The Effectiveness of the Text Familiarity on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learner’s Novel Lexical Achievement through Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT: This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of text familiarity on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learner’s Novel Lexical Achievement through Reading Comprehension. In this study, 80 learners participated in Shokoh English institute in Lahijan, Guilan, Iran. Having being homogenized by an OPT test, and they were randomly divided into two groups of 40, control and experimental. Then both groups took a pre-test, which included a reading comprehension with 30 number of multiple choice vocabulary items, The purpose of this test was to measure the learners knowledge of vocabulary knowledge ability. Afterwards, the experimental group received treatment based on raising awareness of reading comprehension for vocabulary learning. But, the control group received no treatment. The treatment procedure took 10 sessions. After treatment a post test was administrated in both groups to ensure the effectiveness of the treatment in the experimental group. Then the statistical analysis was run through one way ANCOVA. It was explored from the study that vocabulary learning ability improves more when they are provided with raising awareness of reading comprehension. However, this study provides a significant contribution in curriculum innovation and policy with respect to the learners’ vocabulary learning development.

Key words: Reading Comprehension, Novel Lexical Meaning, Text Familiarity, Social Schema

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary has a great significance for language learners. Words are the building blocks of a language since label objects, actions, ideas without which people can convey the intended meaning. The ability to read and to decode written words effectively is vital to functioning in everyday life. With the introduction of a schema approach to reading, EFL students are given the opportunity to enhance their lexical item meaning due to contextualized instruction. In recognizing the readers in the reading process, researchers in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition have investigated the important role of readers’ prior knowledge in reading outcomes (Carrell, 1987; Chen & Donin, 1997; Krekeler, 2006; Lesser, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Tsui, 2002; Wu, 2005). So it is concluded, knowledge of contextualized meanings of words develops as learners have awareness of context. Familiarity with the topics indicates which students can comprehend and recall more important and correct textual information better than those who are unfamiliar with the content of the text, which indicates that prior knowledge exerts a positive effect on measures of reading comprehension. Many theories of learning especially the ones which emerged from prior knowledge framework utilized text familiarity can comprehend in improving vocabulary learning.

Familiarity with the topics indicates which students can comprehend and recall more important and correct textual information better than those who are unfamiliar with the content of the text. There are many unknown words in one text. Then, subsequent textual pieces of information must be taken into account and be integrated with previous information. This can be done using information contained within the text and learner knowledge sources because these factors can influence processing and help determine the availability of textual clues to inference. So in the learning of reading, it is assumed that learner knowledge sources interact with text. Just as students’ prior knowledge about particular concepts facilitates comprehension, a lack of knowledge about concepts within a text can have an inappropriate impact on understanding. Reading is the most important activity in any language class. It enables the learners to work at their own pace and to increase their world knowledge. This thesis explores the role of text familiar in influencing Iranian learner’s vocabulary knowledge. With the introduction of this topic, EFL students are given the opportunity to enhance their lexical item meaning due to contextualized instruction.
Theoretical Framework

Vygosky (1978) believed that language is as a social and cultural basic, accordingly, development of language facility to enhance improvement of the cognitive process. Also this theory stressed on cultural and social environment. According to Carrell (1981), the text must activate, in the reader, all of the appropriate cognitive schemata in order to be comprehended. When reading a story with a familiar theme, especially one from the native culture, L2 readers might more easily activate the appropriate background concepts and hence more efficiently process the text. Not only is it important for the reader to have the background knowledge to read more efficiently, but that knowledge also needs to be activated. So having awareness is important to readers in the function of elaborating a text and making inferences from it. Lee & Van Patten (1999) remarks the deeper explanation of schema and their important role on learners. Eskey’s socio-cognitive view of L2 reading (1986) is explored. Implications from this theory are proved to be of significance for the affirmation that schema, or background knowledge, plays a crucial role in text interpretation. Oller’s Episode Theory of Language (1983) emphasized the importance of the social world and schemata already formed by the L2 reading. There are two views: the socio-psycholinguistic view and the word recognition view (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). These two help us to better understand the reading process in general. In particular the socio-psycholinguistic view will support the emphasis on social context of lexical items in a new text. Lee (1987) also demonstrates, through empirical evidence, the reasoning for a socio-psycholinguistic view.

Statement of the Problem

Vocabulary is a major obstacle to many students. Most of the students are faced with the problem lack of word storage. Learners usually complain about lexical meaning problems in reading, translating, and even simple writing. The direct link between vocabulary and reading has been made in L2 research in that vocabulary enhances reading comprehension and reading in turn increases vocabulary knowledge. It was reported that L2 learners are often reluctant to read (Day & Bamford, 1998) because they regard reading as an unpleasant and painful process to the extent that the lack of reading leads to the lack of vocabulary that is a big problem for L2 learners. Furthermore, it is necessary for EFL/ESL learners to read without using dictionary to enjoy reading and overcome the feeling of frustration by unknown words. The main objective of this study is to investigate whether students interpret the meaning of novel lexical items when they are presented in social schema in reading. In view of this, vocabulary acquisition is currently receiving attention in second language pedagogy and research. One of the vocabulary learning problems is misconception or misunderstanding. In the process of learning, it should be meaningful. In meaningful learning, learners can relate the new learned items with their background information. Hence learning vocabularies can increase by contextual reading (understanding how a word’s meaning adapts to different contexts). Sometimes learners exposed to new words and they tend to learning through de-contextual learning. It involves deliberate learning and memorized words (out of context) by the list of the words. Another problem is the lack of background knowledge on the text discussed. Anderson & Lynch (2000) believed lack of background knowledge can cause obstacle to comprehension. This indicates that background knowledge plays an important role in interpreting meaning. So it’s claimed every piece of new data should be linked to the previous blocks to be fined in the mind’s learners.

Recently, there was done a study on the relationship between learner vocabularies learning ability through different manners in Iran. Mr. Naraghizadeh, and Barimani (2013) cited some technical subjects are not satisfactorily learned until students study relevant text books English. In addition to Atef, Maftoo, and Zahedi (2013) examined effect topic familiarity (TF), passage sight vocabulary (PSV) and L2 lexical inference in Iranian EFL context. They cited this nature increase understanding of individual differences and variability found in L2 and consequently further expand knowledge about the nature and impact of reader-based variables. In a similar research, Mr. Pour Hossein (2011) investigated the effect of text familiarity on Iranian learner’s Listening Comprehension. Most of the studies which have done about vocabulary learning, related to improving vocabulary learning and its relevant instruction, little research has focused on effect familiar text about vocabulary learning. This study reveals some common problems in learning vocabulary which often occur among intermediate EFL learners in Iran in novel lexical meaning. These discussions can also facilitate the development of independent word-solving strategies in students. In this study, the researcher surveyed learning novel vocabulary through familiar reading to see if it can be an effective way among Iranian intermediate students as EFL learners.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the effect text familiarity on novel lexical meaning learning Iranian learners through reading comprehension. This study was driven by the need to determine the problems that students face to read a text. Specifically, this study was carried out in order to investigate if reading comprehension could be improved by providing the necessary background knowledge. Knowing the context of
the reading text can help learners decrease the burden of learning unfamiliar words. The researcher will be conducted whether vocabulary learning will be improved by background or not.

At the pedagogical level, the result of this research may be useful for teachers, students, researchers, and course book designers to pay more attention to L2 vocabulary teaching techniques. The present study is an attempt to benefit for practical implication and application of the impact of vocabulary learning on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners.

**Research Questions**

The following questions have been considered to examine in this study:

1-Does text familiarityy has any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners’ Novel Lexical Meaning Achievement through Reading Comprehension?

2-Does text familiarities make any difference between Iranian Female and Male intermediate EFL Learners' Novel Lexical Meaning Achievement through Reading Comprehension?

**The Hypotheses of the study**

Base on the mentions before, the following null hypothesis were formulated:

H1: Text Familiarity does not have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' Novel Lexical Meaning Achievement through Reading Comprehension.

H2: Text Familiarity does not make any difference between Iranian Female and Male intermediate EFL Learners' Novel Lexical Meaning Achievement through Reading Comprehension.

**METHODOLOGY**

This part introduces the method of the study. It mentions the design of the study, the subjects who participated in the experiment, the instrumentation, procedures and statistical analysis. The design of the study was quasi-experimental design, which is a pre-test and post-test design.

**Participants**

The subjects who took part in the study, included 80 Iranian EFL learners, all participants were non-native English speaking undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Shokoh English institute in Lahijan, Guilan, Iran. All the students at the Intermediate level at English Institute. The participants reported having studied English between 4-6 years. They were between fourteen to twenty two years old who were selected randomly based on the result of an OPT administered. Both male and female students participated, 18 of them were males and others were females.

**MATERIALS**

**Oxford Placement Test**

OPT test measures learners’ ability to communicate in English. It gives the instructors the information they need to find out about a person's language level. Usually before enrolling in one of the English language courses, learners have to take a placement test which will help the teachers to identify the learner's level of English proficiency. So it can apply as criteria for arranging groups homogenously. In this study, the OPT test was administered at the beginning of the study to find the knowledge of vocabulary ability.

**Vocabulary test**

This test was used in order to examine learners' knowledge of vocabulary. In second or foreign language learning research, tests are generally used to collect data about the subject's ability and knowledge of the language in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, meta linguistic awareness, and general proficiency (Seliger and Shohamy 1989). The main purpose of using a vocabulary test in this study was to measure the learners’ ability in knowledge of vocabulary.

In fact this test constituted of 40 multiple choice vocabulary questions that the students just should answer it without any preparation for the exam. The reliability of the test was estimated to be 0.8. An OPT test covered the areas of vocabulary proficiency. Test consisted of forty Multiple Choice vocabulary items picked out from Essential Words for TOEFL (Barron’s, 2007). The subjects in both groups were screened and equated as far as their proficiency levels were concerned. Then a pre-test was demonstrated. Finally, a posttest of vocabulary was administered to both groups to find out the effectiveness of the treatment.
Procedure

A vocabulary test, as an OPT test, was administrated to check the level of proficiency. Then students were randomly divided into two groups, experimental (NE=40), and control group (NC=40). Then a pre test was given to the participants, which included a reading comprehension with 30 number of multiple choice vocabulary items. The purpose of this test was to assess the initial knowledge of the subjects under investigation. The control group received no treatment and teaching vocabulary. After the pre test was administrated, the treatment lessons were administrated on the experimental group based on familiar texts reading comprehension. The treatment lessons carried out 5 weeks, about 60 minutes. At the end of 10 sessions of treatment a post test, was administrated in order to measure progress from pre-test to post-test and the effectiveness of the treatment in the experimental group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

This study investigated the effectiveness of familiar texts on novel vocabulary learning through reading comprehension on Iranian EFL Intermediate learners. In this chapter the descriptive statistics will handled through measuring mean and standard deviation (SD). Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and SPSS software will be used to test the hypotheses.

Data Analysis and Findings

First, the following the hypotheses were examined:
1-Liner relationship between the two variables, pre-test and post-test, that was examined through spread plots.
2-Equality of variances
3-Homogenity of regression

In order to examine liner relationship between the two variables, the graph 4-1 is examined. Graph 1 show, the regression lines are parallel, so there is a liner relationship between the two variables in both groups is the same.

The graph 1: The amount of novel vocabulary learning on effectiveness of familiar texts on novel vocabulary learning two variables in both groups, pre-test and post-test.

![Graph showing the relationship between pre-test and post-test](image)

The amount of correlation between the two variables is showed in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Vocabulary learning (post-test)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary learning pre-test</td>
<td>0.484**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p**</.01
The result of correlation shows that there is significance relationship between two variables. Therefore, using of ANCOVA is possible.

**Descriptive Analysis of the Data**

Statistical characteristic of the result of the T test and two variables, pretest and post test in both of the groups and the result of is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Statistical characteristic of the T test and pre-test variable and post-test variable dependent in experimental and control group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>control</td>
<td>14.70</td>
<td>2.709</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.2000</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>2.417</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>.2000</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre-test)</td>
<td>control</td>
<td>14.903</td>
<td>3.0025</td>
<td>.47475</td>
<td>-7.47500</td>
<td>-13.406</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Post-test)</td>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>22.37</td>
<td>1.8492</td>
<td>.29240</td>
<td>-7.47500</td>
<td>-13.406</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result shows that there is a significant difference between students' performance in experimental group (M=22.37) comparing to control group (M=14.90). As it is clear this difference is statistically significance (t=13.406, p=0.000). But there is not a significant difference in the pre-test scores.

**Table 4-3 shows the dependent variable which is novel vocabulary learning. The data demonstrates that the means of the experimental group (M=22.466) are higher than the of the control group (M=14.809).**

**Table 3.** Mean and equal mean of dependent variable novel vocabulary learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Equal mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14.9000</td>
<td>3.00256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>22.3750</td>
<td>1.84929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table 4-4 and table 4-5 demonstrate the comparing result pre-test and post-test between experimental group and control group.

**Table 4.** The result of comparing of Novel vocabulary learning in control and experimental in pretest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental (Pre-test)</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** The result of comparing of Novel vocabulary learning in control and experimental in post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>47.78</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental (Post-test)</td>
<td>22.37</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>47.78</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is clear, there is no significant difference between mean score of novel vocabulary learning in the pre-test and the post-test of the control group (t=1.84, p=0.073). But there is significant difference in mean score of novel vocabulary learning of the post-test in the experimental (t=47.78, p=0.000). So the experimental group, who received treatment, has better scores in vocabulary learning.

**Table 6.** Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of Novel vocabulary learning in control and experimental group by eliminating subjects' effect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novel Vocabulary learning</td>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1170.914</td>
<td>1586.748</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interval</td>
<td></td>
<td>56.821</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it can be seen, in this model F is statistically significant and meaningful. The result ($F(1, 57) = 1586.748, P = 0.000, \eta = 0.954$) indicates that there is a significant and meaningful difference between scores participants of experimental and control group. As a result, the first hypothesis of this study was rejected and the text familiarity has proved to have a positive effect on Novel Vocabulary learning.

![Estimated Marginal Means of post test](image)

Figure 2. The graph of the mean of vocabulary learning between the control and the experimental group in post test.

The second hypothesis of this study examined whether there is significant difference between male and female learners in vocabulary learning through text familiarity comprehension. The T test between the female and male data is demonstrated in table 4-7.

Table 7. The sum of result of t test vocabulary learning between female and male in experimental group in pre-test and post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.72</td>
<td>2.2292</td>
<td>.4752</td>
<td>.50505</td>
<td>.652</td>
<td>.518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>2.6691</td>
<td>.6291</td>
<td>.50505</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.4222</td>
<td>.22727</td>
<td>-.382</td>
<td>-.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>1.7235</td>
<td>.40624</td>
<td>.22727</td>
<td>-.382</td>
<td>-.382</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 4.7 there was no significance between mean score of the pre-test and the post-test between males ($M=22.5, SD=1.72$) and females ($M=22.27, SD=1.98$). So the second hypothesis that there is not significant differences between the post-test scores of males and females in the experimental group was accepted.

RESULTS OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The results of the present study seem not to support the first hypothesis formulated in this research. The first is, the use of text familiarity through reading comprehension practicing does not affect the novel vocabulary learning achievement of EFL learners. The statistical result showed that there is a positive effect of the use of a text familiarity through reading comprehension on the achievement of novel vocabulary learning. Also, a round of t-test was conducted in order to find out if there is a significant difference between female and
male participants in their post-test. The results obtained from this T test have shown that the second formulated hypothesis of this research is supported.

**DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of this study explores is to examine the effect of text familiarity on new lexical meaning learning through reading comprehension. Base on Varity of studies and researches, there are different views toward vocabulary learning. A word’s definition, words can be learned through context and not only through explaining word definition. As it has seen from the aforementioned researchers, background knowledge and a schema have a positive role in L2 learning. Through the reading model and examples of studies it is clear that there are implications that the concept of background prior knowledge in terms of the social environment of the L2 reader is very important to their motivation. Coady and Carrel have concluded through their approaches, notion of background knowledge and schema is relevant to the learning process of novel L2 vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. As learners are able to communicate with their world knowledge in social world of the L2; therefore, they successfully achieve more lexical items than if they had not been activating their social schemata. Nation (1990) also believes that" most vocabulary learning will occur as a result of language activities that do not focus particularly on vocabulary"(p.192). Also, Brown (2000) puts it: “engagement in problem solving requires in- depth exploration of the materials and affords multiple opportunities for students to create rich problem representations through discussion and application of problem solving strategies” (p.391). In this method the process of learning will be meaningful. This finding is compatible with some of the empirical studies conducted earlier and reported. Lastly, all of the above lead to the role of learning through context and effect of text familiarity plays on comprehension of L2 reading and better learning new lexical meaning.

**Implications**

This study implies more complex cognitive processes by the learner who is actively seeking meaning as opposed to more memorization of a list of words, which conforms to its “opposite” strategy of de-contextualized vocabulary learning. The findings of this study will path the way for progress in second language learning. New vocabulary learning through familiar texts reading has been presented in order to provide an effective method to the improving in the field of education system. This method can be a problemsolving task to increase learning in long term memory. Also, it can be an applicable method of conveying new information in order to learners expand and learn lexical items by learning through contextualized vocabulary exercises. Moreover, it canimprovement motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and their reading comprehension.

This study can be an applicable technique for language teachers and researchers in foreign language teaching in order to help curriculum developers and syllabus designers through which they will be able to plan the course books to enhance vocabulary learning and will feel more confidence in acquisition L2. The findings obtained in this study may lead to some implications which are beneficial for language teachers and students in an EFL context.

**Suggestions for future study**

The researchers can adopt more tests for further research and provide a richer picture of the types of word knowledge that learners can acquired. The purpose of this study is to find an appropriate educational system in using a familiar text on novel learning vocabulary meaning. Also it is suggested that for having more efficient vocabulary learning students discuss with their teacher and the teacher allow to students to read material which they are interested in. In addition to, beyond the scope of this study, a productive structure is suggested .This materials can be explored as a future study and for next researchers by examining on grammar through context for advanced level.

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