

## **The effect of collocations and phrasal verbs on EFL learners' writing skill with a focus on attitude**

Seyedeh Maryam Mousavi  
Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch  
Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

Laya Heidari Darani\*  
Department of English, Falavarjan Branch  
Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

*(First version received 13/05/2019. Last version received 01/09/2019)*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to investigate the effect of collocations and phrasal verbs as language chunks on the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Moreover, the researchers intended to find out the attitude of learners towards writing after they learned collocations and phrasal verbs. To achieve the objectives, 30 Iranian EFL learners whose age ranged between 18 and 26 and who were all native speakers of Persian were selected. The instruments used for data collection included: Quick Placement Test (QPT), writing pretest and posttest and an attitude questionnaire. Findings revealed that collocations and phrasal verbs had effects on the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Furthermore, it was indicated that the learners' attitude increased in the course of this experimental study, indicating that learning collocations and phrasal verbs had significantly positive impacts on the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners towards writing skill. The findings of this study have implications for EFL teachers and learners as well as translators.

*Keywords:* attitude; collocations; language chunks; phrasal verbs; writing skill

### **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo busca investigar los efectos de la enseñanza de colocaciones y verbos preposicionales como fragmentos en la habilidad de la escritura en alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel intermedio en Irán. Asimismo, se investiga la actitud de los estudiantes hacia la escritura después de aprender colocaciones y verbos preposicionales. Para lograr este objetivo, se seleccionaron 30 estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera entre 18 y 26 años, todos hablantes nativos de persa. Para recolectar datos se recurrió a pruebas rápidas de nivel, a escritura pre y post evaluación y a cuestionarios de actitud. Los resultados revelan que la enseñanza de colocaciones y de verbos preposicionales tuvo una incidencia significativamente positiva en la actitud de los estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera hacia la habilidad de la escritura. Este descubrimiento es de importancia tanto para docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera como para traductores.

*Palabras clave:* actitud; colocación; fragmentos; verbos preposicionales; escritura

---

\* Corresponding author, e-mail: [layaheidari@yahoo.com](mailto:layaheidari@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in second/foreign language learning to the extent that without sufficient vocabulary, successful communication does not occur (Min, 2013). Additionally, Nation (2011) claimed that vocabulary is an essential tool in the development of all language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, particularly in the formation of written texts (Gu, 2003; Marion, 2008).

The lexical chunk is regarded as a significant part of second language learning by more and more linguists. Wei (2007) claimed that the prefabricated chunk is a language structure with both lexical and grammatical characteristics, usually multi-word units that have a linguistic function with specific characteristics of discourse function. Lexical bundles are widespread in any language. It might be supposed that they will naturally and easily be obtained. Nevertheless, as Biber & Barbieri (2007) and Cortes (2006) stated, acquiring these expressions is very difficult and their appropriate use does not naturally and easily happen.

Comparing vocabulary and grammar in language acquisition, vocabulary learning plays the main role, while grammar is ordered as a second factor (Krashen, 1989; Wilkins, 1972). Thus, for more than half a century, linguists have taken into account phraseology, the study of the structure, meaning, and use of word combinations (Cowie, 1998). According to Lewis (2000), teaching collocations, as multi-word units, constitutes the central part of vocabulary teaching; hence, it should not be devalued. He maintained that, when learners are able to analyze the language into lexical 'chunks', they can acquire a language. Differently put, learning collocations would make foreign language learners' speech and writing sound native-like.

Collocations and phrasal verbs, as language chunks, seem to be difficult for EFL learners to learn (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Namvar, 2012; Nation, 2003) and this has caused researchers to focus more on grammar as a key element in the writing skill (Fatemi, 2008; Shen, 2012) and thus research on collocations and phrasal verbs has not been paid enough attention. Moreover, this learning difficulty has presumably made EFL learners develop a fear of learning collocations and phrasal verbs. It is well-known that lack of positive attitude towards language learning may result in lack of motivation and thus in quitting it (Domyei, 1998; Gardner, 1988; Gardner & Clement, 1990). Furthermore, since the contemporary education community has focused on the improvement of writing, research which explores writing performance and attitudes towards it are of paramount importance (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). Concerning this problem, the current study sought to investigate the effect of collocations and phrasal verbs on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill as well as their attitude towards writing after learning such language chunks.

### **Theoretical background**

The use of the Lexical Approach (hereafter LA), which was put forward by Lewis (1993), is widely acknowledged in EFL teaching and lexical teaching and is a very important improvement in the progress of language teaching. The lexical approach focuses on improving learners' proficiency with lexis or words and word combinations. Lewis' lexical approach concentrates on students' improvement on lexis and word combinations. In this approach, the emphasis is on language learning which takes place through the comprehension and production of lexical phrases as unanalyzed entities, or chunks, and that "these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar" (Lewis, 1993, p. 95).

Firth (1957), who was considered to be the father of collocation, propounded the idea of separating lexis and semantics since collocation was the core of a word's meaning. Collocation can be defined as words which associate with one another and are more often than not used in spoken and written English. For Nattinger and deCarrico (1992, p. 1), they are "multi-word phenomena that exist somewhere between the traditional poles of lexicon and syntax, conventionalized form/ function composites".

According to Sinclair (1991), collocations have long-lasting connections. He found syntagmatic (*chain*) as well as paradigmatic (*choice*) relations in the connection between lexis and meaning. He further illustrates, "language is organized according to semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, that is, words do not occur at random in a text, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments" (1991, p. 110), e.g. the meaning of the phrasal verb *log out*, is not found by dividing and analyzing its respective parts *log* and *out*, but rather in its full meaning as a phrase or chunk. Thus, according to Aitchison (1996, p. 109) collocations and phrasal verbs "can be regarded as integrated into a single whole, the lemma".

Attitude is an essential factor in language learning. Chambers (1999) provides the following definition:

Attitude is taken to mean the set of values which a pupil brings to the foreign language learning experience. It is shaped by the pay-offs that she expects; the advantages that she sees in language learning. The values which a pupil has may be determined by different variables, such as experience of learning the target language, of the target language community, experience of travel, the influence of parents and friends and the attitudes which they may demonstrate and articulate. (p. 27)

Considering the definition above, to succeed in learning English, students' attitude toward English in general, and to collocations and phrasal verbs in particular, should be of concern. As a result, lecturers and educators should pay more attention to language learners' attitude when preparing English language training and pedagogy.

### **Empirical background**

A plethora of studies (Ashouri & Mashhadi Heidari, 2015; Ghonsooli, Pishghadam, & Mohaghegh Mahjoobi, 2008; Hsu, 2002; Marton, 1977; Mousavi & Heidari Darani, 2018; Seesink, 2007; Zhang, 1993) have been conducted in recent years exploring the effects of collocations on ESL/EFL writing skill and found that collocations were effective in improving this skill. Marton (1977), in an earlier study, found that collocations included problems at the level of production. This lack of collocational competence often causes learners to create longer utterances/paraphrases because they do not know the collocations which express precisely what they want to say; thus, they produced sentences which seemed odd, albeit correct.

Zhang (1993) measured the relationship between EFL learners' writing fluency and their use of lexical collocations among English native speakers and non-native speakers. He observed that native English writers were better than non-native writers on the collocation test, and native writers did better than non-native writers in writing. Moreover, Hsu (2002) studied the relationship between use of English lexical collocations and online writing among Taiwanese college English majors and non-English majors. The results showed that there were a positive relationship between EFL learners' frequency of lexical collocations and their writing. Additionally, Seesink (2007) studied vocabulary teaching and collocations in order to find how it can help to promote writing ability of Arab, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students. He realized that focus on collocations had a positive effect on the students' writing.

In the Iranian context, Ghonsooli, Pishghadam, and Mohaghegh Mahjoobi (2008) investigated the effect of teaching collocations on Iranian EFL learners' English writing. The results demonstrated that subjects' vocabulary and fluency increased considerably as a result of collocation teaching at the process stage. Furthermore, Ashouri and Mashhadi Heidar (2015) explored the impact of corpus-based collocation instruction on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' writing ability and the findings indicated that there is a significantly positive correlation between the participants' use of various lexical collocations and their writing proficiency. Mousavi and Heidari Darani (2018) also explored the effects of collocations on the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. They found that the participants' writing skill improved after the treatment which was concerned with teaching collocations.

Although the above-mentioned studies showed that teaching collocations was beneficial for ESL/EFL learners, when Adelian, Nemati, and Falahati Qadimi Fumani (2015) investigated the influence of knowledge of collocation on writing ability of advanced EFL learners their results indicated that knowledge of collocation did not have positive effects on the production of collocation in free writing by EFL learners but it had positive effect on the comprehension of collocation by EFL learners and there was a significant relationship between the receptive knowledge and productive knowledge of collocations.

As far as phrasal verbs are concerned, several studies (Barekat & Baniasady, 2014; Liu, 2011; Mahmoud, 2015; Sung, 2012) have mainly explored the underuse or avoidance of phrasal verbs by ESL/EFL learners. Among these studies, only Barekat and Baniasady (2014) investigated EFL learners' writing improvement in addition to phrasal verbs avoidance. The rest of the studies indicated that lack of sufficient knowledge as to which phrasal verbs are appropriate caused language learners not to use them in their writing or speaking.

In 2014, Barekat and Baniasady sought to investigate the impact of phrasal verb avoidance on the writing ability of Persian learners of English. To accomplish this, three elicitation tests were administered, eliciting preference for either a phrasal verb or an equivalent one-word verb. The participants were divided into two groups: Group A (participants with higher amount of avoidance) and Group B (participants with lower amount of avoidance). Then, the participants were then asked to perform a writing task. The results revealed that the participants in group B had a better performance than those in group A.

Other studies concern learners' preference for using single verbs or the pertinent phrasal verbs (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004). These studies demonstrated that language learners found learning phrasal verbs demanding and thereby preferring to replace phrasal verbs with their equivalent single verbs.

Akkaya and Kirmizi (2010) investigated the relationship between attitudes to writing and the time spent for writing among 4th and 5th year primary school students. According to the result, it can be expressed that there is a significant positive relationship between attitudes to writing and time spent for writing, that is to say, attitudes to writing can be considered as a predictor of time allocated to writing. Setyowati and Sukmawan (2016) conducted a study on EFL Indonesian students' attitude towards writing in English. The findings revealed that nobody has low attitude in writing, while fifty eight percent of them has moderate attitude to writing, and the rest of them have positive attitude to writing.

In the Iranian context, Tahriri, Shabani and Zokaei (2016) and Fathali and Sotoudehnama (2015) investigated EFL learners' attitudes toward writing. The results showed that at the end of the studies, the participants had a positive attitude towards writing, the sort of attitude that they did not adopt at the beginning of the studies.

Reviewing the previous studies, it was found that learning collocations and phrasal verbs is a demanding task for ESL/EFL learners (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Namvar, 2012; Nation, 2003) and the effect of phrasal verbs was not directly investigated on writing skill improvement (Barekat & Baniasady, 2014; Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Liu, 2011; Mahmoud, 2015; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004; Sung, 2012). Additionally, to the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has investigated so far the attitude of language learners towards writing

after learning collocations and phrasal verbs. Thus, this study was an attempt to explore the effect of collocations as well as phrasal verbs on the writing skill of Iranian EFL learners and to investigate their attitudes towards writing. In this regards, the following research questions were raised:

1. Does learning collocations and phrasal verbs, as language chunks, improve the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?
2. Do Iranian intermediate EFL learners have positive attitude towards writing skill after learning collocations and phrasal verbs?

### **Methodology**

This study was experimental. It included random selection of subjects as well as pretest-posttest activities. A brief description of the participants of the study, of the instruments used for data collection including the Quick Placement Test (QPT), of the writing pretest and posttest activities, and of the attitude questionnaire, data collection procedure, and data analysis are presented below.

The first group of participants in the present study consisted of 30 Iranian EFL learners who were studying English as a foreign language in a language institute in Isfahan, Iran. The participants' age ranged between 18 and 26 years old and they were all native speakers of Persian. The participants were female and their level of English proficiency was intermediate. To select the participants, 50 Iranian EFL learners were randomly selected and the Quick Placement Test was administered to them. Those students whose scores on the test fell one standard deviation above or below the mean score were selected as the intermediate level EFL learners and formed the experimental group.

The second group of participants was composed of two non-native English-speaking raters who were Iranian. They were English language teachers who had IELTS certificates and whose overall band scores were 8.0. They were 30 and 42 years old at the time, and had obtained Master's degrees in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and had 8 and 15 years' experience in the teaching of English. They were female, their mother tongue was Persian and they were recruited to rate the pretests and posttests taken by the participants.

A Quick Placement Test (QPT) was used to select the intermediate EFL learners. The QPT (UCLES, 2001) included three parts. Parts one and two were of multiple-choice type and included 40 (Questions 1-40) and 20 questions (Questions 41-60), respectively. Questions 1-5 were visual comprehension questions, while questions 6-60 were a mixture of grammar and vocabulary.

The pretest and posttest measured the participants' writing skill before and after the intervention. The topic which was given to the learners was related to the collocations and phrasal verbs which were taught during the lesson. The students were required to write a paragraph (~200 words) on each topic as pretest and posttest.

An attitude questionnaire developed by Elbow & Belanoff (2000) was used to measure the attitude of the participants towards writing skill before and after learning collocations and phrasal verbs. It was composed of 6 parts and altogether 30 items. It attempted to identify the attitudes toward writing, generating, revising, feedback, collaboration, awareness and control of the writing process. It was a 3-point Likert scale questionnaire. These three points were: Yes, Sometimes, and No. The English version of the questionnaire was used because it included very simple statements and three experts in the field confirmed it in terms of difficulty. Thus, we got ascertained that the participants would complete it easily. Furthermore, one of the researchers who was the teacher was present when the participants were responding to the questionnaire and if they had problems with comprehension of the items, she explained and, if required, translated the items for them. The items were scored from 1 to 3; thus, the maximum and minimum total scores were 30 and 90, respectively.

The teaching materials used during the lesson were two books on collocations and phrasal verbs: *English Collocations in Use* (Michael McCarthy & Felicity O'Dell, 2005) and *English Phrasal Verbs in Use* (Michael McCarthy & Felicity O'Dell, 2004). Four chapters of these books were taught to the students. In chapter one of the two books, collocations and phrasal verbs are introduced. Chapter two of *English Collocations in Use* is about finding, recording and learning collocations, while chapter two of *English Phrasal Verbs in Use* is about what phrasal verbs mean and the most common phrasal verbs. Chapter three of *English Collocations in Use* concerns using a dictionary for collocations and types of collocation. Chapter three of *English Phrasal Verbs in Use* concerns particles in phrasal verbs. Chapter 14 of *English Collocations in Use* and Chapter 62 of *English Phrasal Verbs in Use* pertain to travel and any kind of collocations and phrasal verbs which can be applied while writing or speaking about travel. These four chapters of each book were taught during the 10-session treatment.

Data collection began with the administration of the Quick Placement Test (QPT). Fifty students who were studying English at a language institute were randomly selected from three classes and the QPT was administered to them one afternoon when the three classes were held. The teachers of the three classes helped one of the researchers administer the placement test. Based on the results of this test, 30 students who had an intermediate level of English proficiency were selected and formed the sample of the study. An attitude questionnaire was distributed to the selected participants on the first session of the class. Then, at the same session, they took the pretest: the topic (Traveling to America) was written on the board and they were asked to write a paragraph of about 200 words. The topic related to collocations and phrasal verbs which would be taught to the students during the treatment. The pretest was followed by the intervention, which lasted for ten 45 minute sessions. After the treatment, on the final session, the participants took the posttest, which was writing on another topic (Traveling to England) related to collocations and phrasal verbs which would

be taught to the students during the treatment. After the posttest, the same attitude questionnaire was distributed to the participants.

On the first session of the intervention, collocations and phrasal were briefly introduced and it was highlighted that these combinations sounded natural to native speakers, and that students of English had to make a special effort to learn them because their meanings sometimes seemed to be difficult to guess. Some combinations just sound “wrong” to native speakers of English. For example, the adjective “fast” collocates with “cars”, but not with “a glance”. Combinations such as “fast cars, fast food”, “a quick glance, a quick meal” were written on the board and it was explained that combinations like ~~quick~~ cars, ~~quick~~ food or a ~~fast~~ glance, a ~~fast~~ meal are not used by native speakers of English. Moreover, it was clarified that such combinations are known as collocations. Continuing with the explanations, the teacher explained phrasal verbs as verbs that consisted of a verb and a particle. A few phrasal verbs of the most common verbs including come, get, give, and go which can come along with particles such as about, (a)round, at, away, and back were written on the board as examples and their meanings were explained. At the end of this session, the significance of collocations and phrasal verbs was presented.

While highlighting the importance of collocations and phrasal verbs, the teacher accentuated that learning collocations is a good idea because they can give you the most natural way to say something. In addition, they can give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more expressive or precise. To put it differently, collocations and phrasal verbs can improve your writing style. It was particularly emphasized that such language chunks probably give your text more variety and make it read better. Also, they were encouraged that learning collocations and phrasal verbs was not so different from learning any vocabulary items.

During the rest of the intervention, the teacher began the class with a warm-up, then she started teaching by using a collocation/phrasal verb in a sentence. As the collocation/phrasal verb was unknown to the students, she wrote it on the board followed by the sentence in which the collocation/phrasal verb was employed. Subsequently, the meaning of the language chunk was explained and the teacher was assured that all students learned its meaning. Afterwards, students were asked to write an example of their own and two or three students were volunteered to read their examples. Each session, 3 collocations and 3 phrasal verbs relevant to “travel” were taught to the students. Examples of such collocations are: business travel, safe journey, camping trip, travel brochure, window seat, charter flight, luxury hotel, budget accommodation, make a reservation, fully booked; and examples of phrasal verbs are: get away, set off/out, start off, get on, stop off, check in, check out, get in, pull out, take off, stop over. Finally, for homework, they were required to do the pertinent exercises in the two books—English Collocations in Use and English Phrasal Verbs in Use.

After the participants took the posttest and post-experiment questionnaire, the questionnaires as well as the pretest and posttest were scored. The pretest and the posttest

were scored by the two raters and the questionnaires by the researchers. As for the pretest and posttest, the mean scores of the two ratings were regarded as the data for the statistical analyses.

### Results

Before running the statistical analyses on the data so as to answer the research questions, writing pretest and posttest normality as well as pre- and post-experiment questionnaires should be checked. To this end, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were run on the respective data. The results of such tests used for the writing pretest are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Results for the Writing Pretest*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Pretest	.34	30	.002	.86	30	.007

As shown in Table 1, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality are reported. Since the sample size was lower than 50, according to Yap and Sim (2011), the Shapiro-Wilk results are used. As the *p*-value was lower than the significance level ( $.007 < 0.05$ ), the data were not normally distributed and thus the non-parametric test should be run on pretest data. Similar steps were taken to check whether the distribution of data of the posttest was normal. The results are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Results for the Writing Posttest*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Posttest	.23	30	.001	.79	30	.003

In Table 2, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality are shown. The sample size for the posttest data was also lower than 50; therefore, according to Yap and Sim (2011), the Shapiro-Wilk results are used. Since the *p*-value was lower than the significance level ( $.003 < 0.05$ ), the data were not normally distributed and the non-parametric test should be run on the posttest data, as well.

To check the normality of data distribution of the pre-experiment attitude questionnaire, the relevant data were subjected to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The results of these tests are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Results for the Pre-experiment Attitude Questionnaire*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-experiment	.19	30	.323	.91	30	.623

As shown in Table 3, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality are reported. Since the sample size was lower than 50, according to Yap and Sim (2011), the Shapiro-Wilk results are used. As the  $p$ -value was greater than the significance level ( $.623 > 0.05$ ), the data were normally distributed and thus the parametric test should be run on pre-experiment data. Similar steps were taken to check whether the distribution of data of the post-experiment data was normal. The results are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Results for the Post-experiment Attitude Questionnaire*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Post-experiment	.15	30	.246	.90	30	.598

In Table 4, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality are shown. The sample size for the post-experiment data was also lower than 50; therefore, according to Yap and Sim (2011), the Shapiro-Wilk results are used. Since the  $p$ -value was greater than the significance level ( $.598 > 0.05$ ), the data were normally distributed and the parametric test should be run on the pertinent data.

### Addressing the First Research Question

To answer the first research question, stating whether learning collocations and phrasal verbs, as language chunks, improve the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners, Wilcoxon signed rank test was run on the data as the writing pretest and posttest data were not normally distributed. The descriptive and inferential statistics are demonstrated in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. *Descriptive Statistics of the Writing Pretest and Posttest*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	30	15.69	2.335
Posttest	30	19.53	1.912

Table 5 indicated that the mean score of the writing pretest ( $M = 15.69$ ,  $SD = 2.335$ ) was lower than the mean score of the writing posttest ( $M = 19.53$ ,  $SD = 1.912$ ) and thus there is a

difference between the EFL learners' writing skill before and after the treatment. To see if this difference was statistically significant, Wilcoxon signed rank test was run on the data. The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results Comparing the Learners' Writing Pretest and Posttest*

	Pretest – Posttest
Z	-5.69
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

Based on the results depicted in Table 6, the Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that the writing skill of the EFL learners was higher in the posttest ( $M = 19.53$ ) than in the pretest ( $M = 15.69$ ),  $Z = 5.69$ ,  $p < .05$ . It was found that teaching collocations and phrasal verbs as language chunks had significant effects on EFL learners' writing. It also shows the superiority of the posttest scores over those of the pretest, indicating the effectiveness of collocations and phrasal verbs in the EFL learners' writing skill.

### Addressing the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, stating whether Iranian intermediate EFL learners have a positive attitude towards writing after learning collocations and phrasal verbs, paired-samples t-test was run on the data since the pre- and post-experiment data were normally distributed. The descriptive and inferential statistics are denoted in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics of the Pre- and Post-experiment Attitude Questionnaires*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-experiment	30	56.89	6.347
Post-experiment	30	75.98	5.235

As indicated in Table 7, the mean score of the pre-experiment attitude questionnaire ( $M = 56.89$ ,  $SD = 6.347$ ) was lower than the mean score of the post-experiment attitude questionnaire ( $M = 75.98$ ,  $SD = 5.235$ ) and thus there is a difference between the EFL learners' attitude towards writing before and after the treatment. To see if this difference was statistically significant, paired-samples t-test was run on the data. The results can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of Paired-Samples T-test of Pre- and Post-experiment Attitude Questionnaire

	Paired Differences			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
	Mean	<i>Std.</i> Deviation	<i>Std.</i> Error Mean			
Pre-post	-19.09	5.791	1.76	-9.75	29	.001

Table 8 demonstrated that there was a significant difference between the pre-experiment and post-experiment attitude questionnaires  $t(29) = -9.75, p = .001$ . These results suggest that the attitude of the participants in the post-experiment questionnaire ( $M = 75.98$ ) outperformed that of the pre-experiment questionnaire ( $M = 56.89$ ). It was revealed that there was a difference between the attitude of the EFL learners towards the writing skill before and after learning collocations and phrasal verbs; accordingly, improvement was observed in the attitude of the participants before and after the treatment.

### Discussion

The current study intended to shed more light on the effectiveness of the teaching of collocations and phrasal verbs in the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. The results of the data analysis showed that teaching collocations and phrasal verbs as language chunks was effective in improving the overall writing performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Given this research question, our findings support the results of Ashouri & Mashhadi Heidari, 2015; Barekat & Baniasad, 2014; Ghonsooli, Pishghadam, & Mohaghegh Mahjoobi, 2008; Hsu, 2002; Marton, 1977; Mousavi & Heidari Darani, 2018; Seesink, 2007; Zhang, 1993).

Contrary to the results of this study, Adelian, Nemati, and Falahati Qadimi Fumani (2015) did not reveal any improvement in EFL learners' writing through learning collocations. Moreover, several studies (Liu, 2011; Mahmoud, 2015; Sung, 2012; Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004) also allude to the EFL learners' lack of interest in the use of phrasal verbs. In effect, the language learners avoid the use of verbs in their written or spoken communication.

One plausible justification for such improvement is that the learners realized the importance of collocations and phrasal verbs through the teacher's explanations and understood that increase in vocabulary knowledge may lead to better writing and thus should be taken into consideration in the process of language learning (Thornbury, 2002). Moreover, this improvement in the writing skill can highlight the fact that language is learned faster and easier through chunks (Ellis, 2001; Schmitt, 2000).

Although many researchers have claimed that collocations and phrasal verbs, as language chunks, are difficult to learn (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Namvar, 2012; Nation, 2003), the findings of this study indicated that such chunks seemed to be

remembered and used more easily as they contributed to the learners' writing improvement. The interpretation behind such easy remembrance and use might be grounded in the probable links between the particles. This connection is assumed to be more long-lasting in the learners' mind in comparison to single words. Aitchison (1996) stated that such links are powerful and long-lasting. This power is to the extent that in aphasic children, collocational abilities were not impaired, whereas other language abilities were significantly impaired (Bates, Friederici, Wulfeck, & Juarez, 1988). Given this, Hong (2011) also suggested that ideas are expressed more efficiently through collocations and phrasal verbs. In second language acquisition, Gleason (1982) as well as Conklin and Schmitt (2008) revealed the preference of language chunks over single vocabulary.

Concerning the results of the second research question, it was discerned that the learners' attitude towards writing skill increased in the course of this experiment, indicating that using collocations and phrasal verbs had a significantly positive effect on the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners towards writing skill. In line with this finding, Akkaya and Kirmizi (2010), Setyowati and Sukmawan (2016), Tahriri, Shabani and Zokaei (2016) and Fathali and Sotoudehnama (2015) showed that language learners had positive attitude towards writing skill.

The reason for the increase in the participants' attitude towards writing can probably be that when language learners recognize that through using collocations and phrasal verbs, they can communicate with native and non-native speakers of English with more success, this pleasant feeling affects their attitude towards collocations and phrasal verbs. Such attitude, in turn, helps them use such word combinations in their writing so as to have great achievements. As Gardner, Smythe, and Clement (1979) also claimed, a positive psychological atmosphere is required for language learning to occur. Thus, students' achievement can depend to a large extent on their attitude and a change in attitude will result in a change in motivation as these two are closely related (Dornyei, 1998; Gardner & Clement, 1990; Ramage, 1990; to name a few).

As far as writing is concerned, it is assumed to be a problematic skill for most foreign language learners (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Hyland, 2003). They sometimes find it a difficult and stressful task; therefore, such difficulty may cause negative attitudes towards writing itself and language learning in general and it may demotivate students in the long run. The findings of this study revealed that collocations and phrasal verbs not only improved the learners' writing skill but they also affected their attitude towards writing. It is presumably interpreted that the teacher's explanations on the first session of the class, bringing their attention to the significance of collocations and phrasal verbs, had influence on the students so as to consider these language chunks as important and helpful as other vocabulary items to learn and thus not to have fear of them in language learning.

### Conclusion

The study aimed at exploring whether collocations and phrasal verbs could have any effects on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill and whether learning collocations and phrasal verbs could affect attitudes of the learners towards writing. Taking the findings of the study into account, the first conclusion that can be drawn is that the learners discerned the prominence of collocations and phrasal verbs. This understanding, then, helped them do their best to learn and use them in their writing. The second conclusion concerns the improvement of writing through collocations and phrasal verbs. There is no doubt that vocabulary plays a crucial role in writing improvement. The use of collocations and phrasal verbs as vocabulary items in writing may make writing sound more native-like. Simply put, lack of collocational and phrasal verbs knowledge can considerably affect the writing skill and thus ameliorate their writing to a great extent. This, in turn, leads to the last conclusion. When the writing looks more native-like, the students feel satisfied with themselves. Feeling close to native speakers, thereby being more accepted by the native community, results in a positive attitude towards writing and high motivation in language learning. All in all, highly motivated students make their utmost effort to succeed in the language learning process.

The findings of this study can have certain pedagogical implications. Considering the importance of collocations and phrasal verbs in ESL/EFL learning, teachers can use such language chunks in the class to motivate their students to learn them and even to encourage them to learn more collocations and verbal phrases outside of the class. Furthermore, since increasing collocational and phrasal verbs knowledge helps improve oral proficiency, listening comprehension, and reading speed books (Brown, 1974), books containing collocations and phrasal verbs may be introduced to students to learn two or three collocations and phrasal verbs each day and to share these word combinations with their classmates. Making students aware of the prominence of collocations and phrasal verbs in native speakers' speech and writing, teachers can require students to make use of these word combinations in their speech. In addition, teachers can also apply collocations and phrasal verbs to help students develop self-learning strategies like guessing (Laufer, 1988). For instance, the teacher can say a word and ask the students to guess what it combines with or they can be asked to guess the meaning of a phrasal verb. This guessing can aid the development of self-learning strategies and in the long run change the students to autonomous learners.

Another implication which is of concern targets translators. They can also profit from the results of the present study. Lack of collocational as well as phrasal verbs knowledge may probably make serious problems for the translators; on this account, it is necessary for them to lend attention to collocations and phrasal verbs and try to consider the very equivalents in both L1 and L2 so as to ameliorate the quality of their translations.

The preliminary purpose of this study was to explore the effect of collocations and phrasal verbs as language chunks on the writing skill of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

However, since increasing learners' collocational and phrasal verbs knowledge can develop their communicative competence and serve communicative needs, in order to complement the findings of the present study, the effects of collocations and phrasal verbs on the speaking skill can be studied. Likewise, inasmuch as Nation (2001) stressed "all fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge" (p. 318), such effects are likely to be compared with native speakers' use of collocations and phrasal verbs in their spoken communication as another recommendation.

As for translation, studies are recommended which explore the effectiveness of collocational and phrasal verbs knowledge in the translation of a variety of written texts such as literary, political, economic, business, press, and so on so forth as well as oral translation. Related to this line of research, comparison of such texts can be done to see which texts are more likely to be positively susceptible to collocations and phrasal verbs. That is to say, in which genre, collocations and phrasal verbs are used more.

Another line of research in addition to productive skills is to explore the use of collocations and phrasal verbs in the improvement of the receptive skills including reading and listening comprehension skills. Comparative studies are also recommended, in which the use of collocations and phrasal verbs are compared with the use of single verbs to augment listening and reading comprehension abilities of the EFL learners.

As the final suggestion for further research, investigation of the attitude of both EFL teachers and learners towards collocations and phrasal verbs in the four language skills and translation can be conducted.

### References

- Adelian, M., Nemati, A., & Fumani, M. R. (2015). The effect of Iranian advanced EFL learners' knowledge of collocation on their writing ability. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5(5), 974-980.
- Aitchison, J. (1996). *Words in the mind: An introduction to the mental lexicon*. Oxford and New York: Blackwell Publishers ltd.
- Akkaya, N., Susar Kirmizi, F. (2010). Relationship between attitudes to reading and time allotted to writing in primary education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 4742-4746.
- Ashouri, Sh., & Mashhadi Heidari, D. (2015). The impact of teaching corpus-based collocation on EFL learners' writing ability. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching & Research*, 3(10), 53-62.
- Bahns, J., & Eldaw, M. (1993). Should we teach EFL students collocations? *System*, 21(1), 101-111.
- Barekat, B., & Baniasady, B. (2014). The impact of phrasal verb avoidance on the writing ability of the university EFL learners. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 343- 352.

- Bates, E. A., Friederici, A. D., Wulfeck, B. B. & Juarez, L. A. (1988). On the preservation of word order in aphasia: Cross linguistic evidence. *Brain and Language*, 33(2), 323-364.
- Belkhir, A., & Benyelles, R. (2017). Identifying EFL learners essay writing difficulties and sources: A move towards solution. The case of second year EFL learners at Tlemcen University. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 16(6), 80-88.
- Biber, D., & Barbieri, F. (2007). Lexical bundles in university spoken and written registers. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(3), 263-286.
- Brown, D. (1974). Advanced vocabulary teaching: The problem of collocation. *RELC Journal*, 5(2), 1-11.
- Chambers, G. N. (1999). *Motivating language learners*. Clevedon, U.K: Multilingual Matters.
- Conklin, K., & Schmitt, N. (2008). Formulaic sequences: Are they processed more quickly than nonformulaic language by native and nonnative speakers?' *Applied Linguistics*, 29(1), 72-89.
- Cortes, V. (2006). Teaching lexical bundles in the disciplines: An example from a writing intensive history class. *Linguistics and Education*, 17(4), 391-406.
- Cowie, A. P. (1998). Phraseological dictionaries: some east-west comparisons. In A. P. Cowi (Ed.), *Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and application 3* (pp. 209-228). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dagut, M., & Laufer, B. (1985). Avoidance of phrasal verbs: A case for contrastive analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 7(1), 73-79.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31(3), 117-135.
- Elbow, P., & Belanoff, P. (2000). *A community of writers: A workshop course in writing*. New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.
- Ellis, N. C. (2001). Memory for language. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 36-68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fatemi, M. A. (2008). *The relationship between writing competence, language proficiency, and grammatical errors in the writing of Iranian TEFL sophomores* (Unpublished PhD dissertation). Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia.
- Fathali, S., & Sotoudehnama, E. (2015). The impact of guided writing practice on the speaking proficiency and attitude of EFL elementary learners. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS)*, 7(1), 1-25.
- Firth, J. R. (1957). *Papers in linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, R. C., & Clement, R. (1990). Social psychological perspectives on second language acquisition. In H. Giles & W. P. Robinson (Eds). *Handbook of language and social psychology* (pp. 495-517). West Sussex. UK: Wiley

- Gardner, R. (1988). The socio-educational model of second language learning: Assumptions, findings, and issues. *Language Learning*, 38(1), 101-128.
- Gardner, R. C., Smythe, P. C., & Clément, R. (1979). Intensive second language study in a bicultural milieu: An investigation of attitudes, motivation and language proficiency. *Language Learning*, 29(2), 305-320.
- Ghonsooli, B., Phishghadam, R., & Mahjoobi, F. (2008). The impact of collocational instruction on the writing skill of Iranian EFL learners: A case of product and process study. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 2, 36-59.
- Gleason, J. B. (1982). Converging evidence for linguistic theory from the study of aphasia and child language. In L.K. Obler & L. Menn (Eds.). *Exceptional language and linguistics* (pp. 347-356). New York: Academic Press.
- Gu, Y. (2003). Vocabulary learning in a second language: person, task, context and strategies. *TESL-EJ*, 7(2), 1-26.
- Hong, A. L. (2011). Collocations in Malaysian English learners' writing: A corpus-based error analysis. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 17, 31-44.
- Hsu, J. Y. (2002). Lexical collocations and their impact on the online writing of Taiwanese college English majors and non-English majors. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 4(2), 192-209.
- Hulstijn, J. H., & Marchena, E. (1989). Avoidance: Grammatical or semantic causes? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 11(3), 241-255.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.
- Kear, D. J., Coffman, G. A., McKenna, M. C., & Ambrosio, L. A., (2000). Measuring Attitude toward writing: A new tool for teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 34, 10-22.
- Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. *Modern Language Journal*, 73(4), 440-464.
- Laufer, B., & Eliasson, S. (1993). What causes avoidance in L2 learning: L1-L2 difference, L1-L2 similarity, or L2 complexity? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15(1), 35-48.
- Laufer, B. (1988). What percentage of text-lexis is essential for comprehension? In C. Lauren & M. Nordmann (Eds.), *Special language: From humans thinking to thinking machines* (pp. 316-323). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach; The state of ELT and a way forward*. Heinle: Thomson Corporation.
- Lewis, M. (1997). Pedagogical implications of the lexical approach. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 255-264). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, M. (2000). Learning in the lexical approach. In M. Lewis (Ed.), *Further developments in the lexical approach* (pp. 155-185). Hove, UK: Language Teaching Publications.

- Liao, Y., & Fukuya, Y. J. (2004). Avoidance of phrasal verbs: The case of Chinese learners of English. *Language Learning*, 54(2), 193-226.
- Liu, D. (2011). The most frequently used English phrasal verbs in American and British English: A multi-corpus examination. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(4), 661-668.
- Mahmoud, A. (2015). Under-representation of phrasal verbs in EFL university students' free writing. *International Journal of English and Education*, 4(1), 261-268.
- Marion, T. (2008). The effect of gestures on second language memorization by young children. *Gesture*, 8(2), 219-235.
- Marton, W., & Mickiewicz, A. (1977). Foreign vocabulary learning as problem no. 1 of language teaching at the advanced level. *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin*, 2(1), 33-57.
- McCarthy, M., & O'Dell, F. (2004). *English phrasal verbs in use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M., & O'Dell, F. (2005). *English collocations in use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Min, Y. K. (2013). Vocabulary acquisition: Practical strategies for ESL students. *Journal of International Students*, 3(1), 64-69
- Mousavi, S. M. & Heidari Darani, L. (2018). Effect of collocations on Iranian EFL learners' writing: Attitude in focus. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 8(4), 131-145.
- Namvar, F. (2012). Analysis of collocations in the Iranian postgraduate students' writings. *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 18(3), 41-52.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2003). Vocabulary. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English language teaching* (pp. 129-152). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2011). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nattinger, J. R., & DeCarrico, J. S. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, H. E. (1993). *Second interim report on English collocations*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.
- Ramage, K. (1990). Motivational factors and persistence in foreign language study. *Language Learning*, 40(2), 189-219.
- Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seesink, M. T. (2007). *Using blended instruction to teach academic vocabulary collocations: A case study* (Unpublished master's thesis). Virginia: West Virginia University.
- Setyowati, L., & Sukmawan, S. (2016). EFL Indonesian students' attitude toward writing in English. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 7(4), 365-378.
- Shen, Y. (2012). Reconsidering English grammar teaching for improving non-English major's English writing ability. *English Language Teaching*, 5(11), 74-78.

- Sinclair, J. (1991). *Corpus, concordance and collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sinclair, J. M. (1966). Beginning the study of lexis. In C. E. Bazell, J. C. Catford, M. A. K. Halliday, & R. H. Robins (Eds.), *In Memory of J. R. Firth* (pp. 410-430). London: Longman.
- Sung, I- H. (2012). On the productivity of word-formation of English phrasal verbs through corpus analysis. *Studies in English Language & Literature*, 38(1), 201-221.
- Tahriri, A., Shabani, M., & Zokaei, S. (2016). EFL learners' attitudes toward writing instruction based on critical language awareness. *Theory and Practice in Language*, 6(1), 127-133.
- Thornbury, S. (2002). *How to teach vocabulary*. Harlow: Longman.
- UCLES (2001). *University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate*.
- Wie, N. (2007). Phraseological characteristics of Chinese learners' spoken English: Evidence of lexical chunks from COLSEC. *Modern Foreign Language*, 30(3), 281-291.
- Wilkins, D. (1972). *Linguistics in language teaching*. London: Arnold.
- Yap, B. W. & Sim, C. H. (2011). Comparisons of various types of normality tests. *Journal of Statistical Computation and Simulation*, 81(12), 2141-2155.
- Zhang, X. (1993). *English collocations and their effect on the writing of native and non-native college freshmen* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indian University, Pennsylvania.