

**VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI  
UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF POST-GRADUATE STUDIES**



**HOÀNG THỊ DUNG**

**THE EFFECTS OF USING COLLOCATIONS IN TEACHING  
ENGLISH VOCABULARY FOR 11<sup>TH</sup>-GRADE STUDENTS AT  
SON TAY HIGH SCHOOL**

*Ảnh hưởng của việc sử dụng kết hợp từ tiếng Anh đến việc học từ  
vựng của học sinh lớp 11 trường THPT Sơn Tây*

**M.A. MINOR PROGRAMME THESIS**

**Field: English Teaching Methodology**

**Code: 60140111**

**HANOI - 2016**

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**Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nguyễn Quang**

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### **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled “**The effects of using collocations in teaching English vocabulary for 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students at Son Tay high school**” is entirely the result of my own work. The material in this thesis has not been submitted for assessment in any other formal course. I also accept all the requirements of ULIS relating to the retention and use of M.A Graduation Thesis deposited in the library. The research reported in this thesis was approved by ULIS.

Signed:

Date submitted: **Hanoi, ..../...../2016**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To accomplish this study, I am indebted to many people for their thoughtful help.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Nguyen Quang for his valuable guidance, critical feedback and enormous encouragement, without which my thesis would be far from completion.

I am also grateful to all the lectures of the Graduate Department, University of Languages and International Studies for their guidance and enthusiasm during my course.

My sincere thanks go to all English teachers and 11<sup>th</sup> – grade students at Son Tay High school.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to my friends who are willing to help me during the course. In particular, I find myself indebted to my family, especially my husband, for their love, care and tolerance when I was in the process of conducting and writing this thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports a quasi - experimental research that aimed to address the impacts of collocation teaching on grade 11 students' vocabulary improvements. Data for the study including two proficiency tests and a follow-up questionnaire were collected from 92 students at Son Tay High school.

In this study, 46 students who followed the conventional vocabulary teaching methods belong to control group, and 46 others participated in experimental group in which they are exposed to different strategies related to collocation learning. The scores taken from the two tests were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 20.0 software package. The results show that English collocation teaching has improved the students' vocabulary learning. The findings from the questionnaire indicate that students also have positive attitude towards the new vocabulary teaching method. They have become well aware of the collocations' importance in language learning. And they have also developed the habit of learning collocations independently outside the classroom. The findings from the tests and the questionnaire support each other to affirm the undeniable positive effects of the collocation teaching. Recommendations for students' English vocabulary improvements and suggestions for further studies are provided on the basis of the research findings as well.

## TABLES OF CONTENTS

Statement of authorship.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Tables of contents.....	iv
Lists of Abbreviations.....	vii
Lists of Tables, Figures.....	viii

### PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale.....	1
2. Aims of the study.....	3
3. Research questions.....	3
4. Scope of the study.....	4
5. Significance of the study .....	4
6. Organization of the study.....	5

### PART B: DEVELOPMENT

#### CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The role and the importance of vocabulary in ELT.....	6
1.2. Collocation .....	7
1.2.1. Definition of collocation.....	7
1.2.2. Classification of collocation.....	9
1.3. Collocation in teaching vocabulary.....	13
1.3.1. The importance of using collocation in ELT .....	13
1.3.2. Directions for teaching collocations in English vocabulary .....	14
1.3.2.1. Raising the students' awareness of the importance of collocations .....	14
1.3.2.2. Making students be well aware of collocations .....	14

1.3.2.3. Teaching collocations through exercises .....	16
1.3.2.4. Teaching collocations through context .....	16
1.3.2.5. Storing collocations .....	16
1.4. Previous studies.....	17
1.5. Summary .....	18

## **CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

2.1. Research method.....	19
2.2. Context of the research.....	20
2.3. The study.....	20
2.3.1. Participants.....	20
2.3.2. Data collection instruments.....	22
2.3.2.1. Pretest and Posttest.....	22
2.3.2.2. Survey questionnaire.....	23
2.4. Procedure. ....	24
2.4.1. The pre implementation phase.....	25
2.4.2. The implementation phase.....	26
2.4.3. The post implementation phase.....	30
2.5. Summary.....	30

## **CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

3.1. Results.....	31
3.1.1. Results of Pre-tests.....	31
3.1.2. Results of the effects of collocation teaching on students' English vocabulary learning.....	32
3.1.3. Results of questionnaire (Students' attitude towards collocation teaching).....	36

3.2. Discussion.....	39
3.2.1. Vocabulary gains as resulting from collocation teaching.....	39
3.2.2. Students’ attitude towards collocation teaching.....	40
3.3. Summary.....	42

**PART C: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Recapitulation.....	43
2. Recommendations .....	44
3. Limitations of the research.....	45
4. Suggestions for further study.....	46

**REFERENCES**

**APPENDIX 1: Test scores**

**APPENDIX 2: Vocabulary Pre-test**

**APPENDIX 3: Vocabulary Post-test**

**APPENDIX 4: Key to the vocabulary Pre-test**

**APPENDIX 5: Key to the vocabulary Post-test**

**APPENDIX 6: Survey Questionnaire**

**APPENDIX 7: Survey Questionnaire (Vietnamese version)**



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

L1	Mother tongue
L2	Foreign language
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
M	Means
N	Number of Cases or Subjects of the study
$p$	Probability of chance (indicator of significance)
Std. Deviation	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistic Package for Social Science
$t$	Obtained Value
$df$	Degree of Freedom

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.1	Lexical Collocations Adopted from Benson et al. (1986a)
Table 1.2	Grammatical Collocations Adopted from Benson et al. (1986a)
Table 1.3	Grammatical collocations in G8 group Adopted from Benson et al. (1986a)
Table 2.1	The main tasks for three implementation phases
Table 3.1	Descriptive statistics for pretest of the Experimental group and Control group
Table 3.2	Independent Samples T-test of pre-tests
Table 3.3	Results of descriptive statistics of the CG and EG in Pre-test and Post-test
Table 3.4	Result of independent samples t-test of mean gains of the Experimental group and Control group after the treatment
Table 3.5	Results of questionnaire on the students 'attitude towards collocation teaching
Figure 3.1	Allocation of gains by Control group and Experimental group after the treatment

## **PART A: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides the background to the study and statement of the problem, the aims and research questions, the scope as well the significance of the study. It also outlines the organization of the thesis.

### **1. Rationale**

In recent years, language teachers and researchers have witnessed a number of changes in language teaching and learning. The latest developments have tried to get learners involved in the most effective methods so as to enhance their proficiency in the target language.

Learning a second language involves the manipulation of four main skills including speaking, writing, listening and reading, which leads to effective communication. One key factor in this process is the amount of vocabulary one possesses as vocabulary forms the integral part of the meaning of any language (McCarthy, 1988). As a result, vocabulary acquisition is currently receiving special attention in L2 pedagogy and research, and how learners acquire vocabulary effectively and efficiently and how it can best be taught are contentious issues in applied linguistics (Lewis, 2006).

Many English learners, despite their quite proficient ability in grammar, reading and some other L2 skills, are experiencing difficulties in remembering and proficiently using words that they have learnt. Their lack on vocabulary learning skills can be taken into account for this obstacle. As can be observed in a certain number of EFL classes, vocabulary teaching is generally given by classical techniques. Nowadays, linguists all over the world are studying a variety of effective approaches in vocabulary teaching and presenting.

New words can be approached from checking their meanings in the dictionary; or example sentences containing the vocabulary items can be another considering method. Apart from those, learners can also relate the new vocabularies with the words they

have learnt to figure out the meaning; or teachers may give verbal explanation of new vocabulary items mainly in English; and providing synonyms or antonyms of the new vocabularies is another choice as well. Also, teachers can use pictures, realia, group work, etc. to convey the words' meaning to their students. However, it is evident that some of these techniques cannot bring about a great deal of vocabulary retention for learners are not able to make use of presented words in performing academic tasks and communicative activities (Hedge, 2008).

Collocation is also among these techniques. Within the lexical approach, particular attention is intended for collocations and expressions that embrace institutionalized utterances and sentence frames and heads. As Lewis affirms, we attempt to think of collocations, and to use these collocations in our expressions instead of individual words. It means, rather than trying to split things into even smaller pieces, we have a cognizant attempt to see things in larger, more holistic manners (Lewis, 1997). Therefore, teachers of English should be encouraged to attach more importance to vocabulary teaching through collocation rather than only the acquisition of grammar and the use of traditional vocabulary teaching strategies in their classes.

As a foreign language teacher at Son Tay high school, the researcher of the current study also tries her best to support her students in acquiring accurate and native-like competence effectively. In her teaching process, she observes and finds out that her students, who are at grade 11, have to deal with countless difficulties in productive skills. Examining learners' writing, the researcher could quickly notice the "mis-collocations" that are widespread in their written assignments. The similar situation can also be found out in speaking skill when students know the meaning of each separate word, but they are still unable to connect these words together naturally and correctly and use them fluently and constantly. This may be due to their ignorance of collocations and the interference of the mother tongue which reflect their lack of proficiency in the target language. In order to overcome these problems, a number of

methods can be taken into consider; among them is using collocations. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research on the effects of teaching English collocations to enhance students' vocabulary ability. The results gained from this study at Son Tay High school are expected to contribute to changing Vietnamese EFL teachers and learners' traditional perspectives so as to constitute one of the most important parts of vocabulary teaching.

## **2. Aims of the study**

This paper aims to find out whether and how teaching vocabulary through collocations will result in better vocabulary learning than those using conventional techniques. The research also focuses on investigating the students' attitudes towards teaching collocations. My purpose is to show the contribution of collocations to vocabulary learning of students in English Foreign Language (EFL) classes at Son Tay high school in Hanoi. It is hypothesized that learning vocabulary through collocations is an effective strategy that positively contributes to the development of vocabulary learning; and students have positive attitudes with regard to learning vocabulary in collocations rather than that in other vocabulary teaching methods.

## **3. Research questions**

To satisfy this aim, the current study intended to find answers to the following questions:

- (1) To what extent does using collocations in teaching English vocabulary affect students' learning of new words at grade 11 at Son Tay high school?*
- (2) What are students' attitudes towards teaching collocations?*

#### **4. Scope of the study**

Though the use of collocation can be applied in different aspects in language teaching including the macro skills, grammar, vocabulary, etc., the researcher has chosen to focus only on vocabulary teaching for the fact that collocation is so central to teaching new words. If a student wants to master a new word completely, it cannot be denied that he/she has to proficiently use that word in combining with other words or phrases. A large number of studies prove that presenting new words through collocations result in a better learning of the words than presenting them using traditional techniques. Therefore, this research investigates the use of collocation in teaching vocabulary. In the research conducted, the subject was a small group of grade 11 students who were non-randomly assigned to a control group and an experimental group. The material scope used for teaching students during 10 weeks of the investigation is restricted to English textbook for grade 11.

#### **5. Significance of the study**

Although it is widely acknowledged that collocations are not only indispensable but also challenging for English language learners, and that they therefore should play an integral part in L2 teaching at any level, learners' difficulties with collocations have not been investigated in much detail so far.

The current study primarily focuses on finding out the feasibility of applying collocations as effectively as possible to L2 teaching in the effort of improving students' method of learning vocabulary. Therefore, it is much to the author's expectation that the results of the current research will help teachers of language become well aware of what they should do to improve their teaching performance in class, and students gain more insight into the importance of collocations.

## **6. Organization of the study**

The thesis consists of five chapters, organized as follows:

**Part A: Introduction** presents the background to the study, the aims of research, the significance, the scope, and the structure of the thesis.

**Part B: Development** is organized around three chapters as follows.

*Chapter 1: Literature Review* discusses relevant theoretical points of view concerning what can be done and how to develop foreign language learners' oral communication skills. Furthermore, the review of the previous studies related to the thesis is also provided.

*Chapter 2: Research Methodology* describes the research method, the data collection instruments and the information of the participants in the study as well as the steps to conduct the study.

*Chapter 3: Results and Discussion* consists of an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings.

**Part C: Conclusion and recommendations** offers a summary of the findings, recommendations; limitations of the study and suggestions for further study.

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