

Collocational competence among Indonesian EFL learners: Types of errors, causes, and pedagogical implications (A descriptive library research)

Yose Rianugraha

*Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing LIA Yogyakarta
yose.rianugraha@stbalia-yk.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

This descriptive library research investigates the nature of collocational competence among Indonesian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with a focus on identifying common error types, exploring their causes, and examining the pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Indonesia. Collocational competence, the ability to produce natural combinations of words, is essential for achieving fluency and idiomaticity in English. However, EFL learners, particularly in Indonesia, often struggle with collocational accuracy due to limited exposure to authentic language use and the influence of their first language (L1). This study synthesizes findings from both local and international sources, drawing on data involving approximately 250 Indonesian EFL students across secondary and tertiary education levels, as reported in previous empirical studies. By synthesizing findings from both local and international studies, this research identifies frequent lexical and grammatical collocation errors, such as *make a photo*, *strong rain*, or *interested to*, which often result from direct L1 transfer, overgeneralization, and insufficient instructional emphasis on collocations. The study highlights the importance of incorporating explicit collocational instruction and contextualized practice into classroom activities. Pedagogical strategies such as consciousness-raising, the use of corpora, guided exposure to authentic input, and collocation-focused exercises are recommended to enhance learners' competence. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse in EFL vocabulary teaching and calls for a more systematic and intentional approach to collocational instruction in the Indonesian EFL context.

Keywords: collocational competence, Indonesian EFL learners, lexical collocations, grammatical collocations, vocabulary instruction

INTRODUCTION

English has undoubtedly established itself as the leading global lingua franca, serving a vital function in various fields such as international diplomacy, academic research, global commerce, and technological advancement. In Indonesia, English is recognized as the primary foreign language that is formally introduced in the national education system, usually starting from elementary or secondary school levels (Cahyono & Widiati, 2021). This significance highlights a national recognition that mastering English is increasingly essential for individuals to gain access to wider higher education opportunities, improve their competitiveness in both domestic and international job markets, and engage more comprehensively in the global exchange of information and ideas. As a result, successive Indonesian governments and educational authorities have persistently sought to enhance the

quality and accessibility of English language instruction across the country (Cahyono & Widiati, 2021).

In the field of second language acquisition, mastering vocabulary extends beyond knowing individual word meanings—it also involves understanding how words naturally co-occur in a target language. This phenomenon, known as **collocation**, plays a crucial role in achieving fluency and native-like proficiency in English (Nation, 2001; Gyllstad, 2007). Collocational competence, the ability to use common word combinations accurately and appropriately, has been increasingly recognized as a core component of communicative competence (Lewis, 2000). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially in contexts such as Indonesia where English is not used as a daily communication medium, mastering collocations remains a significant challenge.

Indeed, the official recognition of English as the primary foreign language taught in Indonesian schools results in its extensive incorporation throughout the educational system. From its introduction at the elementary level in numerous private institutions and certain public programs, to its more standardized and compulsory inclusion in junior and senior high school curricula across the nation, English language instruction is aimed at establishing a vital linguistic foundation for Indonesian students (see, e.g., Zein, 2018; Hamidah, 2020). The ongoing educational emphasis on English during these formative years is intended not only for the acquisition of fundamental vocabulary and grammatical structures but also to equip students with the advanced communicative skills necessary for higher education and the increasingly globalized requirements of the future job market, thereby positioning English language education as an essential element of national human resource development.

The profound integration of English into the educational framework is a direct reaction to its growing significance as a vital facilitator for Indonesians across various essential life areas. In the realm of higher education, for example, a considerable number of academic journals, foundational textbooks, and innovative research are published in English, rendering proficiency in the language crucial for students and scholars aiming to engage with the leading edge of global academic discourse (Hadid, 2021). Additionally, numerous Indonesian universities are proactively internationalizing their curricula by offering programs in English to attract international students and better equip local graduates for global participation, while opportunities for postgraduate studies abroad almost invariably require demonstrable English proficiency. Beyond the academic sphere, the Indonesian job market increasingly favors individuals with strong English communication abilities. Multinational companies operating in Indonesia, along with significant growth sectors such as technology, international trade, and tourism, consistently identify English proficiency as a highly sought-after, if not essential, qualification, often linked to improved career advancement and earning potential (Marlina & Giri, 2022). Furthermore, in an ever-more interconnected world, English acts as the primary medium for accessing a vast array of global information, ranging from breaking news and technological innovations to varied cultural expressions and entertainment, thus empowering Indonesian citizens to become more informed and engaged participants on the global stage.

The growing importance of English in both academic and professional fields has made its mastery not only advantageous, but also essential for Indonesian

learners seeking to thrive in a globalization era. However, despite many years of formal instruction, many Indonesian EFL learners still struggle with producing natural and fluent English, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and writing. A critical factor contributing to this challenge is the lack of mastery in the use of English collocations. Although learners may have a reasonable understanding of grammar and a broad vocabulary, their inability to produce idiomatic and native-like word pairings often results in awkward, unnatural, or incorrect expressions. This will hinder their overall fluency and may negatively impact their academic writing, oral communication, and even performance on standardized English proficiency tests.

The difficulty in mastering collocations arises partly from the distinctive characteristics of collocational knowledge, which is frequently implicit and not easily inferred from grammatical rules or the meanings of individual words. In contrast to grammatical structures that are usually taught explicitly in educational settings, collocations need to be learned through considerable exposure and contextual application, a process that many Indonesian students may struggle with due to insufficient authentic input and output in English. Furthermore, interference from the learners' first language (L1), Indonesian language, often leads to direct translations of word combinations that are either non-existent or mistaken in English. For instance, a learner might say *strong rain* instead of *heavy rain* or *make a photo* rather than *take a photo*, demonstrating the ongoing impact of L1 on L2 lexical selections.

In light of these challenges, there is an urgent need for a more profound understanding of collocational competence among Indonesian EFL learners—specifically regarding the types of errors they commonly commit and the fundamental factors that lead to these mistakes. Recent research in applied linguistics has highlighted the significance of collocational knowledge for effective language application. Lewis (2000) notably pointed out that “language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar,” indicating a shift in paradigm that emphasizes the importance of lexical patterns in language teaching. Additionally, other scholars, including Nesselhauf (2005), Gyllstad (2007), and Laufer & Waldman (2011), have investigated collocational competence among ESL/EFL learners across different contexts, revealing that learners frequently generate incorrect collocations as a result of negative L1 transfer, limited exposure, and inadequate instruction.

In Indonesian context, however, research concerning collocational competence remains relatively less explored compared to other areas of English language learning. Although there have been some efforts to examine vocabulary acquisition and error analysis, comprehensive investigations into the specific difficulties Indonesian learners face with collocations are still less familiar. Moreover, few studies have synthesized the existing body of knowledge on this topic in a structured manner that can inform pedagogical practice. This gap presents a valuable opportunity for library-based research to consolidate, interpret, and present findings from relevant studies, and therefore providing educators with evidence-based insights into how to address collocation-related challenges in the classroom.

This research, therefore, seeks to investigate collocational competence among Indonesian EFL students using a descriptive library research methodology.

Instead of gathering primary data through fieldwork or experimental methods, this study relies on existing scholarly literature, empirical research, and linguistic analyses conducted both in Indonesia and similar EFL environments. The emphasis is on identifying the prevalent types of collocational errors made by Indonesian learners, the factors that lead to these errors, and the possible pedagogical strategies that could be employed to enhance the teaching and learning of collocations. By systematically reviewing and synthesizing pertinent studies, this research aims to contribute to both the theoretical and practical understanding of collocational competence within the Indonesian EFL context.

Employing a descriptive library research design offers numerous advantages for this type of investigation. Firstly, it enables a comprehensive analysis of diverse perspectives, outcomes, and techniques utilized in previous studies, which can then be compared and critically evaluated. Secondly, it provides an in-depth overview of the challenges and progress within the field, unencumbered by the constraints of limited participant samples or institutional access. Finally, this approach facilitates the integration of both local and international research, yielding a more holistic understanding of the topic. As a result, the methodology chosen for this study is particularly appropriate for synthesizing patterns, highlighting consistencies and discrepancies among results, and drawing conclusions that are pertinent to pedagogy.

Specifically, this descriptive library research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What types of English collocation errors are most frequently made by Indonesian EFL learners? 2. What are the possible causes of collocation errors among Indonesian EFL learners? 3. What are the pedagogical implications of these errors for English language teaching in Indonesia? By addressing these questions, this study aims not only to deepen the theoretical understanding of collocational competence but also to provide practical guidance for EFL instruction and curriculum development.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative library research design, aimed at identifying and analyzing patterns of collocational errors made by Indonesian EFL learners. Instead of collecting primary data through fieldwork, this research systematically collects, organizes, and interprets secondary data from previously published scholarly sources.

Data Sources

The data for this study were drawn from a range of academic journal articles, undergraduate and postgraduate theses, and conference proceedings that focus on English collocational competence and collocational errors among Indonesian learners. The data analyzed in this research include empirical findings from studies involving approximately 250 Indonesian EFL students at both secondary and tertiary levels. The sources were selected from reputable databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, National and university repositories (e.g., UPI, UNY, UNAIR), as well as Peer-reviewed journals like Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, TEFLIN Journal, and Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra.

To ensure relevance and quality, the inclusion criteria for selecting sources were as follows: (1) The study focuses on Indonesian EFL learners (2) It includes analysis or discussion of English collocational use or errors (3) It is written in English (4) It was published between 2010 and 2025, to ensure a contemporary perspective.

Data Collection Procedure

Any relevant studies were first identified using keywords such as ‘collocational competence,’ ‘collocation errors,’ ‘Indonesian EFL learners,’ and ‘lexical and grammatical collocations.’ The titles and abstracts were screened to assess the relevance, followed by a full-text analysis of selected works.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Key findings from each source were extracted and categorized into themes, including the types of collocational errors (lexical vs. grammatical), the frequency of specific collocation types, the sources or causes of error (e.g., L1 interference, lack of exposure) and pedagogical implications. Next, the themes were synthesized and compared across studies to identify recurring patterns and to generate conclusions relevant to classroom practice in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of English conversation errors which are most frequently made by Indonesian as EFL learners

Research into the collocational competence of Indonesian EFL learners has shown that lexical collocation errors are more frequent than grammatical collocation errors. These errors often reflect learners’ difficulty in combining content words (e.g., verbs, nouns, adjectives) in a way that is natural in English, largely due to interference from their native language and overreliance on direct translation. The analysis of earlier research outcomes uncovered consistent trends in the collocational proficiency of Indonesian EFL learners. In the studies examined, which is encompassing a total sample of around 250 students from both secondary and tertiary educational levels, two main types of collocational errors were identified: lexical collocation errors and grammatical collocation errors.

1. Lexical Collocation Errors

Lexical collocations refer to combinations of two or more content words (typically nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs) that frequently co-occur in a conventional and natural way in a particular language. These combinations are often idiomatic or semi-fixed and it means that they cannot always be predicted based on rules of grammar or logic. In line with Benson, Benson and Ilson’s (1986) classification, these errors can be divided into verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, adverb + adjective, verb + adverb, and noun + noun combinations. The observed errors often reflected direct translations from Bahasa Indonesia or overgeneralizations of existing vocabulary knowledge, where learners applied familiar lexical items in ways that were grammatically correct but semantically unnatural in English. Learners cannot simply substitute a synonym and expect the

collocation to remain correct. These lexical collocation errors involve unnatural combinations of content words. Common types include:

a. Verb + Noun Errors

Examples: *make a homework*, *take a bath* in the river (instead of *do homework*, *have a bath*)

Those examples have been widely documented in Indonesian EFL contexts (Hastuti, 2015; Sari & Hidayat, 2019). These errors are often caused by direct translation from Indonesian, where verbs like *membuat* (“make”) are overgeneralized.

b. Adjective + Noun Errors

Examples: *strong rain*, *high temperature* of emotion (instead of *heavy rain*, *intense emotion*)

Those examples are reported by Laufer and Waldman (2011) and Nesselhauf (2005), indicating that learners often choose semantically correct adjectives but miss the collocational norms of English.

c. Noun + Noun or Noun + Verb Errors

Examples: *traffic is jam*, *the information is spreaded*

Those examples are recorded in studies on Indonesian learner corpora (Nurhayati, 2018; Pertiwi & Siregar, 2020). These reflect confusion in fixed expressions or verb forms, particularly in contexts where literal translations from Bahasa Indonesia are applied. These reflect confusion in fixed expressions or verb forms.

According to a study by Wulandari (2020), verb-noun combinations are the most error-prone category, especially in academic writing tasks. Students frequently select inappropriate verbs for common activities, likely due to L1 interference and limited exposure to native-like input.

2. Grammatical Collocation Errors

These involve combinations of a content word and a grammatical word, such as a preposition, particle, or grammatical construction. According to Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986), grammatical collocations typically consist of a dominant lexical item—such as a verb, noun, or adjective—followed by a grammatical element, most commonly a preposition, an infinitive, or a clause.

a. Verb + Preposition Errors

Examples: *depend to*, *interested with*, *discuss about*

The correct forms are *depend on*, *interested in*, and *discuss* (no preposition needed). Those errors have been recorded in Indonesian EFL learner corpora and error analyses (Hastuti, 2015; Sari & Hidayat, 2019; Nurhayati, 2018). Such errors persist because of different prepositional patterns in Bahasa Indonesia, where prepositions are either omitted or used differently compared to English.

b. Adjective + Preposition Errors

Examples: *good in* English (instead of *good at* English), *afraid from* (instead of *afraid of*)

These errors are reported in previous research (Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Pertiwi & Siregar, 2020) and suggest incomplete acquisition of English's fixed adjective–preposition pairings, which, as Benson et al. (1986) emphasize, are largely arbitrary and must be learned through exposure rather than inferred from grammar rules.

While grammatical collocation errors occur frequently, studies like Hasyim (2012) and Widyastuti (2018) suggest they are often less disruptive to understanding than lexical collocation errors, but still mark a learner's language as non-native.

The possible causes or contributing factors to English collocational errors made by Indonesian EFL learners

Several studies have revealed that the errors in collocation made by Indonesian learners are influenced by several factors which include the cognitive, pedagogical, and cultural ones. These factors do not stand as a single factor, but often overlap, shaping how learners process, acquire, and produce collocations in English.

The dominant cause consistently identified in various studies is first language (L1) interference. L1 interference, commonly referred to as negative transfer, happens when a learner inappropriately applies the lexical, syntactic, or semantic rules of their first language (Indonesian language) to their target language (English). Within the context of collocational competence, this frequently results in errors in word combinations that, while grammatically correct, sound unnatural or non-native in English. Indonesian language learners often translate expressions directly from Indonesian to English, applying familiar L1 lexical and syntactic patterns to target language output.

The most common type of L1 interference in collocation happens on verb-noun collocation. Indonesian learners might say “He did a mistake in the exam” instead of “He made a mistake in the exam” because in Indonesian, *melakukan* is often paired with *kesalahan*, but English requires *make a mistake*, not *do a mistake*. The second common type is adjective-noun collocation. Indonesian learners might say “My friend has a big problem”. The collocation of *big problem* is acceptable but not always natural in academic writing. More native-like alternatives might include *serious problem* or *major issue*. Learners influenced by L1 may overuse *big*, translating every instance of *besar* as *big* without considering the context-specific collocation preferences in English. These examples illustrate negative transfer, where phrases that sound equivalent in the L1 lead to non-native or incorrect collocation choices in English.

Another significant factor is the lack or insufficiency of exposure to authentic English input, especially in collocation rich environments. A study carried out by Ma (2012) reported that Chinese EFL students have inadequate vocabulary learning strategies, low motivation, no collaborative learning environment to practice their lexical competence, insufficient exposure to authentic language input, and inadequate teachers' instruction on social strategies. In Indonesia, English learners are primarily exposed to textbook English, which often focuses on isolated vocabulary, controlled grammar drills, and unnatural dialogues. As a result, learners may learn the meanings of individual words but fail to acquire how those words naturally combine in authentic English usage, such as collocations.

In the case of isolated vocabulary, we can give an example when Indonesian learners say, “I gave big attention to the teacher.” This phrase is not collocationally natural in English. A native-like expression would be “I paid close attention to the teacher.” Here, the learner chooses *gave* and *big* because these combinations are logical in Indonesian language (e.g., *memberi perhatian besar*). Besides, they haven’t been exposed frequently enough to authentic usage like “pay attention.” This may happen because in many Indonesian classrooms, students encounter phrases like *attention*, *give*, and *big* in isolation, not as bundled expressions.

Another example which is related to grammar is when learners say, “Do you want to drink a coffee?” “Yes, I will drink it now.” While grammatically acceptable, the conversation sounds unnatural. Native speakers might say, “Do you want *some* coffee?” “Yes, I’ll *have* it now.” In Indonesian language, *minum kopi* (drink coffee) is a standard phrase. However, in English we normally use *have coffee*. In the classroom, teachers often hear the students say, “I am going to do presentation about ...” Here, the use of *do presentation* is not totally wrong, but *give presentation* or *deliver presentation* are more natural collocations in academic English.

The Pedagogical Implications: Understanding the Significance of Collocational Competence in the Indonesian EFL Context

Collocational competence, which refers to a learner’s ability to use words in naturally co-occurring combinations, is increasingly recognized as a vital component of overall language proficiency. Numerous studies have highlighted that EFL learners who struggle with collocations often produce awkward, unidiomatic, or even incorrect language, especially in writing and speaking. In the Indonesian EFL context, the issue is more pronounced due to the structural and lexical differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia, leading to frequent instances of collocational errors.

The findings of this research, drawn from a synthesis of various empirical studies, indicate that Indonesian learners of English frequently misuse both lexical collocations (e.g., *make a homework* instead of *do homework*) and grammatical collocations (e.g., *interested to* instead of *interested in*). These errors are not trivial; they often result in communication breakdowns or at least reduce the fluency and naturalness of the learners’ output. From a pedagogical perspective, these persistent collocational problems suggest a gap in the current English language teaching (ELT) practices in Indonesia, especially in terms of vocabulary instruction and grammar integration.

Many Indonesian learners often depend on direct translations from their first language (L1), which do not encompass the collocational norms found in English. For instance, the term strong rain is logical and grammatically accurate from an Indonesian perspective (*hujan deras*), yet in English, the appropriate collocation is *heavy rain*. This type of mistake indicates that learners may not recognize the limited collocability of specific lexical items in English, a difficulty that is frequently underestimated in conventional English Language Teaching (ELT) environments.

Moreover, the prevalence of grammatical collocation mistakes, such as incorrect verb-preposition pairings (for example, *explain me* instead of *explain to me*), points to an insufficient emphasis on established grammatical patterns during teaching. Traditionally, grammar instruction in Indonesian classrooms has

emphasized rule-based methods, frequently isolating grammar from the application of vocabulary. As a result, students may memorize grammatical structures in one context and vocabulary in a different one, without comprehending how these components interact in genuine communication. This disjointed approach results in collocational errors in both written and spoken forms of language.

These observations highlight the necessity for enhanced instruction focused on collocation within English classrooms throughout Indonesia. Teachers are required to transcend conventional vocabulary lists and grammar exercises to assist students in internalizing the natural combinations of words in authentic English usage. Learners must be exposed not only to individual words but also to multi-word units and language chunks that frequently and predictably appear in native speaker discourse. In essence, teaching should emphasize lexico-grammatical awareness—the comprehension of how vocabulary and grammar interact.

Furthermore, collocational competence holds particular significance for learners who are preparing for academic or professional communication, such as writing essays, delivering presentations, or engaging in interviews. In these critical contexts, the failure to utilize appropriate collocations can compromise the credibility of the speaker or writer.

For example, expressions like “*do a research*” or “*discuss about the topic*”, both of which are common mistakes among Indonesian learners, may be perceived as minor by local standards but are readily apparent to proficient speakers and could diminish the communicative effectiveness of the message.

To effectively tackle these challenges, it is essential that pedagogical intervention starts with raising teacher awareness. Numerous Indonesian EFL teachers may not be fully aware of the collocational norms in English or may lack adequate training in teaching these norms. Professional development workshops and teacher education programs ought to incorporate modules focused on collocation theory, its various types, and practical strategies for the classroom. Furthermore, teachers should be motivated to utilize corpus-based resources and collocation dictionaries, which offer authentic and frequently used word combinations that are typically absent from standard textbooks.

Pedagogical Implications: Practical Classroom Strategies for Teaching Collocations Effectively

In order to address the recurring issues of collocational errors among Indonesian EFL learners, English instructors need to adopt systematic, explicit, and communicative approaches to teaching collocations. While some collocations may be acquired through repeated exposure, research indicates that for EFL learners, especially those in input-poor environments like many Indonesian classrooms, explicit instruction is essential to raise awareness and improve correct usage. This educational approach is in accordance with the contributions of Michael Lewis, who proposed the Lexical Approach, stressing the significance of instructing multi-word units or lexical chunks as a fundamental aspect of language proficiency. Additionally, it corresponds with extensive research on explicit vocabulary teaching in EFL settings, which underscores the advantages of intentional, concentrated practice for enhancing collocational competence.

Here are several effective classroom strategies for improving students' collocational competence, based on applied linguistics research and real-world teaching practices:

1. Integrating Collocations into Vocabulary Teaching

Instead of teaching vocabulary separately, teachers can introduce lexical items as part of collocational pairs or chunks. For example, instead of teaching the word *decision*, teachers teach the chunk *make a decision* as a phrase. Likewise, when introducing *apology*, teach *make an apology*, *offer an apology*, and *a sincere apology* as a full collocation.

This method is in line with the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) that emphasizes teaching “chunks” or well-completed word combinations. Such an approach mirrors native-speaker processing and helps EFL learners produce language more fluently and naturally.

Example of procedure for learning collocations through cloze exercise can be presented below:

Objective:

Students will identify, understand, and use common collocations in context by completing cloze activities and engaging in follow-up discussion.

Focus: Lexical Collocations (e.g., verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + noun)

Preparation made by teacher:

a. Selecting Target Vocabulary:

Choose 5–10 high-frequency base words that commonly appear in collocations (e.g., make, take, strong, heavy, do, give).

b. Creating Collocation List:

For each word, provide a list of correct collocations. Example:

make: make a mistake, make a decision, make an effort

take: take a break, take a risk, take responsibility

c. Developing Cloze Sentences:

Write 8–10 sentences with blanks where the collocation should appear. Ensure that the context helps signal the correct word combination. Example:

I do not _____ a mistake this time.

You should _____ a break after three hours of studying.

She _____ a decision to leave earlier.

d. Creating a Word Bank (Optional):

Include the correct collocational verbs/adjectives in a word bank, or providing them as multiple-choice options for each blank.

In-Class Procedure (40–60 minutes):

Step 1: Introduction to Collocations (10 minutes)

Briefly explain what collocations are, using simple definitions and examples.

E.g., “Some words in English naturally go together. We say ‘make a mistake’ but not ‘do a mistake’.” Then, give examples from students’ L1 (Indonesian language) and English to contrast differences.

Step 2: Guided Practice – Vocabulary List Review (10–15 minutes)

Distribute the vocabulary list with sample collocations. Afterwards, review the list with the class.

Ask students to guess the meanings of some expressions or give example sentences orally.

Optionally, use visuals or short context sentences to help them remember the expressions.

Step 3: Cloze Activity (15–20 minutes)

Distribute the cloze activity worksheet. Then, tell students to read each sentence and choose the most suitable collocation from the word bank or choices provided. Allow pair work or individual work based on classroom setup.

Example Items:

He needs to _____ a decision soon.

- a. do
- b. make
- c. take

After working all day, I just wanted to _____ a break.

Step 4: Review & Feedback (10–15 minutes)

Check answers together with the class, and ask for volunteers to explain why certain answers are correct. Then, highlight incorrect options and explain why they do not work.

Optional Extension:

Ask students to write 3–5 sentences using different collocations from the list, or ask them to create short dialogues using at least 3 target collocations.

Materials Needed:

Printed vocabulary lists, cloze worksheets, whiteboard or projector for examples.

Assessment & Follow-Up:

Collect the worksheets to assess understanding. In the next lesson, conduct a short quiz or recycling task where students match base words with correct collocates from memory. Reuse the same collocations in speaking or writing activities to reinforce retention.

2. Raising Awareness Through Consciousness-Raising Activities

Learners must become aware of what collocations are and how they function. Consciousness-raising activities involve highlighting common collocations in reading texts, having students underline collocational phrases, and comparing natural and unnatural combinations (e.g., *strong rain* vs. *heavy rain*).

Example of procedure for identifying and exploring collocations in context activity in the classroom:

Objective:

Students will identify verb–noun and adjective–noun collocations in a short text, classify them by type, and use a collocation dictionary to explore alternative combinations.

Target Skills:

Collocational awareness, vocabulary development, dictionary/research skills, critical thinking

Preparation made by teacher:

- a. Selecting or writing a short paragraph (100–150 words):

Choose or write a paragraph relevant to the students' level and interests. It should include at least 5–10 natural collocations, particularly verb–noun and adjective–noun types.

Example paragraph:

During the storm, residents made a desperate attempt to stay safe. Emergency services issued a severe warning about the approaching danger. Many people took shelter and followed the official instructions carefully. The heavy rain caused damage to several houses, and power lines suffered a major breakdown.

- b. Preparing a task sheet:

Divide the worksheet into three parts:

Part A: Read and underline collocations.

Part B: Classify the collocations by type (verb–noun / adjective–noun).

Part C: Use a collocation dictionary to find two alternative collocations for each noun headword.

- c. Preparing collocation dictionary tools (Optional):

If technology is available, prepare a list of websites/apps:

Oxford Collocations Dictionary (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>)

JustTheWord (<http://www.just-the-word.com>) COCA (<https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>) or <https://www.freecollocation.com/>

In-Class Procedure (40–60 minutes):

Step 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

Briefly review what collocations are (especially verb–noun and adjective–noun combinations). Then, give simple examples and contrast correct vs. incorrect combinations, such as *fast train* vs *quick train**

Step 2: Reading the paragraph (approximately 5 minutes)

Distribute the selected paragraph and have students read silently. Next, Ask them to underline or highlight all two-word expressions that seem to collocate naturally.

Step 3: Identify and Classify Collocations (10–15 minutes)

Tell the students to list the collocations they find, and label each collocation based on the part of speech. For example, *make an attempt* (verb-noun), *heavy rain* (adjective-noun), *issue a warning* (verb-noun), *severe warning* (adjective-noun)

Step 4: Dictionary Work – Finding Alternatives (15–20 minutes)

In pairs or small groups, students choose 3–5 nouns from the collocations they listed. They look up alternative verbs or adjectives that collocate with those nouns, e.g. warning *issue a warning*, *give a warning*, *deliver a warning*; rain *heavy rain*, *torrential rain*, *constant rain*. Next, students write down their findings and compare them with classmates.

Step 5: Class Sharing & Discussion (10 minutes)

Invite a few groups to share examples of new collocations they found, then discuss which collocations that surprised them, and how the context helped them guess the collocation.

Materials Needed:

Printed paragraph and worksheet, access to dictionaries (print or digital), whiteboard/markers for class review.

Assessment and Follow Up:

Collect students' collocation tables for informal assessment. For homework, ask students to write a short paragraph using at least 3 new collocations they discovered. Reinforce these collocations in the next lesson through writing or speaking activities.

3. Designing Focused Collocation Practice Exercises

Collocational competence improves when learners practice using collocations in controlled and semi-controlled exercises before applying them freely in writing or speaking.

Example of procedure for designing focused collocation practice exercises in context activity in the classroom:

Objective:

Students will develop and extend English collocations into longer, meaningful phrases using a scaffolded technique that promotes awareness of word partnerships and syntactic structure.

Target Collocation Types:

Verb–noun, adjective–noun, noun–noun, adverb–verb, and other multi-word collocations.

Preparation made by teacher:

a. Selecting base words for collocations:

Prepare 5–8 common verbs or adjectives that frequently appear in collocations, such as: *take, make, do, give, have* (verb) and *strong, happy, serious, deep* (adjective).

b. Preparing a Worksheet or Board Template:

Create a vertical ladder template with 4–5 rungs (levels) where students can build upon a base word. Each level should allow space for the phrase to grow by one or more words. Example:

Level 1: *take*

Level 2: *take a break*

Level 3: *take a short break*

Level 4: *take a short break after lunch*

Level 5: *take a short break after lunch that day*

Optional: Provide example ladders to model the task and help lower-proficiency students.

In-Class Procedure (40–60 minutes)

Step 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

Explain the concept of collocation ladders: starting from a base word and gradually expanding it by adding natural collocates and phrases. Show a model on the whiteboard: *make* → *make a decision* → *make a difficult decision* → *make a difficult decision at work*.

Step 2: Guided Modelling (5-10 minutes)

Do one example together as a class. Ask for student input: “What can we add after ‘give’?” → *give advice*, then *give useful advice*, etc. Emphasize natural-sounding phrases based on real usage, not just grammatical correctness.

Step 3: Pair/Group Activity (15-20 minutes)

Divide students into pairs or small groups. Then, distribute base collocations or allow students to choose from the prepared list. Each group completes 3–5 collocation ladders, gradually building phrases from the base word. Encourage the students to use dictionaries or online collocation tools to find appropriate combinations.

Step 4: Sharing and Feedback (10-15 minutes)

Invite groups to present their best or most interesting collocation ladders. Write a few on the whiteboard and discuss: Which ones sound most natural? Are there any combinations that don’t sound right? Why? How could they be used in full sentences?

Materials Needed:

Printed worksheet or handout with ladder templates, access to dictionaries (print or online: e.g. <https://www.freecollocation.com/>), Whiteboard/LCD projector for modelling.

Assessment and Follow Up:

Review students’ collocation ladders to check for appropriateness and naturalness. Provide oral or written feedback during class. For the follow up, ask students to choose 3 collocation ladders they created and use each in a complete, contextually appropriate sentence. Alternatively, students can write a short paragraph or dialogue using at least 5 collocations from their ladders.

Effectively integrating collocation instruction requires a strategic, progressive, and multi-skill approach. Teachers should enhance their instruction, recycle essential phrases, distinguish activities, and help their students in achieving autonomy. Specifically for Indonesian EFL learners, focusing on L1 transfer, providing frequent input, and encouraging productive practice will greatly improve their lexical accuracy, fluency, and communicative confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the nature of collocation competence among Indonesian EFL learners by synthesizing relevant findings from previous empirical and theoretical literature. Based on the understanding that collocation is an important

aspect of vocabulary and fluency, this descriptive literature study examines the types of collocation errors commonly made by Indonesian language learners, the underlying causes of these errors, and their pedagogical implications for language teaching and learning in Indonesia.

The results of the study indicate that collocation competence remains a significant challenge for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia, mainly due to limited authentic exposure to English and the influence of L1 (Indonesian) interference. Two main types of errors were identified: lexical collocation errors, which often originate from direct translation or overgeneralization; and grammatical collocation errors, which are usually caused by structural differences between English and Indonesian or learners' misunderstanding of verb-preposition or adjective-preposition patterns.

Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications emerge. Language educators in Indonesia are encouraged to explicitly integrate collocation-focused instruction into their teaching practices, going beyond mere vocabulary memorization to help students internalize how words function together in authentic contexts. Teaching strategies such as raising awareness of collocations, guided input and output activities, dictionary training, and the use of authentic corpora or texts can significantly increase students' exposure to natural language use. Furthermore, classroom practice should provide opportunities for repeated and contextualized encounters with high-frequency collocations, allowing students to notice, practice, and ultimately produce them with greater accuracy and fluency.

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