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## Turkish EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Collocations

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### Abstract

This study explored perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers and learners on teaching and learning of collocations. Participants were 32 high school teachers and 326 students from five different state schools. The participants completed a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers were conducted to further explore the issues related to their perceptions and practices of teaching collocations. Results indicated that teachers consider it crucial to develop learners' collocational knowledge starting from beginner levels. According to them, the main sources of collocational errors are learners' unawareness of collocation as a concept and first language interference. Teachers reported that they specifically allocate teaching time for most frequently used collocations. Regarding learners, their responses indicated that most of them believe collocations play an important role in language learning. However, they think that teachers do not always dedicate enough time for collocations during teaching. Learners also believed that their collocational errors mostly stem from Turkish interference, and that the most effective strategy to study collocations is through collocational grids. The results of the study are discussed with reference to previous research conducted in different EFL settings, and in terms of practical applications for foreign language teaching in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Collocations, Turkish context, teacher perceptions, learner perceptions.

## İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Türk Öğrencilerin ve Türk İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Eşdizimlilik Algısı

### Öz

Bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin ve Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eşdizimlilik öğrenmeye ve öğretmeye ilişkin algılarını saptamak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Bu amaçla, çalışmanın katılımcılarını oluşturan beş farklı devlet lisesindeki 32 öğretmen ve 326 öğrenci, bir anket tamamlamıştır. Ayrıca öğretmenlerden altısıyla eşdizimlilik öğretim uygulamalarıyla ilgili yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar öğretmenlerin, eşdizimlilik bilgisinin başlangıç seviyesinden itibaren geliştirilmesi gerektiğini, öğrencilerin eşdizimlilik hatalarının genellikle eşdizimlilik kavramını bilmemelerinden ve ana dilden yaptıkları aktarımdan kaynaklandığını düşündüğünü göstermiştir. Buna ek olarak, öğretmenler sık kullanılan eşdizimli sözcüklere özel olarak zaman ayırdıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Öğrenciler ise, eşdizimli sözcüklerin dil öğreniminde önemli rol oynamasına rağmen öğretmenlerinin yeterince zaman ayırmadıklarını, eşdizimlilikle ilgili yaptıkları hataların ana dilin etkisinden kaynaklandığını ve onlar için en etkili öğrenme stratejisinin eşdizimlilik tablosu kullanmak olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Makalde, çalışmanın sonuçları farklı yabancı dil olarak İngilizce

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ortamlarında yapılan çalışmalarınkiyle karşılaştırılmış ve Türkiye'deki yabancı dil öğretim uygulamalarına istinaden yapılan çıkarımlar sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eşdizimlilik, kelime öğretimi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Collocations refer to a group of words that go together, to form fixed or semi-fixed expressions. They compose a significant portion of a native speaker's linguistic competence (Wray, 2002; Schmitt, 2004). In the context of foreign language learning, many scholars have viewed collocational knowledge as a crucial element that improves students' vocabulary knowledge and use of target language (Nation, 2001). Given the importance of collocations and their relevance to foreign language teaching and learning, a growing body of research studies has focused on measuring the productive and/or receptive collocational knowledge of learners, exploring how collocational competence relates to overall linguistic competence, and identifying ways of enhancing learners' collocational competence (Bağcı, 2014; Gitsaki, 1996; Nesselhauf 2003; Shei & Pain, 2000). However, studies investigating teachers' and learners' perceptions of collocations are limited worldwide and non-existent in the Turkish context. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate the perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and learners related to the teaching and learning of collocations. In doing so, it aims to provide insight into how provision of collocation teaching practices in Turkey can be improved.

### 1.1 Collocations as Formulaic Language

Vocabulary is one of the key components in foreign language learning and teaching. Vocabulary learning does not only comprise of learning single words, but also phrases of two or more words that have clear and formulaic usage (i.e. *strong tea, come to an agreement*). Applied linguists have argued that formulaic language composes a large part of written and spoken discourse (Erman & Warren, 2000; Foster, 2001) and that the knowledge of a formulaic expression enables the production of more than one word without hesitation (Pawley & Syder,

1983; Wray, 2002). Additionally, the knowledge of formulaic language has a facilitating effect on predicting what kind of words may be found together (Nattinger, 1988), which assists learners in associating and storing words more easily. Considering the facilitating role of formulaic language in language learning and use, teachers should pay special attention to these elements of language, so that students notice formulaic language and utilize it to improve their fluency during language production (Vasiljevic, 2014).

The concept of collocation is classified as a subcategory of formulaic language (Lewis, 1994). According to Firth (1957, p.183), who first coined the term collocation, it is 'the company that the words keep'. Similarly, Sinclair (1991, p.170) explains the concept as 'the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text'. Nesselhauf (2005, p.25) asserts that a collocation is not restricted to only two lexical items (e.g. *put pressure*), as it may also include other items that are closely associated with them (e.g. *put pressure on somebody*).

Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997) divide collocations into two major types as grammatical and lexical. According to the researchers, grammatical collocations consist of a noun, adjective or verb plus a preposition or a structure like to+infinitive or that-clause, while lexical collocations are different combinations of nouns, adjectives and adverbs. They do not contain prepositions, infinitives, or clauses. According to their classification, grammatical collocations are further divided into eight types: noun+prep., noun+to+infinitive, prep.+noun, noun+that clause, adjective+prep. combinations, predicative adj.+to+infinitive, adj.+that clause, verb+to+infinitive; while lexical collocations are listed as seven types: verb+noun (eradication), verb+noun (creation), adjective+noun, verb+adverb, noun+verb naming an action, noun1 of noun2, adverb+adjective.

As Martynska (2004) points out, for each language, collocations comply with the rules characteristic of that language, thus they cause serious problems for foreign language learners; yet, in order to communicate effectively, and to be more natural and fluent in speaking and writing learners need to know a large number of collocations (Nattinger, 1988; Wray, 2002).

### 1.2. Research on English collocations

It is possible to identify various strands in research on English collocations, among which are investigating learners' productive and receptive knowledge of collocations, the relationship between collocation learning and proficiency, and effective ways of enhancing learners' collocational competence.

Learners' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations have been measured by means of collocation tests (Bonk, 2001; Gitsaki, 1999; Gyllstad, 2007). In testing, test batteries involving sentence completion, multiple choice and translation tasks, and corpus analysis based on learners' written work have been used to explore learners' knowledge of collocations (Gyllstad 2007; Nesselhauf, 2005). Based on analyses of learners' output and errors, researchers have identified that most collocational errors stem from first language interference, and that mastering collocations is a challenging task even for advanced level learners (Howarth, 1998; Laufer & Waldman, 2011). Other studies have found that receptive knowledge of the learners on collocations was higher than their productive knowledge, and vocabulary size positively correlated with collocational knowledge (Alsakran, 2011; Gitsaki, 1999; Koya, 2005; Martynska, 2004).

Another strand of research has investigated the correlation between collocational competence and proficiency. To measure the correlation, Bonk (2001) used a fill-in task and a TOEFL proficiency test with university students. In the Greek context, Gitsaki (1996) measured collocational knowledge of 275 learners at different proficiency levels through fill-in and translation tasks. In the Turkish context, Bağcı

(2014) compared collocational knowledge of pre-intermediate and advanced level learners focusing on verb-noun, adjective-noun, adjective preposition, and noun-preposition collocations. In all these studies, researchers reported a positive correlation between collocational knowledge and general proficiency.

Various other research studies, in both Turkey and abroad, have sought effective ways of enhancing learners' collocational competence (Akıncı, 2009; Gençer, 2004; Hsu, 2002; Koç, 2006; Koosha & Jafarpour, 2006). Through an experimental study conducted with 200 Iranian EFL students, Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) investigated whether Data-Driven Learning (DDL) would affect the learning of collocation of prepositions. The results indicated that DDL approach was significantly more effective compared to the study of collocations through conventional textbooks. Hsu's (2002) study involved direct emphasis on lexical collocations in both spoken and written discourses. The results revealed that such emphasis could help students learn new collocations. In Turkey, Gençer(2004) conducted an experimental study in which a group of learners received instruction through awareness-raising tasks while the control group was taught collocations through conventional vocabulary teaching techniques. According to the post-test scores, the experimental group outperformed the control group in both productive and receptive collocation tests.

Similarly, Koç (2006) investigated whether explicit collocation instruction improved students' lexical collocation awareness and influenced the retention of vocabulary. Results showed that the participants were able to identify and categorize collocations in any text, and that vocabulary instruction was helpful in vocabulary retention. Akıncı's (2009) study, on the other hand, compared the effects of three types of instruction in learning verb-noun collocations: DDL instruction, explicit instruction, and combined method. The findings indicated that explicit instruction group and

combined method group performed similarly and significantly better than DDL group in relation to accurate use of collocations. According to the results of these studies, it can be concluded that in general giving place for collocations in teaching, either in specific tasks or as part of general classroom instruction, have helped learners to acquire targeted collocations and raised their collocational competence.

Studies that have explored teachers' and students' perceptions on vocabulary teaching and learning are limited (Borg, 2006; Gao & Ma, 2011), while perception-based studies on collocations and collocation learning are scarce (Phuong, 2012; Wu, 2015). However, such investigation is important, as it would help identify mismatches between teacher and student perspectives, which then can be used to equip teachers with appropriate professional knowledge and beliefs to support students' learning efforts (Gao & Ma, 2011). In the Chinese context, Phuong (2012) examined teachers' perceptions of teaching collocations through a questionnaire. Results indicated that teachers had positive attitudes towards teaching collocations, since they believed that collocations were important for language proficiency. Teachers also stated that they focused on commonly used collocations in activities such as comparing the synonyms of collocations, and they attributed students' collocational errors to the negative transfer from their native language, and students' habit of learning words in isolation. In Taiwan, Wu (2015) investigated the effects of using an online database on collocation teaching, and students' perceptions of collocations by means of a questionnaire, pre- and post-tests, and an interview. Students' answers showed that before training they lacked awareness of the concept of collocation, resulting in erroneous production of collocations. After training, students were in favor of including corpus in teaching of collocations.

## 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

In the Turkish context, a review of studies on collocations indicates that despite growing research interest, studies on collocations have been scarce, and mainly conducted to explore effects of various types of instruction on learners' collocational knowledge (Akıncı, 2009; Koç, 2006). To the best of our knowledge, no previous study in Turkey had explored perceptions related to teaching and learning of collocations. Thus the purpose of this study was to explore the role of collocations, and their teaching and learning from the perspectives of Turkish EFL teachers and students. Teachers' perceptions influence their attitude toward subject content, teaching styles, and tendencies to use specific instructional techniques. It was hoped that the findings of this study would help us gain a deeper insight into high school teachers' and students' perspectives about teaching and learning collocations; and furthermore highlight some of the challenges involved in collocation teaching practices so that both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs can better equip teachers with relevant knowledge and skills to help students improve their collocational knowledge. Moreover, if these challenges involve teaching materials and resources, such awareness can also be raised for material designers.

### 2.1. Methodology

#### 2.1.1. Participants and Setting

The participants of this study were 32 teachers and 326 senior students of five different Anatolian high schools in Turkey. They were chosen through convenience sampling. Teachers' teaching experience ranged from 6 to 20 years. Thirty teachers had BA degrees in Foreign Language Education and 2 teachers had BA degrees in English Language and Literature. None of the teachers had a post-graduate degree. They taught between 24 to 29 class hours per week.

The 164 male and 162 female students who participated in the study were between the ages of 16-18 and had been learning English for

approximately 9 years. According to their responses, they mostly used English when visiting online websites (n=138), to chat with foreigners on the Internet (n=129), and to watch films and news in English (n=88). Interestingly, 52 students stated that they did not use English outside the classroom.

The participants were from 5 different Anatolian high schools. Anatolian high school is a selective state school model that admits its students according to grade point average and scores received in nation-wide standardized tests. Education in this school model typically lasts for four years. Information about the participating schools is given below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Information about the schools

Schools	No of Students	No of Teachers	Location
S1	68	6	Kadıköy, İstanbul
S2	80	7	Mersin
S3	80	8	Üsküdar, İstanbul
S4	68	7	Zeytinburnu, İstanbul
S5	30	4	Muş
Total	326	32	

Regarding coursebooks, two of the participating schools, S2 and S5 followed *Yes You Can* (B1 level) provided by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). In this coursebook, vocabulary items based on listening or reading texts on the theme of the unit are presented individually and mainly through matching activities. In other participating schools, *Spark 4-upper intermediate* (S1 and S4) and *Longman-TOEFL IBT* (S3) were used. The coursebook *Spark 4* involves vocabulary teaching activities such as looking up words and phrases in word lists, matching them to their synonyms, antonyms or definitions, spider grams, gap filling exercises and categorizing. In *Longman-TOEFL IBT*, different meanings of words are presented through various examples together with their daily usage in different phrases. Teachers also commented that along with coursebooks, other supplementary materials such as worksheets and visual aids were used.

## 2.1.2. Data Collection Instruments

### 2.1.2.1. Teacher Questionnaire

A questionnaire designed by Phuong (2012) that consists of ten questions was administered to participating teachers to understand their perceptions about collocation teaching. The questions particularly addressed issues to do with teachers' attitudes toward the importance of teaching collocations, practices regarding the

frequency and techniques of collocation teaching, opinions of the causes of students' collocational errors, and suggestions on effective techniques for learning collocations. While for the first four questions teachers had to choose the most appropriate answer according to their views, they could choose more than one option for the remaining questions.

The questionnaire underwent some minor modifications before the administration. A demographic information part was added in order to obtain background information related to teachers' gender, age, training, years of experience, and the number of classes they teach weekly. *I am not sure* option was added to the options in the question which is about the role of collocations in vocabulary learning. The aim behind this modification was to allow teachers who were not actually aware of the importance of collocation in vocabulary learning to state their opinions. The other modification in the questionnaire was in the question which asked the participants how they presented word combinations in their classes; *I teach words in isolation* option was added considering that there may also be teachers who did not teach target words with their collocations. Also, a statement was added at the end of the questionnaire for participating teachers to tick if they agreed to be interviewed regarding their perceptions and

practices of teaching collocations. Before the administration, the questionnaire was given to 3 Turkish EFL teachers working in the preparatory school of a state university in order to identify and amend any problems related to the content, wording, length, or instructions of the questionnaire. After ensuring that questionnaire did not have any problematic parts, it was administered in English.

#### 2.1.2.2. Student Questionnaire

An adapted version of Phuong's (2012) questionnaire was given to the students. The adaptation procedure involved addition of a demographic information part to the original questionnaire, inclusion of a brief section in which collocation concept was defined and exemplified before students started answering the questions, and the transformation of questions. In the original questionnaire, Phuong (2012) addresses teachers as in the example below:

**Teacher Questionnaire:** Which methods do you often use when presenting collocations?

- Listing
- Translating
- Collocational grid
- Displaying the collocation with pictures
- Comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms
- Others(s)

Transformation involved changing of teaching-focused wording into learning-focused wording:

**Student Questionnaire:** Which method(s) do you think are more effective to learn collocations?

- Listing
- Translating
- Collocational grid
- Displaying the collocation with pictures
- Comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms
- Other(s)

In addition, two questions in the teacher questionnaire, related to the criteria and the suitable level for teaching collocations, were not used in the student questionnaire since these questions are naturally teaching-focused. The questionnaire was translated to and administered in Turkish, in order not to cause any misunderstanding about the questionnaire items. Before the administration, the questionnaire was given to three students of an Anatolian high school who did not participate in the study, in order to check that the instructions and wording in the questionnaire were comprehensible. They commented that instructions and items of the questionnaire were clear, thus no revision was made.

#### 2.1.2.3. Interviews

For triangulation, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from teachers. Cohen and Manion (1994) define triangulation as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior" (p.233). According to them, studying human behavior from 'more than one standpoint' allows deeper access to the 'richness' and 'complexity' of it (ibid). While through questionnaires one-dimensional measurements of many constructs are possible, data collected through interviews provide rich detail that adds depth to the information collected. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are well suited for the exploration of participants' perceptions, and allow probing for follow-up questions (Cargan, 2007). They also enable the interviewer to capture verbal and non-verbal cues that clarify respondents' interpretations of questions.

As mentioned earlier, the teachers were asked if they would agree to have an interview about their views on teaching collocations. Six teachers indicated on the questionnaire forms that they were willing to be interviewed. Four of these teachers (Cemile, Mina, Arzu, Sevgi) were from S4, one teacher (Merve) was from S3 and one teacher (Deniz) was from S5. Teachers from the schools in Istanbul, S3 and S4, were interviewed individually in face-to-face meetings, whereas

the teacher working at S5 in Mus was interviewed on the phone. In these semi-structured interviews, their perceptions of the role of collocations, collocation teaching practices, comments about students' knowledge and strategies students might use to expand their collocational knowledge were asked. Further elicitation questions were added during the interview process.

### 2.1.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In order to collect data through the questionnaire, five schools from three different cities were included to reduce the potential bias which one particular city may create. However, as all schools were regulated by the MoNE, comparison between schools was possible. Concurrently, teachers working in schools located in Istanbul received the questionnaires by hand while teachers in other cities received the questionnaires by e-mail. They stated that it took approximately 8 minutes to complete the teacher questionnaire. The student participants took their questionnaire in a regular class hour. The data collected from the student and teacher questionnaires were analyzed through descriptive statistics using SPSS. Namely, the means and standard deviations were computed to understand the perceptions of both participant groups.

The individual interviews with the teachers took approximately 25 minutes. They were conducted in Turkish and audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Audio recording helps validate the accuracy of the information collected and reduces any potential interviewer errors. In order to ensure reliability and validity of the semi-structured interviews, as suggested by Denzin (1989), the wording and sequencing of the questions were kept the same; where any diversions occurred, the interviewer was careful about conveying the equivalence of meaning. As the interviews were conducted with six teachers who volunteered to participate in the study, due to the randomness of participants it was anticipated that they might be viewed as

representative of the broader sample of English teachers who worked at Anatolian High Schools.

Following this, interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researchers and the translations were verified by two reviewers currently working as English instructors in the preparatory school of a state university in Turkey. Finally, the transcriptions were submitted to the participant teachers for member checking so that they could confirm the credibility of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to member checking as a process in which participants validate the trustworthiness of the researchers' interpretation.

In the data analysis process, to protect anonymity of the participant teachers pseudonyms were used. For qualitative data analysis, pattern-coding steps involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification of Miles and Huberman's (1994) model was used. Following this model, the researchers first reduced the responses given by the teachers during the interviews into smaller units to examine the emerging themes, working both collaboratively and independently and comparing notes. Then, each rater examined the relationships between different codes carefully and placed the codes with a similar nature into major categories. Finally, each pattern was reexamined to ensure whether it truly reflected the nature of its supporting data. The quotes below illustrate how reducing data and coding was done in the analysis process of interview data. In response to the question 'What is the role of collocations in vocabulary teaching and should they be taught?' teachers made the following comments:

*Collocations are very important in correct use of the target language. When students try to form a sentence in the target language, they prefer to make the same reasoning as in their native language and use the literal meanings of the words in contrast to the nature of collocations. Unfortunately, this hinders them to convey the*

*intended message. If they know the collocations, they will not experience such a problem.*

*(Cemile)*

*Collocations are the word combinations that learners can use to give the correct meaning in their sentences.*

*(Arzu)*

*Collocations have a crucial importance in language teaching. To express ourselves and to be understood accurately, collocations should be absolutely taught. Also, the meanings of the same words in two languages may not overlap. The knowledge of collocations solves this problem since they are the most correct language structures.*

*(Deniz)*

From these responses, key words such as “correct use”, “correct”, “accurately” were underlined. The key words were decided by taking the whole response into account. For

example, the key word in Cemile’s response was “correct use” because the following sentences were formed to elaborate on it. Later, a common theme that would describe all the comments was found, which was “accuracy” for this question.

### 3. RESULTS

This section presents results obtained from questionnaires and teacher interviews related to how participants perceive the role of collocation in learning, how often they work on collocations, prefer techniques and exercises when working on collocations, and the sources of collocational errors.

Table 2 illustrates the answers of teachers and students related to the emphasis they attribute to the role of collocation in vocabulary learning.

**Table 2.** The role of collocation in vocabulary learning

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		f	%	f	%
What is the role of collocation in vocabulary learning?	Very important	21	65.6	29	8.9
	Important	10	31.3	163	50
	I am not sure	1	3.1	107	32.8
	Not very important	0	0	15	4.6
	Not important	0	0	12	3.7
Total		32	100	326	100

Thirty-one out of 32 teachers believed collocations are either very important or important. Only one teacher was not sure about the role of collocations. There was no teacher stating that collocations are not important in vocabulary learning. Regarding students’ views, 29 students (8.9 %) stated that collocations are very important, while half of them considered them important (163 students, 50%). However, a large number of students, 107 out of 326 (32.8%), stated that they are not sure about the role of collocations. Additionally, 27 students perceived collocations as not (very) important (8.3%) in vocabulary learning.

The answers of teachers on the importance of collocations were also well mirrored in the interviews. All 6 teachers who participated in the interviews underlined that collocations are

crucial elements in vocabulary teaching; and they mentioned two reasons for focusing on collocations: collocations aid accurate and naturalistic language use. Cemile’s comment is representative of other participants’ views:

*“Collocations are very important in correct use of the target language. When students try to form a sentence in the target language, they prefer to make the same reasoning as in their native language and use the literal meanings of the words in contrast to the nature of collocations. Unfortunately, this hinders them to convey the intended message. If they know the right collocations, they will not experience such a problem”.*

Similarly Deniz pointed out that students tend to rely on translation from mother tongue to



English when they need to construct sentences, which result in “unnatural expressions” as Deniz put it. According to her, “to be able to use the language in a natural way, to be like a native speaker, students should know collocations”.

Teachers and students were also asked how frequently new words are presented with their combinations during teaching/learning activities (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Presentation of collocations

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
How often do you present/learn new words in their combinations with others?	Always	7	21.9	8	2.5
	Mostly	23	71.9	56	17.2
	Sometimes	2	6.3	148	45.4
	Rarely	0	0	87	26.7
	Never	0	0	27	8.3
Total		32	100	326	100

The majority of the teachers (n=23) reported that they mostly give place for word combinations in their teaching. Seven out of 32 teachers stated that they always teach words in combinations, and 2 teachers sometimes include them in their classes. There was no teacher who stated that they rarely or never present new words in their combination with others. With respect to students' perceptions, only a small group (n=8, 2.5%) indicated they always learn new words in word combinations, while 56 students (17.2%)

responded that they are mostly taught new words in that way. The majority of students thought they sometimes learned new words in word combinations (n=148, 45.4%), while a considerable number of them (n=87, 26.7%) stated that new words were rarely taught in their combination with others. Finally, 27 students (8.3%) thought that they never learned the words in word combinations.

Table 4 demonstrates how teachers determined the collocations they focus on.

**Table 4.** Choosing collocations to teach

Item	Options	<i>f</i>	%
Do you teach all collocations in the coursebook or choose to teach the common ones?	All collocations	8	25
	Most frequently used collocations	24	75
	I teach words in isolation	0	0
Total		32	100

In terms of teaching the collocations that are found in coursebooks they use, 24 out of 32 teachers indicated that they choose to focus on the ones that are frequently used, while 8 teachers stated that they teach all the collocations given in the coursebooks.

Data from teacher interviews about the criteria they used to choose the collocations to teach yielded similar results. Merve pointed out that she organizes collocations according to their

frequency of use, while Arzu said “If there are collocations in the reading text of the coursebook that we go through in the class, I give the meanings of them”. Deniz, on the other hand, commented that she considered students' proficiency level, as some collocations may be hard for her students to learn.

Table 5 presents teachers' views on the most suitable proficiency level they think collocations can be taught at.

**Table 5.** Suitable level to teach collocations

Item	Options	<i>f</i>	%
Which level is the most suitable to teach collocations?	Around elementary	3	9.4
	Around intermediate	11	34.4
	At any level	18	56.3
Total		32	100

Regarding the most suitable level to teach collocations, the majority of the teachers thought that collocations can be taught at any level (n=18), followed by 11 teachers who stated that collocation teaching should be around intermediate level, and 3 teachers who believed that they should be taught around elementary. In the interviews, teachers also emphasized that focusing on collocations should start as early as possible. For example Mina said, "There is a general perception that collocations are a language area that should be dwelled on when teaching advanced level learners. However, I

think, we should not forget that there are some collocations that elementary level learners need to know to express themselves". Sevgi also commented that collocations are "indispensable" in language learning and their teaching "should start in the very beginning of language instruction", echoing Mina's emphasis on an early focus.

For the remaining questions, participants could choose more than one option among the given ones. Table 6 illustrates the reasons why teachers teach and students learn collocations.

**Table 6.** Reasons to teach/learn collocations (N<sub>teachers</sub>=32, N<sub>students</sub>=326)

Item	Options	<i>Teachers</i>		<i>Students</i>	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Why do you teach/learn collocations?	It is compulsory in the syllabus listing	0	0	156	47.9
	It is common in general English	14	43.8	119	36.5
	It is important for language proficiency	28	87.5	111	34
	It is easier for students/me to learn words in combination with others	22	68.8	93	28.5
	Students are/I am interested in it	15	46.9	40	12.3
	Students/I habitually learn individual words	4	12.5	23	7.1
	Students/I have poor knowledge on it	11	34.4	74	22.7

The three most common reasons teachers provided for teaching collocations were their importance for language proficiency (n=28), the ease of learning words in combination with others (n=22), and the interest of students in collocations (n=15) respectively. None of the teachers included syllabus demands among the reasons they gave for collocation teaching. On the other hand, students most commonly thought that they learned collocations because it

was in the syllabus (n=156, 47.9%). Collocations' being common in general English (n=119, 36.5%) and their importance for language proficiency (n=111, 34%) constituted other frequently given reasons by students.

The table below shows the choices of teachers related to the techniques they utilized when presenting collocations, and the preferences of students about the techniques they find effective when learning collocations.

**Table 7.** Techniques for collocation focus (N<sub>teachers</sub>=32, N<sub>students</sub>=326)

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
	Listing	17	53.1	90	27.6
Which techniques do you often use when presenting collocations/find effective to learn collocations?	Translating	9	28.1	100	30.7
	Collocational grid	15	46.9	134	41.1
	Displaying the collocation with pictures	15	46.9	100	30.7
	Comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms	17	53.1	76	23.3

Most of the teachers stated that they employ listing and comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms (n=17). Other techniques utilized by the teachers are collocational grids (n=15) and displaying the collocations with pictures (n=15) and translating (n=9) respectively. Students indicated that they most commonly prefer collocational grids (n=134, 41.1%), translating collocations to Turkish (n=100, 30.7%), displaying the collocation with pictures (n=100, 30.7%), listing (n=90, 27.6%) and comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms (n=76, 23.3%) respectively.

In the interviews, when the teachers were asked about the techniques they employed to teach collocations, four techniques namely listing, using collocations in a sentence, matching, and encouraging students to watch TV series in English were mentioned. Cemile commented that students see the usage of collocations in the texts that they cover in the classroom; and after dealing with reading comprehension, they list and discuss the collocations. Deniz indicated that after the study of selected collocations, she asks

students to use them in their own sentences, followed by her checking of students' sentences. Merve used matching activities that involved students' matching collocations with their English meanings. According to Merve "in this way they can see the meaning of each collocation". While other teachers referred to in-class materials and techniques, Mina emphasized the potential of using authentic materials for collocation focus:

"Our students are growing up with technology, so classroom activities conducted with the coursebook is not appealing to them. Most of the students are not interested in the classroom activities. Taking this into account, I want my students to watch famous TV series with English subtitles like Game of Thrones so that they can learn the meanings and correct usages of collocations."

The participants were also asked to comment on which core skill area they found the integration of collocation teaching most effective. The teachers' and students' responses were similar as displayed by Table 8.

**Table 8.** Language Skills to teach/learn collocations (N<sub>teachers</sub>=32, N<sub>students</sub>=326)

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Which language skill(s) would be the most efficient to include in teaching/learning collocations?	Reading	24	75	172	52.8
	Listening	13	40.6	107	32.8
	Speaking	22	68.8	133	40.8
	Writing	19	59.4	134	41.1

For teachers, while the most preferred skill was reading (n=24) followed by speaking (n=22),

writing (n=19) and listening (n=13) respectively; their responses indicated that they consider all

core skills enable effective teaching of collocations to some degree. For students, the most preferred language skill was also reading (n=172, 52.8%) followed by writing (n=134, 41.1%), speaking (n=133, 40.8%), and listening (n=107, 32.8%).

In the same line, during the interviews all six teachers stated that teaching of collocations should be integrated with all core language skills. However, reading and speaking skills were particularly emphasized by two teachers. In Deniz's words:

Reading should be highlighted among the language skills to include the teaching of collocations. In our school, we concentrate on reading. Students have to finish a reader each

week and prepare a project. In these books, there are vocabulary activities some of which are collocations. We observe that they are very helpful.

Similarly, Merve considered speaking as a particularly effective skill area to teach collocations, as according to her "students perform what they have learned and try to use the collocations correctly".

The participants were also asked about their views on the causes of collocational errors. As presented in the table below, both the teachers and students considered first language (L1) interference as the primary cause for students' errors.

**Table 9.** Collocational Errors (N<sub>teachers</sub>=32, N<sub>students</sub>=326)

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
According to you, what are the causes for students'/your collocational errors?	Students/I have the habit of learning individual words	15	46.9	52	16
	There is no rule for collocations	13	40.6	54	16.6
	There is interference from Turkish	22	68.8	135	41.4
	The knowledge of collocation is vast	10	31.3	89	27.3
	The concept of collocation is not thoroughly explained	2	6.3	55	16.9
	Students are not/I am not aware of the importance of collocation	14	43.8	80	24.5

Following L1 interference (n=22), teachers believed that collocational errors of students stemmed from students' habit of learning words individually (n=15), their lack of awareness of the importance of collocation (n=14), irregularity of collocations (n=13), the vastness of collocational knowledge (n=10) and ambiguity of collocation as a concept (n=2) respectively. Likewise, after L1 interference (n=135, 41.4%), most of the students reported that the vastness of collocational knowledge (n=89, 27.3%), their unawareness of the importance of collocations (n=80, 24.5%), unavailability of a specific rule for forming

collocations (n=54, 16%), their habit of learning words in isolation (n=52, 16%) and their continuing problems with collocation as a concept (55 students, 16.9%) respectively caused their collocational errors.

The teacher interviews yielded similar results regarding teachers' perceptions of the causes of students' collocational errors: transfer from Turkish, lack of knowledge of collocation patterns, and students' indifference. Sevgi's following words, for example, pointed out to L1 transfer and collocation patterns:

*"I think my students make collocational errors because they compare collocations with their native language. Their curiosity may actually have been useful, but they just look up the Turkish meanings of each word in collocations, instead of searching for their correct meanings as a whole".*

According to Merve students' errors were mainly due to their tendency to focus on individual words while ignoring "which words are used with which words". Arzu however, thought that there was a more general cause for students' collocational errors:

*"To me, the main problem is their attitude towards not collocations but English. They always worry about their exams and ask me to let them work on their tests in other subject areas. In this case, their collocational errors are not surprising".*

In addition, teachers were asked to elaborate on possible ways to help learners minimize

**Table 10.** Strategies for improving collocational knowledge (N<sub>teachers</sub>=32, N<sub>students</sub>=326)

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		f	%	f	%
What are the most suitable strategies for students/you to improve their/your knowledge of collocations?	Memorizing all collocations	2	6.3	78	23.9
	Doing exercises on collocations	24	75	163	50
	Forming a habit of learning words in combination of others	17	53.1	129	39.6
	Using collocation dictionary	7	21.9	72	22.1
	Watching movies, listening to music	20	62.5	47	14.4
	Reading books, articles etc.	25	78.1	78	23.9

As can be seen in the above table, most of the teachers thought reading books, articles in English (n=25) is the most suitable method for students to improve their knowledge of collocations. Other preferred methods are doing exercises on collocations (n=24), watching movies, listening to music (n=20), forming a habit of learning words in combination with others (n=17), using a collocation dictionary (n=7) and memorizing all collocations they had learned (n=2) respectively. However, the majority of students believed that the most

collocational errors. They mentioned giving examples and providing feedback to students' written work as useful techniques. The following comment offered by Cemile is illustrative of how she gave students examples to minimize errors and raise awareness about negative language transfer:

*"I exemplify collocations with a different point of view. I ask them to think about an English student searching for the meaning of "take photo" in Turkish. I tell them that if he translates each word into Turkish and comes up with "resim almak", this will be absolutely wrong and similarly they should be careful about the use of words with their combinations".*

Through the questionnaire, the participants were asked to identify the most appropriate strategies to improve students' collocational knowledge:

suitable method to improve their collocational knowledge is doing exercises (n=163, 50%). In addition, students pointed out that forming a habit of learning words with their combinations (n=129, 39.6%), memorizing all collocations they had learned (n=78, 23.9%), reading books and articles (n=78, 23.9%), using a collocation dictionary (n=72, 22.1%) and watching movies and listening to music (n=47, 14.4%) would help them improve their collocational knowledge.

The participants were asked to express their views on which supplementary exercises they

found most useful in developing collocational knowledge. According to the results, while teachers did not favor multiple-choice and

correcting mistakes, these two exercises were the most preferred types for students, as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Supplementary exercises for improving collocational knowledge ( $N_{\text{teachers}}=32$ ,  $N_{\text{students}}=326$ )

Item	Options	Teachers		Students	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
	Multiple choice	8	25	108	33.1
Which of the following supplementary exercises do you find the most helpful to improve students'/your knowledge of collocations?	Matching	25	78.1	81	24.8
	Gap filling	24	75	88	27
	Correcting mistakes	9	28.1	108	33.1
	Finding synonyms and antonyms	20	62.5	81	24.8
	Translating	2	6.3	88	27

The majority of the teachers preferred matching ( $n=25$ ) followed by gap filling ( $n=24$ ), finding synonyms and antonyms ( $n=20$ ), correcting mistakes ( $n=9$ ), multiple choice ( $n=8$ ) and translating exercises ( $n=2$ ) respectively. Students mostly preferred multiple choice and correcting mistakes ( $n=108$ , 33.1%) followed by translating and gap-filling ( $n=88$ , 27%), matching and finding synonyms and antonyms ( $n=81$ , 24.8%) respectively.

In the interviews, when teachers were asked to comment on supplementary activities that they thought students' could benefit from, they suggested that students should use readers which come with readily available exercises, perform collocation activities on-line, and watch films and TV series in English or with subtitles in English. In addition, Sevgi said that "students tend to learn individual words. If they work on vocabulary items with their combinations, like listing the words that are used with 'have' or 'party', this will be more helpful to memorize collocations", which pointed out to students' perceived habit of committing words to their memory in isolation, and indicated that word maps could be useful to overcome such tendency, and help students improve collocational knowledge.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The current study aimed at understanding Turkish EFL teachers' and students' perceptions

of collocations. To gather data, a questionnaire by Phuong (2012) was administered to 32 high school teachers and 326 students. Additionally, in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 of the teachers. In this section, the results will be discussed under several headings.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of collocations

The results of the present study indicated that teachers are aware of the importance of collocation teaching in promoting vocabulary knowledge (Table 2). Moreover, they believe increased knowledge of collocations aids students in accurate and naturalistic language use. The significance that teachers attribute to collocation teaching echoes the findings of Phuong (2012) who similarly reported that teachers considered collocation teaching important. In line with the importance they attribute to the teaching of collocations, the teachers in this study deem it necessary to focus on collocations at all proficiency levels (Table 5). According to them, students' awareness on collocations should be raised at elementary level and maintained throughout their learning.

A similar emphasis on collocations was observed in students' answers. Around 59% of them stated that collocations are important in vocabulary learning. However, nearly 33% of the students indicated they are not sure about the importance of collocation learning. In order to raise these students' awareness, teachers might explicitly

explain the concept of collocation, how increased collocational competence might contribute to their overall language use, and integrate various tasks and exercises to encourage students' collocation use. Although at elementary level, learning of individual words may be prioritized since the students at this level need to expand their lexicon by learning the most common words in English, the important thing is still to make the students, even at this level, aware of the fact that words are best learned together with their collocates to help students become "far more communicatively competent" (Hill, 2000, p. 62). As their language proficiency increases, for more challenging language tasks, students need to utilize more words with more collocates. Hence, for all proficiency levels teachers should integrate effective collocation teaching and practice techniques to help students record lexis for appropriate use and revision.

#### *Reasons for teaching and learning collocations*

When the teachers were asked their reasons for focusing on collocations, most of them (n= 28) indicated the importance of collocations for students' language proficiency as their primary reason. A majority of the teachers (n= 22) also thought that it is easier for students to learn words in combination with other words (Table 6). For students (n=156), they learn collocations primarily because collocations are compulsory in the syllabus. This shows that students perceive the primary reason behind the learning of collocations as something not related to an individual gain but to an external factor. Students view learning collocations as something obligatory or a duty although they were found to be aware of the importance of collocations in English. The conflict observed in the answers of students may actually be derived from their perceiving English as a school subject; they might feel it is important to be successful at that particular component of the subject in order to get good grades.

#### *Collocation teaching and learning in the classroom*

When teachers were asked how frequently they taught words in combination with other words,

the number of teachers who answered 'always' or 'mostly' was 30 out of 32; however, the majority of the students (n= 235, 72%) stated teachers 'sometimes' or 'rarely' taught collocations (Table 3). The differences in perceptions may result from students' lack of awareness of word combinations presented by their teachers. The discrepancy might be compensated with teachers' directing the attention of students to collocations deliberately through awareness-raising activities.

When choosing collocations to teach, teachers reported that they paid attention to how frequently specific collocations were used, their availability in the coursebook, and the language proficiency of the students (Table 4). The data also showed that while teaching collocations, teachers prefer using several techniques like making collocation lists, using collocations in sentences and matching activities (Table 7). With these techniques, students can be encouraged to keep their own collocation dictionaries so that they can have command of more collocations and design their own collocation learning strategies. Other techniques reported by the teachers are comparing collocation of a word with those of its synonyms, and encouraging students to watch TV series in English, which they consider would help students understand more about the usage of confusing words.

On the other hand, most of the students said that they would like to learn collocations through collocational grids. Channell (1981, as cited in Lewis, 1997) claimed that learners need to be exposed to a great variety of typical collocations when a word is first learned since they tend to use only a limited number of collocations that they feel sure of. Collocational grid (Channell, 1981; Nesselhauf 2005) is a way of overcoming this problem that can also be employed as an enjoyable activity by the teachers to teach collocations. It presents acceptable and unacceptable collocational pairings in the form of a table. Words are listed in the row and column headings. Learners are asked to find the appropriate collocations by marking the correct

intersection of row and columns. The table can either be given completed for self-study or asked to be completed by learners, which will enable them to realize the differences between the collocates of the words. These activities should be further supported with example sentences to demonstrate students the usage of these collocations.

With regard to the most suitable language skill to study collocations, the students chose reading; while for teachers, the teaching of collocations should be integrated into all core language skills although speaking and reading are considered the most effective ones (Table 8). In fact all language skills can be used as a tool to maintain the involvement and motivation of students in learning collocations. In that way, students have a chance to revise collocations as well as test their collocational knowledge.

#### *Sources of collocational errors*

In students' opinions (n=135, 41%), their collocational errors mainly stemmed from interference from Turkish (Table 9). This finding indicates that students are aware that their judgments on cross-linguistic similarities and differences produce varied results. Following that, students considered two factors significant in causing collocational errors: the vastness of collocational knowledge (n=89, 27%), and their lack of awareness regarding the importance of collocations (n=80, 25%). As both factors are significant for students, teachers need to explicitly communicate with and motivate students by pointing out how increased lexical knowledge in general and collocational knowledge in particular can contribute to their language use; and design appropriate activities to support students in dealing with the vastness of collocational knowledge.

Similarly, for the teachers, the main cause of collocational errors was their students' tendency to transfer from Turkish. Teachers' and students' views on language transfer were supported by the findings of previous research (Nesselhauf, 2003; Shehata, 2008) conducted to examine the role of L1 in learning collocations. These studies

found a considerable influence of L1 in the use and acquisition of collocations. Since collocations are language specific, students can easily produce erroneous collocations as a result of negative transfer from their native language. This result emphasizes the need that teachers should present English collocations by referring to their Turkish equivalents to help students avoid negative transfer. According to the teachers, another cause was that students had the habit of learning individual words and ignored collocational patterns, as pointed by Ying and O'Neill (2009) stating that learners focus on learning new words rather than acquiring depth of knowledge of already known words. Trying to learn as many words as possible and ignoring their collocates, the students just increase the number of words in their lexicon without learning the way that words can be combined to produce natural and accurate language.

#### *Teaching and learning activities to improve students' collocational knowledge*

Participant teachers considered reading books, articles and similar materials as the most effective way of improving students' collocational knowledge (Table 10). Doing exercises on collocations was the second most effective strategy according to the teachers. This finding indicates that teachers considered both implicit and explicit learning of collocations useful for students. From their perspective, the least helpful strategy was memorizing all collocations. From the students' perspective, the most helpful strategy was to do exercises on collocations, followed by forming a habit of learning words in combination with others. The least favored strategy was watching movies and listening to music although these were the activities done by 39% of the students according to the data from demographic part of the student questionnaire. This finding suggests that students have a preference for an explicit focus on collocations, and popular culture materials that are interesting in terms of their content may draw students' attention on meaning rather than form.



In terms of supplementary exercises that they found most useful in developing collocational knowledge of students, teachers thought matching, gap filling, and finding synonyms and antonyms were the most helpful ones consecutively (Table 11). The least favored strategies were translation, followed by multiple-choice and correcting students' mistakes. On the other hand, students favored multiple choice and corrective teacher feedback, followed by gap filling and translation exercises. It is understandable that with large groups of students teachers find it challenging to provide corrective feedback individually, however, students feel such individual attention is useful for their knowledge development. Hence, teachers should find practical ways of providing feedback so that students feel they receive sufficient corrective input to clarify any questions or concerns. Another important finding is that although students are largely aware that translation is a major source for their collocational errors, their preference for translation exercises indicates limited awareness regarding negative language transfer. For that reason, teachers need to draw students' attention to the limitations of translation.

#### *Limitations and future directions*

The present study has a number of limitations that need to be pointed out. First of all, the participants of the study were senior students from Anatolian high schools. In order to have a more complete picture of Turkish EFL students in terms of their perceptions of learning collocations, this study may be validated with further research including more students at different ages, proficiency levels and school types. Similarly, the number of the teacher participants was 32, and the interviews were conducted with 6 of these participants; the inclusion of more teachers would have helped us construct a broader understanding of teachers' preferences and practices in teaching collocations. In addition, as this study investigated perceptions and reported practices, further studies observing classes with a focus on

collocation teaching followed by stimulated recall interviews may shed light on collocation teaching/learning practices and challenges involved.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of the study reported in this article have shown that students and teachers in Turkey give much importance to the collocational knowledge in language learning. However, while teachers feel confident about their collocation teaching and the amount of time they dedicate for collocation focus, students disagree with their teachers about collocation teaching practices and the time dedicated to these activities during the classes. Moreover, a significant proportion of students indicate that they are not sure about the role of collocations in language learning. Students report to focus on individual words, rather than learning words with their collocates, and believe negative language transfer to be the major source of their collocational errors. While teachers believe collocations can be learnt implicitly, as well as through activities with explicit focus, students have a preference for tasks and activities that explicitly focus on collocations. These results emphasize that teachers have certain assumptions about students and their learning, while there are likely to be differences between teachers' and students' beliefs and perceptions. Teachers need to communicate effectively the purpose of learning activities and how each one will contribute to students' learning, so that students are more aware of the relationship between teachers' actions and rationale. For both in-service and pre-service teacher training programs, these findings point out to the importance of attention on vocabulary pedagogy that empowers language teachers with skills to diversify their pedagogic activities, in order to equip learners with the awareness of collocations, and with appropriate strategies to expand collocational knowledge.

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