



The Impact of Narrow Reading on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Lexical Depth

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of narrow reading on the lexical depth of Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level at Shokuh Language Institute in Talesh, Iran. To achieve the goal, Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered to 38 EFL learners. Those who performed between one standard deviation above and one below the mean on the test ($N = 32$) were divided into two classes of control group ($N = 16$) and experimental group ($N = 16$). The participants in the experimental group were provided with narrow reading instruction for 24 sessions while the control group underwent a traditional instruction of reading during the same time. The pre-tests and post-tests of word association task (WAT) were administered and t -tests were used to compare means of test scores between the control and experimental groups' pre-tests and post-tests and within the experimental group's pre-tests and post-tests scores. The results revealed that while the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their lexical depth before the treatment, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. That is, teaching reading through narrow reading is a significantly effective method to improve EFL learners' lexical depth. At the qualitative stage, data from interview with the participants of the experimental group were used to shed light on the gathered data through exploring the participants' attitude towards the narrow reading. The findings can be practically used by teachers and syllabus designers to work on narrow reading and lexical depth.

Keywords: lexical depth, narrow reading, vocabulary knowledge, word association task

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a major priority in language learning and several approaches have considered vocabulary as cornerstone of language learning and teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Besides, a number of researchers have stressed the role of lexicon in second language (L2) acquisition (e.g., Schmitt, 2008). It is also asserted that learning vocabulary is "the first step to learn a foreign language" (Alhamami, 2016, p. 87).

Vocabulary knowledge is more than vocabulary size and is divided into breadth and depth (Zhang & Lu, 2015). The distinction between breadth and depth is clear-cut (Read, 2004). The former refers to the number of words one knows. The latter one is defined as how well a word is known (Schmitt, 2014) or as one's knowledge of different aspects of a word (Qian, 1998). Furthermore, "it is possible to know a little about a larger number of words or to know a great deal about a smaller number of words. That is, size and depth do not necessarily grow in a parallel manner" (Schmitt, 2014, p. 915). Most learners, however, are somewhere between these two extremes.

There is an agreement that "depth of vocabulary knowledge occupies a primary and central place in the multidimensional domain of vocabulary knowledge" (Qian & Schedl, 2004, p. 30). For instance, Qian (1999), showed that depth of vocabulary knowledge was not only a better indicator of L2 reading comprehension but also made an invaluable contribution to L2 reading comprehension, more than contribution made by size of vocabulary knowledge.

Qian (1998) argues that main aspects of the depth of knowledge of a word are as follows:

- Pronunciation and spelling;
- Morphological properties;
- Syntactic properties;
- Meaning;
- Register;
- Frequency of the word

Most of the vocabulary tests in the literature assess vocabulary depth. Nonetheless, in recent years, some attempts have been made to develop measures to deal with various dimensions of depth of vocabulary knowledge (Nassaji, 2004). The basic technique for exploring the lexical depth is the word association tasks (WAT), where "language users are presented with a set of stimulus words one-by-one and are asked to produce the first word they think of in response" (Read, 2004, p. 220).

Regarding learning vocabulary, Chang (2019) maintains that the practice of narrow reading enjoys three merits which make it one of the most useful ways for acquiring new vocabulary.

- Familiarity with lexicon of a particular topic has been found helpful for comprehension since it increases background knowledge. That is, if learners are exposed to the same topic, they will become familiar with that topic and will have better background knowledge, and consequently improve comprehension.
- In narrow reading key words related to the central theme occur more often; therefore, learner have multiple exposures to the same words and might become familiar with them, thus acquiring words with less burden.
- From an input-processing perspective, the having better background knowledge of a topic may provide learners with more attentional resources for processing unknown words or phrases.

Narrow reading which is defined as "a series of texts addressing one specific topic" brings about the advantage of having multiple exposures to a set of new words without modification of the word frequency (Kang, 2015, p. 2).

The texts in narrow reading are related to each other. That is, learners do not have to read texts with various topics or make use of completely new background knowledge to understand different texts. This is likely to provide learners with opportunities to process the input more smoothly. In addition, related texts contain fewer word types since key words might recur across texts, which are likely to ease the lexical burden (Gardner, 2004).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Among different knowledge sources, "one type of knowledge source that has been found to be strongly related to the learner's ability to read and understand texts is vocabulary knowledge" (Nassaji, 2004, p. 389).

Direct vocabulary instruction has been found to be insufficient to prepare EFL learners for the basic vocabulary (Min, 2008). It is notoriously difficult for language teachers to teach great number of words in any explicit way (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Moreover, the effectiveness of reading in learning vocabulary has been strongly challenged by many researchers (e.g. Kang, 2015; Waring & Takaki, 2003). Therefore, EFL learners need to learn the essential vocabulary through a more efficient type of reading, that is, narrow reading (Krashen, 2004).

Due to the increasing nature of vocabulary acquisition, "repeated exposures are necessary to consolidate a new word in the learner's mind" (Schmitt & Carter, 2000, p. 4). Further, the benefits of narrow reading for EFL learners have been acknowledged by many scholars (e.g. Chang, 2019; Schmitt & Carter, 2000). As a case in point, narrow reading "may provide some optimal conditions, such as better background knowledge and repetition of key lexical items" (Chang & Millett, 2017, p. 2).

Additionally, it should be highlighted that many studies have explored only the meaning of lexical items and not other dimensions of vocabulary knowledge. Learners need to learn other aspects of vocabulary knowledge, such as spelling or the use of a word. A few studies have revealed that L2 learners acquire different degrees of various aspects of vocabulary knowledge, and that each aspect differs in its retention over time (Chang, 2019).

Moreover, it has to be noted that the necessity of knowledge of lexical depth is undeniable. Not having sufficient knowledge of manifold dimensions of depth of vocabulary knowledge by the students would hinder the growth of their overall language proficiency (Hasan & Shabdin, 2017). Issues regarding lexical depth, however, are not yet fully resolved and knowledge of lexical depth is neglected by L2 learners. In general, the role of narrow reading has been neglected and no study has been reported to investigate whether narrow reading has significant effect on the further improvement of lexical depth in an EFL context. In this study, it is sought to expand the scope of narrow reading

by reporting on how knowledge of lexical depth could improve lexical depth of EFL learners in an Iranian context.

Research questions

The research questions of this study were as follows:

Q1: Does narrow reading have any statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' lexical depth?

Q2: How do the learners exposed to narrow reading perceive the experience and its effect on lexical depth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last few years, interest towards the role of vocabulary in the L2 learning has considerably risen. The relationship between strategies of learning vocabulary and breadth of vocabulary has already been established by many scholars. However, it should be mentioned that knowledge of vocabulary breadth is regarded as only one dimension of vocabulary knowledge, and vocabulary depth knowledge is another important aspect that should not be ignored (Zhang & Lu, 2015). To put it simply, vocabulary knowledge is a multi-dimensional concept and includes various aspects of knowledge about a word (Chapelle 1994; Schmitt 2014).

Reading is described as the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language through the medium of print (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). It is a multilevel and interactive process where readers reconstruct a text meaningfully through their schemata. In short, reading is an interactive process between the reader and the written text (Al-Isa, 2006). Exposure to recurrent vocabulary throughout the various texts with the same topic, by the same author or from the same genre, is known as narrow reading (Bernardo, 2017).

Similarly, To Hadaway and Young (2010), narrow reading refers to reading books written by the same author, about the same theme, or from the same genre. In narrow reading, "the vocabulary tends to appear rather frequently across the texts, so this high degree of exposures might facilitate acquisition" (Bernardo, 2017, p. 6).

Lexical depth

The importance of knowledge of vocabulary depth is widely undeniable (Qian, 1998). In general, lexical depth is "the ability to relate to semantically linked words" (Doczi, 2006, p. 121). Lexical depth is described as "how well a learner knows a word" (Qian & Schedl, 2004, p. 29). Vocabulary depth also known as vocabulary quality is defined as how well words are known (Schmitt, 2014). It is also defined as "one's level of understanding of various important aspects of a word" (Qian, 1998, p. 13). The main aspects of the vocabulary depth to Qian (1998) are as follows:

- Pronunciation and spelling
- Morphological properties

- Syntactic properties
- Meaning
- Register features
- Frequency of the word

Read (2004) contends that there are three distinct lines of development in the application of depth to L2 vocabulary acquisition:

- 1- The difference between having a limited, vague idea of what a word means and having much more elaborated and specific knowledge of its meaning, i.e., precision of meaning
- 2- Knowledge of a word which includes not only its semantic features but also its orthographic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, collocational and pragmatic characteristics, i.e., comprehensive word knowledge
- 3- The incorporation of the word into a lexical network in the mental lexicon, together with the ability to link it to and distinguish it from related words, i.e., network knowledge

Lexical size and depth are two interdependent dimensions. The relationship between them, however, is yet unclear. Although some scholars hold that there is little difference between them, it is shown that depth typically adds unique explanatory power in comparison with size alone. In fact, the relationship between knowledge of vocabulary size and depth depends on how they are conceptualized and measured. For words with higher frequency and for learners with smaller vocabulary sizes, the difference between size and depth measures is little. However, for words with lower frequency and for larger vocabulary sizes, there is often a gap between size and depth: depth measures develop more slowly than size measures (Schmitt, 2014). This is especially true about language learners as Akbarian (2010) argues “the depth dimension might be lagging behind the size for non-native speakers” (p. 394).

Word association test (WAT)

WAT is one of the well-known measures of knowledge of vocabulary depth in English, which was devised by Read (1993, 1994, & 1998). The WAT is claimed to measure the learner’s depth of vocabulary knowledge through word associations, i.e., different semantic and collocational relationships that a word has with other words (Nassaji, 2004). In this study, it was used without any changes.

Generally, vocabulary tests aim attention at lexical breadth in that “they cover as many words as possible within the time allocated and require only a single response in relation to each word tested” (Read, 1993, p. 357). Knowledge of lexical depth is complex, and therefore it is “very difficult to assess all the different components that constitute the full range of meanings and meaning relationships of a word” (Nassaji, 2004, p. 390).

Scholars “have used various types of assessment tools with different formats to measure this dimension of vocabulary knowledge, including tests that require the learner to

identify a synonym for a word in a multiple-choice test, match words with definitions, translate a word into L1, or use checklists" (Nassaji, 2004, p. 389).

In the new version of WAT, the stimulus words are academic adjectives. Different meanings of the target word are represented through the choice of association. Moreover, words with which most of test-takers are likely to have some familiarity are selected. The new version measures two aspects of the depth of vocabulary knowledge: meaning and collocation, i.e., the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships of words. It consists of 40 items; each item includes one target word with two boxes (4 adjectives in the left box, 4 nouns in the right box). Among the four words in the left box, one to three words can be synonymous or one aspect of the stimulus word and among the four nouns in the right box, there are one to three associates that can collocate with the target word. There are always four correct answers in each item. The test was proved reliable with a coefficient of 0.93 (Read, 1998). The WAT is in a controlled, receptive format (Zhang & Koda, 2017). An example of the test is provided below:

Fresh

<input type="checkbox"/> another <input type="checkbox"/> cool <input type="checkbox"/> easy <input type="checkbox"/> raw	<input type="checkbox"/> cotton <input type="checkbox"/> heat <input type="checkbox"/> language <input type="checkbox"/> water
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Studies on lexical depth

Many scholars have investigated the relationship between lexical depth and breadth and language learning. For example, Zhang and Lu (2015) investigated the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and knowledge of vocabulary breadth and depth. One hundred and fifty first-year university students in China participated in their study. They took a Vocabulary Levels Test and a meaning recall task to elicit vocabulary breadth knowledge, and the Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge Test to elicit participants' depth of vocabulary knowledge. In order to assess how vocabulary-learning strategies predict breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, they used structural equation modeling. Results indicated that strategies that focused on learning the forms and associative meanings of words were significant predictors of both vocabulary breadth and depth knowledge.

Nassaji (2004) examined the relationship between ESL learners' depth of vocabulary knowledge, their lexical inferencing strategy use, and their success in deriving word meaning from context. The WAT was used to measure the learner's depth of vocabulary knowledge. He found a significant relationship between depth of vocabulary knowledge and the degree and type of strategy use and success. He found that (a) those who had stronger depth of vocabulary knowledge used certain strategies more frequently than those who had weaker depth of vocabulary knowledge; and (b) depth of vocabulary knowledge made a significant contribution to inferential success over and above the contribution made by the learner's degree of strategy use. His findings provided empirical support for the importance of knowledge of vocabulary depth in lexical inferencing and

the fact that lexical inferencing is a meaning construction process that is greatly influenced by the richness of the learner's existing semantic system.

In order to find out the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, a review of 128 studies was carried out by Rosado and Caro (2018) using a set of criteria. They selected thirteen studies and screened them to discover specific patterns. Salient themes emerged from their analysis including lexis, direct instruction, lexical knowledge, incidental and intentional learning and receptive and productive lexical knowledge. Their analysis confirmed the connection between lexis and reading comprehension not only in EFL, but also in ESL and L1 contexts. They suggested that teachers should focus on systematic vocabulary instruction since it helps learners increase both lexical knowledge and reading comprehension.

In an Iranian context, Akbarian (2010) examined the relationship between vocabulary size and depth for Iranian learners of English for specific purposes. The participants were 112 graduate students at a university in Iran. The findings from linear regression analyses indicated that, overall, size test and depth test had a great deal of common shared variance for the participants ($R^2 = .746$). Nonetheless, when they were divided into low and high proficiency groups, a significant amount of shared variance was shown for the low group ($R^2 = .464$) and a much higher one for the high group ($R^2 = .804$). He argued that both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth are accounted for by the same factors, especially as the learners' proficiency increases. It was also concluded that there was a strong positive relationship between vocabulary size and depth for Iranian learners of English for specific purposes. The implication of his finding was that it may not be necessary to teach size and depth of vocabulary knowledge separately. He further stated that it is not necessary to even test the two dimensions separately.

Dabbagh and Janebi Enayat (2019) examined the interaction between vocabulary breadth and depth as well as assessments of L2 learners' descriptive writing. They explored the predictive role of these two aspects of vocabulary knowledge in relation to the vocabulary component of the assessment. They also investigated the extent to which knowledge of vocabulary at different word-frequency levels may predict general descriptive writing performance along with scores on the vocabulary component. In doing so, 67 EFL students took the Vocabulary Levels Test, WAT, and undertook two descriptive writing tasks. Results of correlations and stepwise regressions revealed that (a) vocabulary breadth was predictive of general assessment of descriptive writing whereas vocabulary depth only correlated with the overall assessment; (b) vocabulary breadth was predictive of the vocabulary component of L2 descriptive writing. Vocabulary depth, however, again simply correlated with this variable and (c) although mid-frequency vocabulary was correlated with, and predictive of, the general assessment of descriptive writing, knowledge of low-frequency words was an important factor in explaining the variance in the vocabulary component.

In another study in Iran, Hatami and Tavakoli (2012) investigated breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and their relationship to L2 ease and success in lexical inferencing. To this end, they administered two tests measuring vocabulary breadth and depth to 50

participants. Two weeks later, all participants received an inferencing task and rated the degree of perceived ease in inferencing on a 6-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The findings indicated that although both vocabulary breadth and depth played an important role in lexical inferencing success, vocabulary breadth made a more important contribution. Furthermore, the results showed that neither vocabulary breadth nor depth had a significant effect on perceived ease of inferencing. For the same reason, most vocabulary tests in the literature deal with breadth of vocabulary knowledge

Mohammadi and Afshar (2016) explored the relationships between EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension and analyzed whether there is a correlation between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. After reviewing several studies in this regard, they found that both breadth and depth vocabulary knowledge play key roles in EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. Depth of vocabulary knowledge, however, performs a more significant role. They also found that those learners who have large vocabulary size will have a deeper knowledge of the words.

In a similar vein, Tavanpour and Biria (2017) explored the relationship between the breadth and the depth of lexical knowledge and reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, they examined the effect of gender and language proficiency level of learners on the breadth and the depth of lexical knowledge and reading comprehension. A number of 52 intermediate and advanced level (both males and females) majoring in English Translation at University of Isfahan participated in their study. Data collection was done in two sessions via two vocabulary knowledge tests (the breadth and the depth) and the reading comprehension test was administered to the participants. The results of the data analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and Iranian advanced/intermediate EFL learner's reading comprehension performance totally.

Narrow reading

Presenting new information and vocabulary in reading might be challenging for poor readers who do not have experience with the topic or theme. "Instead, reading several stories that share the same theme that motivates the reader to engage in the reading activity and process language learning at the same time" (Raisa-nguan & Sukying, 2019, p. 3). This method of reading is known to narrow reading.

First introduced by Krashen (1981), narrow reading is a term that describes reading organized around a specific topic with overlapping language and content (Lee, 1996). Also known as series reading, it refers to learners reading a series of books written by the same author or on the same theme (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1996; Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Narrow reading is reading about the same topic during the course of a number of texts (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). To Min (2008), narrow reading refers to "reading supplemental texts on the same theme" (p. 80). It also indicates focusing on "the work of a single author or a single topic over the course of a number of texts for an extended period of time" (Chang & Millet, 2017, p. 1).

If EFL learners learn to read by reading, providing them with the material to read and some guidance concerning book selection is a basic and highly efficient form of information support. Academic and public libraries could encourage narrow reading among their patrons, and may find that developing a reading culture amongst language learners is beneficial to all parties (Bryan, 2011).

Abdollahi and Farvardin (2016) claim that "reading on one specific subject means that much of the topic-focused vocabulary will be repeated across texts. It facilitates the reading process and affords the reader a better chance of comprehending and learning vocabulary" (p. 2). It requires students to devote some time reading a large number of texts to achieve both reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. In narrow reading the students read texts under the same topic, the same genre of writing or the same author to gradually gain reading comprehension and learn specific vocabulary incidentally prior to expanding their reading to other topics.

Krashen (2004) asserts that narrow reading makes L2 acquisition easier on the grounds that each writer has a unique style and uses fixed expressions and grammatical structures and each topic contains a specific set of vocabulary. Therefore, narrow reading provides the learners with the possibility of finding the same words and expressions throughout various contexts. Furthermore, previous knowledge about the topic is important when it comes to understanding a given text. In other words, having good prior knowledge is an indicator of a higher degree of acquisition, as readers might find the text more comprehensible. To put it simply, "the more one reads in one area, the more one learns about that area, and the easier one finds subsequent reading in the area" (p. 17). Regarding narrow reading, Redmer (2019, p. 32) argues that

- Topics can supplement a textbook. This boosts vocabulary learning that students may be supposed to learn for exams.
- Graded readers can be employed, especially with younger or lower-level learners; consequently each student would read various versions of the same title while keeping a record of reading speed.
- Sets of narrow reading could be spread out throughout many classes. This may have the advantage of repeated exposure over a period of time.

Bryan (2011) contends that narrow reading is similar to extensive reading in which the texts have a common element including theme or author to expose learners to more textual redundancy. In other words, "the two main concepts in the narrow reading model are books linked by author and books linked by theme. These concepts are applied to both narrative works and expository material" (p. 117). Constant exposure to target words through narrow reading improves the productive dimension of vocabulary knowledge. In order to become competent users of vocabulary items, learners should know more than basic meaning of a word, and repeated exposures to words through narrow input "could create the conditions for out-growth of knowledge about a word's usage, including a word's grammatical behavior and part of speech" (Abdollahi & Farvardin, 2016, p. 8). In narrow reading, the same words may be used repeatedly. Therefore, increasing the opportunity to learn unknown words are provided. Key words

and proper nouns might recur, and this, in turn, may reduce lexical burden and allows readers to process the information more effectively and to pay more attention to other unfamiliar elements in the text (Chang & Renandya, 2019).

Hanuvong and Sukavatee (2021) believe that the narrow reading process helps to lessen vocabulary burden since the reading narrowly to one particular area shares both similar content and vocabulary. Consequently, learners need fewer amount of vocabulary to comprehend the texts. When vocabulary burden was lessened, the students could consolidate their word retention. They further argue that the designed instruction causes occurrence of both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning. The incidental vocabulary learning takes place through reading narrowly the same topic passage, since when reading some passages with same theme respectively, the students could incidentally acquire vocabulary from meeting repeatedly the same words. Moreover, the intentional vocabulary learning takes place through the activity in the retrieval stage and generative use stage, such as writing sentences by using the learned word.

Many studies on vocabulary learning through narrow reading have mainly explored the meanings of individual words rather than other aspects of vocabulary knowledge. It is thought that learners may acquire other aspects of vocabulary knowledge including the use of a word, and various dimensions of vocabulary knowledge that are acquired and forgotten at different rates (Chang & Renandya, 2019).

It has been estimated that the number of times a new word should be encountered before it is learned ranges from 5 to 17, being the average 10 repetitions (Perry & MacDonald, 2001). Many scholars have also maintained that "vocabulary is best acquired when reading is enhanced with intentional learning exercises" (Paya-Guerrero & Segura, 2015, p. 95).

Regarding implementation of narrow reading, it has been argued that one useful tool is internet technology. The internet has been found to be a useful source for locating and collecting materials for this purpose. Using such an accessible tool can help L2 teachers to easily incorporate narrow reading into their classrooms. Furthermore, in a content-based approach, classroom activities are limited to the subject matter being taught. In this regard, narrow reading lends itself quite naturally to content based instruction (Abdollahi & Farvardin, 2016).

Rationale for narrow reading

There are many benefits to narrow reading. The main advantage of narrow reading is that "readers become familiar with the topic and have much better background knowledge for future passages on that topic" (Schmitt & Carter, 2000, p. 5).

Krashen (2004) claims that getting involved in a specific topic enables the reader to be exposed to a wide variety of vocabulary items and grammatical structures that may be used in other types of texts. Moreover, learners do not normally read about only one topic, but they have other interests that make them expand their reading habits gradually. One of the main merits of narrow reading is its motivational nature. Since learners read about

their favorite topics, they will find themselves reading for meaning, in early stages of language acquisition.

It needs to be stressed that narrow reading can lead to many educational merits. Easing the lexical burden is one of the merits achieved through narrow reading since the texts are related and have similar topics. "Related texts contain fewer word types because key words recur across texts, which can ease the lexical burden" (Naguib, 2020, p. 21).

It is obvious that "reading a series of related texts benefits various aspects of L2 learners' of linguistic knowledge, and enhances their interest to read more". Admittedly, in narrow reading, L2 learners read only one theme or one series of books and it is not clear whether if they have more experience in reading different texts, they may perceive differently or favor one theme over the other (Chang & Renandya, 2020, p. 3).

Narrow reading provides greater opportunities for repetition of words in passages of the same topic and in turn consolidation of knowledge of unknown and partially known words. In sum, the narrow reading "can be an effective approach for vocabulary development and spatially for learners' vocabulary recall and retention" (Abdollahi & Farvardin, 2016, p. 8).

Hanuvong and Sukavatee (2021) hold that reading narrowly to the same theme makes students feel more comfortable to learn vocabulary as they get familiar with the similar content and the same vocabulary through narrow reading approach. Besides, Ballance (2021) maintains that narrow reading has the potential to lessen vocabulary load and to provide golden opportunities for improving collocation knowledge. Nonetheless, these merits hinges on narrow reading increasing lexical repetition within a text. Moreover, the more one reads in one area, the more they "would be informed with that area, and comprehends the text easier" (Sotoudehnama & Zarmehri, 2020, p. 166).

One of the groups which benefits greatly from narrow reading is university students as most of the students need to know technical words to be able to read specialized texts. They, however, do not have the opportunity to meet these words in every context since they are not very frequent. Thus, narrow reading sounds to be a good solution. When students read thematically related texts, it is recommended to narrow texts to expository genre or texts written by one author so that they will have the chance to meet mid-frequency words repeatedly. Moreover, those who are interested in learning vocabulary are likely to enjoy the advantage of narrow reading (Sotoudehnama & Zarmehri, 2020).

Krashen (2004) states when students read fun, easy and interesting texts, they become prepared for more difficult texts. However, he argues that the most appropriate way to make the transition to more demanding texts is by reading fields that are closely connected to each other. He also believes that narrow reading is a process that can be pleasing at any time and in any place (2004).

Nagy and Herman (1987) contend that children between grades three and twelve learn up to 3000 words each year. It is believed that only a small percentage of such learning is because of explicit vocabulary instruction and a far greater amount is thanks to the

acquisition of words from reading. They also argued that conventional approaches to teaching vocabulary, in which the number of new lexical items taught in each class is carefully controlled, is much less effective in enhancing vocabulary growth than simply having students to spend time on silent reading of interesting books.

Krashen (1981) held that narrow reading is an efficient way for novice readers to develop reading comprehension as well as vocabulary learning. With frequent repetition of the same words under the same or similar topic, the readers would attain new inputs themselves.

Books written by the same author, having a common genre or topic, would ease reading because reading such books provide readers with familiar context (Cho, Ahn, & Krashen, 2005). Graded readers which are used in narrow reading, have a controlled grammatical and lexical load and offer regular and adequate repetition of new language forms (Wodinski & Nation, 1988).

Another point that should be mentioned is that "narrow reading can increase background knowledge, which can be general knowledge, cultural knowledge or knowledge of a certain topic or discipline. Thus, one efficient way to gain specific background knowledge or contextual knowledge is narrow reading" (Chang & Millett, 2017, P.3).

Considering these advantages, "it is worthwhile to explore the extent to which L2 learners can benefit from narrow reading and how L2 learners perceive this type of input" (Chang & Renandya, 2019, p. 2)

A related issue concerning narrow reading is that since the texts are not controlled for vocabularies, students would encounter a wide range of lexical items from different frequency levels. Nonetheless, when students read a series of books written by an author and about a particular topic, they will be exposed to these words repeatedly since each author has a set of favorable phrases and expressions which are frequent in his works. Additionally, "providing students with a series of stories by a favorite author may help readers give up the belief that reading the works of a particular author is tiring and tedious" (Sotoudehnama & Zarmehri, 2020, p. 194).

Research on narrow reading

Reading is defined as the construction of the meaning of the text, which is an active and strategic process. The reader's skill and knowledge interact with the features of the text such as genre, and structure of the text (Schellings, Aarnoutse, & Leeuwe, 2006). There have been several research studies concerning the acquisition of vocabulary through narrow reading. Some of them are reported here:

Chang and Renandya (2019) explored the effect of narrow reading on EFL learners' vocabulary learning. They selected 12 graded readers and categorized them into four sets: same author, same genre, same title and random readers. Each set included three graded readers: one Level 1, one Level 2, and one Level 3. They divided the students (N = 56) into four subgroups and each group took turns reading each set of the graded readers.

They selected 25 unknown target words to be tested in each category. Students read a set of three graded readers. Then, their vocabulary knowledge was measured on three dimensions: form-meaning recall, sources, and use. The data were analyzed through linear mixed-effects models, with the participants as the random effect, and text organization, vocabulary dimensions, time order, and reading text sequence as fixed effect variables. Interestingly, the findings of their study revealed that texts by the same author or random texts lead to acquiring more vocabulary words compared to texts of the same title. The L2 learners recalled 61% of the source and 50% of the meaning, and 41% of the target words were used in correct way. The students scored the lowest at Time 1 and the highest at Time 4. This indicated that learning rates improved as they read more.

Hansen and Collins (2015) explored children's access to books, narrow independent reading volume, and growth in vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. A total of 220 EFL learners and native-English speaking children from various socioeconomic backgrounds were given measures of vocabulary and literacy in fourth grade. Book reading volume was recorded using reading management programs. ELL children had greater access to books at school than had been previously reported among children from low income communities. ELLs, however, were exposed to fewer words and comprehended books more poorly than their non-ELL peers. Development in receptive vocabulary knowledge was due to the proportion of narrow books children read, regardless of language status. The results suggested that teachers can support ELL children's literacy development through helping them select appropriately difficult books, encouraging them to engage in more independent reading, and suggesting narrow reading.

Hanuvong and Sukavatee (2021) explored the effects of learning conditioned narrow reading instruction on vocabulary knowledge of Thai EFL learners, and examined the perceptions of students towards learning conditioned narrow reading instruction. They selected 30 grade six students of academic year 2020 at a private school in Thailand as participants of their study. The results of the study demonstrated that students' performance after receiving learning conditioned narrow reading instruction was higher than the pre-test mean score at significant level of .001. Regarding the affective component, it was found out that several interviewees had positive feeling toward the instruction. As to the cognitive component, their study revealed that most of the participants perceived that narrow reading approach made them encounter with the same vocabulary repeatedly. This helped them increase their word retention. With regard to behavior component, many students tended to use narrow reading approach to further enhance their vocabulary knowledge. However, they preferred to read other topics that are interesting to them.

Paya-Guerrero and Segura (2015) investigates the role of reading in vocabulary acquisition, focusing for the purpose on two different approaches: narrow reading and reading plus vocabulary-enhancement activities. In order to assess the effectiveness of these two instructional approaches in learning English vocabulary by Spanish students

in secondary education, a classroom-based study over a 6-week period was conducted. Two groups of students participated in it, each undergoing a different treatment. An adapted version of Paribakht Wesche's vocabulary knowledge scale has been used to measure students' knowledge of 20 target words. Both groups showed considerable vocabulary improvements with the two methodologies.

Chang and Renandya (2020) explored L2 learners' perceptions of narrow reading. Thirty-two students finished four sets of graded readers organized by the same author with the same genre and same title, or random texts. After finishing each set of three graded readers, the students were supposed to answer an eight-item questionnaire and write their reading feedback. They employed linear mixed effect models to analyze the data gathered from the questionnaire, taking the participants as the random effect variable, and four forms of text organization, reading time order, language proficiency, and the reading text sequence as fixed effect variables. The two 10-week treatments indicated that text organization and language proficiency have significant impact on the students' perceptions, while reading time order and text sequences do not have such influence. Students' written feedback showed that all texts were interesting except the texts of the same titles which were boring for having to be read three times. Students' written feedback provided useful information for choosing reading texts.

The impact of narrow reading on learning mid-frequency words was explored by Sotoudehnama and Zarmehri (2020). The findings of their study demonstrated that when the theme was fixed, reading expository texts brought about the development in vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, the group that read narratives forgot most of the mid-frequency words in the retention phase. Their study also demonstrated that reading texts written by one author resulted in a better vocabulary achievement in both learning and retention phases.

Khamesipour (2015) conducted a study to find out the difference between teaching vocabularies explicitly i.e., through providing definitions and implicitly, i.e., using narrow reading. The participants of his study were 30 EFL students registered in Sciences courses in a university in Iran. They took some pre-tests and then they completed the experiment: explicit instruction through word definitions and implicit instruction through narrow reading texts. The findings revealed that the learner's knowledge of vocabulary before the treatment was almost the same. Moreover, both the explicit and the implicit teaching of vocabulary appeared to have a positive influence on learning vocabulary. There, nevertheless, was a significant difference between these two methods, as students achieved better scores when they were taught vocabulary implicitly (i.e., narrow reading) than when explicit teaching was used (i.e., presenting definitions).

Hansen and Collins (2015) stated that narrow reading may also be helpful for children in recognizing words that they read:

It is possible that narrow reading was not related to growth in word reading and decoding, because the children were already proficient in these skills. It is also

possible that narrow reading was not related to growth in comprehension, because of the short duration of the study (p. 139).

The findings of the abovementioned studies imply that narrow reading can be an important source for vocabulary acquisition (Abdollahi & Farvardin). In other words, it is believed that "narrow text collections can provide readers with multiple exposures to words which may facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition" (Hansen Collins, 2015, p. 139).

METHODOLOGY

The Design of the study

The method adopted in the current study was a mixed one. In the quantitative stage, after homogenizing the selected participants (32 English EFL learners at Shokuh Institute, in Talesh), they were randomly assigned to one control and one experimental group. The study drew some forms of comparison within and between groups. In fact, the present study conducted a true experimental design since it had all the necessary characteristics of an experimental method. The study used random control/experimental group design to investigate the impact of the treatment on the experimental group. Both groups took the same pre-test and post-test. However, they did not have the same treatment in between tests.

Further, the participants' attitude was also explored in order to fully understand and explain the potential effect of narrow reading on the learners' lexical depth.

In order to identify potential problems with the research design, a couple of weeks before conducting the study, 14 students with similar characteristics to the main sample in terms of proficiency, gender, and age undertook a pilot study. They were selected from students at the same institute. Some subtle changes were introduced to the design of the study after the pilot study: First, it was discovered that for the experimental group to get familiar with the new technique, the amount of time for each session should take at least 30 minutes. Moreover, decision regarding the number of sessions for implementing the study was made.

Participants

Thirty-two English EFL learners at Shokuh Language Institute, in Talesh, participated in the study. They, initially, were 38 male EFL learners, who were selected randomly at the same Institute. They were native speakers of Persian and had already studied English at the language institute for approximately three years. They were divided into two classes: each class consisted of 16 students. One of the classes was randomly selected as a control group and another as an experimental group. In this study, gender was not considered as a moderator variable. All of the participants were aged 18 to 25 with a mean of 21, and they were male.

Instruments

To conduct the current study, the following instruments were used:

Quick Placement Test (QPT) is a well-developed English language proficiency test which is constructed by Cambridge ESOL and Oxford University Press. The test is validated in many countries by more than 6000 students. It can be administered quickly and easily. Two versions of QPT are available: paper and pen version and a computer-based one. The former consisting two parts was used in the present study. Only Part 1, questions 1-40, was taken by the participants.

The book that the participants studied was *Interchange 2* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2017, 5thed). It is a four-level, American English course. Every unit contains two cycles, each of which has a specific topic, grammar point, and function. The reading sections offer updated topics that are relevant to today's students, while helping them develop a variety of skills such as reading for main ideas, reading for details, and inferencing.

Factfiles are non-fiction graded readers from the Oxford Bookworms Library available for Levels 1 to 4 (A1- B2). Students learn about different countries and cultures, science and nature, history and historical figures all while practicing and improving their English.

To read thematically related materials, the experimental group read *Martin Luther King level 3* published by Oxford University Press (McLean, 2008). It contains 9,871 words and the scenario is easy to comprehend. It includes 14 chapters and there are also some reading activities related to every two chapters. Moreover, to supplement the current book, every session the teacher provided the students with some text with the same topic, as reading homework, extracted from the internet.

To determine the effect of treatment on the participants' lexical depth, two versions of WAT (Read, 1993 & 1994) were prepared as both pre-test and post-test. It was chosen since it is reliable enough and includes multiple choices, which made the administration and scoring convenient for rating. In the new version of WAT, the stimulus words are academic adjectives. The new version measures two aspects of the depth of vocabulary knowledge: meaning and collocation, i.e., the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships of words. It consists of 40 items; each item includes one target word with two boxes (4 adjectives in the left box, 4 nouns in the right box). Among the four words in the left box, one to three words can be synonymous or one aspect of the stimulus word and among the four nouns in the right box, there are one to three associates that can collocate with the target word. There are always four correct answers in each item. The test was proved reliable with a reliability coefficient of 0.93 (Read, 1998).

Data collection

Quantitative stage

In the first step, 38 male EFL learners, who were selected randomly at Shokuh Language Institute, in Talesh, sat for the Quick Placement Test and those who performed within one standard deviation above and below the mean on the test ($N = 32$) were chosen as

homogenous learners. In effect, to make sure that the participants were intermediate, the test was administered to the initial students ($N = 38$). Since almost all the initial students scored above 30, they were considered intermediate (based on the interpretation format of QPT). However, to ensure the homogeneity of the participants, the learners whose scores deviated one standard deviation below and above the mean on the test were excluded from the study. Then, they were randomly assigned to two groups: one control group ($N = 16$) and one experimental group ($N = 16$). The participants were assessed on the lexical depth on two separate occasions: at the beginning of the study, that is, before the treatment and approximately two months later, that is, immediately after the study.

In order to provide the uniformity of instruction, both groups were taught by the same teacher (researcher). The classes were held at Shokuh language institute in Talesh. The whole study took 24 sessions. The classes were held three times a week, but the students received reading instruction twice a week (16 sessions). Accordingly, there was approximately two months interval between the pre-test and post-test in each group. Each session took 75 minutes of which 30 minutes was devoted to reading instruction. During the sessions, the participants were allowed to interact with the teacher and ask questions. The teacher provided relevant feedback to each student.

In both groups, in the first session, the teacher introduced the purpose of the study to the students. The medium of instruction was mainly English. However, the teacher used Persian when it was necessary. In all of the treatment sessions, the researcher checked participants' active participation. The participants were told to focus on comprehending the content of the texts. Both groups of participants did not have any experience of reading independently in L2. However, they were familiar with graded readers.

In reading sessions, the students in the experimental group practiced thematically related passages as they only read Martin Luther King (McLean, 2008) and related supplementary texts. In each reading session, the teacher introduced one chapter of the book. As to reading exercises, the students completed the various activities at the end of the book. A striking feature of narrow reading was that it included thematically related topics.

During the treatment, the students in the control group read about various topics and genres from their course-book. Reading was taught traditionally without employing narrow reading. Unlike the experimental group, the students in the control group were exclusively instructed through the course-book. In short, while the narrow reading group continued to read about the same topic throughout the 16 sessions of the treatment, the regular reading group read about a number of unrelated topics.

Before conducting the study, the students read a consent form that explained the goal of the study and they agreed to participate. Then, to the both classes, the pre-test, WAT (Read, 1993 & 1994), was given. The participants were required to accomplish the task in 40 minutes. After 16 sessions of reading instruction, the post-test was given to the students. In WAT, the pre-test and post-test were the same for both groups. However, the order of items was different. For the post-test, the students were given a time limit of 40

minutes to complete the task, as well. The participating students were instructed to read each of the target words and then circle the four words closely related to the target word. In scoring, each correct answer had one point. Therefore, the maximum possible score was 160 for the 40 items (each item with four correct answers). Each student received a score out of 160- one score for each correct answer.

There was one dependent variable (learners' lexical depth) and one independent variable (narrow reading). Paired and independent-samples *t* tests were used to compare means within each group and between groups. Data were analyzed through SPSS 18. The alpha level was set to .05.

Qualitative stage

In an attempt to enrich related data and to find out the participants' attitude towards the narrow reading, the researcher developed a few interview questions to be carried out with the experimental group after the treatment. The responses were recorded, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher.

Interviewing, one of the useful ways for researchers to collect data, is often employed to elicit the participants' self-reported attitudes and perceptions of the topic under discussion. Although the nature of the current study was quantitative, the researcher found a qualitative approach useful as a complement to the quantitative tests. In doing so, he spoke shortly to the participants about their feeling towards experiencing narrow reading in order to record any unexpected findings about the participants' learning experiences.

In order to analyze the interview data, the thematic content analysis was used in the present study. The following steps were taken:

- 1) Getting familiar with the data (reading and re-reading).
- 2) Coding (labeling) the whole text.
- 3) Searching for themes with broader patterns of meaning.
- 4) Reviewing themes to make sure they fit the data.
- 5) Defining and naming themes.
- 6) The write-up (creating a coherent narrative that includes quotes from the interviewees).

RESULTS

Data analysis and findings

The findings demonstrated the potentials for the positive effect of narrow reading on lexical depth. Moreover, although the nature of the current study was not qualitative, the researcher found it useful as a complement to the WAT test, to speak shortly with participants in order to gain understandings into the participants' attitude and experience.

Descriptive analysis of the data

The first set of analyses was used to report the descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the students who took QPT (in order to select homogeneous participants) prior to the study. The mean score was 32.50 and standard deviation was 0.75. Those who performed within one standard deviation above and below the mean on the test, that is, 32 participants, were selected as homogenous ones.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the results of QPT test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
QPT score	38	32.50	0.75

Table 2 represents descriptive statistics for lexical depth test (WAT) scores of both groups on the pre-test. Both groups obtained almost the same values on the pre-test. Although the experimental group had a slightly better performance, the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the groups on the pre-test

Test	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Pre.con	16	18	69	87	1228	76.75	5.544	30.733
Pre.exp	16	20	68	88	1230	76.88	5.830	33.983

Table 3 demonstrates descriptive statistics for WAT score of both groups on the post-test. The values obtained by the experimental group showed a considerable difference in range, minimum, maximum, sum, and mean in comparison with the control group. The standard deviation was also greater in the experimental group.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the groups on the post-test

Test	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Post.con	16	18	70	88	1235	77.19	5.492	30.163
Post.exp	16	21	74	95	1367	85.44	6.582	43.329

In order to illustrate the change within each group, the comparison of each student's score on pre-test and post-test of WAT in the control group is exhibited in Figure 1. The scores on the post-test of the lexical depth indicate the same scatter as those of the pre-test, with those of the post-test being marginally better than the pre-test. Students number 1, 6, 9, 11 & 13, however, had a worse performance on the post-test. Overall, the improvement was not statistically significant.

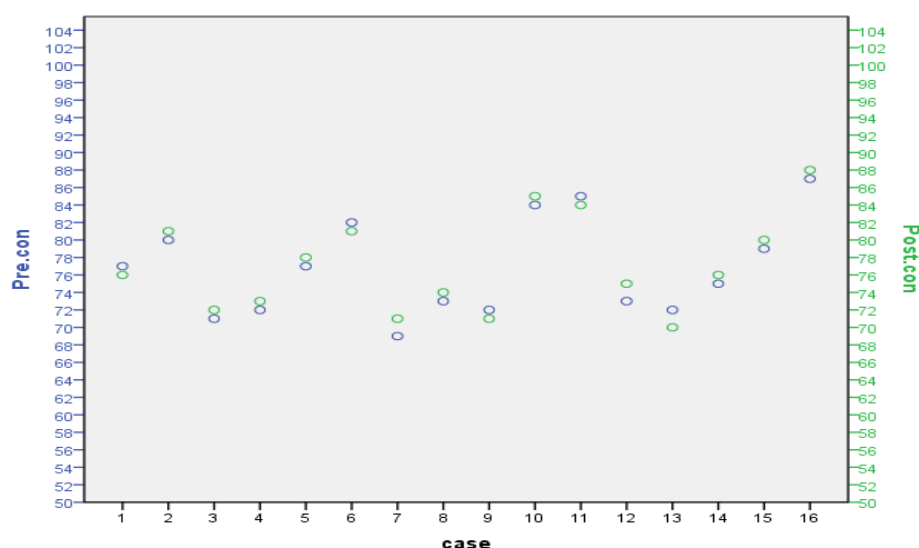


Figure 1. The comparison of each participant's score on the pre-test and post-test of WAT (Control group)

Figure 2 demonstrates the comparison of each student's score on the pre-test and post-test of WAT in the experimental group. It exhibits that WAT score of all participants boosted on the post-test. The participants in the experimental group were able to enhance their scores up to night values. In other words, the score difference between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group was statistically significant.

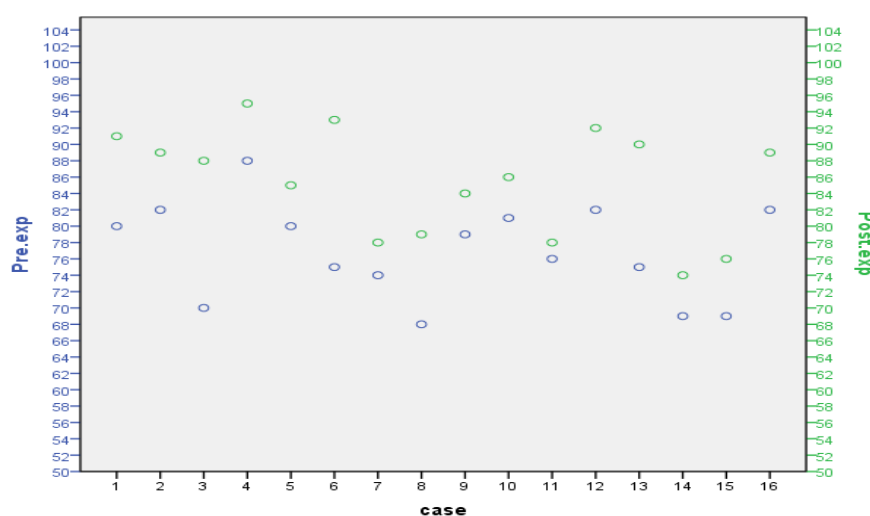


Figure 2. The comparison of each participant's score on the pre-test and post-test of WAT (Experimental group)

Inferential analysis of the data

The results of an independent-samples t test of WAT test score between the pre-tests of the control and experimental groups, at a 95% confidence, are indicated in Table 4. It demonstrated that the mean difference was not statistically significant, $t(30) = -.062$, at $p < .05$, 2-tailed. In other words, the average difference of $-.125$ between WAT test score on the pre-test of control group and experimental group was not statistically significant.

This indicated that on the pre-test the participants in both groups had an approximately similar performance.

Table 4. Independent-samples *t* test between pre-test of control and experimental groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
W A T	Equal variances assumed	.060	.808	-.062	30	.951	-.125	2.011	-4.232	3.982
	Equal variances not assumed			-.062	29.92 5	.951	-.125	2.011	-4.233	3.982

The results of an independent-samples *t* test of WAT test score between the post-tests of the control and experimental groups, at a 95% confidence, are indicated in Table 5. It demonstrates that the difference was statistically significant, $t(30) = -3.849$, at $p < .05$, 2-tailed. In other words, the average difference of -8.250 between WAT test score on the post-test of control group and experimental group was statistically significant. This further indicates that the students in the experimental group improved their lexical depth to a statistically significant degree compared to the control group in the two-month period, during which they practiced narrow reading.

Table 5. Independent-samples *t* test between post-test of control and experimental groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- taile d)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
W A T	Equal variances assumed	.727	.401	-3.849	30	.001	-8.250	2.143	-12.627	-3.873
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.849	29.06 7	.001	-8.250	2.143	-12.633	-3.867

The most striking result emerging from the data is that the difference within the experimental group from pre-test to post-test is statistically significant, $t(15) = -7.011$,

at $p < .05$, 2-tailed. Table 6 presents the result of a Paired t test of WAT test score in the experimental group at a 95% confidence. The probability, then, is less than 5% that this difference occurred by chance alone. That is, the average difference of -8.563 between WAT test score on the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. In addition to being significant, the difference is meaningful because it is large. This indicates that the students developed their lexical depth to a statistically significant degree in the two-month period, during which they engaged in narrow reading.

Table 6. Paired-samples t test (experimental group)

		Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 2	Pre.exp - Post.exp	-8.563	4.885	1.221	- 11.165	-5.960	-7.011	15	.000

Figure 3 shows the comparison of the control and experimental groups' mean score from the pre-test to the post-test. As it is exhibited, there is a considerable rise from the pre-test to the post-test in the experimental group's WAT test score. However, that is not true for the control group, where WAT test score remained approximately stable.

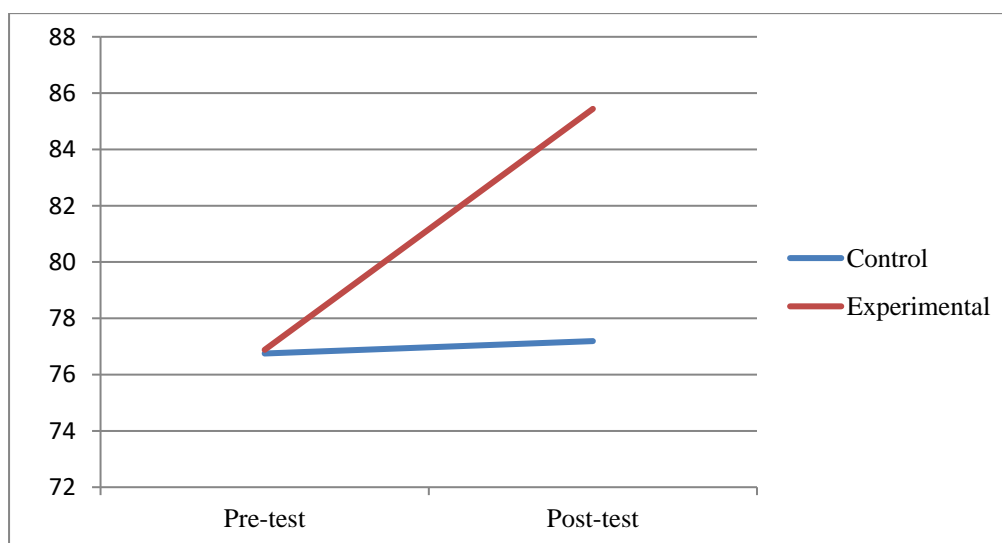


Figure 3. The comparison of each group's mean on WAT from pre-test to post-test

The data analysis of the qualitative stage

To answer the interview questions, the students in the experimental group were orally asked three questions. With regard to the first one, "How did you feel about experiencing narrow reading?" the majority of students (approximately 81.25 %) stated that narrow reading was more positive than negative, and the method was quite encouraging for them. As a case in point, one of the interviewees said "It is a good method. It helps to read

easily". However, a few number of the participants (18.75 %) found it boring as they had to read the same topic during the semester.

As for the second question, the participants were asked to talk about the positive aspects of narrow reading. Some of the participants (25%) mentioned that through the narrow reading they were more active during the classroom as they were supposed to continue reading the same topic. Additionally, 43.75 percent of the interviewees stated that they felt more involved during the narrow reading. "It's really interesting. I like to keep reading" said one of the interviewees. Further, five interviewees said it had been helpful for them and they had learned lots of vocabulary.

In the third question, the researcher asked about drawbacks of narrow reading. Three of the students (18.75 %) complained about the repetition and consequently boring nature of the reading the same topic throughout the semester. The rest of the participants (81.25 %) did not express any negative aspects.

Results of hypothesis testing

According to the results of the independent and paired *t* tests, the first null hypothesis that narrow reading has no significant effect on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of lexical depth was strongly rejected. The mean differences were significant in the *t* tests, both between the post-tests of the control and experimental groups as well as between the pre-test and post-test within the experimental group. The results indicated that the experimental group developed the knowledge of lexical depth on the post-test meaningfully. The results of control group confirmed this improvement since the mean difference in the control group from the pre-test to the post-test was not significant. This suggests that narrow reading takes priority over conventional techniques in enhancing lexical depth.

In the experimental group, the participants' knowledge of lexical depth improved significantly by practicing narrow reading; they boosted their mean score significantly (8.563 scores). In the control group, the participants improved their lexical depth mean scores slightly (0.44 score) through conventional instruction.

Regarding the second research question, it should be highlighted that although there were a few criticisms and complaints from the participants as to the nature of the narrow reading, the general attitude towards it was positive and promising. Most of the participants said that they enjoyed the narrow reading procedure of focusing on the same reading topic as they found it more interesting and motivating. As they expressed, they felt more involved.

DISCUSSION

General discussion

The results of this study showed that the participants' performance on the pre-test regarding knowledge of lexical depth was not satisfactory: the mean scores for both the control and experimental groups were 76.75 and 76.88 out of 160, respectively. Reading

had been taught and practiced conventionally in these classes. This implies that conventional instruction of reading may be one of the main reasons of lack of adequate knowledge of lexical depth in these classes.

However, they exhibited different behavior on the post-test. After introducing narrow reading and practicing it for a 2-month period, the groups were not homogeneous anymore in terms of lexical depth. In other words, on the post-test, the difference between experimental group's knowledge of lexical depth and the control group's was significant, with the participants of experimental group outperforming the participants of the control group.

Narrow reading had a positive significant impact on the intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of lexical depth. To put it another way, it makes a difference to the knowledge of lexical depth if reading is taught to the EFL learners through narrow reading or it is taught by conventional methods.

In general, it should be taken into consideration that since, in the experimental group, narrow reading led to a growth in the learners' knowledge of lexical depth on the post-test compared to the control group, it is rational to conclude that the narrow reading itself was the main reason for a growth in their knowledge of lexical depth. Moreover, as the difference was both significant and meaningful (8.25), it can be argued that narrow reading was a crucial factor in improvement of the participants' lexical depth.

Learners' attitudes toward using a new method (in this study narrow reading) can be valuable in helping teachers with how to adopt this method in teaching effectively (Barabadi & Khajavi, 2017). Therefore, in the present study, there had also been some findings obtained from the qualitative stage (semi-structured interviews) and the teacher's observation.

Therefore, the present study benefited from feedback from the participants as well. The followings are the major findings from the interviews with the participants of the experimental group:

- 1) Almost all of the participants stated that narrow reading helped them to improve their general English lexical knowledge. "This is a good method. It helps us to learn many vocabulary items. It is really useful." Said one of the interviewees.
- 2) Generally, the participants found narrow reading interesting; "It's really interesting and challenging. You have to read carefully about the same topic." Said an interviewee.
- 3) A few number of the participants found narrow reading boring. Another participant said: "It is repetitive. I read the same topic and the same vocabulary."
- 4) The attitudes toward narrow reading were more positive than negative. The following statements are produced by some of the interviewees: "I like the new method." and "It is interesting."
- 5) The participants tended to work in pairs. "Reading should be done in pairs or groups. I think, individually it would be a bit boring." said one of the interviewees.

- 6) The participants felt that narrow reading would make learning vocabulary much easier. "I don't need teachers any more. I can learn vocabulary better." said the other.

The present study is in line with the claim maintained by Rosado and Caro (2018), and Tavanpour and Biria (2017) in that there is a direct relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. However, unlike their studies which showed vocabulary instruction might bring about improvements in learners' lexical knowledge, the present study indicated that the relationship was the other way around. That is, narrow reading led to increase in the knowledge of lexical depth among the participants. Examining the effect of narrow reading on lexical depth, this study supported the claim made by Chang and Renandya's (2019) study, which investigated the impact of narrow reading on EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge using various types of graded readers. Their study showed that texts by the same author or random texts bring about acquiring more vocabulary words in comparison with texts of the same title.

The result also supported the assertion made by Krashen (2004) that narrow reading makes L2 acquisition easier since each writer has a particular style, uses specific pieces of language and grammatical structures, and each topic requires a fixed set of vocabulary. The findings of the qualitative part of this study are also in accord with Hanuvong and Sukavatee (2021). The result of their questionnaire and interview indicated that the students had positive feelings toward vocabulary learning through narrow reading. What is more, their study revealed that several interviewees had positive feeling toward the instruction.

It is worth highlighting that most of the participants perceived that narrow reading made them encounter with the same vocabulary items repeatedly. They believed that this helps them increase their word retention. Therefore, the findings of this study is compatible with Abdollahi and Farvardin's (2016) claim that narrow reading is considered an effective approach for vocabulary development, spatially for learners' vocabulary recall and retention.

This study is also in congruent with the study carried out by Chang and Renandya (2020) that reading texts form the same topic benefits various aspects of L2 learners' of linguistic knowledge, and enhances their interest and motivation to read more.

Pedagogical implications of the study

The findings obtained in the current study resulted in several pedagogical implications, which are invaluable for different stakeholders in the field of language teaching and learning.

The main implication of this study is that narrow reading is an effective method of language instruction due to the fact that it allows learners to see vocabulary repeatedly in a variety of familiar contexts.

To curriculum and materials developers as well as syllabus designers, the current study suggests that course books should provide EFL learners with reading texts of the same topic or theme, so that they are repeatedly exposed to specific vocabulary items in different contexts and consequently increase their knowledge of vocabulary depth.

The achieved results are also useful for teachers and teacher trainers to improve the condition and status of teaching lexical items through indirect and innovative methods, with paying specific attention to lexical depth in the context of teaching English.

Besides, as Nation (1990) argued lexical knowledge implies more than only knowing the meaning and form. It includes the meaning, written form, spoken form, grammatical behavior, collocations, register, associations, and the frequency of the word. Therefore, teachers should consider all these aspects of vocabulary in teaching lexical items.

Since the general attitude toward the narrow reading is positive, material developers and teachers could take advantage of it, where teaching vocabulary is not recommended in more traditional ways.

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