

The Effect of Consciousness-raising Tasks on Collocational Competence of Iraqi EFL Learners

Qasim Jalil Kareem

The Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran.

q.jalilkareem@urmia.ac.ir

Javad Gholami*

The Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran.

j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir

Corresponding Author: Javad Gholami Email: j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir

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Abstract

This research explores the effectiveness of two instructional strategies, input enhancement (an implicit technique) and consciousness-raising (an explicit approach), on developing grammatical and lexical collocation knowledge among Iraqi learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). A total of sixty participants with pre-intermediate English proficiency were selected in Iraq and randomly assigned to one control group and two experimental groups. To ensure baseline equivalency in collocational knowledge, all participants completed a pre-test prior to instruction. Over six instructional sessions, each group engaged with the same reading materials but received different forms of instruction. A post-test was administered one week after the final session to assess learning outcomes. The results showed that input enhancement had no significant impact on grammatical collocation acquisition but did lead to notable improvements in lexical collocation knowledge. In contrast, the consciousness-raising method significantly improved both grammatical and lexical collocation knowledge. Furthermore, learners in the consciousness-raising group outperformed those in both the input enhancement and control groups. These findings offer valuable insights for curriculum planners, instructional material designers, language teachers, and learners..

Keywords: collocations, input enhancement, consciousness-raising, Iraqi students

1. Introduction

Form-focused instruction (FFI) has become a significant approach in language teaching, emphasizing the formal aspects of language, such as grammar, syntax, and collocations, in conjunction with communicative competence. This instructional methodology stands in contrast to purely communicative approaches that prioritize meaning and fluency over accuracy. The core principle of FFI is that drawing learners' attention to specific language forms within meaningful contexts can lead to more precise and sophisticated language use (Lee et al., 2024). The origins of form-focused instruction can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, during which researchers began to challenge the dominant communicative language teaching

(CLT) paradigm (Ellis, 2003). Notable linguists such as Michael Long and Rod Ellis argued that exclusive reliance on naturalistic language exposure might not suffice for the development of certain linguistic features (Ellis, 2006). Long (1991) introduced the concept of "focus on form," integrating attention to linguistic elements within communicative activities (Long, 1991). This approach aims to balance fluency and accuracy by ensuring learners are conscious of the forms they need.

FFI is implemented through various techniques, including explicit grammar instruction, corrective feedback, and tasks that highlight specific linguistic forms (Mhurchú et al., 2024). Research indicates that combining form-focused instruction with communicative practice can enhance language learning outcomes (Kanji & Watermeyer, 2024). For instance, studies have shown that FFI can significantly improve learners' accuracy in using complex grammatical structures (Cai, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of technology in language teaching has facilitated the application of FFI. Tools such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL) systems have been used to provide form-focused practice, enhancing both the learning experience and outcomes (Kang et al., 2024). The main challenge in applying for FFI lies in maintaining a balance between fluency and accuracy. While communicative language teaching prioritizes meaning and fluency, FFI ensures that learners do not neglect the accuracy and complexity of language forms (Eliazarian, 2024). This balanced approach helps in developing both communicative competence and linguistic precision (Mhurchú et al., 2024).

The concept of "focus on form" (FoF) involves directing learners' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in primarily communicative lessons (Long, 1991). This approach contrasts with "focus on forms" (FoFs), which entails isolated and explicit teaching of linguistic elements without integrating them into communicative practice (Ellis, 2006). FoF can be classified into two categories: planned focus on form and incidental focus on form (Long, 1991).

2. Review of literature

2.1. Significance of Collocations in English as a Foreign Language Context

To use vocabulary effectively and accurately, language learners must acquire various dimensions and levels of lexical knowledge. Nation (2013) offers a detailed framework that organizes word knowledge into three major components: (a) form, which encompasses the spoken and written representations of words as well as their morphological elements; (b) meaning, which involves understanding the relationship between form and meaning, the underlying concepts and their referents, and how words relate to each other; and (c) use, which covers grammatical roles, typical word pairings (collocations), and contextual or usage restrictions.

The lexical method, as advocated by Lewis (1993), focuses on enhancing learners' competence in lexis, individual words, and word combinations. According to Lewis (2008), the lexical approach posits that language consists of lexical phrases and meaningful chunks that merge to form a cohesive text. Schmitt (2000) posits that the unconscious mind interprets collocations and lexical phrases as a unified unit of meaning or a distinct entity. The mind organizes and consolidates the language to facilitate its processing by arranging words into lexical phrases rather than individual words. Typically, individuals acquire the common collocations of their native language without conscious awareness.

Although native speakers possess the ability to effectively mix words in their native language,

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners lack this skill. Benson (1989) argued that collocations are arbitrary and unexpected. Why can some words collocate with others lack logical justification? Therefore, non-native speakers struggle to interact with them without proper guidance. Considering a collocation such as "commit suicide," there is no logical guideline for choosing "commit" from its several synonyms, including "perform," "do," and "execute." The capricious restriction of collocations permits that the act of committing suicide gets sanctioned, but the act of *do suicide does not. Hill (2000) stated that over 70% of conversations in any natural language encompass various forms of fixed expressions. Therefore, acquiring collocation skills is crucial for the development of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner's vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and natural speaking abilities.

As defined by McCarthy and O'Dell (2005), fluency refers to the ability to speak consistently, accurately, and authentically. The fluency of native speakers is attributed to the ease with which they can think and communicate using readily available chunks from their mental lexicon. While native speakers can read and listen more quickly due to their ability to identify collocations, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners must analyze multi-word units individually (Hill, 2000).

Pawley and Syder (1983) proposed that student proficiency in collocations eliminates the cognitive burden of determining appropriate word combinations, allowing them to articulate their thoughts effortlessly and without frequent interruptions. Furthermore, with knowledge of collocations, individuals can retain a substantial quantity of pre-existing sets of words in their memory, enabling them to select the suitable collocations for the given communication scenario effortlessly.

McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) contended that collocations facilitate precise and organically spoken and written communication. It is possible for others to comprehend your intended meaning when you mention that I made a few errors. Nevertheless, your speech sounds authentic when you acknowledge that I have made a few errors. Acquisition of collocations also provides us with different methods of expressing something rather than restating it. As an illustration, rather than describing it as extremely cold and very dark, we may express it as brutally cold and completely dark. Furthermore, the acquisition of collocations not only enriches our vocabulary but also enables learners to select language suitable for a specific situation, enhancing their writing and speaking proficiency. For example, we can utter a substantial meal rather than referring to a large supper.

To achieve native-like fluency, learners must possess the capacity to select and effectively recall the correct collocations. Moreover, they should possess the capacity to segment the language effectively. Inadequate knowledge of the crucial collocations of a key word among some pupils produces defective sentences. Deficient collocation competency in learners often results in using longer phrases with grammatical faults (Hill, 2000).

Multiple studies have been conducted to demonstrate the impact of learners' collocation knowledge on their overall development of proficiency and language skills (Bahramdoust & Moeini, 2012; Mounya, 2010; Rahimi & Momeni, 2012). Their findings indicated that improving collocation competence led to an increase in the communicative competence of EFL learners, thereby enhancing their proficiency and language abilities. According to the findings of Jafarpour and Koosha (2006), the challenge faced by learners in producing spoken and written language was not associated with their grammatical or lexical proficiency. However,

the reason for this was the absence of collocation knowledge. Ozgul and Abdulkadir (2012) examined the use of collocations in teaching vocabulary in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The vocabulary was introduced to the control group using traditional methods, including definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and translation into their native language. The experimental group acquired new vocabulary using appropriate collocations designed for each term. The research findings indicated that vocabulary instruction using collocations yielded superior word acquisition compared to studying individual words.

2.2. Consciousness-Raising

Schmidt (1990) emphasized the crucial role of consciousness in the process of acquiring a second language. He delineated consciousness into three distinct aspects: **awareness**, **intention**, and **knowledge**. Within the domain of awareness, Schmidt identified three progressive levels: **perception**, **noticing**, and **understanding**. Perception, as he described, refers to the mental organization of external stimuli and the ability to construct internal cognitive representations of external events (Schmidt, 1990, p. 132). Later, Schmidt (1995) introduced the *noticing hypothesis*, which asserts that learners acquire language features only when they consciously notice them in the input (p. 20). He further suggested that the likelihood of noticing is affected by several factors, such as the nature of instruction, frequency of exposure, perceptual prominence, the learner's proficiency, task-related pressures, and opportunities for comparison (Schmidt, 1990).

Analytical comprehension represents a higher level of consciousness in which learners derive general principles from particular instances. Problem-solving often occurs at this level. Schmidt (2001) asserted that while noticing is fundamental to language acquisition, comprehension plays a facilitative role. Without some level of conscious awareness, learning cannot take place. Thus, recognizing varying degrees of awareness is essential in understanding how language is acquired. Learning is believed to occur when learners consciously direct their attention toward linguistic input.

Ellis (2003) noted that cognitive retrieval tasks typically rely on **explicit** learning processes, aiming to foster comprehension rather than just awareness at a perceptual level. According to Ellis (1991), critical reading (CR) tasks serve as pedagogical tools where learners interact with target language data through specific operations designed to enhance their understanding of particular linguistic features (p. 60).

Willis and Willis (1996) argued that fully encapsulating a language is impractical due to its dynamic and ever-expanding nature. Therefore, they proposed that learners be engaged in cognitively demanding tasks that promote critical thinking. These tasks involve analyzing language samples and drawing personal conclusions about language use (p. 63). They outlined several CR task types, including identification (locating target forms), judgment (evaluating accuracy), completion (filling gaps), modification or reconstruction (rephrasing), classification (categorizing forms), matching, and rule formation or hypothesis generation. Moreover, CR tasks can be employed not only as primary learning tools but also for remedial purposes, encouraging learners to focus on language aspects they struggle to use correctly.

In such tasks, the teacher's role shifts to that of a guide or facilitator, who helps clarify linguistic patterns. Learners need ample time to internalize these patterns, apply generalizations, and construct rules through their cognitive engagement (Amirian & Abbasi, 2014).

There has been a long debate over the effectiveness of CR tasks. A body of research has

explored their influence on various dimensions of language proficiency. Several studies have provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of computer-assisted CR in language development (Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Laufer, 2006; Macaro & Masterman, 2006; Rasha, 2011). Amirian and Sadeghi (2012) investigated the effect of grammar-focused CR tasks on Iranian EFL learners' performance. The study involved 60 female students from Sabzevar who were split into an experimental and a control group. While the control group followed a traditional drill-based instruction method, the experimental group engaged with CR tasks that presented target grammar forms in highlighted sentences. Learners in this group were required to infer grammatical rules and explain them. Noticing errors prompted learners to attempt corrections, and results showed that CR instruction significantly improved grammar learning.

Similarly, Yarahmadzahi, Esfandiary, and Kalali (2015) studied the effects of CR instruction on the grammatical competence of 66 male high school students in Dashtestan, Iran. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was exposed to grammar-focused CR tasks emphasizing rule understanding, error detection, and correction. The results indicated substantial improvement in the grammatical performance of the experimental group, underscoring the instructional value of CR tasks.

Another study by Fatemipour and Hemmati (2015) assessed the impact of CR exercises on grammar acquisition among pre-intermediate learners at an English institute in Tehran. Sixty students were randomly divided between an experimental group (receiving CR instruction) and a control group (taught via deductive grammar instruction). Despite both groups covering the same grammar content under the same teacher, the experimental group demonstrated significantly better outcomes, especially in grammar accuracy. This suggests that CR tasks, particularly in computer-assisted formats, can greatly aid learners in internalizing grammatical rules.

Furthermore, the study revealed that CR instruction fosters learners' metacognitive awareness and curiosity, making them more conscious of their learning processes. However, not all findings are consistent. For instance, Soleimani, Jahangiri, and Jafarigohar (2015) compared explicit CR-based instruction with implicit teaching to assess their effects on learners' understanding of the simple past tense. The study involved 59 intermediate EFL learners, divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received explicit instruction involving text-based CR tasks and guided feedback, while the control group received implicit exposure without rule explanation. Results indicated no significant advantage for explicit instruction, suggesting that CR may not always outperform implicit methods in certain contexts.

In a separate investigation, Pakbaz and Rezai (2015) examined the effectiveness of CR as a post-task activity in improving writing accuracy and complexity among lower-intermediate learners. Participants were divided into control and experimental groups, with the latter receiving CR tasks related to comparatives, superlatives, and articles. The findings showed improvements in writing accuracy for the experimental group, though writing complexity did not significantly improve.

Considering the evidence, the present study aims to determine whether consciousness-raising tasks can support the development of lexical collocational competence among EFL learners.

Research Question (RQ1):

Do consciousness-raising tasks enhance the lexical collocational competence of advanced EFL

learners?

3. Method

3.1. participants

The 60 male students who were recruited from three separate language institutes to participate in this study were all native Persian speakers and advanced EFL students. From 22 to 28 years old, the participants' ages ranged from an average of 25 years. Note that 28 participants were enrolled in graduate programs, 22 were in undergraduate programs, and 10 had finished high school. Based on their scores on the Oxford Quick Placement Test, which classified them as advanced, the participants' level of English proficiency was established. A purposive sampling strategy was used in conjunction with clear criteria to guarantee that all eligible participants were included in the study.

A very high degree of English proficiency was the main requirement for inclusion in the study. This level of proficiency was established because they were classified as advanced language learners based on their results on the Oxford Quick Placement Test. To guarantee that all participants had an equivalent degree of English ability, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was used as an objective metric to evaluate language competence.

3.2. Research instruments

To assess the participants' competency and ensure consistency, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered. The students encountered a total of 89 collocations through six reading passages, including 52 lexical collocations. Five of these readings were selected from McCarthy and O'Dell's (2005) *Collocations in Use*, while one was taken from Rezvani's (2011) study. McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) emphasize that the selected collocations provide an accurate reflection of authentic English usage, representing common word pairings found in everyday conversation, media, literature, and journalism (p. 4). These collocations are practical, frequently occurring in both spoken and written forms, and often pose challenges for learners.

During the pretest, students were required to select the correct collocation from four multiple-choice options. Some items were adapted from McCarthy and O'Dell's (2005) *Collocations in Use*, while others were gathered from free online dictionary sources such as <http://www.yourdictionary.com> via Google searches. To enhance the quality of the test, additional distractors were incorporated where needed. The reliability of the test, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was calculated at 0.78, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency for assessing collocational knowledge. The pretest was administered before the instructional treatments, and a posttest, using the same instrument, was given one week after the final treatment session. The eight-week interval between tests was sufficient to reduce the likelihood of test familiarity or practice effects influencing the results.

For instructional purposes, six reading passages containing collocations highlighted in bold were used. The readability of these texts was evaluated using the online tool <http://readability-score.com>, which measures both reading ease and grade level. The texts scored between 78.7 and 89.8 on the reading ease scale, with an average grade level of 6, indicating that the materials were clear, accessible, and appropriate for the participants' English proficiency.

3.3. Procedure and data analysis

At the outset, all participants completed the Oxford Quick Placement Test to ensure uniformity in their general language proficiency. They were given thirty minutes to finish the test. Following this, sixty students—twenty from each class—were selected, all demonstrating pre-intermediate proficiency levels. To evaluate the reliability of the pre-test and post-test instruments and verify their alignment with learners' collocational knowledge, a pilot study was conducted involving twenty students matched for competency, age, and gender. After administering the initial test version, two items were removed due to ambiguity and difficulty, and distractors in one item were revised to reduce confusion. The finalized test, comprising 40 items, was then administered to the main participants. The reliability of the test was found to be 0.76, indicating an acceptable level.

Prior to the treatment sessions, all three groups completed the pre-test to establish baseline knowledge and ensure homogeneity regarding collocational awareness. The treatment phase began two weeks after the pre-test, allowing for a temporal gap aimed at minimizing potential test-wiseness and practice effects. Each group was provided with the same texts containing embedded collocations; however, the instructional approaches differed. The same instructor taught all groups over six weeks, with one 80-minute session per week.

The first experimental group received explicit instruction using the consciousness-raising (C-R) method. Students were given reading materials where collocations were highlighted in bold to draw attention. The teacher explained unfamiliar collocations by providing definitions, synonyms, and translations into the learners' native language (e.g., "money was tight" meaning limited funds, or "shattered family" referring to children of divorced parents). Students then worked with the texts using various C-R tasks, such as identification, completion, and evaluation exercises, which encouraged focused attention on collocational forms and their correct usage.

The second experimental group received implicit instruction (IE). Like the C-R group, they read texts with bolded collocations but without direct explanation of the collocations themselves. The teacher provided definitions and translations for unknown words unrelated to collocations. Students focused on comprehending the overall meaning of the text and answered comprehension questions, which required using collocations from the readings. Thus, learners indirectly practiced collocations through answering questions, rather than through explicit instruction.

The control group read the same texts but did not receive either explicit or implicit collocation-focused instruction. They participated in their usual English lessons, where the teacher explained unfamiliar single words (not collocations) using definitions, synonyms, and native language equivalents. After reading, they answered comprehension questions identical to those posed to the IE group and paraphrased the texts in their own words.

One week after the final treatment session, a post-test was administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Student responses were scored, with correct answers earning one point and incorrect answers zero; the maximum achievable scores were 25 for lexical collocations and 15 for grammatical collocations. Data from both pre-tests and post-tests were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. The study employed paired sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA to address the research questions.

4. Results

Undoubtedly, collocations are essential elements of foreign or second language acquisition.

This study was meant to translate theoretical difficulties into practice by applying two distinct teaching approaches, namely Instructional Engagement (IE) and Collaborative Reflection (CR), to lexical collocations.

4.1. Estimating Reliability Indices of Research Instruments

The reliability of the research equipment was evaluated through a preliminary inquiry before their application in the main study. A cohort of EFL students, exhibiting comparable traits to the primary study participants, was randomly chosen to participate in the pilot study for this objective.

Table 1. Reliability Indices of the Research Instruments

	Index
Pretest	0.67
Posttest	0.62

Table 1 presents the dependability results for the research tools. Table 1 displays the reliability indices of the research instruments employed in this study, specifically for the pretest and posttest. The reliability index is a crucial metric indicating the instrument's consistency and stability. The pretest yielded a reliability index of 0.67, signifying a modest degree of reliability. This indicates that the pretest exhibited a commendable level of consistency and stability prior to the intervention. The posttest exhibited a reliability index of 0.62. This indicates moderate reliability, affirming that the posttest exhibited comparable consistency and stability after the intervention. Considering these reliability indices while analyzing the study's results is essential, since they influence the confidence level in the findings. A reliability index approaching 1.0 would signify greater reliability of the tests. Despite the indices above 0.6, indicating satisfactory reliability, there may still be variability in the scores unrelated to the constructs being assessed. It suggests a necessity for prudence in forming conclusive judgments based on these instruments.

4.2. Testing the Assumptions

We applied inferential statistics and a one-way ANOVA test to ascertain the significance of variations between pretest and posttest scores across separate groups. Before doing the ANOVA, we thoroughly assessed the essential assumptions related to this statistical method, which are vital for the validity of our findings.

To guarantee the precision of our results, we concentrated on verifying the conditions for employing parametric statistical tests, which include the normality of distribution, homogeneity of variances, the existence of at least interval variables, and the independence of measurements. To examine the assumption of normality, we computed the kurtosis and skewness values, along with their corresponding z-scores, for all three groups. Additionally, Levene's Test was utilized to evaluate the homogeneity of variances among the groups.

In instances where the data failed to satisfy the assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variances, we contemplated employing suitable transformations or utilizing non-parametric options to rectify these discrepancies. We are dedicated to addressing any infractions

stringently to preserve the integrity of our conclusions. We aimed to either modify the data to better align with the assumptions or employ robust statistical methods that are less dependent on these assumptions, preserving the robustness and integrity of our inferential statistics. We wanted to enhance the credibility of our analysis and subsequent conclusions about advanced writing skills across the examined groups by delineating our thorough approach to assumption verification and our tactics for addressing potential breaches. Our rigorous technique guaranteed that the results drawn were based on thorough statistical analysis, offering a dependable foundation for interpretation and further discourse.

Table 4.2. Skewness and kurtosis values

	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Experimental	-0.112	0.328	-0.624	0.749
Control	0.165	0.314	-0.759	0.616

For the experimental groups, the z-score for skewness was $Z_{\text{skewness}} = -0.112$, and the z-score for kurtosis was $Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = 0.749$. The control group exhibited a skewness z-score of $Z_{\text{skewness}} = 0.165$ and a kurtosis z-score of $Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = 0.616$. Upon comparing these z-scores to the critical value of 1.86, which is significant at $p < .05$, it is clear that none of the z-scores surpasses this threshold. This indicates that the scores adhere to a normal distribution.

Table 4.3 illustrates that the outcomes of Levene's test lack statistical significance at $p < 0.05$. Consequently, we may ascertain that the variances among the groups are not significantly different, indicating approximate equality. Therefore, the assumption of variance homogeneity is fulfilled. Having satisfied the primary assumption of the parametric test, we may now proceed to execute ANOVA as the selected parametric test. Additionally, to evaluate the second assumption regarding the homogeneity of variances, we performed Levene's test, with the results displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Levene's Test results

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	0.084	1	74	0.722
Based on Median	0.078	1	74	0.719
Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.078	1	74	0.719
Based on trimmed mean	0.082	1	74	0.720

The average pre-test scores for the three groups ranged between 3.46 and 4.54. This indicates that all participants had a similar level of knowledge regarding lexical and grammatical collocations prior to the treatment. Therefore, the grouping into control and experimental categories was deemed appropriate and balanced.

Table 2. Paired-Sample T-Test Statistics for Paired Differences in IE Group

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	Pre/ Posttest of Gram	-7.13	3.64	.76	-7.35	-4.52	-8.43	.00
Pair 2	Pre/ Posttest of Lex	-15.85	5.65	1.44	-18.22	-12.22	-12.08	.00

Table 2 also showed that for pair two, the p-value was below 0.05 ($0.00 < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. This suggests that implicit instruction (IE) notably improved the learners' knowledge of lexical collocations, as reflected by the increased mean score in the post-test. The next research question examined the effect of corrective feedback on Iraqi EFL learners' lexical collocation mastery. Similarly, the significance level for pair two was 0.00 ($\text{sig} < 0.05$), demonstrating that consciousness-raising (CR) tasks had a significant positive effect on learners' lexical collocation knowledge, supported by a mean score difference of 15.85.

Table 4.7. Post-Hoc Test for Lexical Collocations

		Paired Differences					
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Control	CR	-8.45*	1.32	.00	-13.41	-3.71	
	IE	1.65	1.53	.54	-1.69	5.89	
CR	Control	8.45*	1.72	.00	4.78	13.42	
	IE	10.40*	1.37	.00	6.74	11.75	
IE	Control	-1.65	1.46	.54	-5.99	1.65	
	CR	-10.50*	1.73	.00	-12.75	-6.74	

Table 3 revealed that the consciousness-raising (CR) group outperformed the control group on

the post-test assessing lexical collocation knowledge, showing a mean difference of 8.45 ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, the CR group achieved significantly higher scores than the implicit instruction (IE) group on the same measure, with a mean difference of 10.40 ($p < 0.05$). However, no significant difference was found between the IE group and the control group in their lexical collocation post-test results ($p > 0.05$). Overall, the findings indicate that the CR group demonstrated superior lexical collocation knowledge compared to both other groups, while the IE and control groups showed similar performance levels.

6. Discussion

The findings related to the first research question showed that Instructional Effectiveness (IE) significantly improved learners' lexical collocation knowledge. Despite receiving the same treatment sessions from the same instructor within the same group, two different outcomes were observed. The results for the second research question revealed that consciousness-raising (C-R) training markedly enhanced the lexical collocation understanding of Iraqi EFL learners. These findings are consistent with Ellis (2003) and Willis and Willis (1996), who argued that engaging in C-R activities encourages learners to consciously reflect on and analyze specific language features.

This focused attention enables learners to target particular linguistic elements more effectively. The study's results also align with previous research by Amirian and Sadeghi (2012), Fatemipour and Hemmati (2015), Laufer (2006), Rasha (2011), and Yarahmadzahi, Esfandiary, and Kalali (2015), all of whom concluded that C-R is a beneficial instructional method for improving learners' grasp of language structures.

Although some studies (e.g., Pakbaz and Rezai, 2015; Shook, 1994; Soleimani, Jahangiri, & Jafarigohar, 2015) present conflicting findings, the current research supports the effectiveness of C-R in learning lexical collocations. The most effective strategy appears to be the use of typographical input enhancement combined with C-R exercises. Teachers should intentionally design tasks that guide students' attention to specific target features. As Leow (2001) emphasizes, language instruction and classroom activities must be organized to heighten learners' awareness of particular forms during input delivery. The degree of focus on form is believed to impact how input is converted into intake (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

5. Conclusion

Collocational competence is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition that demands considerable attention from both researchers and language instructors. Overlooking this area may lead L2 learners to produce language that, while grammatically correct, sounds unnatural or awkward. Focusing solely on individual vocabulary items without teaching appropriate collocations often causes learners to create their own word combinations, which frequently lack native-like fluency. Enhancing learners' ability to use collocations effectively contributes significantly to their overall language skills, improving both comprehension and expression.

This importance has spurred a growing body of research on collocations. Scholars have explored L2 learners' receptive and productive collocational knowledge, compared the collocational skills of native and non-native speakers, investigated common collocation errors among learners, and examined how collocational competence develops across different proficiency levels. Studies have also aimed to identify factors influencing collocation acquisition, explore the relationship between collocational knowledge and general language proficiency, track the development of collocations in both every day and specialized contexts,

and evaluate the effectiveness of explicit teaching methods in improving collocational competence. Moreover, new research directions on collocations continue to emerge.

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