

VIETNAMESE EFL STUDENTS' USE OF LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS IN OPINION ESSAYS

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Abstract. This study investigated the use of lexical collocations and related collocational errors in opinion essays written by Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Each of the fifty second-year English majors at a Vietnamese university wrote an opinion essay as a class writing test in 60 minutes. The data was analyzed using AntConc (Anthony, 2021), a freeware corpus analysis tool. The results revealed that adjective-noun collocations were the most prevalent, whereas adverb-adjective and verb-adjective were the least common types. Omission of the morpheme -s in plural nouns and inappropriate word components of lexical collocations were common errors made by students. Besides, errors related to adjective-noun collocations were the most popular among all lexical collocation types. Pedagogical implications are discussed to assist students to enhance collocational use in writing.

Keywords: Vietnamese EFL students, lexical collocations, opinion essays, patterns of use, errors

1. Introduction

The term *collocation* was first used by Firth (1957), who stated that “collocations are actual words in the habitual company” (p. 182). Numerous studies on collocations have been conducted utilizing various methodologies with participants coming from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to examine how collocations were used by English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) learners in writing, different types and sources of collocational errors and factors affecting students' use of collocations (Parkinson, 2015; Laufer & Waldman, 2011)). However, in the Vietnamese context, studies that examine the distribution of lexical collocation types to identify which collocational pattern is more widespread and least frequent in EFL learners' essay writing are lacking. Similarly, although the topic of collocational errors has been extensively researched around the world (Hama, 2010; Shitu, 2015), there have been few studies on collocational errors in Vietnam, particularly at the university level (Duong & Nguyen, 2021). Therefore, this study was carried out to address these gaps by examining the types of lexical collocations used by Vietnamese EFL university students, and the collocational errors they make in their opinion essays. Insights into students' collocational use, along with related errors, could be used to inform the teaching of lexical collocations, and assist students in improving their lexical use in academic writing. The current study specifically aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of lexical collocations do students use most frequently in their writing?
2. What types of errors do students make with these collocations?

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2. Literature review

2.1. Collocations and lexical collocations

According to Benson et al., (2010), "In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations." (p.xix). Collocations were classified into grammatical and lexical collocations. Specifically, lexical collocations are combinations of content words, such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, or adverbs, and normally do not contain prepositions, infinitives, or clauses. In this study, the definition of lexical collocations by Benson et al., (2010) was employed.

2.2. Related research on lexical collocations in writing

Prior research has focused on a few key areas of collocational use, which include lexical collocation types and error analysis of lexical collocations in different settings such as ESL or EFL with various writing genres including research articles, abstracts, and academic essays.

2.2.1. Previous studies on types of lexical collocations in ESL/EFL writing

Many studies have investigated different types of lexical collocations in students' academic writing essays and other writing genres. Focusing on one specific type of lexical collocation, Laufer and Waldman (2011) conducted a study to investigate how native Hebrew speakers at three competency levels from basic to the intermediate and advanced levels used English verb-noun collocations in their writing. The data consisted of 759 argumentative and descriptive essays written by learners in grades 9–12 in Israel. The learners' use of collocations and their accuracy were compared to that of native speakers. The results showed that learners used substantially fewer collocations than native speakers regardless of their proficiency levels. Besides, even students of the highest competency level committed collocational errors in their writing.

Parkinson (2015) studied noun-noun collocations in students' argumentative essays from three sub-corpora of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE). The study contrasted ESL and EFL learning environments on noun-noun collocations and showed that the precision of noun-noun combinations was much higher in the writing of ESL learners. The study also proved that students whose first language allowed noun-noun phrases produced much more of them than students whose first language did not. Although the study was useful in providing a deeper insight into how students' L1 and the context of learning (ESL or EFL) influenced the production of noun-noun collocations, it did not investigate the effects on other types of lexical collocations.

In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen Thi Hong Ha (2020) studied how and to what extent Vietnamese EFL students at a language institution used different types of lexical collocations in 200 written argumentative essays. Two criteria including the frequency of collocations and the mutual information score in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) were used to examine the appropriateness of lexical collocations identified in students' essays. The data indicated that adjective-noun collocations comprised the biggest proportion (57%), followed by verb-noun combinations, and adverb–adjective collocations were rated lowest. The majority of

the collocations discovered were judged appropriate, and students tended to overuse some repeated collocations that they had learned over time.

In general, most of the prior scholars have concentrated on analyzing a single type of lexical collocation, such as verb-noun, noun-noun, or adjective-noun, in the argumentative essays of EFL students, rather than evaluating all types, and thus failed to provide readers with a comprehensive picture of students' collocation use in their written work. Furthermore, in most of the prior research, the process of identifying lexical collocations was often carried out manually, with no assistance from any computer software. Therefore, one of the primary purposes of this study is to explore all lexical collocation types in students' essays by using the AntConc software.

2.2.2. Previous studies on lexical collocational errors

Prior studies on lexical collocational errors (Shitu, 2015; Hama, 2010) have tended to focus on different error types and possible sources of these errors based on the error framework classification of previous researchers.

In the ESL context, Shitu (2015) examined 450 essays produced by 300 ESL undergraduate learners in North-West Nigeria on three different topics to detect collocational errors, error origins, and whether or not there were any connections in the patterns of collocational errors among students. Repeated mistakes in students' collocational use were made most often with verb-noun collocations. Inefficient instruction and learning were cited as the primary reasons for students' collocational errors.

Turning to the EFL context, Hama (2010) carried out a study to investigate the primary sources of collocational errors produced by EFL learners at one language university in Iraq. Quantitative data was taken from the collocation completion test and was used to analyze the key reasons for participants' collocational errors. The findings showed that one of the most common types of errors involved students mistaking one of the collocation components for its synonym. Furthermore, the effect of L1 on the generation of L2 collocations was rather strong, as 56% of collocational errors in students' writing were attributed to L1 interference. Among all types, adjective-noun collocations proved to be the least frequent type which was used by students and also the most challenging for them.

In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen (2020) conducted a study utilizing the taxonomy defined by Benson et al. (1997) and Richards (1973), to determine the various causes of lexical collocational errors in 63 essays produced by third-year double-major students at Hanoi National University of Education. It was revealed that verb-noun lexical collocational errors were most common in the participants' compositions and that these errors were largely caused by Vietnamese interlingual interference.

In general, as opposed to covering all sorts of collocations, the majority of earlier research has mostly concentrated on a particular type, such as noun-noun collocations (Parkinson, 2015) or verb-noun collocations (Laufer & Waldman, 2011) rather than all types. Little research in the Vietnamese context has investigated all types of lexical collocations and related errors in students' academic essays. The present study, therefore, employed the AntConc software, a multiplatform

tool for corpus research (Anthony, 2021), to investigate all types of lexical collocations as well as related collocational errors in students' opinion essays.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Fifty second-year English majors from a Vietnamese language institution took part in the present research voluntarily. They were enrolled in a course on academic writing taught by the second author. The students were all around 20 years old and came from various areas in central Vietnam. They had achieved an A2 writing proficiency in their previous writing course on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

3.2. Data collection

Each student was required to write an opinion essay of 200-250 words about online learning as a midterm test (Appendix 2 for the writing task). They had 60 minutes to complete the essay and were not allowed to ask the teacher or a classmate for help or use any reference materials. No linguistic resources or hints were given before and during the test, either.

3.3. Data analysis

In total, 50 handwritten essays ($M=283$ words, $SD=64.2$) were collected, making up a corpus of 14172 words. Those essays that were not readable or did not have a minimum of 200 words were not used. All writings were kept original. The essays were typed and saved as .doc files and labeled A1 to A50 to de-identify the participants. The typed essays were cross-checked for accuracy of typing by a Vietnamese EFL student who majored in English Linguistics and had the C1 English proficiency level. The doc. files were then automatically converted into plain text files using AntfileConverter (Anthony, 2022) (accessed at <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>). These latter files were then inputted into the AntConc software (version 4.1.1) (Anthony, 2021) (available at <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>) for additional analysis. As there were only a few instances of misspelled words related to the lexical collocations in the present corpus, misspellings were not included in the analysis.

3.3.1. Analyzing lexical collocation types

The lexical collocation classification by Benson et al., (2010) was adopted to classify different types of lexical collocations (Table 1). However, there were some minor changes that were made to the classification of Benson et al., (2010). In particular, noun – verb collocations were excluded from the present study due to its low frequency. Additionally, verb – adjective collocations were introduced since there were a number of them in students' essays.

Table 1. Lexical collocations types

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Collocational types | Examples taken from students' essays |
| 1. Verb - Noun | do exercise – A31, get access to – A34 |
| 2. Adjective - Noun | significant advantages –A6, remote areas – A33 |
| 3. Noun - Noun | traffic jam – A47, learning process – A45 |
| 4. Noun - of - Noun | point of view – A1, lack of interaction – A12 |
| 5. Adverb - Adjective | extremely convenient – A19, socially isolated – A12 |
| 6. Adverb - Verb | totally agree – A16, strongly support – A47 |
| 7. Verb - Adverb | study effectively – A49, go smoothly – A44 |
| 8. Verb - Adjective | feel bored – A44, get sick – A46 |

To identify all possible lexical collocations in students' essays and classify them into eight types, the researchers followed these steps. First, different parts of speech (POS) of words in students' essays were tagged, using TagAnt, a freeware tagger (Anthony, 2021) (available online at <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/tagant/>). TagAnt employs a variety of symbols to represent various parts of speech (Table 2, Appendix 1). To search for a specific lexical collocation type using AntConc, the formula for each type (Table 3) was entered into the search box to obtain the frequency of its occurrences and concordance lines.

Table 3. Formulas for lexical collocation types

| Types | Collocational types | Formula |
|-------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Verb – Noun | * VB* *_ NN* |
| 2 | Adjective – Noun | * JJ *_ NN* |
| 3 | Noun – Noun | * NN* *_ NN |
| 4 | Noun – of – Noun | * NN *_ of_ NN *_ |
| 5 | Adverb – Adjective | * RB *_ JJ* |
| 6 | Adverb – Verb | * RB *_ VB* |
| 7 | Verb – Adverb | * VB* *_ RB* |
| 8 | Verb – Adjective | * VB* *_ JJ* |

Lexical collocations were identified drawing on the definition of Benson et al. (2010). In particular, if a word combination consists of content words, such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, or adverbs, and the component words of that combination are often used together, it is considered a lexical collocation (e.g. online learning – A1). In the present study, idioms and free word combinations were excluded. Word combinations were considered idioms if they are “frozen expressions in which the meaning of the whole does not reflect the meanings of the component parts” while a free combination has its meaning derived from its constituent words and includes elements that “do not repeatedly co-occur”. In other words, they “are not bound specifically to each other; they occur with other lexical items freely” (Benson et al., 2010, p.xxxiv) (e.g. good things – A20). Each lexical collocation type was then calculated for frequency and percentage.

Finally, the component words of each lexical collocation were entered into the Oxford Online Learner’s Dictionary to identify the difficulty level of these words, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This information was used for further discussion of the results.

3.3.2. Lexical collocation error analysis

At this stage, COCA, the British National Corpus (BNC), and the Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English (OCD) were used to evaluate the accuracy of the collocations

used by students. First, each lexical collocation was inserted into the COCA search box. If the lexical collocation exists (frequency ≥ 1), it was labeled a correct collocation and its frequency was noted down. If the COCA informed us there was no matching record, the collocation was double-checked in OCD and BNC. If it appeared in either OCD or BNC, the collocation was considered correct. In contrast, if it did not appear in neither OCD nor BNC, the collocation was labeled an incorrect collocation. Correct collocations were noted in a separate Excel spreadsheet, grouped, and counted for frequency, while incorrect ones were evaluated for errors. For example, when "weak aptitude" – A18 was entered into COCA, the system notified there were no matching records; the same message appeared in BNC and there was no reference to this phrase in OCD, either. Therefore, it was judged an inaccurate collocation and was later checked for errors. In contrast, when the term "online courses" –A3 was entered into COCA, the frequency column revealed 925 occurrences in various texts; in this situation, "online courses" was evaluated as a correct collocation without having to verify it in OCD or BNC.

When evaluating the accuracy of a lexical collocation, the concordance lines in COCA were used to compare the context and the usage in the corpus and student essays. In cases of a noun having more than one modifier, only the directly adjacent noun was chosen. For instance, in the case of "ways of teaching and learning" –A44, "ways of teaching" was chosen, or "time-management skills" instead of "organization and time-management skills" –A34. Lexical collocations that include proper nouns (E.g. Zoom, Facebook, Skype, etc.) were excluded. In adverb-adjective collocations, the adverbs "more/ less/ most/least" which were used in the comparative and superlative forms were not taken as combinations containing these words were not considered a lexical collocation.

Table 4. Lexical collocational error types

| Error type | Explanation | Example |
|--|--|--|
| Wrong choice of component words | Either one or both component words of a lexical collocation were incorrect. | Students who tend to procrastinate or struggle with work-life balance may not complete requirements . – A33 (<i>fulfill requirements</i>) |
| Wrong word order | Component words of a lexical collocation were put in the wrong order. | Online learning have limit interact with student with student, student with teacher so it will affect quality study . – A30 (<i>study quality</i>) |
| Misuse of parts of speech | Words of an incorrect part of speech were used in a lexical collocation. | Especially, they can help each other in studying, do as a teamwork while having projects or presentations this is a chance to become confidently in front of crowded." – A5 (<i>become confident</i>) |
| Omission of morpheme –s in plural nouns | The inflectional morpheme –s that marks plural countable nouns was not supplied. | It is very convenient for people who live in some rural area – A49 (<i>rural areas</i>) |
| Omission of morpheme –s in third person singular verbs | The inflectional morpheme –s that mark the third-person singular verbs was not supplied. | To begin with, online learning reduce interaction between teachers and students." – A17 (<i>reduces interaction</i>) |
| Overuse of morpheme –s in | The inflectional morpheme –s was used in uncountable or singular nouns. | Many universities invested a lot of money in modern equipments , if they do not use for a long |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| singular or uncountable nouns | | time, they will be damaged.” – A2 (<i>modern equipment</i>) |
| Omission of the article "the" | Article “the” was omitted in a definite noun of a lexical collocation. | Last but not least, reducing face-to-face classes will protect environment because it reduces an amount of emissions from transportations.” – A23 (<i>protect the environment</i>) |
| Non-existent component word | One component word that does not exist in English was used in a lexical collocation | Therefore, most people are of the opinion that untraditional classrooms have traditional types of learning unnecessary.” – A28 (<i>non-traditional classrooms</i>) |
| Non-existent lexical collocation | Lexical collocation that does not exist in English was used. | It reduces the weight of books they must carry and save an amount of vehicle money ” – A29 (<i>commuting costs /transportation costs</i>) |
| Omission of the preposition of a prepositional verb | The preposition that goes with the verb in a verb-noun collocation was omitted. | For instance, searching information in the internet much faster and diversified than read the course book.” – A20 (<i>searching for information</i>) |

Inter-reliability

20% of the data (10 essays out of 50) were selected at random. They were initially coded by the first author before being independently coded by another EFL instructor to identify types of lexical collocations and their errors. The percentage of agreement for lexical collocation types ranged from 78.57% to 100%, while the percentage of agreement for lexical collocational errors ranged from 75% to 100% (Appendix 3). According to Yin (2015), this suggested satisfactory inter-reliability. In instances of differences and ambiguity, the two coders reached a consensus through discussion. The remaining data were then coded for lexical collocation categories and errors by the first author.

4. Findings

4.1. Types of lexical collocation

Table 5. Percentage of each lexical collocation type in students’ essays

| Types of lexical collocation | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Adjective – Noun | 850 | 57.82 |
| 2. Noun – Noun | 179 | 12.18 |
| 3. Verb – Noun | 157 | 10.68 |
| 4. Noun – of – Noun | 82 | 5.58 |
| 5. Verb – Adverb | 73 | 4.97 |
| 6. Adverb – Verb | 58 | 3.95 |
| 7. Adverb – Adjective | 39 | 2.65 |
| 8. Verb – Adjective | 32 | 2.18 |
| Total | 1470 | 100 |

Table 5 shows that adjective-noun collocations accounted for more than half of all lexical collocations (57.82%), and were the most common type while noun-noun collocations came in second with 12.18%. The percentage of verb-noun collocations was 10.68 %, which was more than double the proportion of noun-of-noun collocations (5.58%). Verb-adverb and adverb-verb ranked fifth and sixth, with 4.97 and 3.95%, respectively. Adverb-adjective and verb-adjective collocations were the least common in student essays, constituting 2.65 and 2.18 % of the cases, respectively.

4.2. Lexical collocational errors

Table 6. Distribution of lexical collocational errors in students' essays

| Lexical collocational errors | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Omission of morpheme –s in plural nouns | 102 | 62.20 |
| 2. Wrong choice of component words | 32 | 19.51 |
| 3. Non-existent lexical collocation | 7 | 4.27 |
| 4. Misuse of parts of speech | 6 | 3.66 |
| 5. Overuse of morpheme –s in singular or uncountable nouns | 5 | 3.05 |
| 6. Word order error | 3 | 1.83 |
| 7. Omission of the article "the" of a lexical collocation | 3 | 1.83 |
| 8. Non-existent component word of a lexical collocation | 2 | 1.22 |
| 9. Omission of the preposition of a prepositional verb | 2 | 1.22 |
| 10. Omission of morpheme -s in the third person singular verbs | 2 | 1.22 |
| Total | 164 | 100 |

Table 6 shows the percentage of various lexical collocational errors identified in student essays. There were ten major error types detected in total, with the most common being the omission of the morpheme -s in plural nouns (62.20%). The wrong choice of component words accounted for 19.51% including the incorrect choice of verb, noun, adjective, and verb. Among these kinds, the incorrect adjective choice was the most prevalent with 16 out of 32 instances, followed by the wrong choice of adverb, verb, and noun with 7, 5, and 4 out of 32 examples respectively. Non-existent lexical collocation accounted for 4.27%, slightly higher than the percentage of the misuse of parts of speech and the overuse of the morpheme –s in singular or uncountable nouns (3.66% and 3.05% respectively). This was followed by word order error and omission of the article “the”, at 1.83% each. The least frequent errors were the non-existent component word of a lexical collocation, the preposition omission of a prepositional verb, and the omission of the morpheme –s in the third-person singular verbs. Each accounted for only 1.22%.

A critical point to notice is that, while errors occurred most frequently in certain specific essays among all 50 essays, not all of them contained collocational errors. Some essays consisted of a large number of collocational errors compared to others, such as A44 (14 errors), A30 (11 errors), A30 (10 errors), and A28 (10 errors). This shows that certain students made more collocational errors in their writings than others, with the most common error being the omission of morpheme -s in plural nouns. This error, however, did not exist in all 50 essays. It only appeared in 37 out of 50 essays. Besides, among all lexical collocation types, adjective-noun collocations had the highest number of errors with 108 out of 164 errors. Compared to the total number of adjective-noun collocations (850), adjective-noun collocational errors accounted for 12.71%.

5. Discussions

5.1. Lexical collocation types

One of the most notable findings of this study is the distribution of eight lexical collocation types in students' essays, with adjective-noun being the most common collocation. The majority of the component words in the adjective-noun collocations in this study were of basic to upper-intermediate vocabulary level, which corresponds to A1 to B2 in CEFR. For

example, most word components in "outdoor activities", "positive effects", and "poor areas" are familiar to students and can be combined with a range of different collocates. According to Samiha & Imane (2018), the more easily a word unit of a collocation can be combined with others, the more frequently that collocation could be utilized. These findings are compatible with those of Nguyen Thi Hong Ha's (2020) study in which adjective-noun collocations were used most frequently (57%) and students typically chose simpler and more common words to explain their ideas. Nguyen Thi Hong Ha (2020) stated that using an adjective as a modifier for a noun is a common practice in Vietnamese L1, therefore, students may employ this method to produce adjective-noun collocations. Furthermore, according to Demir (2017), students regularly use "booster (assertive words) adjectives for nouns" (p.84) to strengthen their arguments, making adjective-noun a favorite choice of collocation for many EFL students. These arguments could partly explain why the adjective-noun was the most popular lexical collocation produced by students in this study. Besides, the high number of adjective-noun collocations compared to other types was likely due to the fact that students might prefer to reuse and paraphrase collocations taken from the task prompt of this study, which were mostly adjective-noun type (595 out of 850 collocations).

Another important finding is that verb-adjective and adverb-related collocations such as adverb-verb, or adverb-adjective had the lowest frequency among all categories. This result is consistent with Nguyen Thi Hong Ha's (2020) conclusion that adverb-adjective collocations were rated the lowest of all categories. The low frequency of adverbs in the present corpus may possibly be related to the idea that adverbs are optional, as a sentence can be created without them (Hinkel, 2002).

5.2. Lexical collocational errors

A major finding of the present study is that the highest proportion of students' collocational errors involved the omission of the pluralization marker -s for countable plural nouns. This echoes previous research by Nguyen Thi Hong Ha (2020). Omission of this kind could be because students' first language, Vietnamese, is a non-inflectional language (Ngo, 2001) which does not mark plural nouns by means of inflectional morphemes, whereas English does. For example, the same form 'giáo viên' is used regardless of the preceding quantifiers: một giáo viên (one teacher), hai giáo viên (two teachers), nhiều giáo viên (many teachers). Other research shows the majority of collocational errors made by EFL students were due to interference from their mother tongue (Huyen, 2020). However, explaining from a different view, Ardiansah Siahaan (2017) believed that learners may dismiss specific linguistic forms because they think linguistic features, such as the morpheme -s for the third person singular, and the plural marker -s, are unnecessary to generate since they do not carry important meanings of a word. In the present study, time constraints as students were required to complete their essay in 60 minutes could have added to the missing morpheme -s in plural countable nouns since they may focus too much on meaning in the writing process.

Misusing different parts of speech in a lexical collocation also occurred, though at a small percentage. (e.g. "become confidently" –A5, "society skills" – A2). The misuse of parts of speech could also potentially be the result of students directly translating word by word from the

Vietnamese equivalents (“kỹ năng xã hội” = “society skills”; “trở nên tự tin” = become confidently”) without being aware of the correct form.

One more major finding of the study is students’ tendency of using synonyms to replace one component of the collocation, leading to the use of incorrect component words and non-existent collocations. The errors reported demonstrate that students employed incorrect adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and nouns in many collocations. For example, students misused the verb in “complete requirements” – A33 and the adjective in “customary classrooms” (A.42) which should have been “*fulfill requirements*” and “*traditional classrooms*”. These self-made collocations might happen when students try to replace words that seem to be equivalent to the target word without thinking about how well the new word can collocate with the base word in a collocation. This is consistent with the findings of Hama (2010) who concluded that many EFL learners’ collocational errors resulted from their use of synonyms for collocational constituents. Hama (2010) explained that “some incorrect collocations were produced because the learners chose the synonym of the target collocate” (p.56) and students “seem to be not aware that synonyms can have varying collocational restrictions” (p.56). Other examples of incorrect component word choice were “indirect classes” –A49 (*virtual classes*), “especially improve” – A45 (*significantly improve*), “learn productively” –A5 (*learn effectively*), and so on. In some instances, students may translate directly from their native language to English, resulting in incorrect collocations. For example, in the case of “disease circumstances” extracted from A46 “*Many social media platforms have strongly developed because it is extremely useful for education in disease circumstances*”, “*disease circumstances*” can be a literal translation from the equivalent phrase “*bối cảnh dịch bệnh*” in Vietnamese. Students might not have recognized that the words “disease” and “circumstances” do not collocate with each other, hence this combination is not deemed a correct collocation. The correct collocation, in this case, must be “pandemic season”. Other lexical collocational errors appear to be modest, however, such errors cannot be overlooked because they might get embedded in the learner’s language; therefore, all collocational error types should be taken into account by English teachers.

6. Conclusions and limitations

This study examined Vietnamese EFL students’ use of different lexical collocation types and their errors in 50 opinion essays. The results indicate that adjective-noun was the most common type of collocations, whereas adverb-related collocations and verb-adjectives were infrequent. The most common collocational error committed by students was the omission of the morpheme –s in plural nouns and the incorrect selection of component words of a lexical collocation. The collocational errors could result from various reasons, ranging from L1 interference, learners’ habits in language practices, and time pressure. The findings suggest different measures could be taken into account to improve students’ collocational competence in writing. First, teachers can explain the rule of marking plurality in detail, highlight the difference in this linguistic feature between the Vietnamese and English language, and provide practice activities. Additionally, English teachers should focus on teaching new words in chunks to help students get familiar with lexical collocations rather than teaching isolated words. This approach was supported by Li (2014) who claimed that the lexical chunk teaching and learning strategy helps college students improve their English writing. Besides, it is also essential that English

teachers introduce their students to corpora such as COCA, and BNC and show them how to use such corpora to check the frequency and accuracy of a target collocation. Furthermore, it can be useful if teachers expose students to meaningful input through reading or listening to increase exposure along with additional tasks to raise their awareness of the form, meaning, and use of lexical collocations. Besides, in classes, teachers can give students as much time as they need to write and carefully proofread the essays in order to improve their usage of lexical collocations.

There are some limitations to this study that should be considered. The data sample of the present study was quite small, with 50 essays on one writing topic, hence, the results may not be applicable to other types of writing. Future research could consider examining lexical collocation use with a larger number of essays of different genres. As learner proficiency could affect the use of lexical collocations, future studies could explore how learners of different proficiency levels use various types of lexical collocations. Furthermore, because the majority of participants in this study were female, future research should look into the collocational competence of learners of different gender groups.

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VIỆC SỬ DỤNG CÁC CỤM TỪ VỰNG TRONG BÀI LUẬN TRÌNH BÀY Ý KIẾN CỦA SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ TIẾNG ANH

Tóm tắt: Bài báo này nghiên cứu việc sử dụng các cụm từ vựng và lỗi liên quan đến các cụm từ này trong các bài luận trình bày ý kiến của sinh viên Việt Nam học ngoại ngữ tiếng Anh. Năm mươi sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh năm thứ hai tại một trường đại học Việt Nam tham gia vào nghiên cứu này; mỗi sinh viên đã viết một bài luận nêu ý kiến trên lớp với thời gian 60 phút. Phần mềm AntConc (Anthony, 2021), một công cụ phân tích khối dữ liệu miễn phí, được sử dụng để phân tích các cụm từ vựng mà sinh viên sử dụng trong bài viết. Kết quả cho thấy rằng các cụm từ được cấu tạo từ tính từ - danh từ là phổ biến nhất, trong khi cụm trạng từ - tính từ và động từ - tính từ là ít phổ biến nhất. Sinh viên thường xuyên mắc phải lỗi thiếu hình vị -s ở danh từ số nhiều và dùng sai từ thành phần trong mỗi cụm kết hợp từ. Bên cạnh đó, các lỗi liên quan đến cụm tính từ - danh từ là nhiều nhất trong số các loại cụm kết hợp từ. Bài báo thảo luận các gợi ý giảng dạy để giúp cải thiện việc sử dụng các cụm kết hợp từ trong bài viết tiếng Anh của sinh viên.

Từ khóa: Sinh viên Việt Nam học ngoại ngữ, cụm từ vựng, bài viết, loại kết hợp từ, lỗi sai

Appendix 1

Table 2. TagAnt’s indicators for parts of speech

| Symbol | Meaning | Symbol | Meaning |
|-------------|------------------------|------------|---|
| JJ | Adjective | RBR | Adverb, comparative |
| JJR | Adjective, comparative | RBS | Adverb, superlative |
| JJS | Adjective, superlative | VB | Verb, base form |
| NN | Noun, singular or mass | VBD | Verb, past tense |
| NNP | Noun, proper singular | VBG | Verb, gerund or present participle |
| NNPS | Noun, proper plural | VCN | Verb, past participle |
| NNS | Noun, plural | VBP | Verb, non-3 rd person singular present |
| RB | Adverb | VBZ | Verb, 3 rd person singular present |

Appendix 2

Writing test. These days, many universities offer online courses as an alternative to classes delivered on campus. Some people say that online learning has made traditional classrooms unnecessary. To what extent do you agree/ disagree?

Appendix 3

Table 7. Agreement percentage of lexical collocation types

| Types | Coder 1 | Coder 2 | Percentage of Agreement |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|-------------------------|
| 1. Verb – Noun | 28 | 28 | 100 |
| 2. Adjective – Noun | 208 | 205 | 98.56 |
| 3. Noun – Noun | 17 | 15 | 88.24 |
| 4. Noun of Noun | 15 | 15 | 100 |
| 5. Adverb – Adjective | 4 | 4 | 100 |
| 6. Adverb – Verb | 14 | 12 | 85.71 |
| 7. Verb – Adverb | 14 | 11 | 78.57 |
| 8. Verb – Adjective | 6 | 6 | 100 |

Table 8. Agreement percentage of lexical collocational errors

| Errors | Coder 1 | Coder 2 | Percentage of Agreement |
|---|---------|---------|-------------------------|
| Omission of morpheme –s in plural nouns | 13 | 12 | 92.31 |
| Wrong choice of component words | 4 | 3 | 75 |
| Omission of morpheme -s in third person singular verbs | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Misuse of parts of speech | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| Non-existent collocation | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| Overuse of morpheme –s in singular or uncountable nouns | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| Non-existent component word | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Word order error | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Omission of the preposition of a prepositional verb | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| Omission of article "the" | 0 | 0 | 100 |