

Using English Collocations To Improve Writing Skills Of First-Year English Majored Students At Dong Nai University

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not English collocations may enhance first-year English majors' writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For most EFL students, writing well is a difficulty. They don't know how to utilize the terms correctly, which is one issue. This research uses a 3-week training program using a descriptive paragraph writing style for 38 freshman English majors at Dong Nai University (DNU). Furthermore, pre- and post-trial questionnaires are administered to students in order to collect data on how they utilize collocations and assess their attitudes about learning them. After that, information is gathered and examined qualitatively. The study's findings support the theory that using collocations enhances English writing.

Keywords: English, student, first-year English majored student.

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I. Introduction

Background to the study

Writing proficiency is a crucial component of communication. Since teaching writing needs a high level of correctness in every detail, it is regarded as one of the most difficult subjects to teach. It is obvious that emphasizing the value of writing proficiency is necessary. Nonetheless, the majority of EFL students struggle with writing well.

Academic writing courses at Dong Nai University (DNU) provide a significant challenge for first-year English majors, who are at the pre-intermediate level.

The books in the present course book were assembled by DNU instructors. Ten writing lessons are covered throughout the thirty sessions that make up the course. Lack of time results in information that is insufficient for learning, particularly for writing abilities. Pupils lack the skills necessary to compose paragraphs well. One of the issues is that they may not be aware of collocations, which might be connected to their improper use of the terms. This fact motivates the researcher to carry out the investigation into the challenges faced by the students and to determine how English collocations may be used in writing classes.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this research is to determine if English collocations may enhance first-year DNU English majors' writing in the language. It also aims to look at the challenges and attitudes of the students about the use of collocations in writing.

Research questions

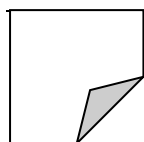
The study presents the following research questions in order to fulfill the aforementioned goals:

○ Does using English collocations contribute to improve English writing?

What are the students' attitudes towards the application of collocations in writing courses?

II. Literature Review

The first section of this chapter addresses important topics pertaining to the conventional notions of teaching writing skills, such as creating descriptive and paragraph-writing paragraphs. After that, it goes on to discuss collocations and writing.



Teaching writing

According to Doff (1988), students who are learning English at a lower level would probably need to write for exams and for the purpose of studying. Additionally, writing new terms down helps pupils concentrate on their studies and retain the information.

Paragraph

"A paragraph is a group of sentences and that the first sentence of this group is intended," note Smalley & Ruetten (1986:3). A paragraph is defined as "a group of sentences that develops one main idea; in other words, a paragraph develops a topic" in their alternative definition.

Paragraph Organization

A paragraph consists of a main sentence, supporting sentences, and a conclusion phrase, according to Savage & Shafiei (2012). The subject sentence appears in the first sentence. It presents the subject and the main concept. The topic's material is further explained in the developing phrases that follow, and the conclusion comes last.

Descriptive Paragraph

According to Savage & Shafiei (2012), a descriptive paragraph helps the reader visualize a certain person, place, or object. According to Smalley & Ruetten (1986), a descriptive paragraph's details must be vivid and rationally organized. A writer may build a clear image for the reader with words, much like a painter. Writing is made more engaging by specific details.

Collocations

"Collocation" is defined in McIntosh, Francis & Poole's 2009 dictionary as "the ways words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing." Collocations are defined as "a pair or a group of words that are often used together" by McCarthy & O'Dell (2005:6).

Given the abundance of collocations, compiling a list of them is exceedingly challenging. As a matter of fact, I believe that almost every English term has a corresponding word.

Adjectives and nouns (*heavy smoker*), verbs and nouns (*make my bed*), nouns and nouns (*bars of soap*), verbs and prepositions (*look up*), verbs and adverbs (*speak gently*), and adverbs and adjectives (*very worried*) are the six categories of collocations. In 2012, Savage and Shafiei

The roles of collocations in writing

Collocations have been shown to be important for ESL and EFL learning in recent research. According to McCarthy & O'Dell (2005), students may convey their thoughts more naturally by using frequent word pairings. Additionally, it gives them other options for selection that are more vivid, expressive, and accurate combinations. Additionally, students' writing style may be enhanced by the use of collocations, which enables them to enhance the vividness and readability of their work.

According to McIntosh, Francis, and Poole (2009), using the appropriate collocations enhances a student's writing and makes it seem more "intermediate." Conversely, using the wrong collocations increases the likelihood of receiving a worse grade on an exam.

III. Methodology

Participants

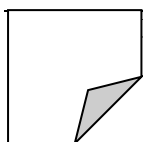
Thirty-eight DNU freshman majoring in English participated in this research. These students voluntarily experimented with using collocations in their writing assignments. The course book selected for writing proficiency is "Writing 1," which was put together by DNU's Faculty of Foreign Languages teachers in 2021. The writing course included thirty sessions in the present curriculum. They study paragraph writing as a kind of writing.

Instrumentation

In order to fulfil the objectives of the study, the following instruments were utilized:

Questionnaire

There were two delivery phases for the same questionnaire. While the post-trial questionnaire was administered toward the conclusion of the instruction, the pre-trial questionnaire was distributed at the start of the trial teaching session. Both included thirteen questions total, with the emphasis being on the knowledge, attitudes, and judgments of the students both before and after the trial instruction. Five questions made up the first section, which tested the students' ability to recall the collocations from the trial instruction. Eight questions made up the



next section, which asked the students about their challenges with learning to write as well as how well they used collocations in their writing. The researcher performs the trial instruction program by combining the two sources of information supplied by the two portions of the questionnaire.

Trial teaching program

Three weeks were allotted for the instruction. For ninety-minute sessions, three lesson plans (see Appendix) were created.

1. Collocations for characterizing persons were introduced and practiced in writing sentences before the appropriate paragraph was written during the first lesson.
2. Collocations for depicting landscapes were presented and practiced in writing sentences and the pertinent paragraph in the second session.
3. Collocations for describing food were introduced and exercised in writing sentences and the pertinent paragraph during the third lesson.

Research procedure

Initially, the students were given a pre-questionnaire to determine their potential and challenges related to learning to write.

The lesson plan-based experimental teaching program came next. Simultaneously, an observation was conducted to ascertain the pupils' opinions on the instruction.

The post-questionnaire used in the research's subsequent phase assessed the students' assessments and competency after the trial instruction.

The information was then gathered and subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

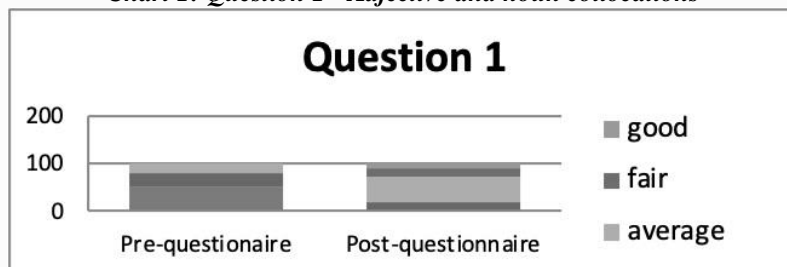
IV. Data Analysis And Findings

Analysis of the results from the questionnaires

Results of part A

The five questions in Part A of the questionnaire were designed to assess the students' foundational understanding of collocations. There were 100 points awarded overall. Every question received a score of 20. There were five different scales created from the results for each question: below weak (0 - <7), weak (7 - <10), average (10 - <13), fair (13 - <16), and good (16 - 20).

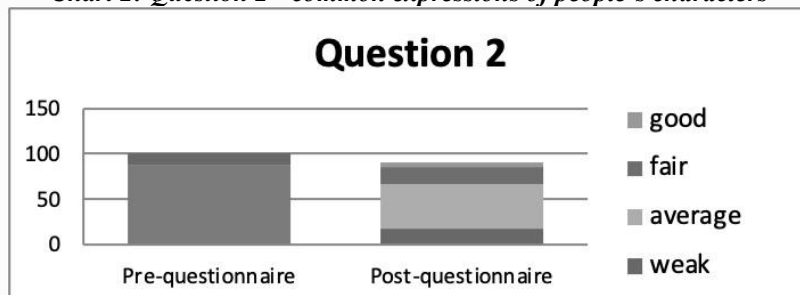
Chart 1: Question 1 - Adjective and noun collocations



The majority of students were unaware of which adjectives in the pre-questionnaire go with which nouns, as can be seen in chart 1 above. While no pupils were classified as "below weak" in the post-questionnaire, 50% of the students answered "below weak," 28% as "weak," and 4% as "average." Of the pupils, 55% received a "average" grade, 17% a "fair," and 11% a "good."

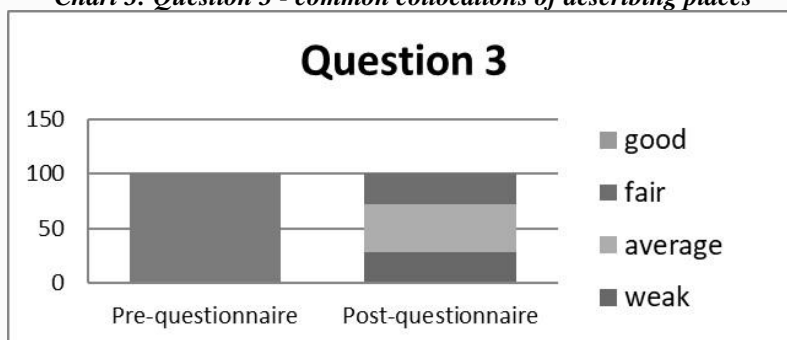
The results of the pre- and post-questionnaire showed improvement. It may be inferred that teaching collocations to describe people's looks was successful.

Chart 2: Question 2 - common expressions of people's characters



The goal of Question 2 was to find out whether the students understood the meaning of several collocations used to characterize persons. The results of the pre- and post-questionnaire significantly improved, as shown in chart 2. By the conclusion of the lesson, only 17% of the students were classified as "weak," 50% as "average," 28% as "fair," and 5% as "good." Initially, 88% of the students could only correctly answer three questions, classifying them as "below weak," and 12% as "average."

Chart 3: Question 3 - common collocations of describing places



The third question assessed the students' understanding of collocations used to describe landscapes. It was evident that the children first had a significant struggle. No student was able to choose the right responses on the pre-trial questionnaire, as shown by chart 3. Surprisingly, five students (28%) were rated as "weak," eight students (44%) as "average," and five students (28%) as "fair" in the post-trial questionnaire. Based on the findings, it seems that the students can now use collocations to depict landscapes.

The purpose of Question 4 was to assess the students' comprehension of the food-related expressions. The percentage of "below weak" pupils decreased from 15 (84%) to 0 (0%), as seen in chart 4. The "Weak" scale dropped one pupil (5%). From one student (5%) to ten pupils (56%), the "average" rose. From 0% to 6 (34%), and then to 5%, of the pupils, "fair" and "good" are ranked higher.

Chart 4: Question 4 - common collocations of describing food

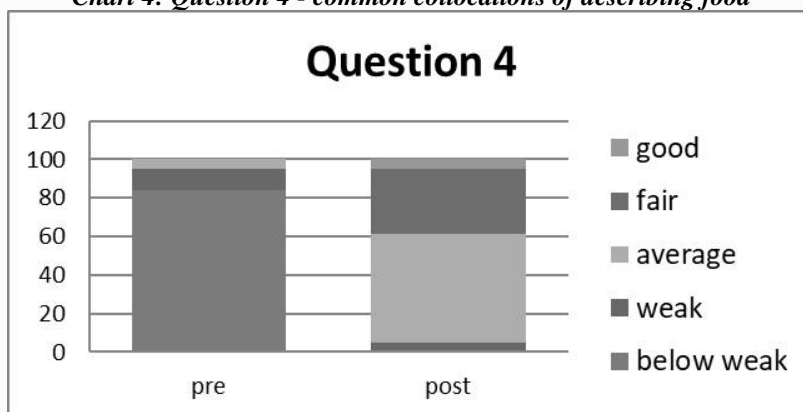
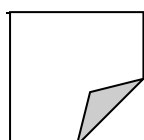
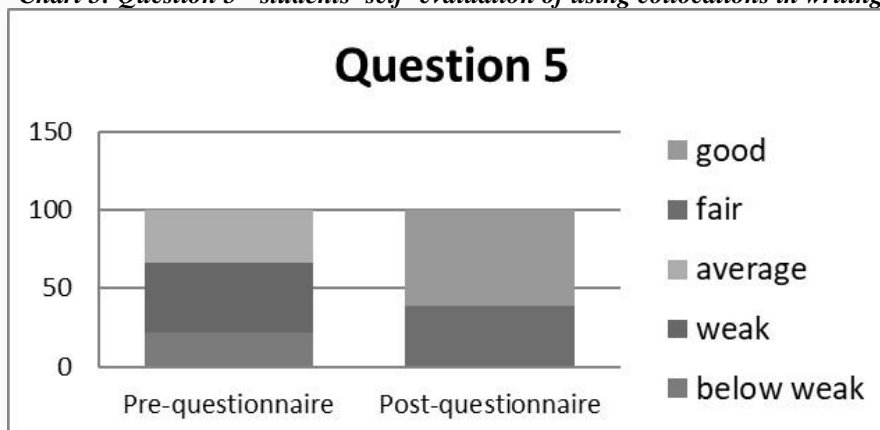


Chart 5: Question 5 - students' self- evaluation of using collocations in writing

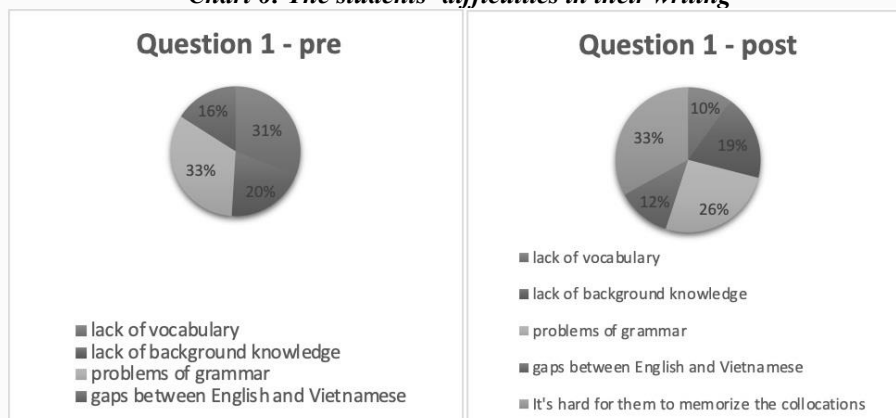


Question number five examined how the students felt about using collocations in their work. Initially, the majority of them believed that collocations had nothing to do with writing. However, thereafter, the majority of them gave their writing's usage of the collocation a good rating.

Results of part B

Part B of the questionnaire composed of 7 questions to assess the students' attitude and evaluation of using collocations in writing.

Chart 6: The students' difficulties in their writing



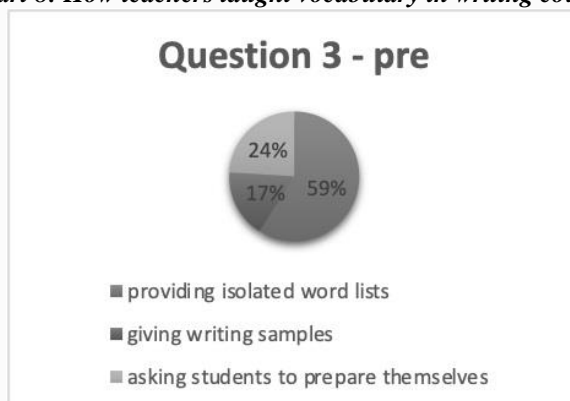
In section B, question 1 was asked to ascertain the kids' challenges with learning to write. In The findings demonstrated that their issues with studying writing were essentially the same, including gaps in their understanding of the subjects, grammatical errors, and word gaps between the English and Vietnamese translations. But after learning how to use collocations in writing, students discovered that it was difficult for them to commit the collocations to memory.

Chart 7: Teaching English collocations in writing courses



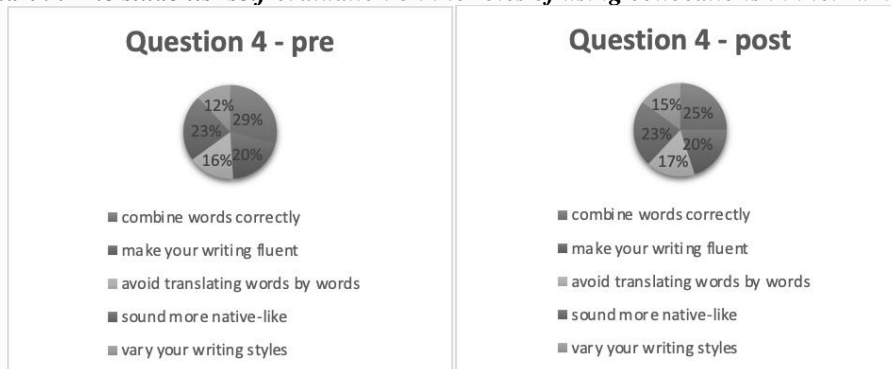
Question 2 looked at whether or not students had previously learned English collocations in writing classes, as the chart above illustrates. According to their responses, the majority of them (89%) did not have the opportunity to study English collocations in writing classes.

Chart 8: How teachers taught vocabulary in writing courses



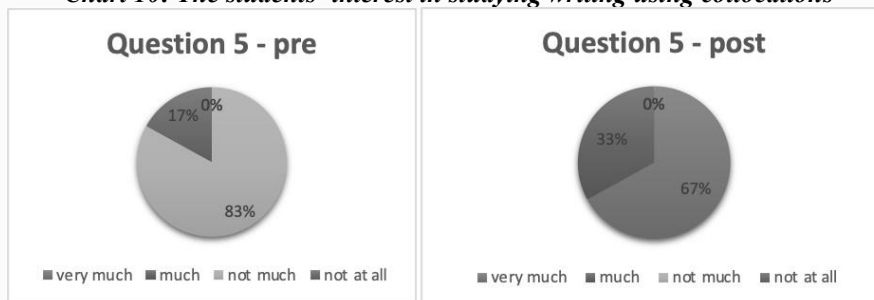
Question 3 sought to elucidate the methods used by instructors to teach vocabulary in writing classes. Of the replies, almost half (59%) were "providing isolated word lists." "Asking students to prepare themselves" and "giving writing samples" were the other two frequently used techniques.

Chart 9: The students' self-evaluation on the roles of using collocations in their writing



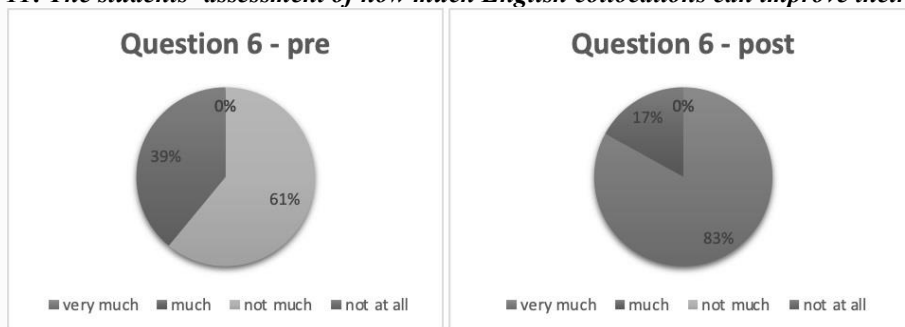
Question 4 revealed the students' assessment of their own use of collocations in their work. The majority of students are able to identify the value of English collocations in written assignments.

Chart 10: The students' interest in studying writing using collocations



The fifth question asked about the pupils' level of enthusiasm in learning English collocations. The chart's findings demonstrated a notable shift in teaching from "not much interest" and "not at all" to "much" and "very much" between pre- and post-trial periods.

Chart 11: The students' assessment of how much English collocations can improve their writing



The purpose of Question 6 was to ascertain how the students felt about the value of English collocations in their work. According to chart 11, the majority of students did not value the use of English collocations in their writing in the pre-trial questionnaire; however, the majority of respondents in the post-trial questionnaire felt otherwise.

Chart 12: The students' expectation of frequency of teaching English collocations in writing courses



The expectations of students about the frequency of teaching English collocations in writing courses were revealed in Question 7. While few students anticipated learning English collocations often in the classroom based on the pre-trial questionnaire, the majority of students wished to learn them frequently based on the post-trial questionnaire.

V. Conclusion

As suggested by the title, the researcher attempted to find out how beneficial it is for first-year English majors to use English collocations in their work. Based on the results, it can be said that using English collocations may help write better and more efficiently. Students' writing may be made more accurate and colorful by using collocations, which improves their writing proficiency. Additionally, the attitudes of the kids are good. Even though it might be challenging to remember these collocations, they understand how important it is to use them in academic writing. One recommendation is that students practice these collocations more often and use them in context. By using such techniques, individuals may enhance their writing in paragraphs as well as other forms of writing in the future.

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