ORIGINAL ARTICLE

THE EFFECTS OF TWO TYPES OF PRE-READING ACTIVITIES (PROVIDING THE GLOSSARY OF UNKHOWN WORDS VERSUS CONTENT RELATED SUPPORT) ON EFL LEARNERS` READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract: Reading comprehension has been considered as one of the main purposes of language learning and teaching. This study aimed to examine and compare the effects of two pre-reading activities, namely, providing the glossary of unknown words and content related support on reading comprehension of EFL learners. Participants of the study were 42 students who were selected from 70 students learning English in the Zabansara Institute in Gorgan after taking the *Nelson English Language Test* as an English language proficiency test. They were randomly assigned into two groups of the glossary of unknown words and content related support. Students in both groups took the reading part of a PET as the pre-test. The only matter of difference was that in the first group the teacher provided the students with a list of unknown words while in the second group the teacher gave a summary of the text before reading and attempted to elicit the students' ideas about the topic. At the end of the treatment period, the reading post-test was given to the students in both groups. An ANCOVA was run not only to compare the performance of both groups after the treatment period in terms of reading comprehension also to show whether post-test differences were due to treatment – pre-reading activities – effect or their differences in pre-test. The results of the ANCOVA revealed that the content related support was more effective than the providing the glossary of unknown words on the participants' reading comprehension. The results of the present study could help course book designers, educational planners, material developers, foreign language institutes, teachers, and learners to provide a better context for foreign language learning and improving different language skills.

Key words: Pre-reading activities, glossary of unknown words, content related support, reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is an increasing awareness on the significance of the reading skill in the world. The progressive nature of technological developments makes reading more crucial. Reading naturally is the foundation of other skills and the early phases of developing the first language and naturalistic acquisition of other languages are firmly dependent on this skill. On the importance of the reading skill, Rivers (1981) states that "reading is a most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language". Reading comprehension is also considered as an outline of second language acquisition theory building, research, and pedagogy (Dunkel, 1991). Therefore, reading can be considered as one of the most important macro-skills in the area of second and foreign language learning and teaching. In spite of the importance of reading, it has been overlooked by teachers and researchers and received less attention than the other language skills and therefore has often been referred to as a 'passive' or 'receptive' skill (Rivers, 1981).

While reading, students encounter variety of difficulties such as lack of vocabulary, structural complexity of the text, inadequate reading skills, lack of interest, and so forth. Dealing with these problems needs different processes and approaches to reading. One of the solutions for the difficulties students are faced during reading may be the use of pre-reading activities. Pre-reading activity, as its name indirectly suggests, occurs before English language learners (ELLs) read a specific text or start a special unit or lesson. Some scholars proposed that applying pre-reading activities makes the understanding of the texts easier (Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Holmes & Roser, 1987; Taglieber et al., 1988). The purpose of pre-reading activities for ELLs

can be classified into five areas (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). First, it should attempt to activate prior knowledge and provide students and teachers with a chance to evaluate whether this previous information is accurate or not. The teachers can build an effective lesson for the forthcoming reading based on what the L1 or L2 students previously have knowledge about and do not have (Holmes & Roser, 1987). It should also develop background by rendering particular information about the topic to be read. Because prior research has proposed that topic interest has a fundamental role in comprehension, pre-reading activities should aim to attempt this purpose as well. It also assists ELLs know what to anticipate from the reading in addition to the model strategies that students can use without dependence on another person later (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Taglieber et al., (1988) further elucidated the impacts of pre-reading instruction for ELLs by adding Hansen's proposal that not only performing pre-reading activities make native speakers prepared for the materials that follow, but also by making the reading task easy and connecting the new knowledge more meaningfully to prior information, pre-reading activities alter reading to a more enjoyable task (Taglieber et al., 1988). Tudor (1989) considered pre-reading activities as enabling activities since they supply a reader with the required background to arrange activity and to understand the material (these experiences include understanding the objective(s) for reading and developing a knowledge base needed for handling the content and the structure of the material). He adds that pre-reading activities extract prior knowledge, and concentrates attention. Different techniques have been proposed by some authors to circulate prior knowledge such as the use of pictures, movies and even role-plays. Research has not come to a clear conclusion which of these is the most effective. Therefore, teachers are free to experiment based on the nature of reading material and tendencies of their classes (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

There are different types of pre-reading activity which may involve previewing the text (evaluating its layout, pictures, titles, subheadings, etc.) to get a main points or forecast the possible topics and generalizations, skimming the text, answering or posing questions about information in the text, talking about/debating topics in the text, recognizing and investigating key vocabulary, linking shared themes in the texts to prior texts read (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). In the present study, the effect of two pre-reading activities of providing the glossary of unknown words and content related support were compared.

Unfortunately, reading skill is being taught so superficially in Iranian foreign language acquisition context that most of the English learners cannot master it and encounter numerous problems in forthcoming stages of their studies as well as their real life situations. Reading as a receptive skill provides input for most of the students during their educational life. For Iranian EFL students, amongst all language learning strategies, L2 reading and comprehension skills seem to be paid somehow insufficiently, since this is not explicitly taught in classroom pedagogy. Furthermore, developing reading skills is not paid due attention in English language teaching and learning. In Iran, based on the field of study, reading skills are mostly instructed for 3-5 hours per week for each term. Frequently, in spite of the fact that teaching of reading skill is specified in the syllabus of many English language institutes, teachers do not teach reading comprehension strategies but just pay attention only to superficial reading of the texts. Currently, reading skills are taught through vocabulary introduction in pre-reading phase to the students, but their examination is done through post-reading comprehension questions (Bozorgian & Pillay, 2013).

In general, nevertheless, more formal techniques might be suitable; of course various scholars enumerated different types of pre-reading activities. The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the effects of two pre-reading activities, namely, providing the glossary of unknown words and content related support on reading comprehension of EFL learners.

Linguistic information can be transferred in speech and written text forms, but it is the content of the message that is eventually crucial for the higher-level processes in language comprehension, such as making inferences and connections between text information and background knowledge about the world

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The sample of the present study was drawn from among 70 students learning English in the Zabansara Institute in Gorgan. So, the sampling design of the study was *convenience non-probability* design. For the purpose of homogeneity, prior to research a Nelson English Language Test, as a proficiency test, was given to the initial 70 students and 42 students whose scores were between one standard deviation

below and above the mean took part in the study. Final participants of the study were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (i.e., 21 students in each group). All participants were in the age range of 15 to 19.

Instruments

Following instruments were used to conduct the present study:

1. Nelson English Language Test (1976): was used as a tool for homogenizing the participants of the study. The Nelson English Language Test is a battery including 40 separate tests for ten levels of language proficiency which range from beginner to the advanced. The levels are numbered from 50, 100, ..., to 500. Each test consists of 50 items. In the present study a test in intermediate level – 200B – was used.

2. Preliminary English Test (PET): the reading sections of two different versions of PET which provide a practical way of assessing students' level of L_2 reading were used as pre-test and post-test. The reading part of PET is composed of 35 close-ended items that each correct answer to these items receives one point. The time needed for administration of the PET was about 60 minutes. The students' answer sheets were scored according to the answer key provided by the manual of the test.

Materials

In order to teach reading in the class, *Interactions 2 Reading* (Kirn & Hartmann, 2002) book was used as the teaching material in both groups. This book is the low-intermediate to intermediate level of Interactions/Mosaic series. Each unit of this book includes three or four texts. It attempt was made to cover one text from each unit every session.

Procedure

At first stage, Nelson English Language Test as a proficiency test was administered to the students and according to the results of this test those students whose scores were between one standard deviation below and above the mean were selected to participate in the study. The subjects involved in this study were randomly divided into two groups. One of the groups (G1) was provided with a glossary of unknown words in the text and the other (G2) was provided with content related support. Both groups took the reading part of a PET as the pre-test. The study was conducted during 12 class sessions for all groups. Each session lasted one hour and 15 minutes, three sessions per week. The same texts were read in the both groups and they were selected randomly from the textbook in order to decrease the chance for students to read them in advance.

In the first group, the teacher provided the students with a list of unknown words, and before reading, a discussion about the meaning of those words was made in the class and students were encouraged to guess and find the meaning of the words. In the end, the meaning of these words was mentioned by the teacher. In the second group, the teacher gave a summary of the text before reading and attempted to elicit the students' ideas about the topic. As soon as the teacher was convinced that students have got the necessary information about the text, the reading of the text started. In both of the groups, after the pre-reading period, he students read the texts and answered the comprehension questions at the end of the text.

In the end of the treatment period, the post-test was given to the students in both groups and its results were compared to the results of the pre-test to investigate the effect of treatments on the experimental groups.

RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Nelson English Language Test Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nelson English Language Test	70	17	50	35.72	8.978
Valid N (listwise)	70	-	-	-	-

As Table 4.1 indicates, the mean and standard deviation of the initial participants' Nelson English Language Test scores were 35.72 and 8.978, respectively. From these initial participants, 42 students whose score were between 27 and 44 were selected.

Descriptive Statistics for the First Experimental Group (G1)

Table 2 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for the participants in the first experimental group.

Table 2. The Results of the Participants' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in the First Experimental Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test in G1	21	15	25	19.43	3.155
Post-Test in G1	21	19	28	22.62	3.201
Valid N (listwise)	21				

In Table 2 it can be seen that participants' pre-test mean score in G1 was 19.43 with the standard deviation of 3.15. Regarding the post-test, participants' mean score was 22.62 with the standard deviation of 3.20.

Descriptive Statistics for the Second Experimental Group
Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the participants in the second experimental group.

Table 3. The Results of the Participants' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in the Second Experimental Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test in G2	21	14	23	19.29	2.610
Post-Test in G2	21	20	33	26.71	3.552
Valid N (listwise)	21	-	-	-	-

As Table 3 illustrates, it was found that students' mean score in pre-test was 19.29 with the standard deviation of 2.61; whereas in the post-test, the second experimental group revealed a mean score of 26.71 with the standard deviation of 3.55.

The research question of the study aimed to investigate the difference between the effects of providing a glossary of unknown words and content related support on EFL learners reading comprehension. An ANCOVA had to be run on the scores obtained from the reading comprehension tests to answer this research question. To conduct the ANCOVA some underlying assumptions must be met. The first assumption is the normality of distribution for each set of scores.

In order to make sure about the normal distribution of the scores in both of the experimental groups, the researcher ran a One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test on four sets of scores. Table 4 presents the results of this test.

Table 4. One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in the Two Experimental Groups

		Pre-Test of G1	Pre-Test of G2	Post-Test of G1	Post-Test of G2
N		21	21	21	21
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	19.43	19.29	22.62	26.71
	Std. Deviation	3.155	2.610	3.201	3.552
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.173	0.171	0.196	0.162
	Positive	0.160	0.154	0.196	0.162
	Negative	-0.173	-0.171	-0.129	-0.118
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		0.173	0.171	0.196	0.162
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.099	0.112	0.075	0.159
a. Test distribution is Normal.					
b. Calculated from data.					

As it is indicated in Table 4, P-value for each set of scores is higher than 0.05, therefore all sets of scores were normally distributed and the parametric test of ANCOVA could be used.

The second assumption prerequisite for running the ANCOVA is the equality of the variances between groups. The equality of the variances between two groups was checked by Levene's test.

Table 5 shows the results of Levene's test of equality of error variances.

Table 5. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
3.359	1	40	0.074

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + Pre-Test + Groups

From Table 5 it can be inferred that the underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for the ANCOVA was also met – as evidenced by $F(1, 40) = 3.359$, $p = 0.074$. That is, $p (0.074) > 0.05$.

The third underlying assumption is that the relationship between the dependent variable (i.e., post-test) and the covariate (i.e., pre-test) should be similar for two groups, the homogeneity of regression lines was checked at the first stage the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Homogeneity of Regression

Dependent Variable: Post-Test					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	468.034ᵃ	3	156.011	35.865	0.000
Intercept	34.865	1	34.865	8.015	0.007
Groups	.559	1	0.559	0.129	0.722
Pre-Test	287.921	1	287.921	66.189	0.000
Groups * Pre-Test	1.466	1	1.466	0.337	0.565
Error	165.299	38	4.350		
Total	26188.000	42			
Corrected Total	633.333	41			

a. R Squared = .739 (Adjusted R Squared = .718)

As it is shown in Table 6, the p-value is equal to 0.565 which is higher than 0.05, so interaction between the independent variable – pre-reading activity (with two levels of providing the glossary of unknown words and content related support) – and covariate – pre-test – is not significant and the assumption of the homogeneity of regression was also accepted. Therefore, the ANCOVA could be performed.

Having been ensured by the provision of all underlying assumptions, an ANCOVA was conducted to investigate the null hypothesis of the study. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)

Dependent Variable: Post-Test						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	466.569[a]	2	233.284	54.557	0.000	0.737
Intercept	38.800	1	38.800	9.074	0.005	0.189
Pre-Test	290.474	1	290.474	67.931	0.000	0.635
Groups	187.594	1	187.594	43.871	0.000	0.529
Error	166.764	39	4.276	-	-	-
Total	26188.000	42				
Corrected Total	633.333	41	-	-	-	-
a. R Squared = .737 (Adjusted R Squared = .723)						

As it is shown in Table 7, the first line highlighted shows that the pre-test is significantly related to the post-test (P< 0.05) with the magnitude of 0.635. The next line is the indicator of the main effect of the pre-reading activity on the dependent variable – reading post-test. After adjusting for pretest scores, there was a significant effect of the group, $F_{(1,39)}= 43.871$, $p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.529$. As P-value is less than 0.05, the difference between two groups is significant. Therefore, the research null hypothesis is rejected and the answer for the research question will be 'YES'. That is, there is a significant difference between the effects of providing a glossary of unknown words and content related support on EFL learners reading comprehension.

To determine which one of the pre-reading activity types – providing the glossary of unknown words and content related support – was more effective on the participants' reading comprehension, the information in Table 8 should be taken into account.

Table 8. Estimated Marginal Means of Reading Comprehension Scores

Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
G1	22.553[a]	0.451	21.640	23.465
G2	26.781[a]	0.451	25.868	27.694

As it can be seen in Table 8, the estimated marginal mean of the G2 was higher than that of G1 (26.781>22.553) and this indicates that the content related support was more effective than the providing the glossary of unknown words on the participants' reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

There is considerable research investigating the effect of different pre-reading activities on improving reading comprehension using different texts. However, the comparison of different types of pre-reading activities for improving reading comprehension of different texts has received very little attention. The findings on the effectiveness of content related support, suggest that contextual cues, activating relevant elements stored in memory (Ellis, 1993) and triggering students' interest and motivation, assisted in reading comprehension of texts.

This research confirms evidence that presenting contextual knowledge may enhance foreign language reading comprehension. Even though all contextual information is helpful, it should be remembered that foreign language reading comprehension will not be enhanced as easily as expected, without the development of learners' linguistic knowledge. The latter may be one of the most important components for improving reading comprehension.

Schema theory compels us to look at reading process and tasks differently. This study along with current research in teaching and learning supports the facilitative and positive effect of schema theory on reading comprehension. In this study, the significance of the schema theory

came to light. It was revealed that placing the learner (i.e., reader) in a context supported by background information is much facilitating factor in teaching unfamiliar texts of which readers have meager information

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