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Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of using chatgpt vs. online dictionaries for English collocations

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Abstract: This study investigates Turkish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' perceptions, attitudes, and usage patterns regarding ChatGPT and online dictionaries for the acquisition of English collocations. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected via an online questionnaire from 27 university-level participants, including preparatory and master's students. The findings reveal that while online dictionaries remain the primary and most trusted resource for checking grammatical patterns and seeking reliable definitions (M=3.81), ChatGPT is increasingly perceived as a valuable "language assistant" for production-based tasks. Specifically, participants rated online dictionaries higher for reliability and ease of use. However, ChatGPT was perceived as more effective for improving writing (M=4.11) and speaking (M=4.04) skills due to its ability to provide personalized feedback and generate contextualized examples. Despite the benefits of AI (Artificial Intelligence), learners demonstrated a cautious approach, often using ChatGPT as a "gap-filler" rather than a primary source. The study concludes that the integration of AI tools does not replace traditional resources but rather offers a complementary framework where dictionaries serve verification purposes and AI (Artificial Intelligence) facilitates linguistic exploration. Pedagogical implications suggest that educators should provide explicit training on leveraging both tools to foster autonomous and context-aware collocation learning.

Keywords: collocation acquisition, ai-assisted language learning, online dictionaries, chatgpt, Efl

1. Introduction

Human history can be seen as the history of human learning, when it is seen from a holistic view. Human beings, from the very beginning of their existence, have a strong tendency to understand and explain the situations that they encounter. We can see the effects of these situations in the holy books.

One of the most important stages of human history, without a doubt, is learning and using the language. According to Nation, knowing a language entails the knowledge of three aspects: use, form, and meaning. He emphasizes that to know a language, learners should master these three aspects. Within the category of 'use', collocation is viewed as a necessary part of it. This highlights that collocational learning is an indispensable part of language learning (Nation, 2001).

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In the EFL context, collocation is considered a barrier since it prevents learners from advancing their interlanguage to a more native-like level (Bahns, 1993). As collocation is a challenging part for learners, they need well-established support to develop effective strategies in the process of acquiring (Wu et al., 2010).

Nowadays, there are many online dictionaries that learners consult on the internet. Major dictionaries define *collocation* as "a predictable combination of words that are recognized inherently. These dictionaries distinguish collocations from random word combinations (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, n.d.; Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In the academic literature, collocations are described as recurrent and statistically significant word combinations that contribute to natural-sounding speech and writing (Kumova Metin & Karaoğlan, 2011). To sum up, these definitions give us a clear idea of the significance of collocations. To be fluent and contextually appropriate while communicating, the ability to select appropriate word combinations plays a crucial role.

With the development of technology, technological devices have had a primary place in our lives. These devices become a resource for language learning and acquisition. Students today prefer online dictionaries to the printed ones (Umwari & Triastuti, 2020). Also, AI- assisted tools become a learning source just as online dictionaries to search words and collocations (Huynh & Pham, 2025).

ChatGPT, as an AI- assisted tool, has gained popularity among language learners. As a large language model, it employs a sophisticated approach to produce output according to the learner's input (Huynh & Pham, 2025). It gives immediate and personalized feedback, contextually appropriate examples, and detailed explanations in vocabulary learning (Koç & Savaş, 2024). Also, research shows AI tools may give confidence to learners and boost learner autonomy in the learning process by offering an engaging and interactive environment (Behforouz & Al Ghaithi, 2024).

In this study, the author aims to conduct a comparative investigation into Turkish EFL students' *perceptions* (their beliefs regarding the utility and accuracy of the tools), *attitudes* (learners' emotional acceptance and confidence in usage), and *preferences* (behavioural choices of learners when completing tasks) regarding the use of ChatGPT versus online dictionaries. By distinguishing between these three constructs, the research seeks to determine both which tool is preferred in collocation learning and specifically which resource is perceived as more effective for acquiring collocation in the Turkish context.

Collocations refer to word combinations that native speakers of a language use together, reflecting natural word combinations rather than random co-occurrence (Firth, 1957; Sinclair, 1991). In English, collocations can be identified in various structural forms, such as make a wish, heavy rain, etc. (Benson et al., 2010). At the same time, acquiring collocations requires consistent exposure to authentic language input rather than reliance on grammatical structures alone (Ellis, 2002). This consistent exposure for collocation learning is needed in fluent language production (Lewis, 1997). Therefore, collocational knowledge plays a significant role in achieving communicative effectiveness in a foreign language (Nation, 2013).

In contexts such as Turkey, collocation learning is a complex thing for language learners because of the limited exposure to authentic English and the strong influence of learners' first language (Özata, 2020). Within this context, Bağcı (2014) studied collocational knowledge of 68 learners, focusing on four different collocation types. The results showed that proficiency level played a crucial role in collocational knowledge as advanced learners performed better than intermediate learners.

Unlike traditional print resources, online dictionaries provide a dynamic environment that supports the acquisition of collocation sequences of words that co-occur in the nature of language. Heid (2014) argues that the digital transition shifted the word lists from stable to interactive, where collocations are presented as central rather than peripheral information. At the same time, Tono (2010) suggests that electronic dictionaries align more closely with the way the human brain stores multi-word units, facilitating more natural language acquisition. Lew and

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Radlowska (2010) focused on the relationship between the learner and the dictionary. They examined how the presentation of collocations in electronic formats affects the accuracy of the acquisition process.

They found that when learners are provided with clear, categorized usage information, they are significantly more successful in identifying appropriate word combinations for their writing skills. This suggests that the design of the online dictionary in its interface is as vital as the content it holds. Dziemianko's (2012) research showed that learners using online resources not only identified possible collocations more effectively during a task but also showed easier recall of those word combinations in tests. Her study concluded that the interactive nature of online examples serves as an effective tool, reinforcing the connection between lexical items more effectively than printed versions. Studies from Laufer & Hill (2000) and Lan (2005) showed that the growing use of online dictionaries showed positive effects on vocabulary retention for learners. To prove this, Chen (2016) studied the use of an electronic dictionary in the production and acquisition of collocations. 55 students at a Chinese university contributed to this study. The results suggested that the participants significantly improved their knowledge of productive collocation. However, the increased amount of dictionary consultation did not correlate with better production and retention of collocations because they needed dictionary training for this (Chen, 2016).

In the literature, artificial intelligence in language learning has gained popularity. The emergence of artificial intelligence has shifted attention toward AI-assisted language learning tools (Lee & Lee, 2024). ChatGPT was launched in 2022, and it has gained attention from language educators and learners for its potential in L2 education (Huynh & Pham, 2025). Studies conducted in higher education EFL contexts have shown that learners generally perceive ChatGPT as a useful and accessible tool for vocabulary learning, language explanation, and self-directed practice (Kohnke et al., 2023; Sujannah et al., 2025). Kohnke et al. (2023) emphasised that the tool is valued for its ability to provide personalized feedback and language explanations for learners. ChatGPT creates a low anxiety environment where learners feel more comfortable without the fear of making errors (Kohnke et al., 2023). Ptasznik and Lew (2024) carried out a study to compare the effectiveness of ChatGPT and Longman Dictionary in supporting Polish university students in completing challenging vocabulary tasks. The time taken by each student was recorded. The findings reveal that students with the assistance of ChatGPT were superior to those using the Longman Dictionary in both of the tests in terms of accuracy (Ptasznik & Lew, 2024).

Research on EFL learning has increasingly focused on the role of collocations in improving learners' lexical competence, showing that Turkish learners often struggle with accurate and natural collocation use in English (Özata, 2020; Mutlu & Kaşlıoğlu, 2016).
Studies on teaching practices further indicate that both teachers and learners recognize the importance of collocations, though instructional approaches and awareness vary across contexts (Truong & Van, 2024).

With the rise of artificial intelligence, recent research highlights the growing integration of tools like ChatGPT and other AI technologies in language education, emphasizing their potential to enhance vocabulary learning, motivation, and overall language skills (Son et al., 2025; Heidari, 2024).

Several studies demonstrate that ChatGPT can significantly improve learners' vocabulary mastery and retention when used as a supplementary learning tool in classroom settings (Siswanto et al., 2025; Abdelhalim & Alsehibany, 2025). Learners generally report positive perceptions of ChatGPT, noting increased motivation, engagement, and support in developing multiple language skills, including speaking and writing (Militansina, 2025; Alsalem, 2024).

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In addition, research exploring instructors' perspectives reveals that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of ChatGPT, they also express concerns regarding its pedagogical implementation and reliability (Tayşı et al., 2025).
Comparative studies suggest that ChatGPT can be as effective—or even more effective—than traditional lexical tools such as dictionaries in supporting vocabulary use and development (Lew et al., 2024).

Other AI tools, such as Microsoft Copilot, have also been investigated, showing promising results in improving interactional metadiscourse and writing quality in EFL contexts (Esfandiari & Allaf-Akbary, 2024). Furthermore, collaborative digital platforms like Google Docs continue to play an important role in facilitating interaction and improving writing skills among EFL learners (Nguyen & Su, 2025). Emerging studies combining AI tools with other digital approaches, such as online games, indicate that blended technological environments can further enhance vocabulary acquisition and learner preferences in diverse contexts (Rababah & Bani Younes, 2025).

Finally, previous research conveys a clear message: while collocations are essential for fluent and natural language use, EFL learners continue to struggle with them, and existing learning tools such as online dictionaries offer partial support. The present study investigates Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT versus online dictionaries for learning English collocations and aims to contribute to both collocation research and AI-assisted language learning literature.

In the Turkish EFL context, most of the learners include Artificial Intelligence and Online dictionaries in their language learning process. In the literature, Lew (2010) investigated the effectiveness of online dictionaries in collocation acquisition among EFL learners (Lew, 2010), and recent studies have begun to investigate Artificial Intelligence tools (ChatGPT) in vocabulary acquisition (Kohnke, 2023). However, limited empirical studies focus on how learners find these tools as the most effective ones in collocation acquisition. This study, therefore, investigates Turkish EFL students' perceptions, usage patterns, and perceived effectiveness of ChatGPT and online dictionaries in learning English collocations.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research design to investigate. Data will be gathered through an online questionnaire. The collected data will be analysed using descriptive analysis to identify the learners' perceptions and the effectiveness of the two tools.

2.2 Participants

There are 27 EFL learners as participants in this study. 14 of them are preparatory year students, 13 of them are master's students. They participated in the questionnaire voluntarily.

2.3 Ethical considerations

Before starting the data collection process, formal institutional approval was obtained from the ASBU School of Foreign Languages. Furthermore, the questionnaire included an informed consent statement at the beginning of the page. By stating "Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. Continuing, you give your consent to participate." Researcher ensured that all participants were aware of their rights and agreed to contribute to the research voluntarily.

2.4 Data Collection Tool

Data collection tool in this study is an online Google Form questionnaire. This questionnaire includes three sections. I adapted the questionnaire from Hong et al. (2022) and Aksakallı & Daşer (2025) studies. Both of the studies reported their Cronbach's Alpha for reliability. The three items listed below serve to explain the framework of the data collection tool. By categorizing the questionnaire into these three parts, the questionnaire provides these constructs to respond research aim using reliable scales from previous research. This questionnaire includes different types of questions in "part 1" (demographic information). It starts with closed-ended questions to collect demographic data such as gender and academic status. This part is followed by a 5-

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point Likert scale and multiple-response questions in "part 2" to investigate usage patterns and reason of learners for checking collocations.

In "part 3" and "part 4," 5-point Likert scale questions were included to identify participants' levels of agreement, focusing on the effectiveness, reliability, and ease of use of ChatGPT in comparison to online dictionaries. Finally, the questionnaire concludes with open-ended questions that allow participants to provide their subjective view of tool preferences, but this part is not compulsory for the learners to answer in the questionnaire. The reason for including this open-ended question is to add depth to the quantitative findings.

(1) For the Technology Perception Part (ChatGPT/Dictionaries): Author adapted the scale from Aksakallı & Daşer (2025). In their study conducted with Turkish students, they reported a Cronbach's Alpha of .94. (2) For the Collocation Part: Author adapted the scale from Hong et al. (2022), who reported a Cronbach's Alpha of .857. (3) Demographic Information Part: Age, gender, proficiency level, academic status, background experience using ChatGPT/Online dictionary.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the collected data were analysed using descriptive analysis. To compare the ChatGPT and online dictionary use, a percentage distribution is applied. To analyse the five-point Likert scale responses, mean score was calculated by giving numerical values for each response (1,2,3,4,5). The results were analysed in the Microsoft Excel programme, and with this programme, comparative tables were created to identify usage patterns, perceived effectiveness of learners using these tools in their collocation learning process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

In this part of the study, author provides a descriptive analysis of Turkish EFL learners' interaction with ChatGPT and online dictionaries for collocation acquisition. Tables and analysis of the results are integrated thanks to Microsoft Excel programme. The results are discussed into three main subcategories: demographic information of participants, usage patterns, and perceived effectiveness & outcomes.

3.1.1 Demographic Information

Gathering data for this study began with the demographic information part of the questionnaire. Participant number is 27, and all of them are adult learners. This part is crucial for understanding if the results can be generalized and applied to other groups of learners, such as young learners. Below is the analysis of the demographic information.

Table 1

Variable	Category	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	22	81.5%
	Male	5	18.5%
Proficiency Level	B1/B2 (Prep Students)	14	51.9%
	C1/C2 (Master's Students)	13	48.1%
Tool Experience	Less than 1 year	13	48.1%
	1–3 years	8	29.6%
	More than 3 years	6	22.2%
Main Device	Smartphone	18	66.7%
	Laptop	5	18.5%
	Tablet	4	14.8%

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As it is shown in Table 1, there are 27 participants in this study, and the majority of the participants are female (81%, N=22). The proficiency level of the participants is nearly equal and divided into intermediate (B1-B2) and advanced (C1-C2) levels. This balance in the level of the participants provides different perceptions across various proficiency stages. Furthermore, to check the collocations, smartphone is identified as the most common technological device (66.7%), and second most used device is laptop (18.5 %), followed by tablet which is (14%). The technological background of the participants is reported as most of the learners (N= 13) have used ChatGPT or online dictionaries for less than 1 year. Only %22 of the participants have been using ChatGPT or an online dictionary for more than 3 years, which may be counted as a limitation of the study.

3.1.2 Usage Patterns

This part of this study is integrated to identify how often learners use these tools to check collocation and their main reasons for checking them. Below is the analysis of the usage patterns of the participants.

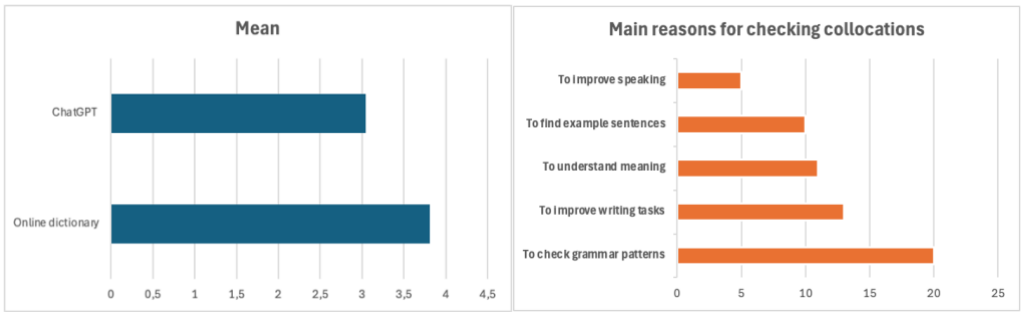

Figure 1

Data results, as it is stated in figure 1, clearly depict how often learners use these tools to check collocations (ChatGPT and Online dictionary). Online dictionary is found to be the primary source when it is compared with ChatGPT. Mean of figure 1 shows that participants have chosen "often (N=12)" or "always (N=7)" use online dictionaries (M=3.81) to check collocations. Furthermore, to understand the general reason for checking collocations, another question is added, and the results (Table 2) show that the primary reason for checking collocation is to "check grammar patterns (74%)" and "improve writing tasks (48%)."

3.1.3 Perceived Effectiveness and Outcomes

Integrating this part into the study is essential to identify the strengths and weaknesses of online dictionaries and ChatGPT in the collocation acquisition process. Author categorized this part of the questionnaire as: Clear Examples, Ease of Use, Reliability, Writing and Speaking Improvement. This allowed us to identify and compare both tools.

Table 2

Statement	Tool	Mean	SD
Clear Examples	Online Dictionary	4,15	0,65
Clear Examples	ChatGPT	4,07	0,66
Ease of Use	Online Dictionary	4,56	0,74
Ease of Use	ChatGPT	4,15	0,65
Reliability	Online Dictionary	3,81	0,82
Reliability	ChatGPT	3,78	0,83
Writing Imp.	Online Dictionary	3,67	0,98
Writing Imp.	ChatGPT	4,11	0,83

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Speaking Imp.	Online Dictionary	3,7	0,81
Speaking Imp.	ChatGPT	4,04	0,74

As it is seen in Table 2, the author included mean and standard deviation measurements to understand the general agreement of the participants (mean) and to identify whether participants' answers are close to the mean results. The analysis of the perceived effectiveness indicates that online dictionaries were commonly chosen for providing clear examples (M=4.15, SD=0.65) and a reliable information source when it is compared to ChatGPT (M=3.78, SD=0.83). Although this result shows that online dictionary is a more reliable source, ChatGPT (M=4.11) for improving writing skills is chosen by the majority of the participants. Similarly, in speaking improvement, ChatGPT (M=4.04) is viewed as a more effective tool than online dictionaries (M=3.7). However, as a final result, online dictionaries are viewed as the most reliable tool. ChatGPT is perceived as a helpful partner for language production.

Finally, in this section author presented preliminary findings. The primary limitation of this study is the sample size. This small sample size prevents the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the gender distribution in this study is not balanced because the number of female participant numbers (N=22) is higher than the number of males (N=5), preventing the generalizability and consistency across all learners. To complete the questionnaire, almost all of the questions were compulsory to answer. However, at the end of the questionnaire, there were two open-ended questions that were non-compulsory questions to answer. Therefore, the majority of the participants left these two parts unanswered.

In these open-ended questions, a significant limitation was observed regarding the question "Which tool do you find most helpful for collocations and why?" Participants misunderstood this question. They perceived it as a general preference for tools for collocation learning rather than writing their preferences for ChatGPT or online dictionaries. For instance, one of the participants answered this question as "I prefer Gemini as an AI tool because it is free for university students". Participants did not clearly understand the aim of the question and did not mention the tools for collocation acquisition. Therefore, the author decided not to include the answers to these questions in this study.

3.2 Discussion

This study focused on learners' perceptions, usage patterns, and perceived effectiveness of ChatGPT and online dictionaries for collocation acquisition. The analysis in the findings provides a comprehensive view. In the first part of the analysis, demographic information of the participants was analysed. As they are university-level students and familiar with recent technology, they represent digital natives (Baturay & Yastibas, 2022), and these participants played a significant role in this study. This demographic information is crucial because, as Usta & Alisah (2025) mentioned in their study, Turkish university students are highly engaged with digital platforms for their learning processes.

In the second category of findings, usage patterns revealed that online dictionaries have a higher frequency when it is compared with ChatGPT. Learners begin their formal education with training in using dictionaries. Therefore, a dictionary is seen as a habitual tool for learning a language (Lew & Szarowska, 2024), a dictionary is viewed as a reliable source in lexical learning.

Most of the learners, as mentioned in the findings, use ChatGPT "sometimes". This reveals that ChatGPT is not something learners are highly familiar with, but it is used as a language assistant or a gap-filler for learners. This result of ChatGPT use is similar to Kohnke et al. (2023) study, as they clearly mention that ChatGPT is viewed as a personalized tutor that can give contextualized examples of collocations. While an online dictionary can give a reliable definition, it cannot give an example contextually. For instance, if a learner wants to include a collocation in their academic paragraph, he/she cannot write a prompt to a dictionary for the

right choices of academic tone. Overall, the usage patterns part clearly identifies that dictionaries are used for verification and ChatGPT for further explanation, or in other words, for exploration.

The final section of the findings is perceived effectiveness and outcomes, which emphasize the reliability and productivity of the tools. The majority of the participants agree that online dictionaries are a reliable source, and they trust ChatGPT less. In Ji et al.'s (2023) study, learners are aware that ChatGPT generates incorrect collocations. This study's data confirms this; despite the fact that 12 participants agree that ChatGPT helps more in production processes for collocation, such as in speaking and writing, participants still view dictionaries as a more reliable source for definitions of collocations. This indicates similar findings from a study of Godwin-Jones (2023) in terms of cautious adoption of digital tools; they integrated Large Language Models in higher education. As it is mentioned, ChatGPT for writing improvement was chosen by most of the participants. ChatGPT is viewed as the most effective tool because it can generate sentences. This result is in line with Zou et al. (2023), who argued that AI is a more powerful tool for lexical variety in students' writing.

The findings suggest that integration of ChatGPT does not change the preferences of learners completely. Most of the learners still rely on online dictionaries, which we can consider as a traditional tool. It brings a different language learning process because learners combine them according to their effectiveness in different parts of language learning. There is a major concern regarding AI use; learners demonstrated a cautious approach to ChatGPT-generated collocations. Furthermore, from a pedagogical perspective, these findings imply that teachers can appropriately integrate these tools; they may teach their students how to use AI tools appropriately, such as ChatGPT, to enhance contextualized understanding and foster autonomous learning for collocations outside of the classroom. Therefore, including this kind of comparison can help learners and educators to explore which tool is better, more effective, and appropriate to use.

4. Conclusion

This study concluded its aims by highlighting online dictionaries' perceived reliability and grammatical accuracy, and ChatGPT for its ability to provide personalized feedback, examples, and facilitate more natural language in production of speaking and writing. As it is mentioned earlier, one of the main limitations was the small sample size, which was 27 participants. Future research may expand the sample size and have participants from different educational backgrounds. All of the participants are currently engaging with the English language, which can be another limitation of this study for generalization.

Quantitative data provided clear results for the study. Future studies would include interviews with the learners. Furthermore, to see the long-term effects of using ChatGPT or an online dictionary with experimental and control groups, a longitudinal study would be more effective for understanding the results more deeply. As there are only two tools compared in this study, future studies may include other tools as AI tools. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that ChatGPT can be a supportive tool for collocation learning when used alongside an online dictionary.

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