

## The Effects of Vocabulary Pre-teaching and Pre-questioning on Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Ability

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### ABSTRACT

Considering comprehension is a main skill in English learning. It is critical to use pre-reading methods in reading instruction to assist students increase their comprehension. This study investigated the effectiveness of pre-questioning and vocabulary pre-teaching on EFL pupil reading comprehension ability. Sixty students participated in the study. An experimental plan was utilized. Twenty pupils were elected for the first experimental group that received vocabulary pre-teaching method, the second experimental group, also consisted of 20 students, received pre-questioning strategy and 20 students in control group gave the conventional method. Students in the groups on both pre-test and post-test were asked to consider a reading text, and after that reply reading comprehension queries. Findings revealed that there were statistically significant variation among the groups. The experimental groups outperformed the control group. Moreover, results indicated that the vocabulary pre-teaching one performance was better than the pre-questioning group.

**Key words:** EFL Teaching, Pre-reading Methods, Reading Comprehension, Pre-questioning, Vocabulary Pre-teaching, Schema Theory

### INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four necessary important language skills for those learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). EFL students need to read texts written in English to get information for careers, academic studies and so on. The ability to comprehend texts which make up the bulk of their foreign language learning is, therefore, very important for all of them. Poor English reading ability of EFL students is commonly recognized in the classes. Several causes have been identified in regard to the EFL students' poor English reading problem. These include a lack of reading resources, a lack of strong reading culture, a lack of reading strategy knowledge, and teachers' use of unsuccessful teaching methods.

Research indicates that two factors play a major role in how well students understand a text: adequate vocabulary and background knowledge. The more words students know and recognize, the better they understand a text (Nation, 2001). At the same time, the more prior knowledge and experience students have about the topic of a given text, the better they understand it. Nation (2001) argues that although vocabulary comprehension is not the equivalent of reading comprehension, reading comprehension is not accessible without vocabulary knowledge.

On the other hand, Ajideh (2006) claims that one of the problems most EFL students face is they have no knowledge about the topic of the reading text and accordingly their attempts to answer reading comprehension questions prove largely futile. The fact is that the problem is not the lack of background knowledge, but the problem comes back to activating the background knowledge. Ajideh continues that the majority of English teachers simply turn a blind eye to pre-reading activities. These activities, which are rooted in the schema theory, give a solution to the EFL students' problem, because the students are able to get knowledge, and activate background knowledge.

This research has two main purposes: (1) understanding the possible effect of pre-reading strategies on the vocabulary learning, and (2) investigating whether pre-questioning is more efficie t than vocabulary pre-teaching for Iranian EFL pupils or vice versa. The study will help teachers to better understand how pre-reading activities are being used as an alternative vocabulary teaching method. Usually teachers spend a lot of time looking for various vocabulary teaching methods that they can use regularly. This study may shed more light on applying pre-reading techniques in reading classes which help pupils with the meaning of key indexes while other techniques encourage pupils to read the text.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Schemata and Reading Skills

Based on Nuttall (1996), the schema "is a mental formation. It is abstract since it does not correlate to any particular event, although it acquires from all the specific events we have had. It is a formation since it is organized; it includes the connections among its parts." (p. 7).

If a student possesses adequate schemata of the text is able to initiate them successfully, the reader can understand the text properly. In the other words, a reader with weak schemata cannot affect the thought and message of the text and the reader just spend more time to read the text and understand it. Nuttall (1996) gave an instance. The first sentence from the example is, *The bus careered along and ended up in the hedge*. In this sentence (p. 7), bus schema can highlight the idea. Also there is no mention of road in the text, however the reader does not have any problem in understanding that the bus was driving through 'a road'.

However, if the reader lacks the necessary schemata, the reader will have problems to understand the text, and is confused where the bus stopped! Therefore, reading uses the reader's schemata and modifies it. Furthermore, all the schemata should not be recalled. The reader just activates the related schemata.

The readers' Schemata are not fixed. They are always in variation. Existing schemata might be varied or amended by new experiences- experiences obtained from reading, or from our daily affairs. According to Nuttall's (1996) word, "a schema grows and varies among the lives, for as long as we retain the capability to learn" (p. 8).

It is hypothesized that schemata of a pupil play has a key role in interpreting and understanding. Based on Shahidullah (1996), "teaching of reading matters principally by schema activation and availability" (p. 214). Cultural, religious, historical and social schemata are all necessary to understand a sentence meaning well.

### Studies into Accuracy and Cohesion

Pre-reading strategies refer to various instructional methods that focus on the comprehension of the text without decoding the meaning of unknown words. Therefore pre-reading strategies make a passage easier to comprehend. The pre-reading strategies aid the EFL learners to create vocabulary fluency, determine the meaning of unknown words in the text accurately and automatically. The pre-reading strategies teach how to connect the vocabulary to comprehension. Beck, et al., (1982) expressed:

A vocabulary learning plan can result in gains in comprehension. Following guidance, subjects process original word definitions more precisely and more quickly. Advances in understanding follow since construction of passage meaning is made easier since original word meanings are understood (p. 520).

Focusing on the meaning of unknown words in reading a text captures the short-term brain capacity and hinders comprehension. Comprehension can be disrupted if great deals of unfamiliar words are in the text (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011).

Pre-vocabulary instruction also "gives both contextual and definitional data regarding the words to be learned as well as various exposures and chances to apply them" (Blachowicz, et al., 2006, p. 57).

Pre-vocabulary instruction in reading classes gave a brief summary of the content of the passage before the reading and help the learners to activate the background knowledge to interact with the text successfully. This activation of schema assisted the reader to start their association with the text. If there is no link to these indexes already, the pre-teaching will assist to build this background knowledge. If there is a link to the indexes, the pre-teaching will help the reader to activate the meanings of the indexes. Beck et al., (1982) discovered that while primary ideas are given before reading, both proficient and less experienced readers profited; less experienced readers accomplished just as well as the proficient ones from the control group taking no prior knowledge activation.

Pre-teaching vocabulary has been determined to be associated with the access, instrumental, and knowledge impacts of vocabulary knowledge as well as prior knowledge activation. Students that have been pre-taught vocabulary can comprehend a passage with more complex words. Kameenui et al., (1998) attended a research in which a control group was given a text utilizing simple words, and the treatment group was assigned to a text with complex synonyms replaced for those simple ones. They observed that through the pre-teaching that the pupils that were pre-taught the complex words had the same gains in comprehension as those who were assigned the simple words. "The replacement of familiar terms for complex or unfamiliar synonyms in a passage makes it simpler to comprehend. People are aided to comprehend a passage if they learn the meanings of the strange terms it includes" (Kameenui et al., 1998, p. 385). Medo and Ryder (1993) had related conclusions meanwhile they discovered that there is better comprehension with high-frequency words than with low-frequency ones. Variations from low to high word frequency facilitated reading comprehension. In their research, Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) discovered that pupils had increased word knowledge while the teacher taught the word meanings before and after a story that was read to them. Pupils had gains of 10 percent when evaluated on word knowledge in instructed and uninstructed meanings through storybook reading (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

It takes time to observe the learners' improvement in reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge after using vocabulary pre-instruction in the classes. A study by Beck et al. (1982) confirmed the effect of vocabulary pre-instruction on the learners' reading comprehension ability. The important point was the time, after the experiment the results of the post-test showed a medium effect size but the effect size was big after a year. This study verified the importance of breadth and depth of vocabulary learning.

Pre-questioning plays a key role in interactive learning (Brown, 2001, p. 169). Good questioning have various characteristics, such as:

- a. Teacher issues give pupils the chance to create language comfortably without having to risk starting language themselves. It is so scary for the pupils to have to start conversation or issues for discussion.

- b. Teacher queries can serve to start a chain reaction of students' interaction between themselves.
- c. Teacher queries are giving direct feedback regarding pupils' comprehension.
- d. Teacher queries present learners with chances to find out what they consider. As they are pushed into answering questions, say, reading, they can find what their ideas and reactions are. This self-discovery can be particularly helpful for a pre-reading activity (Brown, 2001, p. 169).

According to Brown's (2001), he gave definition of pre-questioning as asking some questions based on the topic of the text prior to reading the text. He also believed that the pre-questioning strategy build the students' interest, motivation and cognitive factors. Therefore pre questioning is very well for activating the schemata to predict what is in the reading text.

According to Harmer (2001, p. 153) There are some sorts of pre-questioning, they are: Pre-questioning prior to reading to verify expectations, pre-questioning prior to reading to extract specific information, pre-questioning before reading for overall comprehension, and pre-questioning prior to reading for detail one. The specifications are as follows

Pre-questioning prior to reading to verify expectations. The application of pre-questioning as a device for placing great emphasis on the lead-in stage (where pupil are inspired to become interested in the topic matter of the passage), encourages pupils to predict the content of the passage, and gives them an attractive and motivating desire for reading.

Pre-questioning prior to reading to extract particular information. Pre-questioning as a device to force the learners to extract particular information from the passage. They are going to reply before reading the passage. If they do this it will be possible for them to read in an imperative way, they should see the text only to obtain the information the questions demand.

Pre-questioning prior to reading for overall comprehension, In this instance, pre-questioning employed to build up the students' prior knowledge.

Pre-questioning before reading for detailed comprehension, This sort of pre-questioning aims to provide the pupils some detailed information that should be obtained by them in the whole of the text.

According to Alexander and Heathington (1988, p. 225) teachers use questions before and after reading to achieve a number of purposes: a. to motivate and arouse interest, b. give the children reasons for further reading, c. assess and develop background experiences, concepts and information, d. improve comprehension, e. help vocabulary development, f. review and reinforce concepts and information, g. serve as a basis for deciding whether or not children should read particular selections, h. help students to determine the most appropriate reading rate i. aid in memory.

The pre-questioning strategy helped students' reading comprehension ability especially since students eagerly read the text and interpret the writer's intention to comprehend the text (Silberstein, 1994). On the one hand, pre-questioning strategy motivated the learners to read. On

the other hand, the teacher put a lot of effort in the class. If the teacher cannot control the class it can make valueless (Silberstein, 1994). Moreover, students must master the text ans using strategy to comprehend the text no matter their poor influence comprehending the reading text (Israel et al, 2005).

## PARTICIPANTS

This study took place from April to June 2016 at a language institute in Ardabil. The students of six classrooms were asked to cooperate in the research. All pupils participated in the research. Only the data of the learners who signed consent forms were used in the analysis. One hundred thirty four students were involved in the research. All the learners took Oxford Proficiency Test to make sure they are at the intermediate level. The learners who got above 47 were considered as the sample of the study. A sample was 60 female EFL students. There were two experimental and a control groups. Twenty of the students were stochastically linked to each experimental group. Finally, twenty learners were in the control group. All the students' native language was Turkish; their ages were from 19 to 30.

## PROCEDURES

An assistant teacher participated in the research. The researcher prepared a booklet to discuss the procedures of the study. Training of the teacher was two sessions before the research. The first session gave a general description of the process. The second educating session was a week later. The researcher reviewed the process and replied any queries the teacher had regarding the research.

The informed consent form was given to all of the students one session prior to the beginning of the research. The form described the manner of the study and how the data would be gathered, reported, and ended.

Because students who attended the study were not homogeneous in terms of their English language proficienc , some were at upper-intermediate level and others at a lower intermediate level, students were needed to take a placement test and then the learners who were at the intermediate level were chosen as the sample of the research.

After administering Oxford Placement Test for choosing the intermediate level learners, the researcher assigned the learners into three groups. All the groups took a pre-test of reading comprehension. The aim of the pre-test was to evaluate whether the targeted words were unfamiliar to the students.

All the learners in three groups took part in research. Lessons were taught at the different time of the day every week. The classroom teacher used all the activities and assessments prepared by the researcher for all three classes. Each lesson or reading activity took about 50 minutes.

The first experimental group got the vocabulary pre-teaching strategy. In each session, all the learners were given a new reading text. The researcher read the topic of the text and then gave a brief summary regarding the issue

to familiarize pupils with the content. Next, she told them to look at a draft of new vocabulary below the text and queries. The researchers translated the new vocabulary and expressions into Persian with the learners. Sometimes the students requested synonyms. The students made connections among the words and the title of the text. The learners said that they actively involved in reading text. Then, the teacher asked the participants to read the passage and reply the reading comprehension questions. Participants were given 10 minutes more to reply the queries.

The second experimental group utilized a pre-questioning procedure. Each session, the pupils were given a one-sentence summary of the reading text. Then the teacher asked some related questions. Although the participants were not sure of the answers, they said anything they knew. When the researcher introduced the topic, the students knew nothing. When the participants were involved in pre-questioning strategy, they were eager to read the text. After asking various questions, the participants were given 10 minutes to read the passage and reply the following queries.

Students in the control group were taught reading comprehension according to the plan of language institute. The learners in the control groups read the text and answered the comprehension questions. They didn't get any vocabulary pre-reading strategies. They only were given the same OPT and reading pretest and a reading post-test. Their scores were related to learners in the experimental groups to evaluate the influence of pre-teaching techniques instruction on their reading comprehension. All the groups took the posttest after the last treatment session.

## RESULTS

The results of the posttest appear below in Table 1.

As it is presented in Table 1, the means of the vocabulary pre-teaching, pre-questioning, and control groups are 15.15, 13.95, and 11.40, respectively.

The normality check of posttest scores (Table2) showed the scores are normal. The following table presents analysis of homogeneity of variances for the posttest.

Table 3. showed the homogeneity of the variance for the posttest. The obtained significant value is higher than.05 which suggests that variances for the groups are equal. Table 4 shows the mean comparison of pre-vocabulary teaching group with the control group.

The above table shows that the sig. value is smaller than.05 which means that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental vocabulary pre-teaching. The sig. value is.000. Table 5 shows the mean comparison of pre-questioning group with the control group on the posttest.

A very short glance at the Table 5 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental pre-questioning group and control group. The sig. value is.000. The following table shows the result.

Table 6 indicates the results of one-way ANOVA for the differences among the three groups on the posttest. There was a statistically significant difference among the groups,  $F=20.58, p>.000$ .

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the posttest scores

Group	N	M	SD
Vocabulary	20	15.15	1.75
Pre-question	20	13.95	1.05
Control	20	11.40	1.50

**Table 2.** Normality check for score on posttest

	Statistic	Kolmogorov Smirnov	
		Df	Sig.
Posttest	0.126	60	0.091

**Table 3.** Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.870	2	57	0.164

**Table 4.** Mean comparison of pre-vocabulary and control groups

Group	Group	Mean differences	Standard error	Sig.
Pre-vocabulary	Vs. Control	3.75	0.46	0.000

**Table 5.** Mean comparison of pre-questioning and control groups

Group	Group	Mean differences	Standard error	Sig.
Pre-questioning	Vs. Control	2.55	0.46	0.000

**Table 6.** Results of one-way ANOVA for posttest scores

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	146.700	2	73.350	34.186	0.000
Within groups	122.300	57	2.146		
Total	269.000	59			

**Table 7.** Scheffe post-hoc test results among the three groups for the posttest

Group (1)	Group (2)	Mean differences	Standard error	Sig.
1*	Vs. 2**	1.20	0.46	0.042
1	Vs. 3***	3.75	0.46	0.000
2	Vs. 3	2.55	0.46	0.000

\* = vocabulary pre-teaching, \*\* = pre-questioning \*\*\* = control

However, to pinpoint exactly where the differences existed, a Scheffe post-hoc test was run on the posttest. As Table 7 indicates that the participants linked to the vocabulary pre-teaching group outperformed the other groups,  $p < .05$ . Besides, the pre-questioning group outperformed the control group,  $p < .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

The result indicated that the experimental vocabulary pre-teaching group outperformed the control group. This is in line with the finding of Anderson and Freebody (1981). They observed that there is a high correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension in most of reading research.

Therefore teaching vocabulary before the reading the text is affective if key words are directly taken from the text. This study is similar to that of Hudson (1982). In Hudson study, it is concluded that the students learn vocabulary important to the story. The learners used the vocabulary strategies and answered the reading comprehension questions in 5 minutes and it took eight minute to answer the long reading texts.

In the Taglieber et al. (1988) research, the participants tried to predict the meaning of the new phrases in the sentences. This was a successful strategy to teach and learn the vocabulary. On the other hand, Hulstijn (2001) proposed that, "elaborating on a new word's definition in itself might not suffice to have it available for later access". L1 equivalent of the new words is considered less laborious for EFL learners. Nation (2001) said that it is a wrong idea to believe L1 translation should not be used by EFL teachers in reading classes. He also claimed that translating into L1 is like "choosing an easy synonym" because understanding L2 equivalent is difficult for the learners

The analysis of the data indicated that the pre-questioning method was efficient too. The Taglieber et al. (1988) performed a research to survey the impact of pre-questioning. In their study, teacher read aloud a sentence from the passage and asked the learners to predict some questions that the reading text may aim to answer. In other words, pre-questioning in Taglieber et al. (1988) was a list of comprehension questions. Miciano (2002) studied whether self-questioning affect the reading comprehension of Filipino students who were learning English. The learners were "given a session training in question formulation that ran for 15 days". The findings verified that "self-questioning as a strategy in ESL reading may not deeply influence the text comprehension". Carrell (1984) claimed, "Some passages that have comprehension inquiries following the texts propose that these may be applied as pre-reading questions" (p. 335). Ajideh (2006) assumed that teachers "can adopt ... reading questions from the comprehension questions that there are in the textbook after the reading selection or in the teachers' manual" (pp. 7-8).

Pre-reading strategies help the learners to comprehend the text for the best because pre-reading strategies encourage the learners to activate their background knowledge (Maghsoudi, 2012; Zhaohua, 2004). The results of this study are in contradiction with Mihara's results. Mihara's (2011) found that the learners who got pre-questioning pre-reading strategy were more successful than the learners who used pre-vocabulary instruction.

According to Ur (2007), motivation has a key role in language learning. Pre-reading strategy facilitates the learners' reading comprehension and also motivates the learners to read the text.

This research proposes that for Iranian intermediate level students, vocabulary pre-teaching is more eddicine and applicable than pre-questioning. Data analyses show that for the three intermediate classes, pre-vocabulary teaching strategy class did better on a reading comprehension test than other classes. The findings of this study do not confirm the Taglieber et al. (1988) study's results. Therefore Iranian and Brazilian students are not the same in using pre-reading strategies. After vocabulary pre-teaching, students had greater comprehension on the post-test in comparison with the pre-questioning and control groups. The result was similar to other studies, (Armbruster & Nagy, 1992; Medo & Ryder, 1993). This finding confirmed that students in the pre-vocabulary instruction group benefited greatly from the pre-reading strategy.

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