

reading comprehension and it is particularly important for the less proficient language students who are more word-bound, and for them meaning tends to break down at the word level while they read.

The findings of this research project could be of use to most language learning centers, universities, and schools, in reading instruction; They also add one more weapon to the learners' armory of learning and vocabulary building.

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**Table 3. Comparison of mean scores of the experimental and control group regarding productive use in the post-test**

Group	n	Mean	SD	df	T-observed	T-critical
Experimental Group (VP group)	40	22,72	4,29	78	3,8980	2,000
Control Group (VUP)	40	19,4	3,26			

The result shows that the experimental group for which vocabulary was previewed performed significantly better than the controlled group for which vocabulary was not previewed.

## Conclusion and implications

This study has shown that vocabulary previewing activities are far more effective in improving reading comprehension of EFL learners as well as their receptive and productive vocabulary use. The findings of this study do not support the theories proposed by Been(1975), Wilson (1973), Morgan and Rinvolverci (1986), and Celce-Marcia (1979) who claimed that pre-text work on vocabulary before going through reading selections focuses students' attention on details, which is not useful in terms of reading comprehension. Celce-Murcia (1979) believes that vocabulary should be discussed once the selection has been started or when it is finished rather than before students begin to read.

The findings of the present investigation support the ideas of Bristow (1981), Rivers and Temperly (1978), Garfinkel and Hamilton (1976), Omanson and Perfetti (1985), Finocchiaro (1986), Durell (1956), Carrel and Eisterhold (1977); Stanovich

(2000); Ringlerand& Weber, 1984; Kamil and Hiebert (2005); nad Read (2004). The findings of the above studies led the investigators to speculate that vocabulary previewing activities as proposed in this research project, are effective in improving reading comprehension and word knowledge (recognition and production) of the learners.

The results of the present research have both theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical findings have something to do with the nature of reading and its relation to psychological factors. Practical implications are related to the teaching and testing aspects of reading and vocabulary as its component.

The findings of the current study shed some light on the nature of reading. In the reading process, participants bring their knowledge of the world and their knowledge of language to the text as they construct a meaningful representation for the text. Background knowledge or schemata of the readers is a major factor in reading comprehension. Familiarity with the text, context, and the degree to which vocabulary reveals the content area activate the readers' background knowledge. Therefore, the more familiar the readers are with the concepts or content of the text, the less they will struggle to construct a meaning.

It was also found out that when the goal of reading is in-depth comprehension and good recall of information from reading selections, vocabulary previewing facilitates the process because it familiarizes the reader with the basic content and organization of the text and helps the readers activate relevant prior knowledge. Furthermore, vocabulary previewing does not hinder

were going to read. Furthermore, the new and difficult words which may be problematic to learners were explained and exemplified by the teacher.

2. Reading: the students were exposed to the reading materials. They read silently trying to comprehend the reading selections carefully.

3. Post-reading: the students were given three sets of questions for each reading selection: questions of reading comprehension, word recognition, and word production.

Posttest was the final phase of investigation. All of participants who had taken the reading selections were tested regarding their performance on their reading comprehension, receptive use and productive use of vocabulary.

### Results and Discussion

The comparison of the means showed that the groups differed significantly at the .05 level of significance. Table 1 presents the information obtained from comparing the mean scores of the two independent groups regarding their reading comprehension in the post-test.

Table1. Comparison of mean scores of the experimental and control group regarding reading comprehension in the post-test

Group	n	Mean	SD	df	T-observed	T-critical
Experimental Group (VP group)	40	20,87	4,98	78	2,2892	2
Control Group (VUP)	40	18,67	3,48			

Considering the obvious difference

between the observed t value and the critical t value, the first null hypothesis is strongly rejected. This result shows that the participants for whom vocabulary was previewed performed significantly better on reading comprehension than those for whom vocabulary was not previewed.

For the second null hypothesis concerning the existence of a significant difference between the mean scores regarding the receptive use of vocabulary of those participants for whom vocabulary was previewed and those for whom vocabulary was not previewed, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between the two.

Table2. Comparison of mean scores of the experimental and control group regarding receptive use in the post-test

Group	n	Mean	SD	df	T-observed	T-critical
Experimental Group (VP group)	40	20,65	5,32	78	2,932	2,000
Control Group (VUP)	40	26	5,98			

As depicted in Table 2, there is a significant difference between the observed t and the critical t value. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is rejected at a  $p=0.05$  level of significance.

In testing the third null hypothesis regarding the difference between the two groups in terms of productive use of vocabulary, it is clear that there is a significant difference between the observed and the critical t value. The results of the comparison of the mean scores of the two groups are presented in Table 3.



North Branch. The rationale behind selecting sophomore English students was to have more proficient students who, at least, passed some courses of grammar and paragraph organization. The number of participants who took part in this study was 80. They were selected out of 100 student who took part in a Michigan English Language Test of Proficiency. The rationale behind selecting participants suitable for this study was to select homogeneous participants regarding their language proficiency. To do so, participants with scores  $X \pm 5$  were selected. These participants were randomly assigned into two groups. One group was exposed to vocabulary previewing while the other one received no vocabulary previewing activities.

#### ***Instrumentation***

Three testing instruments were used in this study. The Michigan Proficiency Test (1966) Form P was utilized for assessing the proficiency level of the participants. It was a test of 100 questions; 40 items of grammar, 40 vocabulary items, and 4 reading comprehension passages, each with 5 questions. The second testing instrument of the study was a standard test of reading comprehension taken from TOEFL consisting of 3 reading passages. This test was given to both experimental and control groups to discover whether the two groups were homogeneous in terms of reading comprehension or not. The last testing instrument had 8 passages. The selected texts belonged to different categories such as, literary, medical, political, scientific, etc. The rationale

behind selecting the reading passages from different genres was to exclude the effect of text as a variable because of narrow reading; that is, reading about the same topic in a number of texts will enable the learners to become familiar with the vocabulary and the concepts (Finocchiaro, 1986; Krashen, 2002).

#### ***Procedure***

In the first session, the Michigan Test (1966) Form P was distributed among the participants. The allowed time for this test was 100 minutes. In the second session, the selected participants, were randomly divided into two groups: the group for which vocabulary was previewed (experimental group), and the other group for which vocabulary was not previewed (control group). A pretest containing three passages of reading comprehension with 18 questions was given to these two groups. The second phase of the study was the treatment.

For the experimental group, the vocabulary previewing instruction techniques were used before the learners went through reading the eight passages, each one in a session. Difficult and infrequent words to be previewed were selected. This was done by giving each passage to a typical student to underline the words which he/she did not know. Having selected the words to be previewed, the researchers planned different vocabulary previewing instruction techniques to present them to the students. The reading comprehension procedure included three main stages:

1. Pre-reading: the researchers gave a brief summary on what the participants

Students cannot understand text without knowing what the words mean (Nagy, 2003). Laflamme (1997) believes that vocabulary knowledge is the most important factor in reading comprehension.

Vocabulary can be acquired in two ways: intentionally through explicit instruction of specific words and word strategies and incidentally through indirect exposure to words. For many years, research has unveiled an abundance of information about the kind of vocabulary instruction that is most effective for assisting students with comprehending what they read (Baumann, & Kane, 2003; Beck & McKeown, 1991; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Some researchers and vocabulary experts have asserted that the best methodology for teaching vocabulary entails both direct and indirect teaching of words and the provision of opportunities for both receptive and productive learning to take place. Direct instruction means teaching specific words, such as pre-teaching vocabulary prior to reading a selection. It is believed that students can be taught explicitly more than 400 words per year (Beck et al., 2002).

When the goal of reading is in-depth comprehension and good recall of information from expository texts, previewing (surveying, overviewing) facilitates the process because it familiarizes reader with the basic content and organization of the text and helps to activate relevant prior knowledge. Previewing establishes the important topics and subtopics to be covered. Reading will be easier because the reader knows the direction of discussion and the important concepts. Previewing activates

thinking and brings to mind what the reader already knows about the subject; new information can be then integrated into the reader's existing knowledge structure (Shih, 1991).

Providing background information and previewing are particularly important for the less proficient language students (Hudson, 1982). These readers are more word-bound and meaning tends to break down at the word level. Thus, less proficient students tend to have vocabulary acquisition emphasized, and are encouraged to do a lot of specific word-by-word processing. More proficient readers tend to receive content previews because they are no longer susceptible to vocabulary and structure difficulties in reading (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Finocchiaro (1986) proposes "previewing vocabulary of a reading selection by discussing new or difficult vocabulary with the students; giving numerous examples of its use in authentic contexts; providing key word/key concept activities such as word association tasks (antonyms, synonyms, definitions, connotations, circumlocutions, paraphrases); placing new words on the board; giving several examples of them" (p.78). Pacheco (2005) states the impact of pre-reading direct instruction on using selected affixes to form new words and the use of these words in context.

## **M**ethod *Participants*

The participants in this study were undergraduate male students majoring English who had passed more than 40 credits in Islamic Azad University, Tehran-



While some researchers put emphasis on previewing vocabulary of a reading selection before it is going to be taught (Finocchiaro, 1986; Stanovich (2000); Ringlerand & Weber, 1984; Omanson & Perfetti, 1985; Kamil & Hiebert, 2005; Read, 2004), some other researchers disagree on vocabulary previewing (Wilson, 1973; Garfinkel and Hamilton, 1976; Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1986; CelceMurcia, 2001). They argue that pre-text work on vocabulary focuses students on details in the text, which is not useful in terms of reading strategies. So, the role of previewing vocabulary is in need of empirical investigation.

The purpose of the current study was to determine whether previewing vocabulary of a reading selection yields more reliable results than lack of previewing vocabulary in terms of learners' reading comprehension and their receptive and productive use of vocabulary. Owing to the mentioned conspicuous problems, the following research questions were posed:

1. Is there any significant difference between the reading comprehension mean scores of those students for whom vocabulary was previewed and those for whom vocabulary was not previewed?
2. Is there any significant difference regarding the receptive use of vocabulary by those students for whom vocabulary was previewed and those for whom vocabulary was not previewed?
3. Is there any significant difference concerning the productive use of vocabulary by those students for whom vocabulary was previewed and those for whom vocabulary was not previewed?

## **R**eview of related literature

Vocabulary has been a topic of interest for many years. As Baumann (2005) states "future research needs to explore this phenomena in more authentic instructional environments" (p, 127). The importance of vocabulary to reading success cannot be overstated. Indeed, the National Reading Panel (2000) has named vocabulary one of the five essential elements of reading. Numerous research studies have been conducted in the area of reading, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction. These studies have established that there is a strong connection between reading comprehension and vocabulary (Watts, 1995).

Moreover, There is an abundance of research concluding that vocabulary instruction is critical to reading comprehension (Baumann, Kame'enui & Ash, 2003; Becker, 1977; National Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) also concludes that comprehension development cannot be developed fully without a critical examination of the role played by vocabulary knowledge and instruction. Nagy (2003) emphasizes the importance of having knowledge of words, what words mean, how words are used, and how to use strategies to aid learners in sounding out words. Anderson and Freebody (1979) hypothesize that there are three reasons why vocabulary knowledge is a good indicator of reading success: (a) understanding words enables readers to understand passages, (b) verbal aptitude underlies both word and passage comprehension, and (c) vocabulary knowledge might be related to a person's store of background information.

## Introduction

In a literate society, word knowledge has particular significance for students. It leads significantly to academic achievement, as well as to formal and informal speaking and writing (Biemiller, 2004). The National Reading Panel (2001) stated that vocabulary development was one of the five essential components of effective reading instruction in the early grades (Nagy, 2003). Also, The National Institute for Literacy (2001) noted that, “students who are not successful have difficulty recognizing words and comprehending what they read” (p. 34).

Vocabulary plays an important role in learning how to read. Scientific research about vocabulary instruction revealed that (a) most vocabulary is learned indirectly, and (b) some vocabulary must be taught directly (Put Reading First, 2001). There is a high correlation in research literature of word knowledge with reading comprehension that indicates that if students do not adequately and steadily grow their vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension will be affected (Chall & Jacobs, 1990). The strong relation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension has been powerfully demonstrated in both L1 and L2 contexts. (Nation, 2005; Read, 2004). Researchers, teachers, and students have long recognized the importance of vocabulary development as a foundation for second language reading.

To equip students to read, teachers should provide strategies to assist them in determining word meaning when they hear and read new words (Armbrister, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Educators should equip students with skills and strategies that are necessary for lifelong

vocabulary development (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Christen and Murphy (1991) argue that research has clearly emphasized that for learning to occur, new information must be integrated with what the learner already know. They believe that teaching vocabulary as a pre-reading step is an instructional intervention that should be considered when readers lack the prior or background knowledge to read in a content area. In order to provide a reader with the necessary background to organize the activity and to comprehend the material, prereading activities are considered to be certain types of “enabling activities” (Ringler & Weber, 1984). “They provide a reader with the necessary background to organize the activity and to comprehend the material. These experiences involve understanding the purposes for reading and building a knowledge base necessary for dealing with the content and the structure of the material” (p.70).

Prereading activities should have two purposes; to build new background knowledge and to activate existing background knowledge. Chastain (1988) states that the purpose of prereading activities is to motivate the students to read the assignments and to prepare them to be able to read it. These activities can be affected in several ways. One of these ways is previewing vocabulary-discussing new or difficult vocabulary with the students, giving numerous examples of its use in authentic contexts, and providing some word association tasks (antonyms, synonyms, definitions, connotations, circumlocutions, paraphrases).

# Vocabulary Previewing in EFL Reading Comprehension Class: A Classroom- Centered Research

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## چکیده

مطالعه حاضر درباره تأثیر یکی از فعالیت‌های قبل از درک مطلب یعنی پیش مرور لغت، روی درک مطلب، و استفاده فعال و غیرفعال از لغت انجام شده است. به منظور این که پاسخی منطقی به سؤالات تحقیق داده شود، یک جامعه آماری ۱۰۰ نفره که در نهایت به ۸۰ نفر کاهش داده شد، از طریق پیش آزمون و به صورت تصادفی انتخاب شد. افراد تحت مطالعه به صورت تصادفی به دو گروه آزمایش و گواه تقسیم شدند. یک دوره هشت جلسه‌ای درک مطلب به آزمایش اصلی تخصیص یافت. در طول آموزش، لغت‌های هشت متن درک مطلب در هشت جلسه درس که هر یک شامل پنج سؤال چهارگزینه‌ای درک مطلب، پنج سؤال چهارگزینه‌ای تشخیص لغت (استفاده غیرفعال لغت) و پنج سؤال چهارگزینه‌ای کاربرد لغت (استفاده فعال لغت) برای گروه آزمایش، پیش مرور شد. در این مطالعه از سه ابزار اندازه‌گیری، یعنی آزمون توانش زبانی میشیگان، آزمون استاندارد درک مطلب و آزمون برگزیده درک مطلب استفاده شد. نتایج تحقیق نشان داد که بین درک مطلب گروه گواه و گروه آزمایش تفاوت آماری معنی داری وجود دارد. نتایج هم‌چنین نشان داد که فعالیت‌های پیش مرور لغات در بهبود درک مطلب فراگیران زبان انگلیسی در ایران و نیز تقویت دانش لغوی آن‌ها بسیار مؤثر است. کلیدواژه‌ها: پیش‌مرور لغات، درک مطلب، فراگیران زبان انگلیسی

## Abstract

The present study focused on the impact of one of the pre-reading activities; i.e., vocabulary previewing on the 1) reading comprehension, 2) word recognition, and 3) word production. In order to arrive at a logical answer to the research questions, a sample population of 100 participants which was finally reduced to 80 participants was chosen randomly through a pre-test. Three testing instruments were utilized in the study, namely Michigan Proficiency Test, a standard test of reading comprehension, and a reading selections test. The findings revealed statistically significant difference between reading comprehension of those participants for whom vocabulary was previewed and those for whom vocabulary was not previewed. The results also showed that vocabulary previewing activities were far more effective in improving reading comprehension of EFL Iranian learners as well as their word knowledge, both receptive and productive.

**Key Words:** vocabulary previewing, reading comprehension, EFL Iranian learners