

Investigating the impact of Iranian EFL learners (elementary, intermediate, advanced) use of contextual clues on their knowledge of unknown vocabularies.

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ABSTRACT: *This study was an attempt to examine whether the Iranian EFL learners' use of contextual clues has any significant impact on their knowledge of unknown vocabularies. The participants of the study were one hundred Iranian elementary, intermediate, advanced learners of Andishe Bartar institute in Iran. To homogenize the participants in terms of their English Language Cambridge tests was run sixty participants whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected to take part in the study. The participants were randomly divided into three groups. Firstly, three groups were given pre- tests as experimental groups. After that, four types of contextual clue – explanation, example, antonym, synonym- were taught and practiced during ten sessions of instructions. After teaching, other tests of English Cambridge tests were administered as a post test. The analysis of data revealed that knowledge and use of contextual clues has a significant impact on guessing the meaning of unknown vocabularies amongst three groups.*

KEY WORDS: types of contextual clues, explanation, example, antonym, synonym, prediction of meaning, unknown vocabularies.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing interest in creating more independent language learners who can manage their own learning through strategic vocabulary learning. In order to master academic reading in the second language more effectively, language learners need to possess considerable vocabulary learning skills to learn word meaning more accurately. Vocabulary learning skills are vital as it could equip learners with the ability to improve their experience reading in the second language by learning vocabulary more systematically.

(1) In the latest expansion of English language, the preliminary purpose of English teaching module is to develop goal, the impressive synthesis of the four leading English skills and language elements can be considered as a basic work in English language educating in which vocabulary is of outstanding matter in expanding these proficiencies.

(2) When attempting to decipher the meaning of a new word, it is often useful to look at what comes before and after that word. The surrounding words can give readers helpful context clues about the meaning and structure of the new word, as well as how it is used.

(3) The National Reading Panel (NRP) compiled a report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) identifying and analyzing vocabulary as one of the five prominent components of the reading process. One way to support vocabulary development and help struggling readers is to build word identification and the development of figuring out word meanings through the use of context clues.

(4) One of the greatest problems confronting advanced foreign students when reading material written in English is a heavy load of difficult words and expressions that do not retain even after they have read them and checked their meanings in dictionaries many times. It seems that although their vocabulary developed quickly in the early stages of their study of English, now it has come to a standstill. Little wonder that instead of enjoying reading they often find it a meaningless and boring activity. Some students read without any specific method for remembering new words. They do not pay particular attention to difficult words and structures, but skip over expressions they cannot understand or are afraid to grapple with. Once they have finished a book, they do not go through it again to figure out the meanings of the words that they did not know. As a result, they are dissatisfied with the meager understanding that they have gained from their reading. To tackle these problems, the researcher would describe some procedures that might be helpful for learning lexis in different contexts. Vocabulary knowledge is an important element in second language (L2) acquisition. By learning new words, students can increase their listening, speaking, reading and writing vocabularies and can improve comprehension and production in L2. A student can increase vocabulary meanings in different contexts.

(5) While reading, language learners may confront with unfamiliar words in context. Encountering a few unknown words may not block general comprehension of the text. However, when readers are not acquainted with numerous words or the most essential ones in the text, their reading comprehension may be impaired. In this case, language learners use a variety of strategies such as ignoring unknown words, consulting a dictionary or guessing word meaning from context in order to comprehend reading passages.

(6) Many researchers shared ideas about learning strategies and their functions in the process of second language learning. They defined the strategies as essential techniques intentionally and consciously used by language learners for effective understanding, remembering, and using information. Thus, a number of researchers have focused on the strategic process of learning and the types of strategies most frequently used by successful language learners as well as the conditions under which these strategies are employed by proficient learners (e.g., Anderson, 2003; Goh, 1998, 1999; O'Maley et al., 1989; Rasekh & Ranjbar, 2003; Vandergrift, 1996, 1997; Young, 1997). The findings of these studies support the fact that successful language learners take conscious steps to understand what they are doing through using a wider range of strategies than do less successful learners.

(7) Classification of language learner strategies varies somewhat, depending on the definition of the researchers in question. Many researchers support the classification of L2 learning strategies into six distinct categories that correspond to Oxford's six dimensions of strategy classification for the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Anderson (2003) classifies language learning strategies into seven major categories: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, mnemonic or memory related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and self-motivating strategies. However, other researchers (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Cohen, 1996) use a fewer number.

(8) What is the most efficient way of presenting words, of making clear their meaning, and of causing them to be learned with a view to retention? This central question concerning vocabulary acquisition is still to be answered, despite years of research on the subject. It is true that in the past few years increasingly more attention has been paid to the problems involved in vocabulary acquisition, as various authors have already point out, and has it also evident from the number of important publications that have appeared recently: Meara 1980, 1983, 1987; Takala 1982, 1984; Schouten- van Parreren 1985, Gairns and Redman 1986.

(9) Students can associate new words with the meaningful context in which they appear. Learning words and lexical phrases in context are the main part of language use and development. When language learners read or listen, they usually encounter unfamiliar words in the input. In these cases, they should try to guess their meanings by relying on context clues in the surrounding co-text (Henriksen, 2008). As a result, the way in which learners work out the meaning of unknown words has been the topic of many researches in recent years (Cetinavci, 2013; Clark & Nation, 1980; Hu & Nassaji, 2014; Nassaji, 2003; Wang, 2011).

(10) A strategy really important in reading, because reading strategy is a plan or way of doing something using specific procedure that can help students to comprehending reading texts. Teacher applied a strategy based on their reflection on the students' context and problem. To the context of SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Pekanbaru, some students tend to use dictionary when they read English texts in order to find the meaning of difficult or unfamiliar words. Some students use electronic dictionary or gadget that can be connected with internet. They think that using internet is very effective to understand the meaning of words as well as sentences. As a result, they can understand texts that they have to read.

(11) Vocabulary learning has always been a major concern for language learners (Nation, 2002). One of the two main components of language teaching is vocabulary, the other one grammar. The importance of vocabulary learning can be perceived by looking at the body of research done in this regard (e.g., Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; Singleton, 2008; White, Sowell & Yanagihara, 1989), the variety of teaching techniques and materials developed (e.g., Gairns & Redman, 1998), and also the number of word lists offered for different purposes (e.g., Cobb, 2002; Laufer, 1992; Nation, 1990; West, 1953). To facilitate vocabulary growth, a number of researchers have demonstrated that explicit (direct) learning is more effective than indirect means (Beaton, Grunberg & Ellis, 1995; Hunt & Beglar, 2005; Prince, 1996) and

that explicit vocabulary instruction can enhance vocabulary development (Hatch & Brown, 1995; Zimmerman, 1997). Hence, explicit vocabulary instruction is strongly recommended by several researchers for providing necessary assistance to language learners in both vocabulary learning and longterm retention (Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000).

(13) Nonetheless, in order to gain good knowledge of vocabulary in the second language effectively, it is necessary for students to have practical vocabulary learning strategies to learn new words more effectively and contribute to their reading capacity more positively. Many researchers have agreed that using contextual clues is one of the most effectively used strategies to learn new words. Mart (2012) stresses that learning through context learning. Besides, using contextual clues along the line of the Oxford's (2011) Strategic Self-Regulation Learning (S2R) Model indicates students are more independent and active when they apply strategic learning. What the researchers have done in this study is to show whether or not using contextual clues have any statistically significant effect on predicting meaning of unknown vocabulary on EFL learners? Can those learners who use contextual clues predict the meanings of unfamiliar words better or not? Can those elementary, intermediate and advanced learners use contextual clues; predict the meanings of unfamiliar words better or not? is very much meaningful for students' vocab

METHODOLOGY

The present study set out to investigate the effect of contextual clues on predicting meaning of unknown vocabularies and also the comparative effect of them on learners' prediction of the meaning of unknown vocabularies. It deals with explaining the participants, data collection and data analyses, instrument and the procedure employed to conduct the study.

Participants

The participants of the study were female students who were selected from among 60 students studying at Andisheh Bartar English Language Institute in Damavand, Tehran. They were all native speakers of Persian and were university students, university graduates or high school students with different majors. The participants were all females and males with ages ranged from 15 to 30. These students were selected from Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. The pre-test and post-test were administered among these groups.

Pre- testing knowledge of contextual clues:

To assess the participant's performance regarding contextual clues a pre- test needed to be constructed. The pre- test required the learners to relearners to read the text and choose the correct words for each space and write the correct word in the gaps.

Post- test contextual clues:

The post- test was administered to three groups. According to the object PET, KET and Flyers.

Instrument

The research question was formulated to examine whether contextual clues have any significant effect on predicting the meaning of unknown vocabularies by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Learners received some reading texts and examples which were mentioned after

reading texts, while experimental group received some reading texts which types of contextual clues.

Types of contextual clues consist of:

1. Examples: Examples are kinds of clues to predict the meaning of the unknown words.
2. Definitions: They can be as an appositive sentences or explanations.
3. Synonyms: A word means as the same as unknown words.
4. Opposite/ antonyms: Word that means what the word does not mean.
5. General sense of the sentence: Clues in the sentences or surrounding the sentences about what words might mean.

Data Analysis

The research question was formulated to examine whether contextual clues have any significant effect on predicting the meaning of unknown vocabularies by Iranian primary, intermediate and advanced EFL learners. After classifying the collected information and data, it has been processed and analyzed, and the results and findings of this study have been revealed. The descriptive statistics with the result of paired sample test for the three groups are respectfully presented in Table 1,2 and 3.

Hypothesis 1: Training has no effect on the level of learners in intermediate groups.

Hypothesis 2: Training has an effect on the level of learners in intermediate groups.

Table 1: The result of pre- test and post-test in intermediate level

Variables	N	Error Mean	Mean	T	Sig
Mean score pre-test	20	4.83	57.8	-4.23	00.00
Mean score post- test	20	5.11	68.1		

According to the above table, the calculated test value is significant. The sig value is less than 0.05, the second hypothesis is accepted with 95% confidence and the result can be generalized to the community, it means that the education has an effect on the level of scores of learners.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for intermediate level.

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std.Error	SD	V
Pre test	20	27.00	93.00	1156.00	57.800	4.82842	21.59337	466.274
Post test	20	22.50	97.50	1362.00	68.1000	5.11173	22.86033	522.595

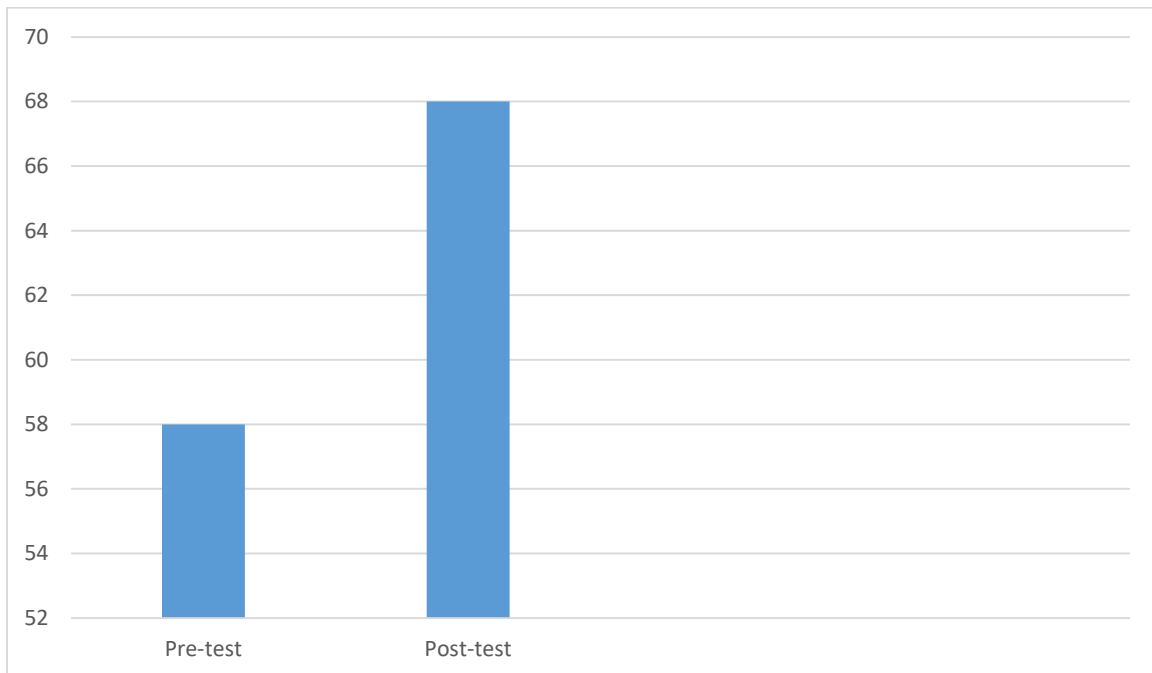


Figure 1: The effect of education on improving the quality level of students.

Hypothesis 1: Training has no effect on the level of learners in Advanced groups.

Hypothesis 2: Training has an effect on the level of learners in Advanced groups.

Table 3: The result of pre-test and post-test in advanced level.

Variables	N	SD	Mean	T	Sig
Mean score before pre-test	20	3.39	66.82	-4.79	0.00
Mean score after post-test	20	2.93	77.95		

As can be seen in table 3, the calculated test value is significant. The sig value is less than 0.05, so the second hypothesis is accepted with 95% confidence and the result can be generalized to the community, it means that the education has an effect on the level of scores of learners.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for Advanced level.

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std.Error	SD	V
Pre-test	20	41.00	92.00	1336.50	66.8250	3.38714	15.14776	229.4
Post-test	20	44.50	100.00	1559.00	77.9500	2.92851	13.09671	171.5

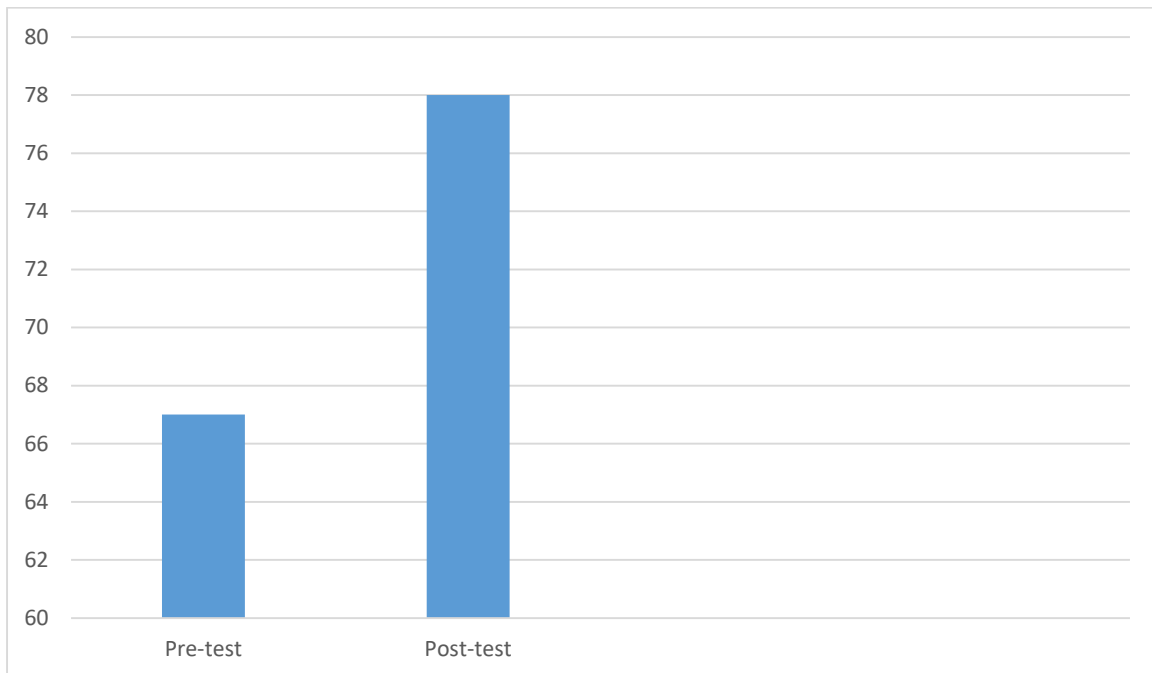


Figure 2: The effect of education on improving the quality level of Advanced students.

Hypothesis 1: Training has no effect on the level of learners in primary group.

Hypothesis 2: Training has an effect on the level of learners in primary group.

Table 5: The result of pre-test and post-test in primary level.

Variables	N	SD	Mean	T	Sig
Mean score before pre-test	20	5.18	63.67	-3.97	0.00
Mean score after post-test	20	4.62	71.50		

As can be observed, the calculated test value is meaningful. The sig value is less than 0.05, so the second hypothesis is accepted with 95% confidence and the result can be generalized to the community, it means that the training has an effect on the level of scores of learners.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for primary level.

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std.Error	SD	V
Pre-test	20	24	95.00	1273.50	63.6750	5.18262	23.17739	537.191
Post-test	20	32.50	98.00	1430.00	71.5000	4.61733	20.64933	426.395

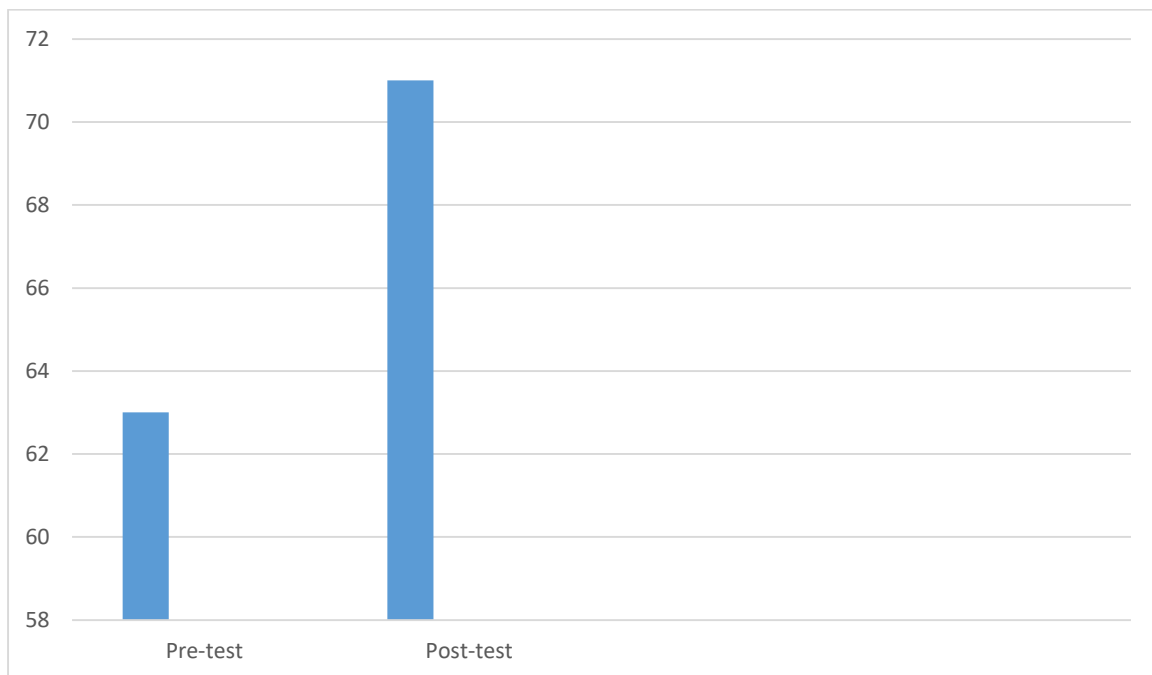


Figure 3: The effect of education on improving the quality level of primary students.

The study was an attempt to examine the effects of contextual clues techniques on predicting meaning of unknown vocabularies of intermediate EFL learners. Thus, the main objectives of the study are: (a) to investigate the effect of contextual clues on predicting meaning of unknown vocabularies which contributed to improve the reading comprehension of different texts, and (b) to examine the effectiveness of certain types of contextual clues which require the learners guess the meaning of unfamiliar vocabularies in the text quickly. (c) to find the comparative effect of types of contextual clues on learners' prediction of the meaning of unknown vocabularies. The previous study revealed that certain types of contextual clues, such as, antonym, synonym, example, explanation, etc.... are more effective on guessing meaning of unknown vocabularies, reading comprehension and listening comprehension. These studies revealed that trained students can guess the meaning of vocabularies in reading faster than other students. Thus using contextual clues as you read is important for one reason.

CONCLUSION

This study attempts to investigate the effect of contextual clues on guessing meaning of unknown vocabularies and to examine the comparative effect of types of contextual clues (synonyms, definitions -explanations-, antonyms) on learners' prediction of the meaning of unknown vocabularies. The findings of the study reveal that first, different types of contextual clues are significantly effective in better comprehension and understanding of unknown vocabularies in post-test

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