Abstract
Second language learners’ poor knowledge of collocations has recently urged researchers to incorporate teaching collocations into all language learning classrooms. The present study attempted to investigate the role of explicit teaching in the recognition of high school learners’ verb-noun collocations. To this purpose, 30 male Iranian learners of English took a proficiency test and a 30-item multiple-choice pretest. Then they were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received a 45-minute treatment for five sessions to learn 20 collocations. Each session they were taught four collocations explicitly while they were involved in free discussion. Results of an independent samples t-test indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly in recognizing collocations.

Key terms: collocations, explicit teaching, L2 learning

Introduction
Recently the importance of collocational competence has been highlighted by some researchers (e.g., Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Howarth, 1998; Lewis, 2000; McCarthy & O’Dell,
Many researchers have found that most of the errors committed by language learners are due to collocational errors (e.g., Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Howarth, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003). L2 learners have to develop collocational competence for achieving native-like competence (e.g., Hill, 1999; Rezaee, Marefat, Saeedakhtar, 2015). Collocations are taken as a necessary component of language to develop higher level proficiency; therefore, learning collocations, which goes beyond mere word selection, is essential for improving fluency as well as accuracy of L2 production (e.g., Wray, 2000; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009).

The term collocation refers to “the natural co-occurrence of a string of words whose meaning is inferable from literal concepts” (Chan & Liou, 2005, p. 231). Collocations have two elements, a node and a collocate which co-occurs with the node (Sinclair, 1991). Collocations can be classified under two major categories, namely grammatical and lexical (Benson, Benson, & Ilson, 1997). Grammatical collocations refer to the co-occurrence of content and function words, including preposition–noun (e.g., by hand), noun–preposition (e.g., advantage of), adjective–preposition (e.g., addicted to), noun–to infinitive (e.g., the foresight to do it), noun–that clause (e.g., an agreement that), adjective–to infinitive (e.g., necessary to work), and adjective–that (e.g., afraid that) collocations. Lexical collocations refer to the co-occurrence of two content words and include verb–noun (e.g., make an agreement), adjective–noun (e.g., strong tea), verb–adverb (e.g., affect deeply), noun–noun (e.g., a pack of lies), noun–verb (e.g., alarms go off), adjective–adverb (e.g., sound asleep), and adverb–adjective (e.g., seriously damaged) collocations.

There are different approaches for teaching L2 collocations such as implicit instruction, explicit instruction, and web-based concordancing (WBC). Some researches endorse the role of implicit learning for teaching L2 collocations and claim that learners can learn collocations through noticing (Schmidt, 1990). Some others (e.g., Tseng, 2002; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009) downplay the role of implicit instruction in learning L2 collocations since it has been found that learners do not learn the new items effectively and they need multiple exposures (Hoffman & Lehmann, 2000; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008) and stress the role of explicit instruction.

A lot of previous studies (e.g., Webb, Newton, & Chang, 2013; Jafarighar & Imanian, 2013; Asaei & Rezvani, 2015) found a positive role of explicit instruction in teaching L2 collocations. To date, few studies have addressed the role of explicit instruction of L2 collocations for high school students. To fulfill the so-called gap the present study was conducted.

Many studies have investigated the effect of implicit teaching on learning L2 collocations (e.g., Nation, 2001; Webb et al, 2013) while others argue that collocations should be taught explicitly through direct instruction (e.g., Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Nesselhauf, 2003; Seesink, 2007).
Webb et al. (2013), for example, investigated the effect of implicit approach on teaching L2 collocations. One hundred sixty one Taiwanese university students learning English as a foreign language were divided into four experimental groups and a control group. The experimental groups were supposed to read a modified graded reader which included 18 collocations. They listened to a recording under four conditions, 1 time, 5 times, 10 times, and 15 times exposure, respectively. The control group didn’t have access to either the graded reader or the recorded listening. The results of the study showed that collocations were learned incidentally while listening to a graded reader and repetition showed a positive effect for learning collocations.

Jafarigohar & Imanian (2013) conducted another study to compare the role of explicit and implicit instruction in learning collocations. Collocations were taught in three different modes, focus on meaning, focus on form, and focus on forms. The participants of the study included 23 Iranian students of English translation and English literature at BA level in Kashmar Payameh Noor University. The study compared the implicit and explicit teaching of collocations in terms of receptive and productive tests. The results showed that the explicit group outperformed the other groups in the recognition and production of collocations. Furthermore, the study showed that explicit instruction might contribute to the development of implicit knowledge.

Asaei and Rezvani (2015) conducted a study on Iranian EFL learners to see the effects of explicit and implicit method of teaching of collocations on embedding collocations in L2 writing. The participants of the study were 45 adult Iranian advanced EFL learners. They were divided into two experimental groups (i.e., explicit and implicit) and a control group. The treatment lasted for 10 sessions. Each session learners received an advanced anecdote in English. The explicit group was exposed to English collocations through highlighting, repetition, memorization, and translation while the implicit group was exposed to collocations through typographical techniques such as bolding and underlining. The results showed that explicit group outperformed the other groups in using collocations in their writing.

Zarei and Tondaki (2015) conducted a study with 180 adult upper-intermediate level Iranian L2 learners of English in Qazvin to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit techniques of presentation on comprehension and production of lexical collocations. They were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (i.e., explicit and implicit instructional techniques). The treatment sessions were 16 and about 20 minutes. The treatment consisted of Jigsaw, STAD, and individual learning as techniques of explicit instruction and capitalizing, underlining and word card as techniques of implicit instruction of teaching the target collocations. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between explicit and implicit techniques on the comprehension and production of lexical collocations.

Karami (2015) investigated the effect of two different methods of explicit and implicit teaching collocations on paragraph writing. The participants of the study were 36 pre-university Iranian EFL learners’ students, divided into two separate groups (namely explicit
and implicit). The result of the study indicated that the group receiving explicit method of teaching collocations outperformed in using collocations in paragraph writing. They talked about the authentic text of focused book during one semester. The researcher expected that the learners memorized lexical and grammatical collocations contextually and integratively. Then they were required to write a paragraph by those collocations. The result of the study indicated that the group receiving explicit method of teaching collocations outperformed in using collocations in paragraph writing.

To date, researchers have investigated the effects of implicit and explicit instruction on teaching collocations. There is a great interest for incorporating collocations into high school textbooks and teaching them explicitly (e.g., Hill, 2000; Kennedy, 2003; Lewis, 2000; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009). Few studies have been conducted on teaching collocations to high school learners (Hill, 2000; Kennedy, 2003; Lewis, 2000). Hoping to fill in this gap, the present study attempted to examine the impact of explicit instruction on improving high school Iranian EFL learners' L2 verb-noun collocations.

The current study seeks to answer the following question:
Would explicit teaching improve the recognition of high school learners’ verb-noun collocations?

**Methodology**

**Participants**

The participants of the study included 30 male high school students who were selected out of a population of 55 by administering a proficiency test. The participants’ age ranged from 15 to 20 and they were bilingual in Azari–Turkish and Persian. Having been chosen for the study, the participants randomly fell into two groups: an experimental group and a control group including 15 subjects each.

**Procedure**

The present study used a pretest-treatment-posttest design. The independent variable of the study was explicit instruction and the dependent variable addressed in this study was learning verb-noun collocations. Learners were divided randomly into an experimental and a control group (15 in each). In session one, a proficiency test was administrated to all learners in order to assure the homogeneity of learners along with a pretest including 30 multiple choice items. In session two the experimental group was given the 45-minute treatment. Before the treatment, the learners were given some information about collocations and their importance in developing L2 proficiency. Every session the treatment included choosing an interesting topic for free discussion in which four verb-noun collocations were taught explicitly. The treatment lasted for five sessions. The control group received the same free discussions without receiving any explicit instruction on any collocations. In session seven both groups took a posttest parallel in terms of items with the pretest.

**Results**
An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the results of the pretest to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in both groups. As indicated in Table 1, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group (M = 12.20, SD= 1.47) and the control group (M = 12.13, SD = 1.35). Another t-test was run to compare the performance of the two groups in the posttest, \( t(28) = 6.60, p = .00 \). The null hypothesis was rejected implying that the treatment was effective. The experimental group outperformed the control group significantly.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Mean Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>1.474</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>1.356</td>
<td>.350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Independent Sample t-Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>Levene’s Variances</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig</td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>6.607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The study was conducted to investigate the effect of explicit instruction on learning verb-noun collocations. Findings demonstrated the positive role of explicit instruction in learning verb-noun collocations. Results are in line with previous studies (e.g., Asaei & Rezvani, 2015; Jafarigohar & Imanian, 2013; Webb et al., 2013) which found explicit instruction as an effective way of teaching collocations. Their studies showed that explicit teaching plays a vital role in learning collocations. As suggested by Nesselhauf (2005), conscious-raising activities focused on the word combinations as chunks, collocations is crucial in EFL learning process. EFL learner’s consciousness plays a vital role in the process of teaching and learning. On the contrary, some other studies (e.g., Sung, 2003) showed that two approaches of implicit and explicit were not significantly different due to the effect they have on learners’ writing ability.
The present study like all studies is not free from some shortcomings and limitations. The present study included only male learners and only verb-noun collocations. The results of the study will have practical implications for ESL/EFL learners and teachers. Learners would benefit from collocations and increase their proficiency in all skills. It is important for teachers to identify strategies and techniques to help learners improve collocations. A better study would examine a larger sample of learners. It would be possible to involve female participants to see the effect of gender and knowledge of collocations. In addition, future studies can address the learners’ collocational competence at different proficiency levels.

References


Tseng, F. P. (2002). A study of the effects of collocation instruction on the collocational competence of senior high school students in Taiwan (Unpublished master’s thesis), National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.

