



# The Study of Direct Vocabulary Learning Strategy on EFL Iranian' Reading Comprehension: The Case of Structure Reviewing

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to study the effect of Structure Reviewing strategy as a direct vocabulary learning strategy on reading comprehension skill. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a language proficiency test was administrated to 100 male and female university students who studied in a course other than English as their major in Omidiyeh Islamic Azad University. Ultimately, thirty pre-intermediate students were selected and assigned into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught vocabulary through Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary learning strategy 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 samples t-test statistics. It demonstrated that the experimental group who utilized Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary learning strategy outperformed the control group.

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### Introduction

Vocabulary plays very important role in learning second or foreign language. In the recent decades, the researches on strategies of vocabulary learning have attracted many researchers in this area, and to the extent that vocabulary learning research becomes the focal topic of many researchers. Cohen (1990), Nation (1990, 2001), Hatch & Brown (1995) studied different kinds of strategies used in vocabulary learning; Sanaoui (1995), Lawson & Hogben (1996) compared the vocabulary learning methods and strategies of learners with different proficiencies (top students and poor students); Krantz (1991), Luppescu & Day (1993), Grabe & Stoller (1997) studied the correlation between extensive reading, using dictionaries and vocabulary learning. 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).

Weak storage of vocabulary will trigger into communication problems. Also for communication purposes, vocabulary is a very important component for the sake of receiving the necessary knowledge. According to Cahyono & Widiati (2011), the vocabulary command and having very good vocabulary storage supports each of the language skills. Knowledge of vocabulary is very effective in affecting learners' comprehension on other skill like reading and listening, meanwhile it also affects the way learners convey their ideas into writing and speaking.

Vocabulary learning strategy is a subcategory of language learning strategies (which in turn are a subcategory of learning strategies in general). (Oxford, 1990: 8), vocabulary learning strategy organizes knowledge about what learners do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in their memory for a

long time, recall them when needed in comprehension, and also apply them in language production (Catalan 2003, cited in: Ruutemets, 2005).

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, et al, 1990), and to direct their teaching efforts (Kinoshita, 2003). Coady (1997) views vocabulary learning strategies are beneficial to lexical acquisition. Wu & Wang (1998) focused on the strategies used in English vocabulary learning by Non-English majors; Zhang (2001) did a similar study on the English vocabulary learning strategy of postgraduates; Gu & Hu (2003) investigated the relationship between learners' vocabulary learning strategy, vocabulary size and English achievements. Alseweed's (2000) study showed that training students in using word-solving strategies increased high proficiency students' strategy use than low proficiency ones. 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. Snellings et al. (2002) carried out a study whose purpose was to see the effects of written lexical retrieval enhancement in classroom settings. The study wanted to determine if the experimental treatment of fluency in lexical retrieval in an L2 could be effectively increased in an educational context. The findings demonstrated that there was a speedup in the lexical access of words by learners when they were asked to retrieve words in exercises oriented towards detection, correction, and

translation. The study also demonstrated that training focusing on both speed and immediate feedback could change effectively the L2 cognitive word processing in production. The researchers concluded that their study allowed them to see that it was possible to develop a methodology to train learners in a specific skill in the classroom setting.

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' Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary language learning strategy on reading comprehension at pre-intermediate level to contribute to the existing literature on the use of direct vocabulary learning strategies.

#### **The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to guide instructors to introduce Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary learning strategy 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' Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary learning strategy on reading comprehension of pre-intermediate level Iranian university students in an EFL setting.

#### **Research question**

The main question to be examined in this study is as follows:

Do Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy has any significant effect on the development of vocabulary knowledge of the Iranian undergraduate pre-intermediate students?

#### **Methodology**

##### **Participants**

The researcher selected 100 English as Foreign Language (EFL) university students from Islamic Azad University of Omidyeh in Khuzestan in Iran studying non-English majors in the course of general English (mostly in the second semester) based on non-random judgment sampling. They participated in a homogeneity test adapted from Objective Placement Test (Lesley, Hanson & Zukowski-Faust, 2005) as a homogeneity test and finally 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) as an experimental group received Structure Reviewing as a direct vocabulary learning strategy while group B (8 female and 22 male) considered as a control group with no strategy use. The age of the participants generally ranged from 19 to 25. Seemingly, they were originally from different regions of the country.

##### **Instruments**

Initially, the subjects in two groups took the Objective Placement Test of Interchange (Lesley, Hanson & Zukowski-Faust, 2005), which used as a standardized measurement to check the homogeneity level of the subjects in terms of language proficiency. The test contained 40 multiple-choice of vocabulary items. In order to verify the reliability of the pre-test and post-test, the researchers selected 40 students from different departments in Omidyeh Islamic Azad University to participate

in the pilot study in two phases, one for the pre-test and the other one for post-test. That is, 20 students for pre-test and 20 for post-test. Calculating the reliability coefficient of the test through KR-21 formula, the researcher found the reliability of the homogeneity test at ( $r=.78$ ).

A post-test including also 40 items was administered to both groups at the end of treatment period after ten sessions. It takes eight lessons and was designed as a summative test. This test indicated 40 multiple-choice items of vocabulary achievement test which was developed by the researcher based on the materials taught in the classrooms. The vocabulary items in the test selected mainly from the new lexical items of reading comprehension texts. The reliability of the post-test was ( $r=.88$ ) based on KR-21 formula.

Another instrument was the reading tasks and activities as the course materials which the researcher afforded to both the experimental and control group. These reading tasks and activities were extracted from the Select Readings (pre-intermediate level) written by Lee and Gunderson (2002).

#### **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 the homogeneity of the learners, the researcher used an Objective Placement Test as language proficiency test (Lesley, Hanson & Zukowski-Faust, 2005). Having obtained the scores and the average mean ( $M = 30$ ) of the scores calculated. Sixty learners whose scores were around the mean were selected. Therefore the thirty homogeneous pre-intermediate students were selected to utilize Structure Reviewing strategy for developing their vocabulary storage in reading comprehension and other thirty students in group B were assigned as a control group with no strategy use in teaching and the treatment in this class was as usual as before, the teacher read the text one time and gives the students equivalent or synonym of new words. In this study, the treatment period lasted for ten sessions. On the first session, the students in A Group received introduction on Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy. The procedure was implied by the corresponding researcher (teacher) for both classes. The next section will introduce the treatment period of Cooperating with peers strategy.

#### **Structured reviewing strategy**

Following Oxford (1990), Structured Reviewing was utilized as a useful technique for remembering new materials in the target language. It entailed reviewing at different intervals. For instance in learning a set of vocabulary item in English, we follow 15 minutes before practicing them again, and practiced them an hour later, three hours later, the next day, two days later, four days later, the following week, and so on until the materials became more or less were automatic. The learners were recommended to put the vocabulary into a context or recombining them to make new sentences. Therefore, direct vocabulary learning strategy instruction can be looked at as a process of learner empowerment which raises learner's vocabulary of the more effective strategies for learning the language and by enabling them to employ the strategies in learning vocabularies.

#### **Findings**

After the treatment, to find out the effectiveness of Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy on reading comprehension of experimental group and compare the improvement in two groups, both groups took part in a post-test

of the vocabulary and reading comprehension test after completing the course.

The researchers dealt with comparing vocabulary learning strategy regarding, a parametric technique for analyzing the descriptive data. In this way, the study investigated the role of the Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy through independent samples *t*-test analysis, in order to find out, whether these strategy influence students' vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL university students at the pre-intermediate level of English reading proficiency or not.

To begin with, an independent sample *t*-test analysis was run on the mean score of the two groups. The results of *t*-test analysis for the effect of this strategy in reading comprehension as an independent variable statistically indicated mean differences are shown in Table 4.1. The data obtained through post-test (Table 1) were analyzed (using SPSS 11.5 software) in different steps.

**Table 1 Result of the *t*-test (post-test of both groups)**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental G	30	6.00	28.00	38.00	35.4767	1.75517
Control G	30	10.00	23.00	37.00	30.6333	2.68688

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 ( $M = 35.47$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) was significantly different from the control group ( $M = 30.63$ ,  $SD = 2.68$ ). Also the minimum and maximum scores in experimental group are 28 and 38 while in control group the minimum and maximum scores are 23 and 37. In other words, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test.

Also, critical  $t$  ( $t = 2.000$ ) was less than observed  $t$  ( $t = 5.45$ ) based on  $df = 48$ . In this case, there was a significant difference between experimental and control group in developing learning vocabulary at pre-intermediate level. In other words, Structure Reviewing strategy was effective in improvement of vocabulary of Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level.

### Result and discussion

The major concern of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of Structure Reviewing on reading comprehension of the EFL students. The results of *t*-tests indicated statistically significant difference between the experimental group (A) and control group (B) in reading comprehension achievement post-test. It indicated that the Structure Reviewing 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 experimental group (A) who received this direct strategy and control group (B). Moreover, the mean of experimental group was higher than control group based on the post-test scores.

The findings of this research indicated that using Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy has positive impact on enhancing vocabulary on reading comprehension of EFL students at pre-intermediate level. With Structure Reviewing as a direct teaching strategy, the teacher explicitly introduces the vocabulary and provides the definitions of vocabulary directly and according to the results of this study, Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy is a effective strategy.

### Conclusion and implications

The teachers should help students in selecting the most appropriate strategy for developing skills. Structure Reviewing strategy because of easy application are suitable and effective in first stages of developing vocabulary of EFL learners and we experienced it in this study. The results indicate that generally there is a great difference between the experimental and the control group performance of the subjects in the learners who were instructed using Structure Reviewing strategy. The findings of this study indicated that this kind of direct vocabulary learning strategy had a positive impact on reading comprehension of EFL students because according to the results we got the researcher can claim that, Structure Reviewing vocabulary learning strategy had an impact on students of this study and is an effective strategy. Direct vocabulary learning strategy is the strategies that suggested for learning vocabulary at a particular level of language proficiency such as pre-intermediate level.

Concerning the implications related to curriculum developers and material producers it can be stated that they should definitely work in cooperation with both teachers and students. Together with teachers, they should decide what learning strategies they need to identify. It should be the curriculum developers' responsibility to allocate enough time in the curriculum for teachers to conduct strategies research in their classes.

With respect to material producers, they should produce materials that teachers will use throughout their class research. That is, the materials they produce should be congruent with students' learning strategies and they should be appealing to students' needs and interests. This process requires continuous evaluation of every single stage or material used. For this reason, curriculum developers and material producers should collect feedback from teachers and students in order to identify the weaknesses and strengths of their products. This will enable them not only to produce better materials but also to develop them. All in all, curriculum developers and material producers should work cooperatively with teachers and students so that they can design a better program, appropriate materials and tasks that will promote a more efficient and a more effective language learning atmosphere. According to the findings of this study, it is suggested that material designers may develop teaching materials based on strategy-instruction especially on direct strategies.

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