An Error Analysis of the Use of Lexical Collocations in the Academic Writing of Libyan EFL University Students

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to explore the difficulties Libyan undergraduate university English major students have in the use of verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations by looking at their performance in free production. Furthermore, twelve verbs and twelve adjectives[1] identified in this research were investigated in depth as part of their combinations. To achieve the main aim, a 250-word academic writing task was used to collect data from fourth-year university students at Tripoli University (the Department of English). The data was analysed using AntConc 3.2.1w (Anthony, 2007). After extracting the learners' collocations, four methods were used to determine and judge the acceptability of learners' collocations in terms of conforming to native-like use. They are: (1) the OCD (2009), (2) the online British National Corpus (3) consultations with two native speakers, and (4) the acceptability-of-collocations survey was used to triangulate the above three methods Findings from the academic writing data reveal that: (1) three broad categories of errors were identified in the erroneously produced verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations in the LLC: (i) grammatical errors, (ii) lexical errors and (iii) errors related to usage; and (2) Furthermore, these categories were classified into sixteen and twelve error types in verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations respectively such as wrong choice of verb, wrong choice of adjective, wrong choice of noun, determiner errors, preposition errors, number errors, wrong word order errors, word form errors, usage category errors, intensifier errors and wrong register errors.

Keywords: verb-noun collocations; adjective-noun collocations; erroneous collocations; acceptable collocations; collocational errors

Introduction

Libyan EFL learners majoring in English generally do not sound like a native speaker when using the language, despite the fact that they have been learning English for about ten years

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[1] The twelve verbs are *do, provide, acquire, gain, enhance, make, offer, take, give, get, have* and *require*. The twelve adjectives are good, *academic, high, higher, modern, current, practical, specific, basic, general, great and special.*

by the time they graduate. One reason for this is that ESL/EFL learners encounter several difficulties in the use of collocations within their speech or writing in English (Fan, 2009, p. 111). For example, the incorrect or inappropriate use of words and expressions in learners' interlanguage, though they are linguistically and pragmatically correct, may still sound 'unnatural' or 'strange' (Mahmoud, 2005, p. 117). According to Selinker (as cited in Ellis, 2008, p.968), the term interlanguage refers to "the systematic knowledge of an L$_2$ which is independent of both these learner's mother tongue and the target language".

Accordingly, collocation is now considered an important aspect of foreign language learning, necessary for knowing how to combine words to make other special meanings and essential for all language use. Lewis (2000) highlights the importance of collocations in language use by proving that both native speakers of a language and successful EFL advanced learners have a high level of "collocational competence – a sufficiently large and significant phrasal mental lexicon" (p. 177). Furthermore, Yang & O'Neill (2009) reported that "[t]his competence plays an important role in helping them use a language fluently, accurately and appropriately" (p. 182).

In the Libyan context, very few teachers take into consideration the importance and value of collocations when planning their English language lessons. Hence, EFL Libyan learners often encounter huge problems in using English lexical collocations. They cannot explain themselves clearly in writing; for example, although perfect grammar might be used, problems concerning lexical choice (i.e. collocational use) may still continue. On this note, Hill (2000) explains that the language produced and used by learners "often sounds awkward and very intermediate" (p. 50). He goes on to argue that "students with good ideas often lose marks because they do not know the four or five most important collocates[2] of a key word that is central to what they are writing about" (p. 50). Thus, collocational violations are "an old problem" and a frequent feature of learners' interlanguage (Hill, 2000, p. 50). The mastery of English collocations is consequently found to be a significant problem encountered by EFL/ESL language learners (Granger, 1998; Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003). As McCarthy (1990) argues, "even very advanced learners often make inappropriate or unacceptable collocations" (p. 13). Language learners in this case often fail to select and combine the lexical items in native-like production and usage (see footnote 2 for definition of native

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[2] A collocate is a word that turns up systematically in close proximity to another word; for example, the word *murder* collocates with the verb *commit* as in *he has committed murder* (for further details, see Sinclair, 1991, p. 170).

speaker) because they are unaware of the collocational patterns and restrictions. This is certainly the case for EFL Libyan learners. Because there are no generalizable collocational rules that govern the construction of these appropriate combinations of words, there is, consequently, a need for EFL learners to use conventions which have to be acquired rather than learned.

This study investigates learners' problems and difficulties in the use of two types of lexical collocation, i.e. verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations, according to Benson, Benson, and Ilson's classification of collocation (1997). Lewis (2000) refers to the verb-noun combination as one of the most important types of lexical collocation. Furthermore, these two types of lexical collocation are the most commonly investigated in the literature (see the reviewed studies below). This includes discussing, in depth, learners' collocational performance in academic written production, since "production data is publicly observable and is presumably reflective of a learner's underlying competence" (Brown, 2000, p. 216). This approach – investigating learners' written production with regard to collocation – is supported by Lewis (1997) who argues that by examining learners' writing, it is possible to show that miscollocation is a frequent source of error. In this vein, errors may be systematic or non-systematic. The assessment of errors in this study will cover both types. According to Corder (1967, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 102) non-systematic errors are mistakes which are "akin to slips of tongue". The speaker in this case is able to recognize the deviant forms. Systematic errors, however, are committed out of ignorance of the grammatical system of the target language. The learner is unaware that (s)he is committing an error and the deviant form has been integrated into his/her interlanguage. Lexical errors (in particular, deviant collocations / misuse of collocations), however, result from the learner's insufficient knowledge of appropriate word use and how words are combined or associated. Since collocation is not determined by logic as is the case with grammar, the learner has to resort to linguistic convention in order to produce acceptable word combinations (Lewis, 1993).

The decision to investigate learners' collocational errors was based on the fact that error analysis has the advantage of providing a better understanding of, and revealing valuable information about the difficulties learners have with this linguistic phenomenon. Thus, in-depth insights can be gained of how language is learned and acquired through examining learners' errors (Brown, 2000, p. 217). Possible explanations for the students' misconstrual of English lexical collocations will be given. This kind of study is important to all people who

are involved in the educational process, e.g., learners, teachers, syllabus designers and coursebook writers. It is also designed to raise Libyan teachers' awareness of the difficulties Libyan learners encounter when using lexical collocations. Various researchers have focused on this method to demonstrate students' difficulties in using English collocations (e.g. Howarth 1998; Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Namvar, Nor, Ibrahim, & Mustafa, 2012). In addition, Bazzaz & Samad (2011) argue that "[c]ollocational knowledge is viewed as a very important issue in writing as it is seen to discriminate (*sic)* native speakers from foreign language learners" (p. 158).

Aim of the Study

The goal of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the competence of EFL university students with regard to their use of verb-noun and adjective-noun lexical collocations in a Libyan context. The aim is as follows:
To identify the types of collocational errors (i.e. errors that occur within phrases which contain collocations) Libyan learners make when producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations in a writing task.

Research Question

The current study aims to answer the following research question**:**

- What types of errors do Libyan learners make when producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations?

Empirical Research on Collocation in an EFL Context

The purpose of this section is to shed light on the relevant research conducted to address EFL learners' use of English lexical collocations in production, with special reference to the Arab world and the Libyan context. It also provides a critical review of the related literature in order to address and highlight the problematic issues constituting the knowledge gap which the current study aims to fill. The reviewed literature enabled me to shape and construct the methodology of this research which tackled all methodological limitations found in the relevant studies.

The reviewed studies below were classified according to their learning context in terms of research on the use of collocations by EFL learners and Arab EFL learners while learning English. My selection of these collocational studies is driven primarily by their relevance to

my study in terms of context; that is, they investigated EFL learners' use of lexical collocations in production, particularly verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. They are divided as follows:

1. Research on the use of collocations by EFL learners, and
2. Research on the use of collocation by Arab EFL learners while learning English.

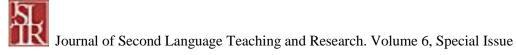**Research on the Use of Collocations by EFL Learners**

There have been a number of interesting studies in recent years focused on the collocational knowledge of EFL learners all around the world; for example, Zarei, 2002; Wang & Shaw, 2008; Darvishi, 2011. Owing to space limitations, I am going to include a review of some studies to show how the current study fills the knowledge gap in the collocational field.

Nesselhauf's study (2003) is considered one of the most comprehensive studies of collocations in learner written English to date (Martelli, 2007, p. 37). She manually investigated the use of verb-noun collocations (for example, take a break) in free-writing by 3rd and 4th year advanced German University students of English. The data were collected from 32 argumentative essays (500 words). Nesselhauf identified and examined various types of mistakes that occurred in the learners' collocations and also investigated the influence of the learners' L_1 on the production of English collocations. In her research, she differentiated between three main types of word combinations: free combinations, e.g. want a car, collocations, e.g. take a picture and idioms, e.g. sweeten the pill. These distinctions were made on the basis of what she called "restricted sense" (p. 225). Various methods were used to judge the acceptability of learners' collocations: a) the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD, 2000) and the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (CCED 1995), b) the British National Corpus (BNC), and c) consultation with two native speakers. The results revealed that "even advanced learners have considerable difficulties in the production of collocations" (p. 237). Regarding collocational errors it was shown that a) nine types of mistakes appeared in the learner corpus. Among these, the wrong choice of verb was the most frequent with 24 occurrences, and b) the greatest proportion of errors appeared in collocations followed by free combinations and idioms, i.e. 79%, 23%, and 23% respectively. In addition, "the learners' L_1 turns out to have a degree of influence that goes far beyond that of earlier (small-scale) studies have predicted" (p. 223). Consequently, some suggestions were made and discussed regarding teaching collocations.

Having similar aims to Nesselhauf's study (2003) and using similar methods to judge the acceptability of learners' collocations in written English, Wang & Shaw (2008) attempted to investigate the collocational errors of 100 Swedish students in the English Department of Stockholm University, Sweden, and 100 Chinese students from the foreign language school of Wuhan University, China. They were asked to write a short essay of about 200 words in class in 30 minutes. They investigated verb + noun collocations of common verbs: *have, do, take* and *make*. They used the BBI, the CCED, the BNC and a native speaker to judge the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns. The results showed that the two groups of students encountered different problems in using these common verbs, and made similar types of error. However, the authors did not specify the register of their corpus for the benefit of the consulted native speaker to make his/her judgement accordingly.

To measure collocational knowledge in written production, Hong, Rahim, Hua, & Salehuddin (2011) aimed to examine the types and sources of collocational errors made in the production of verb-noun collocations by four Malaysian learners of English from three different states in Malaysia. The data were collected from 130 written essays (a sub-corpus of EMAS) constituting 35,931 words. The data were analysed by using Wordsmith Tools software. In their study, Hong et el. used two reference sources which were used to analyse the students' erroneous collocations (i.e., those collocations do not comply with native-like production, particularly in academic written English) to supply suggestions for correction, i.e. the Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2009) and the BNC, to evaluate and determine the acceptability of the learners' produced collocations. They used Nesselhauf's framework (2003) as a guide to identify and classify the errors occurring in the learners' collocations. The results reveal that seven types of collocational errors were identified in the written essays. The most frequent collocational error was the proposition errors with 126 (41.72%) instances in 268 erroneous verb-noun collocations. Furthermore, three main categories of sources of collocational errors were discovered: interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and paraphrase, among which intralingual transfer was the most prominent. Hong et al.'s findings confirmed the results of previous studies, e.g. Li, 2005; Wang & Shaw, 2008; Darvish, 2011; Phoocharoensil, 2011, that interlingual and intralingual transfers were the key sources of learners' collocational errors. However a weakness of this study was that, as in Li's study (2005), no native speakers were consulted to evaluate the learners' collocations.

Research on the Use of Collocation by Arab EFL learners while Learning English

A number of EFL Arab researchers have examined Arab EFL learners' use of English collocations in production data, e.g. Elkhatib, 1984; Farghal & Obiedant, 1995; Al-Zahrani, 1998; Mahmoud, 2005; Dukali, 2010; Alsakran, 2011; Shammas, 2013.

In an early study, Elkhatib (1984) investigated the lexical errors of four undergraduate Egyptian students. He analyzed their writing samples in order to identify their lexical problems, discover the causes of these problems, and ascertain whether the learners were more familiar with the material or with the language structure. The results showed that the students made eight main lexical errors, and that they could not make appropriate lexical collocations. He concluded that the main reason for the errors was unfamiliarity with collocations. This caused them to make such errors *shooting stones* and *do progress*.

Similarly, Mahmoud (2005) studied the learners' actual performance in producing English collocations. A list of topics was given to 42 Arabic-speaking English-major university students to enable them to write an essay as a homework assignment about one of the topics. The results revealed that the EFL Arab learners had limited collocational competence. In addition, the findings showed that they committed several errors. Indeed, a total of 64% of the collocations they used were incorrect, and 61% accounted for inappropriate word combinations. However, the main weakness of this study was to give the writing task to the learners to do as a homework assignment. This may have had a negative impact on the validity of the data, since the learners could have used and accessed different resources and references to help them do the task such as dictionaries, books, the Internet or seeking help from other people. There was also no mention of the analytical framework followed to analyse the learners' collocations, nor was any indication given to native-speaker consultants regarding the register of the writing task. Another limitation of Mahmoud's small data study of 42 essays was that he made a large generalization of the limited results to all Arab EFL learners. In addition, he did not specify the length of the study corpus, stating vaguely that the length of the essays "ranged from one and half to two single-spaced pages in length" (p. 120). Like Li (2005), Mahmoud did not specify the register of their corpus (i.e. academic or spoken English) to the consulted native speakers to enable them to make sound judgements. Hence, it can be said that their results are questionable since register can be a very important factor in the process of judging the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns. Therefore, the current study aims to tackle those methodological weaknesses.

As can be seen from my review of the literature outlined above showed that collocations were problematic for EFL learners, as their collocational performance in many different contexts was consistently unsatisfactory. Furthermore, it showed that the current research is unique in its exploration of the learners' use of two types of lexical collocations in academic English writing in an EFL context and particularly in the Arab world and the Libyan context. A number of methodological issues were also revealed such as some studies did not take into account the drawbacks of using only the BNC and/or collocational dictionaries, e.g. collocational dictionaries are not comprehensive in the sense that they do not list every possible collocate of a certain word. Therefore, one of the innovative natures of the current study lies in the creation and utilisation of an acceptability-of-collocations survey to assess the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns. Concerning those studies which did consult native speakers to assess the acceptability of the learners' collocational patterns, they did not consider indicating and specifying the register of the study corpus (i.e. academic or spoken English) to native speakers to enable them to make sound judgements (see Wang & Shaw, 2008; Mahmoud ,2005). Hence, it can be said that their results are questionable since register can be a very important factor in the process of judging the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns. For example, in reporting the Queen's 90th birthday in a formal news report, a newsreader might use the collocation *an auspicious occasion* whilst people talking about such an event in conversation might say it was a *great occasion.* Therefore, in a formal context the language user would opt for the adjective *"auspicious"* which is relatively more formal than the adjective "*great*". Another methodological issue in some studies is related to giving the writing task to the students to be done as homework. As explained earlier, this could have had a negative impact on the validity of the data, given that the learners could have made use of different resources and references to help them do the task. Therefore, the aim of this study was to address those methodological limitations in order to address this knowledge gap in the collocational field, and, in so doing, establish a basis from which future studies may follow.

Collocation: The Study Definition

According to Francis & Poole (2009, p. v), collocations may be defined as a combination of two lexical items that frequently occur together in a language to "produce natural sounding speech and writing", i.e. language that would be considered natural and acceptable to a native speaker. However, the scope of this definition needs to be expanded to incorporate a

phraseological-based perspective which distinguishes collocations from other types of word combinations such as idioms and compound nouns. Another related area to be considered for defining collocations in this research is the grammatical framework (i.e. verb + noun and adjective + noun collocations; for further details see grammaticality component below). There are four principles (i.e. grammaticality, substitutability, semantic component and conventionality) that combine to form collocations that may be judged as acceptable and appropriate in terms of native-like performance, which I set out (for detailed explanation, see analytical framework for the writing task).

Methodology

Participants

The participant cohort for the writing task consisted of 186 undergraduate EFL learners majoring in English at Tripoli University (in the Department of English). Of these, 90 were males and 96 were females, ranging in age between 21 and 23 years old. They were in their final year of a four year undergraduate degree programme. All of them had taken the same academic courses in their fourth academic year. All the participants were native speakers of Arabic, sharing the same Libyan nationality and culture. They were all studying English as a foreign language. English is a compulsory subject within the curriculum at both preparatory and secondary level in Libya. Hence, all of them had received classroom instruction in EFL for a period of at least 6 years by the time they enrolled at the university. Furthermore, the students had been assessed as being at intermediate to lower-advanced level based on their mid-term exams.

Data Collection Method

The task was a formal written essay on the theme of education with a topic selected from the International English Language Testing System (hereafter IELTS) test. The topic was taken from a previous IELTS examination, which had been published in the public domain (Cambridge ESOL, 2009, p. 102). The topic was:

> How do you think universities should educate their students? Should they provide
> knowledge and skills that students will need to use when they start work OR should
> they simply aim to make students more knowledgeable regardless of whether it is
> useful for their future careers?

Data Collection Procedure

The academic written data were collected during the first semester of the academic year 2013-2014 at Tripoli University, Libya. Both I and a lecturer were present at the time of conducting the study. The participants were informed of the purpose behind the written tasks, that they would be part of my ongoing PhD research and that their participation carried no risk to their academic aspirations. After asking the participants to sign a consent form to show approval of their agreement, they were told that they had the right to withdraw at any time. They were then instructed to write an essay of 250 words within 45 minutes. The participants had no prior preparation time to perform the writing task. Each student was given instructions to write the essay individually, without any further discussion and without dictionaries.

The Libyan Learner Corpus (LLC)

The study corpus contained 186 academic written essays by fourth-year English major students as indicated above. The length of the essays in the LLC varied as 74 essays were under 150 words. Most of the essays complied with the limit of the writing task; however, a few of the essays exceeded the limit, ranging from 260 to 320 words.

Analytical Framework for the Writing Task

In this study, Gass & Selinker's error analysis framework (2008) was adopted to analyse the learners' collocational patterns. Table 1 illustrates the main steps conducted in the process of generating and analysing the data. Furthermore, four methods were used to evaluate and determine the acceptability of the collocations: a) the BNC, b) the OCD (2009), c) consultations with two native speakers (a senior English Language teacher and an ordinary native speaker), and d) the acceptability-of-collocations survey which was administered to 100 native speakers of English in order to triangulate the judgements made according to the three methods.

Table 1: *Procedure for error analysis in the present study*

No.	Procedure of the analysis
1.	Data generation
2.	Identification of collocations: extracting learners' collocational patterns
3.	Classification of collocations and collocational errors
4.	Quantification of collocations and collocational errors
5.	Triangulation methods used to judge the acceptability of the participants' collocational patterns

I further decided to classify verb-noun collocations and adjective-noun collocations according to certain criteria which were based on native-like use of language and in particular academic written English, which I have subsumed under what I term the 'scale of acceptability'[3]. On this note, Lewis (1997, p. 29) indicates that collocation is 'arbitrary'. The following table illustrates the criteria which represent three degrees of acceptability:

Table 2: *The scale of acceptability*

Degree of acceptability	Example	Error type
Acceptable	make a big difference	N/A
partially acceptable	make big difference	grammatical error: determiner (a)
Unacceptable	do a difference	lexical errors: verb (do)

As can be seen from the above table, acceptable refers to native-like use. Native-like use was assessed by using the above-mentioned methods to judge the acceptability of collocations extracted from the learner corpus in context, taking into consideration the four components, i.e. grammaticality, substitutability, semantics and conventionality, which join to form collocations. They are explained as follows:

1. Grammaticality refers to the syntactic relations of the components involved in a collocation which are verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. For example, the following collocation does not conform to the grammaticality criterion: *He shrugged the shoulders*. This fails the grammaticality test because it includes a definite article instead of possessive adjective (i.e. *his*).

2. Substitutability refers to whether certain components (i.e. verb and adjective) of collocations can be substituted for synonyms or near-synonyms. On this note, McIntosh (1967) proposes two kinds of collocability. The first entails the recognition of whether certain synonyms are "mutually replaceable to produce English" (p. 310). He provides the following synonyms as examples: *short*, *low*, *small*, *little*, and *stubby*. He shows that only one of them could fit into the following sentence: *He took a _____ vacation.*

3. Semantic component refers to the selection of those lexical items which work best to convey meaning and are appropriate to the context. This entails the use of the collocating word which is included in the range or collocational set of the node. According to

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[3] According to Howarth (1998) and Nesselhauf (2003), the term acceptability was adopted to indicate the degree to which a collocation conforms to native speaker usage, taking into account the context in which it occurs. In my view, this term is more suitable than others used in earlier research (e.g. commonness) to illustrate EFL learners' production which is often relatively uncommon in English language.

McIntosh (1967) the search for appropriate collocates for a given node is achieved by applying "the test of familiarity" (p. 310), i.e. he claims that native speakers have a range of possible collocates that go with certain nodes. A native speaker will choose a collocate from this range with which (s)he is most familiar, i.e. the most appropriate in a certain context. The notion of range is exemplified by the verb *shrug* which may collocate with *shoulders* but not with other parts of the body such as *stomach* or *arm*.

4. Conventionality is another principle in defining collocations in this study. It is a cultural phenomenon, i.e. the way in which certain words combine together as they emerge from the collective behaviour and norms of the speech community[4] which establishes a convention that has to be memorized. For example, English native speakers use *running water* and not *moving* or *going water*. For this reason, I used the intuitions of native speakers of English as a further method for determining the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns.

To sum up, here is an example of an unacceptable collocation which was applied in the current study and which failed all four criteria: *He enjoyed fit educate* which should read as *He enjoyed a good education.* The following criteria are not met by the above collocation. First, in terms of grammaticality there are two errors, namely, missing determiner (*a*) and wrong word form (*education*). Second, with regard to substitutability, there are several possibilities for the placement of an adjective to accompany the noun (*education*) e.g., *good*, *beneficial*, *excellent* or *useful*. Here, the student selected the wrong adjective (*fit*). Regarding semanticity, the adjective *fit* represents, in semantic terms, the wrong choice of adjective in the given context. In another context the word *fit* might be more suitable, e.g. a(n) *fit*, *popular, extraordinary*, *excellent* athlete. Fourth, native speakers would instinctively reject the choice of adjective as well as the grammaticality of the collocation as it seems out of place in an academic context.
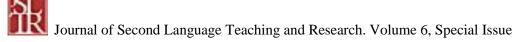
It should be noted that all the above principles were taken into consideration when making judgements using the OCD (2009), the BNC, consultations with two native speakers, and (4) the acceptability-of-collocations survey in order to assess the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns.

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[4] A speech community varies according to which part of the world English is spoken, e.g. American speech community. In this study, I assessed the acceptability of learners' collocations according to the speech community of Britain.

A collocation can reside within an extended structure, e.g., a phrase. Therefore, the previous definition of collocation is not sufficient for the purpose of the study. Hence, the analytical framework needs to be expanded because it is essential for EFL learners to be aware of the whole combination (i.e. lexical and grammatical elements) in order to match native-like usage, rather than simply knowing whether the two lexical items collocate or not. Taylor (1990) indicates that semantics and syntax are two key dimensions which constitute collocations, i.e. "knowing the syntactic behaviour associated with the word and also knowing the network of associations between that word and other words in the language" (p. 2). He illustrates this point using the example of the verb 'undertake', which is usually a transitive verb, followed by article + noun, or pronoun and will, more often than not, appear in the context of transport with such words as 'lane, 'car', 'speed'. In this vein, Nesslhauf (2003, p. 231-232) argues that knowing which words combine, e.g., *get + permission, fail + exam*, is insufficient for learners to produce acceptable combinations. In other words, knowing the whole combination is important to enable them to achieve that aim e.g., *get permission (to), fail an exam*). Hence, the acceptability judgment of learners' collocations not only entails judging whether the two lexical items (i.e. the node and collocate) combine and comply with native-like usage, but also entails judging the acceptability of the whole combination (i.e. verb-noun and adjective-noun phrase [NP] combination). This conforms to the grammaticality criterion discussed above. The noun phrase includes pre-modifiers of the noun such as articles, intensifiers and adjectives within the collocation / combination and/or in some cases a following preposition. The component parts of the noun phrase constitute the phraseological variations of verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations in constituency variation. For example, some of the collocational variations of the verb-noun collocation *make + difference* are *make a difference* and *make a huge difference*. Biber, Finegan, Johansson, Conrad and Leech (1999) explain that "there are a few semantically light verbs - such as take, make, have, and do, - that combine with noun phrases to form set verbal expressions" (p. 428). Such combinations may include a subsequent preposition in some instances such as *take care of*. Apart from the light verbs, some of the investigated verbs may at times (but not always) require a following preposition according to the grammatical context, e.g., *offer something to someone* and *gain something from*. This was also applied in the case of adjective noun collocations such as *a good level of*.

Some components of the collocations mentioned above are grammatical words, e.g. articles and prepositions. These grammatical associations between words are referred to as

colligations by Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003) who define them as "linear co-occurrence preferences and restrictions holding between specific lexical items and the word-class of the items that precede or follow them" (p. 210). In addition, Lewis (2000) defines colligations as "the way one word regularly co-occurs with a particular (grammar) pattern" (p. 137); for example, some verbs usually appear with a specific tense, or a noun might typically appear preceded by a possessive adjective, instead of an article such as *pass **my/your** driving test*, *It's **my/your/our** responsibility to…* (c.f. *I'll take **the** responsibility for …*).

Hence, when a collocation and a colligation co-occur and combine in a phrase, they create a phrasal construction. According to Stubbs (2005), a phrasal construction may be defined as a set of lexico-grammatical combinations which typically contain a stable lexical element at their heart, accompanied by other appropriate linguistic items (p. 1). In short, it may be described as a melange of collocations and colligations (lexical and grammatical) whose meaning may be determined by its communicative function.

'Partially acceptable' means that the components of a given collocation (i.e. node and collocate) are correct and collocate within a span which is deemed acceptable, but the grammatical structure in which it is encased is incorrect. Unacceptable means non-native-like use such as *high man. It is worth mentioning that this area is different from partially acceptable in that the conventions of combining the words in a certain way are not used, e.g. *strong smoker instead of heavy smoker. The native speaker may understand it but would not use it.

In the following section, I present a brief explanation of the various stages of analysis of the learners' collocational patterns. The assessment of the participants' collocations was executed in relation to typical native speaker production and use (naturalness) (as judged by using the four methods), particularly in an academic context as this study was mainly focused on analysing the participants' collocations in academic written English. In addition, the term erroneous collocation refers not only to the wrong production of collocations i.e. where the two components of collocation do not go together (which can be comprehensible, yet, still not comply with native speaker convention), but also refers to the inappropriate usage of collocation in this particular context (i.e. academic register) as some of the participants' collocational patterns were deemed fairly acceptable in spoken language. In this vein, McCarthy & O'Dell (2005) point out that learners can sound strange to the native speaker when they say, for instance, "'making your homework' or 'my uncle is a very high man'" (p.

4). Both of these phrases can be partially understood in context but they represent the kind of language which sounds "unnatural and might perhaps confuse" (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005, p. 4).

1. Data generation: This phase involved generating the concordance lines for each investigated verb and adjective by using the AntConc Concordance Tool. I also investigated the distribution of all the searched words.

2. Identification of collocations: extracting learners' collocational patterns: The concordance lines were checked line by line manually to search for and identify the investigated words occurring as part of verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations, using the BNC and the OCD (2009). Thus, the focus of the next stage of analysis was on the concordance lines containing learners' collocations only.

The two native speakers were then consulted. They were asked to evaluate the acceptability of all the combinations in the LLC. They were provided with enough context to aid their deliberations, according to the scale of acceptability above. In addition, they were also asked to double check the work done on the basis of the collocational dictionary and BNC. They were asked if they agreed with the judgement to put 'yes' and in the case of disagreement to write their suggestions. The next phase of examination entailed comparing the similarity and differences between native speakers' judgements and the work done on the basis of the two searched sources and making some modifications accordingly.

3. Classification of collocations and collocational errors: The classification of collocations and their collocational errors were conducted at the same time to speed up the process of the analysis. I employed two criteria in this analytical phase of classification. They were: (1) Criteria for judging the acceptability of learners' collocational patterns. Verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations were classified according to certain criteria which were based on native-like use of language and in particular academic written English, which I subsumed under what I termed the 'scale of acceptability' (i.e. a) acceptable; b) partially acceptable; and c) unacceptable). As stated earlier, I used four methods to evaluate and determine the acceptability of the learners' collocational patterns. Secondly, criteria for classifying learners' collocational errors were used. They were as follows: a) missing, b) superfluous, c) wrong or d) wrong word order.

- **Quantification of collocations and collocational errors:** The occurrences of both acceptable collocations and erroneous collocations were counted. In addition, different

types of collocational errors were counted. Then, the percentages and the frequencies were calculated.

- **Triangulation of the Methods Used to Judge the Acceptability of the Participants' Collocational Patterns:** The acceptability-of-collocation survey taken from the participants' erroneous use of both verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations was administered to 100 native-speakers of English in order to triangulate the acceptability assessment of learners' collocational patterns. The participants' collocations were judged differently in the academic rating survey (i.e. acceptable) as opposed to the main study. These were to be amended in the main study as acceptable. Accordingly, the frequency of the verbs and adjectives were then amended and the accuracy percentages were calculated. Similarly, the occurrences of the collocational error types were amended and their percentages were calculated.

Results

The Results of the Libyan Students' Overall Performance of Verb-Noun Collocations

Table 3 presents information about the learners' overall performance in producing verb-noun collocations for the twelve verbs under investigation in terms of their frequency of acceptable collocations and erroneous collocations, their ranking of frequency of use and their accuracy percentages. Table 4 shows that a total of 1369 collocational patterns were produced by the participants of the study. Of these, 686 were acceptable collocations whereas 683 were unacceptable collocations.

Table 3: *The participants' overall production of acceptable and erroneous verb-noun collocations*

Frequency ranking	Verb	Overall frequency of collocations	No. of acceptable collocations	No. of erroneous collocations	No. of students	Accuracy percentage
1.	Have	278	131	147	144	47.12
2.	Provide	213	117	96	128	54.9
3.	Give	190	100	90	110	52.6
4.	Make	181	73	108	105	40.3
5.	Get	152	53	99	96	34.8
6.	Gain	71	55	16	54	77.4
7.	Take	67	30	37	57	44.7
8.	Do	58	33	25	50	56.8
9.	Acquire	47	35	12	44	74.4
10.	Enhance	42	23	19	38	54.7
11.	Require	37	20	17	31	54

12.	Offer	32	16	17	26	48.4
	Totals	1369	686	683		50.1

It is clear from the above table that the participants used 5 high-frequency verbs, i.e., 'have', 'provide', 'give', 'make', and 'get' in verb-noun collocations more frequently than the other seven verbs. They had an overall high collocational frequency, at more than 150 occurrences in every instance as used by more than half of the participants and were ranked from the first to the fifth position respectively. Concerning accuracy percentage of collocational use, 'gain' was the most accurately used verb with of 77.4%, while 'get' was the least accurately used verb with 34.8%.

Types of Errors Identified in Verb-Noun Collocations Produced in the LLC

As can be seen from Table 5 below, three broad categories of errors were identified when analyzing errors made by the participants when using verb-noun collocations in their written essays. These are (1) grammatical errors, (2) lexical errors and (3) errors related to usage (i.e. in this study, usage errors refer to any collocation which does not exist in English). My analysis revealed that a total of 907 errors occurred in 688 learners' erroneous collocational patterns. The most frequent errors were related to grammar, with a frequency of 537 (59.5%), while lexical errors totalled 342 (37.7%) and errors associated with usage occurred at a very low frequency of 28, constituting 3% only. Furthermore, those categories were then classified and divided into sixteen error types which related to different parts of speech, e.g., verb, noun and adjective, and varied in their degree of difficulty for learners.

Table 4 presents the various error types according to a hierarchy of difficulty (i.e. according to their frequency in the learners' erroneous collocations from the most to the least frequent errors). The examples provided in the table below illustrate the different kinds of errors. However, this does not mean that other types of errors do not occur in these collocational patterns as these are covered in other sections. For example, in the erroneous collocation *have a good knowledges* (correct collocation: *have good knowledge of*), two types of errors were identified, namely, (a) superfluous determiner and (b) number problems.

Table 4: *Types of errors in verb-noun collocations used in the LLC*

No.	Error type in the learner corpus	Example of error	Frequency of errors
1.	Lexical error: verb (wrong choice of verb)	*give their best* (do ....)	260
2.	Grammatical error: Determiner (missing, or	*gets a good marks* (*gets good*	203

	present albeit unacceptable or wrong)	*marks*)	
3.	Grammatical error: Preposition (preposition is missing, superfluous or is present albeit unacceptable, or wrong)	*provide students opportunities (*provide students with ...*)	107
4.	Grammatical error: Number (noun used in the singular instead of the plural or vice versa)	*have a good knowledges (... *good knowledge*)	80
5.	Lexical error: Adjective (wrong choice of adjective owing to: 1) wrong register or 2) adjective and noun do not collocate)	*have great information (... *good information*) *have a high education (*...outstanding education*)	66
6.	Grammatical error: Wrong word order	*have many doctors good (*have many good doctors*)	50
7.	Grammatical error: Parts of speech (word form)	*have enough qualified (.... *enough qualifications*)	39
8.	Usage: implausible and irreparable combination	* get the stages	28
9.	Grammatical error: Verb (superfluous verb)	*provide develop students' ability (*improve ....*), *make enhance our society (*enhance ....*)	19
10.	Grammatical error: Conjunction (missing, or superfluous)	*have provide education (*have or provide ....*)	18
11.	Lexical error: Noun (wrong choice of noun)	*give the right lines (*give the right guidance or guidelines*)	16
12.	Grammatical error: noun (superfluous noun)	*provided with modern way of technology (*provided with modern technology*)	5
13.	Grammatical error: Adverb (superfluous, missing modifying adverb	*provide the knowledge, the skills and also more and more information (*provide the knowledge, skills and more information*)	5
14.	Grammatical error: Possessive 's (missing)	*get master degree (... *a master's degree*)	5
15.	Grammatical error: Intensifier (superfluous or wrong intensifier)	*have so low level education (*have such a low level of education*)	3
16.	Grammatical error: Adjective (superfluous adjective)	*have a good marks, good knowledge, great information (*have good marks, knowledge and good information*)	3
	Total of error types		907

Lexical Collocational Errors: Wrong Choice of Verb

In terms of a hierarchy of difficulty, the results revealed that the most frequent error type occurring in the participants' verb-noun collocations were related to the lexical category (wrong choice of verb) with 260 occurrences. These occurrences constitute 28.7% of the

overall frequency of errors rated as unacceptable according to the scale of acceptability used in this study such as *take a good educate* instead of *have a good enough education.* Below is an example of these collocations derived from the students' data:

- r it is harder. I guess in modern countries they got awareness to these points and they start to make (78-02-14.txt)

Furthermore, the results revealed that the majority of learners' unacceptable verb-noun collocational patterns were formed by combining high-frequency verbs with various noun collocates; for example apart from the verb 'have', the verbs 'get', 'make', 'give', 'take', 'provide', and 'do' were placed as the most frequent verbs in unacceptable verb-noun collocations with 69, 68, 41, 32, 24 and 20 occurrences respectively.

On the other hand, the verbs 'gain', 'acquire', and 'offer' occurred only one or two times in unacceptable collocations where they were used instead of other verbs, e.g. *gain the techniques* instead of *learn the techniques, *acquire more time* instead of *need or require more time* and *offer the large information* instead of *provide 'valuable' or 'useful' information.* In contrast, there were no instances of using 'enhance' and 'require' in unacceptable collocations.

Grammatical Collocational Errors: Determiners

Determiners, especially definite and indefinite articles, were the second most frequent problematic error type recording 203 (22.3%) occurrences in the students' erroneous verb-noun collocations. The following illustrative examples demonstrate cases of: 1) redundancy as in *acquire the knowledge skills* instead of *acquire knowledge and skills,* 2) omission as in *had basics* instead of *had the basics,* and 3) substitution such as *gives an opportunity for students* instead of *gives students the opportunity*. The following is an illustrative example:

- now the life skills. University can make students acquire the knowledge skills. University should be a mode (150-02-14.txt)

The Results of the Libyan Students' Overall Performance of Adjective-Noun Collocations

The results in table 5 below revealed that 793 adjective-noun collocational patterns were produced by participants. Of these, 491 were acceptable collocations whereas 302 were unacceptable or questionable collocations.

Table 5: *Learners' overall production of acceptable and erroneous adjective-noun collocations*

Frequency ranking	Adjective	Overall frequency of collocations	No. of acceptable collocations	No. of erroneous collocations	No. of students	Accuracy percentage
1.	Good	200	124	76	103	62
2.	Modern	89	63	26	64	70.7
3.	Academic	87	58	29	69	66.6
4.	Great	65	14	51	54	21.5
5.	Higher	57	27	30	48	47.3
6.	High	53	27	26	45	50.9
7.	Specific	51	39	12	36	76.4
8.	General	47	40	7	37	85
9.	Practical	45	32	13	38	71.1
10.	Basic	44	30	14	33	68.1
11.	Special	36	19	17	31	52.7
12.	Current	19	18	1	18	94.7
Totals		793	491	302		61.9

As can be seen above, the adjective 'good' was placed in the first rank according to collocational frequency of use with 200 occurrences. It was also the best well-distributed adjective in the LLC with 103 students using it. In terms of accuracy percentages, 'current' was the most accurately used adjective in the LLC with an accuracy percentage of 94.7%, whilst 'great' was the lowest accurately-used adjective with 21.5%.

Types of Error Identified in Adjective-Noun Collocations Produced in the LLC

As was the case with verb-noun collocations, the analysis identified three broad categories of error in the learners' adjective-noun collocations. These are: (1) grammatical errors, (2) lexical errors, and (3) errors related to usage. These contained twelve error types which were ranked from the most frequent to the least frequent collocational errors as shown in Table 6 below. The results also indicated that errors related to grammar were the most frequent constituting 275 (70.1%) out of an overall total of 390 errors, occurring in a total of 302 learners' erroneous collocational patterns whereas a mere 112 (28.7%) were lexical errors. On

the other hand, errors linked with usage had very low frequency with only six occurrences, constituting 1.5%.

Table 6: *Frequency of adjective-noun error types in the learner corpus*

No.	Error type in the learner corpus	Example of error	Frequency of the errors
1.	Grammatical error: Determiner (article missing or present, albeit unacceptable or wrong)	*a specific information (*specific information*)	130
2.	Lexical error: Adjective (wrong choice of adjective)	**modern knowledge** (*recent ....*)	108
3.	Grammatical error: Number (noun used in the singular instead of the plural or vice versa)	*good personality (*....... personalities*)	53
4.	Grammatical error: Parts of speech (word form)	*academic educate (... *education*)	46
5.	Grammatical error: Preposition (preposition is missing or superfluous)	*academic to modern language (*academic modern ....*)	23
6.	Grammatical error: Wrong word order	*basic accountant stock (*basic stock accountancy*)	16
7.	Usage: Implausible and irreparable combination	*current ages	6
8.	Lexical error: Noun (wrong choice of noun)	*practical life (... *skills*)	4
9.	Grammatical error: Conjunction (conjunction is missing or wrong)	* a good marks, good knowledge (*good marks and knowledge*)	3
10.	Grammatical error: Adjective (superfluous demonstrative adjective)	*an academic and modern of this way (*an academic and modern way*)	2
11.	Grammatical error: Adverb (superfluous modifying adverb)	*more higher education (*higher education*)	1
12.	Grammatical error: Intensifier (superfluous or wrong intensifier)	*very higher levels (*much ....*)	1
Total of error types			390

Grammatical Collocational Errors: Determiners

According to the hierarchy of difficulty, the results showed that the most frequent error type occurred when the students incorrectly produced adjective-noun collocations, namely, determiners (i.e. definite and indefinite articles) with 130 occurrences. This error-type constitutes 33.3% of the overall frequency of errors in the LLC. The determiner errors included cases where the articles were missing or present, albeit wrong or superfluous. The following examples illustrate the point: 1) article missing as in **academic aim* instead of *an academic aim* and **good place* instead of *a good place;* 2) wrong choice of article such as **the good university* instead of *a good university* and **the specific subject* instead of *a*

specific subject, and 3) superfluous article such as **a good experience* instead of *good experience* and **a good careers* instead of *good careers*. Below is an example of these collocations derived from the students' data:

- xample we have 4 Arabic. Third the building isn't good place for study. The class isn't large because th (64-02-14.txt)
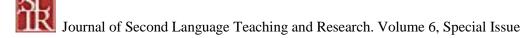
Lexical Collocational Errors: Adjective

The 'wrong choice of adjective' lexical error type was the second most frequent error type in the students' written essays with 108 (27.7%) occurrences. This error type can be further classified into two types:

1. Wrong choice of adjective, where the students opted for using the wrong adjective (adjective cannot be used to modify the head nouns), resulting in unacceptable collocations according to the study's scale of acceptability with 83 occurrences. Examples of this error are: **modern knowledge* instead of *'recent'/'up-to-date' knowledge*, **a higher experience* instead of '*better'/'first-hand' experience* and **high way of thinking* instead of *a sophisticated way....* The following is an illustrative example:

- teach. But here in Libya teachers do not have a higher experience to provide the students. If the studen (139-02-14.txt)

2. 25 instances of using the wrong adjective were errors linked with using the wrong register. In all these instances, the students opted for using adjectives to modify the collocating nouns which are acceptable to use in spoken language rather than in academic written English, e.g., **great education* in place of '*good'/'excellent' education*, **a great generation* in place of *successful generation* and **a great attention* instead of *considerable attention*. The following is an illustrative example:

- vice the managements of the universities to pay a great attention for improving the education systems in (17-02-14.txt)

Discussion

Based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the obtained data from the Libyan Learner Corpus, three broad categories of errors were identified in the learners' erroneous verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. These are: (1) grammatical errors, (2) lexical errors and (3) errors related to usage. This current study result confirms the results of previous

research investigating the errors in collocations produced by different participants all over the world (Wang & Shaw, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003; Li, 2005; Mahmoud, 2005; Kuo, 2009; Miyakoshi, 2009; Darvishi, 2011; Huang, 2011).

Generally, grammatical errors were more recurrent in the two investigated types of collocations than lexical errors. For instance, determiners especially definite and indefinite articles were the first and second most frequent problematic error recording 130 (33.3%) and 203 occasions in the participants' adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations respectively. This finding demonstrates that the correct and acceptable choice of the lexical components (i.e. node and collocate) in a collocation does not inevitably mean that the participants had no difficulties in producing native-like and grammatically well-formed English lexical collocations.

As indicated in the literature review studies and similar to the results of the present study, Wang & Shaw (2008, p. 215) reported that the Chinese students committed different types of errors in using verb-noun collocations. Examples of such errors are given below:

a) Lexical errors: (1) verb choice, e.g., *take the problem; (2)* noun choice, e.g., *make benefit*, (3) adjective such as *do some protecting work.*

b) Grammatical errors: (1) noun plurality, e.g., *have troubles with; (2)* determiner, e.g., *have the duty; (3)* preposition, e.g., *do harm of; (4)* syntactic structure, e.g., *do favor to; (5)* adverb form, e.g., *have a full functional sanitation.*

c) Semantic error (where the correct collocation does not make sense) e.g., *take care of the problem.*

It is clear that these error types are a persistent problem in learning English as a foreign language as they were also found and identified in the current study which means that many EFL learners, whether Arab or others, commit the same collocational error types in their writing e.g., preposition errors and noun choice errors.

Furthermore, the results of the current study confirm the results of previous research such as Mahmoud's study (2005) which demonstrated that Arabic learners of English have particular difficulties in using collocations. Mahmoud identified three types of errors in the 42 students' written essays such as: (1) word choice (where the choice of one word or both words is incorrect), e.g., *repair his mistake* and *hurts the mind*, (2) word form (where the form of a word is incorrect), e.g., *a famous musician band*, and (3) contextual errors (linguistically

correct but contextually incorrect), e.g., *bring a boy instead of (give birth to a boy). He claimed that the identified errors in the learners' deviant collocations show that "EFL students depend on interlingual and intralingual strategies to facilitate learning" (p. 124). The same errors found by Mahmoud's study were also identified in the current study, although several other error types were identified in the collocations produced by the Libyan participants. This further indicates that Arab EFL learners commit many of the same collocational errors.

Particularly in the case of the Libyan students of the current study, different explanations can be provided to interpret the various types of errors committed by the participants in producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations.

Wrong Choice of Verb

 As the data in Tables 4 and 6 illustrated, the most frequently occurring error was related to the lexical category (wrong choice of verb) in producing verb-noun collocations on 260 occasions in the LLC. According to Wang & Shaw (2008, p. 218), this difficulty could be due to the participants' unawareness of the semantic compatibility between the verb and the noun.

In addition, the results of the current study revealed that the majority of learners' unacceptable collocational patterns were formed by combining high-frequency verbs, for example, the verbs 'have', 'get', 'make', 'give', 'take', 'provide', and 'do' were placed as the most frequent verbs in unacceptable verb-noun collocations with 69, 68, 41, 32, 24 and 20 occurrences respectively. A possible explanation for such a finding is that highly frequent verbs such as 'have', 'make', 'do', 'take' and 'get' are polysemous and can be used instead of other verbs.

Thus, the students' tendency to use high-frequency verbs as a substitute for other English verbs is an important finding. This was illustrated by learners' over-use of some of these verbs to convey and communicate the intended meaning and to compensate for their lack of academic vocabulary use. For example, the verb 'get' was over-extended as participants used it 23 times instead of verbs such as 'gain', 'acquire' and 'develop' by combining it with the nouns 'knowledge' and 'skills' to construct various verb-noun collocational patterns. The following combination illustrates the point: *get (the) knowledge x4. Other instances of over-extension were *get new words instead of learn new words and *get benefits instead of gain or derive benefit. Correspondingly, the verb 'take' was also over-extended and was used 11 times instead of 'obtain' as in *take information instead of obtain information. These results

are inconsistent with Dukali (2010), who found that the participants used the wrong verb in many instances due to overextending certain verbs such as 'make' "to cover a more appropriate or concise word which may or may not have been known by the students" (p. 78).

Moreover, the participants produced high frequency verbs in their delexicalized sense interchangeably, e.g. they used *doing the exams* instead of '*take' or 'sit' the exam.* It is apparent that the participants' awareness of collocational restrictions and use is very limited. Also, judging by my own experience as a Libyan teacher, this reflects the practice of teaching and learning lexical items in isolation rather than in their various collocational patterns.

Additionally, the participants' used these two verbs (i.e. 'do' and 'make') interchangeably to the exclusion of other potential English verbs as shown in the following examples: *make special research* instead of *do special research* and *do their efforts* instead of *make an effort.* This practice was also discovered in previous research such as in (Dukali, 2010; Ahmed, 2012). Ahmed discovered that "many students were unaware of the distinctions between *make* and *do* and assumed that they were similar" (p. 160). Consequently, they sometimes use the verb '*do'* where the verb '*make'* should be used as in: *do attempts.* She mentioned that this could be related to the translation of the two verbs into their core or original meaning in the subjects' mother tongue (Arabic). Consequently, the students produced collocations based on the semantic meaning of single lexical items. Moreover, they wrongly "equated the verb يقوم بي /yaqum bi/ with *to do* or to *make* because in Arabic, the verb '*yaqum bi'* enters into a variety of combinations meaning roughly to *perform"* (2012, p. 160-161). In this vein Balhouq (1982, p. 297-298) states that these two verbs overlap together in their meaning in the sense of 'carry out' which is equivalent to Libyan colloquial Arabic (LCA) /da:r/. Therefore, they used them instead of other verbs to convey this meaning as in *make a party* instead of *have a party*, *make a bath* instead of *have, take a bath*, and *do an accident* instead of *have an accident.* He further argued that this type of error is related to the mismatch between L₁ usage and L₂ use. He stated that:

> Unless the learner has acquired the L2 habitual collocation in question, he is more likely to produce a deviant collocation because neither make nor do which have been acquired as the equivalents of /da:r/ (or MSA /ˤamila/, /faˤala/ or /sanaˤa/) will be acceptable (1982, p. 297-298)

The above findings can be summarised as (1) unawareness of semantic compatibility of verb-noun, (2) polysemous verbs, (3) overextension, (4) interchangeable delexicalisation, and (5) L1, L2 mismatch.

Determiner Errors

As the data in Table 4 and 6 demonstrates, applying the correct and acceptable choice of a lexical component in a collocation does not inevitably mean that the participants had no difficulties in producing correct and appropriate English lexical collocations. In this connection, Nessulhauf (2003) explained that mistakes in non-lexical constituents shows that "it is not sufficient for the learner to know which lexical items collocate (such as get + permission, fail + exam), but rather in order to produce an acceptable combination, it is essential to know the whole combination (e.g. get permission (to), fail an exam)" (p. 231-32). It should be noted that too much emphasis is put on teaching grammatical rules and explaining them in the learners' L1 in the Libyan educational system while collocation is neglected and that the Grammar-Translation method is still widely used by a number of Libyan teachers (Saaid, 2010; Emhamed & Krishnan, 2011). However, the above finding shows that the participants still encounter difficulties with various aspects of English grammar. A shift in focus is therefore required by Libyan EFL teachers to bring forth a more modern approach to teaching grammar in order to help their students to produce more native-like utterances of English language and overcome their difficulties with basic grammar. One way of doing this is by teaching grammar in context through teaching collocational patterns as indicated and explained by Nessulhauf above. For example, when teaching collocational patterns in context, e.g., within a reading text, the teacher can draw his/her students" attention to the pre-modification and post-modification of the noun in the form of, e.g. articles, prepositions and intensifiers. The following examples show how teachers might go about it:

1. *pass my/your driving test* instead of pass + *driving test,*

2. *take responsibility for* instead of *take + responsibility,*

3. *good level of* instead of *good + level.*

By so doing, the students' overall grammatical and collocational knowledge will be improved.

For instance, determiners especially definite and indefinite articles were the first and second most frequent problematic errors recording 130 (33.3%) and 203 occasions in the participants' adjective-noun and verb-noun collocations respectively. Determiner errors include cases where the articles are missing, incorrectly selected or superfluous, e.g.

academic aim instead of *an academic aim* and *a specific information* instead of *specific information.* This could be because of the differences between the Arabic and English grammatical systems. On this note, Tengler, Aburiaiza, Ali, & Bakarally (2013, p. 72) explained that Arabic learners encounter difficulties in the use of English articles due to the fact that "there is no indefinite article in Arabic, and the use of the definite article different from the use in English, the indefinite article is routinely omitted or used incorrectly".

The Wrong Choice of Noun

This lexical error type occurred on 16 occasions in the participants' verb-noun collocations and four times in adjective-noun collocations. The following example illustrates the point: *give the right lines for* instead of *give the right guidance or guidelines.* The participants' unacceptable production of English collocations may be due to the fact that they tend to produce messages by combining individual lexical items rather than taking them from prefabricated patterns (Wray, 2002). In Sinclair's study (1991), EFL learners have the tendency to function more on the open choice principle rather than on the idiom principle.

Usage Category Errors

The results revealed that a total number of 28 and 6 instances occurred in verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. Those erroneous collocational patterns were classified as implausible and irreparable combinations, when both I and the consulted native speakers failed to suggest the acceptable collocations and even after looking at the whole paragraph in which the collocation occurred to recover the intended meaning, for instance, *get take different way*, *a special speciality,* and *good substances.* It is worth mentioning that the rationale for including these patterns instead of excluding them from the study is that they provide an insight into the difficulties encountered by Libyan learners in conveying intended meaning in their writing and using lexical verb-noun collocations in particular. The participants clearly tend to express meaning from individual words (i.e. operate on the open choice principle) rather than collocate lexical items. Therefore, it is necessary to demonstrate the importance and the need to teach formulaic language including collocations.

Intensifier Errors

These are the lowest and second lowest frequency errors with only 3 and 2 occurrences in verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations, e.g., *has a very big role* instead of *has a(n) vital/ key/important role.* The low frequency of intensifiers was due to the fact that learners, in

general, did not use intensifiers extensively in their verb-noun collocations. A possible explanation is learners are not confident in using intensifiers, thus, they avoid using them and tend to produce simple verb-noun collocational patterns in the form of either verb + noun collocations or verb + adjective + noun collocations.

Conclusion

This study represents, to my knowledge, the first large-scale investigation of university learners' difficulties in terms of the grammatical and lexical errors typically made by EFL learners in the use of collocation in academic written English in the Arab EFL context. Furthermore, it is the first large exploratory study conducted in a specifically Libyan EFL context. I aim to fill this gap in knowledge and, in so doing, establish a basis from which future studies may follow.

My study is especially important to EFL teachers and learners in general. It may provide some help in solving the problems that learners encounter in the process of language acquisition and in the learning of this particular linguistic phenomenon. In addition, this study contributes to the enrichment of collocational studies and the difficulties encountered in this area in all teaching/learning contexts. The results of this current research confirm the findings of other studies in the area of the use of collocations in English language learning.

In general, the obtained results from the current research support the claim that EFL learners have insufficient knowledge of English lexical collocations as revealed by their error-strewn performance in producing them (e.g. Wang & Shaw, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003; Mahmoud, 2005). According to this research and others, EFL learners tend to commit the same collocational error types in their writing e.g. preposition errors and noun choice errors which means these error types are a persistent problem in learning English as a foreign language worldwide. In addition, other collocational errors, for example, determiner errors, number errors and word order errors may occur as a result of the differences between the Arabic and English grammatical systems.

All in all, it is hoped that this research will contribute to a greater understanding of the difficulties encountered by EFL learners when producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations as well as the various types of collocational errors made. Therefore, it is hoped that EFL language instructors will be informed of such difficulties and will then be more able to implement lessons centred on English collocations which address these difficulties and

target their students' specific needs in order to improve their collocational knowledge to eventually achieve native-like competence. In addition, it is hoped that the obtained results from the current study will encourage language instructors to recognize the importance and the benefits of incorporating various types of English collocations into their teaching instructions in the classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the obtained results, a variety of recommendations are made, and suggestions given, for Libyan EFL English language instructors to take into consideration when teaching and introducing English collocations to their students.

1. While teaching lexical collocations, particular attention should be given to teaching verb-noun collocations as the results confirmed that this type was more problematic for the participants than adjective-noun collocations.

2. Special attention should be paid to teaching the verbs 'make' and 'get' along with the adjectives; 'great' and 'higher' by highlighting their various noun collocates in verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations respectively. Hence, these verbs and adjectives have the lowest accuracy percentages in the LLC, in spite of the fact that 'make' and 'great' were placed in the relatively high position of fourth and 'get' and 'higher' were ranked in the fifth position in terms of overall collocational frequency.

3. Particular focus should be given to the teaching of delexicalized verbs in collocations by introducing their different noun collocates since the results showed that the participants produced high frequency verbs in their delexicalized sense interchangeably. In addition, it is vital to attract students' attention to the commonly mistaken collocations and in particular 'make' and 'do' such as "*make a mistake"* and not *"do a mistake"* and "*do a research"* and not "*make a research"* as the participants (Libyan learners) used these two verbs (i.e. 'do' and 'make') interchangeably or similarly and instead of other English verbs. This can be done by making use of native speaker corpus data such as British National Corpus (BNC) and COBUILD Bank of English corpus which are excellent resources of common and typical English collocations. The teacher would need to identify appropriate collocations and then bring them to the attention of the students by means of concordance lines. Thornbury (2002) explained the benefits of recommending the use of corpus data to EFL teachers and learners as "it provides them with easily accessible information about real

language use, frequency and collocation" (p. 68). In addition, those two corpora represent different types of English collocations in their most standard structures and offer a variety of collocations in both written and spoken language.

4. The study shows that the grammatical errors were more frequent than lexical errors in the participants" collocational patterns when producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations. Therefore, introducing and teaching the whole collocational pattern (i.e. not only the node and the collocate, but also the pre-modification and post-modification of the noun) to the students is vitally important in order to overcome students' difficulties in terms of the grammatical perspective of language. In addition, the students' overall English language proficiency would be improved and they would be more capable of producing native-like utterances. This would also ease the process of communication in terms of communicating and conveying the intended meaning. This is particularly so when it comes to pre-modifiers of the noun such as articles, intensifiers and adjectives within the collocation. On this note, I reiterate Nesselhauf's call (2003) for a more comprehensive approach. She suggests that it is not enough to "merely teach the lexical elements that go together, but it is necessary to teach entire combinations including prepositions, articles, etc" (p. 238).

5. In respect of using a wrong register, the study revealed that the participants did not comply with the requirements of the task of writing an academic essay, since on many occasions they chose the wrong verb and adjective when producing verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations owing to wrong register although they may be considered acceptable in other contexts, e.g., spoken language. Thus, it is recommended that teachers can raise awareness in students of how register affects choice of collocation.

6. The results revealed that some of the participants' collocational errors were, in my opinion, due to the influence of their mother tongue (Libyan colloquial Arabic) because some of their erroneous collocational patterns had equivalents in Libyan colloquial Arabic. It is therefore recommended that Libyan EFL instructors raise greater awareness in their students of such difficulty and point out that transferring language from their mother tongue does not always result in acceptable production of English collocations. This could be done by compiling a bilingual list of collocations and bringing it to their students' attention.

7. The current study results show that L1 interference, overgeneralization, the use of synonymy and the use of de-lexicalized verbs were shown to be common difficulties

for the participants in the production of English collocations. It is therefore strongly recommended that Libyan EFL teachers should design and use collocational activities which address these difficulties in order to raise awareness in their learners. The activities should particularly aim to draw attention to areas of difficulty described below.

1) L1 interference in collocation production, which includes coverage of: a) lexical confusion, for example, *make (idier) the curriculum (LCA) instead of *design the curriculum*, and b) grammatical elements such as: (i) determiner errors as in *academic aim instead of *an academic aim,* (ii) singular/plural errors as in *have a good knowledges instead of *have good knowledge* and (iii) wrong word order errors as in *make a student good instead of *make a good student.* These grammatical error types were identified as arising from the differences between the Arabic and English grammatical systems. Thus, it is also recommended that when teaching collocational patterns, emphasis should be given to the differences between the grammatical systems between the learners' L1 (Arabic language) and L2 (English language).

2) Synonym problems as in *modern knowledge in place of *"recent" / "up-to-date" knowledge*.

3) The use of de-lexicalized verbs as in *got awareness instead of *have an awareness of* and *make modern activities instead of do *modern activities.*

4) Overgeneralization, such as the verb "take", which was over-extended 11 times, instead of using a verb such as "obtain" as in *take information instead of *obtain information*.

Limitation of the Study

There are, of course, caveats and limitations to all research. There are several limitations to this particularly study and these are highlighted below to pinpoint areas where future research is required.

1. One limitation of the study was that the data was confined to one university in Libya (Tripoli University) and it was also collected from a relatively small number of participants (186 fourth year English major students). Therefore, due to these two limitations, marginally different results may have been obtained if the study had included English major students from other Libyan universities. However, I would argue that the

results can be generalised to all Libyan EFL learners due to the following reasons. Libyan students majoring in English are all native speakers of Arabic and studying English as a foreign language. They all have a similar background (i.e. the same Libyan nationality and culture) and they learn English according to one curriculum which is the same for both private and state schools. However, it should be noted that in some cases there may be differences between the students such as their age and English proficiency level. These limitations arose out of difficulties encountered in collecting the data such as the ongoing conflict in other cities, political wrangling and the unstable situation in Libya arising from the recent revolution. This limitation would have been overcome if it had been possible to collect data from various universities in Libya on a larger scale.

2. The focus of the investigation was on two types of English lexical collocations (verb–noun collocations and adjective-noun collocations). Furthermore within each type, the study examined a limited number of verbs and adjectives (twelve each). However, an in-depth investigation and analysis were conducted to determine the overall frequency of every investigated verb and adjective. The frequency of acceptable as well as erroneous occurrences in verb-noun and adjective-noun collocations were also identified and counted.

3. A third limitation of the study was related to the participants' English language proficiency level. As there was no standardised way of assessing the participants' level of English Language proficiency such as the TOFEL or IELTS tests due to financial and political constraints, there was a lack of distinction between the participants' level of proficiency. They were assessed according to their mid-term exams from the University. They were rated as intermediate to lower advanced as indicated by their writing professor. This application of less reliable means of testing language proficiency represents a limitation since more reliable testing services such as the IELTS proved too difficult to administer in terms of obtaining permission from the relevant authorities and funding.

In conclusion, it is important to point out that I anticipated some of the above-mentioned limitations. However, due to the instability of the political situation in Libya, I could not address them. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study provide opportunities for improved future research. Suggestions for future research are introduced in the following section.

Suggestions for Further Research

Researching English collocations is still in its infancy particularly in the Arab context. Therefore, considerable attention is required from researchers and linguists to conduct more research to examine the nature of this linguistic phenomenon in-depth.

1. Future studies need to include a wide range of homogeneous participants from different universities and institutions in Libya in an attempt to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

2. It would also be of interest to assess the Libyan learners' knowledge of collocations at varied language proficiency levels along with a range of learning stages to further investigate their difficulties with different types of English collocation in written production.

3. Furthermore, more research is needed to investigate other types of lexical collocations. Further studies are needed to examine the learners' ability to use various types of grammatical collocations as well.

Biodata

Dr. Aisha A Dukali is a corpus linguist, who joined Research Group in Applied Linguistics in 2013. She obtained her PhD degree from the School of Music Humanities and Media at the University of Huddersfield in 2017. Her research focuses on exploring and analyzing the use of English collocation in the academic writings of fourth-year university students at Tripoli University in Libya (the Department of English, Faculty of Arts). She is interested in topics related to TEFL, language acquisition, corpus studies, corpus linguistics and applied linguistics in EFL environment in particular.

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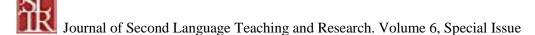
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