Bridging Theory and Practice: Enhancing Collocational Competence in Pakistan's Secondary EFL Classroom through Teacher Development and Curriculum Reform

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Abstract

This research investigates the importance of lexical collocations in English language teaching at secondary level in Pakistan. In spite of the broad and vast use of English in educational settings, many Pakistani EFL learners lack proficiency due to limited collocational knowledge and inadequate contextual language exposure. The study explores the conception, teaching techniques, and difficulties encountered by secondary school teachers concerning lexical collocations. Making use of a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were performed with 10 public-sector English teachers, and responses were evaluated thematically following Kvale's model. Results show that most teachers have only incomplete or ambiguous knowledge of collocations and depend primarily on rote methods and textbook-based knowledge. Collocations are insufficiently present in the curriculum and assessment frameworks, leading to minimal classroom focus. Teachers also have lack of expertise, training resources, and confidence to teach collocations efficiently and productively. The research focuses on the crucial need for professional growth and development, incorporation of collocations in curriculum, and the development of pertinent instructional resources. It concludes that strengthening and improving collocational proficiency is required for enhancing fluency and ability to communicate in EFL learners, and that pedagogical reforms are crucial to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use in Pakistan's educational context.

1. Introduction

English is one of the top languages spoken in Pakistan at national and international levels and serves as the primary medium of instruction in many schools, particularly at the secondary level. The literacy rate in Pakistan increased to 60% in 2015, with a significant gender gap (70% for males, 49% for females) and higher rates in urban (76%) vs. rural areas (51%). According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 62% of urban students and 45% of rural students receive their education in English-medium schools. The most of the presented curriculum to teach English language in Pakistan contains grammar rules and isolated words with emphasis on the isolated words, and not the real context; as a result, EFL learners face numerous issues while speaking fluently and proficiently. In fact, this type of neglect hinders communication because it established that collocation competence will enhance the writing and speaking ability to the tune of 20-25 percent (Wray, 2002). However, despite the widespread use of English, many learners struggle with fluency due to gaps in lexical competence.

Research indicates that lexical competence plays an important role in the development of

language proficiency. According to Nation (2001), students who develop strong collocational knowledge can enhance their communicative skills by up to 30%. Additionally, studies by Hill (2000) and Lewis (1997) suggest that learners with well-developed collocational competence exhibit a 25–40% individual vocabulary. Despite this, lexical collocations remain underemphasized in traditional language learning, particularly in secondary-level English education in Pakistan. When it comes to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and the English learnings, they are of utter importance to the skills of fluency and neb native competency, and that is because of the existence of collocations, which means habitual combination and pairing of words. However, within the context of Pakistan, specifications for English learning in the form of lessons and tasks does not focus on the usage of the language itself in context, rather learnt in that form of lessons and something to be stored and taught in a lesson.

Most of the teachers in Pakistan at secondary level are unaware of the concept of collocations and those who have knowledge about this are unable to teach them properly due to lack of training. Thus, the level of fluency for secondary level learners is usually low and they often make inappropriate lexical choices, hindering good communication. As a model, EFL learners mismanage collocations and Nesselhauf (2003) also reports that over 60% of EFL learners do. Other subsequent works also support the significance of lexical collocations. For instance, in his studies conducted in 2020, Akhter and Nordin noted that there was a notable significant improvement on students' creative writing skill among secondary school students through the use of collocation-based instruction and in his study of 2022, Akhter and Nordin called on the development of a specific Pakistani English Collocation Dictionary for the support of EFL learners. Chen & Lai, 2023 also supported the above-mentioned findings on data driven learning tools that facilitate retention or accuracy of collected collocations. Taking all of these matters into consideration, one can conclude that the only way for lexical competence to be upgraded is with the help of special teaching. Therefore, it is the intent of this research to emphasize on the importance of lexical collocations of concern when acquiring a second language and applying them to the curriculum of Pakistani secondary education to enhance EFL learners' communicative competence in general.

Fluency and natural language competence are heavily dependent on the appropriate use of word combinations, yet Pakistani learners struggle due to a curriculum that emphasizes grammar and isolated vocabulary rather than contextualized lexical usage and because of the fact that teachers at secondary level in Pakistan do not have a proper knowledge about it. They lack in the strategies and techniques to teach lexical collocations. Additionally, this research will serve as a valuable resource for future research on lexical competence, offering a framework for evaluating language proficiency in other non-native English-speaking contexts. Ultimately, this study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical linguistic knowledge and practical language use, ensuring that Pakistani teachers are better equipped to use English effectively in academic and professional settings.

1.1 Statement of Problem

This research is about the essential part of lexical collocations in the field of English as a foreign language for Pakistani secondary school. An important aspect of this study concerns teacher attitudes toward the lexical collocations' instruction. We know from the teachers that vocabulary development is needed, but we are not instructed well in how to teach explicit collocation. It also has a very significant impact on learners' ability to communicate accurately, fluently and competently. Improvement of English language instruction in Pakistan and making the students skilful to handle the real problems of the communication is required.

1.2 Objectives

Based upon this research, the issues that teachers face in teaching lexical collocations, and the

influence of them on the learning process, and finally the strategies the teachers use to teach lexical collocations will be considered. They will provide these insights such as investigations into how collocational competence is currently being taught in classrooms, as well as to probe the extent to which educators possess the resources and methodologies to effectively teach it.

- ➢ To explore the strategies, use by teachers to teach lexical collocations.
- ➢ To find out the perspective of teachers regarding lexical collocations.
- ➢ To investigate the challenges teachers, face in teaching lexical collocations.

1.3 Research Questions

In pursuit of the research objectives, following research questions need to be asked:
1. What is the attitude of English teachers towards the teaching of lexical collocations at secondary level?

   i. What teaching strategies do teachers use to teach lexical collocations?
   ii. Do teachers perceive lexical collocations as essential for language proficiency?
   iii. What challenges do teachers face in teaching lexical collocations?

2. Review of Literature

The literature reviewed while undertaking the research enquiry at two levels, the theories and models propounded by the linguists and researchers as well as the research investigation relevant to the same field. Both of these two levels have been discussed in detail in the following segments.

2.1 Theoretical Framework
2.1.1 Definitions of Collocation

The term collocation is defined as "Co-occurrence of lexical choices in language that take place more frequently and very often than would happen by chance"(Hornby, 2005: 293). Collocation is a linguistic conception that implies to the probability of particular words to appear concurrently with greater regularity than would be anticipated by chance in natural language use. The habitual juxtaposition of two different words occurring together frequently than to be named as by chance concurrence. Also, "The terminology collocation means combination of two lexical choices each of which makes a different semantic contribution, relates to a distinct word class and represents a limited range." (Gramley and Patzold, 2004: 51). Moreover, by the concept of Lewis "Collocations are those combinations of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency. (Lewis, 1997, p. 44).

Furthermore, Benson and Ilson (1986) stated that ― "In English as in any other language there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions, such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations." Because of the impact of the mother tongue, EFL learners would require more comprehensive understanding of the use of collocations. The difference in the collocations of the mother tongue and the English language are also one of the reasons for the difficulties in attaining proficiency in collocations and learning it. (Thao & Trng, 2021).

This phenomenon is frequently investigated in the context of lexical syntax and semantics, specifically in corpus linguistics and computational linguistics (Demir, 2018). Such combinations may be made from various parts of speech, for example:
- **Adjective + Noun:** "Strong + coffee," "fast food"
- **Verb + Noun:** "catch a cold," "have fun"
- **Verb + Prepositional Phrase:** "turn up," "put on"
- **Adverb + Adjective:** "highly motivated"
(Demir, 2018)

Skrzypek (2009) signifies that the insights of collocation are necessary because one of the standards for knowing a word is being known of the other words with which it keeps company. Shin and Nation (2008), also describe one of the reasons that why teachers and students should put emphasis on learning collocations is that collocations enhance learners' language competency and ensure native-like fluency. Collocations have been classified in two basic categories by Benson and Ilson in 1986. (Morton Benson, 1997)

1. Lexical collocations
2. Grammatical collocations

Furthermore, lexical collocations were categorized into seven main categories by Benson and Ilson (1986), which are as follows:

1. Verb + Noun (creation and activation)
2. Verb + Noun (eradication or cancelation)
3. Noun + Verb
4. Noun + Noun
5. Adjective + Noun
6. Adverb + Adjective
7. Verb + Adverb

2.1.2 LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS:

Lexical collocations include pairing of semantic words like nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs without the use of prepositions or prepositional phrases as in grammatical collocations. Zahedi et al. (2010) have focused on the significance of gaining second language learners' focus to standardize multi-word phrases such like collocations and idioms. Various research studies conducted in the area of lexical collocation (Hsu, (2010) and Mounya, (2010) highlight the impact and efficacy of lexical collocational knowledge on other significant areas of English proficiency altogether. Nakata (2006) illustrated that students have to attain a huge number of collocations to be proficient to generate and comprehend notions naturally, fluently and accurately.

Lexical collocations are of deep importance for the language learner wishing to increase his vocabulary level and fluency in the language. They act as learning aids, helping learners understand how words combine meaningfully such that they may communicate effectively. Few examples are as follows:

Notion	Example 1	Example 2
Verb + Noun	Make a decision	Take a break
Noun + Noun	Full moon	Credit card
Adverb + Adjective	Extremely tired	Deeply saddened
Adjective + Noun	Deep sleep	High speed

Collocations play a very crucial role in establishing native-like fluency and accuracy for EFL learners. "Knowledge of appropriate collocations is part of the native speaker's competence." (McCarthy, 1990, p. 13). Therefore, it is of foremost importance to teach collocations to EFL learners as an essential component of their second language learning. The application of appropriate lexical collocations gives more apparent semantic comprehension of the delivered messages. Therefore, it is significant for language learners to have the knowledge of how lexical items could be used in the appropriate context. (Umair et al., 2023)

According to the point of view of Fillmore (1979), the proficiency of collocations is the foundation of its fluency, Because of the fact that an author with the insights of how to combine words in link with one another have benefit over those who have lack of knowledge.

2.1.3   Structuralist Approach:

Syntactic Structures and Lexical Categories
The structural approach related to collocation emphasizes on the syntactic patterns and relationships between lexical categories. This approach distinguishes collocations into two basic categories: lexical and grammatical. Lexical collocations include combinations such as verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, and adverb + adjective whereas, grammatical collocations comprise of a dominant word, typically a noun, verb, or participle, followed by a preposition or syntactic construction. This difference assists linguists and learners in understanding how language patterns are formed, based on structural principles rather than only frequency-based examinations.
Integration of Grammar and Lexis
A significant feature of the structuralist approach is the combination of grammar and lexis in comprehending syntagmatic relationships. Linguists like Nelson (2000) focuses that sentence structure is linked with lexical patterns through collocations. Words that mostly occur together form expected syntactic structures, adding to their meanings. For example, the verb with the conception "V by -ing" (the verb is followed by the preposition "by" and the "ing" form) considering they reflect the meaning of beginning or completion of action. This combination is an example of the role of structure in establishing the meaning and use of collocations.
Applications and Pedagogical Implications
The structural approach has important and noticeable impacts for language learning, teaching and research. It gives a complete framework for scrutinizing and teaching collocations by focusing on the relationship between lexical classes and their grammatical environments. Researchers like Gitsaki (1999) and Yuanwen Lu (2017) have applied this approach to find out the collocational comprehension of language learners, illustrating its efficacy in educational contexts. By emphasizing on the structural patterns of collocations, this theory gives significant revelations for formulating educational materials that can improve students' fluency and accuracy in both native and foreign language environments.

2.1.3.1 Sinclair's Model

Sinclair provided four levels for examining the limitations of co-occurence in language: collocation, colligation, semantic inclination, and semantic prosody. These classifications help linguists in understanding how words group together to form meaningful language patterns.
1.Collocation
From the point of view of Sinclair, collocation relates to the regular co-existence of words. These collocations are factual and observable in textual data, and their frequency can be rigorously measured using t-scores or MI-scores (Stubbs, 1995). Collocations are essential for understanding the natural patterns of language use, as words tend to form predictable combinations. For instance, the phrase "make a decision" is a common collocation in English.
2.Colligation
While John Firth at first explained colligation as the linkage of syntactic classes, Sinclair defined it as "the co-occurrence of grammatical choices." Hoey (2000) gave a more subtle definition, explaining colligation as the syntactic organization a word takes and where it prefers to occur. For instance, 'accountant' often occurs with a classifier (the wages accountant). This is an instance of a syntactic tendency which reflects the predictable structural environment in which certain words are usually found.

3. Semantic Inclination
Semantic inclination, as Sinclair (1996) says, is the lexical association of frequently co-occurring

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words possessing common semantic features (Stubbs, 1999). These lexical sets are however not like collocations that are conceptual and cannot be observed directly from textual data (Stubbs, 1999). For example, 'genuine feeling' is a typical collocation which is used with action verbs like 'express,' 'convey,' 'show,' 'reveal,' etc. This tendency discloses a recurring semantic motif where "genuine feeling" is linked with acts of communication or expression.

4. Semantic Prosody
Semantic prosody is speaker's attitude towards the subject matter and occurs in the pragmatic level of language (Louw, 1993; Sinclair, 1996; Stubbs, 1999). This is a high level of a language, that has no direct observable value. Sinclair shows the negative semantic prosody of the phrasal verb "set in," which mostly occurs with negative subjects such as "decay," "illness," or "bias," typically proposing a disagreeable circumstance. Stubbs (1996) further classified semantic prosody into three categories: neutral, positive, and negative. The phrase "set in" illustrates negative semantic prosody, as it is generally related with adverse contexts.

2.2 Literature Reviewed in the Practical Perspective
Marie Claude L'Homme's research paper involved extracting Specialized Lexical Combinations (SLCs) from French texts in two distinct fields: aeronautics and philosophy. To begin, terminological units representing various semantic classes were selected from each domain. Subsequently, SLCs containing these terms were extracted from the corpus of texts. For each term, fifteen co-occurrences were selected, with five from each grammatical category: nouns, verbs, and adjectives/adverbs. Finally, the analysis examined whether the co-occurrences of a particular term also combined with multiple semantically related terms. Few research gaps mentioned in this research are the extent or importance of the phenomenon of co-occurrents combining with groups of semantically-related terms has not been quantified in previous research. Furthermore, the model of co-occurrents combining with classes of terms has not been extensively explored using large corpora. Finally, the ability to effectively describe Specialized Lexical Combinations (SLCs) in terms of semantic classes has not been systematically examined across diverse types of specialized corpora, such as those from scientific, technical, or legal domains (MARIE-CLAUDE L'HOMME).

Yan's research investigated common lexical collocation errors in English writing samples produced by 300 non-English major students at Qingdao University of Science and Technology. The study further explored potential causes of these errors by examining prevalent English teaching materials and practices in China. Based on this analysis, the research proposes a novel teaching method to enhance students' collocation skills. This method involves a fill-in-the-blank exercise where students complete passages with appropriate lexical collocations, fostering a deeper understanding of how words naturally co-occur in the English language (Yan, 2010).

Muhammad Imran has focused on Pakistani English learners and his research utilized two corpora – LOCNESS (native speakers) and ICNALE (Pakistani learners) – to investigate lexical patterns (e.g., noun-noun, noun-verb) using POS-tagging and the AntConc software. A quantitative analysis was conducted to compare the collocational richness between the two corpora. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify "miss-collocations" frequently used by non-native learners and conducted a qualitative analysis of the collocational choices made by Pakistani learners. Researchers have used following three softwares to support their research objectives:
1. AntConc software with N-gram tool
2. CLAWS4 part-of-speech tagger
3. Online Oxford Collocations Dictionary

Few research gaps explained as previous research on Pakistani English has primarily focused on broader administrative and macro-level issues, such as the establishment of Pakistani English as a distinct variety. There is a notable lack of research specifically examining the collocational usage and lexical behavior of Pakistani English learners. This gap in research limits our understanding of the

specific linguistic challenges faced by learners within the Pakistani context (Muhammad Imran Shah, 2020).

Demir put his efforts for Turkish English learners and his study compiled a corpus based on 40 research articles published in ELT journals, comprising 20 articles which were written by native English speakers and 20 by non-native Turkish speakers. Lexical collocations within this corpus were categorized into seven categories based on a pre-existing taxonomy. Subsequently, independent samples t-tests were employed to statistically compare the frequency and diversity of lexical collocation usage between the native and non-native writer groups. The researchers have keenly observed the facts using PC-based software program SPSS. This research investigates the differences in the use of lexical collocations between native and non-native writers of English, highlighting the crucial role of collocations in enabling non-native writers to achieve native-like fluency in academic writing. The study explores the relationship between collocation competence and sense of nativeness, investigating how effective use of collocations grants to a more native and colloquial style of writing, eventually impacting readers' point of view of the writer's proficiency (Demir, Lexical collocations in English: a comparative study of native and non-native , 2017).

Ahmad Molavi's research comprises of manually investigating lexical collocations within the transcripts of a selected EFL textbook series. The collocational extent of these selected textbooks was then established using specialized collocational dictionaries. After that, the identified collocations were classified into various categories. Eventually, the frequency of these collocations within the textbook series was observed and compared to their frequency in a reference corpus (OANC) by the use of AntConc concordance software and the Oxford Collocation dictionary. This research explores how textbook writers select and present collocations to the learners, investigating how these choices correspond with outcomes from corpus-based research on effectual collocational teaching. The research further examines how the collocations shown in textbooks are cross-checked with the actual use of collocations by native speakers, as indicated through detailed corpus analysis. The aim of this comparison is to identify potential gaps between textbooks and the data of authentic language use, therefore illustrating more effective collocational teaching methodologies (Ahmad Molavi, 2014).

Hatalari indicated in his research about the most frequent lexical collocation errors were observed in the verb + noun category, followed by adjective + noun combinations. A significant proportion (82%) of the verb + noun errors were classified as "restricted," indicating that the verbs in question typically collocate with a limited set of nouns. Moreover, approximately half (47%) of the verb + noun collocation errors were assigned to intervention from the participants' native language, Turkish, proposing a powerful impact of first language on second language collocational acquisition. More research should explore deeper into the linkage between L1 intervention and features like literal translation and the natural impulsiveness of collocations. Furthermore, exploring the impacts of the usage of authentic texts, rather than only relying on textbooks, for collocation instruction is important. A significant area of attention should be investigating the effect of particularly teaching unpredictable and limited lexical collocations to EFL/ESL learners and translators, as these offer certain challenges in second language acquisition and professional practice. (HATALARI, 2019).

The study examines the strength and frequency of collocations using data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The results show that the most prevalent lexical collocation in the students' works is noun-verb sets. The strength of word associations within these collocations was measured using the Mutual Information (MI) Score analysis, a statistical method that quantifies the co-occurrence of words beyond what would be expected by chance. This research has limited number of students that are considered for their writing skills. This research has certain restrictions. First of all, the sample size, composed of reflective writings from 18 students only, may not be large enough to draw ultimate deductions and may not represent the broader EFL learner population. After that, the study's focus is restricted to lexical collocations, cutting out other categories of collocations and their potential efficacy on other language capabilities. Eventually, the discoveries of this research may not be effortlessly generalizable to other educational contexts or

learner environments, calling out for further research with broader and more diverse illustrations. The vocabulary of lexical collocations is generally higher among learners who are habitual to a wide range of English language resources (Mia Dreina Antira Pujiningtyas, 2023).

The significance of collocations in English language educational environments and learning is explained in this research alongside with its definitions, classifications, and role in boosting language fluency and achieving native-like proficiency. Comprehension of collocations is significant for EFL learners trying to enhance their language skills and attain native-like fluency. Lack in collocational knowledge can cause errors in language production and interfere with fluency as learners put efforts to represent themselves naturally. To properly address this, collocations should be specifically taught and included into all elements of EFL teaching materials, making sure that students are equipped with the essential tools to communicate effectively and accurately in English (Bui, 2021).

For the purpose of achieving competency and fluency similar to that of native speakers, the research addresses the significance of teaching and learning lexical and grammatical collocations in the English language. Collocation is a significant term of English language learning, necessary for attaining accuracy and native-like proficiency. Collocations are defined as the tendency of certain words to occur together frequently. Two major clasifications of collocations are: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. This research put emphasizes on lexical collocations, which consist only of content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Acquiring lexical collocations is significant for generating natural-sounding and idiomatic English phrases and sentences, contributing essentially to every aspect of language proficiency (Yu.Ch.Mehmonova, 2022).

The research focuses at the hurdle's expert German-speaking English language students face when forming verb-noun collocations, what categories of errors they make, and how the student's first language and the collocation's level of limitations affect their capacity to generate collocations. Advanced learners illustrated a prominent error rate of nearly 25% in their production of verb-noun arrangements. Notably, the highest error rates were observed in collocations exhibiting a medium degree of restriction. Furthermore, the learners encountered greater difficulty with combinations that lacked congruence between their native German and English, highlighting the impact of L1 interference on collocation acquisition. This study analyzed data extracted from the German sub-corpus of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), specifically focusing on 32 essays written by advanced German-speaking learners of English. The researchers manually extracted all verb-object-noun combinations from these essays. Subsequently, these combinations were classified based on their degree of restriction, categorized as free combinations, restricted collocations, and idioms (Nesselhauf, 2003).

This article by Yong Ping Wu, Hasliza Abd Halim, and Nur Rasyidah Mohd Nordin entitled "A Systematic Review of Studies on L2 Collocational Knowledge among Non-native English Learners" analyses 115 texts on the issue of collocational knowledge as evidenced by ESL and EFL learners between 2000 and 2020. Primarily conducted across the Asia region, the study establishes issues affecting learners at the university level using verb-noun and lexical collocations, majorly because of scanty knowledge of collocation restrictions and interference from their first language. The authors employed the two-stage study review approach, with a synthesis of general trends and a detailed twenty-six study analysis, herein uncovering lacunae in productive collocation knowledge and usage variances. The results of analysis imply that learners often fail in their lexical choices especially low restriction collocations and stress the importance of the study of collocative patterns and higher variability in collocation employment. The study recommends the use of more diversified participants for the study and the use of better methods for handling these challenges one way (Wu & Halim, 2021).

The research "Lexical Cohesion: Aspects of Collocation Using Halliday and Hasan's Systemic Model

of Cohesion" by Mădălina Cerban investigates lexical cohesion, especially collocation, enclosed by the systemic functional framework formed by Halliday and Hasan. The study explores how lexical cohesion is attained through the link of lexical items that often occur together, granting to the coherence of texts. The research categorizes collocations into three types—ordered set, activity-related, and elaborative collocations individually defined by certain associations between lexical items. The population examined comprises linguistic texts analyzed for lexical patterns. Results highlight the significance of collocations in developing text coherence, highlighting their link with certain registers and the demand for shared knowledge between text producers and readers. This research underlines the role of systemic functional linguistics in considering textual cohesion and advancing language analysis (Cerban, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach by doing thematic analysis of the interviews conducted from the teachers.

3.1 Rationale

Lexical collocations are not just frequent word combinations they are central to language fluency and vocabulary development. The present study will help to investigate and understand how teachers perceive and teach lexical collocations. Moreover, it also aims to find out the difficulties teachers face in teaching lexical collocations to EFL learners at secondary level.

3.2 research Design

It involved semi-structured interviews with 10 experienced English teachers, following Steinar Kvale's (2007) model. Thematic analysis of responses revealed key insights into teacher awareness, strategies, challenges, and training needs regarding collocation instruction. Qualitative findings show how lexical collocations are interpreted and implemented by educators. This approach strengthens the study's reliability and relevance to real-world classroom practices.

Table 3.1: Overall Research Design

Design	Approach	Tool/ Resources	Data Source	Purpose	Expected Outcomes
Interview Design & Collection	Qualitative	Kvale's Model, Audio Recording	10 English Teachers	Capture perception & practices	Transcribed teacher responses
Thematic Analysis	Qualitative	Manual Coding	Manual Transcript	Identify recurring themes	Thematic codes + quotes

3.3 Population
To address the research objectives on lexical collocations the primary data source used was interviews with English language teachers.
3.3.1 Sample size
10 in-service English language teachers at the secondary level.
3.3.2 Sampling Technique
Purposive sampling was used to select qualified teachers with relevant classroom experience.
3.3.3 Inclusion Criteria

- Minimum 5 years of teaching experience in Grades 9–10.
- At least an M.A. in English or a B.Ed. degree.
- Employed in public schools using PTB textbooks.

3.3.4 Demographic Overview:

Variable	Details
Gender	Mixed (6 Female, 4 Male participants)
Age Range	30 to 45 years
Qualification	M.A English (8 participants), B.Ed (6 participants – some held both degrees)
Teaching Experience	Ranged from 5 to 20 years
School Type	Public-sector secondary schools
Location	Urban and semi-urban areas of Punjab

3.4 Interview Modality and Ethics

The conduct of interview was outlined with careful observations including both methodological and ethical factors.

3.4.1 Interview Format:

Semi-structured interviews based on Kvale's (2007) model, lasting 25–35 minutes. All were recorded with participant consent and transcribed for analysis.

3.4.2 Ethical Measures:

Anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were ensured throughout the process.

3.5 Tools and Instruments

To gain a deeper understanding of English language teachers' experiences, beliefs, and challenges regarding the teaching of lexical collocations at the secondary level, a structured qualitative interview process was adopted. The process followed established qualitative research standards, particularly drawing on Steinar Kvale's (2007) model for conducting and analyzing interviews.

Table 3.2: Research Instrument

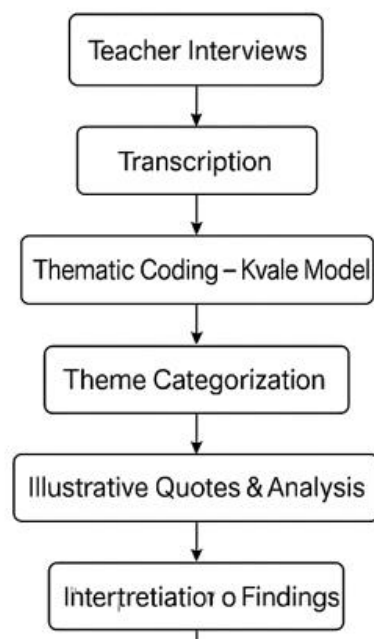| Tool/ Instrument	Purpose
Steinar Kvale Interview Guide	Provides a qualitative framework for designing and analyzing semi-structured interviews. Used for thematic coding, enabling extraction of recurring patterns and insights from teacher responses.

3.6 Qualitative Interview Process

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility in responses while maintaining a consistent line of inquiry across participants.

- **Duration**: Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes.
- **Mode of Delivery**: Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through Google **Meet**, depending on the participant's availability and preference.
- **Interview Guide**: A set of 7 open-ended questions was prepared in advance. These questions were designed to explore teachers' conceptual understanding, teaching practices, encountered challenges, and assessment methods related to collocations.
- **Probing**: During the interviews, probes and follow-up questions were used to elicit richer, more detailed responses, depending on how each teacher responded.

3.7 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Step	Action
Coding	Assign codes to repeating patterns and expressions
Categorizing	Group into broader themes
Interpretation	Analyze teacher attitudes and instructional gaps

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3.9 Flowchart of Research Methodology
3.10 Limitations

While the study produced valuable insights, certain limitations are acknowledged:

- **Limited Sample Size:**
  Interviews with 10 public-sector teachers provide useful perspectives, but may not reflect the diversity of all educational settings across Pakistan.

- **Geographical limitation:**
  The data collected for this study is only from the teachers of the Punjab province and might not precisely reflect the perspectives of all teachers in Pakistan.

- **Contextual Factor:**
  Environment of the schools, teaching contexts and learner demographics might differ significantly, affecting teacher's expertise and point of views.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents findings from the qualitative phase of the study, based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 secondary-level English language teachers from public-sector schools in Punjab. The interviews explored their understanding, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and institutional support regarding the teaching of lexical collocations. Data was analyzed

thematically using Kvale's 7-step model, and the results are discussed under five key themes derived from coded responses.

4.1 Teachers' Understanding of Collocations

The first theme that emerged was a limited or ambiguous understanding of the concept of lexical collocations. While all participants had encountered the term in professional settings mostly during pre-service training or workshops only a few could clearly define or apply it in classroom contexts.

- **Reported Understanding**: Out of 10 participants, 7 expressed partial knowledge, while 3 admitted unfamiliarity with the term beyond vague associations with "phrases" or "word combinations."

- **Illustrative Quote**:

"I've heard about collocations in a training once, but I wouldn't say I'm confident about teaching them. I just focus on vocabulary meanings mostly." (T5, Urban School)

4.2 Teaching Strategies and Practices

The second theme concerned the instructional approaches used by teachers to introduce or reinforce collocations. Most reported relying on rote learning techniques, translation from Urdu to English, and repetition drills.

- **Absence of Explicit Strategies**: None of the participants reported using dedicated instructional materials, collocation-focused worksheets, or chunking strategies within lessons.

- **Textbook Dependency**: Teachers indicated that their lessons heavily followed the structure of the textbook, which did not isolate or emphasize collocations as teachable items.

- **Illustrative Quote**:

"If the word combinations are in the textbook sentences, we use them. But we don't have time to go into much detail—it's mostly about completing the exercises." (T2, Semi-Urban School)

4.3 Challenges in Teaching Collocations

A key set of themes related to the obstacles teachers face when attempting to teach collocations emerged from the interviews. These challenges were categorized into three major subthemes:

a. Lack of Instructional Resources

- Teachers reported that neither textbooks nor teacher guides explicitly identify or explain collocations.

- Supplementary material such as handouts, practice books, or visual aids focused on collocations was reported to be unavailable.

b. Absence in Assessment Criteria

- Collocations are not a part of exam rubrics or official assessment frameworks. Consequently, teachers deprioritize their teaching in favor of exam-relevant content.

- **Illustrative Quote**: "Collocations are never asked in board exams, so we focus on grammar rules and past paper questions." (T7, Urban School)

c. Low Teacher Confidence

- Several participants revealed a fear of teaching collocations incorrectly or being unsure of the right combinations themselves.

- This hesitation stems from limited formal training and a lack of accessible linguistic references during lesson planning.

4.4 Assessment and Feedback Practices
The study also explored whether and how teachers evaluate students' collocational knowledge.

- Sparse Assessment Inclusion: Only 2 out of 10 teachers reported occasionally offering feedback on collocational use in students' writing or speaking.

- Most teachers relied on general vocabulary quizzes, translation tests, or objective grammar-based exams, none of which incorporated multi-word lexical assessment.

- Illustrative Quote: "When we check essays, we look at grammar and spellings mostly. If a student writes a strange word combination, we may correct it, but not always." (T4, Semi-Urban School)

4.5 Training Needs and Institutional Support
The final theme focused on teachers' professional development and support needs.

- **Universal Demand for Training**: All teachers strongly emphasized the need for capacity-building programs, including:

  ➢ Workshops on collocation instruction

  ➢ Sample lesson plans

  ➢ Classroom activities integrating collocations

  ➢ Online or printed reference tools (e.g., collocation dictionaries)

- **Policy-Level Gaps**: Teachers also pointed out the absence of official guidelines from curriculum authorities or textbook boards on how to teach and assess collocations.

- **Illustrative Quote**:

"We really need proper training and practical resources. Otherwise, it's hard to teach something we ourselves are unsure about." (T9, Urban School)

4.6 Discussion:
The lack of intentional pedagogical planning around collocations suggests a curricular invisibility of such elements. Even where collocations appear in textbooks, they are not labeled, explained, or practiced in structured ways, leading teachers to overlook their instructional potential.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion
This study set out to examine the pedagogical handling of lexical collocations by secondary-level English teachers in classroom in Punjab. Through qualitative thematic interviews with English teachers the study provides a multi-dimensional understanding of how collocations are perceived by teachers and taught in actual teaching practices. On the pedagogical front, the qualitative interviews highlighted a consistent lack of teacher training, instructional clarity, and assessment focus on collocations. Most teachers either had a vague understanding of what collocations are or felt underprepared to teach them systematically. The absence of collocational focus in national assessments and curriculum frameworks has further discouraged their inclusion in routine teaching. Consequently, many students may remain unaware of collocational usage despite encountering such expressions in real-world texts or standardized language tests.

5.2 Recommendations
In light of the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders,

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including curriculum designers, textbook authors, teacher educators, school administrators, and language policymakers.

5.2.1 For Curriculum Planners and Policy Makers

1. **Incorporate Collocations into Curriculum Standards**
   National curriculum frameworks should explicitly mention lexical collocations as a learning objective at the secondary level. This will ensure their prioritized inclusion in textbooks, assessments, and teaching objectives.

2. **Align Assessments with Collocational Competence**
   Standardized exams and classroom assessments should be reformed to include collocational usage in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing rubrics. This will prompt teachers to integrate them into daily instruction.

3. **Revise Learning Outcomes**
   Curriculum guidelines must reflect the role of collocations in developing fluency, coherence, and stylistic appropriateness. Bloom's Taxonomy descriptors such as "apply," "analyze," and "create" can be mapped to collocation-based activities.

5.2.3 For Teacher Education and Professional Development

1. **Offer Targeted Training on Collocation Teaching**
   Teacher training programs (pre-service and in-service) must include modules on lexical collocations, including their types, classroom strategies, and assessment methods.

2. **Develop Model Lesson Plans and Toolkits**
   Resource packs should be created and distributed, containing lesson plans, collocation charts, diagnostic tools, and sample assessments.

3. **Encourage Reflective Practice**
   Teachers should be guided to maintain reflective teaching journals or participate in peer review groups to analyze and improve their use of collocations in instruction.

5.3 Final Remarks

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need to bridge the gap between textbook design, teacher competence, and student language outcomes when it comes to lexical collocations. In today's globalized linguistic landscape, fluency is not merely about knowing individual words, but about using them effectively and naturally in context. By reforming instructional materials, empowering teachers, and aligning curriculum with communicative competence, Pakistan's English language education can better equip learners with the lexical tools they need to succeed in academic, professional, and international arenas.

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