

Are collocations worth teaching in adult learner English as a foreign language (EFL) classes?

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the twentieth century communication among people of diverse cultures has become an urgent demand. There are various motives for adults to learn English as a foreign language: to develop their career or to increase their cultural horizons. The challenges facing adult learners are quite different from those encountered by younger learners. The time adults spend in training sessions is their worthwhile investment. Teachers have to adapt their teaching methods to help their adult students acquire the target language in a limited time. The current research involves a survey that raises the importance of collocations in English language acquisition for adult learners (students of military specialty). A multiple choice questionnaire was applied. 58 intermediate English language learners were involved in the research in order to find out that teaching collocation in EFL groups is obviously considered to be one of the most effective ways to easily develop learners' written and oral communicative competence. The results from the research were positive enough: the findings have implications for EFL teachers to encourage adult language learners to practice new words not only by remembering separate words, but also their stable collocations. The study recommends remedial procedures for the curriculum in the students' collocational knowledge development.

Keywords: foreign language learning, adult learner, vocabulary teaching, collocational competence

Introduction

Today no matter what personal or professional goals are, lifelong learning is a key component for a human's success. The chances of employment in today's economy are much greater for those who speak more than one language. When adults think about learning a foreign language, they actually want to learn a new language for some personal and/or professional goals and motivation.

Only a few learn English because of their attachment to foreign languages (intrinsic motivation), but the majority of adults learn English as a foreign language with an intention to pass an exam, develop their career or do business (extrinsic education). There is a growing number of adult education programs specifically designed to working adults.

Before 1950 the language learning studies were conducted only on children and there was little evidence about adult learning. The evolution of the learning system has led to the development of various teaching methods. Talking about adult attributes different from those of younger language learners brought us to the concept of andragogy. Andragogy is a term popularized by Malcome Knowles, an American educator in the study of adult learning. According to Knowles (1984), teaching to adults practices the following assumptions of andragogy:

- The learning is experiential and utilizes background knowledge.

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- The learning is relevant to current roles.
- The instruction is problem-centered.
- The students are motivated to learn.

It has become a controversial issue in recent years whether it's possible to become fluent in a foreign language as an adult. For a long time scientists thought only kids could achieve high proficiency in a foreign language, but today scientists (Huang, 2015; Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979) have proved that adults achieve a foreign language to the fluency nearly as well as children and attain native-like competence. No study has ever shown any direct correlation between reduced language acquisition skill and increased age. The age is considered simply to be a number and it cannot prevent from learning a new language. The only decline in language acquisition in adults is probably the environmental factors like long job hours, stressful work environments and the successful language acquisition in adult learners is more depended on the aspects like language aptitude, cognitive abilities, working memory capability and motivation.

Furthermore, there are many advantages to learning a new language as an adult. Many researchers came to the conclusion that adult language learners are self-directed, autonomous and intrinsically motivated. Adults are normally literate; they easily understand abstractions and have long attention spans. Conforming to Cross (1981), for instance, approximately 70 percent of adult learning is self-directed. Earlier, Knowls (1980) claimed that adults have a deep physiological need to be self-directing. Roberts and Pruitt (2003) consider that adult learners are autonomous in their learning needs and are much more in control of what they learn and how they learn. Volkering et al. (2010) in his turn concludes that "the relation of autonomous and self-determined types of motivation is increasing with the higher age." (p.94). Gethin and Gunnemark (1996) suggest that adults are generally literate, they understand abstractions, and have decent attention spans, and in terms of study habits, adults usually organize their time better than kids do. As Harmer (1991) notes, "adults' concentration span is generally longer than children's" (p.7). Adults habitually manage their time better than children. They are empowered by the ability to organize, summarize, and comprehend things on a large scale (ibid). Brown (1994) also observed, "[adults] can utilize various deductive and abstract processes to shortcut the learning of grammatical and other linguistic concepts" (p.90).

Adult learners are voluntarily participating in adult education courses and consequently are often highly motivated to complete their coursework and program successfully. Learning a language on behalf of their career or personal life are definitely strong motivators. Adults can use this motivation to engage more deeply in the language learning and simultaneously improve English knowledge more rapidly. The difficulty arises for learners about vocabulary acquisition in English language communicative competence. As Newmark (1981) clarifies, "L2 learners rely on their grammatical knowledge and formulate sentences through linguistic processes, rather than access and retrieve the word units in the storage in the mind" (p.180). By the study of Natsumi (2012) the translator "will be 'caught' every time, not by his grammar, which is probably suspiciously 'better' than an educated native's, not by his vocabulary, which may well be wider, but by his unacceptable or improbable collocations" (p. 8). Understanding precise meanings of polysemantic words in particular passages or contexts becomes challenging. As Favretti (2008) states, "the polysemy of the word is disambiguated by the representation of its collocates." (p.92). To deal with this specific issue, Nesselhauf (2005) recommends that some combinations are "arbitrary to some degree and therefore have to be learnt" (p. 252).

Therefore, the researches in the past decades have shown that collocations usually represent a problem for foreign language students because of the interference from their mother tongue. Correspondingly, the awareness of the importance of collocations as a part of learning vocabulary has been growing in the field of foreign language teaching. Much research has been held on teaching collocations to schoolchildren, however, the emphasis still needs to be put on developing collocational competence while teaching ESP, in particular, in English for the military specialty students in Georgia.

Problem statement

Learning a foreign language is definitely a different experience for adult learners. Adult language learners encounter certain challenges and obstacles when they begin learning a new language. Learning a foreign language is not an easy process – it absolutely takes time, effort and energy. Since the modern world is a chaotic bustle and has a lot of challenges, most adults struggle to balance learning and a full-time job. Being “adult” takes a great deal of time, they cannot only focus on learning. Adults have to divide their attention among different responsibilities. It is really hard for them to fit in regular studies or to attend classes regularly, because they have a lot of commitments and busy life styles: they work, manage families, or raise their children. Bourgeois (1999) showed that “about half of students questioned stated that the major difficulty was the lack of time because of familial obligations” (p.90).

Therefore, time is one of the adults’ most precious possessions, and they value it greatly. Learning a foreign language does not need to be a slow or tedious process for them. Adult learners come to the classroom because they need to learn English in a limited time for their work or study. When adults decide to begin learning a new language, they really expect to attain a certain level of the target language quickly. They normally investigate how long the learning process will take, since their working environment and home life appears to be more demanding and they have comparably less time available to be engaged in the learning process due to their various responsibilities. Combining study and other commitments slows down their learning and adults find language learning more difficult just for this reason because it challenges both their mind (to construct a new cognitive framework) and time (sustained consistent practice). Since learning a language is not easy, the time and energy involved in becoming proficient in a foreign language can be discouraging for some students. While in the past it was believed that adults cannot learn a foreign language fast, contemporary research (Gabriele et al., 2021) reveals that it is not so, and, with relevant strategies, they can achieve success.

Learning a foreign language takes a lot of time because in most cases it is not taught properly. The main challenge for the foreign language learners is to enrich their vocabulary, use it accurately in different contexts, familiarize with practical use and keep them in their long-term memory. Schmitt (2002) claims that “evidence from large corpora (language databases) shows that there is more lexical patterning than ever imagined, and that much of what was previously considered grammar is actually constrained by lexical choices”(p.14).

Adults often do not know how each word goes correctly in context that creates difficulties in understanding. Lewis (2000) asserts that the reason why so many students are not making any perceived progress is simply because they have not been trained to notice which word goes with which. They may know quite a lot of individual words which they struggle to use, along with their grammatical knowledge, but they lack the ability to use those words in a range of collocations which pack more meaning into what they say or write.

Of course, nothing can replace hard work and effort language learning requires, but they can absolutely learn a new foreign language faster if they follow the right strategy. Ur (1996, pp. 60-63) recommends that the following aspects of a new vocabulary item must be taught to the students: 1 - form: pronunciation and spelling, 2 - grammar: if it is regular or irregular, transitive or intransitive, its plural and singular forms, etc., 3 - collocation, 4 - aspects of meaning: denotation, connotation, appropriateness, 5 - meaning relationships: synonyms, antonyms, co- hyponyms, superordinates, translation, and 6 - word formation: if it can be broken down to its components. In vocabulary teaching, Woolard (2000) gives collocations a special role and emphasizes that „ learning more vocabulary is not just learning new words, it is often learning familiar words in new

combinations" (p. 31). Correct collocating makes English more fluent and professional, and makes it easier for native speakers understand foreign language learners' speech.

In recent years English language learners have become aware of the significance of learning vocabulary as an indicator of communicative competence (Muliawati & Ismail, 2017). Adult language learners are especially concerned about expanding their vocabulary, since learning a new language without a wide range of vocabulary acquisition is practically impossible. But language fluency does not depend so much on isolated words as on having a quick availability to a store of lexical chunks, among which collocation is the most essential kind of lexical unit (Bui, 2021). Correct collocating makes English more fluent and professional, and makes it easier for native speakers understand foreign language learners' speech. It is English teachers' responsibility to emphasize the teaching of collocations while practicing vocabulary. To meet adult learners' perspectives and demands the language teachers have to be focused on creating an effective language learning environment by intensive teaching of collocations.

Literature review

Adult teaching is getting more and more popular in the past decades. Adult students are generally voluntary learners and resist being taught in a way they view as ineffective. Their intrinsic motivation of learning target language comes from the interest to meet their career prospects in their own country or abroad. Harmer (2007) notes that "many adults are able to sustain a level of motivation by holding on to a distant goal in a way that teenagers find more difficult" (p.84). But they have to distribute their attention in different responsibilities. The main reason is that they have a lot of commitments and lead a busy life style.

In recent years there have been a shift away from rote learning and monotonous grammar rules in favor of a more holistic approach (Wall & Musetti, 2018). The changes in the society resulted some changes in language learners' goals, i.e. learning languages to communicate. Understanding the importance of the issue, linguists and teachers have held numerous studies on foreign language teaching in order to find out and introduce more realistic and effective language teaching methods and approaches that help teachers in performing their job properly. By the beginning of 1970s Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Communicative Approach which emphasized the importance of teaching vocabulary was introduced. Schmitt (2000) observed that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to acquisition of a second language" (p.50). Communicative Language Teaching allows learners to get involved in real communication in the target language. As determined by Hymes (1971), the basic concept of CLT is to develop students' communicative competence by providing real-life situations that initiate communication. So, with more than 50 years of usage as a tested approach to language acquisition, the Communicative Approach is a proven one. Teachers now assess language learners' achievement by looking at their development in communicative competence.

No matter how perfectly students learn grammar, how successfully they master the target language pronunciation, without mastery of vocabulary communication is doubtful to occur in a meaningful way. As Wilkins (1972) claims, "without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.111-112). Effective vocabulary knowledge engages students in the learner – centered, cooperative and collaborative activities. As Nation (1994) asserts, teaching vocabulary should be emphasized as it empowers the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. As Neuman & Dwyer (2009) determine, vocabulary are "words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)" (p.385).

For an adult learner, it is often not enough to just rely on memorization and understanding the meaning of new vocabulary. Many of learners waste hours on memorizing thousands of vocabulary words simply from the dictionary. They are

aware of word meanings quite well, but they still experience problems with using words in different contexts. If facilitators strive to help students improve English fluency, collocation proficiency is one of the fundamental factors. By combining collocations into vocabulary instruction, teachers assist EFL learners in associating vocabulary easily. Hill (2000) asserts that students “do not really “know” or “own” a word unless they also know how that word is used, means knowing something about its collocational field” (p.60). Moreover, learning the co-occur vocabulary intensively will assist foreign language learners to save their time and energy and dramatically increase their ability to speak and write and improve English language proficiency.

Significance of collocation in vocabulary acquisition

Learning vocabulary implies not only gaining new words, but also being aware of their function and applicability in different contexts and situations. There is a problem that without context it is often impossible to say in which meaning it is used, because most English words are polysemantic, i.e. they having more than one meaning. A special difficulty arises when it comes to the exact meaning of a word in a given context. As a result, during the study year foreign language learners are always complaining about a lack of information about the learned words in various contexts.

Learning vocabulary in phrases and set expressions rather than in an isolated position is most helpful, because it gives context to remember the meaning and helps the learner use the vocabulary in a natural way. Besides, it is easier for human brain to remember and apply language in chunks or blocks rather than as single words. It is pointed out in Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English (McIntosh et al., 2002) that “the precise meaning in any context is determined by that context: by the words that surround and combine with the core word by collocation” (p. 2009). This process must reflect the learning of fixed words and their combinations rather than the memorization of single words. In order to develop learners’ communicative competence, ‘collocation’ is considered to be one of the most effective techniques. Firth (1957), who is known as the father of collocations, first introduced this term to refer to “the company that words keep” (p.183). McCarthy (1990) believes that “in vocabulary teaching there is a high importance of collocation” (p.12). Therefore, language fluency (especially while speaking and writing) does not depend only on the knowledge of separate words, but also on having a quick availability to the store of lexical chunks. Because of the arbitrary nature of collocations, researchers suggest foreign language teachers to inspire learners to learn collocations. Collocations should be paid attention to from the very beginning of learning the language. Moreover, as Nattinger (1988) indicates, it is comparatively easier to remember a new word in a group of associations, which implies that language chunks help learners to accumulate information.

Theories in cognitive psychology sustain the positive role of learning collocation in increasing language fluency. Correct collocating transforms a person’s English skills into more fluent and professional type and makes it easier for native speakers to understand what one is saying. Lewis (1997) mentions that “instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations and to present them in expressions. Rather than trying to break things into ever smaller pieces, there is a conscious effort to see things in larger, more holistic, ways” (p. 204). Therefore, a native speaker’s fluency is evidently associated with the fact that their vocabulary is not stored only as individual words. Hill (2000) estimates that “collocations are found in up to 70% of everything we say, hear, read, or write” (p.53).

Hymes (1972) created the term “Communicative Competence” to encompass these abilities that make up a fluent foreign language speaker. Enhancing the communicative competence of the target language, language learners have to concentrate on phraseology and the study of word-combinations or collocations. It is necessary to combine collocations into vocabulary instruction to help EFL learners expand their vocabulary size. When words are combined in a chunk, they have the power to predict each other’s occurrence. If language learners aspire to become advanced speakers of the target language, they will know a huge

number of collocations that will constitute their collocational competence and help learners to express themselves effectively. As Hill (2000) asserts, students speak unnaturally and “create longer utterances because they do not know the collocations which express precisely what they want to say” (p.49).

In countries where students learn English as a foreign language reading is especially important, as most of their target language communication is limited to reading. Language learners can accumulate a large amount of vocabulary, yet reading skill is not easy to develop. It involves so many components to be mastered. Students are required not only to read fluently but also to understand the entire text. Studies made it evident that foreign language learners are equipped with better abilities to understand reading texts if they have a better knowledge of collocations. Based on Hunston and Francis (2000), for instance, by storing a great number of multi-word lexical units in the mental lexicon, learners can comprehend the meaning of a text without having to pay attention to individual words. This is helpful for enhancing both the reading and listening effectiveness. Knowledge of collocations also improves reading speed due to forecasting / anticipation of the forthcoming words.

Lack of collocational knowledge makes specific difficulties in writing. To develop foreign language learners’ writing competence, English language tutors have been making considerable efforts to allocate a great deal of time to correcting students’ writing and try to identify the difficult areas in students’ English compositions. According to Hill (2000), “students with good ideas often lose marks because they don’t know the four or five most important collocations of a key word that is central to what they are writing about” (p.60). As mentioned above, collocational knowledge is very beneficial in the process of attempting to achieve efficient writing competence and native-like language production. When foreign learner’s texts are compared to the texts written by professional language users or native speakers, natural use of collocation appears to be a distinctive feature. Sometimes using them is difficult even for advanced learners of English. Nation (2001) points out that some levels of accurate use of collocation are essential in the matter of achieving native fluency: “all fluent and appropriate language requires collocation knowledge” (p.318). Hill (2000) mentions that it in the literature on the topic “any analysis of students’ speech or writing shows a lack of collocational competence” (p.49). Therefore, collocation is the standard for overall fluency in foreign language learning. Natives acquire collocations naturally since they hear and listen to them every day. Foreign language learners should acknowledge that learning collocations is an integral part of attaining proficiency of a target language.

Although collocations seem to be a well-established topic in EFL, the topic still remains significant. Zaabalawi and Gould (2017) in their research suggest that reading texts should be viewed by EFL teachers as a source of collocational content in order to enhance their students’ awareness of the existence of such expressions in reading texts. The syllabus designers should incorporate a reading component in their courses addressing English writing. EFL learners may sometimes consider that English consists of single words which should be individually mastered and then placed together to make complete utterances, a fragmented view of learning. They indicate that English is a language consisting of readymade lexical chunks that should, for the most part, be committed to memory. An EFL learner, for example, should learn ‘to attend school’, not ‘attend’ + ‘school’, ‘to lead a life’, not ‘lead’ + ‘life’, ‘to conduct a test’, not ‘conduct’ + ‘test’, ‘to launch a campaign’, not ‘launch’ + ‘campaign’. This way, English will come across to an interlocutor as more natural and the approach will also be likely to make learning more efficient.

Bui (2021) emphasizes the significance of the acquisition of collocations in the improvement of four skills. He says that errors in collocations indicate that many students lack the knowledge of collocations. He recommends that collocations should be included in the textbooks and teaching materials so that the teachers and students can explore and absorb the collocations. The learners can gradually improve their knowledge and language skills as collocations are not easy to master for second or foreign language learners. English teachers should find out the best ways to instruct students with collocations and provide sufficient practice to acquire collocations effectively.

Rao (2018) also highlights the importance of collocations in the teaching of vocabulary or language acquisition. He considers that it is the responsibility of English teachers to give importance to the teaching of collocations while working on vocabulary. Teachers should encourage learners to listen to or read genuine English written by native speakers in order to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Teachers and students have to use the more Nizonkizarn vocabulary teaching techniques like collocational vocabulary learning, which is a type of widely-accepted modern technique.

The significance of collocations in ESP, in particular in English for the military specialty students

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), due to its multi-disciplinary nature, has got great significance in our educational setting where English is foreign language and students need it for their academic or professional trends. While so far attention to teaching collocations has been paid for teaching general English to schoolchildren, nowadays the attention shifts to teaching collocations to ESP students in higher education institutions. Teaching professional vocabulary in ESP context is a vital part of English language teaching at a university level. Nizonkiza (2017) explored the effect of teaching collocations on building academic vocabulary and hence improving academic writing abilities. The experiment revealed that purposeful teaching collocations to university students contributes to building students' productive use of collocations in both cued recall and essay writing.

Duplančić Rogošić (2014), for instance, investigated the level of collocational competence of non-native users of Business English. She found that, while students well enough understood collocations typical for business language in the process of reading, they had grave problems applying correct collocations in speaking and writing. Suleman et al. (2020) examined the receptive and productive knowledge of collocations among the business students of COMSATS University Islamabad Vehari Campus who studied English. They applied both a questionnaire and two collocations tests with 100 students. They found that 66.4% of the respondents had the correct answer at the receptive level compared with only 33.7% at the productive level. This underlines that collocations should be paid special attention while teaching speaking and writing.

Najafi and Talebinezhad (2018) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 80 medical students, whose English skills were at intermediate level. While the experimental group concentrated on collocations, the control group applied synonym, antonym, definition and mother tongue translation while teaching isolated vocabulary. The pre-post tests on medical vocabulary and terminology showed a more statistically significant increase of those skills in the experimental group compared to the control one.

Abedi and Mobaraki (2014) studied teaching grammatical collocations to computer students. While lexical collocations do not contain grammatical elements, but are combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, grammatical collocations consist of a noun, or an adjective or a verb, plus a particle (a preposition, an adverb or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive, a gerund, or clause). Comparing the pre- and post-test results after treatment the researchers came to conclusion that that grammatical collocation instruction had a significant positive effect on the understanding of ESP texts by undergraduate computer engineering students.

In today's communication era when expressing one's opinion could lead to arising international integration, English language has become the lingua franca for communicating the basic concepts of different fields, including military. Therefore, motivating military students to reach communicative competence in English is essential. Lee and Kim (2021) defined collocational knowledge for military students as the extent to which learners understand recurring but arbitrary combinations of words, such as 'friendly fire' or 'surgical strike'. They study included 1,637 participants. The students in the experimental group underwent corpus-based (concordance-based) instruction, which revealed to be more efficient than the traditional teaching of vocabulary.

While considerable attention has been given to the importance of teaching and learning collocations among English as a foreign language learners, it would be certainly inappropriate for military specialty students to graduate the English language course, but not make progress in mastering English collocations.

It is uncertain whether Georgian military students achieve a certain level of mastery in collocations and communicative competence. A better understanding of general and military collocations will certainly increase their ability to express ideas in the military field. If military students adequately study collocations, they will be able to practice proper collocations in their daily life and in their workplace. The mastery of English collocations will be beneficial for their future career and promotion as well.

Due to limited research on collocations and the lack of emphasis on collocations in teaching and learning in English for the military specialty students in Georgia, this study will help encourage the prominence of learning collocations among military students as well as increase an awareness among Georgian military instructors to focus more attention on collocations. These two key objectives of the study will promote mastering collocations and consequently develop their communicative competence in English language.

To sum up, teaching collocations have a great importance for some reasons:

- The knowledge of collocations is a good sign of language competence;
- Usage of collocations is a distinguish feature in native speaker's oral and written speeches;
- Thinking about every single word every time one speaks or writes detains learner's achieving fluency;
- Language fluency depends on being able to produce word combinations automatically;
- Collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms, and everyday chunks are used as ready- made pieces of the language the learner can access quickly when they need;
- The context and the deliberate association including collocations provide connections that help learners to deeply understand a word's meaning and add it to their current vocabulary;
- Knowing collocations diminishes errors. A number of researchers have pointed to the fact that many errors may be attributed to lack of accurate and appropriate use of collocations;
- The knowledge of collocations also promotes the language learners' comprehension, since they are more driven towards understanding lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes rather than as individual words.

Methodology

Research goals

The current research aimed at collecting and analyzing data concerning collocational teaching in English foreign language groups at the language school of National Defense Academy, i.e. at defining how frequently English language teachers apply collocations in teaching, how well the language learners can apply collocations and whether they acknowledge the value of collocation in vocabulary knowledge. It was held during the academic year 2019/2020. At National Defense Academy, English is taught in two steps: general English (A2 for some students, although National Admission exams suppose that all school graduated possess B1 level, but in reality it is not always so →B1→ B2 level, during 1-2 semesters, depending on the student's initial level) and professional (military English (B2 level, during 1 semester). Students whose English level is already B2, can directly take military English.

The aim of this study was investigating the impact of teaching collocations on language competence based on the inquiry of the adult language learners specializing in military English. The research determined the further steps and recommendations in order to promote collocation teaching in English language groups.

Research questions

The study will provide the answers to the following questions:

- Do the adult learners have difficulties to comprehend the context even if they know the meaning of the separate words?
- Is the intensive collocation teaching more effective than teaching isolated vocabulary?
- Does the intensive teaching of collocations improve students' language skills?
- Do the effective language teachers put more emphasis on collocations?

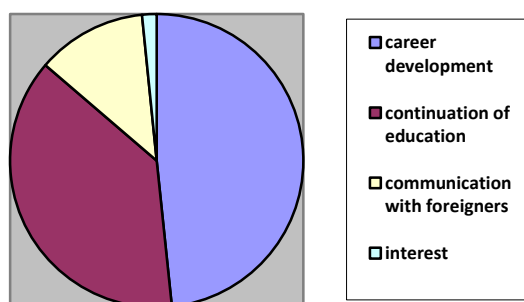
Methods

The current research involved quantitative methods (a questionnaire survey). The research was conducted in the academic year 2019-2020 at the language school of National Defense Academy in order to get the relevant findings and results. The total amount of the participant students was 58 intermediate English students from six groups. The research participants were adult language learners aged 20 – 40. 62 % were male and 38% female.

A multiple choice questionnaire made up by the researchers was composed in English. The obtained results are as follows.

Figure 1: Number of Students showing different purposes of learning English

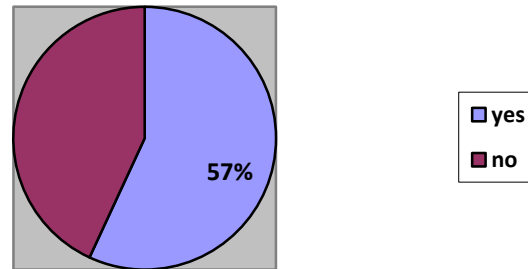
What is your purpose of learning English? (58 responses)



The answers to the question show that adult students attend English language classes with different purposes: 48.3% of the research participants claim that they learn English language for their career development, 37.9% for their future education, and other 12.1 % want to know English to communicate with foreigners.

Figure 2: Number of students having problems with understanding words

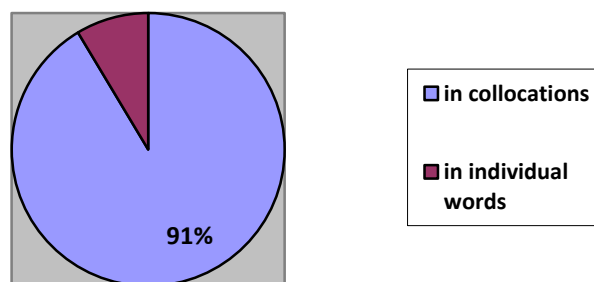
When you know the meaning(s) of a word, do you still often have problems understanding it in context? (58 responses)



56.9% of the questionnaire participants claim that they still have difficulty to understand word meanings in context, though they have been learning English for years and most of them reached the B2 level of English skills.

Figure 3: Number of students giving their opinion about learning language with separate words or collocations

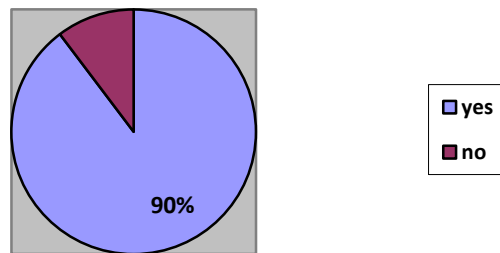
What is better, learning English in collocations (1) or individual words (2)?



Based on the following question, 91.4 % of the students clearly showed that they would rather be taught the English language vocabulary in collocations than as individual words.

Figure 4: Number of Students analyzing the improvement of learners' language competence through teaching collocations

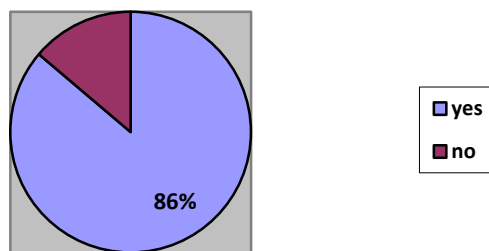
Do you think that teaching collocations will improve students' language skills? (58 responses)



89.7 % of the survey participants believe in the case of delivering and practicing a sufficient amount of collocations they will improve their language skills.

Figure 5: Number of students giving their opinions about English teachers' preference to collocation application

Do you think that good language teachers should pay much attention to collocations while teaching vocabulary? (58 responses)



As the survey shows, 86.2 % of the participant students think that good teachers pay much attention to teaching collocations in English classes. They should encourage the learners to remember not only separate words, but also their proper collocations.

Conclusion and recommendations

According to the research findings, the current situation gives the researchers the basis to conclude that adult learners at the Academy of Defense in the given research attend English classes for the reason for career development (48.3%) and in order to continue their education (37.9%). Although, according to course assessment results their level is defined as B2 more than half of them (56.9%) still find it difficult to comprehend the meanings of different collocations in contexts and to use them while speaking and writing because of irrational and unpredictable nature of collocations. The majority of them (91%) feel a need in collocation teaching which both saves their learning time and makes their communication more natural and effective. They (89.7%) believe that teaching them collocations will significantly improve their language skills. And they (86.2%) expect teachers to teach accordingly. These findings, due to their modest scale, of course, cannot be generalized. More studies in Georgia and beyond are needed.

However, if we compare the obtained results with other researches (Abedi & Mobaraki, 2014; Duplančić Rogošić, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2021; Nizonkiza, 2017; Najafi & Talebinezhad, 2018; Suleman et al., 2020) on a similar topic, a conclusion can be made that teaching collocations to ESP students is necessary to improve their language skills. Based on the conducted literature review and research, the following recommendations can be a useful guide for:

- The syllabus designers to place a great deal of emphasis on collocation teaching in order to develop language proficiency;
- The English teachers to have awareness on the need to take into consideration collocation patterns when dealing with new vocabulary in the classroom;
- The teachers to make sure that their students remember not only the word itself, but also its proper collocation;
- The adult language learners, especially ESP students to show more interest in collocational knowledge when practicing new words.

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