Investigating Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching Lexical Collocations to Improve EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency

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Abstract:

Collocations are considered one of the most challenging components of second and foreign language acquisition due to their huge existing number and arbitrariness. The present study aims to explore whether or not EFL teachers teach lexical collocations. It also aims at investigating EFL teachers' attitudes towards teaching lexical collocations and their practices in teaching them to improve their learners' speaking fluency. In order to achieve the predetermined objectives, an exploratory descriptive method was adopted using a questionnaire as a data collocation tool. The questionnaire was designed and distributed to 20 oral expression teachers at the department of English, University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia -Jijel. The results revealed that teachers do not sufficiently focus on teaching lexical collocations in the speaking class, even though they are aware of their importance in the learning process, and failure in teaching them would negatively impact students' overall language performance. Additionally, teachers hold positive attitudes towards lexical collocation teaching to improve EFL students' speaking fluency, and indicated some practices that could prevent its full implementation.

Keywords: Lexical collocations, Speaking fluency, Attitudes, Practices, Teaching collocations

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1. **INTRODUCTION**:

Formulaic language, or word combinations, plays a central role in language acquisition since a significant number of language components consist of pre-fabricated combinations that are stored to be retrieved and used (Wray, 2002). Lewis (2000, p.8) claimed that collocations are considered the most important type of chunking. Additionally, collocations form a substantial part of the linguistic knowledge of native speakers (Wray, 2002). Thus, the effective teaching and learning of collocations would help foreign language learners to use the language appropriately. Despite the unquestionable importance of collocations in both teaching and learning English as a foreign language, they are often disregarded by both teachers and learners in the classroom. As far as the department of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University- Jijel is concerned, students exhibit a deficiency in their lexical repertoire, particularly in terms of lexical collocation knowledge, which refers to the proper use of lexical word combinations. Furthermore, teaching collocations is challenging because of their huge number; thus, teachers might not be aware of the different appropriate teaching principles. As a result, the aforementioned reasons lead to students' lack of collocational knowledge, hence, producing verbose statements that are grammatically correct but communicatively awkward, as claimed by Hill (2000, p. 49).In the light of what has been mentioned, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

    1. To what extent do oral expression teachers teach lexical collocations?
    2. How do oral expression teachers teach lexical collocations?
    3. What attitudes do oral expression teachers hold towards teaching lexical collocations to improve EFL students' speaking fluency?

2. Review of Literature:

2.1. Collocations: Origins and Definitions

The term collocation originates from the Latin word 'collocare', which denotes the act of arranging things in close proximity or placing them side by side, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005, p.293). The latter also provided a more comprehensive explanation of the term collocation, defining it as the habitual, frequent, and expected occurrence of a certain word in close proximity to other word(s). The term was initially employed in the eighteenth century; however, it was not until the twentieth century that it became a well-established notion. Robins (1967, p. 21) claimed that the study of collocations as a linguistic phenomenon can be traced back to the examination of lexical semantics by the Greek Stoic philosophers thousands of years ago, where they expressed their rejection of the notion that each word has only one meaning and instead proposed the language semantic structure as a significant element. It was considered that word meanings are not independent entities but rather vary depending on the specific collocation in which they are employed.

Cowan (1989, p.1) clarified that many efforts have been undertaken to establish a clear definition of collocations. Thus, the task of defining them is accompanied by a plethora of definitions found in the literature, suggesting a lack of consensus on a commonly accepted definition. For this reason, the term collocation is comprehended in diverse manners and employed for different purposes. However, a unifying thread among these definitions is the characterization of collocations as the mere occurrence of words in conjunction based on a syntagmatic relationship.(Nesselhauf, 2005, p. 11)

To start with, Firth, considered as the father of collocations, was the first to claim that one "shall know a word by the company it keeps" (1957, p.179); it means that a collocation is not only about the word meaning but also its relationship with other word(s). He additionally used the terms *habitual* and *customary* as two important features in identifying collocations where certain words are frequently placed and combined together in a linear relationship

(1968, p.181).Moreover, Halliday (1961, p.276) who was influenced by Firth's definition, explained that collocations refer to joining words together in a linear co-occurrence within a syntagmatic relationship, and those combinations can be measured textually in terms of the likelihood of their occurrence. According to Benson et al. (1986, p.61), a collocation can be described as the recurrence of words that can be combined together within a certain language. Similarly, Lewis (2000, p.127) and Hill (2000, p.48) clarified that collocations are recurrent combinations in which words are predictably joined together. To sum up, it can be deduced from the aforementioned diverse definitions that certain commonly accepted criteria exist among linguists and phraseologists for defining collocations. Thus, a collocation is simply defined as the habitual co-occurrence of words in a sequence possessing a limited semantic relationship.

2.2. Approaches to Collocations

There are two primary approaches when it comes to investigating collocations, namely the frequency-based approach and the phraseological approach (Nesselhauf, 2005). The first approach pertains to frequency and statistics, which are, according to Barfield and Gyllstad (2009, p.3) essential components in the examination of textual instances of a collocation. It is widely acknowledged that Firth (1957) and Sinclair (1991) are the pioneering adopters of this approach. Firth (1968, p.23) considered collocations to be important lexical items where meaning and functional value interact in use, and he suggested using the test of collocability. The second approach, the phraseological approach, diverges from the frequency-based approach by placing greater emphasis on the level of opacity and substitutability of words in combinations (Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009,p.6), in which a collocation is analysed at the level of its syntactic and semantic structures (Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009,p.3).Furthermore, the frequency-based approach is associated with the British scholars, but the phraseological approach is linked to and influenced by Russian phraseologists. The main focus of the latter lies in the study of phraseological units (word combinations), and raising learners' awareness of their importance. Cowie (1981,p. 224), who was regarded as the leader of this approach, elucidated that collocations are distinctive pairings of two or more words occurring within a particular set of grammatical structures and syntactic categories.

According to the previously mentioned principles of each approach, both of them have shortcomings. Since the frequency-based approach is based only on the frequency of recurrence, it would lead to the production of uninteresting collocations (Hunston, 2002,p. 74). Additionally, Wray and Perkins (2000, p.7) claimed that collocations cannot be only identified based on their frequency; there should be other features to avoid producing unnecessary collocations. On the other hand, the phraseological approach was criticised because of its total reliance on intuition; native speakers cannot estimate collocations' occurrence by ignoring the collocational restrictions and just depending on their intuition, which is not always reliable (Stubbs, 1995,p.25). Gries (2008, p.20) also criticised the phraseological approach for considering collocations as frozen expressions, claiming that they are flexible and dynamic. As a conclusion, the two approaches should be perceived as complementary rather than opposite. They should be fused depending on the benefits of each approach to better define and investigate collocations. For example, when adopting the phraseological approach with a need to add frequency, the two approaches can be combined and vice versa. (Benson et al., 1986; Nesselhauf, 2005)

2.3. Collocations and other Confusing Word Combinations

It is of utmost significance to distinguish collocations from other word combinations. To start with, there exist two distinct features to differ collocations from idioms, for example. The first one is the semantic opacity (transparency), which pertains to the extent to which the meaning of a collocation can be deduced from the literal meaning of its constituents, in contrast to idioms where the meaning is not readily apparent. The second feature is about the degree of fixedness, where idioms are characterised as being frozen and their constituents cannot be replaced. On the other hand, collocations exhibit a lesser degree of fixedness in terms of the potential substitution of their constituents (Bentivogli & Pianta, 2003, p.68). In addition to collocations and idioms, free combinations refer to another type of word combinations that adheres to the rules of syntax without any inherent binding between the lexical items. Consequently, these lexical items have the capacity to be substituted with alternative words without constraints (Benson et al., 1986). According to Hsu (2002, p.18), collocations stand in an intermediate position between idioms and free combinations as they encompass both syntagmatic limitations and semantic transparency. The perspective that situates collocations in a continuum has gained significant acceptance among numerous researchers (Gitsaki, 1999; Lewis, 2000). All in all, collocations evolve just like a life cycle; a collocation begins as a freely combined expression; however, as it becomes more frequently employed, it gradually solidifies and eventually reaches a stage where it is recognised as an idiom.(Nattinger&DeCarrio,1992,pp. 37-38)

2.4. Lexical Collocations

Based on a syntactic classification, collocations are classified into two categories (lexical collocations and grammatical collocations), and this classification is considered the most widely used in many studies (Gyllstad, 2007). While a grammatical collocation is the combination of a major word (verb, noun, adjective) and a grammatical element (preposition, infinitive, and clause), a lexical collocation is a combination of only lexical items or content words.

Benson et al. (1986) basically divided lexical collocations into seven major subcategories in which content words (verb, noun, adjective, and adverb) are combined together. The first category is composed of a verb and a noun; the verb in this case may denote both creation (*compose music*) and activation (*wind a watch*).The second category of lexical collocations also consists of a verb and a noun, but the verb in this case can denote eradication and/or nullification (*dispel fear, revoke a license*). In addition, the third category is composed of an adjective and a noun *(a rough estimate)*, the fourth one is the combination of a noun and a verb (*blood circulates*), the fifth joins a noun to a noun (a *bouquet of flowers*) and the sixth category is composed of an adverb and an adjective (hopelessly *addicted*). In the last category, a verb and an adverb (*apologize humbly*) can be combined to form a lexical collocation (Benson et al., 1986, pp. xxxi-xxxiv).

2.5. Significance of Collocations in Language Acquisition

It has been proven that collocations are important in the acquisition of a foreign language, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, since they are present in all its spoken and written instances (Francis& Poole, 2009, p.2). Various researchers (Brown, 1974; Nation, 2001) argued that learning collocations is crucial for several factors, including the development of language performance. For instance, Brown (1974) focused on the significance of collocations in second and foreign language acquisition and their relevance in the classroom, asserting that they allow learners to enhance their listening comprehension, oral proficiency, and reading speed (pp.1-2). In addition, the effective use of collocations in various academic tasks can significantly contribute to learners achieving high scores since they frequently make grammatical errors when they produce lengthier sentences. Those

mistakes were made as a result of learners' lack of knowledge of the appropriate and acceptable collocations that would typically allow them to convey meaning precisely. Hence, it is seen that even learners with good ideas tend to receive reduced scores due to their unfamiliarity with the appropriate collocates of a given term. (Hill, 2000, p.49)

Collocations are important in improving EFL learners' vocabulary since memorising them, rather than learning words in isolation, is considered a highly effective method for expanding vocabulary (Lewis & Hill, 1997, p.13). According to McCarthy (1990), the effective learning of vocabulary can be clearly achieved through using collocations as an organising principle (p.12).In this vein, Lewis (2000, p.15) elucidated that a particular collocation, albeit consisting of just two words, possesses the capacity to convey an enormous amount of intricate information. Therefore, it is of utmost significance to acquire and arrange vocabulary through the use of collocational linking.

Another important reason for learning collocations is to enhance learners' communicative competence (Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000). According to Channel (1981), enhancing learners' communicative competence can be achieved by raising their awareness and knowledge of collocations. Hill (2000,p.49) claimed that it is important to expand our understanding beyond communicative competence and include collocation competence since acquiring collocational patterns is an essential aspect of developing learners' communicative competence. Thus, some difficulties may arise for learners when they lack collocational competence, leading them to produce lengthier utterances due to their unfamiliarity with collocations that accurately convey their intended meaning.

All in all, by placing emphasis on the instruction and acquisition of collocations, learners will develop the ability to accurately employ them instead of only understanding the meaning of individual words and employing them based on syntactic rules. In addition, collocations are essential for language learners in order to effectively produce the target language. According to Benson et al. (1986), in order to produce a native-like language in both its spoken and written structures, learners need to know how and which words collocate with one another because the more their collocational knowledge increases, the more their vocabulary and language proficiency do.

2.6. Teaching Collocations

Carter and McCarthy (1988) claimed that collocations serve a dual purpose of enhancing both comprehension and production in the target language. For instance, the process of memorising collocational groupings enables learners to develop an understanding of certain lexical restrictions, and most importantly, teaching collocations enables them to anticipate appropriate language forms that can ensue from the preceding one. Consequently, learners will no longer be required to engage in the process of language construction every time they wish to express themselves since they may readily use these collocations as pre-assembled linguistic components (p.75). Furthermore, Woolard (2000) argued that collocations have evolved as a significant form of lexical patterning and are increasingly recognised as a fundamental part of language courses and teaching materials. (p. 28)

In addition to their significance in facilitating proficient language acquisition, collocations are also problematic because of their arbitrariness and unpredictability (Nesselhauf, 2003). Therefore, it is clearly recommended to systematically introduce and teach them throughout the early phase of foreign language acquisition. According to Hill (2000, p.60), it is evident that collocations should be accorded considerable importance in the instructional process from lesson number one. Despite the widely recognised importance of collocations in language acquisition, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the most effective methods for teaching them. Webb and Kagimoto (2009, p.56) clearly argued that

there is a dearth of empirical studies that have specifically examined the optimal teaching techniques and materials for teaching collocations. However, some scholars such as Hill (2000) and McCarthy et al. (2010) proposed many effective principles, mainly collocations' selection and awareness-raising, for the purpose of a successful teaching process and language proficiency improvement.

Selecting which collocations to teach may present some challenges due to the inherent difficulty in ranking them in terms of their importance. According to Henriksen and Stoehr (2009, p.229), the selection of collocations becomes challenging when the input is abundant. Nevertheless, scholars (Yorio, 1980; Fox, 1998; Hill, 2000; Nation, 2001; Fan, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2010) have put forward various suggestions to choose the appropriate collocations to teach in the classroom. To start with, Fox (1998, p.80) recommended that collocations should be taught based on their frequency, which greatly aids teachers in directing their learners' attention to the most significant and repeated words. Similarly, Nation (2001, p.16) chose two criteria (frequency and range) when selecting collocations with great consideration to time constraints in foreign language classes. In addition, classifying collocations into categories (noun+ verb, adjective+ noun ...) is considered as another important criterion for choosing which collocations to teach (Hill, 2000, p.63). McCarthy et al. (2010, p.38) also supported Hill's idea and advised teachers to save strong collocations for higher stages of learning. Moreover, L1 and L2/FL differences are also important when teachers choose collocations, in which congruent collocations are not to be taught but incongruent collocations should be taught and given more attention since their misunderstanding leads to negative transfer. Lastly, learners' needs can be added to the previously mentioned criteria and considered as equally important (Yorio, 1980). According to Fan (2009, p.121), teachers should concentrate on teaching relevant collocations, taking into consideration the language needs of their learners.

Another important principle for teaching collocations after selecting the most appropriate ones is raising the collocational awareness of learners. Fan (2009, p.113) argued that since collocations are arbitrary, it is greatly important to raise learners' collocational awareness and understanding. Lewis (2000) clearly recommended enhancing learners' awareness of collocations in the classroom. Additionally, McCarthy et al. (2010, p.36) elucidated that the absence of learners' awareness would lead to the emergence of some challenges in collocation tasks. For this reason, the explicit instruction of collocations is greatly recommended. For instance, explicit instruction allows learners to learn an acceptable number of collocations, thus improving their collocational knowledge, which will mainly improve their language proficiency (Nesselhauf, 2003, p.238). Durrant and Schmitt (2010, p.181) insisted on the explicit instruction of collocations in order to greatly enhance their acquisition. As a matter of fact, enhancing learners' collocational knowledge can be achieved by fostering their ability to autonomously notice the collocational patterns, thus heightening their awareness. Therefore, noticing is an important level of raising awareness and language acquisition, as claimed by Schmidt and Frota (1986) that "learners who notice most, learn most." (p. 89)

2.7. The Importance of Collocations in Speaking Fluency

In addition to accuracy and complexity, fluency is also considered an important aspect of the speaking skill (Ellis, 2005, p.15). Speaking fluency is generally described as the ability to effortlessly convey messages (Ur, 1991, p.103). Woolard (2005, p. 7) also defined fluency as the learners' ability to engage in spontaneous and coherent speech. More specifically, it has been described as generating language in real-time with no excessive pauses and hesitations (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p.139). Moreover, fluency in speaking is exhibited when a message is delivered clearly and concisely with few pauses or hesitations, and it also

illustrates the rare instances in which there is a miscommunication between the speaker and the listener (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 43).When it comes to measuring speaking fluency, frequency of pauses, use of fillers, placement of pauses, and number of syllables separating pauses are considered, according to Thornbury (2005, p.8),the most important features to be taken into account.

Some researchers (Hill, 2000; Fan, 2009) claimed that improving fluency is one of the key objectives of teaching collocations for EFL learners. Fan (2009, p.111) claimed that using collocations not only enhances fluency but also assists learners in making their speech more comprehensible. Hill (2000) explained that the reason for this phenomenon lies in the fact that possessing an extensive collection of pre-existing linguistic resources in one's mental lexicon facilitates faster cognitive processing and more effective communication (p.54). Moreover, Nation (2001) clearly asserted that teaching collocations enhances fluency, claiming that "all fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge" (p.318). All in all, the significance of collocations lies in their role as a crucial element in achieving fluency in language production.

3. Method:

This study aims to elucidate teachers' perceptions of the role of teaching lexical collocations in enhancing EFL learners' speaking fluency. Therefore, one of the most appropriate tools to shed light on attitudes and beliefs is the questionnaire, which is considered an effective descriptive tool (Richards, 2001). For this reason, a questionnaire, based on an expository descriptive research method, was designed and administered to all (20) oral expression teachers at the Department of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University, Jijel, Algeria. The questionnaire is divided into three sections comprising fifteen questions. The first section attempts to elicit the participants' background information, while the second section focuses on whether oral expression teachers teach lexical collocations and how they teach them. Finally, the last section is designed to probe teachers' attitudes towards teaching lexical collocations as a way to improve EFL students' speaking fluency. The gathered data were calculated manually; they were reported and analysed, respectively in accordance with the questionnaire sections.

4. Results:

Section One: *Teachers' Background*
Q.1.How long have you been teaching English?

Table 1: English Language Teaching Experience

01 to 05 years	06 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20	Total
05	06	07	02	20
25%	30%	35%	10%	100%

As table 1 indicates, seven teachers of English as a foreign language, making up 35%, are the most experienced ones with a teaching experience of over ten years and less than 20 years. In addition, six teachers, representing 30% of participants, are less experienced, as they have taught English between six to ten years. On the other hand, five teachers (25%) have a relatively short experience ranging from one to five years. Only two teachers (10%) have been teaching English for more than 20 years.

Q.2. How long have you been teaching oral expression?

Table 2: Oral Expression Teaching Experience

01 to 05 years	06 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20	Total
15	03	02	00	20
75%	15%	10%	00%	100%

When it comes to oral expression teaching experience, table 2 indicates that the majority of participants (75%) have a short experience, while three participants (15%) are considered to be more experienced as they have taught oral expression from 06 to 10 years. Only two teachers, representing 2% of participants, are the most experienced since they have a teaching experience ranging from 11 to 20 years.

Section two: *Teaching Lexical Collocations in the Speaking Classes*

Q.3. How do you generally teach new words?

Table 3: Teaching New Words

a.Words in isolation	b. Words in combination	c.Both	Total
00	14	06	20
00%	70%	30%	100%

The bulk of teachers (14), representing 70%, teach new words in combination instead of teaching them in isolation. The rest of the participants (30%) claimed that they teach words both in isolation and in combination.

Q.4. what type(s) of word combinations do you mostly teach in your speaking classes?

Table 4: Teachers' Word Combinations Preferences

a. Idiomatic Expressions	b. Collocations	c. Free Combinations	a+b	a+b+c	Total
03	01	00	10	06	20
15%	5%	00%	50%	30%	100%

The table above indicates that half (50%) of teachers focus on teaching both idiomatic expressions and collocations in their speaking classes. In addition, six teachers, representing 30%, claimed that all the word combination types mentioned above are taught in the classroom. On the other hand, only three respondents chose to teach only idiomatic expression, and one opted for teaching collocations only.

Q.5. Do you think that teaching collocations is important in the learning process?

Table 5: Teachers' Attitudes towards the Importance Teaching Collocations

a. Strongly agree	b. Agree	c. Undecided	d. Disagree	e. Strongly disagree	Total
12	08	00	00	00	20
60%	40%	00%	00%	00%	100%

Table 5 clearly shows that more than half of the teachers (60%) strongly agreed on the importance of teaching collocations in the learning process. Likewise, the rest of the teachers (40%) agreed that collocations are important in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

Q.6. How often do you focus on teaching collocations?

Table 6: Frequency of Teaching Collocations

a. Always	b. Often	c. Sometimes	d. Rarely	e. Never	Total
02	04	06	08	00	20
10%	20%	30%	40%	00%	100

The table denotes that a considerable number of respondents (40%) rarely teach collocations in their speaking class. Additionally, six teachers (30%) claimed that they sometimes teach collocations, and four teachers (20%) often teach them. Only two teachers (10%) claimed that they always teach collocations.

Q.7. Which type of collocations do you mainly focus on?

Table 7: Teachers' Collocational Focus

a. Lexical Collocations	b. Grammatical Collocations	c. Both	Total
03	00	17	20
15%	00%	85%	100%

As displayed in table 7, the majority of the informants (85%) proclaimed that they focus on both grammatical collocations and lexical collocations when teaching speaking. Only three teachers (15%) stated that they only focus on teaching lexical collocations.

Q.8. How do you categorize and organize lexical collocations for teaching purposes?

Table 8: The Categorization of Lexical Collocations

a. Frequency	b.L1/L2 differences	c. Learners' needs	a+b	a+c	b+c	a+b+c	Total
02	02	09	01	02	02	02	20
10%	10%	45%	5%	10%	10%	10%	100%

Table 8 shows that nine teachers (45%) take learners' needs into consideration when it comes to the selection of the most appropriate lexical collocations to be taught in the speaking classes. In addition, two teachers (10%) chose frequency as an important criterion in selecting lexical collocations and two other teachers (10%) chose L1/L2 differences. On the other hand, the remaining participants claimed that they used a combination of the previously mentioned criterion for the purpose of selecting lexical collocations. For instance, two teachers (10%) relied on frequency and learners' needs, two teachers (10%) relied on L1/L2 differences and learners' needs, and two teachers combined the three (frequency, L1/L2 differences and learners' needs) to choose the best list of lexical collocations for students to learn. Only one teacher (05%) relied on both frequency and L1/L2 differences.

Q.9. How do you incorporate lexical collocations into your lesson?

Table 9: The Incorporation of lexical Collocations

a. Explicitly	b. Implicitly	c. Both	Total
04	11	05	20
20%	55%	25%	100%

When it comes to teaching lexical collocations, table 8 indicates that more than half of the teachers (55%) teach them implicitly. On the other hand, five teachers (25%) chose to teach lexical collocations both implicitly and explicitly. The remaining ones (20%) preferred to teach lexical collocations explicitly.

Q.10. Do you think that students are aware of the importance of knowing the collocations of certain common words in learning English?

Table 10: Students' Awareness of Lexical Collocations

a. Yes	B .No	Total
05	15	20
25%	75%	100%

The above table indicates that the majority of teachers, presenting 75%, claimed that students are not aware of the importance of lexical collocations in learning English as a foreign language, whereas the rest of teachers (25%) said that students are aware of their importance.

Q.11. How often do students make collocational errors while having a speaking performance?

Table 11: Frequency of Students' Collocational Errors

a. Always	b. Often	c. Sometimes	d. Rarely	d. Never	Total
03	12	05	00	00	20
15%	60%	25%	0%	0%	100%

The majority of the respondents (60%) said that students often make errors in producing lexical collocations while performing oral presentations. Likewise, five other teachers (25%) claimed that students make collocational errors from time to time. Only three teachers (15%) said that students always make collocational errors.

Section Three: *Teachers' Attitudes towards the Impact of Lexical Collocations on Students' Speaking Fluency*

Q.12. Do you think that students' good understanding of lexical collocations may influence their speaking performance?

Table 12: Lexical Collocations Influence on Students' speaking Performance

a. Yes	b. No	c. Undecided	Total
18	00	02	20
90%	0%	10%	100%

For the vast majority of teachers (90%), lexical collocations have an impact on students' speaking performance. The rest of the teachers (10%) could not decide whether lexical collocations may have an influence on students' speaking performance or not.

Q.13. If your answer is yes, which of the following speaking aspects can be remarkably influenced?

Table 13: The Influenced Speaking Aspects in Understanding Lexical Collocations

a. Accuracy	b. Fluency	c. Both	Total
01	04	15	20
05%	20%	75%	100%

As displayed in table 13, the two aspects of speaking, accuracy and fluency, were chosen by the majority of respondents (75%) to be remarkably influenced by learners' good understanding of lexical collocations. On the other hand, four teachers (20%) elucidated that a good use of lexical collocations can have an impact on students' speaking fluency, and only one teacher claimed that accuracy can be remarkably influenced by the appropriate use of lexical collocations.

Q.14.How can lexical collocations influence students' speaking fluency?

Table 14: The Influence of Lexical Collocations on Students' Speaking Fluency

a. Pauses are decreased	b. Length of pauses is reduced	c. Speed of speech is increased	a+c	b+c	a+b+c	Total
04	03	06	02	01	04	20
20%	15%	30%	10%	05%	20%	100%

According to table 14, six participants (30%) claimed that lexical collocations can increase the speed of speech, which is considered an important aspect of achieving fluency in speaking. Four teachers (20%) believed that pauses can be decreased, and three teachers (15%) believed that the length of pauses can be reduced when students appropriately use lexical collocations. On the other hand, four respondents (20%) claimed that all three aspects of speaking fluency can be influenced, while two teachers (10%) chose pauses and speed of speech. Only one teacher (05%) opted for length of pauses and speed of speech.

Q.15. Do you think that teaching lexical collocations improves EFL students' speaking fluency?

Table 15: Teachers' Attitudes towards improving EFL Students' Speaking Fluency through Lexical Collocations

a.	b. No	c. Undecided	Total
20	00	00	20
100%	00%	00%	100%

As can be deduced from table 15, all the informants (100%) confirmed that teaching lexical collocations in the speaking classes improves EFL students speaking fluency.

5. Discussion:

The analysis of the questionnaire for teachers yielded significant insights concerning their practices in teaching lexical collocations and beliefs about their role in enhancing EFL students' speaking fluency. First of all, when it comes to teaching new vocabulary, teachers mostly focus on teaching words in combination. This clearly indicates that there is a shift in learning new vocabulary, moving from a focus on words in isolation (open choice principle) to a focus on words in combination (idiom principle) since a large part of language, as claimed by Wray (2002), is composed of ready-made word combinations. Moreover, half of teacher respondents (50%), as shown in the results pertaining to question four, claimed that

collocations are the most taught type of word combinations in the speaking class in addition to idioms. Indeed, the relevant literature emphasised collocations as the most important type of word combinations (Lewis, 2000). It could be inferred from the results of questions five and six that even though all teachers (100%) agreed on the importance of collocations in the learning process, they rarely (40%) or sometimes (30%) teach them in the classroom. This clearly indicated that collocations are not sufficiently taught, and this matter could be attributed to time constraints and diversity of the syllabus content, where teachers cannot only focus on teaching collocations.

Moreover, the results from question seven indicated that the majority of teachers (85%) focus on teaching both lexical and grammatical collocations, with an extra focus on lexical collocations (the remaining 25%), since learning lexical collocations is easier than learning grammatical collocations according to Gistaki (1999).As shown in the results pertaining to question eight, teachers were aware of the importance of the "selection phase" which is considered challenging because of the huge number of collocations (Henriksen & Stoeher, 2009). Hence, teachers clearly took into consideration different criteria such as Frequency, L1/L2 differences, and learners' needs (or just combining them together) when selecting appropriate lexical collocations. For instance, nearly half the number of participants (45%) chose learners' needs to be the most important criteria to be taken into consideration, and this matter was confirmed in theory by Yorio (1980). After the selection phase, the way of teaching lexical collocations needed to be tackled as the second important phase of effective collocational teaching. More than half the number of the teachers (55%) claimed that they teach lexical collocations implicitly. This significantly contradicts the principles of teaching collocations, and it seems that teachers are not aware of the importance of the explicit teaching of collocations, as emphasised by Nesselhauf (2003), who explained that the explicit teaching raises the students' awareness and allows them to learn an acceptable number of collocations. Since teachers teach lexical collocations implicitly, students would be unaware of their importance. This was clearly shown in the results pertaining to questions ten and eleven, where the majority of teachers (75%) claimed that students are not aware of the collocations of certain words and (60%) confirmed that students often make collocational errors. Unfortunately, lexical collocations may be misused or not recognizable because of the students' unawareness of their importance as lexical entities (Ying & O'Neill, 2009) and because of the students' deficient exposure to those entities. (Woolard, 2000)

In addition, the results pertaining to questions twelve and thirteen revealed that the majority of teachers (90%) agreed on the fact that lexical collocations can greatly influence students' speaking performance. More importantly, they claimed that the impact could be clearly noticed in their speaking fluency. For instance, being fluent, as teachers claimed in question fourteen, was identified in the speaking fluency aspects. Thus, some teachers elucidated that students' speed of speech is improved (30%) and pauses are decreased (20%) because of their understanding of lexical collocations (Boers et al., 2006). All in all, students' collocational knowledge needs to be improved (through raising their awareness in the classroom) in order to enhance their communicative competence and achieve native- like fluency. (Lewis, 2000)

In a nutshell, teachers are not familiar with the appropriate teaching principles of lexical collocations, as they mostly focus on teaching them implicitly. Thus, neglecting the central principle, explicit teaching, could negatively affect students' speaking proficiency in general and their speaking fluency in particular. As agreed by teachers, EFL students' production of unconventional combinations of words leads to the production of clumsy and unnatural English, thereby impeding their ability to communicate effectively. This can be primarily attributed to two factors: firstly, a deficiency in collocations' instruction that leads to students' unawareness; and secondly, teachers' unfamiliarity with the collocational teaching principles.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated teachers' attitudes towards teaching lexical collocations to improve EFL students' speaking fluency. The analysis of the questionnaire revealed that teachers are aware of the importance of lexical collocations in teaching English as a foreign language. It also demonstrated that even though teachers hold positive attitudes towards teaching lexical collocations to improve EFL students' speaking fluency, they insufficiently teach them in the speaking classes. The study's results underscore the critical importance of devoting more attention to the instruction of lexical collocations, given their fundamental contribution to enhancing EFL students' overall language proficiency in general and their speaking fluency in particular.

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