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**Research Article****The Effect of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension**

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**ABSTRACT**

Current study aimed at investigating the effect of NLP techniques (rapport, maintaining flow and reframing) on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level. To this aim, the study benefited from quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design. Sample of this study consisted of 60 female Iranian EFL learners of a Language institute at intermediate level. Sampling of this study was convenient sampling because the two available intact groups (30 people in each class) were selected to participate in the study in the absence of random sampling. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test were run. Results of the current study showed that there is a significant effect for NLP techniques on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level. These findings refer to the effectiveness and importance of NLP techniques in the realm of education in general and language learning in particular.

**Keywords:** Neuro-Linguistic (NLP); EFL Learners; Reading Comprehension



## Introduction

In the history of language teaching and learning, researchers and scholars have been seeking for improvement and excellence. Educators have proposed various methods, different techniques, variety of materials, and trained qualified teachers to enhance learning and educational environments. More importantly, come and go of different teaching methods is a sign of seeking excellence and improvement in the realm of language teaching/learning. In seeking the so-called excellence and improvement in the sphere of education in general and language teaching in particular, a set of techniques called Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) have been borrowed from psychology. Originally NLP was proposed by Richard Bandler and John Grinder (1975), generally in the sphere of psychology and specifically in the context of client treatment to be used by psychiatrists. It was used to enhance the independence and self-confidence of those clients who had problem in building relationships with the others.

Generally, Neuro-linguistic programming conveys the point that our actions and words should be planned in a way that our experience and life is shaped in an efficient way through using our five senses and nervous system. Here the role of our choices is very important, because our choices, especially our words influence on our communication quality. And it is believed that by the right uses of words and building a high-quality relationship with the others, it is possible to reach our full potential and capability.

However, in its first appearance, NLP just attracted therapists, then gradually in the passage of time, it became popular among the experts of other fields such as business, art, education, etc. More importantly, because NLP was introduced without an interdisciplinary application in mind, it was used in various fields based on the perceptions of the experts of NLP principles and that is why there is no standard given way of applying NLP which works in different fields.

According to Bandler and Grinder (1975), NLP consists of eight techniques namely anchoring, reframing, mirroring, creating rapport, maintaining flow, pacing leading, perceptual positioning and modeling good practice which are briefly described below so that reader gains a better insight in NLP.

- Anchoring means recouring to a memory or event in the past which created the same state in us. Technically speaking, it is invoking an external stimulus for the activation of an internal state.



- Reframing means that always new ways and things, should be sought and followed, not the old ones. And in this process, even new uses can be made out of old things and every alternative which may work should be tried.
- Mirroring, as the name speaks for itself, involves reflecting the others' behaviors including their words, lexical phrases, gestures, facial states, etc to have a better interaction with them. This is somehow the same with simulation and it means that to build a better relationship with the others their behaviors and words can be stimulated.
- Rapport is tuning into the word of learners or intentionally creating harmony between the teachers and learners. This is creating harmony on the part of teachers so that students feel comfortable in the class and express their ideas freely.
- Maintaining flow, consistent with Czikzentmihaly's flow theory, is achieved by providing an atmosphere wherein learners feel a sense of control over classroom events and by giving them positive feedback. Simply, it means that students should be involved with the class events and don't feel alien in the class.
- Pacing leading requires the learners to first accept the teacher's view and then give their own point of view. Contrary to the previous case, this means creating harmony on the part of learners and accepting their teachers' views.
- Perceptual positioning involves mediation of a third party to solve the problem. This view has been taken from mediation theory and in education field, it means involvement of the other class members for any dispute between the teacher and his/her student to be settled. However, here by dispute any kind of misunderstanding is meant, not a physical one.
- Modeling good practice or modeling what excellent people do involves following the strategies, behaviors and activities of successful others. Here it means that to be more successful, teachers can follow the strategies of successful teachers.

In addition to NLP techniques, NLP presuppositions are proposed NLP designers as follows:

- The map is not the territory: our mental maps, which are changeable, not fixed, are just the intermediaries which connect us with the external world. This means that human beings can't directly communicate with the external World and their cognitive plans play the role of intermediary in the process.
- Experience as structure: our thoughts and memories have a pattern/structure. Any change in this pattern/structure automatically will lead to a change in the experience. That is, our memories and



thoughts shape our experience and consequently our behavior and any change in them consequently leads to a change in our behavior and self.

- If one person can do something, anybody can learn to do it: everything is possible as long as others have been able to do it in the past. This is somehow similar to the notion of modeling excellence and it means that if a person has been able to do something, anybody also can do it and what matters is our choice of words and actions.
- The mind and body are the same system: there is a dialectic relationship between the mind and body, so a change in one leads to a change in the other. This means that our mind and body are tightly interwoven and they are not separate entities.
- People have all the resources they need: so many resources are at our hand including mental images, inner voices, and feelings and the matter is that a way should be found to use these resources.
- You cannot not communicate: communication, verbally and non-verbally, is inevitable. Communication is an essential part of our life and plays a significant role in the quality of our life. So, people should be careful in choosing their words when communicating with the others.
- The meaning of your communication is the response you get: the quality of the communication can be enhanced by noticing how others respond to it. That is, communication is not a one-way process, but it is two-way and is influenced by the response of the communication partner.
- Underlying every behavior is a positive intention: There is a positive intention behind all behaviors, even negative ones. This means that optimism and having a positive attitude towards others is the best choice
- People are always making the best choices available to them: by recouring to our past experiences and memories, the best choices can be made from existing alternatives. It can be said that the past wrong doings shouldn't be repeated.
- Always new ways should be sought. That is, recouring to the repeated old ways of doing something is not recommended.

Since NLP is a set of general communication techniques, it is applicable to many communication-related fields including education. This applicability to education can be attributed to the similarity of the nature of teacher-student and psychiatrist-client relation. That is, similar to the clients, students are creatures in need of help by the teacher to use their full capability.

Moreover, reading comprehension is a skill characterized with high levels of complexities for EFL learners. Knowingly, it requires dynamic interactions between text and reader. This is what makes reading



comprehension a difficult skill in EFL settings where learners are constrained in terms of access to native contexts with frequent exposure to English materials. In this sense, NLP may serve effective, due to its specific features argued above, in enhancement of reading comprehension of EFL learners. However, reviewing the existing literature, the researcher found a research scarcity in this regard. To fill this gap, this study aimed at investigating the effect of NLP techniques (rapport, maintaining flow and reframing) on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level. That is, this study sought to uncover whether teaching reading comprehension by using NLP techniques makes any difference in the performance of the participants.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

As mentioned, NLP has been originally proposed in psychotherapy by Bandler and Grinder (1975) under the influence of Bateson' cybernetic views (1972, as cited in Van Lier, 1984), but it has been extended to other more or less related realms including education and ELT. In its first appearance, NLP was proposed within humanistic psychology framework. "Humanistic and psycho-suggestive approaches claim that if language teachers keep the lessons pleasant, learners may be able to process more input as intake and access more intake as output." (Egitim & Dergisi, 2004, p. 3)

In its theoretical framework, NLP is based on modeling excellence and what excellent people do in conveying their strategies to other people. In this framework, by excellent people mainly psychotherapists and their relation with clients are meant. However, in education, the context of the relationship is changed into teacher-student relation and modeling what successful and excellent teachers do (Farahani, 2018; Moharamkhani et al., 2016).

### **2.2 Related Studies**

Yameen and Iftikhar (2014) investigated the effect of NLP on enhancing communicative competence of language teachers and on mode of language teaching. The results of their study give support to a positive association between NLP and both communicative competence of language teachers and mode of language teaching. In other words, the results reveal that mode of the classroom wherein NLP was used



was more goal-oriented and student-centered and the teachers who used NLP techniques in their classes were rated as of higher communicative competence by their students. One of the main benefits of Yameen and Iftikhar's study is that to investigate the effect of NLP, they have taken the benefit from an experimental design instead of taking a qualitative descriptive design which is merely focused on description of NLP techniques and various perceptions of their use in educational settings. Another interesting point of their study is that they simultaneously investigated the effect of NLP techniques on both language teachers and students and this adds to the depth of their study and its results.

Pishghadamand Shayesteh (2014) revalidated the NLP scale designed in their 2011 study through Rasch-rating scale and omit some items for the uni-dimensionality requirement to be met. For the NLP scale to operate satisfactorily they converted it from a five-category scale into a three-category one. Their analysis shows that in Iran's educational system, due to some contextual barriers like the heavy burden of materials which should be covered, time limitations and institutional agendas, unfortunately implementation of some items is not practical, if not impossible. However, as the researchers state, due to sample restriction, relative but not absolute honesty on the part of respondents to seem better teachers and keep their face, external validity or generalization of the study should be considered with caution not with certainty.

Moharamkhani et al. (2016) investigated the effect of NLP on EFL learners' writing achievement. Utilizing an experimental research paradigm, this research compared post-test scores of the experimental and control groups and found significant differences between them. This led to the conclusion that NLP has a significant effect on writing achievement in EFL learners.

Salehi and Karimi (2023) tried to figure out the impact of NLP on EFL learners' writing achievement and critical thinking. To fulfill the aims of this study, a quasi-experimental posttest only design was used. The analyses indicated that there was significant statistical difference between the two groups' mean scores on the writing posttest, while there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups' mean scores on the critical thinking posttest. As a result, it was shown that NLP had significant impact on learners' writing skill, but NLP had no significant impact on learners' critical thinking level.

Molaei et al. (2024) delved into the effect of NLP on reading comprehension among EFL learners. Post-intervention comparisons of this experimental study revealed a significant increase in the experimental group's reading comprehension with a big effect size. These results corroborated that NLP significantly improves EFL learners' reading skills.

### 3. Methodology



### **3.1 Design**

This study benefited from a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design. It was quasi-experimental in the sense that two intact classes were used as the sample of study in absence of random sampling.

### **3.2 Participants**

Sample of this study consisted of 60 female Iranian EFL learners of a Language institute at intermediate level. Sampling of this study was convenient sampling because the two available intact groups (30 people in each class) were selected to participate in the study in the absence of random sampling. One of these classes was assigned to the experimental group and the other one to the control group. The participants were young and averaged about 13-14 years of age.

### **3.3 Instruments**

To achieve the objectives of the study three instruments were used: During the educational sessions, readings of Top Notch book (by Joan Saslow & Allen Ascher), currently used as educational materials of the Language Institutes, were taught to the learners in both experimental and control groups.

To measure the participants' reading comprehension skill, two equivalent test forms, one to ensure the equivalence of the groups in terms of their reading comprehension at the beginning of the study and another to assess the participants' reading comprehension skill at the end, were designed by the researcher and used in pre-test and post-test. The format of tests was Multiple Choice (MC) and they included 20 items designed based on the content of Top Notch book. Validity of the tests was determined by expert judgment and their reliability was calculated as .8 and .7 for pre-test and post-test respectively, through running a pilot study with a small set of people from target population.

### **3.4 Procedure**

This study was conducted at a Language institute, among Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level. At the beginning, two intact classes were selected and assigned to experimental and control groups in the absence of randomization.



Educational sessions of this study were held for 45 minutes two times a week during an eight-session period. In this study, the only difference between experimental and control groups was the presence of NLP techniques, that is, learners in both groups were given classroom instruction for eight sessions, but the experimental group with NLP while the control group without NLP. Due to convenience, practicality and time limitations of the study, just three NLP techniques (rapport, maintaining flow and reframing) were used in the study.

Rapport technique was implemented by intentionally creating harmony between teacher and learners on the part of teacher so that students feel comfortable in the class and express their ideas freely. In other words, teacher behaved in a way that learners don't see her as separate from them but see her as their friend. The other manifestation of rapport was that the teacher called the learners with their first name in the class.

Maintaining flow was operationalized in the class by helping learners take the control of classroom events, involving them in class activities and giving them feedback (mostly positive) on their performance. Besides, by giving external motivation to the learners in the form of bonus scores their energy and motive for class activity was enhanced.

Reframing was implemented by trying new ways and things in the class. Here by new ways and things everything which works is meant. For instance, if the learners didn't get the meaning of a word or sentence by explanation, pictures were used. Or if they had problem by memorizing the meaning new words through learning by heart and visual learning, they were asked to write the words along with their meaning three or four times as homework.

Then one week after educational sessions were finished, post-test was run to investigate the effect of NLP techniques and compare the two groups' reading comprehension ability with each other to see whether there is a significant difference between average performance of these two groups regarding their level of reading comprehension ability.

#### **4. Data Analysis and Results**

To compare reading performance of NLP and NNLP (non-NLP) groups, firstly descriptive statistics was calculated for both groups and then independent samples t-test was run to see if the observed difference is significant. Results of pre-test group statistics show that NLP and NNLP mean is 13.56 and 13.48, respectively.



**Table 1***Pre-test Group Statistics for NLP and NNLP Groups*

group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
NLP	30	13.56	1.32	.26
NNLP	30	13.48	1.44	.28

**Table 2***Pre-test Independent Samples T-test for NLP and NNLP Groups*

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	(2- Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
.206	58	.680	-.03333	.52175	-1.07773	1.01106
					-1.07773	1.01106

According to the results of independent samples t-test, as shown in table 2, this difference is not significant ( $t = .206$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This means that both groups are equivalent before educational sessions.

Results of post-test group statistics, in table 3, indicate that NLP and NNLP mean score is 16.88 and 14.24, respectively. Obviously means are different.

**Table 3***Post -test Group Statistics for NLP and NNLP Groups*

group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
NLP	30	16.88	1.56	.31



NNLP	30	14.24	1.61	.32
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**Table 4**

*Post-test Independent Samples T-test for NLP and NNLP Groups*

t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
5.870	58	.000	2.80000	.44434	1.73041	3.54959

Table 4, showing the results of post-test independent samples t-test, shows that after participants' exposure to educational sessions the two groups' scores are significantly different ( $t= 5.870$ ,  $df=58$ ,  $p<.05$ ). And the effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) is 1.35, revealing a large value of difference, which shows that the difference between these two groups is large enough and consistent enough to be really important.

## 5. Discussion

Results of the study showed a significant difference between NLP and NNLP groups' reading comprehension performance. This gives support to the significant effectiveness of NLP on the learners' level of reading ability. The results give support to Helm (1989, as cited in Pishghadam et al., 2011)'s view that NLP is a tool which reinforces learning and improves education and instruction. Findings are also consistent with many proponents of NLP's belief at the strong potential of NLP in generating positive changes in education among whom Craft (2001), Tosey et al. (2005), Millroad (2004), and Pecha (2012) can be mentioned. More interestingly, the results give confirmation to Churches and Terry (2007, as cited in Carey et al., 2010)'s argument for a change in the learners' internal states as a result of using NLP through associating learners' past experience of space and anticipation of future events with classroom events. Similarly, the results are consistent with Moore (2009)'s conclusion that NLP application leads to developing rapport, influencing others, and changing behavior and thereby causes the person to have a better and more fulfilled life. They are also consistent with Lara (2012) in that she also suggested that NLP techniques have worked in her classes as a complement to her teaching methods and her students



have found them new, effective, innovative and creative and this creativity has led to higher level of performance among them.

The positive effect of NLP on the participants' performance is justified in that interaction and interaction quality is an interface between NLP and language teaching/learning phenomenon. Besides, supporting role of the teacher, encouraging the learners to self-create their own idiosyncratic views, learner-friendly classroom atmosphere, personal involvement of learners in learning and teaching process, all lead to fostering the quality of classroom interaction, learners' increased self-confidence, self-belief, and motivation and increased personalization of learning process, and these in turn contribute to increasing the amount of learning and teaching in the classroom.

An interesting point supporting the above saying is the positive attitude generated by NLP techniques in NLP group, which can be attributed to their increased level of motivation or this is an indicator of improving learners' increased eagerness to learn as a result of using NLP.

## 5. Conclusion

The bottom line is that NLP techniques (rapport, maintaining flow and reframing) proved to be significantly effective in improving EFL learners' reading comprehension ability at the intermediate level.

However, as repeatedly mentioned in the previous discussions in this study, NLP is a new comer in the realm of education and language learning, so many aspects of their effectiveness has remained untouched so far.

Finally, it is worth noting that although the results of this study may add to the knowledge base in the area of NLP and its effects in the realm of language learning, due to such issues as convenient sampling, smallness of the sample and short breadth of this study, the results must be generalized with caution to other situations.



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