

17. Enhancing EFL Learners' Delexical Collocation Knowledge Through Contextual Reading and Digital Tools¹

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the impact of contextual reading and digital tools on enhancing Turkish EFL students' receptive and productive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations. Twenty-four Turkish EFL students, who were enrolled in an English Preparatory School of a state university in Türkiye, took part in the study. The study adopted a one-group pre-test/post-test design with an intervention stage, which included a contextual reading text and *Quizlet* activities that target delexical verb-noun collocations. The tests were composed of two parts, fill-in-the-blanks task and paragraph writing task, which aimed to evaluate receptive and productive knowledge of the students, respectively. The results indicated that the students showed statistically significant improvements not only in receptive task but also in productive task. Furthermore, Cohen's *d* was calculated as 1.1787 for receptive knowledge while it was even higher in productive knowledge (Cohen's *d*=1.3077), revealing that the intervention had a large effect on students' retention. Therefore, it can be concluded that providing students with delexical verb-noun collocations in context and scaffolding them through engaging activities play a significant and an effective role in their receptive and productive skills.

Keywords: Contextual reading, digital tools, receptive knowledge, productive knowledge, delexical verb-noun collocations

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Deleksik (Yarı İşlevli) Fiil-İsim Eş Dizimleri Kapsamında Bağlamsal Okuma ve Dijital Araçların Alıcı ve Üretken Bilgiyi Geliştirmedeki Etkisi⁴

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, bağlamsal okuma ve dijital araçların, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin deleksik (yarı işlevli) fiil-isim eş dizimleri kapsamında alıcı ve üretken bilgilerini geliştirme üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Çalışmaya Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinin İngilizce Hazırlık Okulunda okuyan 24 Türk öğrenci katılmıştır. Çalışmada, deleksik (yarı işlevli) fiil-isim eş dizimlerini hedefleyen bağlamsal okuma parçası ve *Quizlet* etkinliklerinin dahil olduğu tek gruplu ön test-son test tasarımı benimsenmiştir. Testler, öğrencilerin sırasıyla alıcı ve üretken bilgilerini değerlendirmeyi amaçlayan boşluk doldurma ve paragraf yazma etkinlikleri olmak üzere iki bölümden oluşmaktadır. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin yalnızca algılamada değil, üretken açıdan da istatistiksel olarak anlamlı gelişmeler gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, Cohen's *d*'nin algılayıcı bilgi açısından 1.1787 olarak hesaplanırken üretken bilgi açısından daha yüksek olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır (Cohen's *d*=1.3077), ve bu durum da bağlamsal okuma parçası ve *Quizlet* etkinliklerinin öğrencilerin bilgi birikimi açısından büyük ölçüde etkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu nedenle, öğrencilere deleksik (yarı işlevli) fiil-isim eş dizimlerini bağlam içinde sunmanın ve ilgi çekici etkinliklerle öğrenmeyi desteklemenin öğrencilerin alıcı ve üretken becerileri üzerinde önemli ve etkili bir rol oynadığı sonucu çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bağlamsal okuma, dijital araçlar, alıcı bilgi, üretken bilgi, deleksik (yarı işlevli) fiil-isim eş dizimleri

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1. Introduction

Effective teaching strategies for collocations have become a key part in ELT, mostly in foreign language education. Hill (1999) emphasized that a lack of collocational competence often caused students to produce longer sentences, which were prone to more errors, even if they had good ideas to express. This aligns with Nation's (2001) argument that knowing a word extends beyond its meaning to include its collocational patterns and multi-word expressions. These patterns represent fixed or semi fixed multi word units, such as make a decision or take a chance, which are used naturally by native speakers of English; however, they bring about remarkable challenges for second language learners (Hill, 1999). Despite their importance in language proficiency, research shows that collocations remain one of the most problematic areas for learners, especially in productive use (Nesselhauf, 2003; Laufer & Waldman, 2011). In the former studies concerning the relationship between L2 learners' receptive and productive vocabulary size, it always emerged that L2 learners have larger receptive vocabulary size than productive one. In addition, the fact that ESL learners have larger receptive vocabulary size results in them gaining larger productive vocabulary in ESL (Laufer & Paribakht, 1998) and EFL (Webb, 2008). Therefore, even students with a good knowledge of individual vocabulary items can experience problems while they are producing collocations accurately. These challenges are not only due to lack of clear rules or logical patterns to explain the use of collocations, but also due to the common use of non-congruent items which cannot be directly translated from L1 to L2 (Suzuki, 2015; Zhou, 2016). For instance, while congruent collocations like make a mistake can be understood, non-congruent ones, such as take a nap, often result in errors if students rely only on direct translation from their L1 to English (Yamashita & Jiang, 2010). As delexical verb-noun collocations, formed with verbs like make, do, take, and have, are particularly more challenging because these verbs carry little meaning, which results in challenges for learners to discerningly choose the correct combination (Chi et al., 1994; Liao, 2010). Juknevičienė (2008), underlining the impact of L1 transfer, stated that learners often apply incorrect verb-noun collocations based on their native language structures.

2. Literature Review

Research has shown that contextual learning can significantly enhance learners' ability to understand and retain collocations. Studies by Schouten-van Parreren (1989) and Carpenter et al. (2012) indicated that encountering vocabulary in varied, meaningful contexts leads to long-term retention. However, in the case of production, Lee and Muncie (2006) were of the view that reading and coming across words in the context were not likely to make the students use the vocabulary to become produced in cases where the students were supposed to write about the same topic as the reading. Furthermore, direct teaching methods have been found particularly effective. Studies concluded that learners who benefited from direct instruction of collocations as the treatment group outperformed those who were in the control group (Lien, 2003; Hsu, 2010).

Integrating authentic materials and technology-based tools has also been a part of teaching collocations. Additionally, digital tools and game-based learning have become contemporary and effective methods for vocabulary teaching. Cabraja (2016) found that students who took part in vocabulary games showed higher levels of receptive vocabulary proficiency. Besides, studies have shown that tools like *Kahoot* and *Quizlet*, which create a competitive learning atmosphere, improve both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge by offering real-time feedback, fostering collaboration, and allowing repeated practice (Jia et al., 2024; Bouzaiane & Youzbashi, 2024). Nevertheless, there is a widely accepted gap in the familiarity relating to how such tools can become a source of collocation application in production

since the receptive knowledge has been the major object of research (Zou et al., 2019). This study attempts at offering a detailed method that would focus on teaching delexical verb-noun collocations by combining the use of contextual reading materials and digital technologies with paragraph writing, what would enable addressing both receptive and productive skills.

As far as delexical verb-noun combinations, quite complex and important to the fluency, are concerned, collocational competence is the other field where EFL learners need to work the most, and research in the Turkish setting has concentrated primarily on the problem. Babanoğlu (2013) deemed to conclude that Turkish learners tend to face challenges in using make collocations in the proper way, which they encounter due to L1 transfer. In the same way, in their recent work, Kahraman and Subaşı (2022) outlined common mistakes in the application of *make* and *do* collocations in argumentative essays and demonstrated grammatical and semantic issues that these verbs introduce. Regarding the grammatical perspective, Akıncı and Yıldız (2017) examined the effectiveness of explicit instruction and corpus-based learning teaching in terms of teaching collocations and they discovered that explicit teaching enhanced the recognition and retention of learners. In accordance with this, Kartal and Yangıneksi (2018) showed that though the use of corpus tools elevated the use of collocations in the written works of students, authentic resources played an important role in its longer-term retention. The urgency of direct teaching and context-base tasks were also supported by other studies including that of Özata (2020), and Uçar and Yükselir, (2015). This corroborates with the conclusion made by Özen (2021), who states that some of the most frequently occurring and yet the most erroneous delexical verbs in the context of writing assignments by the students include *have*, *give*, and *make*, which do not only encourage the learners to penetrate the use of collocations in their meaningful use but also assist teachers to comprehend how students grasp the use of such patterns wisely. In addition to these tasks show differences between receptive and productive knowledge of students concerning collocations, especially mentioned by some studies (Akıncı & Yıldız, 2017; Kartal & Yangıneksi, 2018), and guide the teachers in seeking the methods to enhance collocation competence in the Turkish EFL classrooms.

As per the recent studies, the delexical verb-noun combinations are passed through by the EFL learners which are mostly attributed to their random character and their dependence on the L1 transfer (Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Babanoğlu, 2013). The research emphasizes how explicit teaching can be a viable method to build recognition of collocations because among other examples Akıncı and Yıldız (2017) conducted a study on that matter, whereas contextualized learning improves retention and usage practices as the relevant contexts are provided (Carpenter et al., 2012). An engagement and an exposure to natural language such as those discussed by Uçar and Yükselir (2015), and Kartal and Yangıneksi (2018) aids the students through game-based learning and corpus-based programs. To remedy the difference between receptive and productive knowledge, paragraph writing activities prove to be useful because they make the students remember and apply collocations to situations in which they are meaningful (Özata, 2020). All these studies stress upon the need of incorporating explicit instructions, meaningful contexts and interactive tools in order to improve in recognition and production of the collocations. Although some research on the teaching of collocations to EFL students has already been conducted, articles mainly concentrate on the exploration of a single methodology only, either explicit teaching (Akıncı & Yıldız, 2017) or corpus-based instruments (Kartal & Yangıneksi, 2018). Moreover, the studies usually tend to apply emphasis on reception as opposed to the production aspect without filling the gap between the two aspects. Moreover, contextual reading (Carpenter et al., 2012) and digital tools (Cabreja, 2016) demonstrated effectiveness individually and can be widely used to teach delexical verb-noun collocations; however, the combination of the two is not thoroughly studied and stands out more obviously in the Turkish EFL environment, where students cannot manage delexical verbs without

L1 interference (Babanoğlu, 2013; Kahraman & Subaşı, 2022).

Although recent research highlights the effectiveness of contextualized reading and digital tools, studies often focus on either receptive or productive skills, which poses a gap to comprehend how these methods can be connected or integrated. Collocations, particularly delexical verb-noun collocations such as *make a decision*, *give a speech*, are essential for achieving fluency and accuracy in language use but are challenging for foreign language students due to their arbitrary nature and lack of clear rules. By integrating contextual reading and *Quizlet*, the aim was to address this gap and to improve receptive and productive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations in Turkish EFL context. In line with this, the study adopted a quantitative pre-test/post-test single-group design, which compared students' performance before and after the intervention, and was guided by the following question:

- To what extent does integrating contextual reading to teach delexical verb-noun collocations and utilizing digital tools to scaffold learning improve students' receptive and productive collocational knowledge?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to engage participants in the study. Although the expected number of the students to participate in the study was 30, 1 student was absent on the pre-test day; thus, the data collection process started with 29 students. After meticulous measures, the emerging outcome was 24 pre-intermediate students to participate in the study. The students were aged 17–19, and their proficiency level had been determined through an institutional placement test, which classified them as pre-intermediate students (CEFR A2 level) at the beginning of the term. As students at this level often possessed enough vocabulary knowledge to engage with collocations but had trouble utilizing them accurately and fluently in productive tasks, the study tried to provide insights into effective ways for recognition and use of collocations at this proficiency level.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Pre- and Post-Tests:

In accordance with the design of the study, receptive and productive knowledge was tested through two types of assessment. The receptive knowledge test was compiled from *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*, which included 20 fill-in-the-blanks exercises where students put delexical verbs such as *make*, *do* in the blanks followed by nouns such as *a decision*, *a research*. This task assessed students' ability to recognize and understand the use of collocations in context. Subsequently, the productive knowledge assessment was done through a cause paragraph writing task where students were expected to use delexical verb-noun collocations in a meaningful context. To support their learning, students were assigned a writing task where they produced a cause paragraph on the same topic as the reading passage. This task required retention and application of the delexical verb-noun collocations in a coherent paragraph. This task was aimed to see how many delexical verb-noun collocations the students were able to use accurately and contextually. The aim of the writing task was to promote transition from recognition to production.

3.2.2. Intervention Stage:

The intervention integrated contextual reading and *Quizlet* activities to enhance both receptive and productive knowledge of collocations during 4 weeks. Time allocated for intervention was 4 class hours each week. It consisted of the following steps:

Contextual Reading: Students were given a carefully designed reading passage that incorporated delexical verb-noun collocations in meaningful and natural contexts. The reading task included comprehension questions and meaning-focused activities that guided students to notice and understand the use of delexical verb-noun collocations. The aim of this task was to raise reception and expose students to a more focused engagement with the collocations.

Quizlet Activities: After the reading, to reinforce their receptive knowledge, students were assigned tests on *Quizlet* sessions each week, where they matched delexical verbs with nouns. This activity promoted not only engagement but also repeated exposure to the collocations, and aided students internalize them. The pair-matching activity specifically addressed the challenges of delexical collocations, allowing students to go over and correct errors in real-time. As the activity provided repeated exposure and immediate feedback, it was implemented to reinforce receptive knowledge and students' understanding of collocational patterns.

3.3. Data Analysis

To evaluate the first part of the pre- and post-test, which was a fill-in-the-blanks task to test receptive knowledge, each correct answer was assigned 1 point, and the total score was calculated for each student. For the second part of the pre- and post-test, which was cause paragraph writing task to test productive knowledge, the number of correct delexical verb-noun collocations were counted. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data collected. Besides, pre- and post-test scores for receptive and productive tasks were statistically compared to determine the effectiveness of integrating contextual reading and *Quizlet* activities using *paired samples t-test*.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the pre-and post-test scores for Receptive Knowledge (Pair 1) and Productive Knowledge (Pair 2)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test Fill-in Score	24	6.00	15.00	9.7917	2.18650
Post-test Fill-in Score	24	8.00	19.00	12.2500	2.38200
Pre-test Paragraph	24	.00	3.00	.7917	1.06237
Post-test Paragraph	24	.00	7.00	2.9583	1.96666
Valid N (listwise)	24				

Considering the pre- and post-test Fill-in scores, descriptive statistics (Table 1) illustrated that the lowest score increased 2 points (from 6 to 8) while the highest one increased 4 points (from 15 to 19), which in turn led to an increase in average scores (9.7917 for the pre-test; 12.2500 for the post-test). Taking the paragraph scores into account, though the minimum score was the same for both tests (minimum=0), the maximum one increased from 3 to 7 for the pre- and post-tests, respectively. This increase brought

about an improvement in the mean score (from 0.7917 to 2.9583).

Table 2. Comparison of the pre- and post-test scores for Receptive Knowledge (Pair 1) and Productive Knowledge (Pair 2)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test Fill-in Score	9.7917	24	2.18650	.44632
	Post-test Fill-in Score	12.2500	24	2.38200	.48622
Pair 2	Pre-test Paragraph	.7917	24	1.06237	.21685
	Post-test Paragraph	2.9583	24	1.96666	.40144

Table 3. Correlations of the pre- and post-test scores for Receptive Knowledge (Pair 1) and Productive Knowledge (Pair 2)

		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pre-test Fill-in Score & Post-test Fill-in Score	24	.870	<.001	<.001
Pair 2	Pre-test Paragraph & Post-test Paragraph	24	.786	<.001	<.001

Table 2 shows that the mean of the pre-test Fill-in score was 9.7917; however, after the intervention, it became 12.2500 in that of the post-test. Likewise, the mean of paragraph writing scores of the post-test became 2.9583 though it was 0.7917 for the pre-test. Besides, the correlations of the pre- and post-tests (Table 3), 0.870 and 0.786 for Fill-in scores and Paragraph scores, respectively, showed a strong correlation between the two tests ($p < .001$). Considering pre- and post-test results, the *paired samples t-test* for the receptive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations showed a significant improvement ($M=9.7917$, $SD=2.1865$; $M=12.25$, $SD=2.382$, respectively). Taking paragraph writing task into account, the increase in the students' scores from the pre-test ($M=0.7917$, $SD=1.06237$) to the post-test ($M=2.958$, $SD=1.966$) showed that the intervention improved students' retention.

Table 4. Mean differences between the pre-and post-test scores for Receptive Knowledge (Pair 1) and Productive Knowledge (Pair 2)

		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pre-test Fill-in Score - Post-test Fill-in Score	-2.45833	1.17877	.24061	-2.95608	-1.96058	-10.217	23	<.001	<.001
Pair 2	Pre-test Paragraph - Post-test Paragraph	-2.16667	1.30773	.26694	-2.71887	-1.61446	-8.117	23	<.001	<.001

Table 4 illustrates the mean differences between the pre-and post-tests. Mean difference was -2.45833 (t-value: -10.217, df= 23) and -2.16667 (t-value: -8.117, df= 23) for Fill-in scores and Paragraph scores, respectively. These negative mean differences and p-value (<.001) indicated that the intervention had a significant effect on post-test results.

Table 5. Effect Sizes of the pre-and post-test scores for Receptive Knowledge (Pair 1) and Productive Knowledge (Pair 2)

			Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
Pair 1	Pre-test Fill-in Score – Post-test Fill-in Score	Cohen's d	1.17877	-2.086	-2.798	-1.358
		Hedges' correction	1.21903	-2.017	-2.706	-1.313
Pair 2	Pre-test Paragraph – Post-test Paragraph	Cohen's d	1.30773	-1.657	-2.271	-1.027
		Hedges' correction	1.35239	-1.602	-2.196	-.994

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.

Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

The impact of the intervention was calculated using *Cohen's d* (Table 5), and 1.17877 effect size for Fill-in scores pair, and 1.30773 effect size for Paragraph pair showed that the intervention was effective (0.8 or higher= large effect size), which indicated that the integration of contextual reading and *Quizlet* activities was highly effective for students' improvement in receptive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations. This aligns with the studies by Schouten-van Parreren (1989) and Carpenter et al. (2012) as they concluded that encountering words in context led to retention. For paragraph writing task, *Cohen's d* was 1.3077, which was even higher than that of fill-in-the-blanks task for receptive knowledge, highlighting that the effect of the intervention on students' productive knowledge was ample. As there was a significant improvement in the productive knowledge, the results of this study challenges Lee and Muncie (2006) claiming that reading and contextual vocabulary learning did not ensure improvement in productive knowledge.

According to the results, it became evident that integrating contextual reading and *Quizlet* activities led to statistically significant improvements both for the receptive knowledge and the productive knowledge. Although not evaluated separately, the results also showed that the implementation of *Quizlet* activities had an effect in enhancing receptive and productive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations, which was in line with the results of Cabraja (2016), and which addressed to Zou et al. (2019) who doubted the effectiveness of the digital tools to contribute to the use of collocations in productive tasks.

This study showed that implementing contextual reading and digital tools, specifically *Quizlet*, significantly enhanced Turkish EFL students' receptive and productive knowledge of delexical verb-noun collocations. Despite the prominent results, there are some limitations that need to be taken into account. First of all, as the sample size ($N=24$) was small, it can limit the generalizability of the results to larger contexts. Moreover, due to time constraints of the academic term, the study had to be conducted in four weeks, which can also be a limitation to evaluate long-term retention of delexical verb-noun collocational knowledge. Besides, in order to both meet the curricular expectations of the institution and to present a contextual intervention, the productive task was about cause paragraph writing, which was closely related to the context of the reading text in the intervention. Therefore, focusing only on one form of production and tying it to the reading text can be another limitation of the study.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that teaching collocations in meaningful contexts and scaffolding learning through follow-up activities that keep up with recent technological tools enabled students to make considerable progress in not only receptive but also productive tasks, which meant that they

gained from both repeated and meaningful exposure and interactive and engaging practices.

Regarding the vast use of collocations in everyday English, it paves the way for a need to utilize these patterns both accurately and naturally. However, as students are prone to transfer their knowledge of L1 to L2 directly, teachers should allocate enough time to correct their mistakes through explicit and meaningful instruction. Classroom practices including comparison tasks between L1 and L2 can help students better assimilate and accommodate the collocational patterns.

From another point of view, integrating engaging and cooperative activities through digital tools instead of traditional matching exercises or fill-in-the-blanks activities arose interest and enthusiasm among the students born to the digital era. Since they are used to anything integrated with technology, teachers should use such platforms for collaborative learning and spaced repetition. Furthermore, by guiding them and facilitating their learning, teachers can promote learner autonomy through digital platforms.

All in all, this study investigated an integrated approach to teaching collocations by bridging the gap between recognition and production. Teachers should acknowledge the value of helping their students internalize collocations to achieve fluent, accurate, and natural communication.

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APPENDIX 1

PRE- & POST-TEST

A. Complete each of the following sentences using do, make, have, take or give (more than one answer may be possible).

1. Make sure you _____ a look at the engine before you buy the car.
2. After the interview, I had to _____ a test.
3. They always _____ us a welcome when we go there.
4. I sometimes _____ a siesta in the afternoon.
5. Saturday is my day for _____ jobs around the house.
6. The housing committee are _____ priority to the elderly.
7. Let's _____ one more swim before we go back to the hotel.
8. He _____ a short laugh when he realized his mistake.
9. The moment we met, we _____ a dislike to each other.
10. I told her I would run in the marathon –I'm not going to _____ any promises like that again.
11. She has always _____ an interest in current affairs.
12. She _____ fortunate on the stock market.
13. _____ a picture of me and your dad together.
14. The kids are _____ a terrible racket.
15. Her singing _____ an impression on me.
16. _____ the handle a twist and the door should open.
17. I don't know the answer, so I'll _____ a guess.
18. How often do you have to _____ the medicine?
19. Everyone else was _____ notes in the lecture, but I had forgotten my pen.
20. The BBC are visiting our school to _____ a programme about teaching!

- Why do people have unhealthy eating habits?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.