Research Article

THE EFFECT OF LEARNER'S READINESS ON IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNER'S READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

*Masoumeh Mirzajani Shahrestani and Fereydoun Vahdani
Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Payam Nour University
Rasht, Guilan, Iran
*Author for Correspondence

ABSTRACT
This study was conducted to investigate the effect of learner's readiness on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's reading comprehension ability. For this purpose an OPT test was administered to a population of 100 students from which 60 participants were selected and they were randomly assigned into two groups of 30, control and experimental. Then both groups sat for a pre-test, which was reading comprehension ability. The purpose of this test was to measure the learner's initial subject knowledge of reading comprehension ability. Afterwards, the experimental group received treatment based on learner's readiness. However, the control group received no treatment and approached the traditional way of teaching. The treatment procedure took 18 sessions. Finally at the end of the course both groups sat for the post test of reading comprehension ability. Then the statistical analysis was run through T-Test and ANCOVA. It was explored from the study that learner's reading comprehension ability improves more when they are provided with learner's readiness. However, this study provides a significant contribution in curriculum innovation and policy with respect to the learner's reading comprehension ability.

Key Words: Learner's Readiness, Reading Comprehension Ability

INTRODUCTION
Perhaps the most well known effect of background knowledge is its ability to directly influence the understanding of what is read (Stahl *et al.,* 1991). It makes perfect sense—the more you know about a topic, the more likely it will be that you can comprehend what is written about it. For instance, when reading an abstract of a scientific article (considered to be the most difficult kind of text), educators are more likely to understand one from the *American Educational Research Journal* than from the *American Journal of Nursing.* It isn't that you can't decode the words or read them fluently, but rather that you don't have the background knowledge to understand radiofrequency catheter ablation. The more extensive a reader's background knowledge is, the easier it is to acquire new information offered by the text (Alfassi, 2004).
Background knowledge also acts indirectly on reading comprehension. Fluency, an important contributor to overall reading comprehension, is heavily impacted by the level of background knowledge one possesses about a topic (Klauda and Guthrie, 2008). The ability to infer meaning in social studies texts is positively influenced by the level of background knowledge the learner has (Tarchi, 2009).

Statement of the Problem
Many studies have been done on factors influencing subject's language learning. Some researchers have investigated the effect of learner's readiness on improving language learning in general, and learning language skills and sub-skills in particular. Some specialists consider the role of schematic knowledge as a determining factor affecting and influencing language components especially comprehension. Brown and Yule (1983) define schemata as "organized background knowledge which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse" (p. 248). They say that the listener uses two basic principles to relate the new information to his or her previous experience: the principle of analogy, i.e., things will be as they were before and the principle of minimal change, i.e., things are as like as possible to how they were before. Gebhard (2000) points out that background knowledge relates to our real world

Research Article

experiences and expectations that we have. This knowledge is very important when we consider the language processing problems of students.

So the present study is an attempt to ameliorate the pedagogical and practical implication and application of the effect of learner's readiness on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's reading comprehension ability.

Research Question

In order to tackle the problem of the research in a much consolidated way, the following research question has been formulated as follows:

RQ: Does learner's readiness have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's reading comprehension ability?

Research Hypothesis

In order to answer the research question, the following null hypothesis has been formulated:

H0: learner's readiness does not have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's reading comprehension ability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Method

1.1. Introduction

This part introduces the method of the study. More specifically it details the design of the study, the subjects who participated in the experiment, the instrumentation, procedures and statistical analysis.

1.2. Design of the Study

The design of the study was quasi-experimental design, which is a pre-post test design.

1.3. Participants

This study followed a quasi-experimental-design. An OPT test was administered to a population of 100 students from which 60 participants were selected. The test is intended to homogenize the research population on the basis of the result of the OPT. The subjects were divided in two groups: experimental group (N=30) and control group (N=30). Both groups took a pretest. The pretest of the study was consisted of a test of reading comprehension. The control group received no treatment and approached the traditional way of teaching. The experimental group received the treatment during 18 sessions besides the book of institute. At the end both groups received the final version of the posttest which was a reading comprehension test.

1.4. Materials

This research scheme takes advantage of three types of tests for the sake of data collection. An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) in order to measure the subject's current status of proficiency level. This test is divided into 3 parts, cloze test, structure, and vocabulary proficiency. The subjects in both groups were screened and equated as far as their proficiency levels were concerned. A pre-test of reading comprehension was given to the subjects to measure the subject's initial differences in reading comprehension test. And finally a post test of reading comprehension was administered to both groups to find out the effectiveness of the treatment.

1.5. Procedure

The procedure through which this study is conducted includes different stages of application which embraces the selection of the subjects, instrument and materials. Basically three types of test were used in this study; one is OPT test which is used to make the subject homogeneous. This test is divided into 3 parts, cloze test, structure, and vocabulary proficiency. Part one begins with questions 1 to 40, Part two from questions 41 to 60, and part three is a writing section. For questions, 1 to 5 students are supposed to mark one letter A, B or C on their answer sheet. From questions, 6 to 10 students must choose the word, which best fits each space in the text. From questions, 11 to 20 students are supposed to choose the word in the space provided in the passage. From questions 21 to 40 students must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence. From questions, 41 to 50 students are given a passage to fill in by choosing the best word or phrase. From questions, 51 to 60 students are supposed to mark one letter A, B,

Research Article

C, or D, which best complete each sentence. Having been homogenized by an OPT test 60 students were selected and they were randomly divided into two groups, control and experimental. Both groups sat for a pre-test of reading comprehension. The purpose of this test was to assess the initial knowledge of the subjects under investigation. The control group received no treatment and approached the traditional way of teaching reading. However, the experimental group received treatment based on learner's readiness. The treatment procedure was based on pre reading activities. The pre reading activities were combined with tasks and texts, which provided learner's with rich exposure through language plus opportunity to use it themselves. The researcher applied and adopted a 2o minute three reading tasks each session. The whole project took for 18 sessions. And the last step was the posttest of reading comprehension in which the subject's ability in both groups on the specific treatment program was assessed.

1.6. Statistical Analysis
The date of the study was computed based on computer assisted program (SPSS) software. T-Test and ANCOVA coefficient was used to present the analysis and result of the study based on the hypothesis of the research

1.7. Data Analysis and Results
In order to find out whether the treatment has been influential and beneficial in improving the subject's reading comprehension ability two kinds of statistical analyses were employed. a t-value (t-test) was calculated between the posttest scores of reading comprehension in the two participant groups to show the effect in the hypothesis of the study. Two separate ANCOVA as were calculated between the scores of pretest and posttest of the experimental group as well as the pretest and posttest of the control group. Descriptive statistics for the application related to the posttest of the experimental and the control group of the study presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The summary of descriptive analysis for the data related to the posttest of the experimental and the control group of the study

Groups	N	Mean	SD
Experimental	30	23.63	1.34
Control	30	21.03	1.62

As table (1) indicates, the mean of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group. Accordingly, the number of participants in each group was 30 ; in addition, the amount of the standard deviation was lower in the experimental group as compared to the control group of the study which indicates that the experimental group posttest scores are more homogenous than those of the control group.

1.8. Inferential Analysis of the Data

Table 2: The summary of t-test between the posttest scores of experimental and the control group of the study

Variance	t	Mean Difference
Equal variance not assumed	4.65	2.60

According to table (2), the result of t-test (tobs= 4.65, p<.05) yielded significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The obtained t-observed is higher than the critical value of t in the t-student table with the degree of freedom of 56 (df = 56) and the level of significance of 0.05 (Sig. = 0.05) for the two-tailed (null)hypothesis as to be 2.000 (tcrit= 2.000). Such a result (tobs>tcrit) rejects the null hypothesis of the current study.

Table (3) below represents the results of two ANCOVA coefficients calculated separately between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental and the control group of the study:

Research Article

Table 3: The covariance matrix between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental and the control group of the study

Group	Covariance
Experimental	1.13
Control	2.06

Table (3) indicates that the coefficient of ANCOVA for the experimental group is lower than that of the control group. This means that the pretest and the posttest scores in the control group are closer to each other as compared to those in the experimental group, which represents that treating the experimental group with learner's readiness has resulted in increasing the range of their reading comprehension scores in the posttest.

The results in tables (2) and (3) indicated that the null hypothesis of the study was rejected. This rejection means that the utilized treatment of the study affected the outcome; thus, it can be concluded that learner's readiness enhance performance in a test of reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners.

Based on the obtained results, certain justifications regarding the effectiveness of learner's readiness on Iranian EFL learner's reading comprehension ability can be made. Accordingly, the subjects under experimental group seemed to succeed because of getting involved in learner's readiness.

Conclusion

In the rush to teach new information, it can be tempting for educators to overlook learner's readiness. But to do so is to build on an unstable foundation. Learner's readiness has a profound influence on student's ability to comprehend what they read. Its effect can be defined directly, as in knowledge of the topic, as well as indirectly, especially in the ability to resolve problems when meaning is lost. Evidence of the effect of learner's readiness can also be seen in the other skills of language such as speaking, listening and writing. Importantly, the ability to acquire new skill is linked to learner's readiness. Learner's readiness has an equally strong effect on student's ability to comprehend reading texts. Without knowledge of the broad application of such strategy, it is nearly impossible to understand the texts completely.

The good news is that there are many curricular and instructional practices that can positively influence activation of learner's readiness.

First, it is useful to teach patterns in history by explicitly identifying the enduring understandings that transcend a single period. In addition, essential questions invite students to examine the details of a time or place in order to answer thought-provoking questions. It is useful to use assessment measures of learner's readiness, such as anticipation guides, in order to examine how strong student's foundational knowledge is, as this provides insight into what should be taught next. By using approaches such as these, we can ensure that learner's readiness is not overlooked.

REFRENCES

Fisher D and Frey N (2009). Background knowledge: The missing piece of the comprehension puzzle. *Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.*

Garcia G (1991). Factors influencing the English reading test performance of Spanish-speaking Hispanic children. *Reading Research Quarterly* **26**(4) 371-392.

Hancock OH (1998). *Reading skills for college students* (4th edition). Upper Saddle Rivers, NJ: Prentice.

Hall Harmer J (2007). *How to teach English.* Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Joshi RM and Aaron PG (2000). The component model of reading: Simple view of reading made a little more complex. *Reading Psychology* **21** 85-97.

Klauda SL and Guthrie JT (2008). Relationships of three components of reading fluency to reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology* **100**(2) 310-321.

Martin-Chang SY and Gould ON (2008). Revisiting print exposure: Exploring differential links to vocabulary, comprehension and reading rate. *Journal of Research in Reading* **31** 273-284.

Research Article

Pressley M (2000). What should the comprehension instruction be instruction of? In: *Handbook of reading research*, edited by Kamil M, Mosenthal P, Pearson P and Barr R (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum) **3** 269-284.

Stahl SA, Hare VC, Sinatra R and Gregory JF (1991). Defining the role of prior knowledge and vocabulary in reading comprehension: The retiring of number 41. *Journal of Reading Behavior* **23** 487-508.

William C and Thomas M (1991). Increasing Comprehension by Activating Prior Knowledge. ERIC Digests. Retrieved 13 July, 2004 from http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9219/prior.htm.