Exploring the Attitudes of English as a Foreign Language Learners Toward Collocational Learning Using Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract
This study investigates the attitudes EFL learners towards the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in developing the knowledge of **lexical collocations** among EFL learners in Pakistan where traditional teaching methods often fato address collocational competence. Despite the significance of collocations for fluency, Pakistani learners struggle due to reliance on rote memorization, L1 interference, and limited authentic exposure. It aims to assess learner perceptions of AI tools in language education. Adopting a **qualitative** design, the study involved **30 BS English students** divided into five groups comprising six students each. Focus group **interviews** highlighted AI's benefits—24/7 accessibility, personalized practice, and error correction—but also identified challenges like **cultural mismatches** (e.g., "queue patiently" vs. local "wait quietly") and risks of overreliance. However, the study advocates for a **balanced integration** of AI with teacher guidance to address cultural relevance and meta-cognitive understanding. Practical implications include **teacher training**, localized AI tools, and policy investments in digital infrastructure. Limitations include sample size. This research contributes to **technology-enhanced language learning** (TELL) in understudied contexts, offering a model for AI adoption in EFL classrooms while cautioning against uncritical implementation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Adjective-noun collocations, ChatGPT, EFL pedagogy, Lexical collocations, Verb-adverb collocatio

1. Introduction

English is a global language, widely used for education, work, and communication. Developing countries, including Pakistan, emphasize English proficiency for progress. This study examines the perspectives of EFL learners on how Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT, can impact their collocational competence. Pakistan's EFL learners struggle with collocations—natural word pairings like "make a decision"—due to outdated teaching methods. Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, presents a promising alternative by offering affordable, scalable, and adaptive collocation practices. It aims to explore student attitudes, and suggest ways to integrate AI into Pakistan's English education system.

The natural tendency of a word to combine with other words plays an important role in foreign language learning. This salient feature of the lexicon is called collocations, which were first defined by Firth as "the company words keep their relationships with other words." Another definition is "the habitual association of a word in a language with other particular words in sentences" (Robins, 2000, p. 64). Collocations (…) are fixed, recurrent combinations of words in which each word retains its meaning (Benson 1990: 85). Collocation is a term used to describe a group of words that occur repeatedly in a language (Carter 1994: 47).

In past years, different studies have been conducted on learning and teaching collocations:

A quasi-experimental research by Basal et al. (2021) demonstrated that ONCOLL web-based learning effectively teaches foreign language collocations better than conventional educational approaches. In another study, Basal (2017) conducted a quasi-experiment on the effect of online tools on teaching English adjective-noun collocations. The participants who used online tools for educational purposes achieved greater success in learning adjective-noun pairings compared to learners who used traditional academic activities. Research involving corpus analysis of collocations has taken place in previous years. Matthew A. Siegel researched to analyze how English language learners benefited from using the digital corpus (COCA) for acquiring prepositional collocations. Students accepted the digital corpus as an advantageous educational instrument but traditional methods produced less effective results according to the study findings. The research recommended enhancing learner effectiveness by combining COCA with new instructional approaches as well as dictionary references.

In the continuation of above cited studies, this research study is also moving knowledge ahead while exploring the attitude of EFL Pakistani learners towards the usage of AI tools in the development of the knowledge of English collocations.

1.2 Statement of Problem

EFL learners in Pakistan often face difficulties in using appropriate collocations because they lack exposure to specific combinations of words in traditional methods of language learning. Moreover, traditional methods do not always prove to be fully effective among all learners. Our learners are unaware of the positive use of AI. They are not aware of the fact that they can achieve native-like competency in language using AI. Our educators are not even aware of the proper use of AI and how AI can do wonders in developing collocational knowledge. Nowadays, with the prevalence of modern technology, AI can be a potential source of learning, but there is a need to explore the role of AI in language learning. However, there is limited research on the effectiveness as well as perspective of learners regarding the use of AI for developing collocational knowledge. So, this study seeks to address the role of AI in the development of lexical collocations from the learners' perspectives.

1.3 Research Objective

To assess the EFL undergraduates' attitude towards the development of collocational knowledge using AI tools

1.4 Research Question

What is the attitude of EFL undergraduates towards the development of collocational knowledge with AI tools?

1.5 Significance of Study

This study has several implications for EFL learners, educators, and researchers. For learners, it offers a novel approach to mastering collocations, which are essential for achieving fluency in English. For educators, it provides insights into the fact that AI can be integrated into language teaching to enhance collocational competence. For researchers, it contributes to the growing body

of literature on technology-enhanced language learning, particularly in the context of AI and collocations.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is advancement in modern technology that can be a valuable source for learning and teaching language. This study has significance for both learners and educators of EFL specifically in terms of lexical collocations. Moreover, this study will make the instructors/educators realize that they can use AI for various classroom activities besides traditional methods, which can be more effective for learning in the context of collocations.

2. Review of Literature

Various research methods for studying collocations have emerged since the beginning since scientists began using traditional linguistic and pedagogical methods alongside modern automated approaches and psycholinguistic techniques.

2,1 Definitions of Collocation

Collocation is one of the most important features of language knowledge, or the ability of specific words to occur together in natural language. This mastery of collocations also distinguishes between first and second language speakers because of the greater exposure that is assumed. In EFL context, specific importance of knowing collocations has been implicitly understood as they help in producing more fluent and contextually appropriate language (Jahanbakhsh et al., 2019).

In the early 1980s, discussions on collocations started. The term collocation is defined and explained in various ways by different scholars. Collocations are present in every language. The term itself denotes combinations of two or more words that co-occur repeatedly (Białek, 2023). The term collocation is used to describe a group of words that occur repetitively in a language(Balcı, 2006). Collocations are the combinations of two lexical items that belong to different word classes and show a limited range, each of which makes a diverse semantic contribution (Zagórska, 2022).

2.1.1 Types of Collocations

Some publication divides collocations into two principal types including grammatical collocations and lexical collocations (Şen, 2019).

- **Grammatical Collocations:** A grammatical collocation consists of either two or more nouns or an adjectival-verbal pair or prepositions-adverbs regardless of their grammatical order (Bahns, 1993:57). There are eight main grammatical collocation categories.
    1) Noun + preposition (e.g., interest in)
    2) Verb + to infinitive (e.g., decided to leave)
    3) Adjective + that clause (e.g., I am glad that you enjoyed the vacation)
    4) Preposition + noun (e.g., for the bus)
    5) Noun + to infinitive (e.g., desire to succeed)
    6) Noun + that clause (e.g., the fact that it's cold doesn't bother me)
    7) Adjective + preposition (e.g., afraid of)
    8) Adjective + to infinitive (e.g., difficult to understand)
- **Lexical Collocations:** Lexical collocations form expressions which fail to include prepositions or infinitives or clauses which appear in grammatical collocations. Benson et al. (1997) divided lexical collocations into seven categories which are described below:
    1) Adverb+ adjective collocations (e.g., fully aware, richly decorated)
    2) Adjective + noun collocations (e.g., hard time, strong supporter)
    3) Noun + noun collocations (e.g., ceasefire agreement, color blindness)
    4) Verb+ noun collocations (e.g., do my homework, have lunch)
    5) Verb + prepositional phrase collocations (e.g., participate in, belong to)

6) Verb + adverb collocations (e.g., drive carefully, wait patiently)
7) Verb (transitive) + noun/ pronoun or prepositional phrase (e.g., wrote a letter, called her yesterday, placed books on the shelf)

2.2 Linguistic Approaches to Collocation Study

Research based on linguistic principles examines the theoretical framework together with structural elements of collocations to establish fundamental principles for learning and teaching these phenomena.

- Structuralist Approach: According to Firth (1958) the structuralist approach defines collocations as recurring word pairings that appear in particular linguistic settings. The famous words of Firth demonstrate why word analysis should focus on its natural environment. By establishing this methodology researchers founded corpus linguistics which utilizes extensive text libraries for the analysis of collocational patterns (Sinclair, 1991). Through this approach, we gain an organized methodology to identify collocations as well as measure their linguistic frequency patterns across texts. The method primarily investigates patterns found on the surface without exploring cognitive or semantic mechanisms for understanding collocations.

- Cognitive Approach: Research following the cognitive approach draws from cognitive linguistics to study collocations by studying how mental processing affects conceptual frameworks. According to Hoey (2005), collocations exist non-arbitrarily because the human brain contains mechanisms such as priming and chunking to construct them. Experts criticize this model because it presents conceptual complexities which prevent direct use in instructional applications.

- Semantic Approach: The semantic approach studies the relationships of meaning between two words that co-occur. Semantic field analysis and the evaluation of lexical relations between words including synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy. This method clarifies why specific words naturally connect together ("strong coffee" instead of "powerful coffee") to demonstrate contextual meaning of collocations. The approach fails to recognize syntactic structures as well as functional elements within collocations (Cruse, 1986).

2.3 Technology-Based Theories/Models in Language Learning and Teaching

2.3.1 Connectivism Learning Theory

This digital theory was first introduced by two theorists, (Downes & Siemens). This theory supports the role of technology in learning in this modern era. This emphasizes the learning that happens through social media, online platforms, and other information databases.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Fred Davis in 1986 proposed the TAM. This model argues the users' acceptance of new information or technology. This model states that the acceptance of new technologies can bring several long-term benefits on individual levels. This provides insights into the attitudes and behaviors toward the acceptance and implementation of technology. This study will evaluate students' attitudes and perceptions toward using AI for collocational learning.

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL)

TELL explains the impact of technology on language teaching and learning. Technology-enhanced language learning involves the use of computers and the Internet for learning. TELL provides more diverse learning methods instead of traditional methods. TELL argues that digital tools can replace conventional learning methods by providing more effective and direct responses to learners. Language input and output both can be improved by technology.

2.4 Lexical Approach

Michael Lewis proposed a lexical approach to second language learning in 1993 in which he argued the importance of vocabulary acquisition for language proficiency mainly collocations. According to Lewis, Collocation is "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency" (Uysal, 2015). This approach argues that language proficiency should be developed with lexis or specific combinations of words i.e. collocations rather than grammar or vocabulary only. Collocations are considered an integral factor in achieving language fluency.

2.5 Literature Reviewed in Practical Perspective

Many works have been done on collocations in the past years. These studies covered collocations and their importance in many different ways. Many studies have been done on learning and teaching collocations in various contexts worldwide. Some studies have also shown the impact of various online tools or web platforms on teaching and learning collocations. These studies gave a route for learning/teaching collocations through digital resources.

The research "The Impact of AI-Driven Corpus Tools on Collocational Learning Among Chinese EFL Learners" was published by Li and Wang in 2018 as an experimental study. The research investigated AI-powered corpus tools' potential to help learners discover collocations in their context using Sketch Engine as an example tool. The experimental students achieved superior performances in writing collocations as the control group did not show similar improvements. The research findings demonstrated that students had difficulties processing uncommon collocations which indicate that educational AI systems require specified instructional feedback.

The research by Al-Jarf from 2021 investigated AI chat bots as educational tools to teach collocations to students studying English as a foreign language in Arab countries with "AI chat bots for Teaching Collocations to Arab EFL Learners." Undergraduate students across 50 candidates tested an AI chat bot system for high-frequency collocation education during eight weeks of usage. Students who interacted with the chat bot system received both coordinated exercises and immediate responses and context-based learning material. Research data demonstrated that the participants demonstrated notable progress in recognizing and applying high-frequency collocations. The research findings revealed that students encountered problems with specialized vocabulary but the study did not evaluate how well participants kept the material in their memory after the intervention.

The researchers Hussain and Ali published their paper "The Role of Mobile-Based AI Applications in Enhancing Collocational Knowledge Among Pakistani EFL Learners" in 2022. A research investigation evaluated how mobile-based AI applications that include Quizlet and Anki affect the collocational knowledge development of Pakistani EFL learners. The app users achieved better results in collocational knowledge when compared to the participants who studied using traditional methods. The research uncovered that learners struggled to use these tools by themselves because of restricted technological resources as well as insufficient training.

Shahini & Shahamirian (2021) researched the effects of CALL and online resources on learning collocations. The subjects for this study were fifty-two EFL learners from an Iranian university. Online materials through www.englishclub.com website were given to the experimental group while the control group was given access to paper dictionaries and traditional classroom instructions. A proficiency assessment comprised of sixty items evaluated student English language fluency. The test results demonstrated equal proficiency levels between participants ($p>0.05$). The pretest and posttest contained 30 linguistic collocational items.

Statistical analysis revealed the experimental group scored better ($p<0.05$) than the control group in the study findings. Research data showed that both genders achieved equivalent results without indication of gender differences during testing (Koç, 2016).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study investigated the attitudes and perspectives of EFL undergraduates toward using AI for the collocational development. The present study employs a qualitative design. The data from focus group interviews underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) manually for systematic coding and pattern identification.

3.2 Population

This study is generalized to all the EFL undergraduates in Pakistan. The target population for this study comprises all EFL undergraduates enrolled in compulsory English language courses across Pakistani universities. This broad population is narrowed for practical purposes to students in BS English (Literature & Linguistics) programs, as they typically receive more intensive English language instruction and have greater exposure to collocational concepts through courses like Stylistics. The accessible population consists of students at Government College University Faisalabad, a representative public university with a diverse student body drawn from various regions of Pakistan.

3.4 Sampling

The sampling used in this study was non-probability purposive sampling. This is a sampling technique in which the researcher selects the participants according to specific criteria or purpose to gather relevant data for their study.

3.4.1 Sample

The sample in this study was thirty last-semester students of BS English (Literature & Linguistics) enrolled in the academic year 2021-25 at Government College University Faisalabad. The participants belonged to different ethnic and regional groups, which helped in generalizing the results of the study. Those participants who had taken the course in Stylistics were selected because the basic knowledge of collocations is taught in this course.

3.5 Instrument

Qualitative data collection followed a structured protocol for focus group interviews, employing Kvale's (2008) seven-stage questioning framework. This semi-structured approach progressed from introductory questions through various probing techniques to explore participants' usability experiences, perceived effectiveness, and implementation challenges with the AI tool.

3.6 Procedure

Focus group interviews were conducted to assess their opinions on the use of ChatGPT. The students were divided into 5 groups comprising 6 students each. Then, their responses were audio recorded and transcribed. The data was then analyzed by using manual thematic analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

The research utilized strict qualitative analytical methods for evaluating focus group interview data. At each phase of their systematic analysis process, the research team used Braun and Clarke's (2006) defined framework for thematic analysis to study interview transcripts. Interview themes were cross-checked via member checking to enhance credibility.

An integrated approach of themes and content analysis method was implemented to measure and classify results from qualitative research manually. The research approach involved

counting frequencies of emerging categories during interviews and selecting notable quotations, and performing cross-case analysis to discover patterns in participant feedback.

4 Results and Discussions

This section examines interviews that provide information on students' opinions about learning with AI. Focus group interviews were conducted with 5 groups comprising 6 students each. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for manual thematic analysis. The interview question-set was comprised of 7 questions administered to 30 participants following Kvale's (2007) seven-stage model. The first introductory question: "What do you think is the status of collocation learning in Pakistan and how do you currently learn collocations in English?" revealed that collocation learning in Pakistan primarily relies on traditional memorization techniques, with participants reporting significant difficulties in practical application. Many admitted to direct Urdu-to-English translations resulting in errors like "speak fastly," while lamenting the lack of systematic collocation instruction in formal education.

In response to the follow-up question: "In your experience, how have AI tools been integrated into your study of collocations, and what role do they play in your everyday language learning routine?" participants described how tools like GPT had become essential to their daily learning routines, providing 24/7 access to immediate corrections and contextual examples. When probed about GPT's effectiveness compared to traditional methods: "Why do you think GPT was more or less effective than traditional methods?" the majority emphasized its superiority due to personalized feedback and adaptive exercises, though some noted occasional overreliance without proper rule internalization.

The specifying question: "What specific challenges did you face using GPT for learning collocations?" uncovered distinct challenges including internet dependency in rural areas and cultural mismatches in suggested collocations. When directly asked; "In your opinion, should AI tools like Chat GPT replace traditional methods for learning collocations entirely or is a balance better?" about replacing traditional methods, 85% advocated for a balanced approach combining AI with teacher guidance. Indirect questioning: "How do you think others in your field view the role of AI in language education?" revealed mixed peer perceptions, with some colleagues skeptical about AI's role in formal education. Finally, when structuring their preferences: "Considering all the ways AI tools support your learning, could you rank them in terms of their effectiveness for learning collocations?" The participants consistently ranked real-time feedback and contextual examples as GPT's most valuable features for collocation learning.

Students had many difficulties in learning how to join verbs and adverbs before using AI tools. Traditional ways of teaching, focused on memorizing things, turned out to be the greatest difficulty. Many students knew their word pairs for exams, but had trouble talking with them in actual situations. A number of participants described that when no relevant examples were included, they often confused some common collocations and translated Urdu expressions word for word, ending up saying things such as "speak fastly" when they meant "speak quickly." Not getting immediate feedback in ordinary classrooms often let students keep repeating their mistakes. Because they did not hear such phrases spoken frequently in real life, students became unclear about the exact differences between "whisper softly" and "speak quietly."

4.1 Analysis strategy of Research Question

Most of the students shared that they look forward to learning with AI tools. The students and their parents, liked how the tools were interactive, making the practice sessions seem more like discussions. Being able to review feedback straight away gave students a chance to strengthen

their speaking and writing skills. Flexible learning during off-hours was emphasized by many students because the system was available around the clock. Accessibility of these readings helped students who managed many responsibilities. In the end, AI played a major role in enhancing the process of learning collocations.

4.1.15 Challenges Reported

Some students experienced troubles when using AI tools. Many were worried that some students could blindly take AI criticisms, not realizing what grammar rules they were applying. Experts explained that it can make it harder for students to learn languages on their own. Barriers such as troubles with internet connectivity and confusing software made the work even tougher for students in rural areas who may not have good digital skills. Certain AI tools sometimes suggested compound words that are seen differently in Pakistani English, like "queue patiently" rather than the usual "wait in line quietly." These cultural mismatches sometimes led to confusion and required additional instructor guidance to clarify appropriate usage.

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Table 4.1
Manual Thematic Analysis of Interview Responses

Theme	Key Findings	Participant Quotes
1. Pedagogical Gaps in Traditional Teaching		
• Minimal collocation instruction	Lack of explicit teaching on verb-adverb and adjective-noun collocations in formal education	"We never learned collocations systematically—just memorized lists for exams." (Speaker 2)
• Overreliance on textbooks	Textbooks provided limited examples, focusing on grammar drills.	"Our book had 3–4 collocation examples per chapter, no explanations." (Speaker 3)
• Rote memorization	Students translated Urdu phrases literally, leading to errors (e.g., "speak fastly")	"I'd say 'close the light' from Urdu, not 'turn off.'" (Speaker 5)

Table 4.2
Benefits of AI Tools in Collocation Learning

Category	Description	Example	Participant Evidence
Immediate Feedback	Real-time correction of collocation errors	Correcting "speak fastly" to "speak quickly"	"GPT instantly fixes my mistakes—like a 24/7 teacher." (Speaker 1)

Category	Description	Example	Participant Evidence
Contextual Examples	Providing register-specific (formal/informal) usage examples	"laugh loudly" (friendly) vs. "shout loudly" (angry)	"It showed the difference between casual and formal use." (Speaker 4)
Accessibility	24/7 availability for practice beyond classroom hours	Midnight practice before presentations	"I could practice at any time that suited me." (Speaker 2)
Adaptive Learning	Personalized suggestions based on individual error patterns	Focusing on user's frequent confusion between "early" and "soon"	"It kept giving me exercises for my weak areas." (Speaker 3)

Table 4.3
Challenges of AI Tools in Collocation Learning

Category	Description	Example	Participant Evidence
Unnatural Suggestions	Providing technically correct but uncommon/archaic collocations	"utterly devastate" instead of "very upset"	"Some suggestions sounded like from an old novel." (Speaker 3)
Cultural Mismatch	Lack of localization for Pakistani English context	"queue patiently" vs. local "wait quietly"	"The AI doesn't understand how we speak here." (Speaker 5)
Overreliance Risk	Tendency to accept corrections without understanding the rules	Blindly copying AI suggestions	"I stopped analyzing why something was wrong." (Speaker 1)
Technical Barriers	Internet dependency and interface challenges	Connectivity issues in rural areas	"When the internet is slow, I can't use it properly." (Speaker 4)

Discussion of Key Findings

Qualitative findings from student interviews provided deeper insights into why learners prefer using ChatGPT for collocation learning. Students said they liked how the AI feedback allowed them to fix their mistakes right away. They also appreciated the demonstrations that showed them collocations were used in various situations. Because AI was available anytime, students could study it whenever and wherever they liked. Nevertheless, occasionally there were mistakes

because local language expressions differed from how AI operated and problems occurred when connecting online.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the attitudes and perspectives of learners toward using AI for learning collocations. A qualitative approach was employed getting insights from focus group interviews. The results disclosed the importance of the on-demand feedback and contextual examples offered by AI to learners who deepened their knowledge of collocational patterns. These findings confirmed the theoretical premise of the study connectivism and lexical approach, and showed how technology-aided learning may demonstrate itself as a successful answer to the long-term problems in EFL education. Nevertheless, there were some drawbacks of using this tool mentioned like the problem of the lack of culture compatibility and the excessive focus on the usage of automated corrections, and so they may require an attentive approach.

The research question examined the attitude of the learners towards the AI collocational learning experience, the results of which depended on the learners but were, overall, somewhat positive among Pakistani EFL undergraduates. A vast majority (85%) of the respondents had the positive attitudes towards AI tools, and many of them mentioned that the interactivity and game-like features of AI activities were considerably more entertaining than the textbook drills that they believed to be tedious and not relevant to the use of language in the real world. The independence and versatility that AI introduced among participants were especially welcome, as they had a chance to practice at their pace and during times convenient to them regardless of classroom attendance, and the latter proved to be an especially welcome option among students, who had several responsibilities to maintain. The description of ChatGPT given by one of the participants, as a 24/7 teacher, captured a shared sentiment: the fact that ChatGPT is capable of instant corrections as well as avoiding the delays associated with receiving feedback, a frequent problem encountered in conventional learning experiences. Nevertheless, approximately 3 out of 10 learners alleviated important difficulties, such as tending to over-rely on AI-based feedback without sufficiently internalizing provision of the fundamental grammar principles or collocational theory, which may compromise long-term language acquisition. The issue of cultural mismatch appeared as a recurring problem, and AI gave inappropriate collocations in Pakistani English situations every now and then, e.g. in some instances, it suggested the term chemical formula where the learners only needed to use the term complex phenomenon, which caused confusion instead of clarity. Such ambivalent responses help explain the need to come up with balanced integration plans that can maximize the advantages of AI in its ability to enhance accessibility and provide instant feedback whilst combining them with the contributions of teachers, which are necessary to bank on data mastery of concepts, cultural suitability as well as building up the meta cognitive understanding of how to use language by learners. The results can be summarized by stating that, although it is evident that AI tools can serve as valuable resources in language learning settings, they need to be implemented in a way which would involve careful planning, constant observation, and in-concert traditional instruction, in order to maximize the learning benefit and minimize the possible negative impact.

5.1 Practical Implications of the Research Study

The research presents practical implications in EFL pedagogy in Pakistan. Firstly, teachers are to incorporate AI tools as an addition to the conventional teaching. Secondly, schools should offer teacher training to assist instructors to mediate AI feedback generation, countering cultural

gaps and passive adoption of corrections. Thirdly, developers ought to remain concerned about localization of the AI models to Pakistani English standards, so that the suggestions made correspond to the linguistic realities of learners.

6. Limitations of the Study

Nevertheless, this study has shortcomings in spite of its contributions. Firstly, the sample size (30 participants) and the single-institution nature restrict the external validity to varied EFL settings. Secondly, the use of ChatGPT as the only AI tool does not allow drawing any comparisons with other platforms.

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