

The Effect of Extensive Reading on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge has indispensable function in learning and using a language. The number of words one knows is really important in how effectively s/he makes use of a particular language. Thus, the current study aimed at investigating the effect of reading on vocabulary learning of the Iranian EFL learners. Sixty female elementary level learners took part in this quasi-experimental study which lasted for one academic semester. The results of the study provided strong support for the effectiveness of reading in vocabulary acquisition. The effectiveness of reading might be due to “a richer grasp of the contextual meaning and use”, “the concurrency of the two activities of reading and vocabulary learning” and having “a more learner-centered learning atmosphere”.

Keywords: extensive reading, Iranian EFL learners, vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

Linguists, language teachers and psychologists have a desire for vocabulary learning strategies for long time. Vocabulary knowledge is of vital role in learning and using a language. It is basic access to language, and is the major step in learning a language. But language users are no good strategy users (Shoari & Farrokhi, 2014). The number of words you know is of active role in speaking or writing or reading in a foreign or second language. Accordingly, educators need to mind meaningful vocabulary tutoring for language learners. The more words you know the more you might be able to comprehend what you hear, and read, and thus you will be able to write efficiently. Learning vocabulary looks as an easy step in learning a language but in effect it is one of the trickiest things to do. It is even more challenging when it comes to foreign language learners with limited exposure to language and opportunity to use learnt words in genuine contexts. Consequently, they experience deep problems in language use. The number of studies which carried out on finding the most effective vocabulary learning strategies is evidence to the effective role of strategies in word acquisition (Yongqi Gu, 2003).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Vocabulary

Pikulski and Templeton (2004) state that words are vital part of life; they affected the knowledge of the world and will keep on doing so. Vocabulary is an essential constituent of language use. The significant effect of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been highlighted recently. In early 1930s, it was reported that there is close association between English word knowledge and achievement in life. There was high correlation between success in earning and management and vocabulary scores. When the vocabulary knowledge is not at adequate level people have difficulty in communicating their thoughts and ideas and this typically leads to physical aggressiveness. It can be claimed that low vocabulary is a type of imperfection (Shoari & Farrokhi, 2014). For understanding what one hears and reads and also with the intention of communicating effectively with other people vocabulary size is so crucial (Shoebottom, 2013).

On the importance of vocabulary knowledge in communication Wilkins (1972) states "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (as cited in Schmitt, 2010, p.3). As said by Schmitt a large vocabulary is required for anyone to use language in the most wanted way. Since people make use of language for communicating, handing over thoughts and sharing beliefs. Thus there is an essential point here;" the size of vocabulary "that might be appropriate for a language user to utilize language productively and without breakdowns, is of great importance. In English vocabulary size yields in putting limitation on the types of texts someone is able to read, put it another way there is close relationship between number of words one knows, and how well s/he is in diverse language skills (Nation & Meara, 2002, p. 46). On the significance of vocabulary, Krashen (1989) insisted that "a large vocabulary is of course, essential for mastery language"(as cited in Schmitt 2010, p.4). Rubin and Thompson (1994) on the role of vocabulary in communication have discussed: "One cannot speak, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words. Vocabulary is at the heart of mastering a foreign language".

Incidental vocabulary learning

There are two types of vocabulary learning incidental learning and intentional learning. In vocabulary learning, incidental learning at all times means the approach of learning vocabulary through texts, working on tasks or trying other activities that are not related to vocabulary in a straight line. On the contrary, the intentional learning at all times puts emphasis on vocabulary itself, and unites all kinds of conscious vocabulary learning strategies and means of memorizing words. Works on incidental vocabulary learning in the foreign language unsurprisingly involve subjects in extensive reading. One of the main objectives of extensive reading is to read for pleasure, which will optimistically result in general language development and enhancing the motivation (Krashen, 1994). The general language-learning procedure from extensive reading is incidental, with only some specific learning demands from the teacher (Widdowson, 1979). A number of

researchers propose that extensive reading is chiefly for the purpose of reinforcing partially known words in order that they may elevate to known words, rather than center on constructing new vocabulary (Nation & Wang, 1999).

Extensive reading

There are several studies on the effectiveness of the extensive reading on vocabulary development. Extensive reading is derived from the fixed idea that we learn to read by reading. This is right for learning to read our first language over and above foreign languages. In teaching foreign language reading, an extensive reading assists students to read again and again. The research influentially demonstrates that extensive reading raises vocabulary knowledge. It might not be unexpected that it aids students get better readers. Research in both L1 and L2 explains that we "learn to read by reading". The more language users read the better reader they will be. An essential part of this is learning new words. One of the main ways wherein vocabulary is learned is by means of reading. Learners come across the same words over and over in context, which give rise to vocabulary learning (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). While Read (2000) gives emphasis to the role of large vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension and its relationship with fluency, Richards and Renandya (2002) persist powerfully for including extensive reading in the second or foreign language core curriculum. There is currently forceful evidence that extensive reading can have significant impact on learners' second or foreign language development. According to Loucky (2003) wider extensive reading is supportive for lengthening exposure to the target language meanings and forms, while intensive reading serves to extend cognitive processing through learning and practicing specific lexical and reading comprehension.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

The current study aims at finding answer to the following questions:

- Research question: Does extensive reading enhance Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?
- Null hypothesis: There are no significant differences in the effect of extensive reading on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning.
- Alternative hypothesis: Iranian EFL Learners' vocabulary learning will be improved through extensive reading.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of sixty elementary language learners with an age range of 8-14 participated in this study. The participants were picked from Turkish backgrounds from 7 classes.

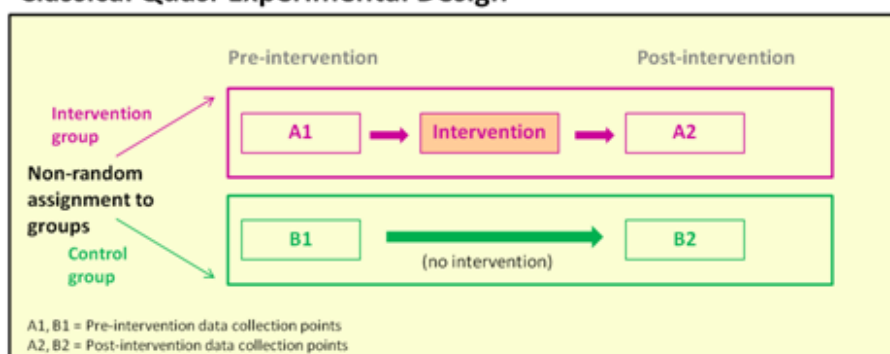
Context of Study

The participants were selected from *Irandoostan* institute. In this institute a course consists of 15 sessions which meet three times a week. "New Parade" series by Mario Herrera and Theresa Zanatta are the main source books there.

Design of the study

The design of the study is quasi-experimental, that is without random assignment. Typical experimental study includes a control group for the case of comparing the results of treatment. The independent variable of the research is extensive reading and the dependent variable is vocabulary learning.

Classical Quasi-Experimental Design



Instruments

For collecting quantifiable data, the researcher made use of the following instruments. One language proficiency test (PET) was run for assuring the proficiency level of the contributors. The other instrument was pre-test of vocabulary that was carried out for proving that there were not meaningful preexisting differences on the word knowledge of the participants. At the end of the study one post-test was performed on the pupils' vocabulary knowledge.

Procedure

Before starting the program language proficiency test was conducted to both groups, with the intention of guaranteeing their proficiency levels. Afterward one pre-test on vocabulary knowledge was done. Then the examiners started the program. The target words were from the source books of the participants. The words were worked on through extensive reading in the experimental group. But in control group the same words were taught through traditional instruction. That is new words and their meanings in learners' mother tongue were given in each session, and they were posed to memorize them. The students utilized dictionaries without any instruction. At the end of the study one post-test has been applied for measuring the effectiveness of the treatment. The collected data was analyzed by means of SPSS. Since there were two groups in the present study the researchers made use of t-test for comparing the results, and measuring the efficiency of the treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	16.7344	30	.73966	.13507
	Pretest	12.1655	30	1.17686	.21485

As indicated in the Table1, the experimental group of the study had a mean score of 12.16 ($SD=1.17$) in the Vocabulary pretest. The group, however, scored higher ($M=16.73$, $SD=0.73$) in the Vocabulary posttest. It is safe to argue that there was a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest to Posttest following the treatment sessions.

Table 2. Paired Samples 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 1	Posttest - Pretest	4.56661	1.00639	.18375	4.19092	4.94242	24.855	29	.000

Table 2 depicts that the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 4.56 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.19 to 4.94. It is also indicated that the mean increase in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t= (29) = 24.85$, $P= .000$). Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Posttest	12.8311	30	.91288	.16669
	Pretest	12.0322	30	1.06622	.19469

Table3 shows the descriptive statistics for the control group. By a brief look, it can be noticed that there was a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest ($M= 12.03$, $SD= 1.06$) to Posttest ($M= 12.83$, $SD=0.91$).

Table 4. Paired Samples Test-Control Group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest	.80000	.40688	.07424	.64806	.95194	10.779	29	.000

According to the Table, the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 0.80 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.64 to 0.95. The mean increase in the vocabulary

posttest was statistically significant ($t(29) = 10.77, P = .000$). In respect of the experimental group, the control group demonstrated much poor performance in the Vocabulary posttest though.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics-Pretest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	30	12.1655	1.17686	.21485
	Control	30	12.0333	1.06620	.19466

Table 5 depicts the descriptive statistics for the Vocabulary pretest. The experimental and control groups of the study had a mean score of 12.16 ($SD=1.17$) and 12.03 ($SD=1.06$) respectively. That is to say, the two groups did not perform differently in the pretest and they were harmonized in terms of their vocabulary performance.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test-Pretest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.057	.812	.460	58	.646	.13344	.28994	-.44703	.71370
Equal variances not assumed			.460	5.711	.646	.13344	.28994	-.44715	.71382

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 0.13 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.44 to .71. The results revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = .460, p = .647$. Therefore, the two groups performed homogeneously in the Vocabulary pretest.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics-Posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	30	16.7344	.73966	.13507
	Control	30	12.8311	.91288	.16669

According to the descriptive statistics shown in the Table, the experimental group performed much better than the control group in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean score for the former was 16.73 ($SD=0.73$) whereas for the latter the mean score is 12.83 ($SD=0.91$).

Table 8. Independent Samples Test-Posttest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.84	.097	18.171	58	.000	3.90000	.21431	3.47060	4.32927
Equal variances not assumed			18.171	55.610	.000	3.90000	.21431	3.47020	4.32947

Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of the two groups in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 3.90 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.47 to 4.32. The results revealed significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = 18.171, p = .000$. Therefore, the Null hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported. The results of the study provide strong support for the effectiveness of the extensive reading in vocabulary learning.

CONCLUSION

This small-scale research examined whether extensive reading has an important effect on vocabulary development of elementary level of the Iranian EFL learners. There might be interaction between vocabulary development and reading. The current study reported that extensive reading affects positively EFL learners' vocabulary development and it guarantees supplementary word learning albeit the participants were reluctant to learn English. The findings of the study indicate that extensive reading significantly improved the results. These findings are in agreement with that of Hafiz and Tudor (1989) and Raemer (1996).

The claims of Davis (1995) also are supported here, he discusses that extensive reading might be supplementary class library scheme put together to an English course wherein learners are given the "time, encouragement and materials "to read enjoyably at their own level. Nevertheless, there were some limitations. It more often than not reading causes noise and thus students were sometimes experience difficulty focusing on the works. Anyhow there were also other limitations like the gender of the participants and their proficiency level, which put limitation on the generalizability of the findings. Time on tasks was also another issue; it means more time was needed for reading the texts in desired manner.

The current study recommends some points which need to be taken into consideration by teachers and educators. Reading is one of the four language skills that second or foreign language learners are supposed to obtain in their language learning process. The

ability to read is seen as the steadiest and durable for the second or foreign language skills (Rivers, 1981). Through learning through reading in effect we kill two birds with one stone: learning vocabulary and improving reading skill together. Reading is important by itself because; it is of crucial role to function in the societies; it develops the minds, and discovers new things. Thus, through applying reading as a tool for vocabulary learning, not only learners obtain words which are building blocks of language learning and use but also they get successful readers, and consequently effective language learners and users.

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