

Research paper

The Effect of Collaborative Output Tasks on EFL Learners' Collocation Knowledge

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Abstract

Tasks have played a significant role in both early descriptive research and subsequent more theoretically-based research. The purpose of the present study was to measure the effect of collaborative output tasks on improving Iranian EFL learners' lexical collocation. To do so, 60 female students were selected to participate in this experiment, based on their performance on Oxford Placement Test (OPT). They were divided into two equal groups, experimental and control. The participants in the experimental groups were assigned collaborative output tasks involving collocations in order to review them without memorizing or learning by rote. The control group got vocabulary education using the school's standard teaching methods. The posttest was administered to both groups' participants in order to assess the students' lexical collocation knowledge. Comparing the posttest of the two groups revealed a significant difference between the score of the experimental groups and that of the control group in posttests. It was proved that collaborative tasks were effective in enhancing EFL learners' collocation knowledge. Collaborative output tasks are useful tasks in promoting communicative interactions among students and at the same time provide them with a focus on linguistic forms. The present study investigates the effectiveness of output tasks, so it helps the teachers to develop such tasks in their teaching methodology to improve the quality of their teaching.

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Introduction

Task-based learning is an attempt to overcome language-teaching challenges by involving learners in realistic learning processes on the one hand, and regulating the teaching process in

a methodical manner on the other (Skehan, 1996). Cameron (1997) defines a classroom assignment as "a unit that enhances awareness of language learning and teaching processes and can assist teachers conduct more communicative and meaning-focused activities." Bygate (1999) coined the words framing and reframing, as well as tasks. He stated that new activities may lead to learners reframing familiar language in new circumstances, and that reframing allows learners to generate information that can be used across contexts and frames, knowledge that seems 'un-framed.' Frames are then used to lay the groundwork for learning. According to Bygate (2000), tasks can provide settings for studying specific aspects of learner behavior, such as learners' participation in cognitive processes, discourse, attention, interaction with language challenges, and the use of tasks in syllabus creation. According to Calvert and Sheen (2015), optimal activities are those that detect students' demands for getting proper form, function, and meaning. They are the ones who will incorporate it in the curriculum, execute it in the classroom, and keep it going throughout the course. Skehan (2003) defines the teacher's duty as 'leading from behind', that is, providing suitable language form assistance when learners perceive a 'need to mean' to open the ways for interacting with activity, expressing meanings, and giving relevant aid with language form when learners feel a 'need to mean'.

The functions of tasks may be split into two categories: output-oriented tasks and input-oriented activities. According to Renandya (2013), output-based tasks such as drills, information-gap exercises, and oral communication games help students gain language fluency. According to Swain (2005), there are four output functions: fluency, hypothesis testing, metalinguistic awareness, and noticing. The output hypothesis posits that language acquisition/learning can occur through the production of language, whether spoken or written.

Output-based collaborative activities, according to Ellis (2000), are intended to address the requirement of integrating attention to language form with a communicative direction, and their research may be addressed from two unique but complementary perspectives. Collaboration is an interpersonal and chosen behavior concept in which individuals are made responsible for their activities, including learning and recognizing the talents and contributions of their peers (Laachir, 2019).

In the collaborative approach, groups assume nearly whole responsibility for addressing the topic and determining if they have enough information to do so. If not, they consult various sources such as books, journals, films, the internet, and so on (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). Because the word collaborative implies 'to work together' or 'to co-labor together', collaborative organizations work together to achieve a common goal the teacher has articulated (Barkley, et al., 2005). Collaborative learning, like cooperative learning, has its roots in constructivist epistemology.

The notion of collocation has increasingly garnered scholars' attention to the issue of second language acquisition as more academics understand that "language knowledge is collocational knowledge" (Nation, 2001, p. 318) by nature. Collocation is characterized as a natural combination of words; it alludes to the close relationship of English words (O'dell & McCarthy,

2008). For example, pay and attention go together, as do conduct and crime; blond goes with hair, and heavy goes with rain (O'dell & McCarthy, 2008).

Nation (2001) similarly stated that "all fluent and appropriate language usage requires collocational knowledge" (p. 318) and that increasing collocational competence would improve native-like fluency. Furthermore, Conzett (2000) indicated that collocational knowledge would aid in the productive and correct use of terminology. Collocational information is thus critical in increasing target language competency.

Collocations are important for English learners to understand since they will help them speak and write English in a more natural and correct manner (O'dell & McCarthy, 2008). Learning collocations will also assist learners in expanding their English vocabulary (O'dell & McCarthy, 2008).

Review of Literature

Collaborative learning promotes the theoretical work of Jean Piaget and Vygotsky, both of whom highlight the importance of social interaction in learning and feel that collaborative learning is an essential component of developing deeper understanding (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Vygotsky (1978), some scholars (such as Lantolf & Appel, 1994) advocate for a sociocultural perspective, which posits that knowledge is generated via social interaction between individuals and subsequently internalized.

Students in collaborative learning are accountable for one other's learning, therefore the success of one student helps other students succeed. Collaborative Language Learning has arisen as a learner-centered language education technique (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). Johnson et al. (as stated in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) emphasize the significance of collaboration in the process of increasing learning and describe collaborative learning as "the instructional use of small groups in which students collaborate to optimize their own and each other's learning" (p. 195).

The collaborative task is a hybrid of two educational approaches: reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning. In a collaborative work, students are separated into small groups to assist one another in employing learning methodologies (Klingner & Vaghaun, 2000).

Minaei and Rezaie (2014) investigated the impact of two types of output tasks (editing and cloze) on English collocation learning. A collocation knowledge exam was performed before and after the therapy to assess knowledge of the target collocations. The findings revealed that collaborative output tasks resulted in more collocation knowledge than individual output tasks. The results, however, revealed that task type had an influence on boosting learning of the target collocations, with cloze tasks being more successful than editing activities.

Ganji and Ketabi (2015) evaluated the impact of two types of output tasks on the acquisition of English lexical collocations (reconstruction cloze task and reconstruction editing task). The

research was carried out in two separate intermediate adult English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) courses. The participants were required to perform four editing activities or four cloze tasks either independently or cooperatively, as well as a vocabulary knowledge scale exam before and after the therapy. According to the findings, performing the exercises cooperatively (in pairs) resulted in a larger increase of collocation knowledge than doing them independently. The results also revealed a substantial difference in the impacts of two task types, with editing tasks outperforming cloze tasks in the learning of lexical collocations.

Dehqan and Mohammadi Amiri (2017) investigated the effects of two types of collaborative output tasks on Iranian EFL learners' comparative adjectives with two or more syllables. Thirty Iranian EFL learners were divided into two experimental and one control groups; one experimental group was given dictogloss tasks in four pairs, while the other experimental group received text reconstruction editing tasks in six pairs. A grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and audio-recording of the learners' interaction, as well as pretests, posttests, and delayed posttests, were used to collect data. When the mean scores of the three groups in GJT were compared, it was revealed that the experimental groups gained more than the control group, and the experimental groups gained more than the control group.

El-Dakhs, et al. (2019) investigated the effect of textual enrichment on L2 collocation acquisition in the context of foreign language learning. Textual augmentation, textual non-enhancement, and control individuals were divided into three groups. Over the course of four weeks, the participants were exposed to unfamiliar verb + noun and adjective + noun collocations embedded in stories in four 45-minute sessions. Using a pre-test/post-test strategy, the results demonstrated a considerable advantage for the textual non-enhancement group across numerous comparisons, albeit to varying degrees. The data also revealed that there was little and uneven heterogeneity in learning gains across word categories.

Naserpour, et al. (2020) evaluated the effects of input-oriented and output-oriented activities with varying participation load indices on the understanding and production of lexical collocations in Iranian EFL learners. The participants were divided into six experimental groups, which included input-oriented tasks with involvement loads 1 (True-false), 2 (Matching), 3 (Multiple-choice), and output-oriented tasks with involvement loads 1 (Short answer), 2 (Fill in the gaps), and 3 (Multiple-choice) (Sentence formation). The researchers evaluated the participants' understanding and production of collocations at the end of the treatment session. The findings revealed that activities with greater involvement load indices were more successful in terms of both receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations. The findings also demonstrated that output-oriented activities were more advantageous than input-oriented jobs across all three involvement load indices.

Duong, et al. (2021) looked at how oral input-based and output-based activities affected vocabulary knowledge. The experiment group received both input- and output-based tasks in a counterbalanced way, while the comparison group only received L2 input. At three levels of sensitivity, oral spontaneous usage, oral form recall, and meaning recall were employed to

measure vocabulary acquisition. According to the findings, participants who were just exposed to L2 input learned significantly fewer words than those who conducted both the input-based and output-based tasks. Results also demonstrated that there is no significant difference between the two groups.

Teaching English effectively is the main concern of language teachers these days. Tasks are very important tools that help L2 teachers to teach better and students to learn better. In fact, tasks are activities that involve learners in the process of learning to make meaning. Output tasks are those tasks that require students to produce the language, written or oral. Studies show that students usually face problems in doing the tasks individually. When they do the tasks collaboratively, they correct each other. In other words, they produce some feedbacks that can help them to do the tasks better.

A problematic era for students to learn is learning English collocations. Collocation usage is widespread in English and students are in need of learning them, but they get confused when using them. Collocations are somehow difficult to learn, because some specific words can go with each other while others cannot. Sometimes, there are specific verbs that go with a specific noun. What makes the problem more confusing is that the meaning of a phrase might be different from its components. It means that the overall meaning of a collocation might be different from its parts separately. That is why the present researcher chose this area to work on.

Therefore, the present study was developed to examine the use of task-based collaborative teaching in enhancing EFL learners' collocational knowledge. In order to clarify the points under investigation in this study, the following research questions are posed:

- Does collaborative output task have any significant effect on EFL learners' English collocation knowledge?

The following null hypothesis was formulated in order to answer the research question of the study:

- Collaborative output task does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' English collocation knowledge.

Methods

Population and Sampling

To conduct the current study, 60 female students were selected to participate in this experiment. They were selected based on their performance on Oxford Placement Test (OPT). This study consisted of two groups of foreign language learners. Each group consisted of 30 learners of English in intermediate level, aged 15-25. The participants of the present study were female Iranian foreign language learners in an English language institute. Their native language is Persian.

Instrumentations

To collect data, a proficiency test, pretest-posttest, and two types of tasks were used.

In this study, a variant of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was utilized to measure the skill level of the participants. OPT includes 50 multiple-choice questions ranging from elementary to intermediate levels that measure students' understanding of important grammar and vocabulary, as well as a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions.

Before and after the research treatments, the learners were given a 30-item collocation test as a pretest and posttest. This syllabus-based test is meant to assess learners' collocation knowledge. To measure the reliability of the researcher-made collocation pretest, the test was piloted on 20 learners who had the same age and proficiency level. Items with a facility index more than 0.63 were too simple, while those with a facility index less than 0.33 were too hard. Three items were updated (two simple and one difficult). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the tests, and the findings ($r = 0.82$) suggested that the test was reliable.

The posttest consisted of modified versions of the pre-test that were administered after completing the activities to assess learners' collocation gain, with the items from the previous test administration removed. The results of these tests were compared to determine the efficacy and difference of therapy.

Finally, there were two types of exercises in the study: cloze and editing tasks. The assignments include the collocations the students were supposed to master. In cloze exercises, students must restore the missing components as accurately and precisely as possible to the original. In editing activities, students were expected to identify and repair any errors. It employed a within-subject design to reduce the impacts of individual differences, in which all students did both types of tasks cooperatively and independently. The sequence of the tasks and conditions was counterbalanced to remove task effects.

Data Collection and Procedure

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study to determine the reliability and validity of the vocabulary test. To participate in the pilot project, a group of 20 EFL learners with comparable age, gender, and competence level were chosen. During a 9-week semester, data were gathered in regular class time.

The administration of a language placement exam was the next stage in this project. The participants in this research were chosen based on their performance on the OPT. A total of 74 EFL students took the competency test. The results indicated that 20 respondents with low frequent scores were excluded from the entire sample. Then, they were randomly assigned to two equal groups of experimental and control.

The main study was conducted in 9 sessions in the following manner. The treatment was given to the learners of experimental groups consisted of several lessons which were related to

collocations. Each experimental group received one type of tasks. In every session, the learners were first introduced to the target collocations through an input-based mini lesson. The teacher recited a conversation including the collocations to the pupils during the input-based mini lesson. The students next undertook a vocabulary-matching assignment in which they attempted to match a series of collocations in one column, including the target ones, with their instances in another. The brief lecture was the same for all students over both weeks and before each activity. The brief lesson was designed to acquaint students with the assignment and target terms before they were asked to perform the output activities. The learners were not engaged in any output-based tasks during the brief lesson.

After the initial introduction, the students in editing group were asked to complete one editing task. The students in cloze group completed cloze task. The participants of both groups completed the task collaboratively (in pairs), while the participants of the control group did it individually.

All study participants took the posttest at the end of the treatment sessions. At the very last session of their intensive course, students reviewed all of the vocabulary items they learned throughout the sessions in order to measure their lexical collocation acquisition. The posttest was essentially the same as the pretest.

Results

The participants in the two groups accomplished a pretest to see if their collocation knowledge was approximately to the same level. Table 1 displays the descriptive data for each group.

Table 1
The descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on pretest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental (Pretest)	30	9.00	15.00	13.90	2.05
Control (Pretest)	30	9.00	16.00	15.00	3.12

The results of descriptive statistics showed that both experimental and control groups have a rather similar mean scores. The researcher used an independent sample t-test to determine whether there was no significant difference in pretest results between groups. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2
Independent samples test between the scores of experimental and control groups on the pretest

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
F	Sig.	T	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
						Lower	Upper		

Pretest	Equal variances assumed	6.241	.087	.146	58	.367	.62054	2.10	-1.598	2.27604
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The findings revealed that there is no significant difference ($t = .17, p > .05$) between the collocation knowledge of the experimental and control groups on pretest. To determine the impact of treatments on learners, each group was given a posttest on collocation that was identical to the pretest. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the posttest scores of the two groups of participants.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the groups' performance on the posttest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental (Posttest)	30	18.00	29.00	24.1500	3.21632
Control (Posttest)	30	12.00	20.00	17.2500	5.69279

The results of the descriptive statistics showed that the experimental group had a better performance on posttest. In order to verify the research question of the study in finding whether using collaborative task lead to a greater gain of English collocations in EFL learners, the researcher conducted an independent sample t-test. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Independent samples test between the scores of experimental and control groups on the posttest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
	F.	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Posttest	19.23	.000	-6.16	58	.000	-4.70	.76	-6.22	-3.17
Equal Variances Assumed									

The results revealed that that there is a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores ($t = 6.16, p < 0.05$) of the experimental and control groups in such a way that experimental group outperformed on posttest. In other words, collaborative task lead to a greater gain of English collocations in L2 learners and the null hypothesis of the study was not accepted.

Discussion

The present study was designed to find out the impact of collaborative tasks on Iranian EFL learners' collocation knowledge. The results indicated that collaborative tasks are effective in enhancing L2 learners' collocation knowledge. The study of the students' pretest and posttest scores from both the experimental and control groups indicate that collaborative tasks are in line with the hegemony that they can assist students to improve their great achievement in collocations.

Findings of previous studies confirm that collaborative tasks have a positive effect on their learning achievement. The current study's findings corroborate those of Minaei and Rezaie (2014) who found that collaborative output tasks resulted in more collocation knowledge than individual output tasks.

The current study's findings are consistent with those of Ganji and Ketabi (2015) who showed that participants received editing tasks outperformed cloze tasks in lexical collocation test. According to the findings of Dehqan and Mohammadi Amiri (2017), two types of output tasks consisting of text reconstruction editing and the dictogloss had better performance in noticing and learning English comparative adjectives with two or more syllables.

The findings of the present study contrasted those of those of El-Dakhs, et al.(2019) who found that the textual enhancement collocations had no impact on EFL learners' learning gains for different word categories.

This study's findings support those of Naserpour, et al. (2020), who found that activities with higher participation load indices resulted in increased receptive and productive understanding of lexical collocations. They also discovered that, across all three involvement load indices, output-oriented activities were more favorable than input-oriented ones.

The outcomes of this study are not in line with those of Duong, et al. (2021) who compared the impact of input-based and output-based tasks on learners' vocabulary knowledge. They found no significant difference in vocabulary knowledge of learners in input-based and output-based t-groups.

Conclusion

Improving lexical collocations has long been a top priority for EFL students. Recently, significant, but insufficient, work has been invested into improving lexical collocations using various methodologies. The extraordinary shift in attitudes about vocabulary as an active component of second language acquisition has encouraged the majority of researchers to adopt a new approach in which the learner is more actively engaged in the learning process. This means that using collaborative ways to involve students more deeply in the process of vocabulary learning is preferable. In other words, it may be time to abandon the stereotyped ways of lexical education, which seldom engage the readers' minds in the learning process, and instead concentrate their efforts on applying new methods of vocabulary learning, particularly collocations.

The utilization of collaborative assignments necessitates the employment of a teacher to organize and assess the materials, inspire students, and offer feedback. The outcomes of this study may assist EFL teachers in designing and adapting language learning assignments to improve learners' collocation knowledge.

The findings of this study can give great chances for EFL teachers to involve students in the collocation learning process. Because there is limited chance to expose learners to language outside of the classroom in EFL environments, it is vital to offer circumstances for learners to make the most of class time. Collaborative exercises help students to thoroughly process lexical elements. Learners may easily see the importance of such learning scenarios over typical and dull classroom procedures and tactics.

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