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Entitled:
The Effect of Summarizing Short Stories on Iranian Elementary EFL
Learners' Vocabulary Learning

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In The Name of God

TO MY FAMILY

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Abstract	
<p>. Regarding second language vocabulary acquisition, researchers have tried to determine whether explicit attention to vocabulary is absolutely necessary in vocabulary learning or not. Many studies in Iran have investigated vocabulary learning strategies from different perspectives, but few have surveyed the effects of summarizing strategy on vocabulary learning. The main concern of the present study is to probe the effects of summarizing short stories on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The present study followed a quasi-experimental design and included two groups (one experimental and one control group). Each group consisted of 20 female learners whose proficiency level had been determined based on their scores on the previous term's final examination. A pre-test was administered to both of the groups to guarantee their homogeneity. The experimental group received only one kind of strategy (summarizing) while the control group didn't receive any kind of treatment. At the end a posttest was administered to the participants to find out the effectiveness of the instructed strategy. T-test was used for the data analysis of the study. Findings revealed that summarizing strategy has a positive effect on enhancing EFL students' vocabulary knowledge.</p>	

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

VLS: Vocabulary Learning Strategy

RT: Rote Learning

RT: Reaction Time

VLSI: Vocabulary Learning Strategy Inventory

MSs: Memory strategies

CML: Creating Mental Linkage

PET: Preliminary English Test

Chapter one

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

It is generally accepted that learning new words is fundamental to success in school and social life. Researchers have always argued that the number of word meanings that a student knows is one of the strongest predictors of how well that student will understand texts and will be able to communicate through writing (Mahwah, 2006). It's necessary to consider Wilkin's (1972) famous saying that without grammar, very little can be conveyed, but, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Researchers agree that insufficient vocabulary knowledge is a critical problem for many young children, particularly English language learners (Ellis, August, & Shanahan, 2006; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For understanding the texts children need to know a wide range of words.

In the very early stages of the learning, children don't know how to overcome this problem. With limited English language background, understanding vocabulary items' meanings is their most frequently encountered obstacle in attempting to access information in classroom texts (August & Hakuta, 1997; Carlo et al., 2004; Jimenez, 1994). One instructional technique that shows promise for supporting the vocabulary development of ELLs is the use of short stories, in which content is presented through pictures. Considering the problems and importance of teaching and learning vocabulary, the researcher is interested in providing a helpful strategy for learners to conquer their fears of unknown words.

1.1. Background of the study

Vocabulary learning and its relationship to reading has gained much interest in the field of second language acquisition. Since reading requires accurate and automatic word recognition skills, learners need to be equipped with sufficient vocabulary knowledge to read fluently. Consequently lots of studies around the world have been carried out to find out the effectiveness of the use of strategies in learning vocabulary items. Language learning strategy instruction is a teaching approach that aims to raise learners' awareness

of learning strategies. Moreover it provides learners with systematic practice, reinforcement, and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities (Kinoshita, 2003).

In the case of vocabulary learning, some researchers have been confronted with helpful strategies applied in the classroom. In a study by Mandel and Johnson (1984) young, middle aged and old adults were asked to recall or make important judgments about canonical stories, in which the order of mentioned events corresponded to their order in the underlying structure of the story, and non-canonical stories, in which the order of events did not correspond to their underlying order. Canonical stories were better recalled than non-canonical stories by all three age groups and a variety of measures indicated that older adult's recalling was both quantitatively and qualitatively similar to that of young adults.

Christine Glenn (1980) examined the roles of length and episodic structure on second grade learners' recall of simple stories. He found that story length affected the number of accurately recalled statements but did not affect the organization of information. Conversely, episodic structure was related to the organization of recall and variation in episodic structure achieved by either changing the number of episodes in the story or by changing the type of temporal relationship existing between episodes did not affect the amount of recalled information.

1.2. Statement of the problem

A view of these findings reveals that it is impossible to study all the strategy types in a single study. For this reason researchers have focused on a single strategy at a time. In this effort some strategies have received great attention in research studies like metacognitive strategies, while others have received little attention. Summarizing, one kind of metacognitive strategy, leads to effective use of mental skills, and increases remembering and understanding. It helps students to comprehend knowledge, transferring it to long-term memory because it leads students “ to a) reading to understand, b) to

distinguish important ideas, and c) to express the information by using their own words” (Senemoglu, 2001, p. 569)

1.3. Purpose of the study

For many EFL learners, reading is a suffocating slow process. One of the most important reasons for this problem is the learners’ lack of vocabulary knowledge. Due to this limitation, they often give up trying to understand the meanings of the texts or skip reading if sentences or entire paragraphs contain a small number of unknown words. These encounters suggest that some learners might not have the knowledge to handle words they do not understand. Although vocabulary knowledge has been recognized as a critical determinant of one’s reading ability, yet not much research has focused on investigating the strategies learners employ to learn vocabulary. (Zaini, Amir & Noorizah Mohd 2009). In this study an attempt is made to test the effect of summarizing short stories on Iranian Elementary EFL learners’ vocabulary learning.

1.4. Research Question and Hypotheses

Vocabulary acquisition is currently receiving attention in second language pedagogy and research. But how learners acquire vocabulary items effectively and efficiently or how vocabulary items can best be taught are still contentious issues. This study intends to address the following research question:

Research Question: Does summarizing short-stories have any significant impact on Iranian elementary EFL learners’ vocabulary retention?

Accordingly, the following null and research hypotheses are formulated for the above mentioned question:

Null Hypothesis: Summarizing short-stories doesn't have any significant impact on Iranian elementary EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

Alternative Hypothesis: Summarizing short-stories has a significant impact on Iranian elementary EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

1.5. Definition of the key terms

When learning and using an L2, learners may employ a number of strategies which are usually aimed at improving their performance. Because numerous studies have investigated strategies used by L2 learners, before proceeding to an overview of these studies, it would be beneficial to provide the reader with a conceptual framework in order to allow for consistency in the terminology used throughout this study. Although a number of studies have attempted to conceptualize the notion of strategies used by language learners, Oxford (1990) offers a useful and comprehensive classification scheme of the various strategies used by learners. Within the broader context of reading strategies, the following six strategies can more appropriately be referred to as sub strategies:

- A) Affective strategies
- B) Cognitive strategies
- C) Compensation strategies
- D) Memory strategies
- E) Metacognitive strategies
- F) Social strategies
- G) Summarizing strategies

- **Affective strategies**

Learners also use affective strategies, such as self-encouraging behavior, to lower anxiety, and encourage learning.

- **Cognitive strategies**

Cognitive strategies are used by learners to transform or manipulate the language. In more specific terms, these strategies include note taking, formal practice with the specific aspects of the target language such as sounds and sentence structure, paraphrasing, predicting, analyzing, and using context clues.

- **Compensation strategies**

Compensation strategies include skills such as inference, guessing while reading, or using reference materials such as dictionaries.

- **Memory strategies**

Techniques that help the learner to remember and retrieve information are referred to as memory strategies. These include creating mental images through grouping and associating, semantic mapping, using keywords, employing word associations, and placing new words in a context.

- **Metacognitive strategies**

Metacognitive strategies are behaviors undertaken by the learners to plan, arrange, and evaluate their own learning. Such strategies include directed attention and self-evaluation, organization, setting goals and objectives, seeking practice opportunities, and so forth. In the context of reading, self-monitoring and correction of errors are further examples of metacognitive strategies. According to Flavell (1976) metacognition is a process in which the person is actively monitoring, controlling and arranging the cognitive process in order to attain cognitive goals. Flavell (1979) defines metacognition as being aware of one's own cognitive processes and products or everything else which is relevant like those aspects of information related to the learning process.

O'Melley and Chamot (1990, p. 44) believe that metacognitive strategies are "higher order executive skills that may entail of planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of activity". Harris (2003) views metacognition as a guiding process to learning in which the learner is using strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate language use and language learning. To put simply, metacognition is cognition of cognition (Carrel et al., 1998). According to Anderson (2002) it is thinking about thinking. Likewise, it is defined as the process of recognizing what is known (shimamura, 2000). Metacognition is considered a kind of self-assessment. The reader observes the primary stages of reading, which are cognitive activities. Then, supplementary activities (i.e. Metacognition) will be assigned in order to provide more awareness and understanding of the text. It is important to recognize that the above strategies can be used to facilitate learning, or can be used to facilitate comprehension. For example, a learner can employ the memory strategy of grouping in order to learn vocabulary items more quickly and more effectively.

- **Social strategies**

Lastly, social strategies are those that involve other individuals in the learning process and refer to cooperation with peers, questioning, asking for correction, and feedback; for example, while reading, a student may ask another individual for feedback about his/her reading responses.

- **Summarizing strategy**

The very important strategy which is going to be tested in this study is the summarizing strategy. The researcher would like to provide a brief definition of this term. Summary, like paraphrase, allows you to reproduce another writer's thoughts but in shortened form. In writing a summary, you focus on the most important aspects of the original statements of the original passage and eliminate the less important material. Three techniques selection and deletion, note taking, and miniaturizing can help you shorten the material. In all cases the summary must be written in readable prose that reflects the essential meaning of the original text. Like paraphrase, summary can be used for many purposes: to help you understand the main points and structure of the author's argument, to convey understanding to others, to present background information quickly, or to refer to another writer's ideas in the course of making your own original statement.

1.6. Organization of the study

This study includes five chapters. Chapter one explains the fundamental issues of the study that is, it covers the background of the study, significance of the study along with the purpose of the study, research question, and definition of the key terms. In chapter two the researcher reviews the related literature in detail. Chapter three provides