



A Just Demand: Integrating Collocation Fully into Language Instruction

Jose K.K
Research Scholar,
Capital University,
Jharkhand, India.

Abstract

Despite notable advancements in English Language Teaching (ELT), the systematic instruction of collocation remains significantly under-emphasized in many educational frameworks, especially within English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts such as Kerala, India. Collocations—the natural and predictable combinations of words like *make a mistake* or *take a risk*—are fundamental to achieving fluency and producing language that sounds natural to native speakers. Nevertheless, in many ESL classrooms, instruction often focuses on isolated vocabulary items, overlooking how words typically occur in combination. This neglect affects learners' communicative skills, diminishes their confidence, and hinders their ability to use English proficiently in real-life contexts.

This article advocates a calculated inclusion of collocation materials throughout the language learning process, from primary to advanced stages. It suggests structured and progressive instructional material for the learners with emphasis on adequate contextual relevance, curriculum coherence, and classroom-based activities and strategies. It should be founded on contemporary teaching theories, research findings, and real-world classroom practices. This discussion urges the integration of authentic linguistic input, sophisticated technological interfaces, and visually enriched scaffolds to cultivate learners' sensitivity to collocational dynamics within genuine communicative contexts. In order to improve collocational competence, the study also emphasizes the necessity of thorough teacher preparation programs and focused assessment techniques as such educational systems can enable students to use English with ease, more correctly, idiomatically, and fluently in manifold circumstances by adopting these innovations.

Keywords : Collocation instruction, ESL education in India, Collocational competence, Vocabulary instruction, Communicative fluency, Teacher training

Introduction

Expansion of vocabulary has constantly been a key component of language learning, and students working to comprehend particular words and their meanings has been a constant exercise for students of all levels. However, learning specific terms is just one step in the process of becoming a language expert. In actuality, the ability to employ words in context—particularly with regard to collocations—is essential for effective communication. Collocations are the habitual combinations of words that native speakers intuitively know but often do not explicitly teach in language classrooms. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where learners in places like Kerala, India, struggle to produce fluent, native-like English despite years of formal instruction.

There is a gap in pupils' ability to communicate fluently and easily as a result of this omission in collocation education. Many students consequently struggle to understand the nuances of word combinations, such as *make a decision* rather than *do a decision* or *strong tea* rather than *powerful tea*. This essay aims to close this disparity by synthesizing best

practices and proposing strategies for the integration of collocations in instructional materials at all stages of learning. Through a careful examination of current curriculum frameworks, teacher training needs, and the role of cultural relevance in language learning, this paper aims to create a comprehensive approach to collocation teaching that will help learners achieve fluency and native-like proficiency in English.

Raising Institutional Awareness

Educational authorities must acknowledge the value of collocation instruction if any curriculum intervention is to be successful. Making sure that collocations are seen as essential elements of language proficiency rather than just linguistic oddities begins with increasing awareness among curriculum designers, school boards, and legislators. Educational authorities must be convinced of the role explicit teaching of collocations plays in vocabulary development and enhancement of overall fluency.

Therefore, one of the most effective ways to raise awareness is through research dissemination. Seminars, workshops, and conferences focused on collocations in language teaching can play a pivotal role in spreading the word about their significance. Additionally, research papers and journal articles that emphasize how collocations affect students' communicative ability might serve to emphasize how important they are. Integrating collocation instruction into current frameworks requires an informed group of educators and policymakers. Additionally, increasing institutional knowledge will guarantee that collocations are taught consistently rather than only in textbooks as isolated examples.

Such awareness also prompts necessary curricular revisions at the institutional level. Giving educators the information and abilities they need to effectively teach collocations, collocations can be incorporated into professional development and teacher training programs. This will help achieve the overarching objective of improving students' fluency, which will make them more skilled at applying language in authentic situations.

Curriculum Revision and Scaffolded Integration

The integration of collocations into the language curriculum requires a thoughtful, scaffolded approach that begins early in a student's language learning journey and progresses through to more advanced stages. Collocations are essential for creating fluent, natural-sounding English. As a result, their education needs to be introduced methodically, with a distinct development from basic to higher levels. With a scaffolded approach, students can build a solid foundation and gain a profound comprehension of the natural word combinations in English.

Initially, collocation awareness can be fostered by drawing parallels with equivalent expressions in students' first language (L1). For example, in Malayalam, although multiple words can be translated as "died," the contextual applications differ greatly. The word *charinju* is typically used for animals, such as elephants, but it would not be appropriate when referring to a human being. This distinction mirrors how collocations work in English, where we say *strong tea* but not *powerful tea*. These realizations aid pupils in understanding that language is a sophisticated system of word pairings rather than just a translation of words. This cross-linguistic comparison gives students a starting point for understanding the nuances of English collocations.

The curriculum should gradually introduce collocations, with complexity increasing at each level to match the students' growing linguistic ability. A well-structured approach to collocation instruction can look like this:

Beginner Level: At this stage, students can start with basic, high-frequency word pairings like *make a mistake* or *take a shower*. These collocations are simple but foundational and can be introduced through engaging, interactive exercises such as matching activities, simple sentence completions, or flashcards. Reinforcing these collocations through repetition will help students internalize their use in everyday conversations.

Elementary Level: As students progress, more nuanced collocations, such as *catch a cold* or *do the homework*, can be introduced. These require a slightly higher level of understanding of contextual language use. Teachers can incorporate context-rich exercises, such as dialogues,

role plays, and gap-fill activities, where students have to choose the correct collocation based on context. Understanding and using these combinations will help students sound more natural and confident in speaking and writing.

Intermediate Level: At this stage, students should begin working with more complex and specialized collocations. These may come from fields like business, health, education, or technology. Examples might include collocations like *run a meeting*, *take notes*, *make an appointment*, or *carry out research*. These collocations will be particularly useful for students preparing for academic or professional English, as they are commonly used in both formal and semi-formal contexts. Through debates, problem-solving exercises, and case studies, students can interact with these and experience applying collocations in authentic contexts.

Advanced Level: Phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and academic collocations should be the main topics of instruction for advanced students. These collocations are crucial for learners to navigate both formal and informal language contexts fluently. At this stage, students should work with highly specialized collocations such as *under consideration*, *in contrast to* or *on the contrary*, as well as academic phrases commonly used in research papers, presentations, and professional discussions. Phrasal verbs, which have multiple meanings depending on context, should also be introduced to help students master fluency and comprehension in the language. In this stage, students must be involved in activities such as writing essays, delivering presentations, and analyzing academic texts, where students can apply these complex collocations in various written and spoken tasks.

This systematically arranged materials for teaching collocations felicitate students' developing language proficiency making them adept and it aligns with their increasing mastery of word combinations. It emphasizes gradual progression, allowing learners to build confidence at each stage and ultimately gain a deeper understanding of collocational patterns in English.

The curriculum should incorporate exercises based on real-life materials such as newspapers, magazines, podcasts, audio recordings, and video content to shape and elevate it. These resources expose students to collocations in real-world contexts, helping them see how native speakers use language in diverse situations. Integrating such materials not only helps students use collocations in real-life situations but also teaches them the cultural and situational meanings behind language use.

By carefully including collocations in the curriculum with step-by-step support, students can build both fluency and accuracy, eventually mastering natural, everyday English.

Fostering Student Awareness and Contextual Learning

A key part of good collocation teaching is helping students notice how words go together in real-world situations. Students should be taught to spot and understand collocations in the texts they read, the conversations they have, and the media they watch or listen to. Instead of looking at single words by themselves, students need to see how words naturally pair up in English, which makes speaking and writing sound more natural and fluent.

Contextual learning can be facilitated by encouraging students to read diverse texts, such as news articles, short stories, and dialogues, where collocations are used in authentic situations. The teacher's role is to support students in finding and understanding collocations within the texts they read. Teachers should guide students to notice common word pairings and explain their meanings in different contexts. After reading a passage about planning a vacation, the teacher highlights key collocations like *book a hotel*, *plan an itinerary* and *catch a flight*. The teacher explains what each phrase means and discusses situations where they are commonly used.

To strengthen students' understanding, they can be assigned writing tasks that require the use of specific collocations. For example, they might write a letter, diary entry, or short story using collocations related to topics such as "school life," "family activities," or "holiday plans." These activities encourage students to practice collocations in a personal and meaningful way.

Along with writing tasks, speaking activities like debates, presentations, and group discussions allow students to practice using collocations naturally. Encouraging students to use target collocations during these tasks helps make these word combinations part of their everyday speaking. Teachers should keep checking students' use of collocations, giving feedback to correct mistakes and strengthen correct usage.

Culturally Relevant Materials

Language and culture are closely connected, and effective language. In Kerala, for example, students will relate more to collocations that reflect their lived experiences and cultural practices than those that are culturally distant or unfamiliar. Teaching collocations through culturally relevant examples ensures that students find the learning process relatable and engaging.

Collocations that reflect local culture and everyday life connect better with students. For example, phrases like *monsoon showers*, *tea estate* and *Onam celebrations* are closely linked to the culture of Kerala. Using these collocations has a great advantage in building students' vocabulary and helping them develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their culture. By adding such culturally meaningful collocations to the curriculum, teachers can make language learning more relatable and memorable for students by linking it to their surroundings.

In addition, culturally relevant teaching can help address common language learning problems, such as the influence of students' mother tongue on their English. In many ESL learners, including those in Kerala, the tendency to translate directly from their native language into English can lead to errors in collocation. For instance, Malayalam speakers may say *write an exam* instead of *take an exam* due to direct translation from the Malayalam phrase. Teaching culturally relevant collocations helps teachers minimize common errors, making students' language use sound more natural and instinctive.

Teachers can also bring regional proverbs, sayings, and traditional expressions into collocation lessons, as these often carry important language patterns along with cultural knowledge. When students recognize the cultural significance of a collocation, it becomes easier for them to remember and use it correctly in future communication.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

One of the primary barriers to effective collocation instruction is the lack of teacher awareness and preparation. Many teachers lack a clear understanding of collocations, which limits their ability to teach them effectively (Hill 47). It is a clear indication that teacher training programs should be revised to enhance teachers' knowledge of collocations.

These programs should be capable of raising collocation awareness and providing practical strategies and resources for classroom use. This will improve teachers' confidence and competence in teaching too.

Training should begin with a focus on the definition and function of collocations in language. Teachers must be able to identify different types, such as verb-noun, adjective-noun, noun-noun combinations, phrasal verbs, and idiomatic expressions. Practical techniques should also be part of the training. For example, teachers can learn to use gap-fill exercises and corpora tools to highlight common collocations in authentic texts.

Teachers should also be trained in error analysis. This will help them recognize and correct students' common mistakes with collocations. They can then provide constructive explanations and appropriate alternatives. Workshops on culturally responsive teaching practices are also useful. These help teachers understand regional variations in collocation use and integrate local culture into their lessons.

In addition, professional development should promote continuous learning. This can include seminars, workshops, and online courses focused on collocations and language fluency. Teachers must be trained to use tools like the Oxford Collocations Dictionary and other corpus-based resources. These tools will support effective lesson planning and deepen teachers' understanding of authentic language use. Teachers should also have access to resources like the Oxford Collocations Dictionary and other corpus-based tools, which will

help them create more effective lesson plans and deepen their understanding of how collocations are used in real-world language. Teachers should also be given access to resources such as the Oxford Collocations Dictionary and other corpus-based tools, enabling them to design more effective lesson plans and teach the students how collocations function in authentic language use.

Resources and Authentic Materials

Effective instruction of collocations requires a combination of both print and digital resources, which enable students to encounter collocations in authentic, meaningful contexts. Dictionaries and online resources specifically designed for collocation learning are essential tools for both teachers and students alike.

Teachers can use authoritative resources such as the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary* and *Collins COBUILD* for their lesson plans as these dictionaries list a wide range of collocations, often organized by topic. Teachers can easily include them into their lessons. They can use these tools to introduce new collocations, give contextual examples, and explain word relationships.

In addition, *Quizlet* and *Memrise* are useful online platforms in this regard. They give interactive tools such as flashcards, games, and quizzes. These features allow students to practice collocations in a fun and engaging way. They also help learners reinforce their knowledge outside the classroom.

Beyond dictionaries and apps, authentic materials are also valuable. Newspapers, podcasts, TED Talks, and movies expose students to collocations in real-life settings. These sources show how collocations appear naturally in context. For example, a podcast on climate change may include phrases like "raise awareness," "take action," and "environmental impact." Such examples help students understand how collocations are used in everyday conversation. Similarly, articles from reputable newspapers provide examples of formal and informal collocations, giving students insight into diverse registers of language.

Teachers must integrate the traditional resources and modern digital tools to offer students a well-rounded exposure to collocations, helping them not only to comprehend but also recollect the contextual applications of these word combinations. This can reinforce the natural use of collocations by students and students making them a part of their active vocabulary enabling themselves to communicate more fluently and naturally.

Visual Aids and Digital Tools

Illustrative materials are vital and more engaging tools for fostering students' understanding of collocations. Educators can help students visualize, organize, and connect word pairings by using mind maps, word clouds, collocation webs, etc. These will make the abstract concept of collocation more tangible. For example, a mind map centered around the word "crime" might branch into common collocations such as "commit a crime," "crime rate," and "violent crime." This visual organization not only shows how these terms are related but also helps students understand how they function together in real-life contexts.

In the digital age, interactive tools like Coggle, MindMeister, and Padlet provide great opportunities for visualizing and organizing collocations. These platforms are a great help for students when creating engaging, creative, interactive collocation maps, either individually or in groups. These digital tools encourage critical thinking and active involvement, motivating students to explore and analyze word pairings in greater detail. The right use of these platforms will help learners explore a greater variety of example sentences and contexts and how to realize how collocations are used in different situations.

Additionally, Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle or Canvas are useful for adding quizzes, flashcards, and other interactive activities on collocations. These platforms give students instant feedback on their use of collocations, helping them spot and correct mistakes right away. Immediate feedback strengthens learning, helping students remember the correct word combinations and increasing their confidence in using them in both speaking and writing.

Recommendations for Material Developers

Textbook developers and instructional material creators play a pivotal role in shaping language acquisition experiences. To better integrate collocation into English language learning, the following strategies should guide material design.

A dedicated “Collocation Corner” in each thematic unit can highlight common and useful word pairings linked to the topic. For instance, in a unit on health, collocations such as “catch a cold,” “take medicine,” or “suffer from fatigue” help reinforce natural usage and context-based learning.

Collocation should also be woven into grammar and vocabulary exercises. Fill-in-the-blanks, matching, and sentence transformation tasks can draw learners’ attention to habitual word combinations, making grammar more meaningful and vocabulary more functional.

Culture-specific examples enhance relatability and authenticity. Including regional collocations—such as “power cut” or “eve-teasing,” commonly heard in South Asian English—ensures that students can connect with language that reflects their sociolinguistic environment (Mukherjee 142).

In addition, companion workbooks focused exclusively on collocations offer opportunities for further practice. These materials can include themed collocation banks, guided writing prompts, and productive speaking tasks to strengthen fluency and reinforce correct usage through repetition.

Finally, phrasal verbs should be treated as collocational entities rather than isolated items. Teaching combinations like “give up,” “look after,” or “run into” in rich contexts, supported by visual aids and realistic dialogues, makes them easier to understand and apply. This method reflects the principles of the Lexical Approach, which emphasizes acquiring fixed expressions as foundational to fluency (Lewis 133).

Implementation of these strategies properly will make instructional materials more comprehensive and effective in bridging the gap between knowledge and communicative competence, and learners will develop both accuracy and idiomatic language use.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the systematic integration of collocations into English language instructional materials is essential for developing students' fluency and natural use of the language. By raising awareness at the institutional level, followed by a revision of the curriculum to include scaffolded collocation instruction, and fostering student awareness through contextual learning, educators can bridge the gap between passive vocabulary knowledge and active language use. Teacher training, culturally relevant teaching methods, and the use of authentic resources are essential in this regard. All these together will create a language environment where collocations are learned and used naturally. Material developers should also focus on creating resources that prioritize collocation instruction. This ensures that students have the tools they need to succeed.

By adopting these strategies, we can create a generation of English learners who are not only proficient in vocabulary but also skilled in using language naturally and fluently.

Works Cited

- Benson, Morton. *Collocations and Their Place in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Brown, H. Douglas. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Pearson Education, 2007.
- Brown, John, and Sarah Green. *Collocations in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Carter, Ronald, and Michael McCarthy. *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written Grammar and Usage*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Cobb, Thomas. “Measuring the Association of Words in Natural Language.” *Language Teaching Research*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2008, pp. 261–282.

- Hill, Jimmie. "Revising Priorities: From Grammatical Failure to Collocational Success." *Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach*, edited by Michael Lewis, Language Teaching Publications, 2000, pp. 47–69.
- Lewis, Michael. *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward*. Language Teaching Publications, 1993.
- . *Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach*. Language Teaching Publications, 2000.
- McCarthy, Michael, and Felicity O'Dell. *English Collocations in Use: Intermediate*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- . *English Collocations in Use: Advanced*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Mukherjee, Joybrato. *English Datasets and Corpora in Indian Contexts: Studies in Language and Society*. Orient BlackSwan, 2010.
- Nattinger, James R., and Jeanette S. DeCarrico. *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
- O'Dell, Felicity, and Michael McCarthy. *English Collocations in Use: Advanced*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Emma. "Language Acquisition through Collocations." *Language Education Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2019, pp. 120–134.
- Thornbury, Scott. *How to Teach Vocabulary*. Pearson Education, 2002.

