



Measuring Students' Ability in Using Collocations in Argumentative Writing Across Gender

Annike Putri Ardi

English Department, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang
Jl. Semarang No.5, Sumber Sari, Kec. Lowokwaru, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur
annikeputriardi95@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research is a descriptive study. It investigates the difference of EFL male and female students' ability in using collocations in argumentative writing. There were 24 students taking a writing test in this research. They were 17 female and 7 male students. The test used a writing test with two different writing prompts to be chosen by the students. The rubric focused on the use of collocations as other elements of writing are ignored to make the test valid. The research findings show that overall score of the students' ability in using collocations in argumentative writing is 63.8 which is in average level. There is no student with excellent ability, 13 students with good ability, 7 students with average ability, 3 students with fair ability and 1 student with poor ability. Another finding, even with different score 64.2 for male and 62.7 for female, there is no difference between the male and female students' ability in collocations in argumentative writing as they both are in average level. In conclusion, the ability in using collocations of male and female students is in the same level.

Keywords: *Collocations, Argumentative Writing, Gender*

INTRODUCTION

EFL writing for higher education demands high level of vocabulary use where EFL students must consider the use of the elements of writing properly. As vocabulary is one of the elements, it is necessary for the EFL students to master many types of the vocabulary. Brown & Abeywickrama (2010) suggest that vocabulary in writing is given 20% of score. Collocations for English students as they are learning English for academic purposes should be prominent as the students strive for the higher degree of language learning (Nesselhauf, 2003). This is as important as content and organization in writing. Therefore, it is considered a necessity for EFL students in higher education to use many types of vocabulary to make their writing as close as native's writing.

One of types of vocabulary that is important to make natural use of English is collocations. Thornburny (2002) identify six types or categories of vocabulary which are word classes, word families, word formation, multi-word units, collocations, and homonymys. Collocations, according to McCharty and O'Dell (2008; 2017), collocations are natural combinations of words and they are naturally used by native speakers of English.



There are seven types of collocations proposed by McCharty and O'dell (2008). They are Adjectives and Nouns (AdjN) as in “*embarrassing moment*”, and “*unforgettable experience*”, Nouns and Verbs (NV) as in “*Bees buzz*”, and “*train pass*”, Nouns + nouns (NN) as in “*a selfish streak*”, and “*a good sense of humor*”, Verbs and Adverbs (Vadv) as in “*strongly agree*”, and “*fail miserably*”, Adverbs and Adjectives (AdvAdj) as in “*always happy*”, and “*almost finished*”, Verbs and Nouns (VN) as in “*have no idea*”, and “*start work*”, and Verbs and adjective (Vadj) as in “*go crazy*”, and “*turn red*”. For higher students, it is minimum that they understand those types of collocations.

A number of studies have shown the importance of collocations in EFL or ESL context of teaching and learning English. Dukali (2018) states that in Libyan context, the students might have perfect grammar, but they still encounter lexical problems. Then, they do not achieve high score, for example, in writing. As a result, to achieve maximum score in skills of English, the students must consider the use of collocations in speaking and writing skills. A research done by Petkovska & Neskovska (2020) show that teachers from both primary and secondary schools agree that collocations are important for acquiring EFL, enriching students' vocabulary and reaching a native-like fluency of the English language. Xu, Akhter, & Qureshi (2020) found in their review article that it is important for students of EFL to learn collocations based corpus to produce accurate language with the understanding of collocations. Even though it is important to use collocations, Phoocharoensil (2020) asserts that English students find it difficult to use collocations.

The importance of collocations have been a base for other research which found that many students had low ability in mastering collocations in Indonesia, EFL context. First, Kweldju (1999) found that English department students had a low ability in using collocations. Second, a research by Yalmiadi (2016) found that in descriptive writing, students had collocation problems that make use of incorrect collocations. By using different instrument, a multiple-choice test, Harida & Hamka (2019) found that six semester students had low ability in using collocations. Finally, another research was done by Nopita (2021) found that after taking a take-home writing test, the students were found to have a low ability in using collocations.

Regarding the students' ability in writing performance, different results of achievement by male and female students have been investigated by some researchers. Recent research done by Wiyanto & Asmorobangun (2020) found that in descriptive writing, in describing people male students used more locative feature while female students used a reference to quantity more frequently. In another research by Wulandari & Trisno (2020) male students' ability was lower than female students' ability in describing people. It can be seen that the genre of writing used to investigate different achievement of male and female students is descriptive text.

All research mentioned above used different instruments with different texts of writing to collect the data and the time used for the tests was allocated differently. The same context used was that the participants of the research were all EFL or ESL students. However, regarding the findings of those research, there was none of the research found to investigate the difference between the ability of male and female students' in using collocations in which it is still questionable whether there is a difference between male and female students' ability in using collocations in argumentative writing. Therefore, it is necessary for the writer to conduct a research to investigate the male and female students' ability in using collocations in argumentative writing. The reserach question is “Is there any difference between male and female' students ability in using collocations in argumentative writing?” The

finding of this research is expected to contribute to the development of strategy or media to integrate the teaching of collocations to the teaching of writing.

RESEARCH METHOD

This present research conducted was a descriptive research. According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012) qualitative research is defined as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. In this research, the source of data is English students' argumentative essays. The participants were 24 students of English Linguistics and Literature who are in third semester of a state university in Central Java. 17 students were female, and 7 students were male.

The instruments in this research were a writing test and a scoring rubric. The test was already consulted and validated by an English lecturer whose interest was teaching of writing. To make the data valid, data analysed were collocations in the students argumentative essay as instructed in the test. The scoring rubric was based on the correct and incorrect uses of collocations and the variation of types used by the students in their essays. It was a holistic rubric adapted by Brown & Abeywickrama (2008). The more number of correct uses of collocations and the more various the types of collocations are used, the higher the students' score of the essay. The score of the students' use of collocations and the levels are shown in the table below.

Table 1. The classification of the score and level of the students' ability in using collocations in their argumentative essays.

Score	Level
81-100	Excellent
66-80	Good
50-65	Average
40-50	Fair
0-39	Poor

The writing prompts were:

- (1) *Should immunizations be required for students to attend public school?*
- (2) *Should university students be drug tested regularly?*

This research limited the types of collocations into six types. In other words, the data analysis was focused on these types which means other possible types were ignored. The six types and the examples are as follows:

Table 2. Indicators of Types of Collocations

No	Types of Collocations	Examples
1.	Adjectives and Nouns	"a brief chat", "a long war"
2.	Nouns and Verbs	"a war broke out", "contracted a disease"
3.	Nouns + nouns	"a surge of anger", "a round of applause"
4.	Verbs and Adverbs	"significantly increase", "earnestly strive"
5.	Adverbs and Adjectives	"desperately sad", "perfectly healthy"

6.	Verbs and adjective	“ <i>fall sick</i> ”, “ <i>appear insignificant</i> ”
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The data analysis was run as follows: (1) the data analysis was started by administering a writing test to the students. To make the test valid, the test as the instrument was reviewed by the expert in teaching writing, a lecturer of Argumentative Writing course. The test was to write a 300-350 word argumentative essay which was hand-written on a piece of paper and sent the photo of their writing to the researcher via WhatsApp. (2) After finishing the test, the researcher analyzed the collocations in the students' essays by using <https://www.freecollocation.com/>. Here, the researcher identified the word combinations in each sentence which might be one of the six types of collocations, decided whether the use of collocations was correct or not, and calculated the types. (3) Then, the researcher tabulated the collocations found in each student's writing, and by guidance from the scoring rubric, the researcher gave score to each student's writing. The component to score was collocations, and others were ignored. (4) Once the score was obtained, the score was identified by categorizations of grading levels (Excellent, Good, Fair, Average, Fair, and Poor. (5) To ensure reliability of the score, this research employed inter-rater reliability in which a lecturer of teaching writing contributed as rater 2. (6) Next, to answer RQ 2 among the students, it was identified which gender got the higher mean score than another. To make it fair the mean was divided by the total of students in each gender. (7) Lastly, the researcher drew the conclusion based on the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

1) Students' classifications of ability and the overall ability in using collocations in argumentative essay

After administering the test and analyzing the data, based on the classification of the students' score and level, it was found the following findings in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' classifications of ability and the overall ability in using collocations in argumentative essay

Student No	M/F	Score	Level
1	F	53	Average
2	F	70	Good
3	F	68	Good
4	F	46	Fair
5	M	43	Fair
6	F	63	Average
7	F	68	Good
8	F	39	Poor
9	F	77	Good
10	M	58	Average
11	F	72	Good
12	F	70	Good
13	F	67	Good
14	F	71	Good
15	M	75	Good
16	M	61	Average

17	F	80	Good
18	F	66	Average
19	M	71	Good
20	F	63	Average
21	F	75	Good
22	F	45	Fair
23	M	75	Good
24	M	56	Average
Mean Score \bar{x}		63.8	Average

Table 2 shows that firstly, there is none of the students having excellent ability in using collocations in their argumentative essay; secondly, there are 13 students whose ability in using collocations are classified good; thirdly, 7 students have average ability in using collocations; fourthly, there are 3 students who have fair ability; and lastly there is only one students who has poor ability in using collocations in the argumentative essay. In addition, it can be seen that male and female students have mixed ability where at some level female dominated while at other levels male dominated. For example, out of 13 students having good ability in using collocations in argumentative essay, there are 9 female students whereas there are only 4 male students who have good ability in using collocations in argumentative essay. Overall, the students' ability in using collocations in argumentative essay is 63.8 in score and average in level.

1) Differences between Male and Female Students' Ability in Using Collocations in Argumentative Essays

The table below shows the mean score and the level of male and female students' ability in using collocations in argumentative essay.

Table 3. Differences between Male and Female Students' Ability in Using Collocations in Argumentative Essays

Gender	Mean Score \bar{x}	Level
Male	64.2	Average
Female	62.7	Average

Table 3. shows that male and female students' mean score is slightly different, but the level is the same. However, male students' mean score is still higher than 2.5 (64.7) than the female students who got 64.2. The data here is believed to be reliable because even there more numbers of female students, it does not affect the calculation of the mean score. Therefore, the data can be considered reliable.

Discussion

Based on the finding of this present research, the after two semester of instruction and a few weeks in the third semester, the English Linguistics and Literature students have average ability in using collocations in argumentative essay. Furthermore, there is only slight difference on the students' ability in using collocations in argumentative essay between male and female students. Even though there are different numbers of the students to compare between, the higher score obtained by the male students is a evidence of the reliability of the score of the collocations found in the students argumentative essay. However, this finding is

considerably a fail of the students of English regardless the years of instruction as they must have had experiences learning English in high schools.

The finding of this present research is in line with research findings by other researchers. The first research was from Kweldju (1999) investigating English Department students' collocation abilities, and the finding was the learners had a low mastery of collocations. This research used a fill-in-the-blank form test. This finding seems to be more easier than this present research used since the learners were given context of the use of the collocations in each sentence. In addition, the collocations used in the test were not natural from the test takers.

Another research was done by Yalmiadi (2016). In this research, the instrument instructed the students to write descriptive texts. However, there was no finding of the students' ability in using collocations, yet there was a finding that the students made collocation problems of all types of collocations investigated. Consequently, the finding shows that the students have low ability in using collocations. In addition, this finding of research supports the finding of the present research.

Other recent research also have the same finding as the present research. Harida & Hamka (2019) found that English Department students of IAIN Padangsidempuan had low ability in mastering collocation, and the students were in low categories even they were in the sixth semester. In addition, the test used was multiple-choice test which is considerably easy for the students to take a guess to answer each question. Another research by Nopita (2021) found that out of 42 students taking a take home writing test, there were only 5 students having excellent skill, 14 students having good skill and 23 others having low skill in using collocation in writing essay. In addition, the students were given 14 days to complete the test which is considered very much longer than any test ever administered to investigate students' ability in using collocations.

The research compared above all support the finding of the present research in which regardless the instrument used, the duration of the test given to the students, and the number of participants involved, the students' ability in using collocations is still low. Therefore, the present study is considered a novelty where the students worked with appropriate amount of time, and the naturalness of the collocations used was well maintained in which the students were not in position to choose but to produce.

The second finding is there is no significant difference between male and female students' ability in using collocations in argumentative essay. Ganji (2012) found that there was no significant difference between boys and girls in their knowledge of lexical collocations. However, years of instruction had impact on the students' knowledge of lexical collocations. These findings are in line with this present research finding. Even though these two research used very different instrument, fill-in-the-blank and writing test, the findings are the same. It can be inferred that even with different instrument there is still no difference between male and female students ability in using collocations.

There have been research on gender differences in the performance of writing descriptive text and describing people. These research are not pretty similar with the present study, but the skill used and the variable, gender, are quite important to be compared with the finding of the present research. The first research was done by Wiyanto & Asmorobangun (2020). It was found that male and female students used different linguistic features more frequently than others in which male students often used locative feature while female students often used a reference to quantity feature

and “I” reference feature. In the same year, Wulandari & Trisno (2020) found that the male students’ ability in describing people was lower than female students with 2.92 (good) and 3.09 (good) for female. This finding is the same as the second finding of this present research in which male and female students have the same level of ability with different score by 2.5 poin.

CONCLUSION

After showing the findings of this present research, here is some conclusion can be drawn. There is no student having excellent ability in using collocations. There are 13 students having good level of ability in using collocations, 7 students having average level of ability in using collocations, 3 students having fair level of ability and there is only one students which has poor ability in using collocations in the srgumentative essay. However, the mean score shows that overall students’ ability in using collocations is in the average level. In conclusion, the English Literature and Linguistics students in the third semester have average level of ability in using collocations.

Another conclusion can be drawn is there is slight difference of score between male and female students in using collocations in wrgmentative essay. Male students’ mean score is still higher than 2.5 (64.7) than the female students who got 64.2. It can be concluded that there is no different level of ability in using collocations in argumentative essay between male and female students.

This present research involved only 24 students which may be for some reasons too small for drawing a conclusion. In addition, the numbers of male and female students were not identical which may result different findings. Consequently, for future research, it is suggested to make use of big number of participants and the same number of male and female students to find different possible findings about students’ ability in using collocations across gender. In addition, this finding can be used more accurately as an initial step to start an experimental research.

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