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Does Consciousness Raising Task Promote EFL Learners' Recall and Retention of Collocations?

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the effects of consciousness-raising tasks on the ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners to recall and retain collocations. The study examined 60 female students, aged 18 to 25, who were selected from a language school in Tehran, Iran, and were similar in language proficiency. The experimental and control groups were randomly assigned, with 30 learners each. Initially, they were given a test of collocations as a pretest to ensure that both groups had equal knowledge of collocations. The treatment group received corrective feedback while the control group received the same instruction without feedback. After an eight-week treatment period, both groups were tested on their ability to recall collocations with an immediate post-test. One month later, the researchers gave the experimental group a delayed posttest to see how well they retained the learned grammatical collocations. According to the analysis of the immediate and delayed post-test data, it was found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test as they showed a significant improvement in recalling collocations. Moreover, the results revealed that learners' retention of collocations is not affected by time, indicating that C-RTs enable retrieval during comprehension and retention. Furthermore, the participants in the experimental group were required to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the effectiveness of consciousness-raising techniques used during the treatment. The responses were analyzed, and categorized, and the most prominent ones were reported. The findings can help learners and practitioners develop appropriate learning behaviors.

I | INTRODUCTION

The role of conscious and unconscious processes in foreign or second language acquisition is a controversial issue in applied linguistics. Some linguists argue that language learning is mainly an unconscious process (e.g., Seliger, 1983), while others believe that learners must consciously comprehend the target language system to produce appropriate forms and use them correctly (e.g., Ellis, 1992; Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985; Schmidt, 1995).

Second-language research has seen a rise in consciousness-raising tasks since the 1990s, with a particular emphasis on the Noticing Hypothesis of Schmidt. This hypothesis is being adopted by more researchers, who advocate its significance in interlanguage development. (Schmidt, 1995). Rutherford

& Sharwood-Smith (1985) argued that any activity which draws learners' attention to the formal properties of language facilitates language learning (i.e., consciousness-raising tasks). Skehan (1998, p. 64) considered consciousness-raising as "tasks that draw attention to a particular form, but give no explicit information", and Ellis (1992, p. 138) defined it as "a type of form-focused instruction designed to make learners aware of a specific feature". According to him, the process of consciousness-raising is not visible in the immediate output of conversation; however, it involves making significant changes in the learners' minds. As L2 learners become aware of grammar forms, they integrate them into their overall study process, and this delayed language production is a key characteristic that distinguishes consciousness-raising from grammar translation (Ellis, 1992).

The English language has gained immense popularity worldwide, making it a sought-after subject of study for researchers in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). With the advent of modern media like the Internet, English has spread rapidly and is now considered to be a global language. According to Nation (2001), mastering this language requires knowing 3,000-word families and 500 collocations, which is the minimum requirement for developing other language skills. Without this knowledge, learners may face difficulties in comprehending the language they are exposed to (Condon, 2002). Collocations are groups of words that are commonly used together in a language. Since they make up a significant portion of learners' vocabulary, second language (L2) learners must acquire knowledge of them to use the language fluently (Lewis, 2000). Fluent language use is an important issue that indicates how well L2 learners can perform academic language skills like reading, listening, and writing. Advanced learners exhibit collocational competence, which enables them to produce grammatically correct, fluent and accurate English sentences. However, lacking such knowledge can result in the creation of long and incorrect sentences that hinder their ability to express their intended ideas clearly. Researchers have emphasized the learning of collocations for the improvement of communicative competence (e.g., Andrews, 2007; Ocarina et al., 2022; Tabak & Takač, 2023).

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Consciousness-raising (C-R) is a concept in psycholinguistics that deals with the cognitive question of how second languages are learned and how students' minds work" (Tilahun et al., 2022). In 1981, Sharwood Smith introduced the term "consciousness-raising" to refer to the deliberate efforts of instructors and researchers to enhance learners' awareness of the formal aspects of the target language (Behbahani & Khademi, 2022; Khezrlou, 2024). These efforts aim to improve L2 proficiency and assist learners in their progress. This definition suggests that learning is the outcome of manipulating learners' mental states directly. Similarly, Willis & Willis (1996, p. 64) declared that "consciousness-raising occurs when students are encouraged to notice particular features of the language, to draw conclusions from what they notice, and to organize their view of language in the light of the conclusions they have drawn".

Rutherford & Sharwood-Smith (1985, p. 280) declared that "C-R is considered as a potential facilitator for the acquisition of linguistic competence and has nothing directly to do with the use of that competence for the achievement of specific communicative objectives, or with the achievement of fluency". C-R is a learner-centered teaching method that raises awareness of grammatical features through form-focused activities. It indirectly facilitates second language acquisition by emphasizing practice (Goetz, 2023).

Consciousness-raising Task (C-RT) was first recommended by Fotos & Ellis (1991, p. 609) as "a grammatical activity with interactive nature", and was named a problem-solving task. C-RT motivates learners to "interact in the target language to consciously analyze data and arrive at the explicit representation of the target structure" (Xavier & Gesser, 2022). Richards & Schmidt (2002, p. 110) describe C-RTs as "techniques that encourage learners to pay attention to language forms in the belief that an awareness of form will contribute indirectly to language acquisition". They believe that the central

themes in C-RT involve methods like deducing rules of grammar from examples, contrasting two or more expressions, and analyzing the discrepancies between a learner's and a native speaker's usage of a grammar item. Similarly, Skehan (1998, p. 64) considered consciousness-raising as "tasks that draw attention to a particular form, but give no explicit information", and Ellis (1992, p. 138) defined it as "a type of form-focused instruction designed to make learners aware of a specific feature". It is claimed that consciousness-raising is something between the grammar-translation method (GTM) and the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Yip, 1994). C-RT doesn't focus on immediate language production or motivate the correct use of target features. It emphasizes making significant changes in learners' minds by raising their awareness of grammar forms (Ellis, 1992). This process isn't visible in immediate conversation output and is different from grammar-translation due to delayed production (Svalberg & Askham, 2020).

Teaching collocations through C-RTs can enhance learners' proficiency in all four language skills and sub-skills, according to Hernandez (2008). Experts have debated the best ways to help language learners notice and acquire collocations. Two approaches are explicit and implicit treatment (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003). Proponents of explicit teaching of collocations emphasize the necessity for some certain amount of consciousness and argue that a C-R approach that includes C-RTs could be a great source of help to L2 learners (Willis & Willis, 1996) as it is not feasible for teachers to teach all the necessary collocations in language classes; therefore, using guidelines or C-RTs to encourage learners to think about language samples is suggested. In the same vein, Lewis (2000, p. 163) maintains that it is very beneficial for learners to be explicitly aware of collocations and to be provided with activities that can improve their independent learning strategies since when learners are more aware of the chunks of text, the input they notice is more likely to contribute to their intake.

To this end, the idea of explicit collocation instruction through a consciousness-raising approach has strongly been advocated by various linguists and researchers (e.g., Alqaed, 2022; Khezrlou, 2024; Li & Sun, 2023; Moghadam & Pourmohammadi, 2023). In contrast to explicit instruction of collocations, implicit instruction exposes learners to audio and visual texts where the target item is artificially increased in frequency (i.e., input flood). However, in this method, learners are not provided with explicit instruction or feedback. This treatment (i.e., input enhancement techniques) is believed to aid L2 learners in noticing and then acquiring the target features (Hernandez, 2008). Prominent advocates of implicit instruction of collocations (e.g., Ellis, 1997; Nation, 2001) consider it a beneficial method for language learners that can help facilitate language acquisition.

Based on various meta-analyses on L2 instruction (e.g., Li & Lei, 2022; Li & Sun, 2023; Norris & Ortega, 2000), explicit methods are more helpful and effective than implicit methods of instruction for both complex and simple features, which have the potential and potency to make C-RTs a better option in L2 instruction compared to the tasks needing no language awareness (Xavier & Gesser, 2022). This could be "a powerful tool to develop self-efficacious learners who are more confident and reassured about their capabilities in dealing with the complicated tasks and activities of learning a foreign language" (Safdari & Farzi, 2018). The efficacy of C-RTs on L2 grammatical performance has also been explored by several researchers (e.g., Behbahani & Khademi, 2022; Gotez, 2023; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Tanihardjo & Stardy, 2024; Tilahun et al., 2022). Several studies have also probed into the effect of corrective feedback as a form of consciousness-raising activity (e.g., Karim & Nassaji, 2019; White et al., 1991).

White et al. (1991) found that beginners aged 10 to 12 learned question formation better using form-focused methods and corrective feedback (input enhancement). The study involved three experimental groups that were exposed to enhanced input for two weeks, with explicit instruction and a longer instructional period. The experimental groups performed significantly better than the control group. Participants were tested immediately and again after five weeks to ensure the effects were long-lasting.

Biskup (1992) acknowledged that rendering English collocations and using user-friendly tasks are more effective in facilitating the retention of idioms by EFL university students. According to Durrant (2008), C-RTs are beneficial in teaching speaking to EFL students. Similarly, Fan (2009) described effective

cooperative learning techniques for the ESL classroom, where C-RTs were found to be particularly fruitful. Bahns & Eldaw (1993) highlighted the positive impact of code-breaking and word identification tasks (i.e., C-RTs) in English language teaching classrooms. These tasks foster a cooperative learning environment that encourages learners to enhance their second language skills.

Naeini's (2008) study found that providing corrective feedback, such as requests for clarification, repetitions, elicitations, and meta-linguistic clues, improved learning outcomes compared to a control group without feedback. Scutt & Fueute (2008) discovered that learners frequently use their first language while working on language tasks together. They use L1 to recall L2 sessions, seek assistance, refer to a dictionary, and clarify meaning. They also employ techniques like providing L1 definitions, synonyms, pictures, or demonstrations.

Tilahun et al. (2022) also emphasized the positive role of consciousness in second language acquisition and conducted a study to explore the impact of consciousness-raising and noticing techniques on the grammar test performance of EFL learners. The study found that within the framework of communicative language teaching, the use of focused tasks can enhance the development of L2 grammar ability in learners.

Svalberg & Askham (2020) stressed the positive outcomes of teaching grammar through C-RTs, and Tabak & Takač (2023) conducted a study that showed that the consciousness-raising approach has a positive impact on learners' knowledge of word collocations. The study also revealed the beneficial role of cooperative learning in improving learners' understanding of collocations in their second language. In this regard, Oliver (2002) emphasized that effective meaningful negotiation in children's interactions is contingent on the degree of cooperation present, and competitive interactions often hinder successful negotiation.

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

According to Hernandez (2008), teaching collocations through consciousness-raising tasks can enhance learners' proficiency in all language skills. However, there is no strong and consistent research evidence to support the effect of employing these tasks on recall (i.e., immediate test) and retention (i.e., delayed test) of collocations by Iranian EFL learners. In effect, this study aims to investigate the effect of consciousness-raising tasks on the learning of grammatical collocations among Iranian intermediate EFL learners at an intermediate level.

The study explores the effectiveness of consciousness-raising tasks in teaching grammar and vocabulary. It examines whether such training has a significant impact on learners' recall and retention of grammatical collocations, investigates different techniques that may enhance understanding, and explores participants' perceptions of using consciousness-raising tasks to improve their knowledge of English collocations. The research is of great significance as it can benefit English teachers, those learning English, curriculum developers, and individuals interested in expanding their knowledge about English as a second language. The results of this study can assist English teachers in teaching collocations more effectively. In addition, syllabus designers and textbook writers can use the findings to create more efficient textbooks that focus on English collocations in general and consciousness-raising activities in particular. The findings of the study also provide guidelines for teachers to teach collocations in the most effective possible way.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine the impact of consciousness-raising tasks on Iranian EFL learners' ability to remember and retain collocations, as well as their attitudes towards these tasks. Hence, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. Do consciousness-raising tasks as compared to meaning-based tasks affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' recall of grammatical collocations?

RQ2. Do consciousness-raising tasks as compared to meaning-based tasks affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' retention of grammatical collocations?

RQ3. What are the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' perceptions toward consciousness-raising tasks in learning collocations?

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The study included 60 intermediate-level female students aged 18 to 25 from a private language school in Tehran, Iran. The participants were randomly assigned to two intact classes to avoid any uneven distribution of potential confounding variables between the groups, which could affect the study's internal validity. The students were divided into two groups including an experimental and a control group, each consisting of 30 students. The participants all shared the same educational background in English as they had studied at the same language school for at least 12 semesters (3 years), from elementary to intermediate levels. The institute held classes twice a week, each session lasting 90 minutes. There were four semesters in each year. The learners in Iran took English courses in the public schooling system, which is standardized across the country. As a result, the researcher's expectation regarding the learners' language proficiency level was largely met, as there was little difference in this regard among the groups.

2. Instruments

For the present study, the data were collected by using two tests: a PET test and a teacher-made multiple-choice test of grammatical collocations which was piloted, analyzed (in terms of its reliability and item analysis), and then modified and used. They are explained as follows.

2.1. Preliminary English Test (PET Test)

To check the students' homogeneity at the intermediate level, the Preliminary English Test (PET) was employed following its piloted administration among 30 EFL learners with the same characteristics (i.e., age, gender, level) of the target population to calculate the reliability. The results of the pilot test showed that the mean was 40.1, the standard deviation was 2.10, and the reliability of the test was estimated as 0.89 based on the Kr-21 method (Table 1), which was an acceptable reliability. PET test is comprised of four sections, including writing (7 items), reading (35 items), listening (25 items), and speaking sections, each worth 25% of the total score. The total score is calculated by adding all the results together, with a maximum score of 50. The entire test takes approximately 120 minutes to complete. The writing section of the PET exam is rated using the General Mark Schemes for Writing provided by Cambridge. Ratings are based on specific criteria outlined in the rating scale, including a 0-5 rating scale for PET.

2.2. A Teacher-Made Test of Collocations

Based on the learners' language proficiency level and the concepts presented in their course book, a multiple-choice teacher-made test of collocations was developed using the available sources on collocations such as Oxford's Dictionary of Collocations (2009), McCarthy and O'Dell's English Collocations in Use (2006), and Idioms and Metaphorical Expressions in Translation (Tajalli, 2007). Then, the test items were checked by three faculty members of the university (where the researchers teach), modified, and piloted among 30 learners holding the same characteristics (i.e., level, age, gender) to calculate the reliability of the test and then modified. The results (Table 3) showed that the mean was 13.51 and the standard deviation was 1.61. The reliability of the test estimated through the Kr-21 formula showed an acceptable reliability index (0.74). This 30-item test was used for both the pretest and the two post-tests (i.e., immediate post-test and delayed post-test) to measure and compare the participants' comprehension and retention of the grammatical collocations before and after the treatment.

2.3. An Open-Ended Questionnaire

Additionally, learners' attitudes toward the C-RTs in learning collocations were sought through an open-ended questionnaire. The experimental group participants were invited and asked to reveal their ideas and attitudes concerning the effectiveness of the techniques they went through.

3. Design

In this study, both a control group and an experimental group were used, adopting a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2013). The study also sought the participants' views on the use of C-RTs in the second language classroom and its impact on the development of grammatical collocations in SLA. The participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, and the quasi-experimental nature of the research was confirmed by pre and post-tests. The study employed a control group design to experiment. Both the experimental and control groups underwent the same pretest and posttest procedures. However, the control group did not receive the same treatment between the tests, as per Mackey & Gass (2013). The main focus of the present study is on the effectiveness of C-RTs as a method for teaching/learning grammatical collocations. The dependent variables are the recall and retention of these collocations, while the independent variable is the use of consciousness-raising tasks. Control variables include gender (all participants are female) and language proficiency. Additionally, a semi-structured interview to gain insight into the participants' attitudes towards the treatments has been conducted.

4. Procedure

Three phases make up the procedure of the present study, as discussed in the following.

4.1. Pretest

During the first phase of the study, a pilot test was conducted. The pilot test involved 30 intermediate students who had similar characteristics to the target sample. Two assessment instruments were administered during the pilot test: a sample PET was used for homogenizing, and a teacher-made multiple-choice test of collocations was used as a pretest and two post-tests in the study. After conducting the pilot test, all the items were analyzed, and malfunctioning items with unacceptable facility and discrimination indices were removed. Then, the researcher developed a reliable homogenizing test along with pre/posttests. The second step involved selecting 90 intermediate EFL learners who took the piloted PET to ensure that they belonged to the same population in terms of their general English proficiency. The 60 selected participants were randomly divided into two groups: an experimental and a control group, each comprising 30 students. In the third step of the pretest phase, the participants in both groups took part in the piloted teacher-made multiple-choice test of collocations as the pretest to ensure their homogeneity regarding their knowledge of collocations. The collocations that were new for at least 80% of the participants were selected as the main focus.

4.2. Treatment

After the pretest, the treatment phase began and continued for 16 sessions. The semester lasted eight weeks, and the learners attended classes twice a week for 90 minutes, both in the control and experimental groups. As the language school curriculum was to be taught during the semester, 20 minutes of each session were allocated for the experiment in both groups. Both groups received equal instruction and practice sessions, taught by the teacher-researcher. Each session included 8 to 12 grammatical collocations.

Both the control and experimental groups used miscellaneous texts and materials, but they were presented differently. The teacher used context from recorded films, pictures, and other resources to teach the students. This context was of great interest to the students who had generated the vocabulary with the help of their classmates. This approach made learning more relevant and engaging for the students. All the procedures, such as time limits, class hours, course books, the teacher, physical conditions, and tests, were the same for both groups. However, the learners in the treatment group were given corrective feedback in the form of prompts like elicitations, repetitions, clarification requests, and meta-linguistic clues. In contrast, the learners in the control group received the same instruction as the experimental group, but without any feedback provided. In fact, the group that was not given grammatical collocation instruction was the control group. The learners in the control group were introduced to texts and collocations within the texts. They were required to find meanings, complete sentences, do matching exercises, fill in the blanks, and do other similar activities. In other words, they were not encouraged to focus on conscious-raising tasks like the learners in the experimental group were doing.

During the experimental group instruction of collocations, the students were taught a technique called brainstorming to raise their consciousness. They were given separate vocabularies and encouraged to come up with their collocations based on the situations described or sentences given on the board. This helped the students learn new words and reinforced the use of collocations. Additionally, any collocation mistakes were highlighted, and the students were allowed to experiment with different collocation combinations. The teacher provided feedback to the students on their use of collocations. The feedback helped the students categorize and correct their collocation problems. The researchers also employed techniques such as using first language definitions, synonyms, pictures, or demonstrations. Regarding feedback as an indication of consciousness-raising, Long & Robinson (1998) emphasized the role of creating *Input Salience*. They explained that 'flagging' target items such as highlighting, underlining, providing feedback, and rule-giving (i.e., input salience) can be some examples of consciousness-raising activities. Moreover, using the L1 in the classroom may facilitate L2 acquisition according to Levine (2003); therefore, L1 was used in the classroom for meaning and instruction clarification.

4.2. Posttest

After eight weeks, the learners were given an immediate posttest on collocations to assess their ability to recall them. Then, after almost a month, the learners were given a delayed posttest to evaluate their performance in retaining grammatical collocations.

Finally, the experimental group participants were asked to present their attitudes concerning the effectiveness of the C-RTs they had experienced throughout the semester. The participants' written documents were collected, analyzed, and classified based on the frequency of the concepts and points presented, and then the most prominent points were reported.

5. Data Analysis

The researchers employed SPSS, Version 22 (i.e., the Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to analyze the data. In this regard, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation) as well as inferential statistics (i.e., independent samples t-test) were employed. The analysis involved comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the PET before the treatment, comparing their mean scores on the

pretest of collocations among the learners to determine if the two groups had the same level of knowledge of collocations before the treatment, and comparing their mean scores on the posttest (recall test) and delayed posttest of collocations among the learners after the treatment. The learners' attitudes towards the presented C-R techniques were analyzed descriptively. The results of the data analysis are presented in 16 Tables and 4 Figures.

V. RESULTS

This section focuses on the analysis of the data collected through PET and pre-and post-test instruments. It provides a comprehensive report of the data analysis and the study results based on both descriptive and inferential analysis. Additionally, a discussion of the results will follow.

1. Pilot Studies, Subject Selection, and Homogenizing

1.1. Pilot Study of Preliminary English Test (PET)

Initially, a sample PET was piloted in the first phase of the study. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of 30 students' performance (with similar characteristics to the target sample) in the PET pilot study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for PET pilot study.

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance	Reliability (KR-21)
PET	30	39.8	35.0	40.1	2.107	4.441	0.89

As shown in Table 1, the mean score is 40.1 and the standard deviation is 2.10. The reliability of the test based on the Kr-21 method is also 0.89, which is an acceptable value.

1.2. Subject-Selection Statistics

The piloted PET test was given to 90 students, and their scores were analyzed. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the selection process of participants.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for subject selection.

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
PET	90	23.0	50.0	41.42	2.20

As shown in Table 2, the mean score was 41.42, and the standard deviation was 2.20. Based on this analysis, 60 students whose scores were within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected for the study.

1.3. Pilot Study of Pre- and Post-Tests of Collocations

The teacher-researchers created a multiple-choice test on collocations and gave it to 30 students who shared similar characteristics, such as age, gender and level, to those of the main study. The test was piloted to determine its reliability and modified based on the results. The statistics from the piloting process of the pre/post-test are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Pilot study of pre/post-tests.

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance	Reliability (KR-21)
Multiple-choice	30	15	30	13.51	1.613	2.603	0.74

Based on the results presented in Table 3, it can be observed that the average score of the participants is 13.51, while the standard deviation is 1.61. The Kr-21 formula was used to estimate the test reliability which showed an acceptable reliability index (r = 0.74). This 30-item test was administered both before and after the treatment to assess and compare the participants' understanding and memory of the grammatical collocations.

1.4. PET Test and Homogenization

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the PET test between the experimental and control groups and ensure their general language proficiency levels were the same before the treatment.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for language proficiency of both groups.

Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Experimental	30	42.03	2.327	.425
Control	30	42.13	2.209	.403

Based on the data presented in Table 4, both the experimental group (M = 42.03, SD = 2.32) and the control group (M = 42.13, SD = 2.20) had a similar level of general language proficiency before the implementation of the treatment. Furthermore, Table 5 illustrates the results of the independent samples t-test. There is a weak effect size [(t (58) = .171, p > .05, r = .022]. This suggests that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the PET test.

Table 5. Independent samples t-test for homogeneity of variances.

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means					95% confidence interval of the difference	
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.046	.832	.171	58	.865	.100	.586	-1.072	1.272
Equal variances not assumed			.171	57.8	.865	.100	.586	-1.072	1.272

As indicated in the first row of Table 5 (i.e., Equal variances assumed), the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .046, p > .05). Therefore, it was concluded that both groups enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency before the treatment. For a visual perspective of the status of both control and experimental groups before the main study and a better grasp of the data, it is depicted in Figure 1.
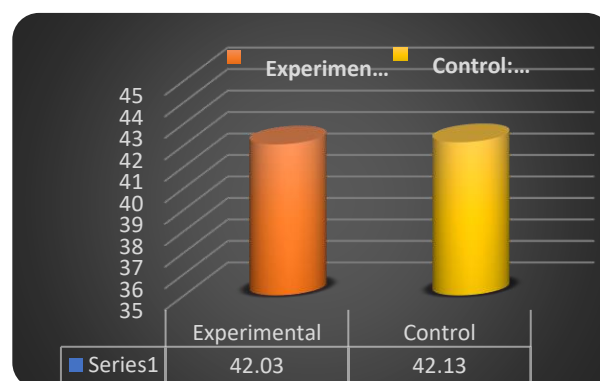

Figure 1. General language proficiency in both groups.

2. Investigation of The Research Questions

Initially, to determine whether the experimental and control groups had the same level of collocation knowledge before the treatment, an independent samples t-test was conducted on their mean scores for the pretest of collocations. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the pretest of collocations by both groups.

Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Experimental	30	12.33	2.591	.473
Control	30	12.10	2.187	.399

According to the data presented in Table 6, the experimental (M = 12.33, SD = 2.59) and control (M = 12.10, SD = 2.19) groups had similar mean scores on the pretest of collocations, indicating that they had the same level of collocation knowledge. Additionally, the independent samples t-test was run, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Independent samples t-test for the pretest of collocations by both groups.

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.561	.457	.377	58	.708	.233	.619	-1.006	1.472
Equal variances not assumed			.377	56.410	.708	.233	.619	-1.007	1.473

Regarding Table 7, the mean scores of the two groups on the pretest of collocations did not show any statistically significant difference [t(58) =.377, p > .05, r = .049], indicating a weak effect size. Therefore, it was concluded that both groups had the same level of collocation knowledge at the beginning of the study. It should also be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .561, p > .05). For a better grasp of the data, they are visually depicted in Figure 2.

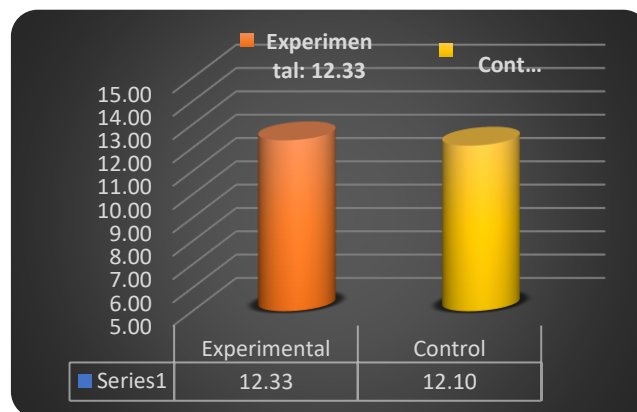**Figure 2.** Pretest of collocations by both groups.

2.1. Investigating the First Research Question

The first research question of the study was whether consciousness-raising tasks or meaning-based tasks had an impact on the recall of grammatical collocations by Iranian EFL learners. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of both groups on the post-test of collocations

to determine the effect of the treatment on the learners' ability to recall the collocations immediately after the treatment. Table 8 shows the descriptive statistical analysis, and Table 9 presents the independent samples t-test in this regard.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for the posttest of collocations by both groups.

Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Experimental	30	16.63	2.076	.379
Control	30	13.00	2.181	.398

Based on the information presented in Table 8, it can be concluded that the experimental group (with a mean of 16.63 and a standard deviation of 2.07) performed better than the control group (with a mean of 13 and a standard deviation of 2.19) on the collocations posttest. Moreover, Table 9 shows the results of the independent samples t-test.

Table 9. Independent samples t-test for the posttest of collocations by both groups.

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means					95% confidence interval of the difference	
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.501	.482	6.609	58	.000	3.633	.550	2.533	4.734
Equal variances not assumed			6.609	57.858	.000	3.633	.550	2.533	4.734

Based on Table 9, the results of the independent samples t-test point to a statistically significant discrepancy between the experimental and control groups' mean scores on the post-test of collocations [t (58) = 6.60, p < .05, r = .65], representing a large effect size. It should also be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .501, p > .05). Thus, as the experimental group outperformed the control group on the posttest of collocations, it is concluded that the consciousness-raising tasks have an impact on the recall of grammatical collocations by Iranian EFL learners considering the first research question. For a better grasp of the performance of the experimental group, it is visually depicted in Figure 3.
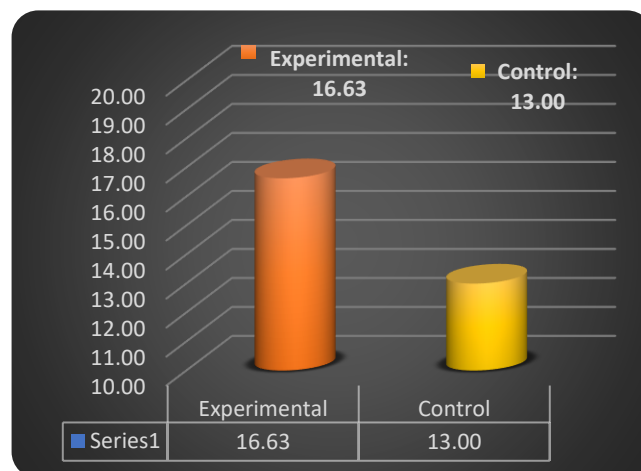

Figure 3. Posttest of collocations by both groups.

2.2. Investigating the Second Research Question

To find the answer to the second research question (i.e., Do consciousness-raising tasks as compared to meaning-based tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' retention of grammatical collocations?), descriptive analysis as well as a paired-sample t-test was run to compare the experimental group's mean scores on the posttest and delayed posttest of collocations to probe the effect of treatment with C-R tasks on the learners' retention of the collocations. The results of the data analysis are displayed in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics for the posttest and delayed posttest of collocations.

Post-tests	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Immediate	16.63	30	2.076	.379
Delayed	16.57	30	1.736	.317

Based on the data in Table 10, the experimental group had almost identical means for both the immediate post-test (M = 16.63, SD = 2.07) and the delayed post-test (M = 16.57, SD = 1.73). Furthermore, the results of the independent samples t-test [t (28) = .528, p > .05, r = .098], indicating a weak effect size revealed that there was no significant difference between the experimental group's mean scores on the immediate and delayed post-test of collocations (see Table 11).

Table 11. Independent samples t-test for the posttest and delayed posttest of collocations.

Paired differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
			Lower	Upper			
.067	.691	.126	-.192	.325	.528	29	.601

Therefore, it is concluded that consciousness-raising tasks (as compared to meaning-based tasks) affect Iranian EFL learners' retention of grammatical collocations as no significant discrepancy was observed between the experimental group's mean scores on the immediate post-test and delayed post-test of collocations. Figure 4 depicts the results in this regard.
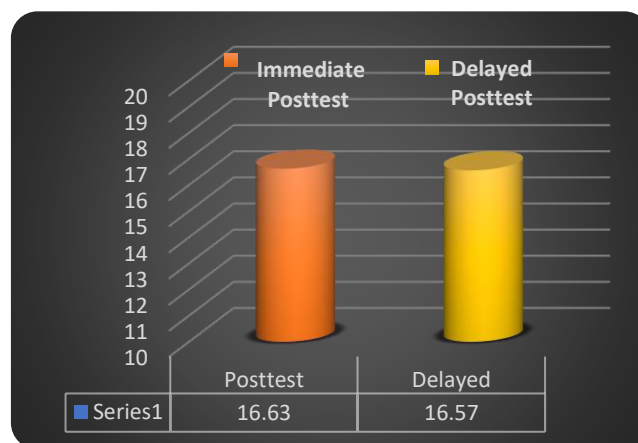

Figure 4. Posttest and delayed posttest of collocations.

2.3. Investigating the Third Research Question

As part of the study, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to assess learners' attitudes toward the use of C-R tasks in learning collocations (i.e., the third research question). The experimental group participants were asked to share their ideas and attitudes about the effectiveness of the techniques they experienced. The data collected were analyzed, and the most significant points reported by the participants who underwent C-RTs were as follows:

1. C-R tasks have taught us how to use collocations in both speaking and writing.
2. C-R tasks helped us determine the correct meaning of the collocations we used.

3. The class presented techniques that made us consider real situations for collocations.
4. The teacher's classroom activities helped the students understand English collocations and culture.
5. When we consciously select our words, we can be more confident in their correctness.
6. Appropriate communication requires lexical and grammatical collocations. C-RTs aid learning.
7. The comparison between collocations in Persian and English was intriguing and introduced their contextual usage to the students.
8. When speaking English, paying attention to collocations enhances fluency and enjoyment. The teacher skillfully helped us understand collocations in daily conversations.
9. We noticed a significant difference between this teaching approach and the previous ones we had encountered. Our teacher was highly cooperative and motivated us to meticulously consider the details of our thoughts before expressing them.
10. In the past, students did not understand the purpose of using grammatical collocations. Now, they easily comprehend the importance of using collocations while communicating in English.

3. Testing Assumptions

3.1. Tests of Normality

Before conducting parametric tests, it is important to ensure that four assumptions are met (Field, 2009). Firstly, the data should be measured on an interval scale. Secondly, the participants should be independent, which means that their performance on the test is not affected by the performance of others. Thirdly, the data should follow a normal distribution. Finally, the groups should have similar variances. In the current study, the data is measured on an interval scale and the participants performed independently on the tests. The normality assumption is also met, as indicated in Table 12, where the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors fell within the range of ±1.96 (Field, 2009).

Table 12. Tests of normality.

Group		N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. error	Ratio
Experimental	PET	30	.221	.426	0.518	-.711	.832	-0.854
	Pretest	30	-.267	.426	-0.625	-.743	.832	-0.892
	Posttest	30	-.587	.426	-1.375	-.652	.832	-0.783
	Delayed	30	-.502	.426	-1.176	-.634	.832	-0.761
Control	PET	30	.334	.426	0.782	-.658	.832	-0.790
	Pretest	30	-.370	.426	-0.867	-1.081	.832	-1.298
	Posttest	30	-.427	.426	-1.000	-1.325	.832	-1.591

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was discussed when reporting the results of the independent t-tests.

3.2. Criterion Referenced Validity

The validity of the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest of collocations is determined by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficients between them and the PET. Table 13 shows that the pretest [r (58) = .96, p < .05], indicating a large effect size, immediate posttest [r (58) = .73, p < .05], indicating a large effect size, and delayed posttest [r (28) = .94, P < .05], indicating a large effect size have significant Criterion-referenced validity indices.

Table 13. Criterion-referenced validity.

Test		PET
Pretest	Pearson Correlation	.963**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60
Posttest	Pearson Correlation	.733**

		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	60
Delayed		Pearson Correlation	.944**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	30
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Reliability Indices

4.1. Inter-rater Reliability of the Writing Section of the PET

The researchers, who were both experienced in marking papers and familiar with the rating scale used, evaluated the students' writings on the PET test. The scale used for scoring the participants' writings was presented by Alderson and Tankó (2010) who rated the writings on a scale of 1 to 6. To determine the inter-rater reliability of the scores, a Pearson correlation was conducted as presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Inter-rater reliability of the writing test.

		Writing R2
Writing R1	Pearson correlation	.856**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 14, the analysis of the writing section of the PET's inter-rater reliability indicated a high level of agreement between the two raters (Pearson r = .85, p < .05).

4.2. Inter-rater Reliability of the Speaking Section of the PET

The students' speaking performances on the PET test were also rated by the two raters (researchers themselves). A Pearson correlation was run to probe the inter-rater reliability between the two raters as displayed in Table 15.

Table 15. Inter-rater reliability of the speaking test.

		Speaking R 1
Speaking R 2	Pearson correlation	.785**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 15 shows the inter-rater reliability of the speaking test. Based on the results of Table 15, there is a significant level of agreement between the two raters (Pearson r = .78, p < .05).

4.3. K-R21 Reliability

Additionally, the reliability indices of all tests are displayed in Table 16.

Table 16. K-R21 reliability indices.

Test	N	Mean	Variance	K-R21
PET	90	41.42	27.23	.75
Pretest	60	12.22	5.664	.17
Posttest	60	14.82	7.813	.54*
Delayed	30	16.57	3.013	.06

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study suggest that Iranian intermediate EFL learners can improve their recall of collocations significantly through the use of C-RTs. The experimental group received C-RTs and performed better than the control group in the post-test. Furthermore, the study showed that the learners were able to retain the collocations effectively over time, suggesting that the use of C-RTs for learning collocations is effective for both comprehension and retention. This result is in agreement with the findings of previously conducted research by other scholars (e.g., Al-Shammari, 2022; Andrews, 2007; Boonraksa & Naisena, 2022; Fatahzadeh et al., 2022; Namaziandoust et al., 2020; Nemati & Motallebzadeh, 2013; Pattemore & Muñoz, 2022; Saito & Liu, 2022; Wu & Ionin, 2023).

According to the findings, using the C-RT method in L2 classrooms can have numerous benefits for learners such as facilitating discussions, promoting cooperative learning, and improving their performance in second-language grammar tasks to an acceptable level. This valuable finding coincides with the study conducted by Fotos (1993), who emphasized the effectiveness of using C-RT tasks and activities for teaching grammatical issues. In addition, the efficacy of C-RTs on L2 grammatical performance has also been explored by several researchers (e.g., Behbahani & Khademi, 2022; Gotez, 2023; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Svalberg & Askham, 2020; Tanihardjo & Stardy, 2024; Tilahun et al., 2022).

Incorporating C-RTs in language classrooms has a highly positive impact on the collaboration and engagement of learners. This helps to create a conducive atmosphere in which students feel comfortable to ask questions, engage constantly, and collaborate to achieve success in their learning. In other words, C-RTs can be used in English language teaching to enrich interactions and facilitate L2 development. This discovery, which has been repeatedly confirmed by various researchers (e.g., Boonraksa & Naisena, 2022; Khezrlou, 2024; Rodgers, 2014), is quite expensive.

It is widely recognized that, to become proficient in a foreign language, learners must have a broad vocabulary as well as sufficient knowledge of collocations, grammar, pronunciation, and other aspects of the language. The findings of this study suggest that consciousness-raising tasks can be an effective method for teaching and learning lexical items. The researchers used C-RTs to help Iranian EFL learners become more aware of their learning process. The results show that consciousness-raising tasks can assist language learning by allowing learners to focus on the details and specifics of the input they receive and identify any gaps in their linguistic knowledge. This is consistent with previous studies conducted by White et al. (1991), Saito & Liu (2022), and Wu & Ionin (2023).

The researchers of this study employed different corrective feedback techniques to help learners notice grammatical collocations. A considerable number of studies have also probed into the effect of corrective feedback as a form of consciousness-raising activity. They have shown that learners who receive feedback demonstrate a higher level of linguistic accuracy (e.g., Kalanzadeh et al., 2018; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; López et al., 2018; White et al., 1991; Zhang & Zhang, 2023).

This study demonstrated that using C-RTs to teach grammatical collocations to Iranian intermediate EFL learners has a positive impact. The approach helped improve learners' knowledge of word collocations. Additionally, the study found that cooperative learning plays a beneficial role in enhancing learners' understanding of collocations in their second language. Specifically, the use of C-RTs as a cooperative learning task was found to be highly effective in EFL classrooms. The students had a positive attitude toward the use of C-R techniques and tasks in the teaching of collocations, finding them enjoyable and friendly. These findings are consistent with those of Moghadam & Pourmohammadi (2023), and Tabak & Takač (2023).

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the effect of consciousness-raising tasks on the ability of intermediate Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to remember and retain collocations. The learners in the treatment group received corrective feedback in the form of prompts, including clarification requests, repetitions, elicitations, and meta-linguistic clues, while the learners in the control group received the same instruction as the experimental group without any kind of feedback. After completing the treatment phase, both groups of learners were given an immediate posttest to assess their ability to recall collocations. Approximately a month later, the experimental group was given a delayed posttest to measure their retention of grammatical collocations. Additionally, participants in the experimental group were asked to share their thoughts on the effectiveness of the CR techniques used throughout the semester.

The results of the study indicate that the use of consciousness-raising tasks can significantly improve the learners' ability to recall collocations as the experimental group, which received C-RTs, performed better than the control group in the post-test of collocations. Furthermore, the study showed that the learners were able to retain the collocations effectively over time, suggesting that the use of C-RTs for learning collocations is effective for both comprehension and retention. In other words, EFL learners' retention of collocations is not affected by the passage of time. It means that the collocations learned through CR task practices are retrieved well both in the process of comprehension and retention.

It is important to remember that using C-RTs in language classrooms has a positive impact on the student's ability to work together. This creates a comfortable and encouraging atmosphere in which students can ask questions and collaborate effectively to achieve success in their learning. Furthermore, using C-RTs can be highly beneficial for learners as it promotes cooperative learning, facilitates classroom discussions, and helps to improve their performance in second language grammar tasks to an acceptable level. Additionally, these tasks offer opportunities to use new linguistic features, such as vocabulary and grammar, in a communicative manner. Based on the findings, it is inferred that the employment of C-RTs as a technique could promote second language development in general, and second language collocation development in particular.

As for the implications of the study, to become fluent in a foreign language, EFL learners must possess an extensive vocabulary and knowledge of collocations, grammar, pronunciation, and other aspects of the language. This study recommends the use of C-RTs to teach and learn lexical items. Second-language teachers can use C-RTs to help their students become more aware of their learning process. Consciousness-raising tasks aid in language learning by enabling learners to focus on the details of the input they receive and identify any gaps in their linguistic knowledge. This cognitive comparison process is a crucial element of language acquisition. C-RTs can be used in English language teaching to enrich interactions and facilitate L2 development. ELT materials developers can utilize the results of this study and others like it to create tasks that promote learners' awareness of their learning process. Such tasks can help learners achieve self-correction, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

1. Limitations and Delimitations of The Study

During the current quasi-experimental study, the researchers faced several limitations. The primary limitation was the lack of familiarity that Iranian students, in general, had with research activities. This lack of familiarity was also observed in the participants of this research. As a result, the researchers had to spend a considerable amount of time and effort to make them aware of research norms and gain their cooperation. The second major problem was the lack of cooperation among the heads of the institute. Their policies and limitations were challenging to comply with, and it was sometimes difficult for the researchers to satisfy them while conducting the research. This put a lot of pressure on the researchers and slowed down the study process. Teaching collocations through conscious raising tasks was a

challenging activity for foreign language learners. The researchers were limited by time, budget and existing policies, which restricted their choice of grammatical collocations.

To ensure that the study was manageable and accurate, the researchers established a few delimitations. Firstly, the study solely focused on grammatical collocations, while disregarding lexical collocations. Secondly, determining the effect of C-RTs on the development of grammatical collocations within the EFL context was a complex and time-consuming task that required several sampling and testing methods. Due to these limitations, the experimental group consisted of only thirty EFL learners, and the results of the study should be generalized with caution.

2. Suggestions for Further Research

The hypothesis that providing Iranian language learners at different proficiency levels with C-RTs has the same effect on their general vocabulary knowledge and knowledge of grammatical or lexical collocations can be formulated. It is worth investigating to discover if this hypothesis holds. It is also important to examine the residual effects of C-RTs to determine how long-term these effects can be. A semi-longitudinal study can reveal if the theory of C-RTs energizes the retention of vocabulary items or collocations in learners' minds. The present study used C-RTs to explore the development of second-language collocations. Future studies may be needed to confirm the findings with other lexical items, language skills, or components. Also, research is recommended to explore the role of C-RTs in developing grammar, vocabulary, or any other skill and component of the second language. It is also important to study their relationship with each other and the probable effect they have on learner autonomy, self-regulatory factors of learning, and learner motivation. It is worth noting that the age and gender of the participants were not controlled in this research. Future studies should take into account the age and gender of learners to ensure more generalizable results and findings. In summary, it is necessary to conduct another study to explore the various methods of gauging the impact of using C-RTs on the acquisition of lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and language skills or sub-skills. If the findings of this study are validated by further research, it can be confidently argued that C-RTs are highly valuable and essential in the process of teaching collocations to EFL learners.

This study aimed to introduce C-RTs in the EFL classroom and enhance the grammatical collocation knowledge of students. Regardless of the approach used to teach language, grammar will remain significant. It is the responsibility of language teachers and researchers to test and evaluate different techniques of teaching grammatical patterns for efficient communication.

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