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Title of the thesis:

**The Effect of Incorporating Cooperative Reading
Technique as a Cooperative Learning Strategy, on
Enhancement of Vocabulary Learning Among
Iranian High- Beginner Adult EFL Learners**

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**To My beloved Parents
and My Dear Husband**

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of a cooperative learning technique called "Cooperative Reading" on L2 vocabulary learning. The overarching objective of this study was to compare the effects of incorporating cooperative reading strategy and non-cooperative teacher-centered approach in reading classes on L2 vocabulary short-term recall.

The participants were 58 high-beginner adult EFL learners from Faraz Language Institute in Arak in Markazi province. They were selected from four groups of fourth-semester English classes at the same level: two male classes and two female classes at the age of 18-27. Without being aware of the goal of the study, the students in all groups took a pre-test of target words (appendix C) one week before the treatment and a post-test (appendix D) one week after the treatment.

However, the treatment was different for different groups. Cooperative Reading as a cooperative learning strategy was incorporated for the experimental group while teacher-fronted technique was undertaken for the control group. Four selected reading passages from their reading book; "Concepts and Comments" (Ackert, 2005) were presented to both experimental and control groups.

At the end, the results of the study indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Consequently, it was concluded that implementing the mentioned cooperative learning technique enhanced vocabulary learning of Iranian high-beginner adult EFL students in that institute. The qualitative data also indicated that using cooperative reading as a cooperative learning strategy fosters cooperation and communication among students and promotes students' responsibility for themselves and for group members.

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Increasing the effect and influence of English language across the world has caused many people to learn it as their second or foreign language in many countries and developing an acceptable, comprehensible and fluent speaking is the major aim of most of these people. A lot of people have enrolled in English institutes in recent years hoping to improve their English. But many of these learners learning English as a foreign language cannot express themselves fluently perhaps because of not having a good command of vocabulary, grammatical or pragmatic knowledge. It has been observed by many teachers that most of the time, mumbling and searching for their intended words, students complain why they have forgotten the words they have learned in the previous semesters. They ask for some new ways that may help them to recall and apply the learned words more efficiently, since as they declare one of the most important skills in foreign language learning is having a good command of vocabulary knowledge.

It is claimed that nobody is able to communicate in a second language without having an acceptable knowledge of vocabulary. Nation (2001) for example, suggests that a native speaker of English knows about 20,000 word families. This poses a challenging task for ESL or EFL learners. Even “formal transformational\generative linguistics which previously took syntax as the primary focus, now gives more central attention to the lexicon.... Even Chomsky, the father of contemporary studies in syntax, has adopted a "lexicon is prime position.” (Richards and Rogers, 2001,

p.132). Hence, vocabulary learning and teaching have been one of the priorities of EFL and ESL experts and teachers. They have always sought for methods that probably promote learning and recalling of the new vocabulary. They feel the responsibility to adopt a more beneficial method to help these students. In this regard, they developed methods such as lexical approach “which drives from the belief that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, function, notion or some other units of planning but lexis” (Richards and Rogers, 2001, p. 132). However, in most of these approaches, vocabulary learning is considered as a learning task in which new words are presented in isolation in a word list especially before a reading passage or “as an area that merits its own syllabus and materials.”(McDonough and Shaw, 2007, p.111). Furthermore, most often vocabulary learning is considered as an individual learning task which could be accomplished without communicative activities. In this view of vocabulary learning, new words are either learned intentionally or incidentally by individual learners through reading, listening, self study, ... or they are presented and defined by teachers.

Traditionally, the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been neglected in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Indeed, the focus of most of the SLA pedagogical methods and approaches was grammar. For instance some methods like the grammar translation method and the audio-lingual outweighed accuracy at the expense of fluency. Therefore, "in favor of syntax, vocabulary was generally given a secondary place in the language curriculum." (Nation, 2001 quoted by Chen, 2006. p.14). However, observing difficulties of the learners being taught by these methods shifts specialist attention from a focus on form to the significant role of vocabulary learning in SLA and FLA. They recognized that most of second language learners have difficulties learning and recalling vocabulary and they “are often frustrated and

discouraged by unfamiliar words contained in reading texts." (Chen, 2006, p.14). It seems that when L2 learners are engaged in reading texts or listening in the target language, their first difficulty is vocabulary, as argued by many second language professionals (Hulstijn, 2001; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Nation, 2001; Read, 2004 cited in Chen, 2006).

Consequently, there have been some innovations in vocabulary teaching in recent years. Most language teaching professionals admit that the main function of language is communication and they believe that in both first and second language learning, most of the language skills and sub-skills are learned through interaction. They claim that interactive activities will promote learning for EFL and ESL learners and it is accepted that learning does not take place in isolation. These perspectives stimulated a large body of studies on the effects of interaction and cooperative activities on different aspects of language learning. With the emergence of communicative approaches in the language teaching profession, cooperative learning approaches began to gain particular attention. This encouraged EFL and ESL teachers to incorporate some cooperative techniques in language classes. In cooperative learning techniques, students work together to achieve a common goal. In addition to the usual learning goals, it includes the goal of establishing a collaborative/helping relationship among participants. It has been defined as the "instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and one another's learning." (Barkely et al., 2005, p.71). Also, as Zaheri (2007, p.10) said, cooperative learning could be beneficial in language classes since:

Work in small groups provides students with the opportunities to talk about ideas and listen to their peers, enables teachers to interact more closely with students, ... and provides opportunities for students to exchange ideas and

hence develops their ability to communicate and reason. Small group work can involve collaborative or cooperative as well as independent work. Projects and small-group work can empower students to become more independent in their own learning.

Cooperative learning can be an alternative of what is called individual learning in traditional education. Cooperative learning requires the students to work together on a common task, to share information, and to support one another. Cooperative learning approaches enhance students' understanding of course content and their attitudes toward courses, and they lead to higher achievement and higher productivity (Oliver, 1999).

Many cooperative learning methods were developed by second language professionals and the most popular ones are students' team learning methods. These methods include Students Team – Achievement Divisions (STAD), Team-Games-Tournament (TGT), Team Assisted Individualization (TAT), Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CTRC), Jigsaw I designed by Elliot and his colleagues (Anderson et al. , 1978), Jigsaw II developed by Slavin (1986), Learning Together developed by Jhonson (1991)at the university of Minesota, and Group Investigation developed by Sharan (1992).

There has been a considerable body of research about the effectiveness of the above mentioned cooperative learning techniques on various skills of second language learning such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Most of these studies have indicated efficient positive effects of cooperative learning on a variety of outcomes. Nevertheless, most of these studies have investigated the effects of cooperative learning on reading and writing skills and an overview of the studies on cooperative learning suggests that there is little information about how it affects L2

vocabulary learning. Therefore, more studies are required to investigate the effects of cooperative learning techniques on L2 vocabulary learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Having a good command of vocabulary knowledge is one of the most essential skills in second language learning; therefore, it is important to pay a close attention to its teaching and learning.

Teaching English in Iranian schools and institutes is mostly teacher-centered that seems to ignore the important role of student activities and involvement in the learning process. Moreover, in these classes, teachers usually structure lessons competitively or individualistically. In competitively structured classrooms, students engage in a win-lose struggle in an effort to determine who is the best (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). Also, in competitive classrooms students perceive that they can obtain their goals only if the other students in the class fail to obtain their own goals while in individualistic structured classrooms students work by themselves to accomplish goals unrelated to those of the other students (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998).

Likewise, the current way of teaching vocabulary in Iranian English institutes is mostly teacher-fronted in which teachers highlight, pronounce and define the meaning of new words usually presented through a reading passage. In these classes students sit passively and the interaction seems to be only between the students and the text. Cooperative learning can possibly act as a useful tool to make classes more student-centered and increase students' involvement and interaction.

It seems that cooperative learning as an instructional methodology that provides opportunities for students to develop skills in group interactions and results in positive effects on student achievement and retention of information (Slavin, 1995) has been overlooked in most of areas of English teaching including vocabulary learning in Iran. Most of the instruction in schools consists of lectures, seatwork, or competition in which students are isolated from one another and forbidden to interact, and that most classroom time is spent in teacher talk, with only a little of the students' classroom time used for reasoning about or expressing an opinion.

Besides, although reviews of cooperative and collaborative studies show moderate advantages in using a structured "social pedagogic" context such as cooperative groups to enhance learners attainments and attitudes (Johnson and Johnson, 1998), these reviews rarely include the effect of cooperative learning on vocabulary learning. Therefore, the present study is going to focus on the effect of one of the cooperative learning strategies that is "Cooperative Reading", on students' vocabulary learning and recalling through reading texts. These strategies are supposed to reinforce students' vocabulary learning by increasing interaction between learners themselves and between learner and new vocabularies. Indeed, these techniques are supposed to make the students meet the challenge of new vocabularies and help them to see and use those new words while interacting with the members of their groups. Furthermore, Raison (2010) claims that cooperative learning integrates several language skills by asking students to read and speak in groups. The proponents of this approach mention that this approach would help the students to activate the passive words in their mind by using the new words in interactive activities. They declare the major problem of traditional approaches is ignoring

language use as a tool for interaction and not considering the fact that language use is more sophisticated in real world.

In fact, an overview of the studies on L2 vocabulary learning suggests that there are few studies which have investigated the effects of cooperative learning techniques on vocabulary learning. Indeed, Most of the studies on vocabulary learning have just investigated individual vocabulary learning. There is rare information about how cooperative techniques such as cooperative reading affect L2 vocabulary learning and recall especially in EFL classrooms and there is not enough information about how these techniques facilitate ESL or EFL students' vocabulary learning. Further investigation is necessary to clarify the role of cooperative techniques on vocabulary learning and to expand our understanding of the application of these techniques in a second language acquisition environment.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of a cooperative learning strategy called cooperative reading technique on students' vocabulary learning. It is going to study the impact of group working on vocabulary learning through reading skill. In fact, it is going to examine whether combining vocabulary teaching with some types of group working will help students' vocabulary learning and retention. It focuses on the question whether the subjects who have been taught the new words by this approach, will gain more benefit in comparison with the subjects who have been taught the new words by current teacher-centered methods in which vocabularies are presented and defined by the teacher.

The proponents of this approach mention cooperative learning helps students to recall new lexicon by struggling and applying the new words and their structure in communication with their classmates. They mention the main problem of traditional approaches is that they ignore the fact that language use is more sophisticated in real world and the fact that language is learned in groups not individually. Furthermore, Panitz (2004) mentions some specialists in language teaching and learning believe that cooperative learning can be influential in EFL and ESL teaching because new lexicon is overused by the students when they talk and negotiate about them in contrast with traditional approaches in which the words are presented only through printed text or by the teacher.

Consequently, this study is going to compare the effect of cooperative reading with traditional teacher center classes on the amount of vocabulary learning .

1.4 Research Question

This study is going to answer the following question:

1. Is there any significant difference between the retrieval of vocabularies learned by cooperative reading technique and the retrieval of vocabularies learned by the traditional teacher-centered method for Iranian high-beginner adult EFL students?

1.5 Hypothesis

The following research hypotheses will be investigated in order to answer the above research question:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference between cooperative reading as one of the techniques of cooperative learning and traditional teacher-centered approaches in improving Iranian high-beginner students' vocabulary learning.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Most of language teaching specialists admit the essential role of vocabulary in ESL and EFL learning. Without having an acceptable level of vocabulary knowledge, nobody is able to communicate in another language. As Nation (2001) mentions a native speaker of English knows about 20,000 word families. This poses a challenging task for English learners. Also, the readability of an L2 text, to a large extent, depends arguably more on vocabulary than on other factors such as sentence structure, syntax and rhetoric style (Chen, 2006). Therefore, developing a good command of vocabulary knowledge may be one of the major concerns of EFL and ESL learners. On the other hand, students always complain that in spite of their effort for improving their vocabulary knowledge, they cannot recall and apply all the words they learn. They always look for new ways that may help them to learn and internalize the new words.

Also it is instructors' moral and ethical responsibility to find new approaches and methods that may facilitate the process of vocabulary learning for ESL and EFL students. In this regard, some specialists have introduced cooperative learning as a way for improving vocabulary knowledge and retention. They suggest new lexicon would be learned more efficiently when in real communication, the learners have more opportunities to use, negotiate, utter and listen to them in groups since it

eventually leads to more efficient internalization and recall of the learned words (Panitz, 2004).

Consequently, this study was designed to answer some questions in this regard and provide the much-needed information on the nature of cooperative learning in L2 vocabulary.

Moreover, although this study is limited to high-beginner students learning English in one of Iranian English Institutions, its result can be used by beginner and intermediate as well as advanced levels. In addition, high school students can benefit from this study. Also it can be applied by curriculum designers. They can develop materials in which vocabulary is presented in a way that increases interaction among learners to help them to learn and recall new lexicon more efficiently. Moreover, the application of this research may provide new panorama for L2 instructors to help their students to learn and recall new vocabulary. It may inform language teachers and administrators who need to make solid decisions about cooperative programs to enhance L2 vocabulary learning.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1. Target Words (TW): Those words tested before and at the end of the experiment to assess lexical learning.

2. Vocabulary Recall: The ability to recognize and recall the word meaning after the treatment.

3. Short-term Vocabulary Recall: The ability to recognize and recall the word meaning one week after the treatment.

4. **Incidental vocabulary learning:** Vocabulary learning that occurs incidentally during the process of reading or listening in a second or foreign language. In other words, the learners learn the word unintentionally when they are engaged in a reading or listening task.

5. **Intentional vocabulary learning:** Vocabulary learning that occurs on purpose during the process of reading or listening in a second or foreign language. In intentional learning, the learners are informed of their responsibility for certain information before doing the task (Hulstijn, 2001). Indeed, in intentional vocabulary learning, student attention is directly engaged and focused on vocabulary acquisition

6. **Cooperative learning:** A learning condition which requires the students to work together on a common task, to share information, and to support one another. It is a learning activity "organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the leaning of others." (Richard and Rogers, 2001, p. 192)

7. **Cooperative reading:** Cooperative reading is a cooperative learning technique that "brings together strategies that promote a cooperative learning community (belongingness), and enable students to set and reach their personal goals (autonomy). Reading practices are explicitly taught and students have many opportunities to use their reading strategies (competence). It focuses on specific processes that facilitate reading engagement and motivation to read." (Raison, 2010, p. 8)

8. **Collaborative learning:** A learning condition that emphasizes the valuable effect of group work and cooperation like cooperative learning. But it is less teacher-