

# The Effect of Explicit Presentation of Phrasal Verb–Noun Combinations via Word Forks to Enhance EFL Studies

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**ABSTRACT:** Decades of experience have shown that one of the most problematic areas of learning English as a foreign or second language is learning phrasal verbs (PVs) in collocation with certain nouns. The present study was designed to test a procedure called the word fork technique to help intermediate EFL students develop their collocational competence in using PVs. A group of 64 intermediate Iranian EFL students were randomly selected. They were given a pre-test and two post-tests including an immediate and delay post-test each in three phases. In order to check the efficacy of using the word fork technique in developing the participants' collocational competence and long term retention of the target forms in using PVs, they were required to devote a time period of about 20 minutes of each class session practicing PVs, using the newly developed technique. This lasted for 10 sessions. Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that the new technique can efficiently help the target population to improve their collocational competence and long term retention of the target forms in using PVs in specific and their communicative ability in English in general.

**Keywords:** Collocation, Collocational Competence, EFL Learners, Phrasal Verbs, Word Fork.

## INTRODUCTION

Collocated English words are pairs of words that, used together, have through common usage acquired a specific meaning different from what might be suggested by interpreting the stand-alone meaning of the same words taken individually. For example, the phrase “heavy metal” in the context of music describes a music style, not a metal’s property. Gaining knowledge of collocations is an important component in a student’s learning of English as a foreign language (“EFL”).

In this paper we examined the use of a device termed the word fork in facilitating the EFL students’ ability to learn and use collated words. The word work is made up of a single verb followed by a list of nouns to form meaningful collocated phrases. Below is one example of a word fork:

	the ad
	the false claim
Fall for	the argument
	A trick
	the propaganda

## **METHODOLOGY**

To select the required sample for the study an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was conducted. Based on the results of the Oxford Placement Test, 64 students whose scores ranged from 60 to 80 out of 100 were selected to participate in the study. The participants in the study were three intermediate EFL Iranian students. The rationale for the selection of intermediate level students as the participants of this study is that according to Donald and Lapkin (2001), quality of noticing may be related to level of L2 proficiency, i.e., the higher the L2 proficiency, the more likelihood that the learners will pay attention to the enhanced forms in the input they are exposed to. There were 23 students in the first group (Group A), 21 students in the second group (Group B) and 20 participant students in the control group (Group C). There were 41 female and 23 male students with an age range of 19 to 32.

The participants of this empirical study were three intact classes of second semester Iranian intermediate EFL university students studying translation, Payam Noor university (PNU), Andimeshk. In order to select the required sample for the study a pre-test on the target structures was administered to make sure that respecting their knowledge of the target forms the selected participants are comparable. The test comprised a set of standard tasks. The results obtained from the pre-test were used to group the participants into either control or treatment groups. The participants were then randomly assigned to a control and two experimental groups. To expose the participants to the target collocations, short texts from the same source were employed. A set of word forks were used to make the instruction of the target forms as explicit as possible.

Two post-tests including an immediate and a delayed post-test were conducted to account for the intake and acquisition of the target collocations. The logic for the use of the delayed post-test was to test if the participant students' retention of the focused forms would be durable over time.

Picture prompts were employed to provide the participants with an opportunity to develop a short text by participants to describe. Then it was revised by them after receiving feedback on the part of the researcher. This was done so they could notice the difference between their original text and a reformulated version of it concerning the use of the target forms of the study.

The groups were randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions. For this reason the present study is best described as quasi-experimental. Key features of such studies are that they include a pre-test (essential if intact classes are used in order to ensure that the groups are equivalent at the beginning of the study) and both an immediate and delayed post-test in order to establish whether any immediate effects of instruction are durable and also whether the effects only become evident after a period of time. Thus, an important issue concerning the measurement of learning FFI studies is timing of the measurement (Ellis, 2009). Therefore, this was a pre-test, treatment, immediate and delayed post-test type of study. There was a control group and two treatment groups in the study. All three groups including the control and the experimental groups were exposed to appropriate reading texts in which the target collocations had been embedded.

To sum up, the procedure of the study was as follows:

A pre-test on the target structures was administered two days before the treatment to make sure that all participants are comparable concerning the target forms.

A specific technique of input enhancement was provided as the treatment. The treatment varied for the two experimental groups lasting about 20 minutes for 10 class sessions was provided for all groups.

The control group was exposed to neutral or baseline texts in which the target forms had not been enhanced. That is, they were simply provided with opportunities to read the same texts to which the experimental groups were also exposed. For the first experimental group (E1), the same texts were employed. However, the target forms were highlighted using explicit instruction. The second experimental group (E2) was exposed to the same texts in their baseline form as in the case with the control group. But the participants in this group were assigned to a different condition from that of the other two groups in that a set of fork form structures called word forks were used to highlight the target collocations (see Appendix D). The researcher hypothesized that using this technique might induce noticing, intake, and possibly the acquisition of the target elements.

An input-output mapping procedure was employed so the students in the experimental groups of the study might notice and use the target collocations in reading and in picture description. The procedure employed here was as follows:

Each participant in the group will develop a short paragraph of about 50-60 words in response to a picture prompt. This is done after they receive the same texts to which other participants are exposed. The students will be asked to utilize as more phrasal verb + Noun as they can to develop their paragraphs. They, then, submit their paragraphs to the instructor who is the researcher, too. Their paragraphs will be reviewed and revised by the instructor. The researcher will employ reformulation (as feedback) which refers to a native or more proficient speaker's re writing of an L2 learners composition such that the content the learner provides in the original draft is

maintained, but the awkwardness, rhetorical inadequacy, logical confusion, style, and so on as well as lexical inadequacy and grammatical errors are tidied up (Levenson, 1978).

This way the rewritten text provides a target language (TL) model so the learner can make a comparison of his/her own draft with a revised version of it. All what is said above is done to raise the participants consciousness and noticing to the highlighted target forms both when they receive the reading texts in which these forms have been embedded and when they face with the challenge of employing them to develop a short but coherent text in response to a picture prompt. The logic was that this way there would be an input-output mapping procedure giving the learners a chance to be exposed to the target forms in the reading texts they read and put them in practice to develop their paragraphs. In this way the researcher attempts to make the participants notice the gap between what they have learnt of the target forms and how efficiently they can utilize them to produce output.

Two post-tests including an immediate test right after the treatment and a delayed one administered one month later were given to the participants on the target forms.

In both immediate and delayed post- tests the participants were given some tasks. The logic to employ the tasks was to check for their immediate and long term retention of the highlighted target forms. All groups, including the control and the experimental groups, were also given picture prompts and topics to give them an opportunity to develop short paragraphs. The researcher had already provided them with the instruction as to use as more target forms in their descriptions as possible to develop their paragraphs.

The control group was exposed to neutral or baseline texts in which the target forms hadn't been enhanced for the first experimental group (E1), the same texts were employed. However, the target forms were highlighted using explicit instruction. The second experimental group (E2) was exposed to the same texts in their baseline form as in the case with the control group but the participants in this group were assigned to a different condition from that of the other two groups in that a set of fork from structures called word forks were used to highlight the target collocations. In order to account for and make sure of validity and reliability of the tasks used in the study, the researchers selected all these tasks from standard texts.

A pre-test, an immediate post-test and a delayed post-test were administered to assess the participants' knowledge of the target forms before and after the treatment. The statistical analyses used were as follows:

A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to see if there was any significant difference in noticing, intake and acquisition of the focused collocations in the study due to different treatments to which the participants were assigned. Post hoc pair-wised comparisons were run on the scores obtained by the participants to determine any statistically significant difference between the mean scores for pre and post-test for each group.

### ***Learners' Problems with Learning Phrasal Verbs***

Phrasal verbs are considered as verb plus preposition or prepositional particle when it is necessary to place a noun group after the preposition although some particles can function as both adverb and preposition. In this study a definition of phrasal verbs will be created by combining the two definitions by Gardner and Davies (2007) and the Collins COBUILD Dictionary as follows:

A combination of any verb plus two or more adverbial or prepositional particles that may be directly adjacent to or separated by one or more words.

Research indicates the difficult nature of phrasal verbs may lead to avoidance causing learners to choose a single word synonym instead. Avoidance occurs whether phrasal verbs are present in the L1 or not, although subjects whose L1 did not contain PVs tended to avoid them more (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993). In addition, Hulstijn and Marchena (1989) found intermediate learners tended to avoid PVs more than advanced learners since they have difficulties using them.

One difficulty lies where the learner may only know one meaning of "take off", for example, such as referring to the removal of clothing or an airplane leaving the ground, but does not know the extended polysemous meaning of leave. The other difficulty is that the form may be completely unfamiliar to the learner making it difficult to recognize the two words together have a unique meaning.

In addition, phrasal verbs present another range of grammatical difficulties. The Collins COBUILD dictionary (2002) sums it up in an interesting way: there are restrictions on the positions in which an adverb can be placed in relation to the object of a verb. Some particles, such as about, over, round, and through can be used as both adverbs and prepositions in particular phrasal verb combinations, although in other combinations they are restricted to one word class only, either adverb or preposition but not both. Some phrasal verbs are not normally used with pronouns as objects; others are normally only used with pronouns as objects.

All of these difficulties can be discouraging for learners to overcome in the process of incorporating a new type of lexical item to their productive vocabulary. Exposure to PVs may help deepen knowledge leading to a reduction in avoidance and a more confident use.

Since there is only one study on word – fork technique to teach vocabulary in our country, and the study has to be replicated in order to confirm its results, the present researcher tried to develop this study in another context with different participants. In the following chapter the researcher will explain the methodology of the study in details.

### ***The Importance of Collocation***

The value of collocations has been considered important by various linguists who focused on the benefits and advantages of learning collocations as well as improving language performance (Brown, 1974; Nattinger, 1980; 1988); L2 vocabulary development (Aghbar, 1990, Laufer, 1988); and finally the improvement of communicative competence (Cowie, 1988; Channell, 1981; Lewis, 2000; Yorio, 1980). Some other linguists believed that collocations are important for enhancing language fluency towards the level of native speakers (Fillmore, 1979; Howarth, 1998; Nation, 2001).

One of the supporters of the idea that collocations are important in L2 learning and they must be used in EFL and ESL classes is Brown (1974). Brown believes that increasing the knowledge of collaboration in students can significantly improve their oral proficiency, listening comprehension, and reading speed. She also states that learners can observe language chunks in the speech and writings of native speakers through learning collocations. They can use those collocations in their own speech. She believes that collocations, concept, and context should be included in introducing new words to advanced level learners since collocations have a very important role in language learning.

According to Nattinger (1980), language production consists of “piercing together the ready-made units appropriate for particular situations and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations” (p. 341). Nattinger (1988) also states that collocations are very helpful and useful in improving comprehension of word combinations. They help learners predict what type of lexical items can come together.

Laufer (1988) has referred to the development of L2 vocabulary and believes that the ‘irregularity’ or ‘rulelessness’ of collocations is a factor which hinders L2 vocabulary learning. She believes that collocations are a very important aspect of the vocabulary knowledge of learners. Laufer also states that since L2 learners face with a lot of difficulties in the use of word combinations, collocations can help them develop the level of their vocabulary. Collocation can help learners develop self-learning strategies like guessing, too. For example, when a learner hears the word ‘intense’, he/she can predict that it can be combined with either pressure, heat, light, or feeling. The learner knows that a word like ‘convenient’ cannot be combined with people.

As a result, a sentence like, ‘I am feeling convenient’ may be considered inappropriate. These types of guessing strategies can be developed through learning collocations. Aghbar (1990) has attributed the poor performance of ESL learners on the test of formulaic expressions to a lack of vocabulary knowledge as well as the insufficient language chunks. Aghbar believes that overlearning is an important aspect of acquisition and learning of formulaic expressions where he puts idioms, proverbs, sayings, and collocations. He also states that the construction of such chunks follows the lexical and grammatical rules of English. He adds that they are called formulaic expressions because of the previous memory of them.

Yario (1980) underscores the important role of communicative competence by stating that conventionalized language forms, such as collocations, “make communication more orderly because they are regulatory in nature” (p.438). Channell (1981) also concludes that knowledge of collocations as well as learners’ awareness is very effective in developing their communicative competence. Moreover, Cowie (1988) refers to lexical phrases and collocations as the servers of communicative needs. Lewis (2000) refers to the cause of communicative competence development and relates it to the learning of chunks or strings of words which is better and more influential than learning words in isolation.

Fillmore (1979) in another study considers language fluency and believes that fluency is an umbrella term which covers all characteristics of a speaker’s competence and performance in language. According to Fillmore, one main aspect of fluency is knowledge of fixed expressions like collocations. Furthermore, Howarth (1998) focuses on the importance of collocations in language learning stating: “all fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge” (p. 318).

As it was stated in the previous sections, a lot of researchers have investigated the importance of collocations from various perspectives. Some (e.g., Brown, 1974; Nattinger, 1980; 1988) have referred to collocations in relation to the development of language performance. Other researchers Others (e.g., Aghbar, 1990, Cowie, 1988; Channell, 1981; Laufer, 1988; Howarth, 1998; Lewis, 2000; Nation, 2001; Yorio, 1980) have referred to factors like L2 vocabulary development, communicative competence improvement, as well as developing language fluency. If we consider these factors which have been mentioned by various researchers, we will understand that all of them are somehow related to the importance of collocation in language teaching and learning. Therefore, it seems that without

the knowledge of collocations, EFL learners will have an unnatural or even foreign expression however the expressions produced by them may be grammatically correct. As a result communication between them may halt.

In the previous section, a number of studies which were related to the advantages and usefulness of collocations were reported. However, some studies have reported the poor performance of EFL/ESL learners on collocation-focused tests (e.g., Aghbar, 1990; Bahns and Eldaw, 1993; Biskup, 1992; Channel, 1981; Zhang, 1993). Ellis (2001) states that learners' collocational errors are more frequent than other errors. Therefore, some other studies have focused on collocations and difficulties with which language learners may encounter. In the next section, the researcher will elaborate on some studies which have been carried out on collocation.

**Result and Discussion**

Pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test designs were used. The purpose of the pre-test was to make sure if the participant groups were homogeneous concerning their entering inter language knowledge of the target collocations. One way ANOVA was conducted on the results. Results are given in table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. Results of ANOVA analysis on pre-test scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.973	2	.986	.230	.795
Within Groups	261.777	61	4.291		
Total	263.750	63			

Results of ANOVA analysis are given in table one. With a df value of 2 (df = 2) and P value of .795 (P>0.05), it can be concluded that there was not any between group difference among the control and the two treatment groups before assigning the two different instructional conditions. The results given in the same table indicate no within group differences as well (df = 61, P>0.05). According to these results it is clear that the three groups were appropriate for the present study.

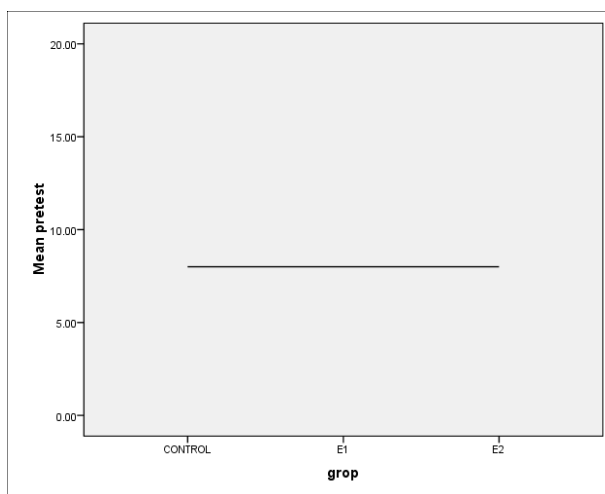


Figure 1. Visual representation of the performance of the participants of the study on the pre-test

As the figure obviously demonstrates, there is neither between nor within group differences among the groups before receiving any instruction. Do word forks have any impact on PhV+N collocational competence? Do word forks have any impact on PhV+N retention?

In order to answer the research questions and test the research hypothesis, a pre-test, an immediate post-test and a delayed post-test were given before and after the instruction. To determine both between and within group mean differences, a one way analysis of variance was run on the results. Post hoc pair-wised comparisons were also conducted on the scores obtained by the participants to determine any statistically significant difference between the mean scores for pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test for each group. All the data were given to SPSS version 21.

Research question 1:

Do word forks have any impact on PhV+N collocational competence?

**Results:** In order to answer this question the treatment given to the participants lasted for 10 sessions. After the instruction an immediate post-test was run to determine any probable effect of the instruction on learning of the target forms. Results are given in table 2 and figure2.

Table 2. Results of ANOVA analysis on the immediate post-test scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	281.435	2	140.718	21.703	.000
Within Groups	395.502	61	6.484		
Total	676.938	63			

In order to see if the different treatment conditions have any probable differential effects on the participants' performance on the target collocations of the study, an immediate post-test was conducted. The results obtained from the test are given in table 2. ANOVA analysis was applied to account for any probable variation that might exist both between and within groups. With df values of 2 and 61, respectively, and P value of .000 ( $P < 0.05$ ), it was concluded that there were both between and within group differences among the groups. This lends support to the hypothesis that most probably the three different conditions to which the control and the two experimental groups were assigned had differential influence on the participants' intake of the target forms.

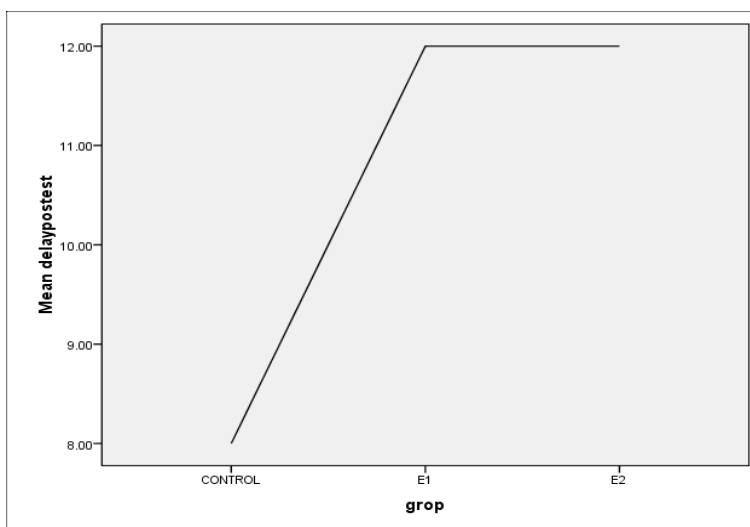


Figure 2. Visual representation of the results of ANOVA analysis on immediate post-test scores

The figure clearly shows that in contrary to the control group the two experimental groups gained significant inter-language knowledge concerning the target collocations. The figure further reveals that in terms of their performance on the immediate post-test, the students in both experimental groups receiving explicit instruction and work forks, respectively, did not perform differently on the immediate post-test. In other words the two techniques were equally facilitative in helping the participants to foster their inter-language knowledge of the target forms.

Research question 2: Do word forks have any impact on PhV+N retention?

**Result:** To demonstrate the possible durable impact of the instruction on the retention of the focused collocations a delayed post-test was given after four weeks. The results are given in table 3 and figure 3.

Table 3. Results of ANOVA analysis on the delayed post-test scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	351.190	2	175.595	35.714	.000
Within Groups	299.919	61	4.917		
Total	651.109	63			

The purpose of the delayed post-test was to see if the probable effect of the instruction was durable on the retention of the target collocations. The results of the delayed post-test are given in table 3. ANOVA analysis was applied to account for any variation in retention of the target forms among the groups. With a df value of 2 and 63, respectively, and p value of .000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), it was safely concluded that the two experimental groups could retain the target forms over time. In other words, as there were no between and within groups differences based on the results

of ANOVA the hypothesis that as the three groups of participants (control and experimental groups) performed variously on the delayed post-test can be supported. This means that the two treatment groups could maintain their gain over time but the control group did not.

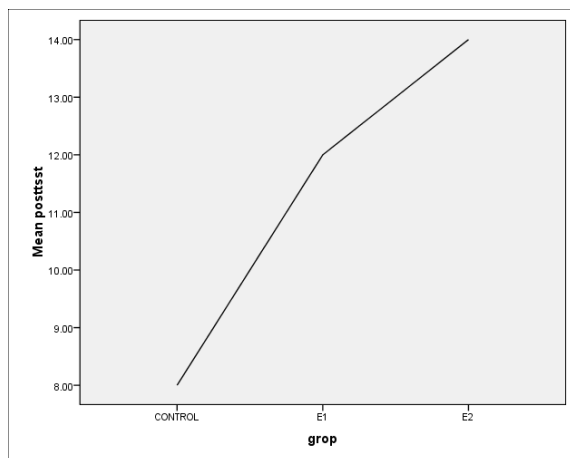


Figure 3. Results of the delayed post-test

The figure indicates the different performance of the groups. It is clear that the experimental group exposed to the word forks made the most progress. The second treatment group receiving explicit instruction placed second, however; the control group experienced no gain of knowledge based on the results of the immediate post-test.

Table 4. Results of pair wise post hoc t-test on control group scores

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre- test	8.4783	23	2.19233	-1.388	22	.179
	post-test	8.9130	23	1.88084			
Pair2	Pre-test	8.4783	23	2.19233	.862	22	.398
	Delayed post-test	8.0000	23	2.59370			
Pair 3	Post-test	8.9130	23	1.88084	1.749	22	.094
	Delayed post-test	8.0000	23	2.59370			

Results of pair wise post hoc t-test on the control group scores on pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test are given in table 3. The mean scores on pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test are 8.47, 8.91 and 8.00, respectively. With a df value of 22 (df = 22) and  $p > 0.05$  ( $p = .179, .398, .094$ ), it can be concluded that the obtained mean scores on all three tests by the control group are not statistically significantly different.

**Figure 4:** Visual representation of the performance of the control group on pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test



To visualize the performance of the control group on all tests given both before and after the instruction figure 4 speaks for itself.

Table 5. Results of pair wise post hoc t-test on the scores of the explicit group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	Df	Sig.
Pair 1	pretest.E1	8.8095	21	1.91361	-7.310	20	.000
	posttest.E1	12.4286	21	1.91237			
Pair2	pretest.E1	8.8095	21	1.91361	-5.573	20	.000
	delaypos.E1	12.0476	21	2.08509			
Pair 3	posttest.E1	12.4286	21	1.91237	.777	20	.446
	delaypos.E1	12.0476	21	2.08509			

The mean scores of the group exposed to the explicit instruction are 8.80, 12.42 and 12.04. With df value of 20 (df = 20) and  $p < 0.05$ , it is obvious that the mean scores of this group have under gone a statistically significant promotion from pre-test to delayed post-test. This means that at least for the participant students in this research, the use of explicit instruction has been facilitative in helping the students develop their inter-language knowledge of the focused collocations.

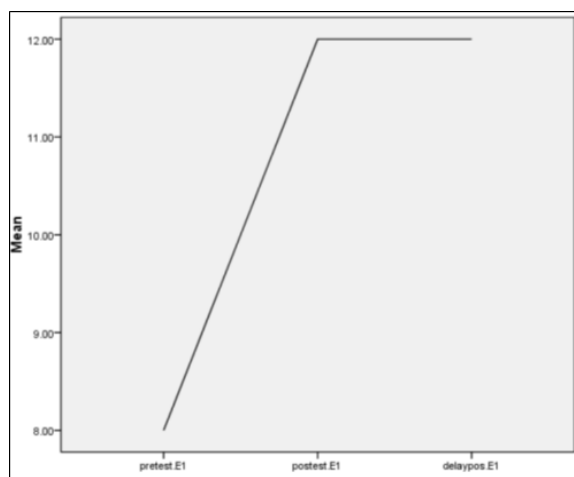


Figure 5. Visual representation of the performance of the explicit group on pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test

In order to visualize the performance of the explicit group on all tests given both before and after the instruction figure 5 given above is demonstrative.

Table 6. Results of pair wise post hoc t-test on word fork group

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test. E2	8.4000	20	2.08756	-6.938	19	.000
	Pos-test.E2	14.5500	20	2.79991			
Pair2	Pre-test. E2	8.4000	20	2.08756	-4.850	19	.000
	Delayed pos-test.E2	12.6500	20	2.90689			
Pair 3	Post-test.E2	14.5500	20	2.79991	4.566	19	.000
	Delayed post-test.E2	12.6500	20	2.90689			

The mean scores of the group exposed to the word fork instruction are 8.40, 14.55 and 12.65. With df value of 19 (df = 19) and  $p < 0.05$ , it is obvious that the mean scores of this group have under gone a statistically significant promotion from pre-test to delayed post-test. This means that at least for the participant students in this research, the use of word fork technique has been positively facilitative in helping the students develop their inter-language knowledge of the focused forms.



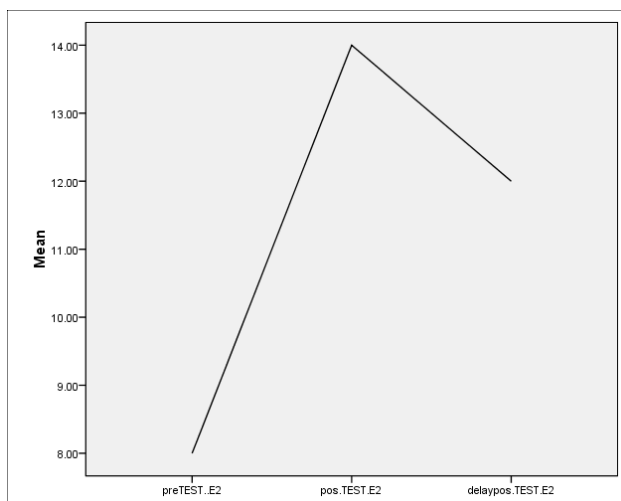


Figure 6. Visual representation of the performance of the word fork group on all tests

Figure 6 demonstrates the performance of the word fork group before treatment, after treatment and over time on pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test. The figure shows a significant gain of mean for the word fork group immediately after instruction. It further indicates that the technique had lasting effect on the retention of the target forms over time though the group experienced a minor loss of mean score from immediate post-test to delayed post-test.

As it was expressed before, the study aimed at investigating of the effect of using word fork technique on the collocation proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. The researcher of the present study focused on intermediate level learners since this group of learners are more motivated for developing their vocabulary especially collocations and the researcher could find more collocations and 'forks' to teach them. Based on the obtained results presented in the fourth chapter of this study, it can be safely concluded that using word fork strategy has been effective on developing the collocational competence of EFL learners in Iran. Thus, it may be also concluded that the new technique will be useful for enhancing the vocabulary knowledge of the learners and must be introduced in various EFL pedagogical settings of our country in order to develop the learners' knowledge of collocation and vocabulary.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Pregelged starch having 11.2 % moisture content, 0.07 ash content, 26% amylase and 74 % amylopectin was kindly supplied by Cairo Company for Starch and Glucose, Cairo, Egypt. Methacrylamide was procured from E. Merck, Germany. Analar grade of ethyl and methyl alcohols and hydroquinone were purchased from S.D. Fine Chemicals, Mumbai, India. All the chemicals used were of analytical grade.

### **Microwave initiated synthesis of poly (MAam)-pregelged starch graft copolymer:**

Unless otherwise indicated, pregelged starch (2 gm) was dissolved in 100 ml of double distilled water. Accurate amounts of methacrylamide (0.5 - 5.0 g) were dissolved in 20 ml water and were added to the pregelged starch solution, i.e. the total volume of water was 120 ml. They were mixed well using magnetic stirrer and transferred to the glass conical flask (250 ml). The flask was then placed on the disc spinner of the microwave oven (CE 1111L, Samsung Electronics, India) and microwave irradiated at different values (150 - 600) and various durations (15-180 S) in order to get the optimized irradiation power and duration. At the end of the reaction (i.e. formation of gel mass), the flasks were placed in ice cooled water. The flasks were kept undistributed for 24 hr to complete the grafting reaction.

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