The Effects of Instruction of Noticing Collocation on Thai EFL learners

Dentisak Dorkchandra

Department of Thai and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science, Kasetsart University, Chalerphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus, Thailand

Received for publication: 17 December 2014.
Accepted for publication: 25 February 2015.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of instruction of noticing collocation on Thai EFL learners in terms of their collocational competence and opinions towards the instruction. The participants were 57 first year English major students in the 2nd semester of academic year 2013 who were selected through a purposive sampling method. They were divided into an experimental group (n=28) and a control group (n=29) by drawing lots. The quantitative data were collected using a pre- and post-test and a five-point scale questionnaire with 11 close-ended items. One open-ended item of the questionnaire was used to collect the qualitative data. The analysis of the quantitative data was done using descriptive statistics and the Independent Samples T-test was used to test the hypothesis. The qualitative data were analyzed by means of content analysis. The results indicated that the experimental group was significantly different from the control group as measured by their post-collocation test mean scores (p<.05). The participants had positive opinions toward the instruction of noticing collocation, and it was revealed through the content analysis that the instruction of noticing collocation was deemed as interesting and conducive to further English learning. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research were included.

Keywords: Collocation, Collocational competence, Noticing

Introduction

At present, it is unquestioningly accepted that one of the important elements of both acquisition of one’s native language and learning a foreign language is vocabulary learning (Morra & Camba, 2009). In the realm of natural and communicative English teaching, vocabulary and the skills to improve it have been increasingly emphasized. This results in more and more language researchers and teachers’ becoming interested in the instruction of vocabulary. It is also well-recognized that to know how to use the right words and use them carefully in some situations is more important than to know the language grammatical structures. This is because without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, it would be difficult to use the grammatical structures correctly. Some decades ago, David Wilkins (1972) made it absolutely clear that “Without grammar, little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111). Wilkins’ words clearly reflect the importance of vocabulary knowledge as an indispensable part of a language teaching and learning activity. Vocabulary knowledge, in this regard, refers to the knowledge of which word is to be naturally used with which word, or collocation. As said by Henriksen (2013) collocations are conveyers of precise semantic information, so incorrect use of collocations may potentially lead to misunderstandings, and the failure to use them appropriately may signal lack of expertise and knowledge.

Thai EFL learners especially university freshmen seem to encounter collocations in EFL settings. One of the causes might have been due to the teachers’ negligence of collocation teaching in high school (Wattanapichet, 2013). Other factors research claims L2 learners’ collocational incompetence is attributable to include insufficient exposure
to collocations (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995), tendency to focus on individual words (Barfield, 2009; Gyllstad, 2007; Wray, 2002), and lack awareness of collocations as lexical units (Ying & O’Neill, 2009). Consequently, students leave schools and institutes with a very low ability to communicate or express themselves effectively by using English collocations. At a university level, even when majoring in English, many students are still struggling English users since they cannot perform satisfactorily in their receptive and productive skills as seen in their midterm and final tests. It is obvious that the learners need collocations both for language production and comprehension, but their collocational competence is still limited.

The researcher himself who has been teaching English at a Thai university for over a decade understands such a common problem. If collocations are not taught, it will still be difficult for these learners to cope with collocations effectively, so as a teacher in an EFL environment (Thailand), the researcher has noticed that collocations do not receive much attention from teachers in classrooms. Teaching collocations to those students is, therefore, deemed very helpful, but where the teaching is supposed to start? The answer to this question lies in the guidance proposed by Lewis (2000) who stated that teaching collocations should start from making the learners notice collocations. But the notion of noticing is not just a passive activity of taking a look at words or phrases, it involves a systematic practice (Nation, 2000) whether in a form of teacher-guided noticing or self-directed noticing. In addition, the effectiveness of teaching noticing should be reinforced by other various awareness-raising activities such as consulting a specialized dictionary, doing exercises — gap-filling, matching, crossing out, translating with L1 scaffolding, and reconstructing, the present study was carried out to specifically investigate if the instruction of noticing collocation has any effects on Thai university EFL learners’ collocational competence, and what opinions the students hold toward the instruction of noticing collocation.

**Literature Review**

**Collocation: Definition and Classification**

Nation (1990) defines the term collocation as being separated into parts, containing its own meaning, “col- (from com- meaning “together, with”), -loc- (meaning “to place or put”), -ate (a verb suffix), and –ion (a noun suffix)” (p. 32). McCarthy & O’Dell (2005) define collocation as a close word combination with other words as in the following examples: too collocates with much or late; the word tall seems to collocate with building and high with mountain. Lewis (2000) explains that collocation can be considered as the method of unexpected natural co-occurrence with lexical items in a context. Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English (Oxford University Press, 2009) gives the following clear-cut definition “Collocation is the way words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing (P. v). It elaborates further by providing examples such as strong wind, heavy rain.

As for the classification of collocations, various types of collocations have been distinguished. For the purpose of present study, the researcher utilized the classification of collocations by Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1986) as follows: Grammatical collocation and lexical collocation.

Lexical collocations consist of two or more content words, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Examples of this type of collocation are as follows:

- Adjective + noun: sour milk
- verb + noun: conduct research
- noun + noun: dust accumulates
adverb + adjective  : mentally disabled
verb + adverb      : move freely
adverb + verb      : proudly present

Grammatical collocations, on the other hand, are the combinations of a content word and a function word, which is usually a preposition, as in the examples below:

noun + preposition : an increase in
verb + preposition : elaborate on
adjective + preposition : familiar with
preposition + noun : on probation

**Collocational knowledge and the necessity to teach collocation**

One frequent problem encountered by English learners is the unnatural use of vocabulary. They cannot express themselves as the native English speakers do. The wrong use of vocabulary items do not make their language sound natural. Lack of competence in this area forces students into grammatical mistakes because they create longer utterances because they do not know the collocations which express precisely what they want to say. Research has identified some causes of such a problem including emphasis of instruction on grammar and pronunciation rather than vocabulary (Fernandez, Prahlad, Rubtsova, & Sabitov, 2009; Farghal & obiedat, 1995), L1 interference (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993) and overgeneralization (Duan & Qin, 1012).

Chan & Liou (2005) explained the cause of students’ being weak in collocation use, pointing out that teaching of collocations in English foreign language classes did not get enough attention. Researchers (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Fan, 2009) suggest that rather than teaching vocabulary as single lexical items which causes a lexical incompetence on the learners’ part, students must be made aware of the necessity of acquiring collocations.

To help ease the problem a large number of techniques and approaches to teaching and learning vocabulary have emerged in response to the recognition of the significance of vocabulary knowledge, and one of such techniques is collocation. According to Jaen (2007), Collocations are vital to non-native English speakers in order to speak or write fluently and accurately. To have a native-like English fluency, it is therefore essential that learners learn and teachers need to teach collocations.

**Noticing**

Noticing or sometimes interchangeably referred to as awareness, as considered by psychologists, is a means which links input to memory system. Scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 1990; Long, 1985; McLaughlin, 1987) consider noticing as an important tool in learning foreign language. They believe that no acquisition takes place without awareness or noticing; while others, such as Truscott (1998) view noticing only as a means for the acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge.

Touching on the acquisition of second language, Lewis (2000) points out the significant role noticing plays as a basic starting point for teaching collocation. Taken as a significant part of the lexical approach, noticing is explained by Schmidt (1990) as “observational activities conducted by learners driven by conscious attention.”

The lexical approach emphasizes the role of noticing as a catalyst for language acquisition and encourages learners to notice language, especially lexical chunks and collocations because it deems it to be central to any methodology connected to a lexical view of language. Batstone (1996) posits that noticing is a complex process because it involves the intake both of meaning and form, and it takes time for learners to progress from initial recognition to the point where they can internalize the underlying rule. For Lewis, (2000), if learners are not directed to notice language in a text, there is a danger that they will see through the text and consequently fail to achieve intake. Therefore, teachers should direct the learners’ attention to notice collocations through various active exercises. Schmidt & Frota (1986) highlights the importance of noticing that “those who notice most learn most” (p. 237). For Thornbury (1997) noticing is “a conscious cognitive process” (p. 327); therefore, it is up to the teachers to push their learners towards developing noticing strategies. In his view, this could be achieved through reformulation and reconstruction. Active exercises of various forms should be constructed to direct the learners’ attention to the noticing of collocations.

To reinforce noticing, Woolard (2000) proposes recording the selected collocations in a self-directed process. Moreover, noticing is affected by factors such as the item’s salience and usefulness, its presentation, the learner’s interest and motivation, the learners’ mindset i.e. focusing on individual words rather than larger chunks of language, and the learning environment. To make noticing stronger, several reinforcing activities are suggested such as homework, cooperation, involvement, and motivation (Lewis, 2000). In addition, repetition and meaningful contexts are also suggested as ways to foster noticing (Kennedy, 2003). One way that mo-
ivation can be achieved in directing the learners’ attention to collocation noticing is using authentic texts from newspapers and magazines (Lewis, 2000).

**Previous Research**

Several research works have investigated the effects of teaching collocation but not many have been particularly conducted to investigate the effects of teaching noticing collocation in relation to the learners’ opinions toward the received instruction. Most of the studies (Darvishi, 2014; Hong & Salehuddin, 2011; Hou, 2012) merely analyze the collocation errors made by EFL students or provided short-term instruction of collocation and then explored the collocation errors made the learners. They mention noticing as an indispensable activity in the instruction, but did not elaborate how the noticing should be practiced in a systematic way.

Some recent studies explored the pedagogical effects of collocation noticing instruction focusing on the collocational competence of the learners (e.g. Eliasi, Mobashshernia, & Khondabandehlu, 2013; Heildari, 2012; Rahimi & Momeni, 2011; Ying and Hendricks, 2004) and most of them found the positive role that noticing plays in enhancing the learners’ collocational competence. Soleimani, Jafarigohar, & Iranmanesh (2013) used the explicit instruction to teach CAR (Collocation Awareness Raising) technique with EAP vocational students and assessed their academic collocational knowledge through writing tasks. The results demonstrated that the learners who learnt academic collocations through Collocation Awareness Raising (CAR) showed a constant increase in success rate, the number of collocations learnt, and making use of collocations to make more fluent and correct English sentences instead of creating incorrect, long and inappropriate phrases and utterances.

Some researchers (e.g. Channel, 1981; Eidian, Gorgian, & Aghvami, 2014), when investigating the effect of collocation instruction, focused only on a few collocations or specific collocational types. Channel (1981) used a collocation grid in teaching the Adjective + Noun and Verb + Preposition to determine the effect of the instruction. Eidian, Gorgian, & Aghvami (2014) used a collocation book to teach collocation awareness focusing on the Verb + Noun pattern after the error analysis of students’ essays showed that the Verb + Noun collocation was their frequent mistakes. This line of research measured the learners’ collocational competence through their pieces of writing and found the significant improvement of their collocational competence.

Teaching collocation on a web-based platform is also gaining interest with the rapidly advancing advent of the Internet technology. Most of the studies of web-based collocation instruction capitalize on corpus-based or concordancing activities to enhance noticing (e.g. Celik, 2011; Zaferanieh & Behrooznia (2011). The results are conflicting. Celik found that web-based collocation instruction did not significantly impact the learners’ learning achievement, but did have a significant impact on the retention of collocation learning. Zaferanieh & Behrooznia found that concordancing approach was highly efficient in teaching and learning collocations, and participants’ scores of learning collocations through this method were higher than learners’ scores in traditional method (especially in learning non-congruent collocations that the difference was significant). However, the weak point of such research works is the lack of mentioning the participants’ proficiency level, time constraints, and Internet access. In addition, such research did not provide the qualitative results in terms of the learners’ perception or opinions toward learning under such environments.

Consequently, to investigate if the instruction of noticing collocation plays any role in the students’ collocational competence and what their opinions toward the instruction will be like, the researcher proposed the following research questions for the present investigation:

1. Does the instruction of noticing collocation have any role in the students’ collocational competence?
2. What are the students’ opinions toward the instruction of noticing collocation?

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Fifty-seven Thai EFL students, out of the total number of 70 students, participated in this study. They were all first year English majors. The participants were chosen via a purposive sampling method based on their English reading test grades from the previous semester (Grade C, 60-69, and Grade B, 70-79, out of 100 total points) and their consent. Thirteen students were excluded from the study because they were either unwilling or inconvenient to
take part. Since most of the students were of medium English proficiency level, they were deemed appropriate for the setting of the study for their population properties were regarded as non-different. Having used the pre-test-post-test quasi experimental design, the researcher assigned the participants to control (n=29) and experimental (n=28) groups by drawing lots.

**Instruments**

A. An English collocation test was used as a pre-test prior to the study and as a post-test at the end of the experiment. The test had three main parts including (A) Filling-in-the blanks (10 items), (B) Multiple-choice (20 items), and (c) Matching the sentence halves (10 items). The reliability coefficient of the test was estimated using KR20 formula and found to be 0.82. The inter-rater reliability of the test was achieved through three university English teachers. The pre-test and the post-test were similar in number and content, but the place of the items on the pre-test was different from the post-test.

B. An opinion questionnaire (Conbrach’s alpha co-efficient = 0.93) which comprised 11 close-ended items and 1 open-ended item, totaling 12 items.

C. Texts for teaching collocation noticing which included 4 texts from the VOA news special English web pages and 4 texts from BBC learning English web pages. According to Lewis (2000), news articles and magazines are interesting sources of authentic collocation patterns. The texts from the two sources were therefore derived for use in this study.

**Procedure**

The study took place in the second semester of academic year 2013. At the beginning of the study, the English collocation test was administered to both groups. Since the participants had no class on Wednesday, the researcher asked them to cooperate in this manner: Every Wednesday the experimental group attended the instruction of noticing collocation class in the morning (10-12 a.m.), and the control group attended the conventional reading and vocabulary class in the afternoon (4-6 p.m.). Therefore, for eight weeks, every Wednesday, two hours per session, the experimental group was taught how to notice English collocations via several awareness-raising exercises and activities. The noticing was teacher-guided in which underlining, highlighting, translating, recording, and reconstructing were involved. First, the researcher told them to read the text, indicating to them the collocation patterns that appear such as Verb+ noun (throw a party / accept responsibility) etc. Then, they were encouraged to consult the Oxford Collocation Dictionary for Students of English to explore more of the relevant collocates. Next, they were to record in their vocabulary notebooks the noticed collocations using the topic method. The researcher then checked to see if they were correct collocations according to the types of collocation that had been taught. After that, the students did 3 sets of collocation exercises based on the text they had studied for the session. Set 1 was the Odd one out exercise in which one word which does not belong had to be crossed out. Set 2 was a gap-fill exercise where an incomplete sentence has to be filled out with one correct word. Set 3 was a sentence constructing exercise in which English sentences with translation in their first language were provided as well as a sentence in Thai which had to be subsequently translated into English with at least one collocation in use.

The control group received the same reading texts and followed the same procedure. For this group, while the teacher was presenting the new vocabulary, only classical techniques (definition, synonym, antonym, mother tongue translation) were used. That is, the words were presented to this group as it was in the previous reading classes before the study, no new application was implemented. One week after the experiment, the English collocation test was administered to both groups again. Also, the opinion questionnaire was distributed to the experimental group toward the end of the post-test. The students spent around 10 minutes or so completing the questionnaire.

The results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 16. Values for all descriptive are presented as means and standard deviation (S.D.).

**Results**

Does the instruction of noticing collocation have any role in the students’ collocational competence?

An independent t-test was run to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and control group on the pre-test of English collocation knowledge in order to probe their reading ability prior to the administration of the treatment. It was found in Table 1 that the significance (p value) of Levene’s test is .262 which is larger than the $\alpha$ value (= .05), so it was assumed that the variances of the two groups are equal. The t-observed value is...
.238, and the p value is .813 which is larger than the α level (.05). Based on these results, it can be concluded that there was not any significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the pre-test of English collocation. Thus, it can be concluded that the two groups enjoyed the same level of English collocational knowledge before the administration of the treatment. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and mean scores for the experimental (M = 18.37) and control (M = 18.50) groups on the pre-test of English collocation.

Table 1: Independent T-Test Pre-test of English Collocation by Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not as assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The descriptive statistics and mean scores for the experimental and control groups on the pre-test of English collocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment (n=28)</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>19.57</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (n=29)</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test of the two groups’ post-test mean scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment (n=28)</td>
<td>19.79</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.247</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (n=29)</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<.05

The results shown in Table 2 from comparing the pre and post- English collocation test means of the two groups showed that the English collocation test scores of the experimental group (M = 19.79, S.D. = 3.54) were different from those of the control group (M = 16.10, S.D. = 4.88). The Independent Samples T-Test of the two groups’ post-test mean scores showed that they were significantly different t (55)= 3.247, sig (2-tailed) =.002, indicating that there was a change in English collocational knowledge scores over two times period. As table 3 illustrates, teaching collocation noticing in the experimental group caused a significant change in their English collocation test scores.

What are the students’ opinions towards the instruction of noticing collocation?

To answer this research question, the students’ responses to the opinion questionnaire were analyzed. There were 11 statements measuring the students’ opinions toward the instruction of noticing collocation. For each statement, the responses were coded 5 for “strongly agree”, 4 “agree”, 3 “uncer-
tain”, 2 “disagree”, and 1 “strongly disagree”. The mean scores were interpreted according to the following levels of opinion: 4.50-5.00 = “very positive”, 3.50-4.49 = “positive”, 2.50-3.49 = “neutral”, 1.50-2.49 = “negative”, and 1.00-1.49 = “very negative”.

The following table (Table 4) summarizes the main findings related to this question.

Based on Table 4, the students’ responses to the 11 items in the questionnaire obtained a lowest mean of 4.07, a highest mean of 4.79, and a mean of 4.43 from all items. The average mean of 4.43 was considered a high rating, implying that the participants had a high level of opinion toward the instruction. In general, a considerable percentage of students perceived the importance of collocations (Mean = 4.79), opined that the instruction was new to them (Mean = 4.64), and that they would notice collocations whenever they speak or write in English (Mean = 4.57). Interestingly after being taught, the students thought they would look for collocations whenever they read English materials (Mean = 4.54).

Table 4: The Students’ opinions toward the instruction of noticing collocation and the interpretation of means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. You know what collocation is.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. You used to be taught about collocations.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. You know the importance of collocations.</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. You always use correct collocation when you speak or write in English.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The instruction of collocation noticing is new.</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Collocation noticing is easy to do.</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Due to collocation noticing instruction, I look for collocations whenever I read English materials.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Due to collocation noticing instruction, I am now more confident in speaking and writing English.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Due to collocation noticing instruction, I will consult a dictionary more often to find suitable words in English writing.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I will notice collocations whenever I listen to or writing in English.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I will recommend noticing collocations to other English learners.</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the students’ responses to the open-ended questionnaire item were analyzed (19 students or 67% responded) and finally categorized into three major themes: interest, benefits for English learning, and the time spent on the instruction. In the category of interest, the respondents commented that the instruction of noticing collocation was something new and challenging to them who had never been taught in high school. One student said, “This is quite interesting because I will know how to study English vocabulary more correctly. But I think it’s somewhat difficult, but fun,
and I have had a lot of knowledge.” In the category of the benefit for learning English, the application of the knowledge gained from the instruction of noticing collocation to English writing was mentioned by some students. For example, one student said, “I would like the teacher to teach writing as well so that I will apply the knowledge about noticing collocations to writing English sentences. I mean the more noticing we practice, the more writing we should do.” Five students commented on what they called insufficient time required for the instruction. They wanted more time to be spent on the instruction, but did not specify the amount. This comment reflects such a view, “I think the time for teaching this technique is too short. The teacher, if possible, should teach every day, and the knowledge will be kind of continuous.”

Discussion and conclusion

The two research questions addressed in this study intended to investigate the effect of the instruction of noticing collocation on the colloca tional competence of the participants and their opinions. For the colloca tional knowledge test, the t-test showed a significant difference between the performance of the group that received the instruction (M = 19.79, S.D. = 3.54) and the group with the conventional instruction (M = 16.10, S.D. = 4.88) t (55) = 3.247, p = .002, α = .05.

The result indicates that the instruction of noticing collocation improves the students’ English colloca tional knowledge. The finding is consistent with Heidari’s (2012) study which reported teacher-directed noticing as having a significant role in learning collocations, and Hsu (2010) who affirmed the effectiveness of direct collocation instruction on the learners’ vocabulary learning and retention. It also confirms the explicit instruction of collocation noticing. In this regard, the result of the present study is in accord with what Lewis (2000) insisted that the acquisition of second language begins at the noticing of collocations and, therefore, the instruction of collocation noticing can affect the learners’ colloca tional competence. The teacher-guided noticing in various forms such as highlighting employed in this study could help to explain the significantly increased post-test mean scores of the students’ colloca tional knowledge. According to Woolard (2000), an effective platform for raising awareness of collocation is to focus on a selection of the students’ mis-collocations. In this study, the students were encouraged to identify various collocation patterns such as Verb + Noun and Noun + Preposition and the teacher (the researcher) helped confirm their selection or correct in case the identified chunks were incorrect collocations. The increased scores could also be attributable to variously active but not passive activities in this study. According to Eser (2013), EFL learners are easily bored in classroom environments. This was achieved through the students’ using collocation dictionaries to help search for other possible collocates. Fox (1998) confirmed that colloca tional knowledge can be expanded through independent learning strategies on the part of the learners who use collocation dictionaries. Throughout the intervention in this study, the students were urged to use Oxford collocation dictionary for students of English and this could surely have played a significant role in improving the students’ colloca tional knowledge retrieved from the 8 texts. Various collocation noticing activities served also as The instruction of collocation noticing supported by active awareness-raising exercises as found in this study, therefore, confirms the lexical approach as an effective way to teach vocabulary, in particular English collocations.

Regarding the positive opinions the participants had toward the instruction of noticing collocation, the result of this study was in line with the finding in Chaiyaphat & Modehiran’s (2004) study that the students who received the collocation-based business English course had positive attitudes toward the so-called teaching and they deemed the instruction as interesting and useful. It was something expecting that the respondents in this study had very positive opinions toward item 3 (You know the importance of collocations.), item 6 (The instruction of collocation noticing is new), and item 10 (I will notice collocations whenever I listen to or write in English). Conzett (2000) states that “collocations exist in students’ L1, so it really is not difficult for them to understand the concept (p.75). The students in this study found the instruction of noticing collocation as new. At the same time, they accepted its importance and would practice what they had learned in the subsequent English encounter. This showed that the instruction of noticing collocation is not too challenging. In addition, that the students had positive opinions toward the instruction might be because the authentic texts were put into use. Using authentic texts for teaching collocations is supported by the study by Attar & Alla-
mi (2013) who used authentic texts in their collocation instruction and found that the learners had very positive opinions and that they were a good source of learning motivation on the learners’ part. The use of authentic texts for teaching collocation is vehemently supported by Lewis (2000) who states that “two of the teacher’s most important skills in the teaching of collocation are choosing the right kinds of texts and then guiding the learners’ attention so that they notice those items likely to be of most benefit in expanding those particular learners’ lexicons” (p. 186). The researcher decided to use the texts from the web pages of VOA special English and BBC learning English, having considered that they are replete with interesting stories and collocation characteristics.

With regard to the effective teaching of collocation, the length of time is also important. The literature has not provided a consensus on the length of time most appropriate for collocation teaching. However, the literature offers a broad suggestion of the length of time ranging from 2 weeks (Macis, 2011) to 16 weeks (Rahimi & Momeni, 2011). The participants in this study went through the treatment for 16 hours and the post-test result revealed that they achieved significantly improved collocational competence. This showed that the length of time used in this study was appropriate for retaining the knowledge in the participants’ long-term memory. Though some participants commented on the seemingly insufficient period of time for teaching how to notice collocation, it was understood that they just wanted to point out that the instruction of noticing collocation was useful and appealing to their knowledge curiosity. That the instruction of noticing collocation in this study resulted in the participants’ significantly increased collocation post-test scores was enough to conclude that the 16-hour instruction was appropriate.

To sum up, the results of the present study have supported the hypothesis that the instruction of noticing collocation is an effective way which significantly and positively contributes to the improvement of English collocational competence. At the same time, the findings have supported the previous studies on the positive opinions the learners had toward the teaching of collocation and collocation noticing.

**Implications of the study**

There are several limitations to the generalizability of the results found in the present study. Firstly, this study has been carried out with the first year students only in one campus of a university. Second, the number of students is another limitation. As this is a small quasi-experimental study, the number of the students is quite limited. Third, some students’ opinions towards vocabulary learning can be seen as another limitation. Nevertheless, in spite of its limitations, it is hoped that the total outcome of this study could be a starting point for more thorough investigations on teaching noticing collocations at a university level.

This study is of the following implications for both pedagogy and further research. One pedagogical implication is that collocation noticing should be integrated as part of every reading/writing course for the English major students at a university level. In integrating the teaching of collocation noticing, at least 2-3 awareness-raising exercises should be used for the purpose of reinforcing the noticing. Moreover, in teaching collocation noticing, authentic texts from various newspapers, both printed or online, should be used because they are appealing to students and contain various collocational patterns. If possible, every reading/writing class should be preceded by about 10 minutes spent on reading news stories so that students may be exposed more to English collocations as used in current situations. However, every research is not free from flaws. This research did not take into account the gender of the participants. Most of the participants in this research were female. Further research should investigate into the effects of the students’ gender and the teaching of collocation noticing on their collocational competence. In addition, the present study did not include pair work in its investigation. Pair work may have some influence on the learners’ achievement especially when considering the fact that a less able student pairs with a more able one. Future research may investigate the influence of pair work on the students’ collocational competence. Finally, since some students commented that it would be more beneficial if the time for the instruction could be lengthened. Future research, therefore, should study the length of time that would be most suitable for teaching collocation noticing.

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