
Enhancing ESL Collocation Learning: A Multi-Stage Qualitative Framework

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ABSTRACT: Collocation acquisition is an important aspect of language learning for those who learn English as a second language (ESL). When combined with the lexical approach, usage-based learning theory, and cognitive processing models, collocation acquisition is an important part of language learning. This research uses a qualitative approach as informed by these three theoretical concepts. The results indicate that collocation acquisition is a process that takes time, is dynamic, and requires repeated input and explicit pedagogical support. This paper provides implications for teaching collocations as well as innovative ideas for the classroom. The proposed framework shows that successful collocation learning involves the integration of instruction based on chunks, repeated exposure and practice, and the use of processes associated with cognition. Further, this research reveals that providing explicit instruction on collocations with the use of corpus-based samples and practice tasks will help improve ESL learners' accuracy of vocabulary and fluency of speaking. By integrating these elements, this research proposes a multi-stage conceptual framework that will help ESL learners to acquire collocations through four stages of learning: exposure, noticing, practice, and automatization. The pedagogical implications of the proposed conceptual framework are of great importance to ESL teachers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators.

KEYWORDS: Collocation Acquisition, ESL, Lexical Approach, Usage-Based Learning, Cognitive Processing, Chunk-Based Instruction, Corpus-Based Instruction, Noticing Hypothesis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Collocation, the habitual association of words in a language, is sometimes regarded as a necessary characteristic of proficient and natural language use. However, collocation acquisition has been neglected in second-language teaching and research in favour of grammar, specific vocabulary items, and pragmatics, despite its importance for communicative skills. This oversight has quantifiable repercussions. Grammar proficiency is often strong among advanced ESL learners. Nevertheless, they frequently create collocational combinations that resemble pseudo-native speakers, which lowers their accuracy and fluency (Nesselhauf, 2003). Widdowson (2007) was the first to say that collocations are important for becoming fluent in a language. He said that the deeper meaning of a word changes depending on the words it is often used with. Sinclair (1991) backed this up with research based on corpora that showed that speakers use pre-made lexical combinations when they speak naturally. These findings suggest that language use is more a case of choosing from an existing repertoire of word pairings than of spontaneous grammatical formation. Subsequent research has repeatedly revealed that students lacking collocational ability are identified as non-native speakers not because of grammatical faults but because of incorrect or unnatural word pairings (HOWARTH, 1998; Wray, 2002). Despite this evidence, a coherent, theoretically integrated paradigm for teaching and learning collocations in ESL settings has remained elusive. The lexical method (Lewis, 2012) is one of the key theoretical lenses that connect collocation acquisition, which has been investigated in previous research. Other research has explored the problem using usage-based learning theory (Bybee, 2010; Tomasello, 2005) or cognitive processing models (DeKeyser, 2010; SCHMIDT, 1990), each providing unique perspectives on how collocations are learned. Of course, these frameworks have mostly been studied separately, and no cohesive pedagogical model has yet been developed that combines these complementary ideas into a coherent whole. This dispersion has reduced the usefulness of research findings for ESL teachers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators. This study addresses the existing gaps by performing a qualitative analysis that helps to integrate to find from three prominent theoretical frameworks to establish a multi-stage conceptual framework for collocation acquisition in ESL. The framework is basically structured into four sequential stages: exposure, noticing, practice, and automatization, and each of these designed progressively to enhance learners' proficiency in collocational language. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review; Section 3 discusses the research methods; Section 4 introduces the theoretical framework; Section 5 analyses the findings and their instructional implications; and Section 6 concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Collocation in Second Language Learning

The non-random co-occurrence of words, called collocation, is now widely accepted as a central dimension of lexical competence rather than a peripheral feature of language. The Nation (2022) model of word knowledge now explicitly incorporates collocations as part of the constraints of use and grammatical behaviour. In this model, collocational competence is re-conceptualized as the core of vocabulary development from the very beginning of the process of the learning. Bui (2021) proved that instruction based on isolated words rather than collocations severely hampers learners' spoken and written production even when they have a relatively high level of grammatical proficiency. Demana et al. (2025) conducted a scoping review to verify that lexical and grammatical collocations are still a chronic problem for ESL and EFL learners of all proficiencies and that such difficulties are due to limited authentic input, L1 interference, and lack of systematic, explicit instruction.

B. Theoretical Frameworks Lexical Approach, Usage-Based Theory and Cognitive Processing

Three converging theoretical traditions underpin the modern pedagogy of collocations. As Lewis (2012)) mentioned in his Lexical Approach, multi-word units are the basic building blocks of language competence. This was empirically supported by Yu (2022), who, from a psycholinguistic perspective, demonstrated that chunk-based retrieval reduced cognitive load and increased automaticity in oral production. Fan and Wang (2024) showed that even advanced L2 learners are mostly involved in controlled rather than automatic processing in the production of formulaic sequences, confirming that sustain is necessary for automatization. From the perspective of usage-based learning theory, collocations are learned from frequency, not from rules. The experimental evidence of (Guo & Ellis, 2021) demonstrated a direct sensitivity of the L2 acquisition of collocations to the distributional availability and statistical reliability of forms in the input, thus corroborating the need for systematic manipulation of frequency and salience in instructional input. Cognitive processing models and, in particular, the Noticing Hypothesis (SCHMIDT, 1990) have underpinned the understanding that attention to form comes before intake. Zhang (2022) found that target form salience enhancement, typographic enhancement, and explicit metalinguistic instruction all systematically increase noticing and acquisition. Furthermore, Peters et al. (2023) confirmed in a multisite replication study that the learning benefits of repeated exposure increase substantially with the number of exposures. Individual learner factors, such as prior vocabulary knowledge, however, moderate such findings.

C. Input Augmentation with Multi-Modal Inputs

One productive line of recent empirical work has been to manipulate the input modality and salience of collocates and examine how this will impact collocational learning. Celik (2024) found that although both input flood and typographic enhancement resulted in gains in collocational accuracy in EFL writing, enhancement resulted in further gains in collocational awareness of grammatically subtle target forms. Jung & Lee (2024) found that simultaneous enhancement of both text and audio in reading-while-listening resulted in significantly better immediate and delayed recall than unenhanced conditions. More generally, Vu & Peters (2022) found better form recall with reading-while-listening than reading in a longitudinal study, and Peters et al. (2023) found better meaning recall with captioned TV viewing. Pu et al. (2026) generalised these findings to young secondary school learners in a mixed-methods study. The strongest incidental meaning recall from multimodal captioned input and reduced cognitive load in narrative contexts enhanced processing engagement. Moreover, Tran (2026) conducted a study on ESL learners, which also showed that text elaboration with multimodal input led to better collocational learning outcomes than unimodal reading conditions.

D. Teaching from the Corpus and Explicit Instruction

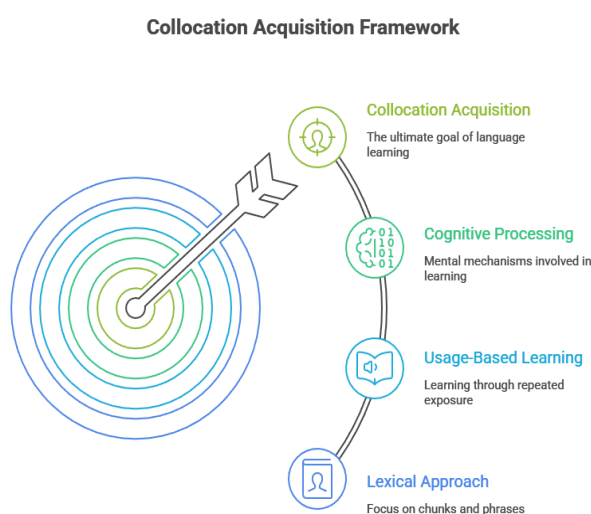
An empirically well-supported corpus-based approach has emerged as a vehicle for delivering authentic collocational input and facilitating data-driven discovery learning. Sun & Park (2023) identified clear developmental trends in collocational diversity and accuracy across proficiency levels. Du et al. (2022) also found clear developmental trends in collocational diversity and accuracy. They observed improvements across different proficiency levels. However, learners still showed gaps when compared to native speakers. These gaps remained even at advanced levels. Li & Lei (2024) confirmed the effectiveness of explicit collocation instruction. Their meta-analysis included 17 studies and 3,859 participants. The results showed a large effect size ($d = 1.415$). Explicit instruction was more effective than implicit instruction. This finding was consistent across different session frequencies and durations. L1 transfer, cross-lingual interference, and assessment are major sources of collocational difficulties in ESL contexts. Cao & Badger (2023) found that about 40% of learners' collocational choices were influenced by their first language. Most of the transferred errors involved prepositions. Boonraksa & Naisena (2021) suggested a comprehensive typology of L1 transfer errors committed by Thai EFL learners and suggested the necessity of contrastive analysis-based instruction to address collocations that are structurally different in comparison to the learners' first language. Yamagata et al. (2024) also showed that organising practice around common node words and spacing encounters across sessions, through semantic restructuring, greatly improved both accuracy and retention. This provides a concrete, evidence-based principle for the design of practice tasks.

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E. Research Gap

The literature under review points to a gap in theory, pedagogy and research design in ESL collocation acquisition. There have been recent empirical studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of various instructional strategies, including corpus-based instruction (Sun & Park, 2023), multimodal and enhanced input (Pu et al., 2026; Vu & Peters, 2022), explicit instruction (Li & Lei, 2024), and contrastive sequencing (Cao & Badger, 2023). However, these findings have been made in isolation from each other, and more importantly, without being integrated into a coherent developmental framework. To date, no research has collated the Lexical Approach, usage-based learning theory and cognitive processing models into a multi-stage pedagogical architecture that can be applied in ESL contexts. In addition, the use of quantitative experimental designs has meant that the dynamic, qualitative and processual nature of collocation development has been overlooked, with the majority of the studies still located in EFL rather than ESL contexts, reducing their ecological validity for learners located in English-medium environments. The present study aims to address this tripartite gap of theoretical fragmentation, methodological narrowness and contextual misalignment by proposing an integrated conceptual framework that links empirically validated instructional strategies with the sequential cognitive stages of exposure, noticing, practice and automatization in the ESL context.

Figure 1: Collocation Acquisition Framework



F. Research Objectives

- To propose a multi-stage conceptual framework for collocation acquisition in ESL by integrating the lexical approach, usage-based learning theory, and cognitive processing models.
- To analyse the theoretical foundations of the four stages of collocational development: exposure, noticing, practice, and automatization through cognitive processing and usage-based learning theories.

G. Research Question

How can the lexical approach, usage-based learning theory, and cognitive processing models be systematically integrated into a unified multi-stage conceptual framework to support ESL collocation acquisition?

I. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides ESL educators with a systematic and diverse methodology for instructing students on the use of collocations, a crucial aspect of their profession. It integrates usage-based learning theory, cognitive processing models, and the lexical approach into a singular teaching framework, distinguishing it from previous approaches. The findings offer ESL teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers' valuable insights on creating instruction that emphasizes collocations through chunk-based teaching methods and corpus-based materials. Ultimately, this framework improves ESL students' accuracy and fluency in vocabulary usage systematically and effectively.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study utilises an interpretive inquiry-based qualitative research design, which is especially suitable for examining complex, dynamic, and context-dependent processes like collocation acquisition. VanPatten & Keating (2025) contend that qualitative

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methodologies are crucial for exploring second language acquisition, as they enable the investigation of the complexities and depths of language learning processes that quantitative measures fail to capture. Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000) emphasised the imperative for rigorous qualitative analysis of learners' genuine language use in significant communicative contexts to understand the development of collocational competence, thereby substantiating this claim. This study employed a qualitative approach to develop a conceptual framework, facilitating the integration and synthesis of theoretical concepts and empirical data while considering the intricacies and subtleties of collocational learning. SCHMIDT (1990) demonstrated that qualitative introspective methods, such as think-aloud protocols and diary studies, can effectively examine the cognitive dimensions of acquisition pertinent to the existing framework. He did this by looking at the role of consciousness in learning a second language. Nesselhauf (2003, 2005) also used qualitative corpus-based analytical methods to look at collocational error patterns in learner writing. This showed that qualitative analysis can find systematic patterns of difficulty that help teachers figure out how to help students in ways that quantitative methods can't.

B. Theoretical Synthesis Approach

This study's qualitative methodology works well for developing a conceptual framework. It recognises the complexities and nuances of collocational learning while facilitating the synthesis and integration of theoretical ideas and empirical data. SCHMIDT (1990) illustrated the usefulness of qualitative methods using qualitative introspective techniques like think-aloud protocols and diary studies. The cognitive components of acquisition that are crucial to the current framework can be investigated using these techniques. He did this by looking at the role of consciousness in learning a second language. Nesselhauf (2003, 2005) employed qualitative corpus-based analytical techniques to examine collocational error patterns in learner writing. This demonstrated that qualitative analysis can identify systematic patterns of difficulty that assist teachers in determining how to support students in ways that quantitative methods cannot. The synthesis incorporates with three principal domains of literature: the lexical approach (Hoey, 1991; Lewis, 2012, 2001; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), usage-based learning theory (Bybee, 2010; Ellis, 1996, 2002, 2006; Tomasello, 2005; Wulff & Ellis, 2018), and cognitive processing models (DeKeyser, 2010; SCHMIDT, 1990; Zhang, 2022). It encompasses empirical studies on corpus-based collocation instruction (Du et al., 2022; Lontas et al., 2023; Mohammadi Foomani & Khalaji, 2016; Sun & Park, 2023) and the nature and development of collocational competence in ESL learners (Granger, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005; YAMASHITA & JIANG, 2010). The resultant framework is presented as a theoretically informed and practically relevant conceptual model, rather than a mere compilation of empirically validated hypotheses; nonetheless, its components are supported by substantial empirical evidence from the examined research.

C. Analytical Framework

The analysis process consisted of three steps. The first step involved identifying and analysing the theoretical foundations of collocation acquisition through a thorough examination of the three main theoretical traditions mentioned earlier. The second step involved examining empirical research on collocational learning and instruction to identify consistent findings about the conditions that facilitate or hinder collocation acquisition. The third step involved creating a unified multi-stage framework that outlines the developmental pathway from initial exposure to automatic collocational production. The framework's stages were grounded in both theoretical concepts and empirical data. This three-phase analytical methodology reflects the integrative methodological tradition of applied linguistics research on instructed second language acquisition (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009) and aligns with the theoretical framework development approach promoted by VanPatten and Williams (2025).

IV. MULTI-STAGE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ESL COLLOCATION ACQUISITION

A. Overview of the Framework

According to the suggested framework, collocation is a dynamic, multi-stage developmental process for learning ESL that consists of four consecutive but intersecting stages: (1) exposure (2) noticing (3) practice and (4) automation. This empirical research aids in collocational learning instruction, underpinned by one or more of the aforementioned theoretical traditions. The framework is intended to be applicable in various ESL teaching contexts, assisting teachers, curriculum developers, and educators in fostering students' collocational competence clearly and systematically. The foundation of the framework is the notion that learning collocations is a continuous process. Furthermore, exposure alone does not cause it to happen naturally. Collocational competence takes time to develop and necessitates deliberate teaching support at every stage of development. Based on current theoretical and empirical literature, the framework applies this support by defining suitable teaching conditions, activities, and objectives for each phase.

B. Stage 1: Exposure

The primary objective of the initial stage of the framework is to provide students with extensive practice of target collocations within context. According to usage-based learning theory (Bybee, 2010; Ellis, 2002; Tomasello, 2005), individuals become more acquainted with collocations through increased usage. Furthermore, it posits that learners must encounter target collocations in diverse contexts before robust mental representations can develop. At this juncture, corpus-based instruction is particularly

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advantageous as it presents students with authentic examples of collocations in their natural discourse contexts, accompanied by relevant contextual, pragmatic, and register information in everyday scenarios (Sinclair, 1991; Sun & Park, 2023). During the exposure stage, the teacher's job is to find and give students real-life examples of collocations that are full of target collocations and easy for them to understand at their level of proficiency. These examples can come from academic texts, graded readers, corpus data, and other real-world sources. Ellis (2002) says that the usage-based theory stresses the importance of spreading exposure out over time instead of cramming it all into one session. On the other hand, Krashen's (1992) Input Hypothesis gives us a theoretical reason to make sure that the input at this point is both understandable and useful. The finding by Webb, Newton, and Chang (2013) that consistent collocational retention necessitates numerous encounters corroborates the notion that students must repeatedly encounter the same material across various lessons and contexts.

C. Stage 2: Noticing

The second stage focuses on directing learners' conscious attention to the collocational patterns in the input they have encountered. As SCHMID (1990) established through the Noticing Hypothesis, conscious awareness of a form is a prerequisite for its conversion from input to intake, and because collocational patterns are statistically subtle and not always perceptually salient, they frequently pass unnoticed even by motivated and attentive learners. Zhang (2022) demonstrated that noticing-facilitation techniques, such as typographical highlighting, input flooding, consciousness-raising tasks, and explicit metalinguistic instruction, have consistently enhanced the salience of target forms and facilitated their subsequent acquisition. During the noticing phase, the teacher uses different ways to get students' attention to learn collocational patterns. These ways might include bolding, colour-coding, or underlining collocations in texts; showing concordance lines from corpus data that show the usual collocational partners of target words; asking students to find and write down collocations from real texts; and giving clear metalinguistic explanations for why some word combinations are better than others. Boers & Lindstromberg (2009) showed that memory-enhancing techniques, like highlighting alliterative, semantically transparent, or etymologically motivated collocations, can make target patterns more noticeable and memorable, which helps them move from noticed input to retained knowledge.

D. Stage 3: Practice

The third stage is all about giving students structured, purposeful practice using target collocations in meaningful situations. This stage is based on DeKeyser's (2010) theory of skill acquisition, which says that the only way to close the gap between declarative collocational knowledge (knowing that a collocation exists and its meaning) and procedural fluency (being able to produce it accurately and appropriately in real-time communication) is to do productive practice over and over again in situations where cognitive support is slowly taken away. Fan (2009) showed how important output-focused practice is at this stage by showing that tasks that require meaningful productive use of target collocations in context lead to much better retention and generalisation than tasks that only require receptive recognition. At this point, some examples of practice activities are helpful to fill the gap in exercises that use target collocation sentences in real-world situations. Sentence completion tasks help learners to ask whether this provides appropriate collocational partners, translation tasks that show L1-L2 collocational incongruences, YAMASHITA & JIANG (2010) writing tasks that ask learners to use target collocations in discourse, and communicative speaking tasks that give learners chances to produce collocations in real-time interaction. Nation (2001) stressed that effective practice must include both fluency and accuracy goals, giving students chances to use target collocations in situations that get closer and closer to real-life communication needs. To facilitate this integration, Lewis (2001) and Lewis & Gough (2008) offered effective classroom strategies for chunk-based practice.

E. Stage 4: Automatization

The fourth stage(final) of the framework is about automating collocational production, which means being able to quickly, accurately, and easily find and produce target collocations in real-time communication. This stage acknowledges that automatic collocational production arises from the incremental strengthening of mental associations through repeated use, resulting in the storage and retrieval of collocations as cohesive units rather than their construction word by word in real time. It is based on Bybee's (2010) theory of how people learn new skills and DeKeyser's (2010) theory of how people learn new skills. Wray (2002) says that the ability to store and retrieve formulaic sequences is the most important sign of native-like fluency, which is what sets proficient language users apart from those who are less proficient. During the automation phase, scaffolded practice transitions into extended, more genuine communication activities that require students to employ various collocations in real-time, without assistance or direct supervision. (Y. Wang & H. Christiansen (2024) assert that instruction should facilitate automatic collocational production through comprehensive communicative practice, providing numerous opportunities for the utilisation of target collocations in diverse meaningful contexts. Chunking refers to the cognitive mechanism that transforms commonly used sequences into individual processing units. Ellis (1996) highlighted the significance of the automation stage, which should include multiple lessons and communicative contexts, rather than being limited to a singular intensive session. He advocated for distributed practice over massed practice to foster enduring and accessible collocational representations.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Contributions to Theory

The proposed multi-stage framework significantly enhances the domain of ESL collocation research through various theoretical advancements. First, it brings together the lexical approach, usage-based learning theory, and cognitive processing models, the three main theoretical traditions that are most relevant to learning collocations, into a single, cohesive developmental model for the first time. One of these traditions has typically been the focal point of previous research, thereby constraining the explanatory efficacy and practical relevance of its conclusions. The current framework offers a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of the processes by which ESL learners achieve collocational competence than was previously possible through integration of the three. Second, the framework addresses a notable deficiency recognized by several scholars (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Granger, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003) the lack of a systematic, theoretically informed elucidation of the temporal evolution of collocational competence in ESL learners. The framework delineates the developmental trajectory across four distinct yet interconnected stages, offering a theoretical foundation that informs both research and pedagogy, in contrast to prior singular-stage or non-theoretical narratives of collocation instruction. Third, the framework places corpus-based instruction, one of the most empirically validated methods for teaching collocations (Liontas et al., 2023; Mohammadi Foomani & Khalaji, 2016; Sun & Park, 2023), in a wider theoretical and developmental context. It clarifies the cognitive and acquisition processes employed by corpus-based approaches, as well as the best ways to combine these approaches with other teaching methods at different stages of the developmental process.

B. Pedagogical Implications for ESL Teachers

The proposed framework provides ESL educators with significant, theoretically informed guidance for the development and implementation of collocation instruction across various educational contexts and proficiency levels. Its emphasis on the incremental, stage-by-stage enhancement of collocational competence facilitates accurate predictions regarding the pace of students' acquisition of collocations and assists in the formulation of lesson plans that offer appropriate support at each stage. To guarantee significant exposure to collocational input, teachers should start teaching collocations to ESL students at a young age. According to Sinclair (1991) and Krashen (1992), corpus data and other authentic materials can be used to provide this exposure. According to SCHMIDT (1990) and Zhang (2022), it should be bolstered by explicit noticing exercises that call students' attention to collocational patterns. Additionally, the framework offers suggestions for creating practice tasks appropriate for various phases of collocational development. Teachers should employ a range of efficient exercises that call for students to use target collocations in suitable contexts during the practice phase. These could include structured gap-fills and speaking and writing activities that focus on communication (DeKeyser, 2010; Fan, 2009; Lewis, 2001). To facilitate the consolidation and automation of collocational knowledge through repetition, educators should provide extensive communicative practice in authentic contexts during the automation phase (Bybee, 2010; Wray, 2002; Y. Wang & H. Christiansen, 2024). (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000) stress that the choice of input materials and practice tasks must follow the principle of integrating all phases of collocation instruction within important discourse contexts.

C. Implications for Curriculum Designers

The framework provides curriculum designers with a robust foundation for incorporating explicit collocation instruction into ESL classes for students of all proficiency levels. Nation (2001) advocated for the integration of vocabulary instruction, including collocation teaching, throughout the curriculum to offer students multiple opportunities to engage with target items over time, in accordance with the usage-based theory that distributed exposure and practice are more effective than massed learning (Bybee, 2010; Ellis, 1996). Curriculum designers must ensure that collocational targets are employed and reiterated across various units and skill domains to afford students sufficient practice opportunities and to gradually increase the complexity of practice activities. The framework also affects how ESL materials are made, especially when it comes to choosing and putting together target collocations. Nesselhauf's (2003) corpus-based analysis of learner errors provides an empirically validated framework for identifying collocational patterns that require explicit instructional emphasis. At the same time, teaching materials should focus on collocations that are different from the learners' L1 patterns. YAMASHITA & JIANG (2010) found that L1-L2 collocational incongruence is a major source of difficulty.

To guarantee that the examples utilised in lessons accurately reflect genuine patterns of collocational usage rather than fabricated or idealised ones, it is essential to utilise corpus tools such as COCA (Liontas et al., 2023). The framework tells people who train teachers that they need to think carefully about how to teach collocations to both new and current teachers. Many studies have found that a lot of ESL teachers don't know what collocations are or how to teach them well (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Lewis, 2012). Teacher education programs should clearly teach collocations, the theory behind the proposed framework, and how to use each part in the classroom. McCarthy (1990) and Nation (2001) stressed the importance of teachers' lexical knowledge for effective collocation instruction. This means that teachers should understand the collocational patterns of the words they teach. To augment and broaden teachers' understanding of collocations, teacher education programs ought to provide opportunities to engage with corpus data and other authentic language resources. HOWARTH (1998) and Wray (2002) showed that corpus-based awareness-

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raising is important for both teachers and students because native speakers' intuitions about collocations don't always match how they are actually used.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper puts forward a multi-stage conceptual framework for collocation acquisition in ESL. This framework is an integrating component that helps learn from the lexical approach, usage-based learning theory, and cognitive processing models into a unified and effective developmental model. This framework outlines four steps for collocational development: exposure, noticing, practice, and automation. These four stages are based on theoretical ideas and backed up by real-world studies on how to learn and teach collocations. A review of the current literature reveals that the acquisition of collocations is intricate, evolving, and time-consuming, requiring diverse pedagogical approaches and theoretical frameworks. Cognitive processing models (DeKeyser, 2010; SCHMIDT, 1990; Zhang, 2022) clarify the mechanisms of noticing, practicing, and automating that enable the transition from explicit collocational knowledge to fluent production. Usage-based learning theory (Bybee, 2010; Ellis, 2002; Tomasello, 2005) explains how frequency, distribution, and repeated exposure strengthen collocations as fundamental lexical units. Mohammadi Foomani & Khalaji (2016), Sun & Park (2023), Lontas et al. (2023), and Du et al. (2022) contend that corpus-based instructional research demonstrates the amalgamation of authentic collocational input. This helps to enhance focused practice tasks and improves students' vocabulary accuracy and speaking fluency. The proposed framework addresses a significant deficiency in the literature by presenting a cohesive, theoretically robust, and practically applicable model of ESL collocation acquisition. This synthesizes the three principles of theoretical paradigms and incorporates corpus-based instruction within a broader developmental and cognitive framework. The pedagogical implications provide specific, empirically validated guidelines for the design and execution of collocation instruction that fosters students' attainment of native-like collocational proficiency throughout the educational process, rendering them directly pertinent to ESL educators, curriculum designers, and teacher trainers. Subsequent research should utilize qualitative methodologies to investigate the experiences of educators and learners with framework-aligned instruction, longitudinal studies to monitor students' collocational progression across the four stages, and comparative analyses to assess the efficacy of framework-aligned instruction relative to conventional approaches, thereby empirically validating the proposed framework. These investigations would enhance the framework and advance the primary objective of establishing an empirically validated science of collocation instruction in ESL.

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