The Effectiveness of Social Media Network- Telegram on Teaching English Collocations to Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Technology has a profound influence on schooling in the 21st century and educators are being challenged to incorporate technological innovation to assist students in their learning. Accordingly, the face of learning is changing in general and new technologies are offering students and teachers with tools and occasions unconceivable before. In this respect, this study aimed to investigate the impact of Telegram (as a mobile technology) on collocation learning and retention of Iranian EFL learners. Participants of this study included 120 EFL learns (in two experimental (N= 60) and control (N=60) groups) who received different treatments over the study. Analyzing the results showed that there was a significant difference between the performances of experimental and control groups, of course, in favor of experimental group who confirming the effect of Telegram on improving collocational knowledge. This study implies that using social media network- Telegram has various pedagogical benefits and it can be very promising in EFL instruction.

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Introduction

Advances in information technology have given rise to a new paradigm for knowledge delivery modules in adult education, which are online learning and using e-learning tools (Reyes Jr et al., 2017; Klement, 2014; Simuth & Sarmany-Schuller, 2014; Umar & Rathakrishnan, 2012). Most e-learning environments permit learners to study individually and independently at their own velocity (Van Waes, Weijen & Leijten, 2014). The primary reasons for the growth of e-learning are the craving of those institutions to generate new revenue streams, improve access, and offer students greater scheduling flexibility. Yet, the growth of e-learning has been accompanied by a continuing debate about its effectiveness and by the recognition that a number of barriers impede its widespread adoption in higher education (Bell & Federman, 2013). In addition to social networks, devices such as smartphones and tablets have now become tools to offer access to social networks and online content anywhere and anytime. (McCarrol & Curran, 2013). In other words, the possibility of installing different applications on these devices has opened new opportunities for learners to comprehend language contents (Nufrianfar, Far, & Gowhary, 2014). So, through these applications students are able to show their creativity, collaborate with their peers in discussion groups to share their texts, videos, pictures as well as audio content. Due to availability and accessibility of these applications in technological world, the main superiority of mobile applications over other electronic tools is recognized as the potential for learning to be personalized, spontaneous, informal, and ubiquitous (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Trifanova, Knapp, Ronchetti, & Gamper, 2004). As a matter of fact, mobility has enabled learning to be independent of location and time, even out of classroom. So, the learners can benefit from their spare time to learn a foreign language regardless of whether they are at home, on the bus, in the street, on move, or they are doing their jobs, sitting at the table or even relaxing in their bed. As mentioned earlier, learning via mobile applications is an ideal solution to language learning barriers and limitations in terms of time and place and helps language teachers and scholars to use them in educational environments for learning and teaching purposes as frequent, portable, and accessible devices (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012). The advances in computer technology and mobile devices have made many opportunities to promote vocabulary learning in general and collocations in specific, which has been considered as the most important aspect of second language acquisition (Wu et al. 2010, Knight,1994). The potential of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) tools to help the learners improve their language skills, especially in the area of vocabulary, it has been the subject of recent studies. Telegram is a popular cloud-based mobile and desktop messaging application with approximate number of 10 million users in Iran, which enabling the users to send and receive various multimedia files including text, audio, photo and video in a brief period of time. Vocabulary and collocations have significant roles in language learning in particular (i.e., collocation competence is important for language production and reception) and they are essential to non-native speakers of English to speak and write fluently and accurately (Ja'en, 2007); as a result, they have been drawn the attention of language teachers and educators. The development of adequate collocational knowledge is important for foreign language learners; nonetheless, learners often have problems in producing appropriate collocations in the target language (Chen, 2011). A close look at the studies that conducted on collocations (e.g., Granger 1998; Källkvist, 1995; Lorenz, 1999; and Nesselhauf, 2005) shows that L2 learners, even at the advanced level, face many challenges when they come to comprehending and learning these formulaic expressions. Therefore, students without collocation knowledge force to make longer statements to express their ideas, on the contrary, one who selects the best collocation, expresses himself clearly and not only conveys a general meaning but also something quite precise (Radhi, 2013). Ellis (2005) and Lewis (2006) argue that fluency occurs because native speakers have a store of prefabricated and memorized lexical phrases. Moreover, during the last decades, pedagogical environments have witnessed an increase focus in second language research and even publications have concerned collocations (e.g., Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009a; Granger & Meunier, 2008; Schmitt, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Wood, 2010). Collocations are word combinations which are crucial for attaining fluency in a given language. Therefore, extensive importance should be placed on teaching collocations as a part of vocabulary instruction in language teaching. However, there is no current consensus on how best to teach collocations, and few studies have addressed the issue (Basal, 2017).

Despite the importance of collocational knowledge, the best way of gaining collocational proficiency has to be determined yet (Zaabalawi & Gould, 2017), and few studies have suggested effective ways to acquire collocational knowledge (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). However, the problem this study deals with is that collocations are still generally neglected in almost all English foreign language (EFL) classes (Chan & Liou, 2005; Shei & Hellen, 2000) and in some cases that they have been taught, it is with traditional techniques (i.e., mother tongue translation, antonyms, etc.) and methods (i.e., printed books); thus, new methods and application technologies are put aside. Moreover, widespread use of mobile applications which help to promote social interaction and connectivity makes the relationship more effective among learners and users. Therefore, with attention to the importance and value of collocations for the development of foreign or second language fluency as well as communicative competence (Brown, 1974; Channel, 1981; Conzett, 2000; Cowie, 1992; Ellis, 1996; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 1997; and Woolard, 2000), the present study aims to investigate the impacts of Telegram as a social interactive tool on students' learning and retention of collocation knowledge among Iranian high school students. In this relation, the study intends to answer the following research question:

Does collocation teaching through social media network, Telegram, result in more effective collocational retention?

Methodology

To gather the required data, a sample of 120 intermediated English language learners in the age ranges of 18 to 22 participated in the present study. All the selected individuals were Persian native speakers and a proficiency test was taken before the start of study to find the homogenized groups of learner. Ensuring their homogeneity and excluding heterogeneous participants, the researcher randomly divided all students into two equal-in-number groups of 60 students in the experimental and 60 students in the control group, as eligible participants of this study received the instruction on collocational knowledge. Three tests were utilized for achieving the predetermined objectives of the study, including a web-based language proficiency test and teacher-made pre- and post-tests. A Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was given to the participants of the current study to make sure that the two selected classes were homogeneous in terms of overall language proficiency prior to the treatment. The TOEFL employed was extracted from Caroline, Duffy and Kathleen (1996). It was administered to all 120 available students to measure the general language proficiency at the outset of the study. Those who obtained one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected and judged as the participants of the current study. In addition, to minimize the effect of participants' background knowledge in terms of collocations, an examination including 40-item teacher-made pretest which was pilot studied on 40 learners of the same age and language proficiency was given to the participants a week prior to the treatment session. The selected participants in two groups took the pretest in order to evaluate their collocation knowledge. Parallel to the pre-test, a 40-item collocation knowledge test was also given to the learners a week after the treatment sessions of the study as a final examination to measure the effectiveness of the program. As there were no courses or materials that precisely devoted to collocations in language institutes in Iran, some research-made question items have been selected to check the existing level of participants' collocation knowledge. Due to the inadequate number of used collocations in the first source, the secondary collocation-based book entitled 'English Collocations in Use', written by McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) was employed as a contributory source. Moreover, both groups did their activities and focused on collocations in order to benefit from the instruction which has been provided in collocational units. Besides, to be sure enough of their collocability features, the third source entitled 'Oxford Collocation Dictionary for Students of English (2002) was also utilized for the sake of if a combination is a collocation combination. The study was carried out in one of the English language institutes of Iran over 8 uninterrupted weeks. Both groups were pre- and post-tested on their language ability in terms of collocations one week before and after the treatment phase. A test was administered prior to the study to control the possible effect of proficiency level and ensure that the participants are representative samples of the larger population. The reliability coefficient was calculated through KR-21 and it was found to be 0.71 which was acceptable for the

purpose of the current research. To measure the test content validity, the researcher validated the test by consulting three expert professors in terms of appropriateness, suitability, and the number of the test items to the students' proficiency level. The researcher administered a teacher-made collocation test to check not only the level of students' collocational knowledge at the outset of treatment but also use scores to compare with the results of participants' proficiency level of collocations at the end of the instructional course. Therefore, a pretest was administered for the students of both the control and experimental groups to make sure that they were at the same level of performance before starting the experiment. During the treatment session, the control group practiced the regular class procedures to learn and retain the collocations traditionally through pamphlets which had been prepared by the researcher. Meanwhile, the experimental groups installed Telegram applications on their devices (e.g., mobile phones or tablets) to receive the materials which the researcher sent them through packages online. In order to apply the treatment on the experimental group, the students joined to three groups (10 members in each) of telegram. The researcher was also able to gain access to their groups because the moderators invited him to join the groups. The researchers' roles were as a tutor, a learning material provider and a facilitator. Moreover, all their activities out of the classroom focused on learning and retention of collocations, choosing the correct collocation in appropriate sentences, finding collocation errors and correcting these mistakes in a text, matching the beginning of collocations with the related end of them, using collocation dictionary if necessary, and finally replacing the underlined words with suitable collocations. These kinds of exercises were followed by the titles that concerning travel, festivals and ceremonies, services, health and injuries, and media covered in their books. The researcher also encouraged students to create other virtual groups for their group assistances and discussing course contents, asking questions, and supporting other group members. During the instruction, the participants in the experimental group received collocations along with their examples and Persian equivalents followed by some exercises at the end of their online packages as a script of PDF. In the rest of treatment sessions, due to connectivity and accessibility to all devices running Telegram, the experimental group was able to transfer information to and from other chat members constantly. For experimental group, telegram was used as a discussion tool to share their ideas and discuss the topics which covered in each section of their PDFs. The researcher had also other responsibilities including responding to students' questions, giving feedback, and evaluating students' contribution based on the provided criteria. A teacher-made collocation knowledge test parallel to pretest was conducted for both control and experimental groups on their collocational language ability at the end of the study in order to measure the learners' progress as a result of instruction.

Results and Discussion

After the required data has been collected, the researcher utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 22) Software to analyze the data statistically. Hence, descriptive statistics were used throughout the process of data collection and the findings of the study were presented in the form of mean, standard deviation, and standard error of mean. Overall, all the collected obtained information were analyzed and summarized accordingly. Moreover, in order to answer the research question and determine the effectiveness of the program, a paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of pre-test and post-test of the control group. By taking the results of data analysis into accounts, the next step was what evidence more than independent samples t-test can help to make sure enough that the treatment was effective. For this end, the scores of the participants were analyzed through paired samples t- test to see the effectiveness of treatment. Table1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of paired samples t -test of control group.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest for Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	19.400	60	8.1975	1.8330
Con. G.	Posttest	20.150	60	5.4702	1.2231

Table 1 showed that the mean score of control group for pretest was 19.40 and for post-test was 20.15. Again, there would be a difference in the means that we compared but a paired samples t-test was run to find out if the difference is statistically significant and it is not due to sampling error.

Table 2. Paired Samples Test for the Comparison of Means for Pretest and Posttest in Control Group

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre &post-test control Group	-.7500	5.1593	1.1536	-3.1646	1.6646	-.650	59	.523

The above table illustrates that the observation for the comparison of the means of two groups is -0.650 at 59 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.523. As the significance level is more than 0.05 (0.523 > 0.05), there is no meaningful differences between scores of these two tests hence both tests are in similar status. It is concluded that the instruction did not have any effects on the performance of the control group. This time, in order to compare the mean scores of presented pre-test and post-test for the experimental group another paired samples t-test was conducted as shown in table 3. Table 3 summarizes the results of this paired samples t-test.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Mean Comparison of Pretest and Posttest in Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Exp. G.	**pretest**	16.9000	60	8.87279	1.98402
Pair 2	**posttest**	24.4000	60	8.12015	1.81572

Based on the presented results, the difference between pretest and posttest is far away, but their standard deviations are much close (M = 16.90, SD = 8.87: for pretest; M = 24.40, SD = 8.12: for posttest). In order to compare the mean scores of pre-test and post-test for the experimental group, a paired samples t-test was also conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program. Table 4 illustrates the results of paired samples t-test.

Table 4. Paired Samples t-test for the Mean Comparison Between Pretest and Posttest in Experimental Group.

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 2	Pre & Post-test Exp. Group	-7.5000	4.6735	1.0450	-9.6872	-5.3121	-7.177	59	.000

As the results of data analysis indicates in the table above, the observed t for the comparison of the means of the experimental group is -7.177 at 59 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.000 (t (59) = -7.18, p < .05, sig. = .00). Since the sig. is less than 0.05, there is a significant increase in the experimental groups' collocation post-test performance on this measure (0.001< 0.05), while the pre-test scores for the control group did not differ significantly from one another (0.523 > 0.05).

To elaborate it more, as it is clear from the above table, there is no significant difference between pre- and post-test in control group while with regard to the effect of teaching collocation which has been used during 8 consecutive weeks on improving EFL learners, the experimental group showed a high level of improvements. Furthermore, it is concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the

pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group after receiving the treatment. Therefore, the researcher related these results to the effect of the mediation program in this study.

Since the sample statistics was significant, to see how much of the differences in the performance of the experimental group is really related to Telegram instruction differences, strength of association (i.e., eta squared) was also run. It was determined that 73.05 of the overall variability in the data which was very strong could be accounted for Telegram instruction for collocation learning and retention purpose.

Conclusion

In the modern world, joining in IT into the learning and teaching of collocations is now feasible with the increasing accessibility and ability of technologies. Many virtual tools such as online dictionaries, corpus databases, search engines and some others with distinctive features can be helpful in teaching collocations to language learners. Using concordances for teaching and learning collocations has been recommended by many scholars (Chan & Liou, 2005; Daskalovska, 2015; Kita & Ogata, 1997). Such an application is the essence of Data-Driven Learning (DDL), and is an ideal approach for teaching collocations (Granger, 1998; Sinclair, 1991) since it allows learners to behave like language explorers by encouraging them to discover the language and increase their awareness of patterns in the target language. In other words, learners can behave like explorers who witnessing aspects of the target language through the use of a huge amount of data. Encouraging the students to be autonomous learners will also be beneficial for them in the future, because they will learn to be lifelong learners. (Bazleh & Yarahmadzehi, 2012). The concept of autonomy along with self-access language learning is still new in many contexts including Iran, and the number of universities and institutes, which provide self-access centers, are relatively few. The educational system is traditional and teachers and learners hold beliefs and attitudes that sometimes hinder new approaches. As Pishghadam and Mirzaee (2008) note, there is no shift in the Iranian educational system from modernism to postmodernism. In the majority of cases, most of the classroom time is devoted to teachers' talk; students answer questions and passively follow teachers' directions. There is no initiation of activities by the students; teachers select the objectives, activities, and evaluate students' progress. The passive role of Iranian students in the learning process is a hindrance to their success; they are observers and listeners in the classroom and compete with their classmates rather than collaborate (Ahmadi, 2012; Shooshtari, Jalilifar, & Ahmadpour, 2016). Among mobile applications that have been used so far, Telegram, of course, is extensively used by the students since it is a popular messaging service which has been designed for mobile devices and it is a communication tool that has had 62 million monthly active users and is used to deliver ten billion messages daily. Although Telegram has evolved over the past years, it has become a powerful new information sharing resource in society for its capabilities and security. Features such as oral communication, sharing videos, photos, music, etc. as well as online group chats (i.e., secret and public) and discussions make telegram a better choice for real communication and social interaction instead of traditional facilities among language learners. So, it is surely worth to consider that this technology is available to support different activities such as surfing the Internet, locating, playing games, shopping online, and especially learning and teaching educational concepts. In the past, teachers were not able to communicate with their students especially after the class, but today, they should use of these modern technologies. When the students see their teachers' explanations and answers, they may be encouraged to take part in discussions. This motivates them to gain a lot of information about the topic (Bicen & Uzunboylu, 2013). More specifically, by becoming a member of telegram groups, they may enhance their ability to discuss and this causes them to communicate with their peers. This way of engagement helps the students to feel motivated when they learn from their classmates. They can also find their mistakes when their teachers or classmates explain the topic. As a result, they may think deeply and freely to correct them. In fact, the growing interest in telegram using has led educators to examine its use for academic practices. Positive outcomes concerning the use of telegram may also contribute to allowing the learners to experience the materials as motivating, enjoyable, and different from what they have used in traditional classroom-based settings. Collocational knowledge helps learners produce natural-sounding speech and writing in the target language. It is widely accepted that collocational knowledge is essential for

fluency (Chen & Chung (2008); Hill, 2000; Laufer, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003; Wu, Witten& Franken (2010). For this reason, collocations have become an increasingly important aspect of vocabulary knowledge in second language acquisition (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005; Lewis, 2000). Hill (2000) points out that, despite the value of collocations, most students have lack competence in using them; many scholars have witnessed similar shortcomings and consider collocation teaching to be an important aspect of vocabulary teaching (Chen, 2011; Lewis, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003).

As mentioned in Results section of this study, the results revealed that the students in the control group did not display any significant improvement while the scores of the experimental group indicated a statistically significant difference before and after the treatment sessions. As a result, the researcher concluded that high scores in the posttest for experimental group can be acknowledged for the success of the intervention program. One reason for this difference may be related to the features of mobile phones that provide the learners opportunities in a convenient way not only as social communications support but also as learning tools (Attewell & Webster, 2005; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2008; Chinnery, 2006; and Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2009). Teachers agree that Social Networking Sites (SNSs) enable several activities which are not possible to do in usual settings. SNSs help to improve group working which leads to fine instruction and increases students' motivation because the students observe themselves in situations in which they are going to be evaluated by their peers (Bicen q& Uzunboylu, 2013). With the help of mobile applications, learners are able to extend the learning into everyday activities and learning anywhere at any time possible (Joseph & Uther, 2009). It is now widely believed that applications-based instruction enhances communication by removing the obstacles of learning. Inconveniences such as lack of time during the class time, shyness, lack of communication skills and other similar difficulties which have been experienced by students in the classroom can be handled through these applications (Peng, Su, Chou, & Tsai, 2009). The findings of this study corroborates previous studies (e.g., Alfaki & Alharthy, 2014; Ashiyan & Salehi, 2016; Basal, 2017; Jorjani & Abdolmanafi-Rokni, 2015; Qarajeh & Abdolmanafi-Rokni, 2015; Pirouz, 2015; and Zaabalawi & Gould, 2017) which have been done in second language learning domain that reported positive effects of social networks in general and telegram in particular on language skills, subskills, and other related language chunks.

Employing different ways of referring to the same contents makes a more interesting didactic setting and virtual peripatetic for teachers and students, which enhance the application of new technologies all over the world (Cutting, 2008). However, as November (2013) states, "just as better pencil will not lead to improve learning, better technology might not, either" (p. 1). According to e-School News (2014), "as more schools adapt blended learning as a way to boost learning … for every learner, it is important to understand the challenges involved" (p. 28). From the preceding discussions, it is evidently clear that telegram has been the necessary equipment for the students in Iranian educational context. In fact, it makes communications easier and faster thus increasing the effectiveness of collocational knowledge share among the students. The results yielded by our experimental research lead us to conclude that teaching collocations through telegram result in a better collocation learning and retention than presenting them using traditional technique and methods.

The above-mentioned reports showed that the rising speed of mobile applications is increasing so that these technologies play a vital role in learning different dimensions of knowledge. In fact, technological progresses in the age of technology and advancement have made it mandatory for the teachers to employ mobile applications as a tool to help in learning and teaching process. In other words, with the great influence that Internet and SNSs had on people's lives, no one can ignore the role of new mobile applications in education. It can be said that these SNSs, especially mobile applications, are becoming perhaps the most popular connective tools among language learners not only at the higher level of education but also in high school settings (Qarajeh & Abdolmanafi-Rokni, 2015) since this type of learning is beneficial for foreign language learners and considerably increases students' interest in the topic. Moreover, a clear shift from traditional-based learning to applications-based ones makes the students feel using this technology is more effective and interesting than before. In fact, students feel a great sense of freedom of time and place. They get the learning away from classroom-based to application-based even

with little or no access to the teachers. So it can be used as an ideal solution for learning barriers in terms of time and place. This application seems to have an impact on language education as well as collocation learning as one form of language chunks. Language chunks, especially collocations, are one of the interesting issues in language learning. The knowledge of collocations enables non-native speakers to add some flavor to their speech. So, promoting this skill in the classroom requires teaching vocabulary in chunks and meaningful contexts. As a matter of fact, inclusion of collocations is significant in English textbooks. Regarding what has been said, collocations are prefabricated language chunks that are needed and should be highlighted in EFL classes. They should be incorporated in language teaching syllabus.

Furthermore, it can be established that with regard to instructional methods what learners prefer should be taken into consideration when designing online courses. The level of involvement of the learner seems to be equally significant. Fish & Wickersham (2009) concluded that to construct new knowledge, learners have to be actively engaged with the course content and their peers. Constructivist viewpoints support current theories of online learning which concentrate on instructional practices that link instructors and learners by the means of collaborative discussions, assignments, and group projects. Teachers and trainers of foreign language should make use of social networks as part of their teaching syllabus to improve language skills. In this regard, Johnson (2012) states that teachers must have the technology training, skills and resources needed for the students to meet learning objectives. They must also have the technological means for assessing and recording their students' progress. Of course, the students can also benefit from the knowledge sharing on the net rapidly. The results are also important to help high school teachers to find equipment and methods to assist students in improving language skills in general and collocations in particular.

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