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The Use of Specialized Corpora as Supply Reference of Collocations for Teaching Reflective Writing in Academic English

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ABSTRACT

Corpora have been regarded as useful sources for English language teaching. As various studies are devoted to the use of corpus in teaching grammar and vocabulary, more research is needed to ascertain how learners could benefit from the use of corpus-based data in improving their writing skills, their reflective writing efficiency, in particular. In the present study, conducted at one of the leading international universities in Uzbekistan, Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), data on 43 students' experiences, opinions and expectations as well as 100 original reflective essays have been analyzed using different corpora to examine whether corpus-based data could serve the ground for material design or not and whether it can indeed function as a source of hypotheses regarding language teaching. The accumulated data along with the designed materials outline the scope for follow-up research into the effectiveness of the corpus-based approach in teaching reflective writing. Relying on students' responses and readiness to attend workshops on corpora-based learning, the implementation of the designed materials seems plausible and heralds fruitful results.

Keywords: Corpus-based data, Corpus linguistics, Collocation, Reflective writing, and Text-based analysis.

INTRODUCTION:

As the purpose of any corpus is to carry out a linguistic analysis, my intention for designing and analyzing it is exclusively pedagogical. I have been teaching Academic English module for over 12 years and teaching students to write a reflection essay has been viewed as something formulaic and devoid of any need to contemplate on how the representativeness of reflective writing could facilitate teachers' approaches to designing tasks with a much greater insight and efficacy. The development of computer technologies offers infinite opportunities for teachers to transcend their teaching to a newer and more lucrative, although thorny, level of teaching. This paper aims to analyze 100 WIUT CIFS students' reflective essays through a specialized corpus and elaborate on three different two-word collocations, adjective-noun, adverb-adjective and verb-noun, to UniversePG | www.universepg.com

design teaching activities. It is known that purposeful and resourceful approach to teaching collocations in the classroom is often neglected (Farghal and Obidedate, 1995, 318), therefore, the current study has actual purposes to dissolve this common belief and examine whether corpus-based data could serve the ground for material design or not and whether it can indeed function as a source of hypotheses regarding language teaching.

Review of Literature

Collocations in Academic Writing

Collocations are defined as words that go together in oftentimes unexpected ways; this lexical togetherness is not a random cohesion, but the denotation of belonging (Walter and Woodford, 2010, p7). Webb and Kagimoto define collocation from a statistical point of view as two lexical items co-occurring at a

particular frequency rate within a determined span (2009, p59). For teachers and lexicographers, collocations are mostly associated with habitual combinations, e.g. *do (not make) a case* or *do (not make) the laundry*, and collocability or restrictions at a greater emphasis (Sultana and Yoko, 2021).

Academic Writing and Collocations

The most obvious and valuable advantage of collocation use is that they help students to express their written ideas in a more natural and concise manner, thereby bringing the level of their writing efficiency close to that of native speakers (McCarthy and O’Dell, 2017). Wood, (2002) emphasizes that irrespective of learners’ age; the knowledge of collocations boosts word-stock and contributes to the fluency in exposition. In language assessment testing, students with lower language levels tend to use high-frequency collocations, while students with higher performance are inclined to apply more low-frequency collocations (Granger and Bestgen, 2014). The latter group is more typical among the representatives awarded IELTS score 7+ on their writing component (IELTS Tutors, 2022).

Errors in the Use of Collocations and Problems in EFL Learners’ Academic Writing

Various research findings illustrate that studying a large number of language examples is indispensable

for EFL learners to detect their writing issues and determine effectiveness of their own learning. Many internal and external factors might influence students’ application of collocations in writing. The most egregious language hurdles diagnosed by teachers are word choice misuse and incorrect sentence structures explained by students' application of their native language (inter-lingual or intra lingual transfer) despite its apparent incongruence (Yang *et al.*, 2019, p115). Apart from native language transfer and incorrect use of collocations, Phoocharoensil, (2011) found preponderance of mistakes in lexical collocations over grammatical ones, attributing them to overgeneralization and synonymy (pp111-115). On top of that, EFL students are predisposed to make mistakes in collocation use when writing due to the dearth of collocational knowledge, lack of practice in paraphrasing and, on the whole, lack of the conceptual understanding of collocations (Hashemi *et al.*, 2012). In **Table 1**, the authors illustrate six different types of collocations, together with their characteristics and examples, which language learners tend to misuse (Hashemi *et al.*, 2012, pp556-557). Various other issues may impact collocation misuse in writing, among which the most prominent ones are ineffective learning strategies, learners' low language proficiency and memory capacity (Liu, 2010, p28; Mohammad *et al.*, 2023).

Table 1: Types of collocations.

Type	characteristics	Examples
Compounds	completely frozen; no variations at all are possible	1. aptitude test 2. floppy disk
Idioms	Relatively frozen expressions whose meanings do not reflect the meanings of their component parts.	1. to have one's back to the wall 2. hammer and tongs
transitional	more frozen and less variable than collocations; their meanings are close to those suggested by their component parts	1. foot the bill 2. to be in the tight spot
combinations	the meaning of the whole does reflect the meaning of the parts	1. pure chance 2. to commit murder
Free	their components are the freest regard to combining with other lexical items	1. to analyze/report investigate a murder 2. to recall an event/ adventure/accident

Sketch Engine Corpus-operated tools for Collocations

Used by major publishers, such as Macmillan or CUP, to produce grammar books and compile dictionaries, web-based program “Sketch Engine” (originated from the word “sketch”) demonstrates a UniversePG | www.universepg.com

word’s collocation and grammatical behavior on a one-page summary (Kilgarriff *et al.*, 2014, p9). It is often referred to as a draft dictionary entry. It functions as both the software and the web service, which collectively contain a considerable number of ready-to-use pre-loaded corpora as well as diverse

tools that help to create, install and manage one's corpora (Kilgarriff *et al.*, 2014). Those tools are word sketch, thesaurus, keywords, word lists, n-grams, concordance and trends. In this light, using, integrated within the corpus, tools, teachers can not only develop and easily adapt learning materials, but also provide guidance to students on how to effectively integrate academic vocabulary in writing.

Teaching and Learning Collocations

Honing students' awareness and confident use of collocations in L2 writing is essential and, beyond any doubt, manifest. Nevertheless, while the importance of aiding students' learning of collocation use is welcomed by teachers, the latter are reported to encounter challenges in applying apposite techniques and strategies in achieving this (Wray, 2000). The author maintains that practical implementation of this is not as customary as mere presentation of semantic or grammatical features of collocations. Cognitive analysis allows for effective teaching of collocations for it helps to learn about ought-to-be-satisfied collocation needs in a language classroom and this is achieved in various ways. Liu, (2010) suggests that teachers utilize dictionaries and corpora, arrange collocations by their meaning, include comparison and contrast as well as pattern explanations of different L2/L1-L2 collocations (pp8-9). **Fig. 1** illustrates the cycle of how corpus linguistics, driven by students' needs incited while teaching, supplies an instructor with updated teaching resources, methods and insights (Huyen, 2019, p280).

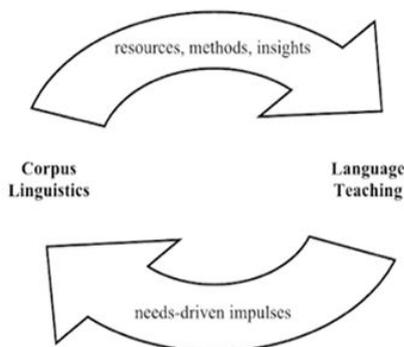


Fig. 1: Application of corpora in language teaching.

So, the relationship between corpus linguistics and language teaching, as of late, has been inextricable and needs more attention from language teachers as well as researchers. Language teachers should pay attention to the application of corpus linguistics in L2 teaching as “corpus data can provide language teachers and learners with illuminating guidance as

to frequent collocations” and it “supports the use of examples of real language class” (Reppen, 2010).

Corpus Description

While “corpus” is crudely defined as a collection of large amounts of authentic texts, any form of linguistic inquiry based on data extracted from such a corpus is known as “corpus linguistics” (Stefanowitsch, 2020). As Hunston, (2002) states a corpus itself is devoid of any new information in terms of language, but the integration of software renders a totally new insight on the familiar. Driven by the idea to reveal a new perspective on the language, I built a corpus of 33,030 words. It consists of 100 texts each ranging between 300-350 words. The texts represent original students' work submitted as Entry 3 for Portfolio assessment at Certificate of International Foundation Studies (CIFS) at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). Initially, the sampling data, comprising about 8% of the total (1,323) submitted through Turnitin, were randomly selected and then manually extracted from Portfolio to be zipped for more convenient upload on Sketch Engine. The type of corpus I created is the most frequent one, *monolingual*. Such corpus allows a user an easier option to study various formal non-translated texts for intra-lingual analysis of patterns and word forms to create highly practical tasks (Johansson, 2007, p57).

Since I used texts created by learners of a language, my corpus is a *learner* one. Using it on Sketch Engine, I was able to identify the most pervasive mistakes and challenges that students have when learning how to write reflectively. Besides, my corpus is *specialized* because the reflective texts of which it is composed relate to one particular subject area, namely Academic English, and using this corpus I was able to see how the language is used. From time perspective, my corpus is *synchronic* since all assembled texts refer to the same time point - Semester 1 coursework submission as of December 2021. According to Meyer, (2004) when synchronic corpus is created, the compiler's main objective is to ensure the narrowness of the time-frame to view the language undisturbed by its dynamics accurately (p45). In regard to topicality, like most corpora, the designed corpus is *static* because of its complete content development and no additional truncations or additions.

Questionnaire and Corpus Analysis

In this section, I will present the results of an online survey (designed to identify and evaluate students' needs, perceptions and expectations they may have in the classroom activities) as well as a detailed analysis of selected data extracted from corpus.

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

To collect information about the students' general background on language proficiency, experiences and perception of various corpora-related aspects, an online survey was conducted among 4 CIFS groups, in which three score of male (60.5%) and almost two-fifths (39.5%) of female volunteers shared their responses. It was found that only a quarter of the students studied English for longer than 5 years, while the majority did so for 2 and 3 years (34.9% and 25.6% respectively). Despite the fact that none of the subjects achieved 7.5+, the percentage of high-scorers (7.0) accounted for 9.3%, a figure similar to that of the low-scorers (5.5) 11.6%; nevertheless, most students scored between 6.0 and 6.5 on IELTS writing component (79%). Although a little over a quarter (25.6%) of the students felt that IELTS had a small or insignificant impact on realizing their potential in the Academic English module, the remaining ones were of the opposite opinion, with some 56% selecting 5-6 on a 10-point Likert Scale. The usefulness of collocations in academic writing is acknowledged by over a half of those questioned (51.2%), however, nearly four-tenths are doubtful and one in ten students do not see practical value in them. What's more, less than one in ten students (9.3%) always checked with the dictionary whether they used formal collocations or not; the same percentage never considered its importance. As for the rest (81.4%), they did so occasionally. Surprisingly, the figures grow considerably when students are ought to find similar to their mother tongue collocations with only 2.3% of the surveyed never doing so and the others checking them sometimes (46.5%) and on a constant basis (51.2%). Following, almost four out of five survey-participants (79.1%) realize they should work more on enhancing their vocabulary to write more skillfully when completing academic assignments. Focusing more on paraphrasing, summarizing and sentence structures is crucial in 65.1%, 55.8% and 51.2% of the cases. All other areas for improvement, namely grammar, overgeneralization, learning strategies and word for word synonymy are the main

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focus for 30 - 44% of the students in the survey. Students' awareness of the most popular corpora is relative. The corpus that the majority of the students (53.5%) knew was Wikipedia Corpus, and American English Corpus following it (25.6%). Approximately three-tenths (27.9%) of the respondents never heard of the corpora listed. When asked what online services, tools and websites students used to facilitate their writing process, various ones, many of which were unrelated, were mentioned with Quilbolt, Context Reverso, Grammarly and several referencing tools heading the list. Finally, over two-thirds (67.4%) of the CIFS students expressed their readiness to attend extracurricular workshops to learn how to make text-based analysis to improve their grammar and the use of collocations. None of them rejected the idea and the remaining third might consider the opportunity given a chance.

Corpus-based Analysis and Interpretation

The current corpus was studied using Sketch Engine Wordlist tool so as to scrutinize how effectively *Adjective + Noun*, *Adverb + Adjective* and *Verb + Noun* collocations were generally used in students' writing and if there were any ways to improve it. Out of 425 adjectives found in the total of 2,592 frequencies (number of times the item was found in the corpus), 12 lemma-adjectives with absolute frequency ranging between 130 (*academic*) and 33 (*next*) were selected. As for adverbs, found in 1,797 instances, the two 2-gram adverbs vary to an extent of 222 items. Of those, 12 lemma-adverbs selected the range of 188 (*not*) and 21 (*really*) respectively was featured. Verbs, roughly comprising one-fifth of the corpus, provided undisputed dominance among other collocation groups resulting in 6,247 instances and, correspondingly 499 different 2-gram collocations. The twelve most frequent Verb + Noun collocations varied extensively between 1,155 (*be*) and 68 (*get*) absolute frequencies. While absolute frequency shows how many times the item was found in the corpus, there was another statistic value considered, viz. a LogDice, which is used in Sketch Engine to identify collocations as well as their strength. Relying on the latter parameter, it should be understood that the strength (typicality) of a collocation is ascribed to the score; in the meantime, a low score means that the words in the collocation frequently combine with many other words. According to LogDice the selected collocations, on the whole, varied on a range of 7.5 to 13.9, e.g.

Adjective-Noun (*difficult module*: 7.5; *reliable source*: 13.4), Adverb + Adjective (*very grateful*: 9.6; *most importantly*: 13.9), and Verb + Noun collocations (*make portfolio*: 8.5; *find source*: 13.0), out of an aggregate of 304 collocations, i.e. 110, 74 and 120 respectively. Using the estimated overall associative collocations strength, there was computed a median of LogDice score given to each type of collocation (**Fig. 2**). This means that the three collocations in the entire corpus of over 33,000 words (37,023 tokens) having the highest LogDice strength are *find source*, *reliable source*, and *most importantly*, with the latter one heading the list.

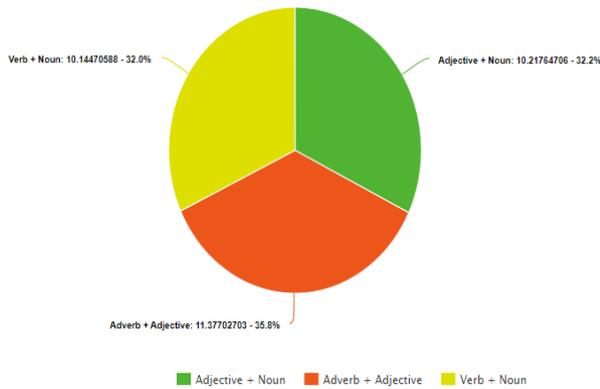


Fig. 2: Median LogDice collocations strength.

Frankenberg-Garcia *et al.* (2019, p32) distinguish between free associations and collocations and point out that the bottom of the minimum of LogDice

score for a collocation is below 5; any of those transcending this threshold should be deemed “free combinations” (**Table 1** above). Young and Sun-Young, (2020, p448), went even further and categorized collocations into five sub-groups depending of their association level: very high strength (over 11), high (9.5~11), upper-mid (8~9.5), mid (6.5~8) and lower-mid (logDice = 5~6.5). None of the selected (over 300) collocations represent the fifth group. Relying on the median of LogDice score (**Fig. 2**), while Adverb + Adjective collocations are representative of very high strength with 11.37703, Adjective + Noun and Verb + Noun ones are typical of high LogDice median (10.21765 and 10.14471 respectively). As it can be seen, there is no single lower-mid (LogDice = 5~6.5) collocation collected from the corpus, but there are two examples of mid (6.5~8) strength associated with gradable adjectives: *difficult module* (7.5) and *easy essay* (7.7). By comparing these data with the obtained from students’ survey, it can be deduced that IELTS scores of 6.0+ could more or less be used as framework indicators of defining the approximate expected level of expertise in the use of collocations. It is interesting to note that showing how many times the item was found in the corpus -“frequency” in 90% (274 items) of the cases, is lower than 11.0 (**Table 2**).

Table 2: Reflection Corpus Collocation Frequency.

11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-80
Academic Style	Main idea	Future	Main point	Reliable	Write draft
Academic writing	Have chance	job	Find	source	Get
Academic word	Write	Write	source	Write	feedback
Future study	portfolio	essay		summary	
Different topic	Improve skill			Complete	
Next semester				portfolio	
Be experience					
Be part					
Have opportunity					
Write coursework					
Write entry					
Find evidence					
Find point					
Learn lot					
Complete coursework					
Complete task					
Give feedback					

The remaining 10% to over a half (17 items) are in the 11-20 frequency group. Besides, 10 of them distributed throughout all groups, except for the 61-80 one, which contains two Verb + Noun collocations *write draft* and *get feedback*. This confirms Granger and Bestgen, (2014) idea that low-scoring

80 one, which contains two Verb + Noun collocations *write draft* and *get feedback*. This confirms Granger and Bestgen, (2014) idea that low-scoring

tend to use high-frequency collocations, while high-scorers prefer to apply more low-frequency collocations. Another surprising upshot is that none of the Adverb + Adjective-lemma collocations entered the list, with only *very useful* scoring as much as 9.0. This result may result from the lack of attention paid in class to this problem. Due to reflective essay being an academic writing assignment type, I at-

tempted to compare 304 collocations with the Academic Word List (AWL) suggested by Victoria University of Wellington (no date). The list is divided into 10 sub-lists, each representing 60 families, except for the last one, which represents 30. The sub-lists provide most common words and their commonality grows less intensive as the list progresses (Table 3).

Table 3: The sub-lists of most common collocations compared with Academic Word List (AWL).

AWL sub-list	Collocation
1.	main factor; reliable source; reliable evidence; different source; important role; have issue; write response; find source; find evidence; complete assessment; do research; improve structure; use source; use method; make source; make method;
2.	main focus; reliable resource; useful aspect; difficult aspect; important element; next aspect; well positive; have draft; write draft; find resource;
3.	main core; difficult task; important component; easy task; be task; complete task; do task; give task;
4.	future job; easy job; be summary; write summary; do job; give job
5.	academic style; future objective; difficult challenge; new style; next draft; as challenging; complete draft; give draft; improve draft; use style; make style;
6.	well abstract;
7.	future topic; different topic; new topic; improve submission; give topic
8.	very appreciative; so ambiguous;
9.	_____
10.	_____

Relying on the obtained data and meticulous analysis, it was ascertained that Verb + Noun collocations, comprise the biggest number 29 (49%), followed by Adjective + Noun 25 (43%) and Adverb + Adjective 5 (less than one-tenth). Further analysis shows that verbal and adjectival prevalence of collocations is explained not by their exceptional diversity, but by the repetition of the head words, with some, *draft* and *task*, recorded in six different collocations and the others ranging mainly between two and three e.g. *draft*, *task*, *source*, *job*, *style*, *topic*, *summary*, *resource*, *evidence*, *method* and *aspect*:

- have draft, write draft, next draft, complete draft; give draft; improve draft;
- difficult task, easy task, be task, complete task, do task, give task;
- reliable source; different source, find source, use source, make source;
- give job, do job, easy job, future job;
- academic style, new style, make style, use style;
- future topic, different topic, new topic, give topic;
- next aspect, difficult aspect, useful aspect;

- be summary, write summary;
- reliable resource, find resource;
- reliable evidence, find evidence;
- use method, make method;

The comparison also allowed revealing that 16 collocations represent AWL sub-group 1, which is over a quarter of the total, and others are from AWL sub-groups 5 and 2, with 11 and 10 collocations respectively. Sub-lists 6-8 are rather scarce, accounting for only 8 collocations, most of which are listed in sub-group 7. Finally, AWL sub-lists 9 and 10 are devoid of any academic words, albeit borrowed from AWL words, such as *anticipate*, *attain*, *devote*, *format*, *team*, *assemble*, *compile*, *convince* or *undergo* could well be phrased within the context of reflective writing to bring greater diversity and avoid repetition.

Creating Corpora-based Activities

In this section, I will rationalize the decision on why a particular classroom activity was chosen. All 11 Tasks integrated within 3 Activities (with answer keys at the end) were created using various tools available for Reflection Corpus, Academic English Corpus and in British National Corpus (BNC). The

created activities are estimated to last approximately 110 minutes and can be planned applying various modes of teaching (e.g. individual, pair-work, small group-work, plenary, etc.). For each task clear instructions, aims, objectives and timing were considered. When planning them, I considered Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs (affective and cognitive domains) and indented to contribute to the development of both HOTs and LOTs in students learning. The objectives were built on the basis of SMART goals.

Activities 1-3 on Adjective + Noun, Adverb + Adjective and Verb + Noun Collocations

Relying data, I selected the most frequent Adjective + Nouns collocations from the corpus and listed the latter in rows of five so that the students could match them with one of the suggested adjectives from the bank of words. The practical value of this task lies not in prescriptivism, but in its non-judgmental,

descriptivist approach allowing operating with the language L2 WIUT CIFS students normally employ when reflecting on their academic experience. Doing this task, the students should pay heed to those words that may be out of regular use because most of the adjectives can match virtually any string of nouns (Activity 1, Task 1). In reflective writing, the interpretation paragraph should consider the reason/causes for why a student succeeded or failed to make a particular achievement, in other words provide justification. Having checked with the and inquiring a Word Sketch Difference in the Reflection Corpus, it can be seen that the nouns “reason” and “cause” were used 13 and 2 times (Fig. 3) respectively and are positioned 113 and 351 in the list of 749 nouns. Compared to the same inquiry on BNC, a similar preference toward the use of the modified noun “reason” can be noticed, but the discrepancy is over twofold less frequent (6.5 and 2.85 times respectively) (Fig. 4) (Activity 1, Task 3).



Fig. 3: Word Sketch Difference: Reflection Corpus.



Fig. 4: Word Sketch Difference: BNC Corpus.

Besides, having analyzed the use of these nouns with the Concordances tool (Fig. 5), it is apparent that students, despite an abundant variation, limit their

use only to adjectives “same” and “main”, thus teachers help in diversifying adjective +cause/noun collocations is compulsory.

Summarizing texts did not pose a considerable challenge as well for the same reason .</s><s>However, finding credible sources to affirm my
 The main reason was bewilderment is that I knew nothing about the approaches of note taking and could not concentrate.</s>
 And the main cause to this was me, myself.</s><s>My laziness didn't give a chance to even check the lectures

Fig. 5: The use of “reason” and “cause” in Reflection Corpus.

Word Sketch Difference provides 100 different adjective as well as their usability and frequency with reason/cause (Table 4). Using these data, I created a “Tick Box” activity. I selected 20 collocations among most frequent and more academic options, where a number was against a zero, e.g. simple 156 - 0, or possible 129 -109, for “Both” option (Activity 1, Task 3). When designing Tasks for Activity 2, I aimed to encouraging students to generalize the meaning of collocations sets through recognizing familiar ones (Activity 2, Task 1), highly successful or strongly negative.

Table 4: Word Sketch Difference.

modifiers of "reason/cause"			
simple	156	0	...
only	312	20	...
obvious	238	19	...
good	1,137	221	...
main	610	180	...
real	231	71	...
possible	129	109	...
likely	23	46	...
common	56	194	...
reasonable	0	75	...
worthy	0	53	...
root	0	95	...

Another essential focus was verb + feedback collocations since those (**Table 5**) were of extremely limited use (with *receive* and *get* heading the list) and often were the result of discussed above interlingual or intra lingual transfer (Yang, Harn and Hwang, 2019, p115), e.g. “surrender drafts” as well as overgeneralization and synonymy Phoocharoensil, 2011, pp111-115). The last task aims to synthesize the most frequent collocations with “feedback” and resolve the problem of repetition and informality. Besides, it aids the use of various prepositions that may follow one out of 33 collocations for “verb + feedback”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This paper has attempted to illustrate how scrupulously analysed data from a specialized monolingual corpus and other corpora data in conjunction with pre-learnt students’ needs could potentially contribute to designing L2 classroom activities to expedite students’ learning. The entire work is devoted to three different types of collocation, the created activities for which pursue the goal to improve students’ written exposition, namely their reflective writing. The classroom activities have not been piloted yet.

However, the accumulated data along with the designed materials outline the scope for follow-up research into the effectiveness of the corpus-based approach in teaching reflective writing. Relying on students’ responses and readiness to attend workshops on corpora-based learning, the implementation of the designed materials seems plausible and heralds fruitful results. Nonetheless, while the constraints are imminent, I can assuredly state that corpora grant immense opportunities for both the teachers and the students and should become an inextricable part in lesson planning.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship and or publication of this article.

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