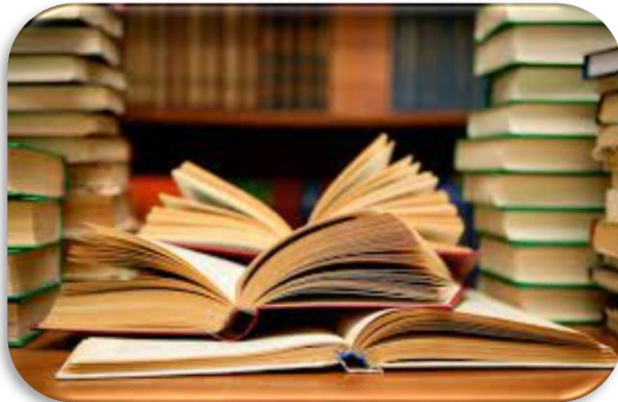


Research Paper



**The Effect of Reading-based
Activities on Vocabulary Learning:
Pre-Intermediate EFL Learners in
Focus**

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ABSTRACT

The present research examined the effect of reading-based activities on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. To do this, 57 students of a language institute in Kerman were selected based on available sampling. After homogenizing them, 50 pre-intermediate students were put into two groups (25 students in each group). The study is a quasi-experimental one and the students took the pretest and posttest of vocabulary knowledge. These tests contained two parts: The first part pertained to the comprehension of vocabulary multiple-choice items; the second part was associated with production of vocabulary consisting of fill-in-the-blank items. Both tests were extracted from their textbook (American English File). The students of the experimental group were provided with related reading activities. The reading activities required the students pre-read passages at home that relate to the reading comprehension activities during classroom on the following day, and the reading engages the students to pre-read passages before the reading activity. However, the students of the control group received the traditional instruction on vocabulary and they were not given any related reading activities. At the end of term, the post test was administered and the collected data was descriptively and inferentially analyzed. The results revealed that reading-based activities had a significant effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The finding indicates the value of reading-based activities leads the researchers to focus on increasing learners' vocabulary in EFL classrooms through designing a variety of tasks.

Keywords: Reading-based Activities, Vocabulary Learning, EFL Students

تأثیر فعالیتهای مبتنی بر خواندن بر یادگیری واژگان با تمرکز بر زبان آموزان ایرانی سطح پیش متوسطه

پژوهش حاضر به بررسی تأثیر فعالیت های مبتنی بر خواندن بر یادگیری واژگان زبان آموزان ایرانی پرداخت. بدین منظور 57 نفر از دانشجویان یکی از موسسات زبان کرمان بر اساس نمونه گیری در دسترس انتخاب شدند. پس از همگن سازی، 50 دانش آموز پیش متوسطه در دو گروه (25 دانش آموز در هر گروه) قرار گرفتند. این پژوهش از نوع شبه تجربی است و زبان آموزان در پیش آزمون و پس آزمون واژگان شرکت کردند. این آزمون ها شامل دو بخش بود: بخش اول مربوط به درک مطلب واژگان چندگزینه ای بود. بخش دوم با تولید واژگان متشکل از آیتم های پرکننده همراه بود. هر دو آزمون از کتاب درسی آنها (American English File) استخراج شده است. به دانش آموزان گروه آزمایش، فعالیت های خواندنی مرتبط ارائه شد. فعالیت های خواندن، دانش آموزان را ملزم می کرد که متن هایی را در خانه پیش خوانی کنند که مربوط به فعالیت های درک مطلب در کلاس درس در روز بعد است، و دانش آموزان را به خواندن قسمت هایی قبل از فعالیت خواندن درگیر می کند. اما دانش آموزان گروه کنترل، آموزش معمول واژگان را دریافت کردند و هیچ فعالیت خواندنی مرتبطی به آنها داده نشد. در پایان ترم، پس آزمون اجرا شد و داده های جمع آوری شده به صورت توصیفی و استنباطی مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. نتایج نشان داد که فعالیت های مبتنی بر خواندن تأثیر قابل توجهی بر یادگیری واژگان زبان آموزان ایرانی سطح پیش متوسطه دارد. این یافته نشان می دهد که ارزش فعالیت های مبتنی بر خواندن، محققان را به تمرکز بر افزایش واژگان زبان آموزان در کلاس های درس زبان انگلیسی از طریق طراحی انواع وظایف، سوق می دهد.

واژگان کلیدی: فعالیت های مبتنی بر خواندن، یادگیری واژگان، زبان آموزان ایرانی

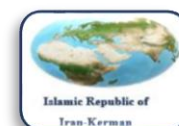
INTRODUCTION

Reading is a basic language ability and a very complicated act that everyone should master. In many situations, reading is considered a necessary channel of communication in an ever-widening world. It is the process of recognition, interpretation and perception of written or printed materials. In fact, people are living in a reading world where it is hard to succeed without (Brevik, 2019). Without comprehension, there is no learning because any educational system cannot neglect these strategies of language and students still practice reading even if it is difficult to understand every single word. Reading is not solely a single skill but a combination of many skills and processes in which the readers interact with printed words and texts for content and pleasure. Through reading, one can teach writing, speaking, vocabulary items, grammar, spelling and other language aspects. The basic goals of reading are to enable learners to gain an understanding of the world and themselves, to develop appreciation and interests, and to find solutions to their personal and group problems (Hollingsworth, Sherman, & Zaugra, 2007).

Reading the written form of the language usually starts from decoding the print on to the language sound system. When a reader focuses on decoding and understanding each word that they read, all their efforts decree his ability to understand underlying meaning. His working memory as a main part in reading comprehension process is occupied and as a result reader cannot make proper communication with writer's purposes (Cotter, 2012). Simply put, reading comprehension is the act of understanding what you are reading. It is an intentional, active, interactive process that occurs before, during and after a person reads a particular piece of writing. There are two elements that make up the process of reading comprehension: vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension. In order to understand a text, the reader must be able to comprehend the vocabulary used in the piece of writing. If the individual words do not make the sense, then the overall story will not either. Children can draw on their prior knowledge of vocabulary, but they also need to continually be taught new words (Ellis, 2015).

The best vocabulary instruction occurs at the point of need. Parents and teachers should pre-teach new words that a child will encounter in a text or aid him/her in understanding unfamiliar words as s/he comes upon them in the writing. In addition to being able to understand each distinct word in a text, the child also has to be able to put them together to develop an overall conception of what it is trying to say. This is text comprehension. Text comprehension is much more complex and varied than vocabulary knowledge. Readers use many different text comprehension strategies to develop reading comprehension. These include monitoring for understanding, answering and generating questions, summarizing and being aware of and using a text's structure to aid comprehension. Despite the recognition of the importance of vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary learning seems to be a great headache to many language learners.

A traditional teaching method in this regard which is still applied at schools and universities of Iran is having the students memorize the word lists or explicitly providing them with paired translation equivalents of the words. The problem is that not only does this traditional method lack theoretical support since vocabulary learning is more than sheer memorization of the target language word lists, but the whole learning experience could also leave a sour taste in language learners' mouth since learners would view vocabulary learning as a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of words. Nation (1990) states that knowing a word is defined as knowing its spelling, pronunciation, collocations (i.e., words it co-occurs with), and appropriateness. Therefore, the sheer memorization of the paired translation of the target words, which is widely applied at schools and universities of Iran, is not considered an effective method. These ineffective methods eventually lead to frozen vocabulary learning courses, which are remembered, with distaste by Iranian school and university students. Thus, new teaching methods for vocabulary learning in EFL contexts are required. One of these methods is reading-based activities. Based on the related literature, no study has been yet conducted to examine the effect of the reading-based activities on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The



current one was an attempt to fill such gap in literature. To do this, the following research question has been formed:

RQ. What is the effect of reading-based activities on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

Significance of the Study

This study and its findings may be useful and helpful for different educational groups such as EFL teachers and learners, syllabus and curriculum designers. Since the research provides a good way to improve vocabulary learning in EFL classes, it is supposed to help teachers promote teaching vocabulary. Likewise, it can assist to enhance L2 reading of learners and their learning quality. Therefore, the study and its findings may facilitate the way of vocabulary learning in a second or foreign language. It may also provide a motivating atmosphere for attracting students to comprehend texts easily. Moreover, this work might help curriculum specialists and syllabus designers improve curriculum and syllabus with the focus on enhancing learners' vocabulary learning in EFL classes in schools, language institutions and universities.

LITRATURE REVIEW

Liu and Zhang (2018) did a meta-analysis, which synthesized the data of 21 empirical studies. It was designed to explore whether extensive reading instruction was effective in improving students' vocabulary acquisition, and if so, how the effectiveness varied in terms of the instruction length and teaching methods. Stata 14.0 was utilized to calculate the collected data. The results revealed that: (1) extensive reading has a significant effect on English vocabulary learning; (2) one semester (less than three months) is the most appropriate length of extensive reading instruction for vocabulary learning; (3) Graded Readers, comprehension questions and vocabulary exercise play significant roles as reading materials and education methods in promoting the vocabulary learning of EFL learners. Also, Nakanishi (2015) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the overall effectiveness of extensive reading on comprehensive language proficiency. To the authors' knowledge, however, few meta-analysis studies exclusively focused on the examination of extensive reading's effects on vocabulary acquisition. In consideration of the shortcomings of empirical studies and insufficiency of meta-analysis concerning the extensive reading's effects on English vocabulary acquisition, the primary purpose of this study is to synthesize the findings of studies on the extensive reading's effects on English vocabulary learning so as to draw more reliable conclusions regarding extensive reading's overall strength and the identification of the influencing variables.

Golpich and Rassaei (2014) investigated the effects of reading comprehension on three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, namely form recognition, meaning recognition and production among EFL learners. Furthermore, it examined which dimension of vocabulary knowledge benefits most from reading comprehension. The results indicated that reading comprehension has statistical effects on the acquisition of three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge in both short- and long-term retention. It also indicated that in short term retention, reading comprehension promoted the acquisition of meaning recognition knowledge more than the form recognition and production. However, with regard to long term retention, the findings revealed that reading comprehension promoted the acquisition of form recognition knowledge more than the other two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, Rashidi and Piran (2011) investigated about the effect of extensive reading and intensive reading on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary size and depth. The result showed that intensive reading and extensive reading can develop the number vocabulary on Iranian EFL students in terms of synonym, antonym and collocation.



In another study conducted by Webb (2008), the participants were fifty Japanese-speaking university students who had learned English as a foreign language. The participants were randomly separated into two groups, an experimental and a comparison group and a short context containing 10 target words were given to both groups. The short context comprised of one or two sentences. The experimental group was assigned to the context where they had more informative clues for the target word than the comparison group. After the treatments, participants in both groups administered a vocabulary quiz that evaluated recall of form, recognition of form, recall of meaning, and recognition of meaning. The result showed that context plays a significant role in understanding and recalling a word meaning. However, it was found that the context does not significantly affect recognizing and recalling a word form. In the same year, Min (2008) reported the results of a research with the purpose of comparing the effect of 'reading plus vocabulary enhancement activities' (RV) and 'narrow reading' (NR), which entails repeated reading of thematically-related articles, on vocabulary acquisition and retention among secondary school EFL students. The results showed that the RV group, who practiced reading with focused vocabulary exercises, performed significantly better than the NR group on the acquisition and retention tests.

MEYHODOLOGY

The present study is a quantitative in nature because the gathered data were in the form of numbers including the students' test scores. In fact, the study is quasi-experimental based on pretest and posttest design. The study was classified as quasi-experimental because the process of random assignment was not used due to practical issues (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Due to COVID-19 restrictions the study was conducted in online classes. 50 EFL learners were selected based on OPT results. The selected participants were divided into a control group and an experimental group. Each group consisted of 25 learners. Prior to the instructions, the vocabulary pretest was run for both groups. Then, the experimental group was taught via reading-based activities. In this group, the EFL students were provided with related reading activities. The reading activities required the students pre-read passages at home that relate to the reading comprehension activities during classroom on the following day, and the reading engages the students to pre-read passages before the reading activity. It was ensured that the reading passages provided for home assignment provide introductory information to the students about the reading comprehension topic in order to develop their understanding in an effective manner. In contrast, the EFL students in the control group were not given any related reading activities. Instead, they received the traditional instruction on vocabulary. Finally, after eight sessions of instructions, the researcher conducted the vocabulary posttest.

Both tests contained two parts: The first part pertained to the comprehension of vocabulary consisting of 20 multiple-choice items, the second part was associated with production of vocabulary consisting of 20 fill-in-the-blank items. The posttest was an achievement test devised by the researcher, and administered after instruction to measure the participants' vocabulary competence, both in comprehending and producing appropriate vocabulary. The total reliability of both tests was calculated through the use of Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula. In addition, to ensure the validity, it was reviewed by three language experts and their comments were used. The scoring procedure was an objective type, that is, the rater's own judgment had no effect on the scores. Both tests were derived from their textbook (American English File), which was instructed during the course.

After the required data were collected, two types of statistical analysis were carried out using SPSS version 24. First, descriptive statistics were done to report mean scores and standard deviations of the groups and present them in charts and tables. Then, inferential statistics were conducted to run independent samples t-test in order to compare the mean scores of the two groups.



RESULTS

The descriptive analysis of the pretest and posttest of the experimental group is presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the pretest mean score of the experimental group is 12.50 and SD= 1.15. In addition, the posttest mean score of the experimental group is 14.00 and SD=1.22.

Table 1

The Descriptive Analysis of Results for Experimental Group

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Pretest	25	10	17	12.50	1.15
Posttest	25	11	18	14.00	1.22
Total	50				

The results of pretest and posttest of control group were presented in the following table. As shown in Table 2, the mean of control group in pretest is 13.50 with the standard deviation of 1.62, while in the posttest of this group indicates a mean score of 13.50 with the standard deviation of 1.02. The following figure shows the pretest and posttest of the group.

Table 2

The Descriptive Analysis of Results of Control group

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Pretest	25	11	13	13.50	1.62
Posttest	25	10	14	13.50	1.02
Total	50				

The current study was to explore the effect of reading-based activities on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. To this end, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the performance of the participants in the pretest. Table 3 presents the results. As it can be seen, the mean of the control group is 12.50 (SD=1.22), and that of the control group is 13.50 with the level of significance of .000. Since the level of Sig. is less than 0.05 set for the study, $F(2, 49) = 98.022, p > .05$, it can be concluded that generally there is no significant difference between two groups in terms of vocabulary learning in the pretest.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test results of the pretest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for t-test for Equality of Means Equality of Variances				
				F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental G	25	12.50	1.15					
Control G	25	13.50	1.62	8.022	0.001	2.323	49	0.724

Then, two groups' performance on the posttest was compared via another independent samples t-test. The results are presented in Table 4. According to the results, the mean posttest of the experimental group is 14.00 (SD=1.22), and that of the control group is 13.50 with the level of significance of .000. Since



the level of Sig. is less than 0.05 set for the study, $F(2, 58) = 7.266, p < .05$, it can be concluded that generally there is a significant difference between two groups in terms of the vocabulary learning.

Table 4

Independent sample t-test results of the posttest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for t-test for Equality of Means				
				Equality of Variances				
				F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental G	25	14.00	1.22					
Control G	25	13.50	1.02	7.266	0.001	2.241	49	0.735

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that reading-based activities had a positively significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. One justification for the efficacy of the reading-based activities is that reading materials expose the learners to a wide range of vocabulary. The results are consistent with Stanovich's (2006) proposal as well as with that of Nagy et al.'s (1985) view that vocabulary growth is largely due to incidental learning from written contexts. Further, the findings are supported by other studies regarding reading activities and the volume of vocabulary (Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008; Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Nonetheless, although it is assumed that reading experience is a mediator of the relationship between word reading and the outcome of vocabulary growth, this mediation was not tested as part of this study. There might be several reasons for these equivocal results for reading based activities effects in previous studies. First, one would not expect to find reading-based activities effects for all reading related variables. Vocabulary learning, on the other hand, is affected by different component skills through reading development. For very early readers, reading comprehension skill is largely a function of word reading or decoding skill. These challenges are compounded when combined measures of word reading and reading comprehension are used. Hence, the finding would be supported by the meta-analysis of Pfof and colleagues (Pfof et al., 2014), which suggested that there was less evidence for a reading-based activities effect for developmentally constrained variables such as decoding accuracy. In the case of the current study, reading would be expected to affect vocabulary growth after learners were exposed to a large number of novel words through reading.

Rashidi and Piran (2011) reported that reading can improve the number of vocabularies among Iranian EFL students in term of synonym, antonym and collocation. The results of the study showed that the mean score of the students' posttest increased after giving the treatment. In addition, the results of a number of previous studies also indicated that reading related activities can benefit formal aspects of vocabulary knowledge. Brown and Waring (2008) investigated the vocabulary learning gains from reading the simplified versions of novels. The results showed that the participants recognized the word form and the meaning of the target words immediately after the reading, and were able to provide the translation of the words. This implies that learners can acquire a significant number of words from reading-based activities. The findings are in line with previous works, which pointed to the importance of reading-based activities. They argue that learners could create mental connections, which lead to enhanced lexicon development. The findings of the current study are in line with the usage-based theories in that language competence is not so much dependent on grammar. As stated by MacWhinney (2008), this usage-based process would result in lexical development and automatization. The participants' lexical improvement after treatment on pedagogical level can be considered as a sign of, first, the implementation of reading-based activities to create development in lexis and to overcome the L1 entrenched patterns and, second, the use of different input types as well as L2 learners' levels in their



lexical success. Recent studies have submitted that the mind stores useful lexical expressions as holistic units to make the retrieving process easier when they are provided through multiple inputs compared to the same words generated only through unimodal input channel (Schmitt, 2010).

The created development through the provision of reading-based activities allows for more fluency and less demands on memory to process the stored data. Moreover, as stated by Lindgren and Muñoz (2013), learners enjoy better language proficiency and vocabulary achievement when they are provided with authentic input. Therefore, the current research provided learners with reading-based activities as input features to make input as close as possible to the real-world language use. Learners were also provided with some tasks to make them use the intended words, thereby ensuring favorable entrenchment in favor of new L2 words. Secondly, the results showed that the learners enjoyed better lexical achievement and retention compared to their counterparts. Thirdly, the research findings showed that reading based activities could help learners to reach higher levels of vocabulary development.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

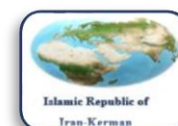
The findings of the present study revealed that reading-based activities had a positively significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. To this end, 50 EFL learners were selected according to OPT results. The selected participants were divided into two equal groups; one control group and one experimental group. Then, the experimental group was taught via reading-based activities. In this group, the EFL students were provided with related reading activities. The reading activities required the students pre-read passages at home that relate to the reading comprehension activities during classroom on the following day. It was ensured that the reading passages provided for home assignment provide introductory information to the students about the reading comprehension topic in order to develop their understanding in an effective manner. The findings showed that adaption of reading-based activities types could be advantageous to a considerable degree, compared to unimodal types, and will result in better lexical gains and the retention of the learnt words or expressions. However, there was a significant difference in the lexical gains of the experimental group. The significantly different achievements of the experimental group from the control group could be attributed to the fact that the control group was provided with only unimodal input.

Learners' vocabulary should be developed in ESL/EFL classrooms by applying a variety of tasks to increase their vocabulary for understanding written texts. However, as the results suggest, promoting vocabulary learning seems to be necessary in second language teaching and therefore a host of in-depth vocabulary activities is specifically encouraged in assessing reading comprehension. In the same vein, the results indicated the importance and the value of the reading-based activities in lexical development. Thus, ESL/EFL students need to be trained in this area by using a variety of reading-based activities in the classroom. In this regard, ESL/EFL teachers should teach the target words in context rather than teach isolated words in order to develop learners' guessing ability. Moreover, vocabulary tests based on reading-based activities could be employed to assess learners' vocabulary knowledge in Iranian EFL context instead of designing vocabulary tests based on multiple-choice formats. Accordingly, these tests could also be used in universities for placing students into the appropriate programs. Implementing this research would impact the researchers in many respects. It has developed the researchers professionally in the sense that it has assisted in gaining more and better insights into teaching and learning vocabulary in ESL/EFL contexts. The fact that the major finding of this study indicates the value of reading-based activities leads the researchers to focus on increasing learners' vocabulary in EFL classrooms through designing a variety of tasks.



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Biodata

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