The Study of Direct Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Reading Comprehension: The Case of Iranian context

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Abstract – The present study was conducted to study the effect of direct vocabulary learning strategies on reading comprehension skill. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a language proficiency test was administrated to one hundred male and female university students who studied in a course other than English as their major in Omidiyeh Islamic Azad University. Ultimately, sixty pre-intermediate students were selected and assigned into two of direct and control groups. The direct group was taught vocabulary through direct strategies (i.e., Structured reviewing, Using mechanical techniques, Repeating) for developing their vocabulary storage in reading comprehension. After ten sessions of treatment, the two groups were given a post-test of an achievement vocabulary test. Data analysis was conducted through t-test statistics. It demonstrated that the direct group who utilized direct vocabulary learning strategies outperformed the control group.

Keywords – Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs); Direct vocabulary learning Strategies

1. Introduction

Having a rich vocabulary treasure can play a very significant role in our personal and social life. The vaster and more exact our vocabulary knowledge is, the more able we are to increase our capability in different vocations and to express our emotions to others. In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is the element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing all together (Hedge, 2002, cited in Huyen, 2003). It is also generally accepted that second or foreign language learners who possess good word power or knowledge of vocabulary are usually more successful language learners. Simply put, people with large vocabularies are more proficient readers than those with limited vocabularies. In fact, there is usually a positive correlation between one's knowledge of vocabulary and his/her level of language proficiency (Luppescu & Day, 1993). Recent findings also indicate that vocabulary knowledge is vital to reading comprehension and proficiency, to which it is closely linked (Tozcu & Coady, 2004).

Teaching language learning strategies (LLSs) is beneficial to both English teachers and learners. Language learning strategy instruction improves both the learning product and process because it enhances learners' awareness of how to learn successfully and motivates them (Rasekh & Ranjbari, 2003). It helps teachers to become more aware of their learners' needs and of how their teaching styles are appropriate to their learners' strategies (Oxford, Crookall, et al, 1990), and to direct their teaching efforts (Kinoshita, 2003). Coady (1997) views that vocabulary learning strategies are beneficial to lexical acquisition. Cohen and Aphek (1981) found that training students to learn vocabulary using mnemonic associations was effective. Crow and Quigley (1985) used semantic field strategy training to enhance learning vocabulary. O'Malley (1987) found that training English Language as a foreign language (EFL) students to use a metacognitive strategy (self-evaluation) and two cognitive strategies (grouping and imagery) improved their vocabulary learning. Brown and Perry (1991) compared the effectiveness of three vocabulary learning strategies: keyword, semantic mapping (elaboration), and a combination of both. Alseweed's (2000) study showed that training students in using word-solving strategies increased high proficiency students' strategy use than low

proficiency ones. Rasekh and Ranjbari (2003) found that metacognitive strategy training had a positive impact on enhancing EFL learners' lexical knowledge.

Tassana-ngam (2005) also found that training Thai EFL university students in using five vocabulary learning strategies (dictionary work, keyword method, semantic context, grouping and semantic mapping) improved their ability to learn English words and enhanced awareness of how to learn vocabulary. Although research findings strongly support the importance of learners ' use of strategies and direct strategy instructions, many learners and teachers are not aware of the power of consciously use of L2 learning strategies for learning effectively Celce- Murcia, 2001; Diamond & Guttohn, 2006). Therefore, this study aims at examining the impact of Iranian learners' direct vocabulary language learning strategies on reading comprehension at pre-intermediate level to contribute to the existing literature on the use of direct vocabulary learning strategies.

1.1 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to guide instructors to introduce direct language learning strategies to learners to improve their vocabulary on language tasks systematically because Learners, in EFL contexts, often have problem in comprehending the reading texts because of the weakness of vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary is generally considered as the basic communication tool, and often labeled as the most problematic area by language teachers (Celik & Toptas, 2010). Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the possible effects of learners' direct vocabulary learning strategies on reading comprehension of pre-intermediate level Iranian university students in an EFL setting.

2. Methodology

2.1 participants

The researcher selected 100 EFL university students (mostly in the second semester) based on non-random judgment sampling. They participated in a homogeneity test adapted from Objective Placement Test (Lesley, et al 2005) as a homogeneity test and sixty students whose scores were one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean (M= 30) were selected. Then they were randomly divided into two groups; group A (18 female and 12 male) received direct vocabulary learning strategy while group B (8 female and 22 male) considered as a control group. The age of the participants generally ranged from 19 to 25. Seemingly, they were originally from different regions of the country.

2.2 Procedure

In this study, 100 Iranian university students who study in a course other than English as their major were selected. To make sure of homogeneity of learners, the researcher used Objective Placement Test as a language proficiency test (Lesleye, et al 2005). Having obtained

the scores and the average mean of the scores calculated. Then sixty learners whose scores were around the mean were selected. Then, they were randomly divided into two groups. After division, the first group was taught vocabulary through direct strategies (i.e., Structured reviewing, Using mechanical techniques, Repeating) while the second group was considered as a control group. In this study, the treatment period lasted for ten sessions. Group A received instruction on direct vocabulary learning strategies. Direct strategies used as treatment to teach vocabulary through giving direct and guided instructions.

3. Data Analysis

As stated before, this study attempted to investigate the role of direct vocabulary learning strategies in developing students' reading comprehension. The results included descriptive data and also the results that will help yield information about any changes in vocabulary learning strategies use in the direct group. The data obtained through post-test (Table 1) were analyzed (using SPSS 11.5 software) in different steps. To test the research hypotheses, the researcher dealt with comparing vocabulary learning strategies regarding, a parametric technique for analyzing the descriptive data. In this way, the study investigated the role of direct vocabulary learning strategies through t-test analysis, in order to find out, whether these strategies influence students' vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL university students at the pre-intermediate level of English reading proficiency or not. The results of t-test analysis for the effect of direct strategies in reading comprehension as an independent variable statistically indicated mean differences in Table 1.

Table1. Result of the *t*-test (post-test of both groups)

	Direct group	Control group
number	30	30
range	8.00	12.00
minimum	32.00	27.00
maximum	40.00	39.00
mean	37.5667	32.7333
Std. Deviation	1.97717	3.26880

After the treatment, to find the effectiveness of direct vocabulary learning strategies on reading comprehension both groups took part in a post-test of the vocabulary and reading comprehension test after completing the course. The reliability of the post-test was r = .88 based on KR-21 formula; the vocabulary items in the test were mainly selected from the new lexical items taught and exposed to during the course of instruction. The results of the post-test in the two groups were compared using independent samples t-test statistical procedure, whose result showed that the mean scores of the experimental group (M = 37.56, SD = 1.97) was significantly different from the control group (M = 32.73, SD = 3.26). Also the minimum and maximum score in direct group is 32 and 40 orderly

while in the control group the minimum and maximum score is 27 and 39 orderly. In other words, the direct group outperformed the control group on the post-test. That is, direct strategies were effective in teaching EFL vocabulary.
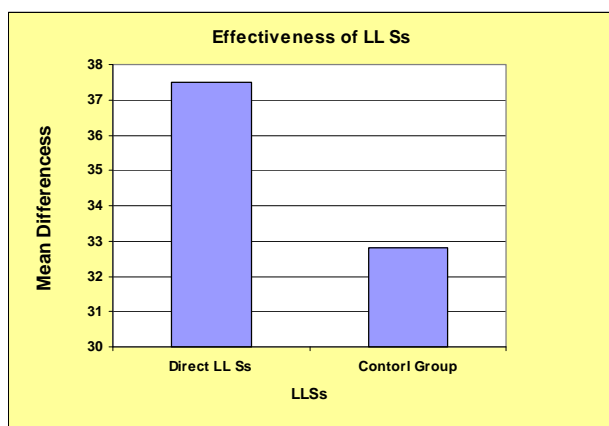
As we can see in the above graph the direct vocabulary learning strategy is effective in vocabulary learning strategy in enhancing vocabulary storage of students in the direct group and there is a clear difference between the two groups of direct and control group.

4. Discussion

The major concern of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of direct vocabulary learning strategies on reading comprehension of the EFL students. The results of t-tests indicated statistically significant difference between the direct group (A) and control group (B) in reading comprehension achievement post-test. It indicated that the direct strategy is effective in improving EFL vocabulary storage on reading comprehension achievement of university students at the pre-intermediate level of English. This result can be more approved and confirmed by this evidence that there was a significant difference between direct group (A) who received Structured reviewing, Using mechanical techniques and Repeating strategies for developing their vocabulary storage in reading comprehension. Moreover, the mean of direct group was higher than control group based on the post-test scores.

As it was shown in table1, the mean scores of the direct group (M = 37.5, SD = 2.14) was significantly (t = 6.553, p< .05) different from the control group (M = 32.73, SD = 3.26). In other words, the direct group outperformed the control group on the post-test. The findings of this research indicated that using direct vocabulary learning strategies has positive impact on enhancing vocabulary on reading comprehension of EFL students at pre-intermediate level. With direct teaching strategies, the teacher explicitly introduces the vocabulary and provides the definitions of vocabulary directly and according to the results of this study, direct vocabulary learning strategy is more effective. The significance of using direct vocabulary learning strategies has been accepted by many of the researchers in the relevant field, and they have emphasized its benefits by means of integrating it into

their strategy training models. So the findings of this study matched with many studies that focused on using direct learning strategies (Robinson, 1995a, 1996b, cited in Long & Robinson, 1998), Waring (1995), Qian (1996), Laufer & Shmueli (1997), and Feryal (2008). Thus many research findings support the effect of direct vocabulary learning strategies. Also direct vocabulary learning strategy instruction is more effective for particular students on development of skills and components of language such as reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion and implication

The major concern of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of direct vocabulary learning strategies designed to assist students enhance their vocabulary in reading comprehension of the EFL students. The instruction lasted ten weeks. In the course of this time, the researcher (teacher) employed the mentioned strategies and instructed the participants in the direct group how to use them in their reading comprehension.

At the end of the course both the direct and control groups were administered the reading comprehension post- test and the results of the tests were compared to find the effect of training. The findings of this study indicated that direct vocabulary learning strategies had positive impact on reading comprehension of EFL students because based on the results we gained and analyzed (Table1), we can conclude that there is a significant difference between direct and control group and also according to these results the researcher can claim that direct vocabulary learning strategies had positive impact on students of this study and is effective in proportion to control group. The results that the researcher gained, support using direct vocabulary learning strategies and these results are in consistent with many researchers' findings (Waring, 1995; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Qian, 1996) and matched these studies.

Direct vocabulary learning strategies are the strategies that suggested for learning vocabulary at particular level of language proficiency such as pre- intermediate level. In this study the direct group outperformed the indirect group on the post-test and based on the research findings the direct strategies were effective and practical strategies; however, some strategies were easy to use and to conduct with only little help from the teacher, especially the strategies that were used in direct mode such as structured reviewing, that need only minimum guidance. Students are very satisfied when they use them. In other two direct strategies e.g. using mechanical techniques, suggested for students in this study, the researcher asked students to prepare flash cards and use them constantly during the treatment. This is the strategy that students liked and used more than others because it is easy to use and helped them for developing their vocabulary storage. The third direct e.g. repeating also was received favorably by the students who faced no difficulty in applying and using it. Therefore, we can conclude according to the results we gained from the analysis of the two groups that if the strategy we use is easy to conduct and we can apply it with no difficulty, using such strategy is more effective and appropriate and the result that we get from it is useful for developing our

skill. The teacher should help students in selecting the most appropriate strategies for developing skills. Direct strategies because of easy application are suitable and effective in first stages of developing vocabulary of EFL learners and we experienced them in this study.

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