

## Testing Collocational Knowledge of Yemeni EFL University Students at Universiti Utara Malaysia

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### Abstract

It is commonly acknowledged that collocations play an important role in the field of ESL/EFL acquisition. Previous seminal studies have reported students' development of collocational knowledge and use of collocations regardless the difficulties students may encounter in learning collocations, specifically, Arab students. The present study focuses on students' collocational knowledge, particularly, Yemeni EFL university students who were attending an Intensive English Course (IEC) at UUM/Malaysia. The data was collected from only five Yemeni students (two postgraduate and three undergraduate). Those were the only Yemeni students who were attending the IEC. All of the participants were male students. The participants' collocational knowledge was tested by a Multiple-choice Collocational Test (MCT). The results of the statistical analysis revealed that participants' collocational knowledge was less than the expected. Moreover, the results concluded that students' lack of knowledge of collocations was due to the fact that collocations were not of a focus in teaching English as a foreign language in schools. The study also ended up with recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** collocational knowledge, collocations, EFL students, English as a foreign language

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## Introduction

Collocations play a significant role in the learning process of a second or a foreign language (Mohammed, 2015; Khodadady & Shamsaee, 2012; Wood, 2007). Therefore, they are increasingly becoming a more essential element in learning and in using language as there are convergent evidences that collocations may sustain students' lexicon (Jackendoff, 1995; Melčuk, 1995). The importance of learning word combinations such as collocations are obviously highlighted by studies that emphasized they are easily taught and retrieved by learners (Wray, 2002). Moreover, the relationship between components of the collocational knowledge and the use of collocations is regarded as an important topic among linguists to improve students' language abilities (Granger & Meunier, 2008; Fellbaum, 2007; Carter, 2004; Wray, 2002; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992).

## Research Objectives

To examine how well the Yemeni EFL university students' collocational knowledge, *who are attending an Intensive English Course at UUM*, increases their ability to collocate words.

## Research Question

How well does the Yemeni EFL university students' collocational knowledge, *who are attending an Intensive English Course at UUM*, increase their ability to collocate words?

## Significance of the Study

In Yemen, studies on the teaching and learning of vocabulary are very fewer (Al-Sohbani, 2013; Bataineh et al., 2008; Ali, 2007), collocations in particular. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there are no previous studies that have been conducted investigating university Yemeni EFL students' collocational knowledge and their ability to collocate words appropriately, specifically, students who are attending their higher studies abroad in an EFL setting such as in Malaysia.

## Literature Review

In general, linguists have not agreed on a common description of what a collocation entails (Bartsch, 2004). McIntosh et al, (2009) define collocations as being "the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing" (p. v). Fontenelle (1998) asserts that "there does not seem to be any clear-cut, non-controversial definition of the term collocation" (p. 191). In order to provide a clearer clarification of the concept, there is a need for a common distinction, particularly taking into consideration Sinclair's (1991) distinction between the *open-choice principle* and the *idiom principle*. Sinclair (1991) proposes these two principles that a speaker alternates when producing language. These two principles are incorporating the usage of complex items into language production. The *open-choice principle* corresponds to the traditional way of looking at language production, that single lexical items are combined using a restricted set of syntactic rules, whereas the *idiom principle* accounts for the usage of more complex items. According to Sinclair (1991), the *open-choice principle* (*a terminological tendency*) refers to "a way of seeing language text as the result of a very large number of complex choices. At each point where a unit is completed (a word or phrase or clause), a large range of choice opens up and the only restraint is grammaticalness" (p. 109). The *idiom principle* (*the phraseological tendency*), on the other hand, refers to "the principle of idiom is that a language user has available to him/her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases

that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 110).

### ***Collocations Facilitate Language Use***

Hymes’s (1972) argumentation on communicative competence involves knowing not only what it is possible to be said, but also what is most likely to be said. Pawley and Syder (1983) call this latter facet as competence native-like selection. Moreover, they note that native speakers “do not exercise the creative potential of syntactic rules to anything like their full extent - if they did do so they would not be accepted as exhibiting native-like control of the language” (Pawley & Syder, 1983, p. 193). Choosing the most natural option from a wide range of grammatically possible sentences in a given situation will require more than knowledge of syntax. Lewis (2008) argues that a part of the extra knowledge that required is to store of what he calls *lexical phrases* “in general, the more de-lexicalised a word is, and the wider its collocational range, the more important it is to meet, acquire and record it in a collocation or expression” (Lewis, 2008, p. 48) where he refers to strings of language which are completely or partially pre-specified, recognized as standard expressions. However, Kjellmer (1990), who looks broadly at the concept of high frequency collocation, believes that lexical phrases have a much more central role in oral production. He argues that phrases are naturally existed in native language emphasizing that a large part of native speakers’ vocabulary is systematized in terms of string words (*e.g. collocations*). Moreover, he claims that in producing discourses, speakers “very largely make use of chunks of prefabricated matter” (Kjellmer, 1990, p. 123). Kjellmer (1990) stresses the need for “a new approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages” (p. 125) in which the emphasis shifts from individual words to word combination.

### ***Collocations Promote Proficiency***

Researchers have suggested that native use of collocations may be partly motivated by what Sinclair (1987) calls “a natural tendency to economy of effort” (p. 320). Calling on memorized collocations is to be less cognitively to demanding constructing new utterances from scratch, and so it is believed that words taught in combination will assist speakers to familiarize with the demands of a real-time language production and comprehension while maintaining proficiency (Kuiper, 2004; Sung, 2003). Others such as Ellis (2001), Newell (1990) and Anderson (1983), suggest that *chunking* may be a key to automatic skill performance. Gobet and Lane (2012) argue that the capacity of short-term memory is not tied to the amount of information in a message, but to the number of *chunks* of information. By recoding more simple items into more complex phrases, we can increase the amount of information our memory handles. Handl (2008) argues that collocations play a key role in the acquisition process, while Ellis (2001) suggests that the same principle might lie behind other types of word combinations as well. Therefore, two or more words that frequently co-occur are recoded as a collocation (O’Dell & McCarthy, 2010) and henceforth treated as a single entity. Lewis (2000) defines collocations as “two or more words that tend to occur together” (p. 73). Therefore, it is important to note that Lewis’s (2000) definition is also coinciding with O’Dell and McCarthy’s (2008) position that collocations are “a combination of two or more words which frequently occur together” (p. 4) and that of Biber’s et al, (2002) concept that collocations are “sequence of three or four words” (p. 444). This process is recursive, with collocations themselves subsequently available for combination into still larger units, enabling language users to encode progressively greater amounts of information which increase the efficiency of communication (Ellis, 2001).

### Acquisition of Collocations among Arab Students

Arab students of English are acknowledged to have difficulties with the acquisition of English lexical collocations (Al-Zahrani, 1998). For example, Hussein (1990) attributes the poor collocational knowledge or competence to different factors such as: students' unfamiliarity with English collocational structure and negative transfer from L1 into English. Other studies such as Farghal and Obiedat, (1995), Al-Zahrani (1998) and Shehata (2008) have shown that the common sources of collocational errors among Arab students are related to the overgeneralization and shortage of collocational knowledge among Arab students. Given that most Arabic-speaking students have fewer opportunities to encounter the English language in their daily input, including Yemeni students. Therefore, studies emphasized that Arab students alternatively resort to their L1 whenever they lack the English collocational knowledge (El-Banna et al., 2014; Al-Zahrani, 1998; Hussein, 1990). Indeed, Arab students typically find it difficult when learning collocations (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995) given that they are more familiarized to learn words individually in classrooms rather than in phrases (Shehata, 2008). In a study aimed at finding the relationship between students' collocational knowledge and language proficiency, Al-Zahrani (1998) examines the relationship between Saudi students' knowledge of lexical collocations and their general language proficiency. The results showed that there was a positive "relationship between students' language proficiency and their knowledge of lexical collocations" (Al-Zahrani, 1998, p. 129). In other words, highly proficient English students had high collocational knowledge and low proficient students had low knowledge of collocations. In addition, Al-Zahrani (1998) found that there were significant difficulties in students' knowledge of lexical collocations when he compared their academic levels. Among such difficulties were those culturally loaded collocations which do not have Arabic equivalents. Al-Zahrani (1998) asserts that this "difficulty was due to semantic factors" (p. 135). In a related work, Hussein (1990) conducts an experimental study to measure the collocational knowledge of Jordanian EFL Arabic-speaking students to collocate words correctly in English. The results showed that students' collocational knowledge was low and that their performance was not satisfactory in light of the "low rate of collocations answered correctly" (Hussein, 1990, p. 129). Hussein (1990) finds out that overgeneralization was one of the communication strategies that students adopted in their attempt to reduce the syntactic and lexical aspects of the language to another easier system that is simple and more regular. Moreover, Hussein (1990) also indicates that some of the correct answers were due to the students' preference to transfer collocations from Arabic L1 to L2 when they were not sure of the correct L2 collocational forms because of their lack of awareness of the collocational restrictions. Therefore, the lack of collocational competence negatively impacted students' performance to gain proficiency.

In their study, Farghal and Obiedat (1995) test students' knowledge of 22 common English collocations. The results revealed that the subjects' knowledge of collocations was deficient than it was earlier expected. Furthermore, since the subjects lack the collocational knowledge, they resorted to lexical simplification strategies like synonymy, paraphrasing, avoidance and transfer to avoid the missing words. Farghal and Obiedat (1995) conclude that lexical collocations must be given a higher priority in language instructions due to their crucial importance in communication and to raise students' awareness of the existence of the nature of the collocations. In studying the extent to which Arab students of English can use English collocations properly, Zughoul and Abdul-Fattah (2003) investigate three dimensions of

collocational knowledge: the use of collocations as an indicator of language proficiency, the strategies Arab students of English use to produce proper collocations and, how equivalent Arabic and English words combine differently. The results revealed that even advanced level students use distinct communicative strategies when translating the collocation *khasara* into English. Twelve distinct communicative strategies were identified such as avoidance, paraphrasing, literal translation, assumed synonymity, overgeneralizations, substitutions and imitation of literary style (Zughoul & Hussein, 2001). Zughoul and Abdul-Fattah (2003) conclude that even advanced L1 Arabic students of English “still have difficulty with English collocational sequences” (p. 14). Nonetheless, they suggest more studies focusing on the phenomenon of collocations at both school and university levels need to be conducted. Al-Amro (2006) measures the lexical and grammatical collocations and the productive and receptive collocational knowledge of Saudi advanced English male students. The results showed that students lack the collocational knowledge and that such a lack can be clearly manifested in their poor performance on the collocational test. The data also revealed a relationship between students’ receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. However, students performed better on the productive test than on the receptive test, a finding that was paradoxical regarding the evidence that receptive knowledge was typically much broader than productive knowledge. Al-Amro (2006) attributes it to the fact that the target collocations in the receptive test were of lower frequency than the productive test. Moreover, Al-Amro (2006) reports that there was no significant correlation between the students’ overall collocational knowledge and their actual collocational usage. In other words, the collocational knowledge from the collocational test did not correlate with the use of collocations in the essay writing task. Al-Amro (2006) concludes that EFL Arab students’ lack of collocational use was the direct result of neglecting of Lewis’s (1993) *The Lexical Approach* in teaching English as a foreign language.

Shehata (2008) examines the influence of L1 on the productive and receptive collocational knowledge among two groups of Arab students in ESL and EFL learning settings. The findings of the study showed a significant difference between female and male students on the productive and the receptive collocational knowledge. Shehata (2008) finds out that female students outstripped the male students in the productive test (female M=20.71/male M=9.31) and the receptive test (female M=38.80/male M=36.24). Additionally, the results showed that L1 interference strongly affected students’ collocational knowledge. Another interesting finding was that all students performed better on the *verb-noun collocation test* rather than on the *adjective-noun collocation test*. Shehata (2008) claims that this might be an indication that *verb-noun* collocations were easier to acquire by Arab students than *adjective-noun* collocations. Overall, the study showed that Arabic-speaking students proved to have a poor knowledge of collocations. This can be attributed to the influence of the learning environment (El-Banna et al., 2014). However, Shehata (2008) emphasizes that the use of authentic materials in teaching collocations should be included in the teaching process which in return will provide students with opportunities to experience a natural language that assists them in developing their proficiency skill. Moreover, Shehata (2008) encourages teachers to pay more attention to the teaching of collocations, specifically, the collocations that do not have a translation equivalent in L1. Shehata (2008) concludes that the English textbooks should include a bilingual glossary of collocations to help students be more familiar with the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Al-Sulayyi (2015) investigates the production of English grammatical collocations among two groups of Saudi students in ESL and EFL learning contexts. The results revealed that

students' grammatical collocation errors in an ESL environment were less than the students who learned English in an EFL context. Additionally, the results showed that the highest number of errors in both groups was recorded on the grammatical collocation patterns such as *noun-preposition* and *adjective-preposition*. Al-Sulayyi (2015) attributes the students' erroneous responses to the L1 interference role, especially those which contain a preposition. For instance, the majority of *noun-preposition*, *adjective-preposition* and *preposition-noun* were used incorrectly throughout the essays that students performed. Moreover, students inclined to avoid using some grammatical collocation categories such as *adjective-that+clause* and *noun-that+clause* since they were beyond their English proficiency level. Al-Sulayyi (2015) includes that students lack of knowledge of grammatical collocations was another possible reason behind various limitations in curriculum and teaching of collocations in classrooms where he recommends teachers to focus on teaching the different types of collocations, especially in Saudi Arabia where the curriculum did not pay a great deal of attention to grammatical collocations.

To investigate the problematic aspects that collocations play in translation in relation to cultural and sociolinguistics issues related to collocation order in English and Arabic, providing equivalent and religious collocations in the target language, Beni-Younes (2015) conducts a study to find out the problems Arab students face in translating English-Arabic collocations. The data was collected through a questionnaire that consisted of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, students were asked to identify the types of the dictionaries that students refer to whenever they want to find the translation of a collocation into Arabic. In the second part of the questionnaire, students were asked to provide the translation of the equivalent collocations into L1. The results showed that students mainly depended on using bilingual dictionaries when they pick out the meanings of collocations. Beni-Younes (2015) claims that "dictionaries cannot give the appropriate cultural translation in all language contexts" (p. 57) which may cause culturally inconvenient translation if students depend on bilingual dictionaries as the only source for translation. He asserts that monolingual dictionaries should be recommended to Arab students in order to better understand the cultural and sociolinguistic background of collocations. As for translation of the equivalent collocation into L1, the results showed that it was difficult for students to find the correct equivalent collocations. Moreover, the results revealed a good number of students who even did not answer the questions, claiming that they did not have any ideas about how to translate such collocations into L1. Beni-Younes (2015) concludes that this is an indication that students were not familiar with English collocations and that students at university level should have at least two courses of teaching English collocations in order to familiarize with collocations and enable them to overcome such translational problems.

### Summary

Studies reviewed show the poor collocational knowledge state among EFL Arab students of the English collocations. While there were few studies on collocations with Arab students conducted in an ESL settings, most of these studies were conducted in an EFL settings. However, in light of the previous reviewed studies the following assumptions can be established. First, collocations present a challenge for students in EFL and ESL settings. Second, like other EFL students, Arab students of English proved to have poor collocational knowledge, which studies attributed to factors, such as unfamiliarity with collocational structures (Shehata, 2008), overgeneralization (Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah, 2003) and negative transfer (Hussein, 1990), which they attributed to the lack of teaching collocations in classrooms and curriculum

limitations. Therefore, in such cases, students were assumed to rely on their L1 collocational knowledge to find an equivalent when using collocations in L2. According to Wary (2002) “collocations can only be learned if they are encountered” (p. 183).

### Method

The purpose of this study was to test Yemeni EFL university students' collocational knowledge on collocating words correctly. Therefore, the current study is mainly qualitative in nature, thus, data is descriptively analyzed to calculate frequencies and percentages and seeking narrative information in order to better understand students' collocational knowledge of the given collocations and to identify the specific collocations that were asked to collocate in the collocational test.

### Participants

The participants involved in the study were five male Yemeni EFL university students who were attending an IEC at UUM/Malaysia. The IEC lasts for one full semester as a requirement before students start their academic programs and it offers only to students who fail to pass the English Language Placement Test (ELPT) that is conducted by UUM compulsorily among all international students who do not meet the English language requirement set by the university. However, since the participants failed in the ELPT, they were the only Yemeni students who were attending the IEC in the first semester, 2014/2015, at the time when this study was conducted. Moreover, the participants studied English in Yemen as a foreign language for six years in the governmental schools before they come to Malaysia. Additionally, a few number of the participants had some kind of English courses in different private institutions in Malaysia before they having the ELPT test and attending the IEC. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of the Participants

No	Learning English at other Institutes in Malaysia	Current Qualification	Program to take at UUM
1	-	Bachelor	Master
2	-	Bachelor	Master
3	1 Year High School	Bachelor	
4	4 Months	High School	Bachelor
5	1 Year High School	Bachelor	

### Instrumentation

The data for the research question of this study was elicited through a *collocational test*. This test was intended to examine Yemeni EFL university students' collocational knowledge and their ability to collocate words correctly, particularly, Yemeni male students who were attending an IEC at UUM. For this purpose, a collocational test in a form of *multiple-choice* was conducted (see Appendix A). The test consisted of 20 questions selected out of 60 questions from a collocational test adopted from Al-Sibai (2009). The reason for choosing only 20 questions out of

60 was because of the test was long and for time consuming. Therefore, the selected questions targeted different types of collocational categories. Each question had four optional items from which students were instructed to select the appropriate item as the correct answer. All of the items were synonymous words that should be familiar to students as the goal of the test was not to test students' ability in vocabulary, but rather to test their collocational knowledge. In other words, the test aimed at examining students' knowledge and ability to collocate words appropriately according to the context.

### Results of the Collocational Test

The results revealed that students' level of performance was not satisfactory as they were studying an IEC and some other courses at different institutions before starting to pursue their academic studies at UUM. However, only 47 items (49%) were answered correctly which was considered far below the half percentage that was anticipated. However, the response to the questions showed a very interesting result. For instance, in item 13, the frequency of correct responses was 5 (100%) for the collocation '*going to movies*', but in item 1, there were no correct answers, to collocate a correct collocation, provided. The reason for such a misinterpretation was due to the fact that students were commonly familiar with the former because it was widely used while the latter was barely used in their context. Therefore, answers such as '*going to take*' were substituted incorrectly.

It would be helpful to list collocations which were collocated appropriately as correct answers, frequencies and percentages and attempting to explain why some collocations were easier to answer correctly more than others. Table 2 shows that the frequency of the correct collocations was 47 out of an ideal score 95. Meanwhile the percentage was obviously showed only 49% of the total number of the collocations that were answered correctly. However, the results showed that students relatively answered the collocations. The high frequency of the correct responses of this category did not come as a surprise, since terms in this category were frequently used and encountered in everyday situations. The results showed that several of the correct collocations answered by students gained a high frequency and percentage as well. For instance, item 13 '*go to movies*' was answered correctly and gained the highest percentage (100%) and the highest frequency of the correct responses was 5 correct responses. While the remaining items had shown varied frequencies and percentages such as '*furious with*', '*let's change*' and '*keep an eye*' which were frequently answered more correctly and gained a percentage of (80%). Moreover, other collocations gained medium frequency with low correct responses and a percentage rated (60%) such as in '*say that to his face*', '*fire alarm*', '*a health spa*', '*put on your seat belt*' and '*bedroom window*'. Others gained lower frequency that gained 2 correct answers only and gained a percentage of (40%) such as '*the tennis court*', '*felt utterly*', '*pulling my leg*', '*walking stick*' and '*frying pan*'. However, collocations '*pick on*', '*how long were you on*', '*surprised at*', '*famous for*' and '*can barely*' gained the lowest percentage of (20%). Predictably, the several items of the correct collocations were gained a high-frequency and percentage as well, while the other items had shown a medium-frequency. This kind of positive transfer may was due to students' reliance on their LI as such collocations can be found and read commonly and had equivalents in students' LI such as '*go to*' (100%), '*keep an eye*' (80%), '*furious with*' (80%), '*let's change*' (80%) and '*put on your seat belt*' (60%).

**Table 2.** Correct Collocations According to their Frequency and Percentage

Item No.	Correct Collocations	Frequency	%
2	<i>furious with</i>	4	80%
3	<i>the tennis court</i>	2	40%
4	<i>felt utterly</i>	2	40%
5	<i>Let's change</i>	4	80%
6	<i>keep an eye</i>	4	80%
7	<i>can barely</i>	1	20%
8	<i>say that to his face</i>	3	60%
9	<i>pulling my leg</i>	2	40%
10	<i>famous for</i>	1	20%
11	<i>surprised at</i>	1	20%
12	<i>put on your seat belt</i>	3	60%
13	<i>go to movies</i>	5	100%
14	<i>how long were you on</i>	1	20%
15	<i>fire alarm</i>	3	60%
16	<i>walking stick</i>	2	40%
17	<i>pick on</i>	1	20%
18	<i>frying pan</i>	2	40%
19	<i>a health spa</i>	3	60%
20	<i>bedroom window</i>	3	60%
		<b>47/95</b>	<b>49%</b>

However, Table 3 shows that the frequency of the incorrect collocations was 53 out of an ideal score 95. Meanwhile the percentage was declined to 55% of the total number of the collocations that were answered incorrectly. This high percentage of incorrect answers was due to the negative transfer as a result of the influence of the translation process that employed by students. For example, in item 1 a high percentage 100% of incorrect answering was provided and incorrect collocations such as 'going to take' which was used in analogy with an expression that found in Arabic. Besides, in the following items, the percentage of incorrect answers ranged between 80% as in items 7, 10, 11, 14 and 17 and (60%) as in items 3, 4, 9, 16 and 18. Meanwhile a medium percentage (40%) of the incorrect answers was noticed in items 8, 15, 19, 12 and 20. However, the lowest percentage (20%) of the incorrect answers was noticed in items 2, 5 and 6.

In Arabic language the terms, 'going to run', 'the tennis court', 'frying ban', 'say that to his face' and 'keep an eye' are not used; however, their equivalents in Arabic were 'going to take', 'the tennis land', 'keep a look', 'say that to his eyes' and 'frying bowl'. Familiarity in structure was another concept that negatively influenced the students' collocational knowledge development. Moreover, as can be seen in several items, the incorrect collocations were not attributed to negative transfer from LI, but rather to the lack of knowledge of the English language structure, specifically, the negative use of the prepositions. In this group, the category

*verb+preposition* and *verb+adverb* gained a high percentage of incorrect responses ranged between 80% for the items 10 and 11 '*famous of*' and '*surprised for*' and 40% for the items 4 and 17 '*felt quickly/ felt keenly*' and '*put by/ pick away*'. Other incorrect collocations can be attributed to students' strategy of overgeneralization. The percentage of incorrect responses due to overgeneralizations ranged between (60%) such as in item 9 '*pulling my foot/pulling my thigh*' and item 16 '*walking bar/walking hook*', and (40%) such as in item 15 '*fire tool*' in which students substituted a generic term with which they were familiar for a specific term with which students were unfamiliar.

**Table 3.** *Incorrect Collocations According to their Frequency and Percentage*

Item No.	Incorrect Collocations	Frequency	Frequency
1	<i>going to take</i>	5	100%
2	<i>furious for</i>	1	20%
3	<i>the tennis land</i> <i>the tennis place</i>	3	60%
4	<i>felt quickly</i> <i>felt keenly</i>	3	60%
5	<i>Let's turn</i>	1	20%
6	<i>keep a look</i>	1	20%
7	<i>can blindly</i> <i>can really</i>	4	80%
8	<i>say that to his eyes</i>	2	40%
9	<i>pulling my foot</i> <i>pulling my thigh</i>	3	60%
10	<i>famous of</i>	4	80%
11	<i>surprised for</i>	4	80%
12	<i>put on your mental</i> <i>put on your fasten</i>	2	40%
14	<i>how long were you for</i> <i>how long were you till</i> <i>how long were you over</i>	4	80%
15	<i>fire tool</i>	2	40%
16	<i>walking bar</i> <i>walking hook</i>	3	60%
17	<i>pick off</i> <i>pick by</i> <i>pick away</i>	4	80%
18	<i>frying bowl</i> <i>frying dish</i>	3	60%
19	<i>a health place</i> <i>a health area</i>	2	40%
20	<i>bedroom ceiling</i> <i>bedroom gate</i>	2	40%
		<b>53/95</b>	<b>55%</b>

### Summary

The overall students' performance in this test was not satisfactory in light of the low percentage of collocations that answered correctly (49%). Besides, the percentage of the incorrect collocations that achieved by the students (55%) was also another sign of their insufficient awareness of the collocational knowledge. Students' low achievement may be attributed to several factors such as teachers' inappropriate way of teaching of vocabulary. In other words, vocabulary learning in classrooms was not centering in teaching vocabulary in word combination but rather individually. Another reason related to the students' collocational knowledge weakness and collocating words inappropriately, though the participants involved in this part were high school and bachelor students who were intending to pursue their higher education, may be students' lacking experience language skills such as speaking and reading which will contribute in providing them with enough knowledge of vocabulary and how to combine words correctly.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This section discusses the summary of findings of the research question of the study: *How well does Yemeni EFL university students' collocational knowledge, who are attending an Intensive English Course at UUM, increase their ability to collocate words?*. The collocational test was meant to examine students' collocational knowledge of Yemeni EFL university students who were attending an IEC at UUM.

As for the findings of the collocational test, although studies in the field of ESL and EFL acquisition among Arab learners highlighted the fact that collocations play an essential role in the construction of language (Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah, 2003 Al-Zahrani, 1998; Hussein, 1990). However, the results of the collocational test indicated that students lack the knowledge of collocating words appropriately. The results were consistent to several studies measuring Arab learners' collocational knowledge and their overall language usage. These studies found that students' knowledge of collocations were limited (Farghal & Obiedat 1995; AL-Amro 2006; Shehata 2008). In addition to the lack of knowledge of collocations, all of these studies indicated that Arab learners are encountering difficulties in collocations due to the neglect of instructions in classrooms. Other studies, such as Howarth (1996) and Brown (1974) confirmed that some language teachers were unaware of the concept of collocations. Thus they could not direct their learners' attention to collocations when they are introduced in teaching materials.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on data analysis and discussion in this study, several recommendations may be made for further research. Firstly, in order to solidify the findings of the study, a replication of the study should be extended not only to the university students, it would be also interesting to have students from the other educational levels such as high school level with longer period of time in order to report more accurate and comprehensive results of the instructional process. In addition, more variables such as writing or reading proficiency need to be examined in relation to collocations acquisition. By involving more students from different levels and more variables, a better understanding of knowledge of collocations among Yemeni students would be reached. Secondly, it is hoped that the insights provided in this study may inspire more researches into students' collocational knowledge performance, which is of crucial importance to ESL/EFL

students' overall language oral performance and which is shown to be a problematic issue for the Arab learners of English.

### Conclusion

The current study found that students' collocational knowledge was less than expected. However, the conclusion that can be drawn, therefore, is that students' lack knowledge of collocations might be due to the fact that collocations have differently collocated inconsistently with Arabic language structure. This conclusion became even more significant when taking in consideration that collocations are not taught explicitly at the Yemeni schools and even at UUM where the participants were attending a 6-month IEC.

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### Appendix A The Collocational Test Instructions

In the following collocational test, one or more words are left out of each sentence. Under each sentence you will see four words or phrases. Choose the correct word or phrase to fill in the blank by shading the correct circle.

#### Example:

When she's cold, she really loves to drink \_\_\_\_\_ tea.

- Strong
- Heavy
- Tough
- Hard

1- We're going to \_\_\_\_\_ some tests on your mother to see if the accident affected her brain.

- take
- add
- make
- run

2- She's furious \_\_\_\_\_ her son's grades in school.

- for
- with
- without
- below

3- Oh look! The neighbours are having a garage sale right out there on the tennis \_\_\_\_\_.

- court
- area
- place
- land

4- Lama said that she felt so \_\_\_\_\_ alone and isolated because even her sister couldn't help.

- utterly
- readily
- quickly
- keenly

5- Let's \_\_\_\_\_ the subject. I don't want to talk about it anymore.

- transfer
- turn
- change
- fix

6- Go ahead and take a break. I'll keep \_\_\_\_\_ on the kids.

- an eye
- an arm
- a stare
- a look

7- There's so much fog outside. I can \_\_\_\_\_ see the car in front of me.

- blindly
- really
- barely
- politely

8- I dare you to say that to his \_\_\_\_\_.

- head
- face
- eyes
- eye

9- You must be pulling my \_\_\_\_\_. That can't be true.

- foot
- thigh
- toe
- leg

10- Picasso is famous \_\_\_\_\_ his paintings.

- For
- Of
- From
- Off

11- They were surprised \_\_\_\_\_ their good fortune.

Toward

For

At

Till

12- Please put on your \_\_\_\_\_ belts. We're about to take off.

Seat

Leather

Fasten

Metal

13- Why don't we go \_\_\_\_\_ the movies tonight?

Into

Upon

Around

To

14- How long were you \_\_\_\_\_ the phone for? Don't you get tired of talking so much?

Over

Till

On

For

15- When the fire \_\_\_\_ went off everybody left the building.

Number

Machine

Tool

Alarm

16- He's still quite active, although he walks with the aid of a walking \_\_\_\_.

Stick

Pole

Bar

Hook

17- Other kids always pick \_\_\_\_ her because she's so overweight.

By

Away

On

Off

18- Put a little oil into the frying \_\_\_\_\_ and quickly fry the vegetables.

Pot

Bowl

Pan

Dish

19- On the seashore there is a new hotel with two pools, a health \_\_\_\_ and playground.

Place

Area

Spa

Court

20- The boys were playing ball outside, then suddenly the ball came flying through my bedroom \_\_\_\_\_.

Frame

Window

Gate

Ceiling

**Good Luck**