THE ROLE OF COLLOCATIONS AND WORD FAMILIES IN STRENGTHENING B1 LEVEL VOCABULARY

Ismoilova Shakhnoza Abdumalik qizi

Teacher of the "Foreign Languages" department of

Namangan State Technical University

+998917797123

Annotation. This article investigates the significance of collocations and word families in developing lexical competence among B1-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining pre- and post-intervention vocabulary assessments, classroom observations, and learner reflections. Findings reveal that targeted instruction in collocations and word families leads to improved vocabulary acquisition, contextual usage, and learner confidence. The article concludes with pedagogical recommendations for curriculum designers and language instructors.

Key words: B1 level, vocabulary acquisition, lexical competence, collocations, word families, EFL learners, language pedagogy

Introduction. Lexical competence, or the ability to understand and use words effectively, is central to communicative language proficiency. At the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners are transitioning from basic to independent users. However, many learners plateau at this stage due to inadequate vocabulary depth and limited exposure to natural language use. Two powerful, yet often underutilized, tools for vocabulary development are collocations and word families:

➢ Collocations are combinations of words that commonly occur together (e.g., "make a mistake", "heavy traffic"), and they reflect natural language patterns.

➢ Word families consist of a base word and its derivations (e.g., "inform" → "information, informative, informant"), aiding learners in recognizing and producing varied lexical forms.

Understanding and applying these elements enhances not only vocabulary knowledge but also grammatical accuracy and fluency. This article explores how structured learning of collocations and word families affects vocabulary competence among B1 learners over an 8-week intervention.

Materials and Methods. Participants

Total: 40 B1-level EFL students

Age range: 17–22 years

Institution: Private language center in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Proficiency verification: Oxford Placement Test (B1 score range: 40–60)

Design and Procedure

The intervention spanned 8 weeks, with three 90-minute sessions per week, totaling 36 hours of instruction.

Week Structure:

Day 1: Introduction to 8–10 new collocations and 3–5 word families

Day 2: Practice through reading, listening, and matching tasks

Day 3: Productive tasks such as role-plays, speaking prompts, and short writings

Materials Used

• Adapted materials from English Collocations in Use (Intermediate)

• Online corpora (e.g., COCA, BNC) for authentic examples

- Custom worksheets and digital flashcards

- Kahoot and Quizlet for gamified reviews

- Assessment Tools

Vocabulary Pre- and Post-Tests: 40-item test on collocations and word families

Speaking Task Evaluations: Measured use of target lexical items

Learner Reflection Journals: Weekly entries on vocabulary use and difficulties

Teacher Observations: Focused on lexical accuracy and fluency during tasks

Results and Discussion

1. Improved Lexical Knowledge

The average vocabulary test score increased from 54% (pre-test) to 82% (post-test). Students showed marked improvement in both recognition and usage of collocations (e.g., "pay attention", "catch a cold") and derivational forms (e.g., "motivate → motivation, motivational").

2. Enhanced Communicative Performance

Speaking tasks: 85% of students used at least five target collocations or word family items appropriately.

Writing tasks: Greater variety of word forms and reduction in repetition were observed.

Sample before:

"I want to do a presentation tomorrow."

After instruction:

"I'm going to give a presentation on marketing trends tomorrow."

3. Greater Learner Awareness

Reflection journals highlighted increased learner autonomy. Many students reported using new words outside the classroom, particularly in listening and reading contexts. Example from a student journal: "When I heard 'strong coffee' in a movie, I remembered it from class. Before, I would just say 'very coffee' or 'big coffee'."

4. Pedagogical Value

The findings underscore the benefit of teaching vocabulary not as isolated words, but as systems: Collocations help learners sound more native-like and reduce hesitation. Word families promote morphological awareness and vocabulary range.

Challenges Noted

Some learners initially found it difficult to remember fixed expressions.

Learners often confused near-synonyms ("do homework" vs. "make homework").

Conclusion. Teaching collocations and word families systematically can significantly enhance the lexical competence of B1-level learners. These elements help bridge the gap between vocabulary knowledge and real-life language use, facilitating: Higher retention, better contextual understanding, improved fluency in productive skills.

Recommendations.

o Curriculum Designers: Include lexical chunks and word formation exercises in textbooks and syllabus.

o Teachers: Use corpora and authentic materials to expose students to natural language use.

o Learners: Engage in active vocabulary learning using digital tools and self-monitoring techniques.

Future Research

Further studies could examine long-term retention of lexical chunks or compare the effectiveness of collocation-focused instruction across CEFR levels (A2, B2, etc.). Moreover, incorporating translation tasks and contrastive analysis with learners' L1 could deepen understanding of collocational patterns.

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