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**THE USE OF COLLOCATIONS BY IELTS AND CSS ASPIRANTS IN
ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY**



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Abstract

The study explored the prevalence of collocations in English essays among examinees of the IELTS and the CSS exam. English language tests for applying to the IELTS and CSS exams. The study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine 15 essays (from both groups) by drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. Both IELTS and CSS students mainly employed adjective + noun and noun + noun collocations. However important differences could be identified in the ways people talk and write about each topic. The CSS essays focused on politically charged and state-centered collocations such as "martial law," "democratic leaders," and "civilian rule," showing local governance mindsets. On the other hand, IELTS essays preferred globally relevant collocations such as "renewable energy," "gender equality," and "digital skills," reflecting discourses of development and social justice. According to CDA, the two groups appeared to follow dominant ideological patterns: CSS aspirants seemed to embrace national narratives, while IELTS seekers exhibited features of global citizenship. An impersonal and authoritative voice devoid of apparent ideology was created with the frequent use of evaluative adjectives and nominalizations in the essay. The study concludes that collocations play a crucial role in developing arguments, constructing identity, and expressing one's ideology. Attention to collocations should become a regular feature of language teaching and preparation for academic writing assessments. analysis techniques specific to the Saraiki language, this research advances our knowledge of the sentiment dynamics within the Saraiki-speaking population.

Keywords: Collocations, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough, IELTS writing, CSS essays, Corpus linguistics, Academic discourse, Ideology, Language and power.

Introduction

For successful performance in examinations such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Central Superior Services (CSS), it is highly important to possess strong writing skills, particularly in terms of fluency, coherence, cohesion, and accuracy (Weigle, 2002; Du et al., 2025). These examinations are conducted for academic and professional purposes in English-speaking contexts, where writing plays a crucial role in developing and demonstrating overall language proficiency (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Among the many components of writing, collocation the natural combination of words that makes language sound fluent and native-like cannot be overlooked when evaluating the overall quality of written work (Hill, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2005).

For speakers of other languages, achieving mastery in collocational usage is often challenging. Unlike grammar rules, which are usually taught explicitly, collocations are primarily acquired through exposure, repetition, and practice (Lewis, 2000; Schmitt, 2010). Candidates of IELTS and CSS in Pakistan, as non-native users of English, often struggle to attain native-like command of collocations and may find it difficult to use them accurately. Such problems are frequently observed in writing tasks, particularly in essay writing, where collocational errors can lead to unnatural expressions, inappropriate word choices, and a lack of clarity (Benson et al., 1997; Nesselhauf, 2005). Therefore, to achieve the desired scores and to ensure fluency and accuracy in writing, it is essential to understand and apply collocations correctly (Granger, 1998; O'Keeffe et al., 2007). This proposed study examines to find the use of collocation in the English essay writing of IELTS and CSS aspirants by using a corpus-based approach to analyze patterns of collocation usage in their writings (Sinclair, 1991; Tognini-Bonelli,

2001). The research is going to search out the collocation types commonly used by the learners and test whether the collocation choices of these individuals match with those of native English speakers (Granger, 1998; Hyland, 2008). By looking into the corpus data that are actual, authentic examples of student writing, this study shows how the individuals use collocation and how they can be effective to improve their usage in order to improve the quality of their writing (Flowerdew & Wan, 2010; McEney & Hardie, 2012).

The study indicates the role of collocation knowledge in second language acquisition in the field of applied linguistics (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Scholars have long debated whether explicit instruction in collocation can effectively improve language learners' proficiency, or whether such knowledge is better acquired incidentally through exposure to authentic language use (Hill, 2000; Schmitt, 2004). Research on L2 writing, specifically in academic disciplines, shows that collocations play a key role in achieving fluency, coherence, and lexical sophistication (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Hyland, 2008). However, many learners still depend on simplified or direct translations from their native language or mother tongue language, resulting in errors in their use of collocations (Kachru, 1986; Shiu, 2011). Understanding the use of collocation is quite important for improving language teaching and exam preparation, specifically in the context of high-level exams such as IELTS and CSS (Harrison & Kuo, 2008).

To add up, on general ground, collocations are commonly used in language learning, while there has been limited research paying attention to the writing skills of IELTS and CSS exam candidates. The purpose of these tests is to focus on vocabulary and check out the fluency and accuracy of the written material, which provide clear ground to examine the importance of collocations in English essay writing (Weigle, 2002; Taylor, 2006).

To sum up, the aim of this study is examining how IELTS and CSS test-takers use collocations in their English essay writing. With the help of corpus-based analysis, the study shows the common errors occurring in collocations and their patterns that provides evidence-based recommendations improving language teaching and helping students enhance their writing skills for these high stake exams.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In spite of the importance of collocation usage in language learning or proficiency, the candidates of both IELTS and CSS often show limited knowledge of collocations. Due to limited exposure of collocation, the wrong and incorrect collocation usage can easily slow down their ability to be coherent, fluent and produce natural essays. It will also be highly affecting their exam performance. This study aims to address the gap in understanding the extent to which aspirants employ collocations and how this improves their writing in IELTS and CSS exams. Analyzing these patterns can boost up language instructions and language learning strategies.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To point out the most periodically used collocations (with attention to genre-specific pattern) by both IELTS and CSS aspirants in their English essay exam.
2. To investigate the role of collocations in determining the overall quality of writing in IELTS and CSS essay paper, comparing their impact on writing proficiency in the context of both the exams.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Which type of collocations (with attention to genre-specific pattern) used by both IELTS and CSS aspirants in their English essay exam?
2. What is the role of collocations in determining the overall quality of writing in IELTS and CSS essay paper, comparing their impact on writing proficiency in the context of both the exams?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is worthy because it provides insights into the writing practices of Pakistani learners preparing for the IELTS and CSS exams. By analyzing the use of collocations, the study highlights an important aspect of language fluency that affects both the fluency and naturalness of writing. The results

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can contribute to a better understanding of how L2 learners, especially those from Pakistan, approach academic writing. This can ultimately inform the development of curricula, teaching strategies, and test preparation materials, helping students improve their writing skills and improve their scores in language proficiency tests and competitive exams.

1. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The use of collocations in English essay writing by the IELTS and CSS aspirants in Pakistan was investigated in this study using a mixed method research design, which is a combination of quantitative (corpus analysis) and qualitative (Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) techniques. This allows for statistical as well as interpretative analysis of the data, both of the data driven statistical analysis of the collocational usage and of contextual, interpretative analysis of the deeper discursive and social meanings of these language choices. The study aimed to examine: Collocations in student essays, their frequency, and accuracy as well as the discourses that underlie the choice of collocations and their academic pressures.

2.2 Research Method

1. **Collection of Essays:** Some essays were gathered from preparation center/centers such as 10 essays of IELTS candidates and 5 of CSS candidates.

2. **Identifying Collocations:** Corpus-Based Analysis (Quantitative Phase) Collocations were identified through manual tagging and, by using software tool (LansBox). The grammatical structure of collocations was considered in terms of classes. verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-noun combinations. Frequency and accuracy of collocations were analyzed, and IELTS and CSS essays were compared in terms of coherence, fluency and lexical richness.

3. **Analysis of Collocations:** The collocations will be categorized by type (e.g., verb-noun, adjective-noun, noun-noun) and frequency. Particular attention will be paid to any differences in collocational use between the IELTS and CSS candidates, and how their collocational patterns correlate with the overall quality of their writing, focusing on coherence, fluency, and lexical resource.

4. **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** A purposive sample of 15 essays (high and low-performing in both IELTS and CSS group) were chosen for Critical Discourse Analysis from the corpus. First, CDA following Fairclough's 3-dimensional model was used. Textual Analysis can be defined as discovering the patterns of collocation use in structure and grammar. Discursive Practice to examine how the expectation of exams impacts writing strategies. Social practice included interpreting what these collocation choices reflect about educational norms, exam pressures, and language ideologies in Pakistan.

2.3 Population

The study targeted IELTS and CSS aspirants. These individuals were either be enrolled in preparatory centers or can be independent learners. The research mainly focused the essays written by such aspirants.

2.4 Sampling Technique

The essays for analysis were collected by using a convenience sampling technique. Some essays (10 from IELTS candidates and 5 from CSS candidates) were gathered from IELTS and CSS exam preparation centers across Pakistan.

2.5 Sample Size

The sample comprised of fifteen essays (10 from IELTS candidates and 5 from CSS candidates). This sample size was drawn sufficient to investigate the usage of collocations and their overall impact on writing quality.

1.6 Instrumentation (Tools for Data Collection)

2.6.1 Manual Collocation Identification

The essays were manually checked in order to identify the use of collocation specifically noting down its correctness, relevance and frequency. To provide better understanding collocations were categorized

based on type such as verb-noun, adjective-noun and were assessed for their overall contribution to the quality of the writing.

2.6.2 Validity and Reliability

The manual identification and categorization of collocations was based on well-organized authentic techniques to ensure validity of the analysis.

2. Findings and Discussion

This chapter shows and considers the main findings obtained from the analysis of collocation occurrence in the corpus of the IELTS and CSS essays. Developing throughout both quantitative corpus methods (i.e., Lans Box) and through qualitative methods via the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study investigates collocational frequencies, structural types, and contextual persuasions. Firstly, the essays corpus was uploaded in Lans Box and the collocate analysis was done by searching keywords. Report was generated by Lans Box and the collocations were extracted from there with their frequency. Afterwards, the collocations were divided depending upon their types and were analyzed by using CDA lens. Results are given in elaborate tables for each essay and interpretative commentary on how these combinations of words create fluency, coherence, and ideological presumption in writing. These findings directly respond to the objectives of the study, as they depict the general use of collocations by CSS and IELTS test aspirants and how these affect the perceived quality and efficacy of academic writing.

Table 1. Collocation Analysis - CSS Essay 1 - Democracy in Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
democratic leaders	Adjective + Noun	Describes evolving maturity: “Democratic leaders have turned mature.” CDA focus: shift from negative to positive identity.	38
martial law	Adjective + Noun	Symbol of military oppression: “The imposition of martial law... obstructed the path of democracy.” CDA shows power structures in conflict.	22
transfer of power	Noun + Noun	Key democratic milestone: “Smooth transfer of power... will ensure continuation of democracy.” CDA: institutional reinforcement of democracy.	10
democratic system	Adjective + Noun	Represents structure: “Introduce democratic system... his sudden death impeded its proper imposition.” CDA shows failed institutionalization.	8
civilian rule	Adjective + Noun	Referenced as contrast to military rule: “Could harm the civilian rule.” CDA: binary of legitimate vs illegitimate governance.	6
foreign policy	Adjective + Noun	“Military not only frame foreign policy...” CDA reveals power imbalance and civil-military dichotomy.	6
feudal lords	Noun + Noun	“Feudal lords enjoy full control...” CDA critique of structural oppression and elite capture.	8
corrupt leaders	Adjective + Noun	“Almost all the democratic leaders are corrupt...” CDA shows delegitimization of democratic image by associating with corruption.	5

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democratic progress	Adjective + Noun	“Could impede the democratic progress.” CDA indicates fragility of institutions.	4
rights to rule	Noun + Infinitive	“Citizens have become aware of their rights to rule.” CDA: empowerment and agency of civil society.	4

Table 2. Collocation Analysis - CSS Essay 2 - Let there be more-light at the corridors of worship places

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
worship places	Noun + Noun	“Worship places... now preach hate and perpetuate radical ideologies.” CDA: Institutions now promote extremism rather than peace.	12
religious institutions	Adjective + Noun	“Reform religious institutions and rethink religious teaching...” CDA: Institutions are depicted as vehicles of dogma.	8
religious dogmatism	Adjective + Noun	“Religious dogmatism prevalent all over the world...” CDA: Highlights rigid ideological control and lack of pluralism.	6
politicization of religion	Noun + Prepositional Phrase	“Politicization of religion... to promote certain interests.” CDA: Power structures use faith for control.	5
radical thought	Adjective + Noun	“Promote radical thought and narrow-mindedness.” CDA: Reflects the ideological manipulation in religious narratives.	4
religious education	Adjective + Noun	“Reform religious education... to promote diversity and acceptance.” CDA: Reframes curriculum as tool for inclusion.	4
intolerant worship	Adjective + Noun	“Worship places... have become intolerant.” CDA: Discursive framing of exclusion and othering.	3
inclusive policies	Adjective + Noun	“Promote more inclusive policies.” CDA: Constructs agency of minorities in countering dogma.	3
reform institutions	Verb + Noun	“It is essential to reform religious institutions.” CDA: Action-oriented discourse pushing for change.	3
accepting society	Adjective + Noun	“Promote diversity and an accepting society.” CDA: Positions society as ideal social structure against extremism.	2

Table 3. Collocation Analysis - CSS Essay 3 - Real Development Should Transform People's Lives, Not Just Economic Statistics

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
economic statistics	Adjective + Noun	Repeatedly critiqued: 'Obsession with economic statistics blinds us to the harmful side-effects of unchecked economic growth.' CDA: Obscures	6

		inequality and structural issues.	
real development	Adjective + Noun	'Real development... champions income equality, eradicates poverty, promotes parity.' CDA: Builds a reform-oriented narrative against current models.	5
income inequality	Noun + Noun	'Real development... ends poverty and income inequality.' CDA: Highlights structural oppression and social justice gaps.	4
economic growth	Adjective + Noun	'Obsession with economic growth has led to climate change.' CDA: Frames environmental crisis as consequence of capitalist ideology.	5
social fabric	Adjective + Noun	'Colonialism destroyed the social fabric of the Third World.' CDA: Shows historical disempowerment and narrative manipulation.	3
structural adjustment	Adjective + Noun	'Structural Adjustment Programs promulgated by IMF...' CDA: Reveals global economic control over developing states.	2
political freedom	Adjective + Noun	'Political freedom... fundamental to real development.' CDA: Supports democratic discourse and human rights emphasis.	3
holistic growth	Adjective + Noun	'Real development prioritizes holistic growth.' CDA: Opposes reductionist views, promotes integrative development.	2
environmental protection	Adjective + Noun	'Development without environmental protection endangers lives.' CDA: Suggests ecological justice within development discourse.	2
political expression	Adjective + Noun	'Real development requires political expression and mobilization.' CDA: Advocates for inclusive governance models.	2

Table 4. Collocation Analysis - CSS Essay 4 - Unless Defence Threats are Dealt with, Pakistan's Economic Troubles Cannot Be Solved

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
military alliances	Noun + Noun	“Military alliances with the United States started building up...” CDA: Reflects dependence on external powers at the cost of economic autonomy.	6
economic woes	Adjective + Noun	“If the economic woes are to be dealt with...” CDA: Emphasizes systemic neglect due to strategic misprioritization.	5

defence threats	Noun + Noun	“Pakistan’s main defence threats are not actual but perceived.” CDA: Challenges security discourse that justifies military dominance.	6
security alliances	Noun + Noun	“Keep security alliances...” CDA: Critique of prioritizing security ties over sustainable development.	4
economic conditions	Adjective + Noun	“Original policy to improve economic conditions...” CDA: Reveals consistent policy neglect for national welfare.	5
policy makers	Noun + Noun	“Policy makers clung to these super powers...” CDA: Discursively critiques leadership’s role in structural failure.	5
fiscal deficit	Adjective + Noun	“Taxes were increased to wedge the fiscal deficit...” CDA: Economic burden shifted to citizens due to elite decisions.	3
external aid	Adjective + Noun	“Made the country more dependent on external aid...” CDA: Frames international dependence as a weakness in strategic autonomy.	3
budget cuts	Noun + Noun	“Major budget cuts started going to the military...” CDA: Illustrates militarization of state spending.	4
paranoid mindset	Adjective + Noun	“Pakistan started with a paranoid mindset...” CDA: Depicts fear-driven national narrative undermining rational policy-making.	3

Table 5. Collocation Analysis - CSS Essay 5 - Pros and Cons of Globalization

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
free trade	Adjective + Noun	“Leaders... will sign agreements to promote free trade...” CDA: Emphasizes neoliberal discourse prioritizing market expansion and investment flows.	5
human rights	Adjective + Noun	“Raise their voices against human rights abuse...” CDA: Aligns globalization with humanitarian accountability and global justice systems.	5
military alliances	Noun + Noun	“Treaties enable non-nuclear countries to make military alliances...” CDA: Reflects strategic interdependence in global security politics.	3
climate change	Noun + Noun	“Fight for the rights of the victims and uphold international law...” CDA: Focuses on collective responsibility and ecological justice.	4
cultural exchange	Adjective + Noun	“Cultural exchange takes place because of the ease of movement...” CDA: Projects globalization as a unifying and diversifying force.	2
soft image	Adjective + Noun	“Promote the soft image of Pakistan...” CDA: Constructs identity through nation-branding in a global context.	2
global village	Adjective	“Concept of a virtual global village...” CDA:	1

	+ Noun	Symbolizes borderless communication and shared identity.	
foreign reserves	Adjective + Noun	“Pakistan has received huge amounts of foreign direct investment that has increased its foreign reserves.” CDA: Economic stability linked to global networks.	2
social media	Adjective + Noun	“Social media has played a major role...” CDA: Instrument of global connectivity and cultural diffusion.	2
international law	Adjective + Noun	“Hold them accountable for human rights abuses under international law...” CDA: Reinforces rule-based global governance.	2

3.1 CDA of the collocations used in CSS Essays

The section explores how collocations in the CSS essay are created, based on Fairclough’s CDA approach. The study looks at the placement of words in different texts, their role in forming conversations, and the major beliefs shared through those words. From essays written by CSS aspirants, researchers have found that language is essential in shaping the political, social, and economic settings of these public service exams.

3.1.1 Textual Analysis (Lexico-Grammatical Features)

At this level, researchers saw that ‘democratic leaders,’ ‘martial law,’ ‘transfer of power,’ ‘policy makers,’ ‘economic problems,’ and ‘help from other countries’ are used in the text more frequently. The list includes terms that many literature consults frequently, including civilian rule, corrupt leaders, military alliances, foreign policy, reform institutions, and helping achieve peace.

The use of adjectives helps people evaluate the event and can also give an idea of what the writer or speaker believes in. These words index power dynamics and moral judgments. Nouns such as “policy,” “leaders,” “rule,” “aid,” and “military” indicate institutional focus. The collocations display a lexical preference for political-institutional language, showing a preoccupation with governance, accountability, and national sovereignty.

The verbs accompanying nouns (e.g., “reform institutions,” “improve conditions”) reflect a problem-solution rhetorical structure, a feature commonly found in exam writing. These structures suggest an appeal to bureaucratic logic, where societal dysfunctions are resolved through rational interventions. This hides the complexity of structural issues and foregrounds managerial ideologies.

3.1.2 Discursive Practice (Production, Distribution, and Consumption)

In the second dimension of Fairclough’s model, the essays reveal their discursive positioning. These essays are crafted under examination constraints, targeted toward a state-centric evaluation mechanism (CSS exams). Writers perform the role of rational analysts of Pakistan’s governance, economy, and security challenges.

There is a similarity in vocabulary between the domain and the policy area, and the clustering of words brings in views from government, media, and organizations. Public service writing usually requires writers to use officialese (a formal and removed writing style). Using terms such as “civilian rule,” “feudal lords”, and “transfer of power” often shows an author is familiar with important political ideas and wants to mirror the goals of the institution. The essays draw on existing dominant ideas but also critique these ideas cautiously. For example, when “corrupt leaders” and “foreign aid dependence” are discussed, they oppose elite practice but still stay within the general development framework.

Additionally, nouns play a big role in these sentences because they form the base of nominalizations, which helps to remove any personal action. The idea of “transfer of power” and “military dominance” leaves out clear responsible parties, which makes it harder to hold anyone accountable and keeps politics out of the picture.

3.1.3 Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Global Structures)

The essays look at the main issues affecting Pakistan’s postcolonial structures at the national level. The topics covered are democracy, authoritarianism, civil-military relations, external dependency, and economic reform. Certain ideologies are made normal by using collocations in speech and texts. As an example, in most cases, “civilian rule” is accepted, while “martial law” is regarded as a past wrong. It also supports an idea of progressive democracy despite issues such as corruption among political leaders.

The use of “foreign aid,” “military alliances,” and “policy makers” suggests that Pakistan is involved with international groups and decision-makers. Such word pairings can uncover issues of inequality and class differences in society. While these two factors suggest changes, they still encourage adopting neoliberal governance by treating society’s problems as things that technology can resolve. This analysis proves that the selected collocations contribute to constructing ideological meaning in the text. They suggest that aspirants are closely tied to ideas that focus on politics, economy, and controlled democracy. The frequent references to “budget cuts,” “economic troubles,” and “failure of the policy process” are examples of how deficit narratives are used to support austerity and blank out the issue of inequality.

3.2 Findings

To sum up, the essays written by CSS aspirants closely imitate main ideas from society, based on the usual values, the state’s agenda, and showing neutral behavior. The model makes it possible to see the ideological ideas expressed by even the most exact phrases in a text. While encouraging people to be civil and reform, the collocations do little to challenge the existing system that creates inequalities. Using certain words and their order, the writers adjust to the expectations of the exam and also support the traditional accounts of Pakistan’s politics.

Table 6. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 1 - Some children spend hours every day on their smartphones. Why is this the case? Is it a positive or negative trend?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
promote healthier	Verb + Adjective	“By doing so, we can promote healthier lifestyles and ensure the well-being of the next generation.” CDA: Encourages active public health engagement.	1
develop further	Verb + Adverb	“Cities evolve and develop further...” CDA: Reflects forward-looking modernization narrative.	1
improve people’s	Verb + Noun	“The aim of science should be to improve people’s lives.” CDA: Technological progress equated with human benefit.	2
take risks	Verb + Noun	“It is important for people to take risks...” CDA: Advocates courage and initiative in societal advancement.	4
make wiser	Verb + Adjective	“...so they can make wiser decisions regarding career options.” CDA: Positions education as a tool for informed agency.	2
support this	Verb + Determiner	“I wholeheartedly support this notion...” CDA: Shows alignment with scientific innovation for social good.	1
increase in	Noun + Preposition	“There is a marked increase in individuals exhibiting curiosity about the historical narrative...” CDA: Emphasizes growing cultural awareness.	1

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technology plays	Noun + Verb	“Technology plays a crucial role in shaping our environment.” CDA: Technology as a social force.	1
education is	Noun + Verb	“Relying solely on formal education is insufficient...” CDA: Challenges effectiveness of traditional schooling.	3
health outcomes	Noun + Noun	“Smartphone use is creating detrimental health outcomes for children.” CDA: Technology tied to physical/mental effects.	1

Table 7. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 2 - Some people think that parents should teach their children how to be good members of society. Others, however, believe that school is the best place to learn this. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
global problems	Adjective + Noun	“Global problems like climate change, food insecurity, and political instability affect every nation.” CDA: Frames universality and urgency of action.	3
climate change	Noun + Noun	“Climate change is exacerbated by industrial emissions and urban sprawl.” CDA: Highlights human role and policy inaction.	2
shared responsibility	Adjective + Noun	“Tackling these issues requires shared responsibility...” CDA: Distributes agency across nations and institutions.	2
address issues	Verb + Noun	“Governments must collaborate to address issues that transcend borders.” CDA: Constructs state as active problem-solver.	2
international cooperation	Adjective + Noun	“International cooperation is the only viable way...” CDA: Establishes global unity as a discursive solution.	2
individual nations	Adjective + Noun	“Individual nations can make limited progress alone...” CDA: Critiques isolationism and stresses collective effort.	1
food insecurity	Noun + Noun	“Food insecurity in developing nations...” CDA: Reveals imbalance in global distribution and policy neglect.	2
developing nations	Adjective + Noun	“Developing nations often lack the infrastructure...” CDA: Highlights systemic inequality and economic dependency.	2
viable way	Adjective + Noun	“The only viable way to tackle global issues is...” CDA: Establishes solution-centered discourse.	1
urban sprawl	Adjective + Noun	“Urban sprawl increases energy consumption...” CDA: Associates lifestyle with ecological strain.	1

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Table 8. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 3 - Some people believe that professionals, such as doctors and engineers, should be required to work in the country where they did their training. Others believe that they should be free to work in another country if they wish. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
mental health	Adjective + Noun	“Mental health awareness is crucial in academic settings...” CDA: Brings attention to non-academic well-being in educational success.	3
academic pressure	Adjective + Noun	“Excessive academic pressure leads to anxiety and burnout...” CDA: Critiques rigid institutional demands.	2
student success	Noun + Noun	“Student success should be measured holistically...” CDA: Reframes success as more than grades.	2
holistic education	Adjective + Noun	“Holistic education includes emotional and physical development.” CDA: Advocates for integrative learning approaches.	1
learning environment	Noun + Noun	“A positive learning environment is vital...” CDA: Highlights institutional responsibility.	2
educational institutions	Adjective + Noun	“Educational institutions must support mental wellness programs.” CDA: Shifts responsibility to institutions.	1
physical development	Adjective + Noun	“Neglecting physical development can be harmful...” CDA: Encourages comprehensive support systems.	1
mental wellness	Adjective + Noun	“Mental wellness should be a priority...” CDA: Expands definition of student support.	2
academic institutions	Adjective + Noun	“Academic institutions often overlook emotional well-being.” CDA: Institutional critique and call for reform.	1
burnout rates	Noun + Noun	“Burnout rates are increasing among university students...” CDA: Indicates systemic failure in student support.	1

Table 9. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 4 - Many university students want to learn about different subjects in addition to their main subjects. Others feel it is important to give all their time and attention to studying for their qualification. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
public transport	Adjective + Noun	“Improving public transport reduces traffic congestion.” CDA: Advocates structural reform for collective mobility.	3
traffic congestion	Noun + Noun	“Traffic congestion is a growing concern in cities...” CDA: Reflects urban planning and policy challenges.	3
urban areas	Adjective +	“Urban areas suffer due to overpopulation and	2

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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	Noun	poor infrastructure.” CDA: Points to inequality in spatial development.	
road safety	Noun + Noun	“Investments in road safety can save lives.” CDA: Highlights state’s role in preventing harm.	2
environmental pollution	Adjective + Noun	“Environmental pollution worsens with traffic jams...” CDA: Links environmental degradation to policy inaction.	1
vehicle ownership	Noun + Noun	“Rising vehicle ownership contributes to congestion...” CDA: Blames consumer trends and privatized transport.	2
urban planning	Adjective + Noun	“Urban planning should prioritize pedestrians and cyclists.” CDA: Argues for inclusive city design.	1
transport infrastructure	Noun + Noun	“Robust transport infrastructure can mitigate these problems.” CDA: Emphasizes systemic investment over temporary fixes.	2
government policies	Noun + Noun	“Government policies should promote sustainability...” CDA: Focuses on institutional accountability.	1
sustainable development	Adjective + Noun	“Sustainable development goals include clean transportation...” CDA: Frames mobility within broader global objectives.	1

Table 10. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 5 - The most important aim of science should be to improve people’s lives. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
online learning	Adjective + Noun	“Online learning has transformed the education landscape.” CDA: Positions digital technology as disruptor and equalizer.	3
digital divide	Adjective + Noun	“The digital divide hinders equal access to online platforms.” CDA: Reveals structural inequities in access.	2
education system	Noun + Noun	“The traditional education system faces pressure to modernize.” CDA: Calls for adaptation of old institutions.	2
virtual classrooms	Adjective + Noun	“Virtual classrooms offer flexibility...” CDA: Redefines physical space in educational practice.	2
remote access	Adjective + Noun	“Remote access enables learning from anywhere.” CDA: Democratization of education through connectivity.	1
technical difficulties	Adjective + Noun	“Technical difficulties disrupt the flow of teaching.” CDA: Highlights limitations of reliance on technology.	1
internet connectivity	Noun + Noun	“Poor internet connectivity affects rural students.” CDA: Structural inequality shaped by geography.	2

teaching methods	Noun + Noun	“Online platforms require updated teaching methods.” CDA: Pushes for pedagogical innovation.	1
access inequality	Noun + Noun	“Online systems worsen access inequality...” CDA: Surveillance of digital privilege and exclusion.	1
technological advancement	Adjective + Noun	“Technological advancement should support inclusion...” CDA: Technology’s role in enabling or hindering equity.	1

Table 11. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 6 - In some countries, more and more people are becoming interested in finding out about the history of the house or building they live in. What are the reasons for this? How can people research this?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
social interaction	Adjective + Noun	“Excessive screen time reduces real social interaction.” CDA: Reflects alienation and digital dependency.	3
screen addiction	Noun + Noun	“Screen addiction leads to mental health issues...” CDA: Frames tech overuse as a public health concern.	2
physical activity	Adjective + Noun	“Children spend less time on physical activity...” CDA: Highlights lifestyle decline in tech-centric societies.	2
mental development	Adjective + Noun	“Essential for emotional and mental development...” CDA: Advocates balance for cognitive health.	1
parental control	Adjective + Noun	“Parental control can minimize online risks...” CDA: Emphasizes family responsibility and governance.	2
online platforms	Adjective + Noun	“Online platforms should be regulated...” CDA: Calls for digital policy and ethical oversight.	2
video games	Noun + Noun	“Prolonged use of video games affects behavior.” CDA: Technology linked to socialization patterns.	2
healthy habits	Adjective + Noun	“Encouraging healthy habits among youth...” CDA: Discursive promotion of lifestyle reform.	1
emotional bonding	Adjective + Noun	“Lack of emotional bonding due to digital devices...” CDA: Technology disrupting human intimacy.	1
technology use	Noun + Noun	“Balance in technology use is necessary...” CDA: Moderation as ideological stance in digital discourse.	2

Table 12. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 7 - It is important for people to take risks, both in their professional lives and their personal lives. Do you think the advantages of taking risks outweigh the disadvantages?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
cultural identity	Adjective + Noun	“Globalization challenges cultural identity...” CDA: Tension between local traditions and global influence.	3
local traditions	Adjective + Noun	“Preserving local traditions is essential...” CDA: Cultural resistance against global homogenization.	2
language loss	Noun + Noun	“Language loss threatens indigenous cultures...” CDA: Symbolic erosion of	2

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

		diversity through dominant discourse.	
global culture	Adjective + Noun	“A global culture is replacing local values...” CDA: Cultural imperialism through media and markets.	2
media influence	Noun + Noun	“Media influence shapes youth preferences...” CDA: Discursive construction of norms through information control.	1
cultural heritage	Adjective + Noun	“Efforts must be made to protect cultural heritage...” CDA: Emphasizes identity, memory, and historical roots.	2
global markets	Adjective + Noun	“Global markets push uniform consumerism...” CDA: Critique of economic influence on cultural choices.	1
traditional customs	Adjective + Noun	“Traditional customs are fading among youth...” CDA: Intergenerational shift in value systems.	2
identity crisis	Noun + Noun	“Youth face identity crisis in multicultural societies...” CDA: Psychological effect of cultural displacement.	1
global exposure	Adjective + Noun	“Global exposure enhances understanding but also creates confusion.” CDA: Ambiguity of cultural contact.	1

Table 13. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 8 - In some countries owning a home rather than renting one is very important for people. Why might this be the case? Do you think this is a positive or negative situation?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
renewable energy	Adjective + Noun	“Investment in renewable energy can reduce dependence on fossil fuels...” CDA: Advocates environmental responsibility and sustainable development.	3
fossil fuels	Noun + Noun	“Fossil fuels contribute to climate change and pollution...” CDA: Highlights environmental degradation from unsustainable practices.	2
carbon emissions	Noun + Noun	“Reducing carbon emissions is a global priority...” CDA: Aligns national policies with international climate goals.	2
sustainable alternatives	Adjective + Noun	“We must find sustainable alternatives to existing energy sources...” CDA: Push for innovation and long-term solutions.	2
climate change	Noun + Noun	“Climate change threatens human and ecological survival...” CDA: Urgent tone to provoke collective action.	2
environmental degradation	Adjective + Noun	“Unchecked energy exploitation leads to environmental degradation...” CDA: Critique of industrial exploitation.	1

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

energy crisis	Noun + Noun	“The world is facing an energy crisis...” CDA: Framing urgency to reform energy infrastructure.	1
solar panels	Noun + Noun	“Solar panels are becoming more accessible...” CDA: Technology democratizing energy access.	2
green technology	Adjective + Noun	“Green technology supports sustainable living...” CDA: Promotes innovation as environmental solution.	1
energy efficiency	Noun + Noun	“Improving energy efficiency reduces waste...” CDA: Practical approach to conservation.	1

Table 14. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 9 - In many countries around the world, rural people are moving to cities, so the population in the countryside is decreasing. Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
gender equality	Noun + Noun	“Gender equality is essential for economic and social progress.” CDA: Frames equality as foundation for development.	3
equal opportunities	Adjective + Noun	“Men and women should have equal opportunities in education...” CDA: Highlights structural barriers and need for reform.	2
glass ceiling	Noun + Noun	“Many women still face the glass ceiling in corporate roles...” CDA: Exposes institutional discrimination.	2
workplace discrimination	Noun + Noun	“Workplace discrimination limits female participation...” CDA: Reveals systemic inequality and bias.	1
economic independence	Adjective + Noun	“Economic independence allows women to make autonomous choices...” CDA: Emphasizes empowerment through financial freedom.	1
social empowerment	Adjective + Noun	“Social empowerment goes hand in hand with legal protection.” CDA: Structural support is needed beyond rhetoric.	1
female participation	Adjective + Noun	“Increasing female participation improves economic productivity.” CDA: Links inclusion with national progress.	1
gender gap	Noun + Noun	“Efforts must be made to reduce the gender gap...” CDA: Calls attention to persistent inequalities.	2
patriarchal norms	Adjective + Noun	“Patriarchal norms still dominate decision-making structures.” CDA: Highlights cultural and systemic obstacles.	1
legal frameworks	Adjective + Noun	“Strong legal frameworks can protect women's rights...” CDA: Emphasizes institutional responsibility.	1

Table 15. Collocation Analysis - IELTS Essay 10 - Some people say that music is a good way of bringing people of different cultures and ages together. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Collocation	Type	Context in Essay	Frequency
artificial intelligence	Adjective + Noun	“Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing the job market...” CDA: Technological advancement reshaping labor dynamics.	3
job automation	Noun + Noun	“Job automation may lead to unemployment in low-skill sectors...” CDA: Economic consequences of tech transformation.	2
technological disruption	Adjective + Noun	“Technological disruption requires adaptive skills...” CDA: Urges readiness and flexibility in labor force.	1
digital skills	Adjective + Noun	“Digital skills will be vital in the near future...” CDA: Encourages education systems to evolve.	2
workforce transformation	Noun + Noun	“Workforce transformation must be inclusive...” CDA: Emphasizes social justice in restructuring.	1
machine learning	Noun + Noun	“Machine learning allows rapid data processing...” CDA: Celebrates innovation but hints at surveillance.	1
ethical concerns	Adjective + Noun	“Ethical concerns must guide AI development...” CDA: Need for moral governance alongside progress.	1
human oversight	Adjective + Noun	“Human oversight is essential in autonomous systems...” CDA: Preserving accountability in automated domains.	1
future workforce	Adjective + Noun	“The future workforce must adapt to evolving roles...” CDA: Anticipates structural and educational change.	1
algorithmic bias	Adjective + Noun	“Algorithmic bias can reinforce inequality...” CDA: Critiques hidden dangers in AI decision-making.	1

3.3 CDA of the collocations used in IELTS Essays

This part of the study does a critical analysis of collocations from ten IELTS essays using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA approach. The goal is to analyze how the words chosen by students help build their ideas of ideology, having control over their lives, and creating power relationships. From these, it’s clear that people’s ways of speaking aren’t only about style but also reflect the influences of society, schools, and international views.

3.3.1 Textual Analysis (Lexico-Grammatical Features)

In terms of vocabulary, the usage of collocations mostly deals with education, technology, globalization, the environment, and social development. Typical phrases include combinations of an adjective and a noun, for example, “gender equality”; combinations of two nouns, for example, “carbon emissions”; and verb plus noun, for example, “support innovation.”

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These combinations encode evaluative meaning. If an essay uses “sustainable,” “global,” “equal,” or “digital,” it matches the tone used by those who care about changes, reform, and rights in society. It is clear that advancements in media and schools are influencing the use of sophisticated nouns such as “machine learning,” “digital divide,” and “algorithmic bias.”

Repeated use of noun versions of verb forms (for example, “development,” “education,” and “transformation”) hides the people responsible for the actions. The result is an impersonal style that follows typical academic conventions. It also makes extreme issues (including inequality or climate change) look like natural events when they are not.

3.3.2 Discursive Practice (Production, Distribution, and Consumption)

In IELTS, all essays are expected to be written in an official, argumentative, and clear manner. The authors use words that are well-suited to communicating with their audience. They deliberately include collocations that are similar to the topics found in IELTS prompts, for instance, belonging to the environment, the use of social media, digital studies, questions of gender, and saving cultural heritage. These discourses are taken from teaching materials, global aid stories, and conversations people have on social media. Collocations such as “digital skills”, “climate change”, “cultural identity”, and “renewable energy” turn up a lot these days in documents and articles written by international organizations and news sites, talking about big problems that people all over the world are concerned about. The writers often talk from the point of view of someone who knows a lot and uses combinations of words to show that they are trying to help people or warn them about something. Using phrases like “solve problems”, “make things fairer”, and “encourage new ideas” help show that you are someone who cares about social and economic change.

3.3.3 Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Global Structures)

At the level of social practice, the choice of words people use often ties into the main ideas and debates going on in society. Neoliberalism, technological determinism, environmentalism, multiculturalism, and fair access to education are all topics where I aim to bring in new ideas. For example, when someone talks about things like “free trade,” “foreign reserves,” and “economic independence,” they might be using economic liberal ideas. But when they talk about things like “gender equality,” “social empowerment,” and “mental health,” they might be following mainstream social justice ideas. Similarly, talking about things like “machine learning” and “job automation” often makes it seem like changes are just going to happen, which can silence conversations or worries about what these changes mean for society.

Collocations related to environmental discourse (e.g., “carbon emissions,” “renewable energy,” “climate change”) imply that everyone in the world needs to share responsibility, often skipping over the different roles and challenges people in each place have when it comes to taking care of the environment. Cultural words such as “identity crisis,” “traditional customs,” and “language loss” show that people are concerned about losing their own culture as the world is getting more global and uniform. This level of CDA shows that IELTS candidates are not only repeating what they hear and read around the world but also trying to blend those views with their own culture in a way that makes sense to them. The essays end up becoming a platform where people try to show off their skills and follow certain rules, all while also taking a stand on certain beliefs.

3.4 Findings

Through the CDA model, it can be seen that the way we use words and groups of words in IELTS essays is influenced by bigger social and cultural ideas. While they show students’ understanding of their studies and main ideas, they also help them fit in with what people around the world are learning. The language used, especially when it includes evaluation and repeat groupings of words, makes it sound like the writer knows what they’re talking about, but these choices often let the dominant ideas stay in place instead of questioning them. These essays show that even when people are writing under pressure and against a strict deadline, they still use the same kinds of words and ways of writing that

we usually see from students in schools around the world. Collocations can help people understand not just the language itself but also the kinds of ideas that different people share and the worldview they come from.

3. Conclusion

This study examined lexical collocations in English essays written by CSS and IELTS aspirants through corpus-based analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model. It explored how language use in test contexts reflects not only linguistic competence but also underlying beliefs and socio-educational influences. Findings revealed that both groups frequently used adjective-noun, noun-noun, and verb-noun collocations. However, their patterns differed significantly. CSS essays heavily featured sociopolitical collocations such as "martial law," "civilian rule," "foreign aid," and "democratic leaders," reflecting Pakistan's historical and political context. These expressions often conveyed government criticism, societal failures, and demands for democracy, reproducing official discourses on power and governance. In contrast, IELTS essays focused on global issues like renewable energy, digital divide, and mental health, using collocations related to environmental care, equity, technological progress, and cultural diversity. Writers positioned themselves as globally aware individuals aligned with international development discourses promoted by organizations like Cambridge and the British Council. From Fairclough's view, both corpora showed heavy use of nominalization and evaluative modifiers (e.g., "policy failure," "climate change mitigation"), which created an impression of objectivity while concealing agency. CSS collocations mirrored national civil service traditions, whereas IELTS patterns reflected global neoliberal values. On the social practice dimension, CSS language reinforced local binaries of military-civilian rule and dependency, while IELTS essays supported universal solutions without questioning their contextual suitability. Overall, collocation choices helped writers demonstrate genre competence and internalize dominant ideologies. The study concludes that effective collocation uses signals both linguistic skill and ideological positioning shaped by cultural and institutional contexts. Teachers should integrate targeted collocation training into writing curricula, with explicit attention to the ideological values and meanings these word combinations carry. Students need ample genre-specific practice that focuses on the typical collocations required for CSS and IELTS essays. In addition, learners should be encouraged to reflect critically on the ideological implications and biases embedded in key collocations related to politics, development, and identity. Finally, educators should introduce corpus tools such as Ant Conc to help students analyze authentic language patterns and develop greater awareness of how collocations shape meaning and positioning in academic writing.

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