Effect of self-assessment on Iranian EFL learners’ reading skill and vocabulary Knowledge

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ABSTRACT: This study was done with the intention of finding the effect of self-assessment on reading skill and vocabulary Knowledge. To accomplish the objective of the study, 192 intermediate EFL learners were chosen after going through an Oxford placement test and then participated in the study. One week after, the participants were given the TOEFL reading and vocabulary tests. The tests had two sections, one was the reading section which they were supposed to do it in 15 minutes and the other section was the vocabulary test which they were supposed to finish it in 20 minutes. A week later, the researcher gave the participants the self-assessment questionnaire to fill in. The participants were supposed to check the number 0-10 for each item in the questionnaire to express how much they agreed or disagreed with the items. After extracting the data from the questionnaires, the data was analyzed by SPSS software. To analyze data Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was applied. The results showed that self-assessment had a significant effect on reading and no impact on vocabulary.

Keywords: Self-assessment, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, reading skill.

INTRODUCTION

Students need to know what their abilities are, how much progress they are making and what they can (or cannot yet) do with the skills they have acquired. John Upshur (1990) was one of the first who provided a rationale for the use of self-assessment in the measurement of the second language abilities. He pointed out that learners have access their success and failure in the use of the second language, whereas any test of actual language use can sample only a small proportion of that ability.

Reading comprehension is one of the issue with which not only many students but also many other teachers have been involved during their educational period and one of the factor that has an evident impact on this phenomena, is self-assessment, that is, these two factors should be confirmed whether has a so called causal relationship with each other. Self-assessment is among the best possible formative types of assessment and possibly the most rewarding, but it must be carefully designed and administered for them to reach their potential. (Brown, 2004)

The benefits of reading widely and relatively long texts are enormous for students with a relatively high level of proficiency and self-assessment in the language. The most typical use of reading in a foreign language class is to teach the language itself.” In this way, vocabulary, structures and other things can be learnt through reading in a foreign language and to extend command over that particular language (Nuttall, 1982, p. 19).Elley & Manghubai (1983) write that the effect of differences between learning of mother language and second language, in formal education, can be eliminated by means of a reading program based on the use of an abundance of high – interest illustrated story books and that high – interest story reading has an important role to play in second language learning. The pupils which, in their study, were exposed to wider reading progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate.

“Everything we do with language improves our comprehension of what we read” (Fry, 1965, p. 127). Practice in writing improves reading comprehension as the accuracy and power of expression are important. Hudelson (1984) writes that classroom practices in literacy for ESL children are not kept up with research. Even children who speak virtually no English read English print in the environment and ESL learners are able to read English with only limited control over the oral system of the language. Pigada& Schmitt (2006) write that the studies that claim that second language learners acquire vocabulary in small amount through reading used only short texts and measured only the acquisition of meaning. Such studies did not credit partial learning of words. They explored whether an extensive reading program can enhance lexical knowledge or not and assessed 133 words. They examined whether one month of extensive reading enhanced knowledge of these target words’ spelling, meaning, and grammatical characteristics. The results showed that knowledge of 65% of the target
words was enhanced in some way. Spelling was strongly enhanced, even from a small number of exposures. Meaning and grammatical knowledge were also enhanced, but not to the same extent. Overall, the study indicated that much vocabulary acquisition is possible from extensive reading than previous studies have suggested. A research, on the teaching of foreign language, by American Council shows that learning a new language enhances and enriches a child’s mental development and has positive effect on his intellectual growth. “Linguistic skills require completing of four steps – speaking, listening, reading and writing. Ignoring any of these four skills cannot give the child an accurate know – how of the language.” A useful way to promote linguistic skills is to read a story in the classroom to make students familiar with the flow, pronunciation and rhythm of the language. The teacher, after a reading session, can write difficult words of a story to give students an assignment of making sentences or just finding out the meanings of those words (Patel, 2008).

METHOD

This study includes all students of Rasht Azad University majoring English translation who were 1100 individuals. By means of Morgan table 285 students with the age range of 19-28 were randomly selected by simple sampling and then they were tested by Oxford placement test to determine their levels, and ultimately 192 of them were chosen to contribute the study.

The participants were reminded that their participation in this study had an effect on their final score that related to reading comprehension. In addition, they were also told that their scores on the tests would remain confidential as far as they themselves wanted to be informed about their real level in English.

Instrumentation

For collecting the needed data for the present study the researcher has used the following instruments:

1-Oxford Placement Test
2-Self-assessment Questionnaire
3-TOEFL Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary tests

To identify the level of the students participating in the study an Oxford placement test (Allan, 2008) has been used by the researcher to pick up the ones at intermediate level of proficiency. The result of this placement test has been calibrated to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels (A1-C2), the Cambridge ESOL Examinations, and other International Examinations, that is the results were compared with the references in the book. This placement test is a standardized validated and reliable placement test, which uses Inter-rater reliability, being used by prestigious schools and universities all around the world. The self-assessment questionnaire utilized in the present study has been developed by Cengage Learning EMEA in the United Kingdom. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.7 by Cronbach’s alpha formula.

The questionnaire includes 64 items with no subscale. This questionnaire is designed as a Likert scale of eleven choices numbered from 0-10 as such: Totally agree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 totally disagree. The detailed information on the reliability of the questionnaire is available in appendix1. By utilizing this questionnaire the researcher was able to understand the amount of using self-assessment by the language learners.

TOEFL reading comprehension and vocabulary tests used in this study have been extracted from the books: TOEFL Reading Flash and TOEFL Word Flash (Broukal, 2005) Published by Peterson’s. As far as all the material have been copied from the books mentioned the tests are content valid. The reliability of them has been calculated 0.6 and 0.7 respectively. The vocabulary tests were of multiple choice format including four options for each item.

The vocabulary test used in this study included 25 items. This point should be mentioned that all the tests were paper-based and the participants were supposed to check the correct option on the answer sheets provided. The reading comprehension test included two passages, each composed of at least 300 hundred words, with reading comprehension questions in multiple choice formats.

In this study because self-assessment was used as independent variable and reading and vocabulary as dependent variables, we had to apply MANOVA. MANOVA is applied in a study that the effect of one or more independent variables on two or more dependent variables is studied. It shows the combining effect through wilk’s Lambda.

RESULT

Table1 . Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dF1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dF2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Box's Test, we can see that, $F(2, 141) = 1.51$, Sig = 0.21 it's not significant because Sig. Value is larger than 0.001.

Equality of Covariance Matrices is confirmed and our assumption is not violated.

Table 2. Levine's test of equality of error variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Score</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We compare the score variance of student's at vocabulary and reading test and find that they haven't any significant difference.

This test is one of the Pre supplies of MANOVA. If Leven's test is significant (P < 0.5) we are not allowed to apply test of MANOVA and we should apply Non-parametric tests. But the variance is the same and we are allowed to apply test of MANOVA.

As it is shown in the table the value of Levene's F is not significant statistically (P > 0.05). Therefore the difference between the variances is not significant statistically thus we are allowed to apply test of Analysis of Variance.

Table 3. The rate of effect based on Wilk's Lambda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>freedom of error</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilk's Lambda</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>34.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows self-assessment has a significant effect on vocabulary and reading in a combined variable (F (1, 190) = 34.22, P < 0.01 Wilk's Lambda = 0.268). That is self-assessment has an effect on vocabulary and reading in a combined variable. So the effect of self-assessment in each of variable of vocabulary and reading is studied.

Self-assessment has an effect on Reading skill

Table 4. The results of effect of self-assessment on Reading skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Resources changes</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>117.42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>117.42</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td></td>
<td>3466.19</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that self-assessment has an effect on Reading (P < 0.01 and F (1, 190) = 6.64). Thus we can conclude that, although our hypothesis says, self-assessment dose not significantly influence Iranian EFL learner's reading skill, it is not confirmed.

In other words, self assessment has an effect on Iranian EFL learners Reading skill.

Self-assessment has an effect on Vocabulary knowledge

Table 5. The results of effect of self-assessment on Vocabulary knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Resources changes</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.65</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that self-assessment has no effect on vocabulary (P > 0.16 and F (1, 190) = 2.03). Thus we can conclude that, as our hypothesis says self-assessment dose not significantly influence Iranian EFL learner's vocabulary knowledge, it is confirmed.

Although our results say that self-assessment in a combined variable has an effect on two independent variables (Vocabulary and Reading skill) but results show that self-assessment has an effect on reading skill but has not any effect on vocabulary knowledge.

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

Self-assessment and its importance and impacts on reading specially reading comprehension, Is one of the concerns of teachers in modern approaches of language learning is. It is obvious that teachers should provide opportunities for students to assess their language level so as to help them focus on their own learning. We should consider that self assessment has gained popularity in recent years and its potential value as an instructional tool as well as a measurement tool has been a topic of much discussion. To analyze the first research question,
we can say that one of the main discussions about reading skill is teaching and ultimately self-assessment respect to whatever we have learned. As the study showed, self-assessment influence reading skill since individuals can assess it by a good quality of learning and creating an equal chance for different students in different levels, and by that make a suitable situation to fulfill their talents.

To analyze this question, we can say that, people should be familiar with vocabularies. Words are divided into lexis and reading words (The words that are recognized during the reading.) Spoken language is formed at the birth time and the reading words are formed when children start their reading. The children with a high ability of vocabulary are more successful in reading.

Knowing more words has a great role in reading skill, since for getting whatever children read, they must know the meaning of the words. Thus, we can conclude that self-assessment can have a significant effect on vocabulary. That is not only self-assessment is a suitable predictor in improvement of reading skills in future education, but also it can fruitful for learning the language sounds. Self-assessment may also make possible for children to learn key-words and based on those words they can distinguish the difference between spoken and written words and so that children would be able to compare them together. In other words, self-assessment increases their motivation, energy and level of activities.

To explain this question that self-assessment influence reading skill and vocabulary in a compound variable we can say that reading skill has a great role in students' success. The children who reads well, are more successful in learning other different sciences, but weak readers are not so. some of the researchers have classified the reading stages based on age, talent and educational levels. Others categorized them according to the growth of the mussel. Actually the more vocabulary they know the easier they get the reading skills, since a high lexis makes reading simpler. Therefore by means of self-assessment children can access the meaning of the texts much easier, and these meanings will help the readers to get even the pronunciation of the words. As a result, the readers get familiar with the words and teachers use these patterns and pictorial materials as well to help students improve and increase their reading skills and range of vocabularies.

This study is going to show the effect of self-assessment on reading skill and vocabulary. The obtained results show that self-assessment does not have any effect on increase and improvement of vocabularies but it has a great role in reading skill, so we can conclude two general conclusions: firstly, this study has shown the impact of self-assessment for improving the reading skills based on empirical evidences and ecology. Most of theorists in learning (such as Marshal 1982) believe that phonological skills are the prerequisite and basis of reading abilities in people. Therefore learning of them at the beginning stage of reading is very important.

Secondly, this study has prepared a scientific and technical basis for teaching self-assessment in reading skill with high quality. During ten years ago, the project for teaching phonology "based on empirical evidences" has been prepared, which shows the impacts of these programs to improve the reading skills in children who have problem to read. (Blackman 2003) so that, the researchers will be able to guide children to read better by organized studied. Actually, the obtained results may help teachers and psychologist for disordered readers, so that they can treat them by means of new educational approaches based on accurate empirical evidences which are one of the commonest neural – behavioral disorders among students.

To present an approved result, it is started by research questions. Afterward the results of each question are mentioned. To analyze the first question that says does self-assessment influence Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge? We can say, according to the results of chapter four, self-assessment has not any significant effect on vocabulary knowledge and our hypothesis is confirmed (P>0.16).

To analyze the second question that says does self-assessment influence Iranian EFL learners' reading skill? We can say, according to table of 4-3 in chapter four, self-assessment has an effect on reading skill and our hypothesis is not confirmed (P<0.01). Therefore it can be mentioned that self-assessment has a great effect on learning and strengthening phonological skills in increasing the accuracy and speed of reading words in individuals. Accuracy and fluency also can be helpful for improvement and ability of individuals in reading skill.

Based on the research and results, self – assessment had an impact on reading and vocabulary in combination, but it did not have any effect on vocabulary separately.

REFERENCES

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