

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLOCATIONS IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE*

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Abstract.

Second language learners very frequently rely on their native tongue, assuming that there is always a one-to-one equivalence between L1 and L2 lexical items. This results in major errors since even equivalent lexical items do not always convey the same sense in two languages mainly because of the cultural differences which are mirrored in the vocabulary of every language. Overlooking collocations and other word combinations also brings about many collocational errors which can be more disruptive than grammatical errors in communication. For most collocations there are no motivations and the same conceptual meaning can be realized by different words. This inexplicability of collocation calls for more attention on the part of both teachers and learners of English.

The aim of this paper is to research the notice given to collocations in the curriculum of EFL in the primary and secondary schools in Macedonia. More specifically, this study is devoted to the elaboration of the concept of collocations including, the definition of collocations, collocation types, the importance of collocations, as well as the exercises and space that is allocated to collocations in the modern English textbooks used in the elementary and secondary schools in our country. Apart from the analysis of a selection of English textbooks, the research is based on a tailor-made questionnaire distributed among and filled out by elementary and secondary school teachers of English who work in the Bitola region.

Keywords: collocations, English textbooks, primary schools, secondary schools

Introduction

David Wilkins (1972) observed that “without grammar little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”, thus, implying that the biggest task foreign language learners face is, in fact, the vocabulary. Given that words are not used in isolation and their actual meaning depends on the context in which they occur, i.e. the way they are combined with other words, it is a must for language learners to acquire knowledge about the combinatory potential of words. In other words, in order for them to reach a native-like fluency of the language they must acquire and actively use idioms, phrases and collocations as the most frequent word combinations. Over the last few years, vocabulary teaching has attracted the attention of English teachers and theorists who argue that, without a wide range of vocabulary, grammar does not help learners much. Therefore, the necessity of teaching collocations, or which word goes with which other word(s), arose, in order to help learners acquire the language more quickly and efficiently. However, when it comes to the actual classroom practice, it seems that collocations are still given little attention.

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collocation types, the importance of collocations, as well as the exercises and space that is allocated to collocations in the modern English textbooks used in the elementary and secondary schools in our country. Apart from the analysis of a selection of English textbooks, the research is based on a tailor-made questionnaire distributed among and filled out by elementary and secondary school teachers of English who work in the Bitola region.

1. Theoretical background

Of all word combinations (free combinations, collocations and idioms), *collocations* occupy the largest chunk of the vocabulary. This is particularly witnessed in the fact that even dictionaries provide the most common collocations of each word. Collocations are words combined in a way characteristic of a specific language (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 1974). J. R. Firth (1968: 11) was among the first scholars to attach importance to collocations by claiming "you know a word by the company it keeps" (e.g. *strong tea, heavy drinker, by accident, etc.*).

Unlike the other word combinations, collocations are harder to recognize; there are criteria they are formed by, and different types based on the elements they are combined of, or, the strength of the relationship between them. When engaged in a conversation learners of English commonly make errors by combining nouns with wrong adjectives. This is due to the negative transfer between the first and the second language (e.g. *powerful tea* instead of *strong tea; strong computer* instead of *powerful computer*). However, this can be surpassed by mastering the process of combining words, which, in turn, will lead to natural sounding speech, fluent and native-like conversations.

2. Defining collocations

The term "collocation" is derived from the Latin word 'collocat' which means putting or placing things together. The concept of collocation has been broadly discussed, taking into account its historical background which can be traced as far back as the 18th century, when supposedly, in 1750 for the first time it was used as a linguistic term by Harris Hermes, who used it to refer to the linear constellation of words (in Palmer, 1933). It was not until the 1930s, however, that Palmer (1931: 4) used the term in a way that is reminiscent of its dominant present day use – "units of words that are more than single words".

Nowadays, however, when it comes to defining the term collocation literature abounds with various definitions, which implies that "there is no commonly accepted definition of collocation" (Pecina, 2009).

Nevertheless, what all definitions have in common is the fact that they all define collocations simply as a co-occurrence of words:

"... words combining or coming together in a way characteristic of language" (e.g. *strong tea, heavy drinker, by accident, etc.*) (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 1974).

"... two or more words that go 'happily' or naturally with each other" (Newmark, 1988).

"... any small group of consecutive words from an utterance or text" (e.g. *yellow dreams* is an unusual collocation) (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1991)

or, as a habitual co-occurrence of words:

"... a group of words that occurs repeatedly in a language" (Benson, 1985; Carter, 1987).

"... the way that some words occur regularly whenever another word is used" (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1987).

"... the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items" (Crystal, 1986)

“... a habitual arrangement or conjoining of particular words”, (e.g. *green as grass; pass the buck*) (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1991).

2. Collocation criteria

In order to distinguish collocations from other word relations certain criteria have been established (Baker, 1992; Fernandez, 2009):

- a) **Meaning** – the meaning of a specific collocation can be predicted from the meaning of the parts it is composed of;
- b) **Word class** – the component parts of a collocation normally belong to different word class;
- c) **Range** – lexemes that belong to the core vocabulary of English are typically found in free combinations;
- d) **Fixedness** – the relationship can hold between all or several of their various forms, combined in any grammatically acceptable order (e.g. *to achieve aims, aims having been achieved, achievable aims, the achievement of an aim*);
- e) **Substitutability** – lexemes can sometimes be replaced by close synonyms (e.g. *hardened criminal vs. confirmed criminal*);
- f) **Additions** – the structure of collocations is sometimes altered by adding most often pre- or post- modifying words (e.g. *to meet still rising world demand*).
- g) **Deletions** – leaving out a word from the collocation (e.g. *I have not got the faintest (idea)*);
- h) **Displacement** - personal pronouns may replace the actual collocation items (e.g. *Instead of banishing or shunning clichés, haven't we got to meet them imaginatively*);
- i) **Distribution** - the word order of lexemes in a collocation is relatively free, i.e. collocations can be "combined in any grammatically acceptable order".

2.1 Types of collocations

Determining the relationship between the words that collocations are composed of leads to the classification of collocations into different types. Collocations can be **strong** (e.g. *rancid butter, addled eggs, ulterior motives* and *harbour grudges*.), the knowledge of the meaning of the collocator in the examples above does not necessarily enable non-native users of English to associate them with the right base or headword. **Weak** collocations are ‘more predictable’ (e.g. *good boy, white shirt, white wine*, etc. (Sughair (2007))). Furthermore, Sughair (2007) in his classification of collocations distinguishes between: **open collocations**, when the headwords are open to partnership with a wide range of items (e.g. *hit gold/home/the hardest/the headlines/the market/the newsstand/the roof/the scene/the screen/ the shops/the stage/streets*, etc.), and **restricted collocations**, when the headword collocates with a limited and fixed number of words (e.g. *commit murder/crime/ embezzlement*) and **bound collocations**, when the headword is “uniquely selective” of its collocates (e.g. *to shrug one’s shoulders*).

The actual lexical structure of collocations serves as a basis for yet another very important classification of collocations. Numerous scholars and researchers have classified collocations as **lexical** and **grammatical** (Firth, 1968; Benson, 1985; Benson, et al., 1986; Ghazala, 2008; Carter, 1987; Baker 1992; Carter, 1998; Hill, 2000; etc.). **Grammatical collocations** are phrases consisting of a dominant word (noun, verb, adjective) and a preposition or grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause; whereas **lexical collocations** are phrases that typically consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs only.

Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997) in their BBI Dictionary list the grammatical collocations as follows:

1. Noun + preposition (e.g. *hostility between*);

2. Noun + to + infinitive (e.g. *pleasure to do it*);
3. Noun + that + clause (e.g. *an oath that he would do his duty*);
4. Preposition + noun combination (e.g. *at anchor*);
5. Adjective + preposition combination that occurs in the predicate (e.g. *angry at everyone*);
6. Predicate adjectives + to + infinitive (e.g. *it was necessary for him to work*);
7. Adjective + that + clause (e.g. *it was imperative that I be there*);
8. Nineteen English verb patterns.

Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997) also put forth seven major types of lexical collocations:

1. Verb + noun/pronoun or prepositional phrase (e.g. *set a record*);
2. Verb + noun (e.g. *squander a fortune*);
3. Adjective + noun (e.g. *pitched battle*);
4. Noun + verb (of action) (e.g. *blizzards rage*);
5. Noun + of + noun (e.g. *a bouquet of flowers*);
6. Adverb + adjective (e.g. *strictly accurate*);
7. Verb + adverb (e.g. *apologize humbly*).

3. Research methodology

Being concerned with the place collocations have in the process of teaching and learning EFL in our primary and secondary education, we conducted a research whose aim was to determine the frequency with which collocations are discussed or practiced in the curriculum of EFL in both elementary and secondary education as well as to inspect teachers' views on the matter.

For the purposes of the research four elementary school English textbooks (*Messages 1, Messages 2, Messages 3, PET buster*) and four secondary school English textbooks (*Close-Up, THiNK1, THiNK2 and Focus 4*) were closely analysed. Texts were closely inspected to mark out collocations, the number of exercises as well as definition and other information regarding collocations were noted. Furthermore, a tailor-made questionnaire was conducted among primary and secondary school teachers of English to investigate their position and their experiences as far as teaching collocations is concerned. The questionnaire was consisted of the following questions:

1. How important are collocations in the process of acquiring the English language?
Please explain why!
2. Do you teach collocations explicitly, or you leave it to your students to pick them up along the way?
3. Would you say that your students use English collocations properly?
4. If yes - do they use correct collocations instinctively or perhaps that is due to their conscious and deliberate efforts to learn various collocations?
5. If no – why do they make mistakes?
6. When teaching vocabulary, do you pay more attention to teaching collocations or single words?
7. How do you usually teach collocations?
8. English textbooks used for elementary school students make no mention of collocations. Why do you think that is the case? Is it because the students' level of English or maybe the curriculum needs to be reworked?
9. Research shows that the English textbooks intended for high school students contain some exercises on collocations, with collocations being defined and explicitly explained in the textbook used with the fourth year students. Do you think that this presentation and distribution of collocations is rightly planned and adjusted to students' age and needs?

3.1. Results

3.2. The analysis of the primary school English textbooks

In the process of teaching English from sixth to eight grade elementary school the curriculum of EFL is based on the *Messages* (Goodey, Goodey, 2005) textbooks and in the ninth grade on *PET buster* (Dodgson, Alston, Galimberti, Graham, 2012).

The analysis of these textbooks shows that the vocabulary is presented in isolation, with the words being classified as nouns, adjective, verbs, linking words, as well as fix phrases and expressions used for greetings, introduction, expressing opinion, interests, activities etc. But there is no mention of collocations, no explanations or exercises on how they should be properly used. In the ninth grade textbook there is no specific section devoted to vocabulary although the textbook features longer texts which are rather rich in vocabulary. Once again collocations as such are not mentioned in this textbook as well. The results have shown that throughout elementary school students are not introduced to the relations that words form with each other; they learn phrases and expressions without being able to explain them, rephrase them properly or understand why certain word connections are considered an error. Thus, for instance, a text titled *Making Music* from Messages 2 (Unit 2 A slice of life, page 21) was submitted to a closer inspection in terms of the collocations it contained. A number of collocations was extracted (e.g. *make music, make CDs, have lessons, give a concert, do sports, appear on radio, appear on TV, etc.*), and then they were looked up in the *Oxford collocations dictionary for students of English (OCD; McIntosh et al. 2009)* to verify their existence. Unfortunately, no exercises or explanations for these collocations were provided in the textbook itself.

Another similar instance we found in *PET buster* (Unit 5, Healthy eating, page 35) with the text titled "*Fast Food vs Slow Food*". The analysis of the text and the activities before and after the text in this textbook also reveal that the nine graders who happen to use this book to study English are bereaved from the opportunity to familiarize themselves with some useful collocations (e.g. *healthy options, world domination, traditional regional food, etc.*) in a clear and explicit manner.

Unfortunately, these findings only prove that the teaching of collocations in elementary school is not carried out in any systematic and planned manner. In other words, this means that teaching collocations is left entirely to the teachers. It is up to them to decide which collocations are useful and relevant enough for their students to know.

3.3. The analysis of the secondary school English textbooks

The analysis of the textbook used in first, second, third and fourth year secondary school (*Close-Up, THiNK1, THiNK2* and *Focus*, respectively) yielded much more satisfactory results.

The analysis of *Close Up* (Healan, Gormley, 2011) which consists of twelve units used with first year students has shown that the vocabulary section of **every second unit** (Unit 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11) has a part dedicated to collocations. This part normally consists of two exercises titled *Collocations & Expressions*. In addition to that, at the end of the textbook, a list is provided with all collocations found in all the units. The analysis also reveals that in this textbook there are four types of collocations-related exercises:

Type 1. Choose the collocative word that does not go with the given verb (Ex.1);

Ex.1 (Unit 1 Family Ties, page 12)

1. get lazy / married / divorced
2. keep a secret / a diary / a decision
3. have sympathy / fun of / a family
4. pay a visit/ a compliment / an opinion
5. fall to pieces / in the middle / in love

Type 2. Use the given collocations to complete the sentences (Ex.2);

Ex.2 (Unit 1 Family Ties, page 12) (three out of 10 sentences provided here)

1. I'm not ready for children now, but I'd love to have _____ in a few years
2. Shhh! You mustn't tell anyone about it! Can you keep _____?
3. I don't think I'll ever fall _____ again. My divorce was very upsetting.

Type 3. Choose the correct explanation for a given collocation out of the two options provided (Ex.3)

Ex. 3 Unit 3 The Wonders of Nature, page 38 (3 out of 6 sentences are given below)

1 If you bring attention to a problem you ____.

A ignore it

B tell other people about it

2 When people try to fight pollution, they ____.

A try to make more pollution

B try to make less pollution

3. In order to save energy, you have to ____.

A turn off the lights

B turn on the lights

Type 4. Create a collocation by matching the given words (Ex.4)

Ex.4 Unit 7 Extreme Situations, page 90:

- | | |
|---------|-------------------|
| 1. keep | a) lost |
| 2. do | b) missing |
| 3. get | c) calm |
| 4. go | d) someone's life |
| 5. save | e) a journey |
| 6. make | f) one's be |

As shown in *Table 1* below, the analysis of Close-up, the textbook used for first year secondary school students, reveals that there are 10 collocation-related exercises in this textbook and the majority of them are of the second and the third type (see the types above).

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
	Choose a word that does not collocate	Use the collocation in a sentence	Choose the meaning of the collocation	Match the words to form a collocation
	Page 12, Ex. A (Unit 1 Family Ties)	Page 12, Ex. B (Unit 1 Family Ties)	Page 38, Ex. B (Unit 3 The Wonders of Nature)	Page 90, Ex A, (Unit 7 Extreme Situations)
		Page 38, Ex. C (Unit 3 The	Page 64, Ex. A (Unit 5 A Place to Call	

		<i>Wonders of Nature,)</i>	<i>Home)</i>	
		Page 64, Ex. B (<i>Unit 5 A Place to Call Home</i>)	Page 116, Ex. B, (<i>Unit 9 High Tech World</i>)	
		Page 142, Ex. B, (<i>Unit 11 Lessons to Learn</i>)	Page 142, Ex. A, (<i>Unit 11 Lessons to Learn</i>)	
Total	1	4	4	1

Table 1. Types of collocation-related exercises in *Close-up*

As shown in the table, in *Close Up* (Healan, Gormley, 2011) the collocations are dealt with only by means of three types of exercises, which are based on choosing (Ex.5), recognizing (Ex.6) and using the given collocations in a sentence (Ex.7).

Ex.5 (Unit 1 Amazing people, page 17)

1. Which of this can you sign?

a) a contract b) an autobiography c) a lesson

2. Which of these can you make?

a) friends b) a cake c) homework etc.

Ex. 6 (Unit 10 “Keep healthy”, page 97)

(Match the sentences halves, then underline the illness collocation in each sentence!)

1. Our neighbor is in hospital. He had an
2. Her doctor gave her medications and she got
3. If you have problem with your eyes, make an
4. Are you sure it’s a cold? Maybe you should see
5. I ate seafood for dinner. I’ve been feeling

- a. better
- b. a doctor
- c. appointment with a specialist soon!
- d. exercise for years now. He’s not very healthy.
- e. sick all night
- f. operation two days ago.

Ex. 7 (Unit 10 “Keep healthy”, page 97)

(Complete the illness collocations from Exercise 1. Use the correct form of the verbs!)

1. I was really happy I could go to your party on Sunday. I _____ for almost a week.
2. Her knee hurts badly, and the medication she takes doesn’t help. The doctor says she needs to _____.
3. ‘Hello, this is Jake Miller. Can I _____ with Dr. Thacker please?’

It is worth noting that in none of the units in this textbook are the collocations defined or explained in any concrete and explicit way.

In the textbook intended for third year secondary school students, THINK, Student's book 3 (Puchta, Stranks & Lewis-Jones, 2015) there is no mention of collocations, and no collocation-related exercises are included either. Vocabulary is thought through discussing words in isolation, and the subject of word-relations is not handled at all.

Finally, in *Focus*, Students' book 4 (Beata, Breysshaw, Vaughan, Sue, 2016), the English textbook intended for fourth year secondary school students, collocations are more elaborately presented. They are defined and divided into types. Moreover, collocation-related exercises are provided which are in close correlation with the given texts, meaning the collocations in the texts are underlined, so that they can be easily observed and discussed. At the end of this textbook attached to the cover is a booklet named Word Store where additional collocation-related exercises are given. Seven out of the eight units of *FOCUS* contain at least two exercises on collocations.

The journey with collocations in this textbook starts in Unit 1 "Do your best" with an exercise that requires pairing verbs and nouns in order to make a collocation (Ex.8).

Ex. 8 (In pairs, make as many verb-noun collocations as you can in sixty seconds)

<i>Verbs</i>	+	<i>Nouns</i>
<i>Attend drop fail</i>		<i>a career a course</i>
<i>Pass pursue skip</i>		<i>an exam a lesson</i>
<i>Study take</i>		<i>a subject university</i>

Then, some more exercises follow with collocations being underlined in the text titled "Do your best" that is part of Unit 1. The instructions on page 13 where the text is further take us to page 3 of the Word Store booklet where another collocation-related exercise awaits the students (Ex.9).

Ex.9 Word Store page 3 (complete the exercise using the words given on page 13)

1. a circle of friends = _____
2. a _____ thinker = _____
3. _____ to do sth.= _____
4. have a _____ for sth.= _____
5. pay _____ = _____
6. _____ a goal= _____
7. _____ knowledge= _____

Interestingly, the selected collocations in Unit 1 are actually defined in the second unit. This practically suggests that students are first encouraged to pick up and use the collocations instinctively, and then their attention is drawn towards conscious acquiring of the exact meanings of the selected collocations.

In Unit 2 'It takes all kinds', page 44 under the section *Language in focus* which is found at the end of every unit, the following definition and explanation of the term collocation is provided:

"Collocation is a central feature of any language. It refers to typical, natural-sounding combinations of words. For example, you can have strong feelings but not tough feelings. You might break someone's heart but not destroy someone's heart. Choosing the right collocation will make your English sound more natural."

The definition and the explanation are followed by an exercises in which the students are familiarized with different types of collocations (Ex.10) and the concept of strength of collocations (Ex.11).

Ex.10 (Unit 2 'It takes all kinds', page 30)

(Match types of collocations 1-6 with examples a-f from the unit!)

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. adjective + noun | a) the centre of attention |
| 2. verb + noun | b) it's absolutely fantastic |
| 3. noun + verb | c) her late husband |
| 4. noun + noun | d) Mary was staring hard |
| 5. verb + adverb | e) My father proposed a toast |

Ex.11 (Unit 2 'It takes all kinds', page 30)

(Translate the examples in Exercise 1. Discuss how 'strong' each collocation is in your language!)

Stronger = few or no alternatives e.g. *the center of attention*

Weaker = some alternative e.g. *stare hard/intently/fixedly*

In the remaining units in this textbook and the Word Store booklet no other information on collocation is found. The focus is placed only on the practical use of Adjective + Noun and Verb + noun collocations as well as several topic-related collocations (e.g. collocation on employment, collocations on selling and buying, etc.) (see *Table 2* below).

<i>Adjective – noun collocations</i>	<i>Verb – noun collocations</i>	<i>Collocations on Employment</i>	<i>Collocations to do with the internet use</i>	<i>Collocations in set phrases</i>	<i>Collocations on buying and selling</i>	<i>Collocations revision</i>	<i>Total</i>
Word store, p. 7, ex. 3B	Word store, p. 9, ex. 4D	Word store, p.11, ex 5B	Word store, p. 15, ex. 7A	Word store, p.15, ex. 7C	Word store, p. 9, ex. 4C	Word store, p. 15, ex. 7D	
Word store, p.7, ex. 3C	Unit 4, p.58, ex. 4;	Word store, p. 11, ex.5C			Word store, p.9, ex. 4D	Word store p.17, ex. 8E	
Unit 3, p.47, ex.5						Word store, p.3	
3	2	2	1	1	2	3	14

Table 2. Collocations-related exercises in Focus

These exercises are of the same type as the ones presented in Unit 1 (Unit 1 "Do your best", Ex.8, Ex.9) in the same textbook, i.e. the collocations are underlined in the given text or written in a box at the beginning of the exercise and students should just match them with the given word, or provide a sentence (once they have done the matching) (Ex.12).

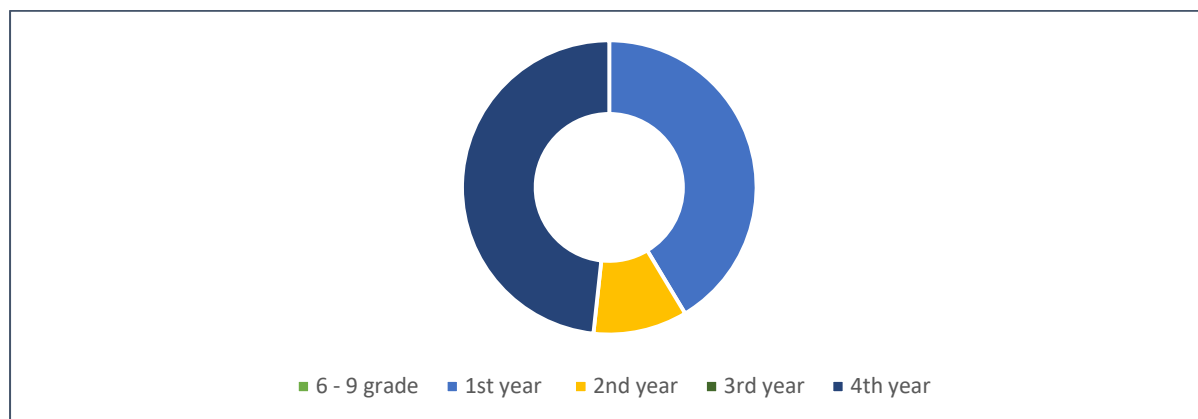
Ex.12 (Word store, page 7)
Adjective – noun collocations

*area backstreets city food
neighborhood nightlife skyline*

1. cosmopolitan/sprawling city → There are so many different cultures in London. It's the most cosmopolitan city I know.
2. dramatic/ impressive _____ → _____
3. dull/ hectic _____ → _____

To summarize, the findings obtained from the research of English textbooks intended for secondary school students, show that the students are officially introduced to the concept of collocations, the lexical division of collocations, and the notion of strong and weak collocations in the final year of their compulsory education. Nevertheless, almost all exercises via which they are expected to practice using collocations deal with only several types of collocations: adjective + noun, verb + noun, noun + noun; and no exercises on the other types of collocations such as: noun + verb, verb + adverb or adverb + adjective are included. On the plus side, the analysis shows that the texts included in the textbook used with the fourth year secondary school students feature underlined collocations, which means that instead of only matching, circling, choosing the right collocate for a given word, students can actually witness collocations being used in specific contexts.

Overall, on the basis of the research at hand, it is inevitable to conclude that collocations are completely omitted from the EFL curriculum during elementary school years. In the course of students' secondary education, collocations are dealt with in a very haphazard way and are only properly introduced to the students in the final year of their studies as shown in Graph 1 below.



Graph 1 Collocation-related exercises in EFL textbooks used in elementary and secondary schools

Bearing these findings in mind, several questions arise: “Is the introduction of the concept of collocations postponed to secondary school because it is too demanding to be grasped by elementary school students?”; “Is the explicit explanation of collocations procrastinated until the final year in secondary school because it is better for students to learn collocations instinctively?”; “Should teachers of English follow the textbooks ‘blindly’ or introduce more collocation-related exercises of their own accord?”.

3.4 The results of the questionnaire

As depicted in Chart 2, all interviewed teachers of English from both the primary and secondary schools agree that collocations are important for acquiring EFL, enriching students' vocabulary and reaching a native-like fluency of the English language.

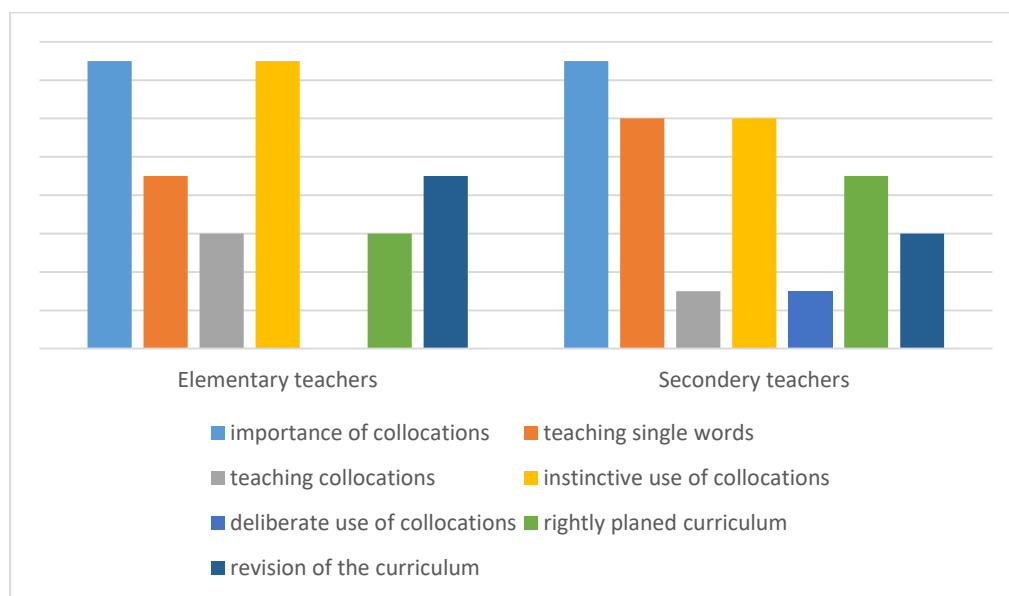


Chart 2 Questionnaire results

60% of the elementary school teachers claim that their pupils pick up collocations along the way as suggested by the curriculum. Given that there are no exercises on collocations in the textbooks they use, teachers claim that they occasionally point out the most important collocations in the texts they deal with.

All of the elementary school teachers agree that, generally speaking, their pupils use collocations properly and instinctively. However, 60% state that when it comes to vocabulary they mainly teach new words in isolation; whereas, the other 40% claim that they pay equal attention to teaching both single words and collocations.

Moreover, 40% of the elementary school teachers believe that the reason why curriculum leaves out collocations in elementary school is due to pupils' level of English, with one of them strongly emphasizing that there is no need for the pupils to know how the word combinations they use are called. 60% of the teacher think that collocations should be introduced in elementary school because students even at that level know the difference between adjectives, nouns, verbs and their potential to combine with other words.

Finally, according to some of the interviewed elementary school teachers with longer teaching experience behind them, not all English textbooks overlook collocations as the ones they are currently using. In other words, previously they have used other textbooks which covered collocations in a more systematic way and which did not place the issue of teaching collocations entirely in the teachers' hands.

On the other hand, only 20% of secondary school teachers of English that took part in this survey claim that students use collocations through conscious and deliberate effort. The remaining 80% think students use collocations instinctively. However, they all agree that to some extent students use collocations properly and the mistakes they make are due to the

negative transfer, lack of interest in learning foreign language or simply not paying enough attention.

Only 20 % of the secondary school professors claim that they pay equal attention to both single words and collocations when teaching vocabulary. The other 80% claim that they pay more attention to single words as that is how the program is designed and work with those collocations only when they are mentioned in the texts and the exercises given in the textbooks they are using.

According to the opinion of 60% of the interviewed secondary school teachers only B2 level students and those at higher levels are expected to learn/use collocation effectively. Consequently, they believe that the layout of collocations starting from primary school and all the way through secondary school, is rightly planned although some improvements could be made. The other 40% of the teachers strongly disagree with the way collocations are presented in English textbooks and state that the program used now is not as good as the previous ones, and that textbooks are poor in both vocabulary and definitions and should be improved in that respect.

Conclusion

The aim in this paper was to inspect the importance of collocations and the notice they are given in the EFL curriculum in both primary and secondary schools in Macedonia, via the space that is allocated to collocations in the modern English textbooks and by investigating teachers opinions and experiences regarding teaching collocations.

The results gained from the teachers' questionnaire on teaching collocations clearly indicate the undeniable importance of collocations in the process of acquiring English as a foreign language. However, this finding is not in line with the treatment collocations receive in the English textbooks, since the close inspection of a selection of textbooks used in primary and secondary schools in the Bitola region, reveals a serious lack of consideration of this issue, particularly in the primary school English textbooks. Such a poor distribution of collocations in the English textbooks is definitely not in teachers' favour, since it is not always feasible for the teachers to introduce additional collocation-related exercises and fit them in the limited time frame of 40 or 45 minutes that they have at their disposal per class. Hence, even those teachers supporting the current design of the curriculum still demand some significant improvement while others even go as far as mentioning the advantages of "the former curriculum which excelled in both definition and exercises as opposed to the present one".

Since the research shows that in larger part teachers base their teaching on the helping materials there is a clear need of textbooks with better distribution of collocations, textbooks that emphasize collocations in the process of acquiring English as a foreign language, regardless of student's level.

If students get familiarized with collocations at the time when they make a comprehensible difference between nouns and verbs, adjectives and prepositions (elementary school), then, by the time they reach B2 level (fourth year of secondary school) they will start using them naturally and without the negative transfer from L1 interfering the process. However, without textbooks to support this claim extracted from the research the above mentioned theory cannot be put to practice.

In conclusion, students must acquire the English language by using textbooks that abound with both information and exercises on collocations starting from sixth grade up until fourth year of secondary school, unfortunately this is possible only if the curriculum is revised so the new design can impose this kind of textbooks selection.

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