (Grant & Bauer, 2004; James, 1998; Kathleen & Dragomir, 2000; Kjellmer, 1994; Lewis, 1997, 2000; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Partington, 1998; Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Sinclair, 1991; Wray, 2002). Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) defined collocations as "strings of specific lexical items

that happen together with a mutual anticipation greater than chance” (p. 36). Similarly, James (1998) stated that collocations are “the other words any particular word normally keeps company with” (p. 152). Lewis’s (1997, 2000) definition of collocation, which is widely accepted and used in the L2 field, is also in line with the definitions given above. For Lewis (2000), collocations mean combinations of words statistically much more likely to co-occur than random chance suggests. Thus, we could say that collocations are word combinations consisting of at least two elements more or less frequently appearing together.

Collocations can be divided into two big categories – grammatical collocations and lexical collocations – depending on the word class of their constituents (Benson, 1985; Biskup, 1992; Lewis, 2000). Grammatical collocations consist of one content word or one open class word (e.g., verb, noun, adjective), and one function word or one closed class word, typically a preposition. Examples of grammatical collocations could be verb with preposition (e.g., abide by, depend on), noun with preposition (e.g., access to, on purpose), and adjective plus preposition (e.g., absent from). On the other hand, lexical collocations are usually composed of two content words such as verb plus noun or adjective plus noun. More specifically, six major types of lexical collocations are identified by Benson (1985):

- (1) verb plus noun: e.g. make complaints, conduct research
- (2) adjective plus noun: e.g. heavy criticism, serious problem
- (3) adverb plus adjective: e.g. increasingly important, totally fine
- (4) verb plus adverb: e.g. speak loudly, rain heavily
- (5) noun plus verb: e.g. changes arise, bells ring
- (6) noun 1 plus *of* plus noun 2: e.g. a variety of food

Among the six word combinations above, verb–noun collocations are targeted in this study. One reason is that verb–noun collocations are one of the most frequently used types of collocations in language production and naturally they are the most often chosen in the previous empirical research (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Caroli, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003). Another reason is based on the widely held perspective that verb–noun collocations “tend to form the communicative core of utterances where the most important information is placed” (Altenberg, 1993, p. 227).

## **2. Explicit and Implicit L2 Vocabulary Instructions**

Explicit and implicit instructions are two of representative teaching methods in language field. While studies on the effects of explicit and implicit instructions on

grammar and/or vocabulary acquisition have been popular, little research has been done for discovering the effects of them on L2 collocation acquisition.

In the implicit instruction setting, learners are provided with experience of specific exemplars of a target grammar or a language item while they are not attempting to learn it (DeKeyser, 1995; Ellis, 2008; Housen & Pierrard, 2006). That is, learners are expected to internalize the grammar or the language item without their attention being explicitly focused on it. On the other hand, learners' explicit attention is drawn to a specific language item in the explicit instruction condition (DeKeyser, 1995; Ellis, 2008; Housen & Pierrard, 2006). In other words, the purpose of learning is clearly focused on acquiring the target form or the language item and learners are encouraged to raise their awareness of it.

There has been no consensus on the issue of the effects of explicit and implicit instructions on L2 vocabulary acquisition. Although a considerable number of studies demonstrate that implicit instruction through (extensive) reading positively affects learners' vocabulary development (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Mason & Krashen, 2004; Zahar, Cobb, & Spada, 2001), there has been an increasing amount of studies suggesting the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction to enhance vocabulary acquisition especially in the L2 field.

Nation (2001) emphasized the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction by saying that a) since high frequency words are very crucial in language use and fairly few in number, teaching them to L2 learners explicitly can be feasible and practical, b) if L2 learners faced with input beyond their language proficiency, explicit vocabulary instruction could serve to bridge the gap between learners' current proficiency level and the level demanded by the input, and c) explicit vocabulary instruction can speed up the language learning process itself. The benefits of explicit L2 vocabulary instruction have been found in many experimental studies (Llach, 2009; Mondria, 2003; Qian, 1996; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2010). In Llach's (2009) study, German participants who were studying Spanish were taught 10 unfamiliar words in three different instructional conditions. In the implicit vocabulary learning group, participants read given texts and found the answers of comprehension questions. Learners in the second group carried out reading comprehension tasks and additionally answered comprehension questions related with the target words. Participants in the explicit vocabulary learning group were given 10 target words with their L1 translations and were required to write L2 sentences with the words. Post and delayed post-tests were conducted to get the information of the participants' learning about the target words and the results showed that the explicit vocabulary instruction group did perform significantly better than the other two groups in both tests. The study also found that participants who answered comprehension questions related with the target words outperformed the participants in the reading only

situation. Similarly, Sonbul and Schmitt (2010) compared the effectiveness of explicit and implicit teaching of new vocabulary in reading texts. Forty Arabic L1 university students were taught 20 unfamiliar words either in explicit or implicit teaching condition. The results demonstrated that explicit vocabulary instruction leads to greater learning than incidental vocabulary learning, showing the superiority of explicit L2 vocabulary instruction.

Another line of research has revealed that implicit vocabulary teaching has a positive effect on the perception and acquisition of L2 words. For instance, several researchers verified that much vocabulary acquisition occurs implicitly as learners just listen to a story (Elley, 1992; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Hudson, & Lawson, 1996). In 1991, Day, Omura and Hiramatsu found practical evidence for EFL students to be able to learn target vocabulary through silent reading for entertainment, supporting the positive effects of implicit vocabulary learning. They investigated learners' vocabulary retention from silent reading of an adapted story, which contained 17 target vocabulary items frequently appeared in the text. They discovered that "exposure to previously unknown or difficult words through sustained reading for entertainment by Japanese EFL students has a positive effect on their ability to recognize these words in a vocabulary test" (p. 545). In the same vein, Mason and Krashen's research (2004) showed the story-only group through listening showed better performance in learning the target words than the story-plus-study group. Zahar, Cobb, and Spada (2001) also have proven that exposure to previously unknown or difficult words through silent or extensive reading for entertainment led to the possibility of implicit vocabulary acquisition.

Thus, it is hard to say that one type of vocabulary instruction could be superior to the other due to the various factors affecting L2 vocabulary acquisition and both forms of instruction could be beneficial to a certain learning context (Laufer, 2003; Nation, 2001). This implies that it could be crucial for L2 educators to consider various factors such as their students' characteristics, task characteristics, and instructional period before implementing a certain teaching method.

### **3. Explicit and Implicit L2 Collocation Instructions**

Although collocation-based instruction has appeared to draw substantial attention from L2 researchers and educators in recent years, not much research has been conducted to see the effect of explicit and implicit instructions on L2 collocation acquisition.

Many researchers claim that good collocational knowledge guarantee better fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the target language, which are clearly the features of

advanced language learners (Hyland, 2008; Lewis, 2000; Nation & Webb, 2011; Pawley & Syder, 1983). Therefore, there has been an increasing consensus on the necessity of teaching collocations to L2 learners rather than letting them acquire the knowledge for themselves (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, & Demecheleer, 2006; Fan, 2009; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009).

In Boers et al.'s (2006) study, the participants were exposed to authentic listening and reading materials for 22 hours while they were encouraged to direct their attention to the target collocations in the input. The researchers discovered that drawing learners' attention to collocations is necessary to improve L2 learners' collocation acquisition. Huss (2002) investigated whether instructing participants about lexical collocations in a business English workshop could contribute to Taiwanese college EFL learners' development of collocational knowledge. He attempted to draw the participants' attention to target collocations by highlighting them throughout the instructional period and found that emphasizing collocations contributed positively to the participants' acquisition of new collocations in written and oral input. In a university in Turkey, Ördem (2005) further tested the efficiency of instructing lexical collocations with 60 first-year English major students in reading courses. The participants were divided into either collocation-based instruction group or control group. In the collocation-based instruction group, the participants learned collocations through collocational grids with their instructors' frequent emphasis on collocations while reading the given texts, and the students in the control group spend their class time to figure out the content of the same reading materials as the collocation-based group. The results showed that the participants in the collocation-based group could use adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations more appropriately than the participants in the control group.

Akinci (2009) conducted an interesting study as to L2 collocation acquisition. He examined the effect of different types of instructions on verb-noun collocations with 58 first-year Japanese EFL students. The participants in this research were assigned into three experimental conditions, a computer-based learning condition using corpus, an explicit instruction condition, and a combined learning condition (explicit instruction plus computer-based instruction). The participants' retention of collocations was measured using two tests and the explicit instruction group demonstrated significantly higher test scores compared to the other two groups, suggesting the necessity of explicit collocation teaching to L2 learners. He explained this result, stating "a great deal of attention should be paid to the L1 interference in the process of teaching these collocations. Explicit teaching is regarded as one of the most effective ways to achieve this, since this teaching style helps learners to enhance their awareness, and thus helps them deal with possible L1 interference" (p. 106).

Research in this area is far from being exhaustive and future studies are necessary to affirm the role of various instructional methods on learners' acquisition of L2 collocations. Particularly, research directly comparing the benefits of different teaching methods such as explicit and implicit instruction is still largely untouched. Therefore, the current study aims to explore which teaching method – explicit or implicit teaching – is more efficient on improving L2 learners' collocation knowledge and the following two research questions are formulated for this study.

- (1) How do the different types of instruction (explicit and implicit) affect Korean middle school students' English collocation acquisition?
- (2) How do Korean middle school students perceive the different types of instruction (explicit and implicit) as to English collocation acquisition?

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 1. Participants

The participants of this study were 40 third-year middle school students in a private language school located in Gangnam, Seoul. All the participants were placed in the same level of classes through the institution's placement tests. The participants were divided into two groups, explicit learning group and implicit learning group, taught by the same experienced teacher. The instructor was a Korean English teacher with ten years of English teaching experience and good command of English. Each group consisted of equal number of students. All of the participants had learned English as a foreign language and they had no experience of living in an English-speaking country. The distribution of the participants is displayed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
Distribution of the Participants

		<b>Explicit group</b>	<b>Implicit group</b>
		<b>(N=20)</b>	<b>(N=20)</b>
Gender	Male	9	8
	Female	11	12
Time for English study (per day)	30 min.~1 hr.	0	0
	1 hr. ~ 2 hrs.	8	6
	2hrs~	12	14
Years of English study	Less than 5 yrs.	0	0
	5~6 yrs.	12	14
	6~7 yrs.	8	6

## 2. Instruments

Two major instruments were utilized in the current study. First, three tests – pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest – were used to probe the participants' knowledge of English verb–noun collocations before, right after, and one week after taking each type of collocation-based instruction respectively.

The pretest was carried out in order to measure the participants' initial knowledge of verb–noun collocations. The pretest consisted of 10 multiple choice questions and five fill-in-the-blanks questions. The 10 multiple choice questions were taken from the verb–noun collocation test designed by Jean (2010) and the other five questions from the book *English Collocation in Use* (Cambridge, 2005). The book is one of the most popular books in teaching and learning English collocations, and some researchers have adapted the book for their collocation related research (e.g., Song, 2009).

The immediate posttest was administered three times from the second week to the fourth week right after either explicit or implicit collocation teaching was provided to each group. Each immediate posttest was made of two parts and 10 minutes were allotted to each test. In the first part, 10 verb–noun collocations extracted from four reading passages taught in the class time were given to the participants and they were asked to fill in blanks with the correct verbs. In the second part, one short reading passage with five verb errors was provided and the participants were expected to correct them. The reading passage was one out of the four reading passages taught in the class right before the test (see Appendix for the reading passage and test examples).

The delayed posttest was carried out three times from the third week to the fifth week same as the way the immediate posttest was conducted. The organization of the delayed posttest was the same as the immediate posttest, 10 fill-in-the-blanks questions and five verb–noun collocation error correction questions. The difference between the two tests was that the immediate posttest was conducted right after each class session to see the effects of different types of instruction and the delayed posttest administrated was conducted one week after the instruction to investigate the retention of learning. In all tests, one point was designated to a correct answer and zero point to a wrong answer.

In addition, to better know the participants' opinions and feelings on the instruction they had received and to back up the quantitative data, we created a simple survey asking the participants to express their general feelings and opinions freely.

## 3. Procedures

Both group students were taught English verb–noun collocations for three weeks, once a week. The same instructor taught both groups with the same reading materials –

four short reading passages with verb–noun collocations for each class. In the explicit learning condition, the instructor distributed the handout composed of four reading passages to the students and read the reading passages in order. While reading each passage, the instructor made the students underline the verb–noun collocations directly and then explained the meaning of the collocations in detail. After taught the meaning of collocations, the students read the reading passages again thinking about the meaning of the underlined collocations so that they could be more familiar with the target collocations and their meanings. In the implicit learning condition, the instructor used the same handout but mainly focused on figuring out the content of each reading passage. While reading the assigned passages and explaining the meaning of each reading, the instructor did not make the students underline the collocations nor directly explained the meaning of them. The students were asked to solve reading comprehension questions after finishing reading the assigned passages. Therefore, the students were supposed to guess the meaning of the collocations implicitly using context clues.

Both groups of the students took immediate posttests shortly after the instruction on the same day over the experiment period and they took delayed posttest one week later after every instruction to investigate the retention of their learning. Figure 1 shows the general procedures of the current research.

**FIGURE 1**

General Procedures that the Participants Followed

	<b>Explicit group (N=20)</b>	<b>Implicit group (N=20)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Background questionnaire Pretest	
2 <sup>nd</sup> week	Explicit instruction 1	Implicit instruction 1
	↓ Immediate posttest 1	
3 <sup>rd</sup> week		Delayed posttest 1
	Explicit instruction 2	Implicit instruction 2
	↓ Immediate posttest 2	
4 <sup>th</sup> week		Delayed posttest 2
	Explicit instruction 3	Implicit instruction 3
	↓ Immediate posttest 3	
5 <sup>th</sup> week	Delayed posttest 3 Survey	

SPSS 18.0 for Windows was used for the quantitative data analyses and the significance level was set at  $\alpha < .05$ , nondirectional. The survey data reflecting on the participants' feelings and opinions on each instruction were also illustrated and analyzed.

## IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 1. Immediate Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction

We conducted a *t*-test to make sure whether the two groups were not different in terms of the knowledge of English verb–noun collocations with the pretest results. The pretest consisted of a total 15 target items with one point each (max = 15). The reliability of the pretest was firstly checked using Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , and it displayed fairly high reliability scores (.72 for the explicit and .74 for the implicit groups). The results showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, we concluded that the two groups were initially equivalent as to the English verb–noun collocation knowledge.

**TABLE 2**  
Results of Group Comparison on Pretest

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Explicit	20	10.30	2.13	-.15	38	.88
Implicit	20	10.40	2.01			

$p < .05$

First, same as the pretest, we checked the reliability of the three immediate posttests using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the results were .82 for the explicit instruction group and .84 for the implicit instruction group, showing the internal consistency of the immediate posttests. The three immediate posttests were administrated to see whether or not the different types of instruction have an immediate effect on the middle school EFL students' collocation knowledge and the results were analyzed and compared (see Table 3).

The explicit group consistently outperformed the implicit group displaying numerically higher mean scores in all the immediate posttests. Interestingly the standard deviations of the explicit instruction group continuously decreased, meaning that the gap among the students in the explicit group decreased over the instruction period. The students who received the explicit instruction did significantly better than the students in the implicit instruction group across the three immediate tests, suggesting the superiority

of explicit collocation teaching over implicit teaching of collocations. The findings coincided with those of the previous studies which have showed that explicit collocation teaching had significantly positive effects (Ördem, 2005; Sun & Wang, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009).

**TABLE 3**  
Results of Group Comparison on Immediate Posttests

Tests	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig
Immediate	Explicit	20	12.00	1.34	8.73	38	.00
Posttest 1	Implicit	20	8.30	1.34			
Immediate	Explicit	20	12.10	.85	9.68	38	.00
Posttest 2	Implicit	20	8.75	1.29			
Immediate	Explicit	20	12.40	.68	10.52	38	.00
Posttest 3	Implicit	20	9.30	.12			
Total	Explicit	20	36.35	1.93	12.25	38	.00
	Implicit	20	26.35	3.10			

$p < .05$

The present study demonstrated that the participants who received explicit instruction showed higher learning gains than those who did not. The better performance of the participants in the explicit instruction group may be explained by several reasons. Collocation-based instruction has not been well implemented in schools of Korea even though increasing number of educators emphasized the importance of English collocations and insisted the need of teaching them in classroom settings. Thus, many students are not familiar with the concept of collocations and need to raise their awareness of collocations. The explicit instruction might be more helpful for making L2 learners be aware of the concept collocations eventually leading to better acquisition of the target items. Since acquiring good L2 collocational knowledge could be extremely demanding (Wolter, 2006), teachers' direct explanation of the meaning of collocations and constraints of words could lead to better learning outcomes by minimizing any possible L1 interference. In addition, it might be possible that the explicit instruction had a greater effect on enhancing collocational knowledge of the participants since the participants of this study were third-year middle school students and their level of cognitive ability presumably would not be that low. Based on the findings through the three immediate posttests, we could say that Korean middle school EFL learners would get immediate benefits by explicit teaching at least in terms of acquiring English collocations.

## 2. Delayed Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction

In order to investigate which teaching method – explicit or implicit – would be more effective for the participants’ retention of English collocation learning, three delayed posttests were carried out. The effects of some instructional methods of strategies in L2 learning and teaching might be delayed and should not be devaluated due to the absence of significantly positive instant effects. In addition, delayed effects could be a better indicator that L2 learners actually acquire target items. Thus, it is meaningful to implement delayed posttests to see any results that are different from those of immediate tests would pop up. Same as the pretest and immediate posttests, the reliability of delayed posttests was checked first. The reliability scores were .83 for the explicit group and .85 for the implicit group, highly acceptable level.

In the posttests, the mean differences between the explicit and implicit groups were clearly visible, the explicit group displaying numerically higher scores in all the three tests. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 4, there was a statistically significant advantage for the group receiving explicit instruction in English collocation acquisition. Considering the rather short instructional period, people might say that the effectiveness of implicit teaching would not be visible within the short period. However, the important fact is that the explicit group initially showed better learning outcomes in their L2 collocation learning, suggesting the immediate help from the explicit instruction, and the initial advantage has been sustained. That is, the students could retain the target items better through the explicit collocation instruction. From the findings, we could say that the explicit instruction focusing L2 learners’ conscious attention on the target items, L2 collocations, resulted in higher learning gains than the implicit instruction.

**TABLE 4**  
Results of Group Comparison on Delayed Posttests

Tests	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig
Delayed Posttest 1	Explicit	20	12.30	1.17	6.02	38	.00
	Implicit	20	10.05	1.19			
Delayed Posttest 2	Explicit	20	12.65	.88	7.18	38	.00
	Implicit	20	10.40	1.05			
Delayed Posttest 3	Explicit	20	12.85	.75	8.71	38	.00
	Implicit	20	10.60	.88			
Total	Explicit	20	39.70	2.47	7.90	38	.00
	Implicit	20	31.05	2.83			

$p < .05$

The overall results demonstrate not just immediate but also sustained benefits of explicit collocation instruction, and these findings are more meaningful considering the English learning context of Korea. L2 learners in Korea learn English mainly inside the classroom and have few opportunities to learn and use English outside the classroom. Therefore, the amount of time for English learning may be not that sufficient. We, as an educator as well as a researcher, continuously try to find effective teaching methods to maximize the positive educative influence within the limited time of instruction. Under this circumstance, L2 learners who have presumably approximate cognitive ability may acquire some target features of L2 with the help of their teachers' explicit explanation of them.

### 3. Students' Perception Toward Explicit and Implicit Instruction

To back-up the quantitative data and to investigate the perception and attitude toward the instruction the students received more clearly, the participants were asked to provide their opinions and feelings on the given instruction freely. The students answered in Korean, and the researchers translated them into English.

The following data are from the original corpus of the explicit instruction group. The survey responses from the students were generally parallel with the findings from the test results.

Example 1. (Explicit group)

English translation: *I think memorizing verb–noun together was good to remember words for a long time. While taking a test, I could associate nouns with the right verb quite easily and I could also come up with the meaning of them clearly.*

Example 2. (Explicit group)

English translation: *I had little difficulty in memorizing the verb–noun collocations in our reading texts since my teacher made me underline them when we studied the texts. I also felt that the tests were not that demanding since I could image the verb–noun parts that I underlined with the teacher.*

Example 3. (Explicit group)

English translation: *It was very helpful for my teacher to teach verb–noun combinations and their meanings directly. Also I guess learning verb–noun combinations in reading texts seemed to be more effective for retaining the meanings.*

As appears by the above examples, the students in the explicit group seemed to be satisfied with the instruction they had received, clearly recognizing the benefits of the explicit collocation instruction. Based on the students' responses, we could infer that the explicit group students obtained not just better learning outcomes but also enhanced motivation from the instruction. The students in the explicit group often expressed increased confidence in English collocation learning and willingness to study further.

Some students mentioned the difficulty of collocation learning by saying that the process of English collocation learning took more time than they expected. Still, those students were aware of the benefits of explicit collocation instruction and reflected on their previous learning habits (see Example 4).

Example 4. (Explicit group)

English translation: *It was true that memorizing verb–noun collocations took more time than I expected initially since I had been familiar with memorizing just individual words. But I realized that by that way I could understand the meanings a lot easily. Still it was a bit difficult to find verb–noun collocation errors in the reading passages. I think I need more time to practice.*

Some students also described the difficulty of choosing the correct answers when they took the tests mainly because of their L1 dependence. However, they seemed to recognize the concept of L2 collocation quite clearly. They also knew that collocational restrictions are different from language to language and tried to overcome their L1 dependence (see Example 5).

Example 5. (Explicit group)

English translation: *I felt that it was not difficult at all to understand English collocations while taking the lesson with my teacher and other classmates. However, it was not easy to find the correct answers taking the tests by myself. I realized that I still tended to translate English verbs into Korean and that made me confused in choosing the right answers.*

In general, the explicit group students revealed very positive feelings about the instruction. Moreover, they showed enhanced level of perceived competence, leading to higher level of learning motivation. However, the responses from the implicit group were quite different from those of the explicit group. The following examples are from the implicit group and the students originally answered in Korean like the explicit group, and the researchers translated them into English.

Example 6. (Implicit group)

English translation: *While teaching, my teacher only focused on translating the English sentences into Korean one by one and explaining the general content of the readings. It was not that interesting. Besides, I was very confused to find the correct verbs associated with nouns when I took the tests, even though we covered the reading passages during the class. It was frustrating.*

Example 7. (Implicit group)

English translation: *When I took the tests, I felt like I was not familiar with all the test items as if I had never learned them in the class. Everything was very confusing and especially the part that I was asked to find verb–noun collocation errors in reading passages was extremely difficult.*

Example 8. (Implicit group)

English translation: *The instruction was somewhat boring. Whenever I took the tests I was very confused choosing the correct verbs since I thought there were a couple of verbs which had very similar meanings in Korean. If my teacher had taught us verb–noun combinations explicitly, I would have had less difficulty in the tests.*

Unlike the students in the explicit group, most of the students in the implicit group revealed their dissatisfaction with the instruction. In addition, they had had greater difficulty figuring out the right answers in tests and often showed decreased confidence. Based on the test results and the students' responses, we may say that providing implicit instruction was not enough for L2 learners to understand and internalize English collocations. In the cases of students who received implicit instruction, they might struggle in understanding English collocations since they were neither familiar with the concept of collocations nor aware that collocational constraints are different from their L1, Korean and L2, English. When the implicit group students did not know the appropriate English verb–noun combinations, they tended to guess word partners by directly translating the meanings from Korean. Based on the test results and the students' responses, we can say that it might not be sufficient to improve L2 collocation knowledge only through implicit instruction in a short period of time and the help of direct explanation should be considered.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study explored which type of instruction – explicit or implicit – would be more effective for improving Korean EFL students’ English collocation knowledge, specifically focusing on verb–noun combinations. To gauge the participants’ knowledge of English collocations and see the effects of each instruction, three immediate posttests and three delayed posttests were administered with a simple survey asking the participants’ feelings and opinions towards the instruction they had received.

This study discovered that the students in the explicit instruction group outperformed those in the implicit instruction group in all the three immediate posttests, indicating the superiority of explicit collocation instruction over implicit one. Furthermore, in the delayed posttests seeing the effects of each instruction from the perspective of retention, the explicit group students did perform significantly better than the implicit students across all the delayed posttests, confirming that explicit instruction is better for improving L2 collocational knowledge once again. Therefore, it would be fair to say that explicit collocation instruction has not just immediate but also sustained benefits at least in English verb–noun collocation acquisition. That is, teachers’ explicit explanation of L2 collocations and learners’ engagement in tasks leading their attention to those word combinations directly need to be included in instructional settings.

The students’ responses along with the test results support the effectiveness of explicit English collocation teaching. Through the explicit instruction, the students learned the fact that collocational restrictions are different from language to language and reflected on their own learning habits in order not to heavily rely on L1–Korean translation while learning English collocations. Moreover, they showed increased confidence in English collocation learning and willingness to pursue the study further. Since this study was carried out with a rather small number of participants with a specific type of lexical collocations, verb–noun collocations, we need to be cautious to generalize the findings of the current study. The five-week experiment period was also need to be considered since different delayed effects could happen if extended instructional period was given to the learners. However, this study is still meaningful in that the issue of the effectiveness of specific instructional types on developing L2 collocation knowledge has been relatively less researched in spite of the importance of the issue in instructional settings. In addition, this study provides L2 educators with instructional tips such as creating effective tasks or materials that make learners consciously aware of L2 collocations.

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## APPENDIX

### 1) Reading passage example:

In the morning I did some work in the garden, then I had a rest for about an hour before going out to do some shopping in town. It was my sister's birthday and I wanted to make a special effort to cook a nice meal for her. I had a look at a new Thai cookery book in the bookshop and decided to buy it. It has some very easy recipes and I managed to make a good impression with my very first Thai meal. I think my sister really enjoyed her birthday.

### 2) Test example:

**1-10.** Use a verb from the box and complete each sentence.

play / made / ease / give
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1. When I left university I \_\_\_\_\_ a decision to take up a profession in which I could be creative.
2. I could \_\_\_\_\_ the guitar, but I'd never any songs.
3. I will Mark \_\_\_\_\_ a lift to the airport.
4. A hot bath will make you \_\_\_\_\_ the pain.

**11-15.** Correct the underlined parts of the following reading passage.

In the morning I 11) made some work in the garden, then I 12) spent a rest for about an hour before going out to 13) have some shopping in town. It was my sister's birthday and I wanted to 14) do a special effort to cook a nice meal for her. I gave a look at a new Thai cookery book in the bookshop and decided to buy it. It has some very easy recipes and I managed to 15) do a good impression with my very first Thai meal. I think my sister really enjoyed her birthday.

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