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## Vietnamese University EFL Students' Use of Collocations

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### Abstract

This study investigates the understanding, challenges, and use of collocations among Vietnamese third-year English Language Teaching (ELT) majors in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, using a mixed methods approach. Analysing 72 letters and essays, along with group interviews with 8 students, the study revealed that while students recognised the importance of collocations in English writing, their understanding of the concept was partial. Challenges in learning collocations included difficulties with word choice and memorisation, while problems with using collocations were linked to insufficient comprehension, memory issues, and negative direct translation from their mother tongue. Although a discrepancy was found between students' perceived frequency of collocation use and their actual usage in writing samples, the most frequent subtype, Adjective + Noun, aligned with students' reported preferences. However, no significant correlation was found between the frequency of lexical collocation usage and writing scores. The study concludes with implications for improving the collocation learning process.

### Keywords

Lexical collocation, EFL writing, collocation usage, writing proficiency

### Introduction

Collocations, defined as words or terms that frequently co-occur, play a vital role in second language (L2) learning. According to Wood (2002) and McCarthy and Dell (2017), collocations are key lexical elements that allow learners to express themselves naturally and clearly in both speech and writing. Mastery of collocations not only enhances fluency but also helps learners attain proficiency levels comparable to native speakers. In writing specifically, studies by Hsu (2007), Kim and Bae (2012), and Jaya et al. (2019) suggest a strong link between collocation usage and writing quality, indicating that proper use of collocations can significantly improve students' writing competence. Given these advantages, the acquisition of collocations is fundamental to L2 learning, and instruction on collocations should be an integral part of language courses.

Despite their importance, collocations are often overlooked in language teaching, particularly in Vietnamese educational settings, where grammar tends to dominate the curriculum (Bui, 2021). Furthermore, learners from various backgrounds face persistent difficulties with collocations due to several factors, including first-language (L1) interference, a focus on individual words, and word-for-word translation. Misunderstandings about how words combine naturally in English contribute to these challenges (Nguyen & Webb, 2017; Labira et al., 2020; Harta et al., 2021).

While existing research highlights the importance of collocations and identifies some general learning difficulties, there is a gap in the literature regarding how Vietnamese EFL learners specifically use and perceive collocations, particularly in relation to their writing. Little is known about the frequency and accuracy of collocation use in their academic writing and how this usage correlates with their writing proficiency. Additionally, although many studies focus on grammatical and lexical collocations separately, few have examined both student perceptions and actual collocation usage within a specific educational context.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how third-year Vietnamese English Language Teaching (ELT) students understand, use, and perceive collocations in their writing. The research also explores the challenges they face when learning and using collocations and examines the relationship between their collocation usage and writing scores. By addressing these areas, this study seeks to offer insights that can inform teaching practices and improve collocation learning for EFL students.

## Literature Review

### Defining collocations

The concept of collocation, introduced by Firth (1957), refers to words whose meanings are connected by their proximity. Two primary approaches that are commonly used by scholars to define collocations are phraseological approach and the statistically-based approach (or frequency-based approach).

The phraseological approach distinguishes collocations from free combinations of words by their limited substitutability. This approach focuses on the fixed and idiomatic expressions where words co-occur to form established phrases with specific meanings. For example, *assumed name* is a collocation due to its restricted co-occurrence, *name* collocates with *assumed* but no other synonyms such as *fake*, *false*, or *imitation*.

Statistically-based approach defines collocations based on the frequency of word co-occurrence. It relies on the statistical probability of two words occurring together, which is referred to as the strength of association measured using metrics like the Mutual Information (MI) score, *t* score, or *z* score (Gablasova et al., 2017). MI score is the most widely employed measure in corpus tools such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and collocation research (e.g., González Fernández & Schmitt, 2015; Nguyen & Webb, 2017; Tabak & Takač, 2023). Consequently, this study followed the statistically-based approach and used MI to determine the strength of word combination. According to Church and Hanks (1989), two words are considered a collocation if they appear together more frequently than would be predicted by chance, with a common threshold being an MI score of 3.00.

### Different types of collocations

Although there have been many ways of categorising collocations proposed by different researchers, the classification of grammatical and lexical collocations of Benson et al. (1997)

is still the most commonly used and comprehensive. Grammatical collocations (e.g., *based on*, *refer to*), combine a content word and a function word, such as prepositions, determiners, conjunctions, or pronouns. Lexical collocations (e.g., *medical treatment*, *background knowledge*) involve combinations of content words only, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Lexical collocation has various subtypes. In this study, we implemented Ackermann and Chen (2013)'s classification of lexical collocations which is frequent and pedagogically relevant in the study context (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1

*Lexical Collocation Subtypes (Ackermann & Chen, 2013)*

No.	Type	Example
1	Adjective + Noun	Financial burden
2	Adverb + Adjective	Increasingly popular
3	Adverb + Past Participle	Severely punished
4	Adverb + Verb	Adversely affect
5	Noun + Noun	Unemployment rate
6	Verb + Adjective	Stay focused
7	Verb + Adverb	Work effectively
8	Verb + Noun	Draw conclusions

### Distribution of lexical collocations

Research on the distribution of lexical collocations across various texts reveals patterns in their usage. Ackermann and Chen (2013) identified Adjective + Noun and Verb + Noun combinations as the most frequent in academic texts. This finding is supported by Molavi et al. (2014) and Bahardoust and Moeini (2012), who also reported that these types of collocations predominated in EFL textbooks and learner writings. Studies such as Chang (2018) and Xia et al. (2023) highlight that Adjective + Noun and Verb + Noun collocations are prevalent across different proficiency levels and genres.

While these studies have provided valuable insights, limited research has focused specifically on the frequency and distribution of lexical collocation patterns used by Vietnamese EFL learners. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative analysis between the actual data and students' perceived usage of collocations.

### Collocations and EFL learners

Despite acknowledging the importance of collocations for writing proficiency, many EFL learners have limited understanding of these word combinations. Studies consistently report that learners often confuse collocations with idioms, phrasal verbs, or compound nouns (Le et al., 2022; Do & Le, 2023). While most learners recognise the value of collocations for improving vocabulary, enhancing cultural understanding, and reducing rigidity in writing, many struggle to use them effectively (Labira et al., 2020; Duong & Nguyen, 2021).

Nguyen & Webb (2017) found that Vietnamese EFL learners struggled to master collocational knowledge, even at the most frequent word frequency levels. They knew less than 50% of each type of collocation overall and their knowledge significantly decreased with each reduction in the level of word frequency. Moreover, Nguyen (2023) found that Vietnamese English-major students with a vocabulary size of around 9,000 words exhibited limited ability to recall academic collocations, despite demonstrating good competence in recognising them within contexts. However, a limitation of these studies is their primary focus on receptive rather than

productive collocation knowledge, which may not fully capture learners' actual challenges in writing contexts.

Learning and using collocations effectively present several challenges for EFL learners. Common difficulties include limited lexical and collocational knowledge (Duong & Nguyen, 2021), grammatical issues (Duong & Nguyen, 2021), L1 interference (Abdaoui, 2010; Labira et al., 2020), and difficulty in guessing meanings, identifying collocations, and understanding word relationships (Le et al., 2022). Furthermore, learners often encounter difficulties in determining which collocations to use in specific contexts and may make errors due to L1 interference (Labira et al., 2020), lack of collocation rules (Labira et al., 2020), and misunderstandings of word relationships (Do & Le, 2023). While prior research has examined collocational difficulties among EFL learners of varied backgrounds, few studies isolate the distinct challenges faced by advanced Vietnamese learners, who may encounter unique issues in selecting appropriate collocations for academic writing. This lack of targeted research leaves a gap in understanding the support needs of advanced learners struggling with collocational use.

Research suggests a strong positive correlation between collocation knowledge and writing proficiency. Hsu (2007), in a study of Taiwanese college EFL students, found a significant positive correlation between the variety and frequency of lexical collocation usage and online writing scores. Similarly, Kim and Bae (2012) observed that proficient Korean university writers employed lexical and grammatical collocations more effectively than their less proficient peers. Jaya et al. (2019) also discovered a positive correlation between English collocation ability and academic achievement among Indonesian students. While these studies consistently demonstrate a link between collocation use and academic performance, they primarily relied on writing tasks specifically focused on collocation, such as multiple-choice questions for recognition or translation and gap-fill (cloze) tasks, which may not fully capture natural collocational use in writing.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by addressing these limitations. By focusing on advanced Vietnamese EFL students' understanding of collocations, practical challenges in learning and using collocations, as well as the correlation between collocation use and writing performance, this study seeks to inform teaching strategies that more precisely address their unique needs, enhancing students' ability to integrate collocations effectively into their academic writing. The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are Vietnamese university students' perceptions toward the concept and importance of collocations in EFL writing?
2. What challenges do Vietnamese university students encounter when learning and using collocations in EFL writing?
3. How does the frequency and type of collocation usage in EFL writing relate to Vietnamese university students' writing performance?

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate lexical collocations among Vietnamese EFL learners. The quantitative data was gathered through a corpus-based analysis, emphasising the functional description of language based on authentic usage samples. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative methods - semi-structured interviews, were employed to delve deeper into student perspectives and experiences with collocations. The triangulation of data provided by this mixed-methods approach allowed for

a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of student behaviours and challenges related to collocation acquisition and use.

### Participants

The study involved 45 Vietnamese third-year English Language Teaching (ELT) majors, aged 20 to 21, including five male participants. All students had completed writing courses at levels B1 to C1, totalling 14 credits (equivalent to 175 hours of class time and 350 hours of self-study). These courses covered various aspects of English writing and provided substantial practice opportunities. From this group, a purposive sample of eight students was selected for semi-structured interviews based on a range of writing scores, ensuring a diverse representation of proficiency within the advanced Vietnamese EFL student population. This selection aimed to capture a variety of perspectives on collocation use and learning strategies, making the sample reflective of broader challenges among advanced Vietnamese EFL learners. Confidentiality was maintained by encoding participant responses (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2).

### Data collection

Data collection occurred in two stages to ensure robust findings through both quantitative and qualitative measures. In the first stage, written work from a C1-level writing course was collected, excluding online submissions to ensure that students relied solely on their knowledge without the aid of external resources. The dataset was comprised of 26 letters and 46 essays, which were scanned or transcribed into digital format for analysis. Letters and essays were chosen to reflect common academic and formal writing contexts relevant to student proficiency levels.

In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight purposively selected participants. These interviews aimed to explore the students' understanding of collocations, the challenges they encountered, and their strategies for improving their collocational knowledge. Sample interview questions included:

- Can you define what collocation is in your own words?
- Do you think using collocations in writing is important?
- Do you often use collocation in your writing?
- What challenges do you face when using collocations?

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### Data analysis

The quantitative analysis involved examining student writing samples using AntConc (Anthony, 2005), a corpus analysis toolkit. Bi-grams (two-word clusters) were extracted from the texts and filtered to identify collocations relevant to the study's focus. Researchers then checked whether these bi-grams corresponded to any of the eight lexical collocation subtypes (see Table 1). To verify if these bi-grams are real collocations, each was cross-referenced with the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2010), which offers a comprehensive and up-to-date database of English usage. Given COCA's status as one of the largest and most reliable corpora for contemporary American English, it served as a rich resource for validating frequency and contextual appropriateness without the need for additional sources. Only bi-grams with a Mutual Information (MI) score greater than 3.00 and a minimum frequency of 50 in COCA were classified as true collocations, while others were considered chance co-occurrences. This threshold ensured that identified collocations met both

statistical and contextual relevance. Finally, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to calculate the distribution of collocation subtypes and analyse the correlation between collocation usage and writing scores, offering insights into the role of collocational knowledge in writing proficiency.

Qualitative data from the interviews was analysed thematically through a systematic coding process. Initial open coding was conducted to identify key themes related to student perceptions, challenges, and strategies in learning collocations. NVivo software was used to manage and organise codes, facilitating consistency in theme identification. To ensure reliability, a second researcher independently reviewed 20% of the coded data, with any discrepancies discussed and resolved to refine the coding scheme. This process enhanced inter-coder reliability and ensured that themes accurately reflected participants' experiences.

Figure 1

*Example of Filtering 2-word Clusters Using N-Gram in AntConc*

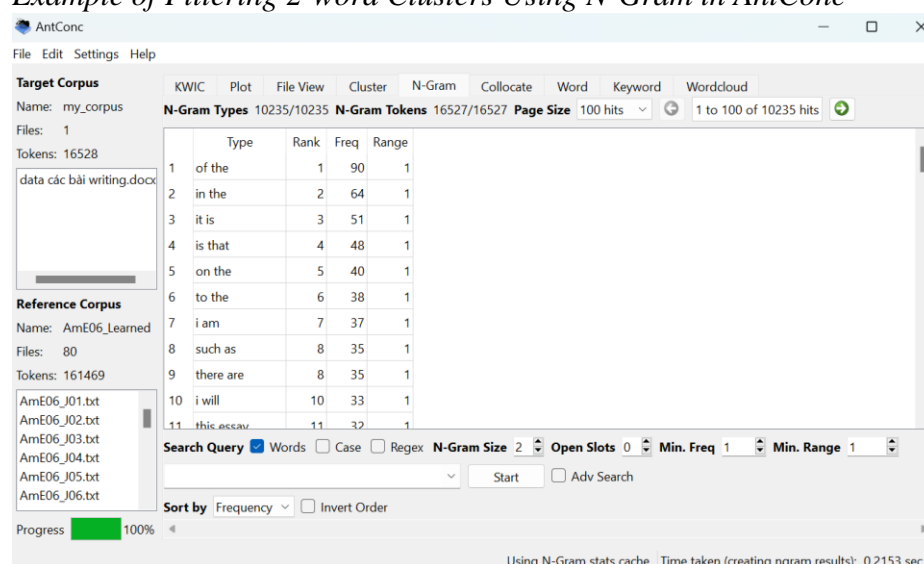
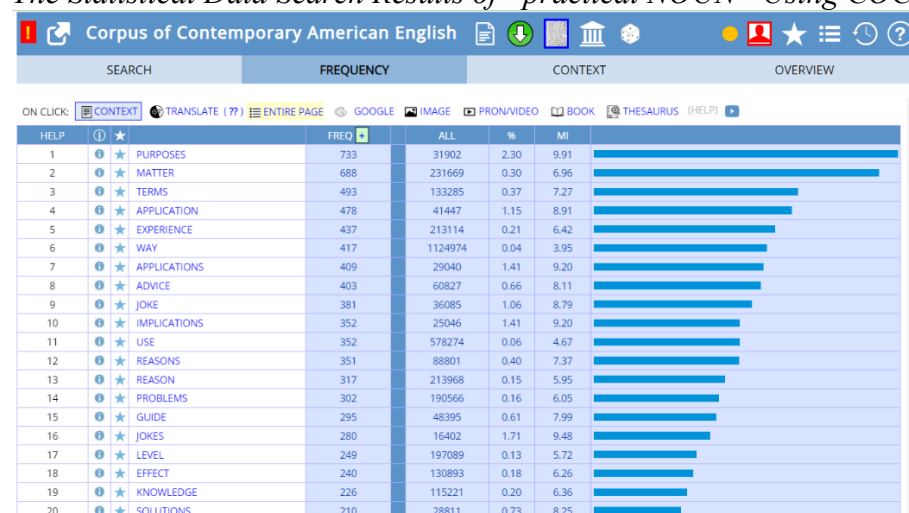


Figure 2

*The Statistical Data Search Results of “practical NOUN” Using COCA*





## Findings and Discussions

### Students' perceptions towards collocations in EFL writing

#### *Understanding of the “collocation” concept*

When asked about their understanding of collocations, students generally described them as combinations of words that frequently appear together. Many referred to them as “language chunks”, “fixed phrases”, or simply “words that go together” (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). One participant (Participant 3) expressed a misconception, equating collocations with slang or colloquial language.

Collocations are fixed phrases that go together [...] that can be used in both formal and informal language.

(Participant 4)

I think collocations are informal words that are often used in daily communication, for example, colloquial language, slang, etc. I have no idea about collocation classifications.

(Participant 3)

In terms of specific subtypes, some students recognised that collocations can be categorised based on the word classes they contain (e.g., verbs and nouns) (Participants 1, 4, 7). However, most participants displayed limited knowledge or uncertainty regarding the various collocation categories (Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 8).

I think collocations are classified based on verbs, nouns, etc. in each chunk.

(Participant 1)

I am not sure about its categories, maybe it is divided based on content words, for example, verb and other words.

(Participant 4)

Interestingly, most students initially reported familiarity only with three-word collocations. When presented with examples of different subtypes (e.g. Adjective + Noun, Verb + Noun), they expressed surprise and indicated they had previously considered these to be simple word combinations.

Overall, the analysis revealed a general lack of in-depth understanding of collocations among the students. This aligns with the studies of Abdaoui (2010), Harta et al. (2021) and Do and Le (2023), which indicated that students had limited knowledge regarding collocations and often mistook collocations and other word combinations. However, the advanced students in this study displayed a basic understanding of collocations, although not comprehensively. This points to a need for better instruction on the classification and appropriate use of collocations.

#### *Perceived importance of collocations in writing*

Students generally agreed on the importance of using collocations in EFL writing. They emphasised that correct use of collocations contributes to more natural-sounding, cohesive, and precise writing (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4).

I think the production of variety and correct collocations in the written works demonstrates the writer's proficiency. It helps sentences become more cohesive, coherent, and reasonable.

(Participant 3)

Some students, however, warned against overuse, which could lead to awkward phrasing (Participants 5, 6, 7).

I think it depends. I would rather use it a few but all of them are correct than overuse too much but most of them are wrong. Although using collocations is better than separate words, overuse can be a problem.

(Participant 6)

These findings reflect previous studies (e.g., Labira et al., 2020; Le et al., 2022), which highlighted the role of collocations in enhancing writing proficiency. The balanced view expressed by students suggests that teaching strategies should emphasise not just the importance of collocations but also how to use them appropriately in different writing contexts.

### **Challenges in learning and using collocations**

#### ***Difficulties in learning collocations***

Two major challenges emerged: word choice and memorisation. Students reported difficulty in selecting the right words to form standard collocations and confusion over subtle differences between collocations (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4). For example, Participant 3 noted the difference between “economic growth” and “economic increase”.

There are words we assume that they are synonyms so they can be used interchangeably. But actually, collocations are certain words that go together. For example, even though “growth” and “increase” can be synonyms, “economic growth” is the standard collocation, not “economic increase”. This leads to difficulties in learning and remembering, and if there is no context and not enough repetition, it will not be acquired, or words in collocation will be confused.

(Participant 3)

The second challenge centred around memorising collocations. Students mentioned the large number and complexity of collocations as a barrier to memorisation (Participant 6). Others attributed their difficulties to a lack of active learning strategies (Participant 8) or challenges in overcoming forgetfulness (Participants 5, 7).

There are too many types of collocations, many of which are quite long so it's hard for me to remember.

(Participant 6)

I am not self-disciplined enough to learn and then revise all the collocations I met so sometimes I tend to ignore it.

(Participant 7)

The findings from this study shed light on the cognitive load associated with learning collocations, particularly regarding word choice and memorisation, which are consistent with Le et al. (2022). These findings highlight the importance of implementing targeted instructional



approaches that reduce cognitive load, such as using spaced repetition and active learning techniques, to enhance EFL learners' ability to internalise collocations.

### ***Difficulties in using collocations in writing***

In terms of usage, students faced challenges such as limited collocational knowledge (Participant 1, 2), memory issues (Participant 3, 4, 6), and negative direct translation from L1 to English (Participant 7). Several students expressed concerns about whether their chosen collocations were contextually appropriate (e.g., Participant 4). This echoes findings from prior studies (e.g., Labira et al., 2020; Do & Le, 2023) that identified L1 interference as a common issue in using collocations.

Usually, I don't remember to use them [collocations] in writing. [...] I also wonder whether the collocation is appropriate for the context or not, whether its tone is formal or informal.

(Participant 4)

I have the tendency to translate word-by-word the collocations into Vietnamese when not remembering the exact word combinations in English. This causes some word combinations to be not quite right.

(Participant 7)

Overall, these findings support the notion that negative direct translation from L1 to English significantly impacts learners' ability to effectively use collocations. To mitigate these issues, instructional strategies that specifically address L1 interference, such as explicit teaching of collocations and contextual practice, could enhance learners' collocational competence.

### **Frequency and type of collocation usage in writing and its relation to writing performance**

#### ***Frequency and types of collocation in student writing***

The student corpus consisted of 17,780 words from 46 essays and 26 letters, with an average length of approximately 295 words for essays and 162 words for letters. After excluding incorrect collocations and free word combinations (MI <3.00), a total of 1,039 valid collocations were identified.

The analysis revealed that students used an average of 16 lexical collocations per writing product, which constituted around 7% of the total word count (Table 2). In particular, the average number of lexical collocations used in letters was 10, which accounted for approximately 6% of per total word product. In essays, the average collocation usage was 23 or approximately 8%. These figures are lower than the research findings of Chang (2018), which was approximately 9%. This difference might be due to the research design of Chang (2018), which required learners to use at least one collocation for each subtype and allowed them to access various reference sources, including the web concordance while writing.

Students, however, overestimated their collocation use, with some reporting that collocations made up 30-50% of their writing (Participants 1, 2, 3). This discrepancy highlights the need for students to develop a more accurate understanding of their usage of collocations.

I guess about 30%-40% of my writing is lexical collocations.

(Participant 2)

I think I use a lot of lexical collocations, maybe more than half of a written work.

(Participant 3)

Table 2

*Frequency of Lexical Collocation Usage*

	<b>The average number of collocations</b>	<b>The average word count</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Letters (n=26)	10	162	6
Essays (n=46)	23	293	8
Total (n=72)	16	227	7

Turning to the subtypes of lexical collocations used in EFL writing, 1,039 collocations were then classified into eight subtypes based on the categorisation system developed by Ackermann and Chen (2013). Table 3 presents the distribution of collocation subtypes within the corpus.

Table 3

*The Distribution Lexical Collocation Subtypes Found in Student Writing*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Subtypes</b>	<b>Number of collocations</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1	ADJ + N	595	57
2	ADJ + ADV	21	2
3	ADV + PP	22	2
4	ADV + V	37	4
5	N + N	117	11
6	V + ADV	32	3
7	V + ADJ	21	2
8	V + N	194	19

As shown in Table 3, Adjective + Noun (ADJ + N) collocations were the most frequent type in our study, making up 57% (n=595) of the total. Verb + Noun collocations comprised 19% (n=194), and Noun + Noun collocations accounted for 11% (n=117). Other collocation types, such as Adverb + Verb, Verb + Adjective, Adjective + Adverb, and Adverb + Past Participle, represented a minor portion (around 3%) of the total collocations identified. The findings align with students' reported preferences, specifically for the Adjective + Noun and Verb + Noun combinations. These findings are also in line with previous research by Bahardoust and Moeini (2012), Chang (2018) and Xia et al. (2023), who reported that Adjective + Noun and Verb + Noun collocations were the most commonly used by learners, accounting for around 75% of all lexical collocations in their studies.

***Correlation between collocation usage and writing scores***

The analysis revealed no significant correlation between collocation usage and writing scores for either letters ( $r = -.263, p > .05$ ) or essays ( $r = .3, p > .05$ ), or for overall written English scores ( $r = .092, p > .05$ ). While some correlations were observed, they did not reach the threshold for statistical significance at the 0.05 level (see Table 4). It should be noted that students' collocation usage in this study was determined by the number of collocations they used, rather than the diversity of collocations in their writing.

Table 4

*Correlation between the Frequency of Using English Lexical Collocation and Writing Scores*

		<b>Letters</b>		<b>Essays</b>		<b>All writing</b>	
		Collocations	Scores	Collocations	Scores	Collocations	Scores
Collocations	Pearson Correlation (r)	1	-.263	1	.300	1	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.325		.136		.561
	N	16	16	26	26	42	42

*Note. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)*

While previous studies (e.g., Hsu, 2007; Kim and Bae, 2012) reported positive correlations, our study's lack of significant findings may be attributed to differences in assessment focus, measurement constraints, and additional factors impacting on writing scores. Firstly, previous studies often employed direct collocation tests, such as multiple-choice tasks, to measure students' ability to recognise and produce collocations accurately. In contrast, our study evaluated collocation use within natural writing samples, which reflects students' real-time language production but may not isolate collocation ability as clearly. Additionally, the C1-level course's grading rubric evaluated vocabulary within broader categories, such as task fulfilment, organisation, and grammar. Consequently, students' overall writing scores may have been influenced by their proficiency in these areas. Moreover, in this writing task, learners may prioritise task completion or grammar accuracy over advanced vocabulary choices, which could explain the modest use of complex collocations in their texts. Lastly, the limited sample size could affect the reliability of statistically significant correlations.

The findings of this study align with theories on lexical competence (Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2010) which propose that, for many learners, single-word vocabulary knowledge outperforms multi-word lexical competence, supporting the need for targeted collocation practice to foster comprehensive lexical proficiency in EFL contexts.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the understanding, challenges, and use of collocations among Vietnamese ELT students in their writing. The findings revealed that, while students recognised the importance of collocations in EFL writing, their understanding was only partial. Learning challenges were linked to issues with word choice and memorisation, while difficulties in using collocations stemmed from limited comprehension, memory retention problems, and negative direct translation from their first language. In terms of collocation use, students' actual usage of lexical collocations (7%) differed from their perceived frequency (30-50%). The most common subtype used was the Adjective + Noun combination. Despite the observed patterns of collocation usage, no significant correlation was found between lexical collocation usage and students' writing scores.

These findings highlight the need for effective instructional strategies to help students overcome their difficulties with collocations. Such strategies could include explicit instruction on collocation word choice, contextual practice activities, and techniques for enhancing memorisation and retention. Additionally, incorporating bilingual resources to bridge the gap between students' native language and English collocations could prove beneficial. By implementing these approaches, educators can better equip students to use collocations effectively, resulting in more natural and precise EFL writing.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for educators teaching EFL writing, particularly at the advanced level. By understanding the challenges that students encounter with

collocations, educators can adapt their instruction to better meet these specific needs. Firstly, learners should be encouraged to engage with a variety of learning methods, combining academic resources such as reading texts, writing samples, and collocation exercises with authentic materials like newspapers, films, and books. This approach can help deepen their understanding of collocations and broaden their vocabulary range. Secondly, learners should focus on acquiring collocations in meaningful contexts. Practice activities should highlight the distinctions of meaning and usage across different contexts. Additionally, using bilingual resources can assist in bridging the gap between learners' native language and English collocations, reducing L1 interference. Thirdly, active engagement is crucial for mastering collocations. Students should be encouraged to regularly incorporate collocations in both writing and speaking tasks, helping them become more familiar with these word combinations and their usage. Lastly, online corpus tools like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), available at <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>, provide valuable data on real-world language usage. These tools offer learners a wealth of examples of collocations across various contexts and genres, making them a powerful resource for both students and educators.

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of lexical collocations by EFL learners, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's focus on a relatively small sample of students from one specific program at a single university may limit the generalisability of the findings. While the results may offer insights into the collocation usage of this particular group, they may not represent the broader population of English language learners. Future research could benefit from including a larger and more diverse sample population, encompassing students from various educational institutions, backgrounds, and levels of English proficiency to explore potential variations across different student groups. Secondly, while the chosen writing tasks (letters and essays) provided relevant academic contexts, they may not fully represent the breadth of collocations encountered in diverse language use contexts. The relatively short length of these tasks and the lack of explicit requirements for collocation usage may have limited opportunities for students to demonstrate a wider range of collocational knowledge and usage. Future research could benefit from expanding the range of writing tasks to encompass specialised topics, longer texts, and a variety of genres, with a particular emphasis on collocation. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of students' collocation usage. Thirdly, the study solely looked at lexical collocations, omitting grammatical collocations, which are also common in students' written works. Future research could incorporate an analysis of grammatical collocations in writing for a more comprehensive view of students' collocation usage and language proficiency. Moreover, this study did not thoroughly investigate collocation errors or their underlying causes. Future studies could focus on identifying common collocation errors in students' writing, exploring the root causes of these mistakes, and proposing strategies to address them. Additionally, further research could examine the effectiveness of various learning materials, digital tools, teaching methods, and teacher feedback on improving learners' comprehension and usage of collocations.

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