

greater than that of the control group due to the instructional focus on content-related support as a teaching procedure. Therefore, it can be said that the content-related instruction can positively affect reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that content-related support has a significant effect on reading comprehension. Providing the learners with background knowledge provides learners with the necessary information to facilitate reading comprehension on an unfamiliar topic. One implication of the results is that content-related support is an important procedure in improving reading. The background knowledge of the students bring which is enhanced through content-related support can help them comprehend the text more successfully. The enhanced background knowledge helps the learners match new information with what they already know about the topic. This study can be significant for English teachers in institutes and private schools as the findings of the study can help them improve their teaching techniques in reading comprehension. In addition, Iranian EFL learners, can benefit from the findings of this study as they are made aware of the significance of background knowledge in reading comprehension.

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Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the effect of content-related support on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. After analyzing the data through descriptive statistics and applying a t-test on the experimental and the control groups' mean scores, the results revealed that the experimental groups' outperformed the control group. Therefore, it can be concluded that the training program based on content-related support could have positive effects on the experimental groups' reading comprehension.

Webb (2009) investigated the effect of pre-learning vocabulary on reading comprehension and writing of Japanese EFL learners. The findings suggest that pre-learning FL vocabulary may be an effective method of improving reading comprehension. In the same

Iranian students usually gain low scores in reading comprehension so, there is a necessity to find a solution to this problem

vein, Jamalipour and Farahani (2015) investigated Iranian EFL learners' L2 reading comprehension ability after receiving vocabulary instruction and background knowledge instruction. The results of a repeated measures one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences between the experimental and control conditions. The participants of both the vocabulary and background instruction

groups outperformed their peers in the control group. In another related study, Ehsanjou and Khodareza (2014) analyzed how pre-listening activities (preview of questions & studying unfamiliar vocabularies) could be useful in developing listening comprehension. The results indicated that preview of questions as a pre-listening activity can be effective in teaching listening comprehension. The findings of the present study support the results of the above-mentioned studies. The findings of the study confirm that the experimental group's mean score was



According to Table 2, the mean differences between the two groups was not significant $p > .05$. This shows that the students in the two groups were at the same level of reading comprehension.

● *Results of the Post-test*

The same statistical procedure was used for the post-test results. The statistical analysis of the post-test for the experimental and the control group is presented in Table 3.

The background knowledge of the students bring which is enhanced through content-related support can helps them comprehend the text more successfully

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' reading Performance in post-test

Group Statistics					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	experimental group	25	16.0800	1.44106	28821.
	control group	25	12.5200	1.78232	35646.

Based on the Table 3, the mean scores of the experimental group in the post-test was higher than the mean scores of control - group in post-test. To see if the difference between the participants' performance after the treatment was statistically significant or not, a t-test was conducted. The results are shown below in Table 4.

Based on Table 4, it can be argued that there is a significant difference between the groups ($t = 7.76$, $p < .000$). In fact, the group which was instructed through content-related had significantly performed better than the group instructed through traditional methods. These results support the positive effect of using the content-related support in teaching reading.

Table 4 T-test Results for the Participants after Treatment

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.613	.438	7.766	48	.000	3.56000	.45840	2.63832	4.48168
Equal variances not assumed			7.766	45.984	.000	3.56000	.45840	2.63727	4.48273

● *Data Analysis*

The data were collected through a pre- and post-test in order to answer the research questions. The results of both tests were analyzed using the SPSS program. First, the data of the pre-test for each group was inserted and analyzed separately in order to find the mean and standard deviation of the scores of each group. The same procedure was followed for the scores of the post-test of each group. An independent sample t-test was used and the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

● *Results of the Pre-test*

To answer the research question addressing the effectiveness of content related support on participants' reading comprehension, two t-tests were run; one on the pre-test and the second one on the post-tests of the control and experimental groups. The descriptive statistics of the pre-test are presented in Table 1.

Table.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' reading Performance in pre-test

Group Statistics					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	experimental group	25	12.0400	1.59374	.31875
	control group	25	11.4800	1.91746	.38349

According to the table above, the mean of the experimental group was higher than the control group $12.04 > 11.48$ and the standard deviation of two groups were also different 1.59 and 1.91. After collecting the data, an independent sample t-test was performed using SPSS to analyze the possible differences between the two groups' scores. The results are presented in Table 2.

Content - related support is one of the best methods to teach reading. It invokes students to make themselves prepared for taking the challenges of reading text

Table 2. T- test Results for Participants' reading performance

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.476	.494	1.123	48	.267	.56000	.49866	-.44263	1.56263
Equal variances not assumed			1.123	46.447	.267	.56000	.49866	-.44350	1.56350

meaning retention lasted for two weeks, the effect of topic familiarity decreased over time. Also, think-aloud protocols were used to identify the main reasons leading participants to make incorrect inferences. The findings imply that lexical inferencing should be practiced in texts with adequate cues. The present study aimed to address the following question.

1. Does practice of content- related support have any significant impact on students' reading comprehension?

Method

● *Participants*

The participants of the study were 80 intermediate female students studying in a language institute in Shahrekord. Then, based on their performance on OPT, 50 intermediate participants were selected. All of the participants were native speakers of Persian.

● *Instrumentation*

The instruments in this study was a reading comprehension test including four passages accompanied with 20 multiple-choice items. The validity of the test was confirmed by two experienced teachers, and the reliability of the test was measured through KR-21.

● *Procedure*

First, a test of reading comprehension was administered to 50 participants studying at a language Institute in Shahrekord, in which four English passages accompanied with 20 multiple questions were given to the participants. Each item received one point. After making sure of their homogeneity in the knowledge of reading comprehension, one group was taught the reading skill

through content- related support. In the experimental group, before starting to teach the passage the teacher talked about the topic, asked questions about the topic and presented some pictures about the topic. The content- related support was in the form of statements, picture, talking about unfamiliar words and giving some information about the content of the forthcoming reading. This pre-reading activity was aimed to activate the readers' pre-existing knowledge and offer a general view about the forthcoming data.

In the other group, students learned through traditional method of reading. The instruction lasted three months, and the two groups attended the class twice a week. At the end of the semester, there was a reading comprehension post-test for two groups. The items were 20. Each answer received one point. Wrong responses were not given penalties. In all test administrations, the instructor was presented to clarifying the ambiguities to the examinees. To score the tests, the following steps was followed. No answer or wrong answer was scored 0; if the correct answer was given, the item was scored 1. To scores ranged from 0 to 20 for each participant. After the required data was collected, they was analyzed statistically.

Reading is greatly valued by students and teachers alike since it increases the process of language acquisition and helps students read for different purposes

Literature Review

Background knowledge which is also referred to as subject knowledge or topic familiarity of learners about the reading text has been investigated in L2 literature for years. Content related support is one of the best methods to teach reading. It invokes students to make themselves prepared for taking the challenges of reading text. The followings are some related studies about pre-task activities and reading comprehension and pre-task activities and other skills.

Alptekin (2006) defined reading as interaction between the reader's text-based and knowledge-based processes

Jamalipour and Farahani (2015) investigated Iranian EFL learners' L2 reading comprehension ability after receiving vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge instruction. In the experimental conditions, the pre-reading activities of vocabulary and background knowledge were used to practice the reading skill; while, in the control condition traditional methods of language teaching were utilized. The results of a repeated measures one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences between the experimental and control conditions, with the participants of both the vocabulary and background instruction groups outperforming their peers in the control group. Maghsoudi (2012) investigated the effects of schema activation through three pre-reading activities – pictorial context, pre-teaching, and previewing – on reading comprehension of cultural texts

among Iranian EFL learners. The results showed that the students' comprehension of cultural texts was improved as a result of the two training sessions of schema activation via the three pre-reading activities. Webb (2009) investigated the effects of pre-learning vocabulary on reading comprehension and writing of Japanese EFL learners. Specifically, the study was designed to investigate the effects of receptive and productive learning of word pairs. The findings suggest that pre-learning of FL vocabulary may be an effective method of improving reading comprehension. Ehsanjou and Khodareza (2014) analyzed how pre-listening activities (preview of questions and studying unfamiliar vocabularies) could be useful in developing listening comprehension and which one is more effective and helpful as pre-listening. The results indicated that preview of questions as pre-listening activity was effective in teaching listening comprehension and studying unfamiliar vocabulary items had no significant effect on improving learners' listening comprehension. Kaivanpanah and Rahimi (2017) examined the effect of contextual clues and topic familiarity on L2 lexical inferencing success and retention. To this end, 67 Iranian EFL learners read stories (cue-adequate contexts varying in degree of familiarity) and single sentences (cue inadequate contexts) including unknown lexical items and inferred the meaning of unknown words. Subsequently, they were tested on those words once immediately and once after two weeks. Results revealed an inferencing success rate of 55.76%, with success being significantly affected by the amount of contextual clues and topic familiarity. Moreover, it was found that although the effect of context on word

Introduction

According to Birch (2002) reading is a complex cognitive process because it involves a lot of precise knowledge structures and many processing strategies which must be practiced until they become automatic. The common view of reading considers this skill as consisting of decoding/word recognition and general comprehension (Alderson, 2005). Understanding the process of reading is important to an understanding of the nature of reading. Reading which is defined as practically synonymous with reading comprehension is a complex behavior which involves conscious and unconscious use of various strategies, including problem-solving strategies, to build a model of the meaning which the writer is assumed to have intended (Johnston 1983). According to Alderson (2005), the process of reading is what we mean by 'reading' proper: the interaction between the reader and the text. The process is silent, internal, private, dynamic, variable, and different for the same reader on the same text at a different time or with a different purpose in reading. Several methods are used to investigate the reading process such as miscue analysis, which analyses the mistakes readers make when reading aloud and introspection through think-aloud protocols or verbal retrospection elicited through an interview schedule.

Alptekin (2006) defined reading as interaction between the reader's text-based and knowledge-based processes. In processing texts, readers combine literal comprehension, based on lower-level cognitive processes of reading such as lexical access and syntactic parsing, with inferential comprehension, based on higher-level cognitive processes

such as the text base of comprehension (to understand what the text says) and the situation model of interpretation (to understand what it is about). Based on Behjat, Bagheri and Yamini, (2012), reading comprehension is the ability of perceiving a written text in order to understand its contents. The essence of reading is 'comprehension'. Reading is greatly valued by students and teachers alike since it increases the process of language acquisition and helps students read for different purposes. In Iran, English is a foreign language and reading English is important for academic purposes. Although English is learned as a subject at school, it continues to be important for university education. Iranian university EFL students are required to learn reading in the classroom in order to successfully gain access to new information for academic purposes. In addition, Iranian students usually gain low scores in reading comprehension so, there is a necessity to find a solution to this problem. So, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of content-related support on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

Reading is a complex cognitive process because it involves a lot of precise knowledge structures and many processing strategies which must be practiced until they become automatic

The Effects of Content- Related Support on Enhancing Reading Comprehension Ability of Iranian EFL Learners

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چکیده

این تحقیق به منظور بررسی استفاده از پوشش محتوایی در تدریس خواندن و درک مطلب در میان زبان آموزان ایرانی صورت گرفت. به این منظور آزمون تعیین سطح برگزار شد و از میان ۶۰ دانش آموز دختر ۵۰ نفر انتخاب شدند که سطح یکسانی داشتند. منتخبان به دو گروه آزمایش و کنترل تقسیم شدند. در ابتدای مطالعه، یک پیش آزمون اجرا شد و بعد از آن گروه آزمایش از طریق پشتیبانی محتوا آموزش دیدند؛ در حالی که گروه کنترل از طریق روش های سنتی لغت آموزش می دیدند. سپس یک آموزش سه ماهه بین پیش آزمون و پس آزمون صورت گرفت. و هنگامی که سه ماه آموزش به پایان رسید، آزمون درک مطلب دیگری به عنوان پس آزمون روی شرکت کنندگان هر دو گروه برای ارزیابی درک مطلبشان اجرا شد. سرانجام با استفاده از «تی تست» مشخص شد که پشتیبانی محتوا تأثیر بیشتری نسبت به روش های سنتی تدریس لغت داشت. یافته های این مطالعه دستاوردهای بسیاری برای وزارت آموزش و پرورش ایران، سازندگان محتوای درسی، مدرسه های زبان و دانشجویان دانشگاهی خواهد داشت.

کلیدواژه ها: درک مطلب، پشتیبانی محتوا، یادگیرندگان زبان های خارجی

Abstract

This research aimed to find out whether using content- related support in teaching reading comprehension is effective on reading ability of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered and out of 60 students 50 female students who were at the same level of proficiency were selected as the control and the experimental groups. A pre-test was also administrated to check their knowledge at the beginning of the study. Then, the experimental group was taught through content- related support; while the control group members were taught through conventional method. There was a three month treatment between the pre-test and the post-test. After instructions, another reading comprehension test, was administered to assess participants reading comprehension. Independent samples t-tests showed that using content- related support was more effective than the traditional method of teaching reading on the Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension. The findings of this study have implications for EFL curriculum developers, language schools, and EFL learners.

Key Words: reading comprehension, content- related support, Iranian EFL learners