

## ANALYZING EFL STUDENTS' VOCABULARY SIZE, DEPTH, AND LEXICAL COLLOCATIONAL ERRORS IN WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

*Learning a language involves many things, such as learning the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, language expressions, etc. Nevertheless, the general condition in Indonesia is that teachers of English, especially in schools and language courses, usually emphasize more on grammar. They do not worry too much about other aspects of the language like semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc. Especially when it comes to collocation, teachers normally neglect to put a lot of focus on teaching students how to properly combine words together. As a result, when students speak and write, they often produce inaccurate collocations. Although this may not necessarily lead to misunderstanding, when a nonnative speaker of English makes an unnatural collocation, native speakers would definitely be able to spot it, which shows that the learner has yet to fully master the language. This can also be seen in the university level, where students would often make inaccurate collocations in both their speaking and writing. Previous studies have shown that there are various factors that affect students' ability to produce proper collocations. Hence, the writer has become interested in examining these possible factors. However, for the current research, the writer would like to focus on only two, namely the students' vocabulary size and depth. To be precise, the purpose of this research is to explore the relation between the students' vocabulary size and depth and their collocational errors in writing. The source of data is the Writing 2 Final Test from the third semester students of the English Department at Bunda Mulia University. The errors in the students' writing are limited to the lexical collocations. To find out which of the two factors have a stronger relation to the number of correct collocations that the students make, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation is used to analyze the data. It is hoped that the result of this study would be able to enrich knowledge in the field of collocations, especially in terms of its relation with vocabulary size and depth. Based on the result, the teaching implications may include more emphasis on explicit vocabulary and collocation teaching. The result shows that vocabulary size correlates strongly and positively with the students' collocation score.*

Keywords: vocabulary size, vocabulary depth, collocational errors, writing

### INTRODUCTION

Learning a language involves many things, such as learning the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, language expressions, etc. Nevertheless, the general condition in Indonesia is that teachers of English, especially in schools and language courses, usually emphasize more on grammar. They do not worry too much about other aspects of the language like semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc. Especially when it comes to collocation, teachers normally neglect to put a lot of focus on teaching students how to properly combine words together. Collocation is defined by Conzett (2001) as "Two or more words that tend to occur together (collocate)." As a result, when students speak and write, they often produce inaccurate collocations. Although this may not necessarily lead to misunderstanding, when a nonnative speaker of English makes an unnatural collocation, native speakers would definitely be able to spot it, which shows that the learner has yet to fully master the language. This can also be seen in the university level, where students would often make inaccurate collocations in both their speaking and writing.

Previous studies have shown that there are various factors that affect students' ability to produce proper collocations. For example, Mutlu and Kaşlioğlu (2016), who made a research on the relation between vocabulary size and collocational knowledge. The respondents were Turkish EFL learners, and the result showed that there is a strong positive relation between students vocabulary size and their collocational knowledge. Next, is a research from Sen and Kuleli (2015) who investigated the relation between EFL learners' vocabulary size and depth and reading performance. Again, the result showed that both size and depth have a strong correlation with reading performance, but depth is slightly stronger.

Based on the background above, the writer has become interested in examining these possible factors. However, for the current research, the writer would like to focus on only two, namely the students' vocabulary size and depth. To be precise, the purpose of this research is to explore the relation between the students' vocabulary size and depth and their collocational errors in writing. The research question for this study is as follows: "How does vocabulary size and depth relate to the students' lexical collocational errors?"

But before going into details about the correlation between these variables, let us quickly look at some definitions. First of all, collocations can be grouped into 2 according to Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997), they are lexical and grammatical collocation. Lexical is a combination of dominant words like nouns, verbs and adjectives, but for grammatical collocation, the combination not only involves dominant words but also other things like prepositions, clauses, etc. Next, Schmitt (2014) mentions that vocabulary size is basically the total number of words that a person knows. On the other hand, vocabulary depth is related to how well a person knows a certain word, for example, its synonyms with other words, its antonyms, etc. Lastly, what is meant by collocational errors in this research are combination of words that the students made in their writing, which are not common or unnatural.

## METHODOLOGY

The source of data is the Writing 2 Final Test from the third semester students of the English Department at Bunda Mulia University along with the students' vocabulary size and depth. The part of the final test that is used is only the essay part. The students are asked to make an essay with at least 4 paragraphs or approximately 800 words. The errors in the students' writing are limited to the lexical collocations, more specifically verb + noun and adjective + noun collocations. To measure the students' vocabulary size, the researcher uses the Vocabulary Size Test by Nation and Beglar (2007). Moreover, to measure the students' vocabulary depth, the Words Associate Test by Read (1998, as cited in Sen and Kuleli, 2015) is used. To find out which of the two factors (size and depth) have a stronger relation to the number of correct collocations the students make, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation is used to analyze the data. Lastly, to analyze the collocational errors, the researcher refers to COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) to decide whether the collocations that the students wrote in their essays are correct or not. To get the score for the collocation score, the researcher will use a percentage, or the number of correct collocations divided by the total number of collocations they made in their writing. The formula is as follows:

$$\text{collocation score} = \frac{\text{number of correct collocations}}{\text{total number of collocations}} \times 100\%$$

For example, if a student has a total of 10 correct collocations out of a total of 15 collocations, this means that the student made 5 errors, and the score is  $(10/15) \times 100\% = 66.67\%$ . This is the score that will later on be correlated with the students' vocabulary size and depth. Finally, to make sure that they more or less have a fair result, the collocation will be limited to the first 15 collocations, which is the lowest number of collocations from one of the respondent.

## ANALYSIS

The result of the students' vocabulary size and depth along with the collocational error score are summarized in the table below:

**Table 1. Summary of Students' Vocab Size, Depth, and Collocation**

No.	Student	Vocab Size	Vocab Depth	Collocation Score
1	Student 1	7000	57.5	13/15 = 86.67
2	Student 2	10500	90	15/15 = 100
3	Student 3	10800	88.75	14/15 = 93.33
4	Student 4	5000	65	8/15 = 53.33
5	Student 5	7100	85	12/15 = 80
6	Student 6	2900	60	5/15 = 33.33
7	Student 7	6000	75	12/15 = 80
8	Student 8	4700	70	10/15 = 66.67
9	Student 9	9100	82.5	11/15 = 73.33
10	Student 10	8200	68.75	10/15 = 66.67
11	Student 11	5200	42.5	8/15 = 53.33
12	Student 12	8700	51.25	12/15 = 80

Looking at the table above, we can see that the highest vocabulary size from the 12 respondents is **10,800** from student 3, and the lowest is **2,900** from student 6. In terms of size, the average size that nonnative speakers of English should have in order to be able to study at an English speaking university is normally around **5,000-6,000**. Seeing as there are only two students with a score below 5,000, we can conclude that the students' vocabulary size is already quite good. In other words, they know enough words to understand the lessons given in the class. Next is the vocabulary depth. The highest score is **90** from student 2 and the lowest is **42.5%** from student 11. For a depth to be considered quite good enough, it would be better to at least have 60%. From the 12 students, 3 of the students did not reach that score. Finally, for the collocation score, the highest is 100% by student 2 and the lowest is 33.33% by student 6. Seeing as there are still a few students who scored below a 60, it can be said that some of the students still make a lot of collocational errors in their writing.

Furthermore, to answer the research question of the study, to see which of the two variable correlates more strongly with the students' collocational errors in writing, we shall take a look at the tables below:

**Table 2. Correlations of Vocab Size, Depth, and Collocation Score**

		Vocab_Size	Vocab_Depth	Collocation_Score
Vocab_Size	Pearson Correlation	1	.566	.837**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.055	.001
	N	12	12	12
Vocab_Depth	Pearson Correlation	.566	1	.573
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055		.052
	N	12	12	12
Collocation_Score	Pearson Correlation	.837**	.573	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.052	
	N	12	12	12

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the result above, we can see that between vocabulary size and depth, size is the one that more strongly or significantly correlates with the collocation score. The Pearson product moment correlation score for vocabulary size and correlation score is 0.837. There is no negative sign which means that the higher the vocabulary size, the higher the collocation score. In other words, the higher the student's vocabulary size, the less collocational errors he or she would make in their writing, and vice versa. This is quite surprising as normally, it is vocabulary depth that should have a stronger relationship with collocation since collocational knowledge is part of what is being tested in the vocabulary depth test. However, in this case it would seem that as long as the student knows and understands the word, he or she would be able to combine the word correctly with other words.

Finally, the following is a list of some of the collocational errors that the students made along with the accurate one:

**Table 3. Brief Summary of Collocational Errors**

No.	Type of Collocations	Collocational Errors	Proper Collocations
<b>verb + noun</b>			
1.		search + happiness	find + happiness
2.		keep + health	maintain + health
3.		do + jogging	go + jogging
4.		add + advantage	gain + advantage
5.		adjust + preference	determine + preference
6.		break + organ	damage + organ
7.		gain + problem	develop + problem
<b>adjective + noun</b>			
1.		hard + city	tough + city

2.	extraordinary + advantage	great + advantage
3.	big + noise	loud + noise
4.	serious + effect	significant + effect
5.	main + food	staple + food
6.	great + management	good + management

From the table above we can see that the students made some collocational errors in their writing. It seems that some of these errors are probably because they do not know the appropriate word to use. Even though the accurate collocation is sometimes a synonym of the word they use, it does not mean that all words which are synonyms can be interchangeable. For example **hard** and **tough**, although they are a bit similar in meaning, the second one is the accurate one to use with the noun city. It also seems like the students sometimes make errors because they are influenced by their L1 or bahasa Indonesia. For instance, **extraordinary + advantage** is probably considered correct because in Indonesian it is okay to say *kelebihan yang luar biasa*. But the word that actually goes better with advantage is actually a less ‘strong’ adjective which is the word **great**.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings above, the researcher would like to conclude the current study. First of all, in terms of the relation or correlation between vocabulary size and depth, it is found that size has a positive and significant correlation with collocational error. The bigger the vocabulary size of the student, the less likely he or she would make an error, and vice versa. Finally, in terms of the collocational errors themselves, the students mostly made more verb + noun errors compared to adjective + noun because they did not write too many adjective + noun collocations in their essays. It would seem that the errors in collocations are caused either because they do not know the precise word to use, or they are influenced by their L1 or Indonesian language.

Last but not least, before closing the article, it would be better to give some suggestions. First of all, since this research is quite small and limited in scope, it is suggested that future research also include other kinds of collocations and involve more respondents. The last and most important suggestion is related to the teaching implications. Seeing as some students still have low vocabulary size and depth and still make a lot of collocational errors, it is suggested that teachers of English pay more attention to the teaching of collocations. To sum up, it is hoped that the result of this study would be able to enrich knowledge in the field of collocations, especially in terms of its relation with vocabulary size and depth.

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