

Exploring Thai University Students' Receptive and Productive Knowledge of Collocations across Four Academic Faculties

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to investigate the levels of receptive and productive knowledge of English collocations of Thai EFL university students and identify the types of grammatical and lexical collocations reported as most and least known by the students. The participants were 286 third-year regular students affiliated with four academic faculties at a university in northeastern Thailand, in the academic year 2018. The participants' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations was measured through an acceptability judgment test and the collocation productive test. The results revealed that the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations was at a low level; their receptive and productive collocation knowledge was significantly different at a .05 level. At the receptive level, their most known grammatical and lexical collocations were verb + preposition and verb + noun respectively. At the productive level, adjective + preposition and verb + noun were their most known grammatical and lexical collocations respectively. The findings highlighted the growing trend of world-wide English learners displaying a low level of collocation knowledge and implied urgent need of explicit instruction of collocations for EFL learners with an emphasis on the easier-to-understand collocation types.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, EFL learners' acquisition of English collocations has been the subject of extensive research. Research shows that collocation errors mostly occur as a consequence of creation of unacceptable items rather than non-understandable ones (Begagic, 2014). When non-native speakers encounter a new collocation, they are able to arrive at its meaning correctly, but when they are to get a certain concept across, they tend to use sequences unacceptable in the target language. There is no, therefore, denying that the key to fluency lies in collocation. Grammatical and lexical collocations have, therefore, been vehemently suggested by linguists and language researchers (Lewis, 2000; Dokchandra, 2015; Rao, 2018) as the most effective aspects of language learning and teaching EFL teachers and learners alike need to uphold in the course of their English teaching and learning.

Hill (2000) posits that lack of collocation competence is general weakness found in students' oral and written performances, claiming that students who have good ideas are often given low marks because of ignorance of the four or five most important collocates of a key word that is the focal point of their essays. With little or no knowledge of the collocations for expressing their ideas precisely, students

struggle with longer utterances, adding to the likelihood of even more errors. Consequently, it can be stated that learning collocations will provide students with another way of saying something, and greatly enhance their language performance.

Statement of the Problem

From the researcher's standpoint, the methods of teaching English to Thai EFL students in general are still unchanged. That is to say, most of the pedagogies employed by the teachers in this country are based on syntactic principles. They overemphasize the grammatical aspects of English, but do not pay much attention to lexical aspects in chunks. Even though they, at times, seem to acknowledge the importance of vocabulary and single out some vocabulary items to teach, they teach the items in a traditional manner—presenting the items along with their meanings in the native language followed by example sentences. Abundant YouTube video clips in which Thai teachers of English teach vocabulary in this style testify to this fact. The learners, therefore, may be able to produce grammatically correct sentences, but their sentences are peppered with mistakes pertaining to word combinations. The effect of an emphasis

on drills or repetition of individual words rather than set phrases and collocations is that Thai EFL learners do not express themselves in English eloquently because their language use is not natural-sounding. In Thailand, studies on the learning and teaching of English collocations are not abundant. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous research has been conducted to examine Thai university EFL students' collocation knowledge at the receptive and productive levels in relation to their major fields of study. Moreover, the findings about the types of collocations—grammatical and lexical—that prove difficult or easy to Thai university EFL students are still far from being generalized. The present investigation was therefore aimed at filling up this gap.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is in relevance to collocation knowledge of Thai university EFL students for certain reasons. To begin with, in Thailand studies on the learning and teaching of English collocations are not abundant. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous research has been conducted to examine Thai university EFL students' collocation knowledge at the receptive and productive levels in relation to their academic disciplines. Second, collocation competence is a must for communicative competence. Next, collocations must be taken as an indispensable part of every stage of the students' academic path. Finally, EFL learners should know around 2,000 most commonly used English words including their collocates. Hence, the results of this study may help language teachers and curriculum designers to identify areas of difficulty and account for errors and problems in learning collocations.

Aims of the Study

The aims of the present study were fourfold: 1) to investigate the students' collocation knowledge at the receptive and productive levels; 2) to examine if the students were significantly different in their knowledge and the two categories of grammatical and lexical collocations; 3) to determine the category of collocations reported as being most and least known by the students; and 4) to examine if there was a relationship between the students' fields of study and their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. Thus, the following questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations like?
2. Are the participants significantly different in terms of their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations as well as the lexical and grammatical types of collocations?
3. Concerning the sub-categories of grammatical and lexical collocations, which category do the participants know the most and which one the least?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the participant's fields of study and their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Receptive and Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

Receptive vocabulary knowledge refers to the capacity to understand a word upon hearing or seeing it, while productive knowledge is the knowledge of producing a word when one writes or speaks. In general, words are understood receptively in the first place, and only after intentional or incidental learning they become accessible for effective use. Therefore, vocabulary knowledge is a continuum on which a word grows from receptive to productive status. In this study, receptive knowledge is the ability to choose a correct collocate from among the options provided that form a correct collocation and productive knowledge is the ability to fill in the blanks with an appropriate collocate which forms the correct collocation.

Two Broad Types of Collocations

Broadly speaking, there are two well-accepted types of collocations –grammatical collocations and lexical collocations (Benson, et al. 2010). Grammatical collocations are made up of the main word (a noun, an adjective, a verb) followed by a preposition or to + infinitive or that-clause. They are also characterized by 8 basic sub-categories:

G1= noun + preposition e.g. blockade against, apathy towards

G2= noun + to-infinitive e.g. He was a fool to do it., They felt a need to do it.

G3= noun + that-clause e.g. We reached an agreement that she would represent us in court., He took an oath that he would do his duty.

G4= preposition + noun e.g. by accident, in agony

G5= adjective + preposition e.g. fond of children, hungry for news

G6= adjective + to-infinitive e.g. it was necessary to work, it's nice to be here

G7= adjective + that-clause e.g. she was afraid that she would fail, it was imperative that I be here

G8= 19 different verb patterns in English e.g. verb + to-infinitive (they began to speak), verb + bare infinitive (we must work) and others.

Lexical collocations consist of two or more content words, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. No prepositions, infinitives or related clauses are contained in this category. Typical examples of lexical collocations are as follows:

Adjective + noun	: sour milk, robust economy
verb + noun	: conduct research, do business
noun + verb	: dust accumulates, news breaks
adverb + adjective	: mentally disabled, newly built
verb + adverb	: move freely, rise sharply
adverb + verb	: proudly present, highly recommend

Empirical Past Research

Extensive research has been conducted on the English learners' knowledge of lexical collocations (Begagic, 2014;

Talakoob & Koosha, 2017; Ei-Dakhs, 2015; Torabian, Maros & Subakir, 2014) and a combination of grammatical and lexical collocations (Alsakran, 2011; Shehata, 2008; Bagci, 2014; Banboua, 2016). It seems fairly conclusive from most research that the learners' knowledge of collocations at both receptive and productive levels is poor to moderate (Abdullah, Ghani, & See, 2015; Torabian, Moaros & Subakir, 2014; Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2013).

However, previous studies are still conflicting in terms of the sub-categories of collocations that pose difficulty to the learners and the level of knowledge at which the learners are better. Some studies confirmed that the verb + noun collocation poses less difficulty to the learners than the other patterns such as adjective + noun (Alsakran, 2011; Begagic, 2014; Bueraheng, 2014; Miscin, 2012, 2015). Other studies revealed that the verb + noun pattern was not the most problematic collocation for the students, but other lexical collocation patterns such as noun + noun (Detdamrongprecha, 2014; Boudribila, 2018) and adjective + adverb (Ahmed, 2012). Chorbwhan and McLellan (2016) also investigated Thai learners' English collocation knowledge, involving 39 Patani Malay and 39 southern Thai speakers as the participants who were encouraged to perform gap filling and collocation judgment tests. The collocation patterns under investigation were lexical (verb + noun and adjective + noun) and grammatical (verb + preposition). It was found that the participants performed moderately in the receptive and productive tests, though their productive test performance was slightly better. The two groups' grammatical collocation knowledge (verb + preposition) was better than the lexical collocation one. Likewise, Dokchandra (2019) found that Thai university EFL learners in their different years of study had a moderate level of collocation competence and perceived collocations as fairly difficult with the idiomatic expressions as the most difficult category.

Studies are still contentious as to whether the learners are better at the receptive or productive knowledge of collocations. Begagic (2014) reported better performance in the receptive but not the productive knowledge of lexical collocation pattern under investigation. Ahmed (2012) Bueraheng (2013), Talakoob and Koosha (2017) Torabian, Maros, and Subakir (2014) similarly found in their studies that the participants performed much better at the receptive level of lexical collocation. Maneewan (2017) exploring the level of collocation competence and the five patterns of collocation errors of Thai EFL learners found that their collocation competence was at a moderate level, and the verb + noun was the most problematic pattern for them.

Research shows that educational environment plays an important role during the process of learning collocations. Previous research (e.g. Begagic, 2014) confirmed that first-year and fourth-year students were significantly different in terms of the collocation knowledge. That is, the students in their advanced year of studies get more exposed to collocations in the target language than their counterparts in the initial study year, i.e. first year, hence their better performance in a collocation test. The learners' environment in terms of their programs of study, i.e. international program and English major program was also shown to influence the learners' acquisition of collocations (Alsakran, 2011).

Scant research is devoted to solely study the grammatical collocation knowledge of the English learners. Farrokh and Mahmoodzadeh (2012) drew on Benson's et al (2010) classification of grammatical collocations to determine Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of three types of collocations of gerund: verb +v-ing, verb (trans) + object + v-ing, and verb (trans) + poss + gerund. He found that the students (high proficiency and low proficiency groups) had a low level of knowledge of grammatical collocations pertaining to the verb + object + v-ing and verb + poss + gerund. Lack of enough exposure to the target language and systematic teaching of collocations was attributed to the students' weakness in this regard.

Studies on the receptive and productive knowledge of collocations also focused on EFL students' year of study and specific collocation types. Begagic (2014) investigated the receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations among first and fourth year students in Zenica, Bosnia, focusing on the verb + noun, adjective + noun, and verb + adverb patterns, and the results revealed the poor collocation knowledge of the students, especially the verb + adverb was found to be the most difficult lexical collocation type for the participants. Bueraheng (2014) also investigated the receptive and productive knowledge of lexical collocations (verb + noun, adjective + noun) of fourth-year regular English major students and international program students, and found the fair knowledge of collocations where the receptive one was better than the productive one. Other researchers (e.g. Torabian, Maros, & Subakir, 2014) found the participants' poor collocation knowledge despite their receptive collocation knowledge being much better than the productive one in the lexical collocations (noun + noun, and adjective + noun, etc.).

Boudribila, Azalmad, and EL Khadiri (2018) investigated the productive knowledge of collocations of the third-year students from seven universities in Morocco focusing on the adjective + noun collocation type. The results indicated that all the 464 students who did the test were incompetent in the use of the adjective + noun collocation.

Regarding the relationship between Thai university EFL students' knowledge of collocations at the receptive and productive levels and their academic faculties, no research has been found, hence the launch of the present investigation to fill this gap.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The present study adopted a survey research design to examine the collocation knowledge of the third-year students at the receptive and productive levels.

Participants

Initially, the participants were 300 third-year students affiliated with four academic faculties—Liberal Arts and Management Science (LAM), Science and Engineering (SE), Natural resources and agro-Industry (NRA), and Public Health (PH)—at a campus of Kasetsart University, in northeastern Thailand, in the academic year 2018. They were selected based on a

quota-sampling method as follows: 100 students from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science (LAM); 100 students from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (SE); 50 students from the Faculty of Natural resources and agro-Industry (NRA); and 50 students from the Faculty of Public Health (PH). In the course of the data analysis, 14 questionnaires were not included for their incomplete answers. Therefore, the exact number of the participants in the present study was 286.

Instruments

To ensure the participant's general English proficiency was established, Cambridge English Placement Test was used. The test was offered free online at www.cambridgeenglish.org/ and comprised 25 multiple-choice items. For the purpose of the present study, the test was downloaded and prepared as a paper-pencil format so that it would be convenient to administer to the participants.

The participant's receptive knowledge of collocation was measured by a receptive test of collocations developed by the researcher. The test contained 60 items of three choices – a, b, and c, requiring the identification of correct collocates. Two major types of collocations were tested—grammatical and lexical. The former included 40 items focusing on the categories: noun + preposition, adjective + preposition, verb + preposition, and other verb structures. The latter comprised 20 items focusing on the verb + noun and adjective + noun lexical collocations.

To measure the participants' productive knowledge of collocation, a productive collocation test, also developed by the researcher, was used. Similarly, the test contained 60 items and the same collocation types as in the receptive test were targeted. However, the items were of a fill-in-the-blank format with the initial letters given as clues only for the lexical collocations. No initial letter was provided for grammatical collocations. The participants had to fill in the blank with one preposition that crossed their mind. The reliability indexes of the two tests were calculated using Cronbach's alpha and were found highly reliable (.87 for the receptive test and .91 for the productive test, respectively).

The Target Collocations

The collocations that are chosen for this study are in the first 1,000 most commonly used words in spoken and written English as listed by Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online and Longman Collocations Dictionary. EFL university students are supposed to know these words because they are high-frequency words. Moreover, some previous research has shown that grammatical collocations are easier than lexical collocations, and therefore the students in this study stand the chance of gaining more familiarity with these collocation types, hence diminishing the guessing possibility on their part.

Procedure

The three hundred third-year students from the four faculties at CCKU were administered the Cambridge Placement Test. The scoring rubrics of the test indicated that the participants,

on average, were at the A2 level of general English, indicating that they were appropriate for taking part in the study because they were deemed a homogeneous group. Then, the participants were administered two tests of collocations – receptive and productive. After that, the gained scores were analyzed using SPSS.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What is participants' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations like?

To answer this question, two tests of collocations were administered to the participants and the results revealed that, on the whole, the participants' collocation knowledge was low, both at the receptive and productive levels, because they barely managed to gain even half of the total score (60) of the tests (receptive and productive). Out of 60, the lowest score gained was 13, while the highest score was 36, and the average score for the receptive collocation knowledge was 25.48. The participants' productive knowledge of collocations was, on average, 26.63, slightly higher than their receptive collocation knowledge. Table 1 below illustrates this finding.

In detail, it was found that the science and engineering (SE) students gained the highest score (39 out of 60) on the productive collocation test and the lowest score (32 out of 60) was gained by the public health (PH) students. The liberal arts and management (LAM) students gained 37 scores on average, and the natural resources and agro-industry (NRA) students generally gained 33 scores respectively. On the receptive aspect, the highest score went to the LAM students (27.79) followed by the SE students (24.99), the NRA students (24.87) and the PH students (22.13) respectively.

Research question 2: Are the participants significantly different in terms of their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations as well as the lexical and grammatical types of collocations?

The results of One-way ANOVA see Table 2 revealed that the participants were significantly different ($F(3, 282) = 23.378, p = .000$) in their receptive knowledge of collo-

Table 1. The participants' receptive and productive collocation knowledge (n=286)

Collocation	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Receptive	13	36	25.48	4.53
productive	11	39	26.63	4.57

Table 2. ANOVA results of the participants' receptive knowledge of collocations (n=286)

Faculty	Mean	Faculty	SE	NRA	PH
LAM	27.96	-	2.97*	3.09*	5.84*
SE	24.98	-2.97*	-	.12	2.86*
NRA	24.86	-3.09*	-.12	-	2.74*
PH	22.12	-5.84*	-2.86*	-2.74*	-

*P<.05

cations. They were also significantly different ($F(3, 282) = 6.491, p=.000$) in terms of their productive knowledge of collocations (see Table 3).

The Scheffe's post-hoc test revealed that the Liberal Arts and Management (LAM) students' receptive collocation knowledge was significantly different ($p<.05$) from that of the students from the three other faculties. The Science and Engineering (SE) students' receptive collocation knowledge was not significantly different from that of the Natural Resources and Agro-industry (NRA) students, but significantly different ($p<.05$) from that of the Public Health (PH) students. The receptive collocation knowledge of the PH students was significantly different ($p<.05$) from that of the students from the other three faculties.

In terms of their productive collocation knowledge, the Scheffe's post-hoc test showed that the LAM students' productive knowledge of collocations was significantly different ($p<.05$) from that of the PH students, but was not significantly different from the other students'. The SE students' productive knowledge of collocations was not significantly different from that of the NRA students, but significantly different ($p<.05$) from that of the PH students. Table 3 shows the results in detail.

In terms of the receptive knowledge of the grammatical collocations, it was found that the participants were significantly different ($F(3, 282)=8.181, p=0.000$). Likewise, their receptive knowledge of the lexical collocations was significantly different ($F(3, 282)=24.579, p=0.000$). In terms of the productive knowledge, the participants were significantly different in the grammatical collocations ($F(3, 282)=3.186, p=0.024$) and the lexical collocations ($F(3, 382)=7.374, p=0.000$). From the one-way ANOVA results, it can be concluded that the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of both grammatical and lexical collocations was significantly different at the .05 level.

In greater detail, it was found that the LAM students were significantly different ($p<.05$) from the PH students regarding the productive knowledge of grammatical collocations. No significant difference was found among the rest of the students. Regarding the productive knowledge of lexical collocations, the LAM students were also significantly different ($p<.05$) from the PH students. And the SE students were also significantly different ($p<.05$) from the PH students. The NRA students were significantly different from the rest of the students pertaining to the productive knowledge of lexical collocations. Table 4 indicates the detail delineated above.

Research question 3: Concerning the sub-categories of grammatical and lexical collocations, which category do the participants know the most and which one the least?

Table 3. ANOVA results of the participants' productive knowledge of collocations (n = 286)

Faculty	Mean	LAM	SE	NRA	PH
LAM	27.41	-	-.021	1.75	2.93*
SE	27.42	.021	-	1.77	2.943*
NRA	25.65	-1.758	-1.770	-	1.173
PH	24.47	-2.931*	-2.943*	-1.173	-

* $p<.05$

Regarding the grammatical collocations, as indicated in Table 5, the participants had the most receptive knowledge of the Verb-preposition collocation and the least receptive knowledge of the Noun-preposition collocation. However, regarding lexical collocations, the participants were almost the same in terms of their most and least receptive knowledge. Concerning the most and least productive knowledge of collocation sub-categories (Consult Table 6), the participants' most knowledge was Verb-Preposition, while the category of Other Verb Structures was their least known sub-category. On the subject of lexical collocation sub-category, their most productive knowledge was Adjective-Noun, and they knew Verb-Noun the least.

Research question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the participants' fields of study and their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations? To answer this question, a Chi-square test was run and the results indicated that in terms of the receptive knowledge of collocations, there was a significant relationship at the .05 level (Chi-square = 104.172, sig.=.001). However, in terms of the productive knowledge of collocations, no significant relationship was found among the participants (Chi-square = 90.760, sig. = .215). Table 7 and 8 showcase the findings.

DISCUSSION

The findings in the present study pertaining to the participants' overall receptive and productive knowledge of collocations clearly indicated that their knowledge in this domain is poor. The findings are not unexpected especially when taking account of previous studies (e.g. Begagic, 2014; Detdamrongprecha, 2014; Yumanee & Phoocharoen-sil, 2013; Abdullah, Ghani, & See, 2015; Nguyen, & Webb, 2016) which found that EFL learners had poor knowledge of English collocations at both the receptive and productive levels. The case of non-English major students with poor knowledge of collocations seems common especially when it comes to the fact that even English major students were also found to have only a moderate level of collocational competence (Dokchandra, 2019). A plausible explanation for the students' poor knowledge of collocations could be that they lack exposure to real English and do not receive systematic teaching of collocations. Exposure to authentic English increases the chance for the learners to notice collocations in use. All the participants in this study were third-year non-English major students who had passed at least 3 fundamental English courses as required by the university. However, taking account of the course materials (New Inter-change Series 1, 2, and 3) they had used, it was obviously seen that the materials were not rich in collocations and the way the course content was presented was not compatible with the way collocations should be taught.

With regard to the significant difference in the students' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations, their different academic faculties, or disciplines to be precise, could be attributed to as a factor. By and large, the LAM students seemed to performed better than the students from other faculties due partly to the fact that the students in this field (liberal arts and management) are more exposed to language

Table 4. ANOVA results of the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of grammatical and lexical collocations (n=286)

Types of collocations	Faculty	Faculty	Mean difference(I-J)	Sig.
Grammatical collocations	LAM	SE	.54693	.706
		NRA	1.17849	.244
		PH	1.60965*	.047
	SE	LAM	-.54693	.706
		NRA	.63156	.750
		PH	1.06271	.319
	NRA	LAM	-1.17849	.244
		SE	-.63156	.750
		PH	.43116	.935
	PH	LAM	-1.60965*	.047
		SE	-1.06271	.319
		NRA	-.43116	.935
Lexical collocations	LAM	SE	-.55909	.450
		NRA	.57986	.606
		PH	1.32171*	.021
	SE	LAM	.55909	.450
		NRA	1.13895	.069
		PH	1.88080*	.000
	NRA	LAM	-.57986	.606
		SE	-1.13895	.069
		NRA	.74185	.516
	PH	LAM	-1.32171*	.021
		SE	-1.88080*	.000
		NRA	-.74185	.516

Table 5. The participants' receptive knowledge of collocations by sub-categories (n=286)

Collocation sub-category	Max	Min	Mean	S.D.
Grammatical				
Noun - Preposition	.00	10.00	3.92	2.14
Adjective - Preposition	.00	9.00	3.94	1.65
Verb - Preposition	1.00	9.00	4.69	1.56
Other verb structures	1.00	8.00	4.42	1.58
Lexical				
Verb - Noun	.00	8.00	4.25	1.66
Adjective - Noun	1.00	9.00	4.23	1.49

Table 6. The participant's productive knowledge of collocations by sub-categories (n=286)

Collocation sub-category	Max	Min	Mean	S.D.
Grammatical				
Noun - Preposition	.00	8.00	4.25	1.52
Adjective - Preposition	1.00	8.00	4.39	1.68
Verb - Preposition	.00	8.00	4.79	1.61
Other verb structures	1.00	8.00	3.94	1.55
lexical				
Verb - Noun	1.00	8.00	4.11	1.44
Adjective-Noun	.00	9.00	4.64	1.69

Table 7. Chi-square test results of the relationship between the participants' receptive knowledge of collocations and their fields of study

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	104.172 ^a	63	.001
Likelihood ratio	118.833	63	.000
Linear-by-linear association	51.352	1	.000
N of valid cases	286		

Table 8. Chi-square test results of the relationship between the participants' productive knowledge of collocation and their fields of study

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	90.760 ^a	81	.215
Likelihood ratio	94.140	81	.151
Linear-by-linear association	15.636	1	.000
N of valid cases	286		

than the rest of the students, especially the PH students whose study courses do not require as much reading as those of the LAM ones. Moreover, some LAM courses are also conducted

in entire English, hence the students' more opportunity to get themselves exposed to the English language. The finding was in line with Pisitsenakul's (2019) study which implied that the students in business administration and liberal arts were better users of grammatical collocations than the students from other disciplines. Bueraheng (2014) also confirmed EFL learners' significant enhancement of collocation knowledge as a result of persistent exposure to the English language.

As for the sub-types of collocations the participants knew the most and the least, the findings in this study both supported and contrasted with previous research. Verb + preposition was the sub-type of grammatical collocations reported as best known at the receptive and productive levels by the participants in this study. Talakooop and Koosha (2017) also found that Iranian EFL learners had quite higher receptive knowledge of the verb + preposition collocation type. Sri-dhanyarat (2018) also reported that verb + preposition was the least difficult grammatical collocation type showcased by Thai EFL learners. However, the present study revealed a new finding regarding the sub-type of grammatical collocations especially at the productive level; that is, the grammatical collocation sub-type that posed greater difficulties for Thai (and possibly non-Thai) EFL students was the other verb structures. This sub-type of grammatical collocations is marked by a domain word (verb, noun, or adjective followed by a grammatical structure like *that clause* or *to infinitive*).

The lexical collocation sub-type reported as most known by the participants was adjective + noun and the least known one was verb + noun. The findings here are in line with other researchers' (Begagic, 2014; Bueraheng & Lao-hawiriyanon, 2014; Detdamrongpreecha, 2014) findings which reported EFL learners' better productive knowledge of the adjective + noun collocation than the verb + noun collocation. This conclusion was recently confirmed by Mirsalari, Bazvand and Khoram (2019) whose study showed that the verb + noun collocation pattern exerted more degrees of difficulty on the learners than the adjective + noun. However, a closer look at the participants' receptive knowledge (25.48) and productive knowledge (26.63) mean scores reveal only a scant difference of 1.15 scores and this shows that, as a matter of fact, the participants' collocation knowledge at both levels does not make a real difference, confirming the pressing concern that Thai EFL university students are wanting in English collocations.

The final point of discussion is a significant relationship found between the students' fields of study and their receptive knowledge of collocations. The results of the present investigation showed that the public health (PH) students were the weakest in terms of the receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. No previous research can be found to help directly explain why the science-related students in this study had the lowest receptive knowledge of collocations. However, the role of exposure to language and employment of vocabulary learning strategies may count in this regard. From the researcher's observation, the PH students are generally less involved in language learning activities than the students in other fields because of their study programs that

are oriented towards hands-on experience. The PH students, therefore, get less exposure to English, in both reading and listening, as compared to the liberal arts students. As found in Niratsai's (2014) study, the students of the hands-on experience oriented field of study, like the nursing students, were of the lowest vocabulary ability compared to the students in other fields of study. The findings in the present study, in consistent with Alsakran (2011) in that the learners' environment in terms of their programs of study had an influence on their acquisition of collocations, clearly indicate the important role that educational environment plays in contributing to EFL university students' knowledge and competence in English collocations.

CONCLUSION

This article reports on Thai university EFL students' receptive and productive knowledge of English collocations, the types of grammatical and lexical collocations the students reported as being most and least known, the difference in the students' knowledge of collocations and collocation types, as well as the relationship between the students' fields of study and collocation knowledge. To this end, 286 third-year regular students a university in the northeastern province of Sakon Nakhon, Thailand, were administered an acceptability judgment test and a collocation productive test to measure their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. On the whole, it was found that the students' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations was at a low level. The students' knowledge was significantly different at a .05 level. At the receptive level the students' most known collocation types were Verb + Preposition (grammatical) and Verb + Noun (lexical), respectively, while their least known collocation types were Noun + Preposition (grammatical) and Adjective + Noun (lexical), respectively. At the productive level, the students' most known collocation types were Adjective + Preposition (grammatical) and Verb + Noun (lexical) respectively, while their least known collocation types were Verb + Preposition (grammatical) and Adjective + Noun (lexical), respectively. There was a significant relationship between the students receptive knowledge of collocations and their fields of study, but at the productive level, no significant relationship was found. The findings were consistent with previous studies and highlighted a common phenomenon of a low level of collocation knowledge among EFL learners across the globe, and this was ascribed to the learners' lack of exposure to authentic English and systematic instruction on collocations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Implications

1. University EFL students should be instructed English collocations so that their enhanced collocation knowledge would benefit them in the reading and writing of English, particularly when taking account of the fact that most of modern-day English tests incorporate both

reading and writing where collocations are abundantly used.

2. In teaching collocations to EFL students, the teachers should draw on such effective technology-assisted pedagogies as web-based corpus because these teaching techniques expose the learners to authentic language and they are not time-consuming. Moreover, explicit instruction of collocations can also be an option.
3. For the instruction of collocations for low to intermediate proficiency learners, focus should be on easy-to-understand collocations especially in Verb + Noun lexical collocation type. However, for high-proficiency learners, the Verb + preposition grammatical collocations should be emphasized.

For Further Research

During the course of the current study, the need for further studies in the following areas became apparent:

1. Exploring the relationship between EFL students' year of study and their receptive and productive collocation knowledge.
2. Exploring the relationship between receptive and productive collocation knowledge in relation to the students' academic faculties especially focusing on the Verb + Noun collocation type.
3. Exploring the receptive and productive collocation knowledge of Thai EFL students in a broader scale; that is at a national level, for instance, in order that a broader perspective regarding this line of research is gained.

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