

**A Study on**  
**the relationship between the Vocabulary size and the**  
**(Verb+ Noun) collocation Knowledge in Business English**  
**for the Third Year Students of All Specializations at**  
**Co-operative University, Thanlyin.**

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## **Abstract**

This Study was carried out to investigate Third Year student's collocation abilities. As collocations are a necessary one for language learners, especially for a foreign language. Every language has its own distinct features and language learners can avoid wrong use of those features. If a language learner does not know the collocations of a language well, he or she will not be able to write a perfect business letter or an email. The wrong lexical choice may cause a mismatch, distorted message, the use of non-existent word or phrase and collocation dissonance. In order to discover how well Third Year students' knowledge of collocations, 100 subjects were requested to participate this study. A matching form test and a multiple choice form test were administered to them. This study indicated that students have a low mastery of collocations and it was discovered that students were not digested enough their early lessons and also they were not familiar with a lot of vocabularies. Particularly they had much less knowledge of collocations. It is expected that this paper helps the learners to get a high mastery of collocations in English.

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between the receptive vocabulary size and receptive verb-noun collocation knowledge of the third year students for all specializations at the Co-operative University, Thanlyin. This paper also investigates the students' productive knowledge of collocations in writing business emails. A total of 260 third year students from all specializations participated in answering questions. Two instruments are used for data collection. They are the vocabulary size test designed by Nation (2001), a multiple-choice test and a matching type test of English collocations. There are 15 (verb + noun) collocations used for this study. Descriptive statistics with two kinds of tests are employed.

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## 1. Introduction

Each and every language has their significance and it cannot be assumed that one's language is less difficult than that of the other. One language may be difficult to some extent for those whose language is not the same as that one. An English man might think that Myanmar language has a great variety. For instance, 1. Don't wear shoes in the monastery. 2. Don't wear your hats. 3. Wear thanakha. 4. Wear clean clothes. 5. Wear umbrella. Such expressions indicate that only the verb, **wear** is used which is totally different from Myanmar language use. In Myanmar, it is: ဖိနပ်မစီးရ၊ ဦးထုပ်မဆောင်းရ၊ သနပ်ခါးမလိမ်းပါ၊ သန့်ရှင်းသော အဝတ်ကိုဝတ်ပါ။ ထီးဆောင်းပါ။ We won't say - ဖိနပ်ဆောင်းသည်။ ထီးစီးသည်။

Similarly, a Myanmar student might say 'I make my homework.' Instead of saying 'I do my homework.' Every language has its own rules. They have the rules of what word must go with what.

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, collocation is a combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequently than it would happen by chance. In Myanmar, English has been learning as a foreign language since they were in their primary schools. Nonetheless, Myanmar students are still making mistakes in collocations of English in tests.

In this paper, the use of collocations for the third year students of all specializations will be studied. Altogether 260 students of third year students were asked to help complete this study. They were provided a test and data were then collected. Before the test, the researcher of this paper gathered necessary information on collocations: What collocation is, Different kinds of collocations, and Common collocations in current reference book. Next, the test result will be studied and discussed how or what or why students make mistakes. Furthermore, how well students can do the test will also be seen. It is hoped that this study will be a useful one for the learners of English in using collocations.

Being the business learners, students get more opportunity to communicate with one another in English. English is an international language and it is used in economic sector and social sector. In this university, Business English is taught as a compulsory subject in every specialization.

## **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

Learning collocations is essential for all learners. In this paper, collocations tests were carried out research in different points of view: multiple choice and matching.

## **1.2 Scope of the Study**

This paper explores the collocation knowledge of the third year students of Co-operative University, Thanlyin. Two types of test questions were prepared as matching and multiple choice. These questions are to investigate the students' production of collocation. The collocations selected for the study are 12 (verb + noun) collocations from their reference book (Business Result: Intermediate Level) for the third year students from Co-operative University, Thanlyin. The other three collocations are selected from the textbook of Grade 11. They are a (adverb+ noun), a (adjective+ noun) and a (verb+ adjective) collocations. There are 260 students from eight different sections participated in the study. Both types of tests: multiple choice test and matching collocation test are the objective tests.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

In this study, the most prominent feature is a large number of the participants from the eight different sections (five different specializations). They are 260 third year students. Collocations are selected randomly from their reference book. The results of the learners' collocation knowledge are the key to improve their overall language proficiency.

## **1.4 Organization of the Study**

This paper contains six chapters. Chapter 1 is concerned with the introduction of conducting research on (verb + noun) collocations including the purpose of the study, the scope of the study and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 deals with the review on the notion of collocations defined by various scholars and the framework of the study of collocations. Chapter 3 mentions the research methodology for the present study. Chapter 4 expresses the literature review. And Chapter 5 describes the findings inferred from the statistical analyses and discussion of the research questions in detail. The final chapter, Chapter 6, explains the summary of the whole chapter together with suggestions for further study. It is followed by references.

## II. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of current study is to observe how well third year students of all specializations can use collocations in English. There are so many forms of collocations in terms of grammar and their strength. This study hopes for the students to see the accurate information on the use of collocations.

Specific objectives to do this research are as follows:

- To examine how collocations are formed in terms of grammar.
- To study how collocations are classified in terms of their strength.
- To understand how students use collocations in a wrong way.
- To see how well they can apply some collocations they have already learnt in their early school days.

## III. Research Methodology

This study was conducted to investigate Third Year students' collocation abilities. Knowing a word is not only knowing its form and meaning. Words occur together to make collocation patterns, or they do not combine and recombine freely and randomly with others (Hanks, 1987). Using language is to select more than one word at a time, and to blend the selections with each other (Sinclair, 1987). In order to discover how well Third Year students' knowledge of collocations, 22 subjects were involved in this study. A test was administered to those 260 students and includes two forms of questions. No. 1 was a Matching Form and the second one was a Multiple Choice question. There were 10 items in Q. No.1 and 5 in Q. No.2. Test question 1 was designed with 10 pairs and question 2 was made with 5 sentences taken from Business Result Course Book of Intermediate Level. All the items were in different types of collocations.

E.g. 1. adjective + noun (basic procedure)

2. verb + noun (exchange news)

3. verb + adverb (sleep deeply)

Multiple choice question was made of the most common verbs-**make**, **do** and **have**. Despite the verbs, errors of the tenses and usage were not counted. Only the correct choice was counted. There were no pre-test and post-test in this study. Students' prior knowledge was to be studied. Students were given time limit (00:30 hour) and then data were collected.1. The number of students who would do well in each test item

2. The areas where students made most mistakes



3. The reason they made those mistakes
4. Ways to overcome the errors

#### IV. Literature Review

Many researchers have different definitions of collocation. In terms of the degree of cohesiveness of lexical combination, Benson et al. (1986) state that “collocations” are fixed phrases stored in the mind. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992:36) consider collocations as high frequency word combinations.

Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary says that Collocation is the way in which particular words tend to occur or belong together. For example, you can say: Meals will be served outside on the terrace, **weather permitting**. But not Meals will be served outside on the terrace, **weather allowing**.

Both these sentences seem to mean the same thing (‘They’ll treat us to lunch outside if the weather is good enough.’): **allow** and **permit** have very similar meanings. But in this combination, only **permitting** is correct. It collocates with **weather** and allowing does not.

It also suggests the learners that they need to know which adjectives are used with a particular noun, which nouns and a particular adjective is used with, which verbs are used with a particular noun and which adverbs are used to intensify a particular adjective so that they can write and speak natural and correct English.

Teachers from the English department had conducted error analysis based on learner’s language specifically on collocations among our university students. The study revealed that 64% of the collocations used were incorrect and 80% of these errors were lexical collocation.

Typical errors in collocation usage in writing productions by the third year students were analyzed. It was found that 17.63% of collocation usages were inappropriate. Three major types of errors were identified; approximation (49%), synonym errors (31%) and negative transfer errors (20%). This result suggests the merit of collocation instruction, for example, teaching vocabularies in collocation forms, keeping collocation logs and reading texts with attention to collocations.

It is known that collocations are everywhere and no language learner can avoid them. Nik Peachey, Learning Technology Consultant, Writer, Trainer (2008) said that collocations are so ever present in the English language and it is hard to find a song without them. Here is an example:

### **The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face**

The first time ever **I saw your face** (not I met your face)  
I thought **the sun rose** in your **smile eyes**  
And the moon and the stars  
Were the gifts you **gave** (not pay)  
To the dark and the **endless sea**, my love (not borderless sea)

## **V. Analysis of collocations in the reference book for third year students**

Collocations are classified in various types: each scholar has divided them according to different dimensions. According to Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell, the use of collocations has become popular in Business English.

Kennedy, Graeme (2003:468) defines collocation as “a succession of two or more words that must be learned as an integral whole and not pieced together from its component parts”. Firth (1957:18), believes that collocations of a word help us to understand its meaning.

There are two main ways to classify collocations into groups, in terms of Grammar and in terms of Strength.

### **5.1. Collocations in terms of Grammar**

Collocations are classified in terms of Grammar as follows:

#### **(Adjective + Noun)**

good	morning
nice	day
lucky	day
ugly	girl
bright	colour
good	night
good	dream

#### **(Verb + Noun)**

go	shopping
make	a nosie

give	speech
take	a rest
play	football
open	the door

**(Noun + Noun)**

sky	blue
girl	friend
paper	clip
mail	man
fighter	bomber

**(Preposition + Noun)**

at	least
on	foot
behind	me
beside	you
in	time
at	the moment

**(Noun + Preposition)**

the daughter in my family  
a day of my lucky days  
a book on the table  
the tree behind you  
the people under the tree

**(Verb + Adverb)**

speak	politely
think	widely
come	quickly
smile	sweetly
feel	gladly
do	quickly

**(Adverb+ Adjective)**

Bitterly cold

Completely satisfied

Terribly sorry

Fast asleep

Virtually important

**(Noun+ Verb)**

Lions roar

Prices fall

Dogs bark

Temperatures rise

Cats miaow

**5.2. Collocations in terms of Strength**

There are four main types of collocations based on its strength.

**5.2.1 Unique Collocations**

This is a kind of collocation which people usually use that and it does not exist. For example, the uniqueness of the word ‘foot’ is that it is used as a verb in the collocation ‘foot the bill’. At the same time, there are some phrases we do not know about this word such as “footing the coffee,” “footing the invoice.” It is unique because it is not used with any other nouns.

**5.2.2. Strong Collocations**

A strong collocation is the one in which the words are very closely associated with each other. For example, the adjective ‘mitigating’ almost collocates with ‘circumstances’ or ‘factors’, it rarely collocates with other words.

<b>Collocation</b>	<b>Comment</b>
In element weather was expected	(very formal = unpleasant weather in element collocations) almost exclusively with weather
She has auburn hair	Auburn only collocates with words connected with hair (e.g. curls, dresses, looks)
I felt deliriously happy	= extremely happy strongly associated with happy. Not used with glad, content, sad, etc
The chairperson adjourned the meeting	= have a pause or rest during a meeting / trial. Adjourn is very strongly associated with meeting, case, trial.

Source: Business Result (Intermediate)

### 5.2.3. Medium- Strength Collocations

This kind of collocation makes up the greater part of what people say and write. For example, in some cases, people often think of “have a conversation,” but it is true that ‘make a conversation.’ Besides there are many phrases which are considered as medium-strength collocations such as “make a mistake,” “recover from a major operation” and so on.

### 5.2.4. Weak Collocations

Weak collocations are made up of words that collocated with a wide range of other words. In fact, most students can create combination of words which are on the verge of the area we define as “collocation”. For example, with colors, people can apply them in English in a similar way to their own language such as red shirt, white wine, a blue film, black hair and so on. In general, these combinations are attentions to them. However, in order to have a perfect writing or essay, it is important to understand and concern about all aspects of weak collocations. It can be seen that there is also another kind of collocation.

## 5.3 Fixed Collocations

Fixed collocations are collocations which are so strong that they cannot be changed in any way. For example, I was walking **to and fro**. (I was walking in one direction and then in the opposite direction, a repeated number of times.) No other words can replace **to** or **and** in this collocation. It is completely fixed. The meaning of some fixed collocations cannot be guessed from the individual words. These collocations are called idioms and are focused on in the book, English Idioms in Use.

e.g    up and down  
       in and out  
       this and that  
       more or less

According to the mentioned types of collocations, it can be seen that collocations cannot stay far away from Nouns and Verbs.

#### 5.4. Lexical collocations

They are made up of only verbs, adjectives, nouns and adverbs.

#### 5.5. Grammatical collocations

They contain words such as verbs, adjectives or nouns combined with a preposition or a grammatical structure.

#### 5.6. De – lexicalized Verbs

De – lexicalized Verbs (get, have, make, do, put, take) are important because although they may have a basic meaning (make = create / manufacture, have = own / possess). They are more commonly used in combinations with nouns or other words as a chunk of meaning. A lot of mistakes in collocations are made with de – lexicalized verbs.

Make a mistake	do your homework	take an exam
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#### 5.7. The importance of Nouns in collocations

Nouns are very useful for learners as a key word. This is because the majority of general nouns usually require further qualification. Nouns are also important because they are usually the words that carry the most meaning within a sentence.

good		package	
well – paid		luxury	
menial	job	expensive	holiday
boring		cheap	
full – time		good	

Source: Business Result (Intermediate)

Here are some examples:

## **Verbs + Holiday**

- Go on holiday  
e.g. The children were excited about going on holiday.
- Have / take a holiday  
e.g. Teachers must not take holidays during term time.
- Book a holiday  
e.g. I booked the holiday online.

## **Adjective / Noun + Holiday**

- A skiing / camping / walking + holiday  
e.g. They went on a camping holiday in France
- A package holiday (= a holiday in which we pay a price that includes travel, room and food)  
e.g. The company organizes package to Spain and Greece.
- A summer holiday  
e.g. They were going to a house on the coast for their summer holidays.
- A winter holiday  
e.g. Why not try a winter holiday for a change?
- A family holiday  
e.g. I first visited Japan on a family holiday when I was a boy.
- An annual holiday (= a holiday we take every year)
- Your dream holiday (= the best holiday you can imagine)

## **Holiday + Noun**

- A holiday resort (= a place with many hotels where a lot of people go on holiday)  
e.g. A holiday resort in Spain.
- A holiday destination (= a town or country where a lot of people go on holiday)  
e.g. Marwari's is one of Turkey's most popular holiday destinations.
- A holiday brochure (= a magazine that shows what holidays you can take)
- Holiday photos (also holidays snaps) (= photographs that you take when you are on holiday)
- A holiday romance (= a brief romantic relationship with someone you meet on holiday)

- A holiday abroad (= a holiday in a country other than the one you live in)

### 5.8. Collocations of do, have, make and take

For people who are learning English, or even who speak it moderately well, these four verbs present difficulties when it comes to many collocations. For example, what about **the shopping**? Is it **do** the shopping or **make** the shopping? How about **photograph**? **Do** a photograph or **make** a photograph? Neither! We should take a photograph..... and so on. This table is an attempt to clear up some of the most common doubts and error.

<b>do</b>	<b>make</b>	<b>take</b>	<b>Have</b>
		take action	
		take advantage	have an advantage
	make an application	take can application	
	make an appointment		Have an appointment
	make an argument		have a argument
	make a baby		have a baby
	make a bath	take a bath	have a bath
	make a bed		have a bed
do one's best	make the best of		have the best
		take a bite	have a bite
	make a bow		
	make a break		
	make a breakthrough		
do business		take business	have business
		take a chance	have a chance
		take a class	have a class
	make conversation		have a conversation
do a deal	make a deal		
	make a decision	take a decision	
	make an effort	take (a lot of) effort	
	make an enquiry		
	make an error		
		take an exam	have an exam
	make an example		
	make an excuse		have an excuse

Source: Business Result (Intermediate)



## VI. Findings and Discussion

In this section, results of the tests will be discussed with four main factors:

1. How many students could do well in each test item?
2. In what area did the students make most mistakes?
3. Why did they make such mistakes?
4. How will the students overcome the errors?

### Test Question. 1.

Match the words in Column A with words in Column B with are the most appropriate ones.

<b>Column A</b>		<b>Column B</b>	
1.	exchange	a.	business
2.	make	b.	hair
3.	place	c.	deeply
4.	sleep	d.	chess
5.	do	e.	an order
6.	basic	f.	word
7.	curly	g.	news
8.	break	h.	research
9.	have	i.	procedure
10.	play	j.	a blouse

**Table 1 Results of the Test Question 1**

	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Correct</b>	<b>Correct</b>	<b>Incorrect</b>	<b>Incorrect</b>
		(No. of std)	%	(No. of std)	%
1	exchange news	68	26	192	74
2	make a blouse	156	60	104	40
3	Place an order	205	79	55	21
4	sleep deeply	115	46	145	54
5	do research	75	29	185	71
6	Basic procedure	49	19	211	81
7	curly hair	200	77	60	23
8	break the law	114	44	146	56
9	have business	55	21	205	79
10	play chess	91	35	169	65

	Total	1128	43.4%	1472	56.6%
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Source: Test Question 1

As seen in the table, 79% of the students could give the correct answer to item 3, 'place an order'. They are thought to have learnt from their teachers. Language learners should not be unfamiliar with such vocabularies. Item 7, 'curly hair' is the second one that most of the students got the correct answer. It is assumed that they have learnt the lesson, 'Describing people' and they know very well to describe someone's appearance. 60% of the students could give the right answer, 'make a blouse' to item 2. They are likely to remember the lesson, 'The Calendar' with 'the use of make'. Nonetheless, 40% could not give the correct answer. The correct answer to item 4 is 'sleep deeply'. According to the data collected, 46% of the students could give the correct match and another 54% could not. It can be seen that their high school lessons were left behind. 44% of the students know that the verb 'break' goes together with 'the law' though they have ever learnt it in their lesson like 'You should not break the law.' Students have already studied the verb, 'play' since they were in a primary school. For example, *I can play football very well./ He is playing the piano.* The verb 'play' can be followed by either a kind of sport or a musical instrument. That knowledge is not a strange one, however, only 35% could do well for this. It is, therefore, more clear that they have not digested their earlier school lessons. Out of 260, only 75 students were correct to item 5, 'do research'. They should indeed get the correct answer as they have been frequently hearing this expression. Only 68 students got the correct answer, 'exchange news' for item 1. Though students are not far away from the words, news and information, they seldom use the verb, 'exchange' in their everyday life. This is because they could not use the collocation, 'change news.' The word 'business' is familiar with the students but only 55 students got the correct answer. They did not know that the verb 'have' goes with 'business'. Most of them know 'start a business' or 'run a business.' 81% of the students did not know the word, 'basic' and as a result, they did the wrong match. Most of them know that the word, 'procedure' usually goes together with 'difficult, easy, or simple.' It showed that students need to memorize several words as much as they can. Totally 43.4% of the students could do well in the test and 56.6% of the students were found to be weak in collocations in English.

Question. II. Choose the appropriate verbs and fill each blank with the correct form of them.

1. I like to ----- my homework. (do, make) Ans. 1.do
2. Last night mom prepared dinner and MaMya ----- the washing. Ans.2.did  
(do, make)
3. The little kids are ----- a lot of fun at the party.(do, have) Ans.3.having
4. Dad's car broke down on the highway but he did not have enough credit to ----- a phone call. (do, make) Ans.4.make
5. We are ----- late. Let's take a taxi. (take, get) Ans.5. getting

**Table 2. Results of the Test Question 2**

No.	Correct Answer	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect
		No.of std	%	No. of std	%
1	do	169	65	169	35
2	did	143	55	117	45
3	having	91	35	169	65
4	make	70	27	190	73
5	getting	161	62	99	38
	Total	634	48.8%	666	51.2%

Source: Test Question II.

As seen in Table 2, 169 students could give the correct answer to item 1 and another 91 students could not give the correct one. Although it is a very common one, 35 students could not get the correct answer. It is certain that they are not good enough to remember the previous lessons. 55% of the students got the correct answer for item 2 and those who could not get the correct answer are altogether 45%. It is clear that they have not digested their early lessons. Only 91 students could give the correct answer to item 3. There is a TV programme called 'Let's sing & have fun'. However, they did not get the correct answer. Students are thought to be very weak in observation. 190 students could not choose the right answer for item 4 although it is not a strange usage. It is considered that students are less in touch with such phrases and they need a lot of practice in collocations. 62% of the students could choose the correct answer for item 5 and it is because students are familiar with phrases such as getting dark, or getting tired. They have ever learnt that certain verbs like feel, become, get are followed by an adjective. In total, nearly 49% of the students could do well in test question 2 and 51% are found to be weak in English collocation.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This study shows that collocations underline the importance of learning a language. Knowledge of collocations enables a learner to say 'Switch on the light' rather than 'Open the light'. A native speaker has a thorough intuition of possible combinations, however, EFL and ESL learners know a little about them. This is because the errors of the students constitute a high percentage. This study reveals that Third Year students do not have sufficient knowledge on collocations. Two major types of errors are identified in this study. The first one is that students are not digested enough in their early stages (lessons). They are assumed not to be able to memorize their early lessons. The second one is that they are not familiar with a lot of vocabularies. The results of the tests suggest the merit of collocations, vocabularies in collocation forms, keeping collocation logs and reading texts with attention to collocations. Hakuta (1974) stated that collocations can be considered as memorized whole utterances or phrases. They are learned through rote memorization or overusing them. This study shows that collocations need deliberate learning. It is not enough just to know the vocabulary. This means that collocations are not easy and even more difficult to paraphrase. Ways to overcome those errors are: to memorize the collocations and to personalize them.

Summing up, this study shows Third Year students have a low mastery of collocations. They need much more study on collocations so that they can have a high mastery of it. This study hopes English Language learners to realize how important collocations are and also hopes to be able to help them study collocations more in detail.

It would be interesting to assess learners' collocation knowledge at different levels. And, it is suggested that additional instrument such as interviews can be adapted in future research. It will get a better understanding of the students' perceptions of collocations.

It is sure that vocabulary learning must be learned before the study of collocations. All languages have a large number of collocating words. A good dictionary will help learners and dictionaries of collocations are also available.

## **VIII. Limitations of the Research**

Firstly, this research might have limitations in exploring the collocation knowledge of the Cooperative University students. Because there are the other students such as first year, second year, final year, post-graduate diploma and master students. In addition, this study mainly focuses on only 260 third year students from all specializations. Those students have to answer only 15 collocations. Therefore, the limitation of the study is that it cannot cover the students of the whole university.

