

The Effect of Linguistic-Based Awareness Raising on TOEFL iBT Reading Module

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the effect of linguistic-based awareness on TOEFL iBT reading module in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context of Iran. For the purpose of the study, via convenience sampling, fifty-one male and female participants aged 19-24, majoring in English and other majors were selected and assigned to two groups of experimental ($n = 24$) and control ($n = 27$) and then they were called upon to take part in four tests, namely placement, pre-test, post-test1 and post-test2. The instructional intervention which was spread over a period of 10 sessions targeted working on the reading module of the TOEFL iBT through linguistic-based awareness raising approach alongside the skills while the participants in the control group were not provided with the treatment and were just given instruction which aimed at developing reading comprehension based on the skills. Afterwards, the pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest results were submitted to statistical data analyses. Findings of the study showed that first, linguistic-based awareness raising had a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL student's TOEFL iBT reading module scores and the scores on TOEFL iBT reading module could be improved through 10 treatment sessions providing that linguistic-based explanations are provided. Further analyses also revealed that the proficiency level of the participants as well as their majors played a significant role in the obtained scores on the reading module of the TOEFL iBT. The findings suggest that the use of linguistic-based awareness-raising as an approach to teaching reading comprehension can have beneficial effects in language teaching pedagogy and L2 learning and the variables of proficiency and major need to be taken into consideration in TOEFL iBT instructional programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic awareness is a necessary component of reading skill. Learning to read is a complex cognitive and linguistic skill which involves several processes including metalinguistic awareness, phonological awareness, syntactic knowledge, vocabulary and comprehension. Unlike developing receptive and productive skills of an oral language through exposure to naturally occurring speech, reading is said to be an unnatural act which requires focused attention and usually direct instruction. Raising linguistic awareness in reading can be looked upon as a type of explicit instruction in second language learning which has aroused a lot of interest among second language researchers and classroom teachers. Some scholars and teachers argue that explicit teaching of language, which means giving learners information about the target language structure during the learning process^[1], facilitates the process of second language learning, because it promotes noticing^[2-4] and subsequent intake of target forms. Furthermore, a number of empirical studies indicate that explicit teaching does have a positive effect on second language learning. On the other hand, there are other researchers who have offered evidence that explicit teaching does not affect second language learning significantly. Therefore, the effectiveness of explicit instruction in general and metalinguistic awareness in particular still remains in question. One of the most significant international proficiency exams, undoubtedly is TOEFL iBT. iBT is the third generation of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). First, PBT or paper-based test was proposed including 50 questions for listening, 40 for structure, 50 for reading comprehension and in some cases 1 question for writing. The next generation was cBT or computer-based test similar to PBT but the examinees were expected to take the exam by computer. The third generation was named as iBT including four different modules named as listening, speaking, reading and writing conducted through computer and internet as an online test. iBT is different from other generations in some cases for example including all skills, proposing independent as well as integrated tasks, considering linguistic terms, different way of scoring, etc. This study aims to investigate the effect of linguistic-based awareness raising on TOEFL iBT reading module. Many students take the TOEFL iBT tests annually and the results of these tests have great consequences for their future careers. Since reading is one of the demanding skills that majority of students fail to score high in, undoubtedly the need for finding a way through which the reading comprehension of students can be promoted is felt. Since, research has indicated that there is an association between reading comprehension and some types of awareness such as morphological and

phonological awareness^[5], it can be revealing to investigate where raising linguistic awareness empirically and in an experimental context can affect the performance of the students in reading skill in general and TOEFL iBT in particular. Raising awareness is one of the important issues in the realm of teaching methodology. Scholars in different eras have coined different names for that, such as noticing hypothesis^[2] and consciousness raising^[6]. Metalinguistic awareness or in a sense linguistic awareness is the ability to analyze, think about or manipulate language as an object separate from its meaning in or out of context^[7]. Phonological, morphological and orthographical awareness are usually considered as different aspects of metalinguistic awareness.

Area of study: The major significance of the present study is proposing a researcher-made lesson plan to teach TOEFL iBT reading module. Study aims to find whether linguistic-based awareness-raising has a significant effect on reading achievements. For example when a learner is taught on the referents, some additional explanations are added to link his linguistic knowledge to the skills of iBT. Presumably, most of the participants for the present study are B.A. English students who passed linguistics 1 and 2 and are familiar with technical terms and explanations; therefore when referents are explained, some additional elucidations are proposed regarding pragmatic, text, cohesion, antecedent, anaphora and anaphora. Most of the scholars such as Ausubel^[8, 9] believe that unforgettable learning takes place when a learner can link the new knowledge to the old one and subsumes whatever he has learned. A trained iBT instructor who is graduated in one of the English-related fields can fulfill the mentioned objective. Moreover, the TOEFL iBT is one of the important standardized tests which are taken by international students all over the world on a regular basis and high scores on the test can open up opportunities for students who are seeking admission to the accredited universities worldwide. The reading module of the TOEFL iBT has always been a difficult part of the test for the students and the TOEFL instructors have been exploring a wide variety of options to help TOEFL candidates master reading skills and develop the necessary ability to cope with this section of the TOEFL successfully. Although, many researchers have studied the effects of different techniques on developing the reading skills of EFL learners, hardly can one find studies investigating the effect of linguistic-based awareness on the reading module of the TOEFL. Therefore, this study mainly focus on two objectives, one is to determine the learnability of TOEFL iBT reading modules through 10 treatment sessions and the other to evaluate the role of participants' proficiency level in obtained scores.

Awareness raising: Deignan^[10] declared that metaphor is recognized as being prevalent in language, it is discussed that more attention should be assumed to the teaching of strategies for comprehending and producing metaphors in L2. In this study, an investigation on a translation exercise conducted by advanced Polish learners of English which showed ways in which metaphorical expressions differ between the two languages and the problems this raises for learners is reported. It is recommended awareness-raising through discussion and comparison of metaphors in L1 and L2 is a valuable method to assisting learners to understand and properly generate metaphors. It has been fundamentally neglected in today's second/foreign language (L2) instruction and teacher education; few curricular efforts for teaching pragmatics have been made. Ishihara describes a web-based pragmatics curriculum for learners of Japanese as a foreign language and proposes the crucial components and principles of the curriculum. The curriculum takes an explicit pragmatic-focused awareness-raising approach learners-as-researchers/ethnographer^[11, 12] with the intention to instill in learners a sense of proper language use. A series of awareness-raising tasks are provided throughout the curriculum that features naturalistic audio samples and experimentally established pragmatic information. Learners study L2 pragmatics via several exercises while self-checking or self-evaluating the answers and electronically sending exercise responses to the teachers and curriculum writer through the web system. During 2003-2004, this curriculum was adopted in a third year university course where learners independently completed an allotted portion of the curriculum for an introductory unit and two speech act units. The study also investigates the instructional effect on 18 learner's pragmatic awareness as found in their reflective journaling.

Noticing hypothesis: Schmidt^[2] claimed that consciousness in the sense of awareness of the form of input at the level of "noticing" is essential to subsequent Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This claim runs counter to Krashen's^[13] dual-system hypothesis that SLA principally results from an unconscious "acquisition" system, the contribution of the conscious "learning" system to SLA being restricted and peripheral. Important to a theory of SLA that permits a central role to the act of noticing is a specification of the nature of the mechanisms engaged and of their relationship to existing models of the organization of memory. Considering the proposed assumptions, the present study reviews current research into the nature of attention and memory and offers a model of the relationship between them during SLA that it is claimed is matching to Schmidt's noticing hypothesis and oppositional to the dual-system hypothesis of Krashen. In light of this model, it is argued that

differential performance on implicit and explicit learning and memory experiments is caused by alterations in the consciously regulated processing demands of training tasks and not by the activation of consciously and unconsciously accessed systems. It is also argued that the attentional demands of pedagogical tasks and individual differences in memory and attentional capability both affect the extent of noticing, thereby directly influencing SLA.

It is argued, first, that the fundamentals of the hypothesis in cognitive psychology are weak; research in this area does not support it or even provide a clear elucidation for it^[14]. The problem of interpreting the hypothesis is much more critical in the area of language acquisition. Partially since the hypothesis is not based on any coherent theory of language, it is very difficult to regulate precisely what it means in this context or to draw testable expectations from it. In the absence of specific predictions, research on form-focused instruction and feedback provide indirect tests, the results of which create additional problems for the hypothesis. The numerous problems can be abolished or greatly reduced if the noticing hypothesis is reformulated as a claim that noticing is necessary for the acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge but not competence.

Consciousness raising: Smith^[15] concentrated on the role and differences between implicit and explicit knowledge as two major and undeniable sources in learning other languages mostly as a second one. The occurrence of implicit knowledge in most of the cases is in line with the motivation, style and the strategies in which a learner uses in learning or acquisition process; while regarding explicit knowledge, the instruction provided by the teacher plays an important role. A triangulation can be drawn among implicit, explicit and consciousness-raising in this regard. If a learner who is aware of the vital factors in learning cooperates with his peers and in addition can make meaningful links with a teacher who is a real facilitator, then by the application of consciousness-raising implicitly and explicitly, not only does the learning process facilitate but the pleasure is added to the progression.

The grammar consciousness-raising tasks combine the progress of knowledge about problematic L2 grammatical features with the provision for meaning-focused use of the target language^[16]. Nonetheless for this task type to be pedagogically beneficial in ESL/EFL classrooms, it must be revealed that task performance is as effective as a teacher fronted grammar lesson in endorsing gains in knowledge of the target structure and is comparable to performance of regular communicative tasks in terms of occasions for communicative language exchange. This article reports an investigation of three grammar consciousness-raising tasks dealing with word order. The results specify that the

tasks successfully promoted both proficiency gains and L2 negotiated interaction in the participants with negotiation quantity being determined by the combination of task features present rather than by the nature of the task content. Thus, grammar consciousness-raising tasks can be recommended as one way to integrate formal instruction within a communicative framework. Scott^[17] in a qualitative study provides primary vision into the role of the first language (L1) when pairs of intermediate-level college learners of French and Spanish are involved in consciousness raising, form-focused grammar tasks. Utilizing conversation analysis of audiotaped interactions and stimulated recall sessions, the ways students used the L1 and their second language (L2) to solve a grammar problem was explored. Students allowed to use the L1 (Group 1) worked collaboratively in a balanced and coherent manner; students required to use the L2 (Group 2) exhibited fragmented interaction and little evidence of collaboration.

Teaching objectives: Hedge^[18] dedicated a chapter to reading comprehension in general. When a text is expected to be sensible for a reader, some different types of knowledge is required to be extracted out of the text, namely syntactic, morphological, general word, sociocultural, topic and genre and then that text is understandable for the reader. In next phase, reading comprehension is considered as an interactive process, it is not merely a product. To be interactive, schematic and language knowledge play very important roles. Schematic knowledge was briefly explained in previous section; however, to clarify the issue, an interventional study in this case is proposed. Ziahosseiny^[19] in a study declared that some of the EFL learners' seemingly reading problems are due to inadequate encyclopedic (schematic) knowledge. The study is to reveal the combined effect of content and formal structure of passages on reading comprehension. Two hypotheses were proposed: familiarity with the content area of reading passages enhances comprehension; violation of the formal rhetorical structure of reading passages hinders comprehension. Results showed content schemata affected on reading gain to a greater extent than formal schemata. That is, the existence or absence of specific content schemata affected comprehension and inference-making ability.

Language knowledge enables readers to work on the text. Because reading comprehension in particular or receptive skills in general are decoding processes, if a learner can decode a text, he makes sure that he understands the meaning. In this regard, the knowledge of language structure and range of vocabulary are very important.

Reading comprehension not only is an interactive process but it is purposeful. Hedge proposes five purposes for reading comprehension as:

- Receptive reading
- Reflective reading
- Skim reading
- Scanning and
- Intensive reading

In this regard, there are some other proposed procedures like SCROL^[20] which is an abbreviation and stands for:

- Survey the heading
- Connect
- Read the text
- Outline and
- Look back

As stated, reading comprehension is an interactive and purposeful process; moreover, reading comprehension is a critical process; it means social processes can be learned in reading comprehension process; regarding, different ideologies can be learned through reading process. In this regard, the principles of critical discourse analysis can be focused for the advanced learners. For instance, analyzing a speech of a politician and finding the answer of this question in what situations they use "we" instead of "I".

The last teaching objective that can be highlighted is allotted to the goal setting of reading comprehension. Hedge^[18] enumerates six goals in this regard as follows:

A successful reader is expected "to be able to read a range of texts in English. To adapt reading style according to range of purposes and apply different strategies (e.g., skimming, scanning) as appropriate. To build a knowledge of language (e.g., vocabulary, structure) which facilitate development of greater reading ability. To build schematic knowledge in order to interpret texts meaningfully. To develop awareness of the structure of written texts in English and to be able to use of, e.g., rhetorical structure, discourse features and cohesive devices in comprehending texts and to take critical stance to the content of texts".

Testing objectives: Testing objectives are in line with teaching objectives; it means at first, based on any approach or methodology, teaching objectives in accordance with different factors such as the proficiency level of the participants are set and then testing objectives are designed. A professional syllabus designer can set these kinds of objectives and then some who are experts in educational statistics do the rest. Regarding, teaching objectives in the case of reading comprehension for the A1 level of Europe Council is completely different from C2; the requirements of the participants or examinees are completely different.

Table 1: Goals, purposes and means of reading assessment

Goals of assessment	Purposes	Ways of assessing
Motivate	Encourage learning Book reports Comprehension tests Speed reading graphs	Reading logs
Measure achievement	Monitor progress Provide feedback to the learner Award a grade	Comprehension tests Speed reading graphs
Diagnose problems	Isolate reading difficulties Provide focused help	Reading aloud Vocabulary tests Receptive grammar tests Translation Speed reading tests
Measure proficiency	Award a grade See if standards are achieved	Comprehension tests Close tests Speed reading tests

Nation^[21] stated that there are some reasons for assessing reading and the skills and knowledge that are engaged in reading. They comprise assessing to encourage learning, assessing to check progress and provide feedback, assessing to diagnose difficulties and assessing to measure proficiency. The same form of assessment may be used for a variety of goals. Table 1 adopted from^[21] lists these reasons and their applications.

Good assessment needs to be reliable, valid and practical. Reliability is assisted by having a high number of points of measurement, by using a test format that the learners are familiar with and by using dependable delivery and marking procedures. Validity is assisted by utilizing reliable measures and by being vivid about what is being measured and why. The practicality of a test can be assisted by giving very vigilant thought to how the learners will answer the test and how it will be scored. The ease of making a test is also part of its practicality.

Teaching and testing objectives of reading comprehension were discussed in previous section and then that discussion paved the way for the next topic which is reading comprehension in iBT. Regarding iBT, reading comprehension from the viewpoint of four reliable sources is elucidated.

Official guide of ETS: The TOEFL iBT Reading section comprises 3-5 reading passages, each almost 700 words long. There are 12-14 questions per passage. An examinee has 60-100 min to answer all the questions in the section.

TOEFL iBT reading passages are excerpts from college-level textbooks that would be utilized in introductions to a discipline or topic. The excerpts are altered as little as possible since the goal of the TOEFL iBT is to assess how well students can read the kind of writing that is used in an academic context. The passages cover a variety of different subjects. There is not any

situation for being worried on the unfamiliarity of the issues because all the information required to answer the questions are in the passage. All TOEFL passages are classified into three rudimentary categories in accordance with author purpose:

- Exposition
- Argumentation
- Historical

Sometimes passages present information about the topic from more than one aspect or viewpoint. In this regard, note-taking can be helpful since at least there is one question focusing on the general organization of the passage. Common types of organization are categorized as:

- Classification
- Comparison/contrast
- Cause/effect
- Problem/solution

iBT questions are classified in 10 types as follows: Basic information and inferencing questions (11-13 questions per set).

- Factual information questions (3-6 questions per set)
- Negative factual information questions (0-2 questions per set)
- Inference questions (0-2 questions per set)
- Rhetorical purpose questions (0-2 questions per set)
- Vocabulary questions (3-5 questions per set)
- Reference questions (0-2 questions per set)
- Sentence simplification questions (0-1 questions per set)
- Insert text questions (0-1 questions per set)

Reading to learn questions (1 per set)

- Prose summary
- Fill in a table

In the previous section, reading comprehension in iBT was elucidated in detail. To make a comparison regarding reading comprehension, reading module is explained in another international exam International English Language Testing System abbreviated as IELTS.

Interventional studies: Gomez *et al.*^[22] declared that providing some information to test takers and test score users about the capabilities of test takers at various score levels has been a obstinate problem in educational and psychological measurement^[23]. Since, the 1990s Educational Testing Service has been exploring solutions to this problem via the development of proficiency scaling procedures and question difficulty research. In 1997 a

proficiency scale was developed for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Reading Comprehension section using a tree-based regression approach. This study describes a scale anchoring study of the new TOEFL iBT reading test and the resulting proficiency descriptors that are now part of the TOEFL iBT score report. This study aims to provide descriptive information about the capabilities that test takers require in order to answer questions appropriately. These capabilities are those generated in the new TOEFL Reading Framework and in the guidelines for writing test questions. Scale anchoring is a method of creating descriptors of the performance of test takers that is on the basis of both experimental data and judgments by test developers. It has been utilized with a variety of assessments including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Weir and Khalifa^[24] focused on a cognitive processing approach as a theoretical basis for assessing the cognitive validity of reading tests. This approach is concerned with the mental processes readers truly use in comprehending texts when involving in various types of real-life reading. Sawaki^[25] investigated the factor structure of a field trial sample of the Test of English as a Foreign Language™ Internet-based test (TOEFL® iBT). An item-level Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was done for a polychoric correlation matrix of items on a test form completed by 2,720 participants in the 2003-2004 TOEFL iBT Field Study. CFA-based Multitrait-Multimethod (MTMM) analyses for the Reading and Listening sections revealed the language abilities evaluated in each section were principally unidimensional, while the factor structure of the entire test was best signified by a higher-order factor model with a general factor (English as a second language/English as a foreign language ability) and four group factors for reading, listening, speaking and writing. The integrated Speaking and Writing tasks, which necessitate language processing in multiple modalities, well defined the target modalities (speaking and writing). These findings largely support the current reporting of four scores corresponding to the modalities and a total score, as well as the test design where the integrated tasks contribute only to the scores for the target modalities.

Plakans^[26] stated that integrated second-language writing tasks elicit writing performances that engage other abilities such as reading or listening. Therefore, understanding the role of these other capabilities is essential for interpreting performance on such tasks. This study utilized an inductive analysis of think-aloud protocol data and interviews to uncover the reading strategies of 12 non-native English writers who fulfilled an integrated reading-writing task. Strategy frequency was considered overall, during composing and across writers.

Word-level strategies were most common along with global and mining strategies. Higher scoring writers used more mining and global strategies while lower scoring writers reveal similar frequency in overall strategy use but differences in choice of strategy. These findings recommend that reading plays a role in the process and performance of integrated writing tasks, an important consideration when using such tasks for learning or assessment. Earlier studies have predicted the percentage of vocabulary required for second language learners to understand written texts as being between 95%^[27, 28] and 98%^[29]. In this study, 661 participants from 8 countries completed a vocabulary measure based on words drawn from 2 texts, read the texts and then accomplished a reading comprehension test for each text.

One of the innovations of this study was conducting a multi variate test to show the effects of some independent variables on some dependent variables simultaneously which is ignored in most of the cases. Multi variate analyses comparing to the bivariate ones are more precise and via them the covariance can also be analyzed. Some related discussions on the findings of the present study are provided and in this regard, the similarities and differences of the findings with other studies are discussed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was quantitative in nature and adopted an experimental method. It used a pre-test-post-test, delayed posttest control group design with 2 classes which were assigned to the experimental group and a control group. The control group only engaged in reading comprehension course without the linguistic-based awareness raising element while the experimental group was provided with linguistic-based awareness materials. The independent variables in this study were the types of instruction, proficiency and major. The scores of the participants on the reading module in pretests and posttests were the dependent variables.

To set the practical framework of the study prior to treatment sessions, the participants of the present study were assumed as B.A. students of English-related majors mostly TEFL and Literature and also other majors. The announcement of the iBT class was made by advertisements in Yazd Islamic Azad University and Yazd State University and all the volunteers were informed for participation in class. Seventy people were needed to be placed into two groups of control and experimental. In each group, 30 participants were required but 10 more were going to be assumed for probable mortality rate. All the volunteers were expected to take the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and then according to their scores, they were assigned into two groups. The outliers were excluded from the study. The detailed

specifications of the participants are proposed in the following chapter (experimental group: 24 persons: 15 medicine or pharmacology students and 9 persons were selected from other majors, control group: 27 persons: 19 English-related majors, 8 persons were selected from other majors). Owing to the plan change regarding the participants, major was considered as the moderator variable of the study. All the participants were male and female, aged from 19-24 with the mean age of 22.

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Procedure: The following steps were taken for the purpose of the study: As mentioned, all the volunteers were planned to be invited by an announcement; however when the announcement was not useful enough to attract, the required participants were called upon by the researcher. The only inclusion criterion was assumed a B.A. student who passed 4 credits of linguistics whereas

the final participants were a mixture from different majors. All the participants were asked to take part in Oxford Placement Test for homogenization. According to the mean scores, they were divided into two groups of control and experimental. There was not any significant mean difference between the participants of two groups; it means before treatment provision, the general English of the both group participants was same.

Participants of each group did not recognize the learners in the other group. All the participants were asked to take part in an iBT reading pre-test adopted from Phillips^[30]. The pre-test scores out of 30 were announced only to the participants who were willing to know. All the participants of experimental group were called upon to take part in 10 treatment sessions each lasted 2 h in total, 20 h of treatment. Regarding control group, they participated in 10 sessions each lasted 1 h in total, 10 h. Regarding the experimental group in addition to the mentioned skills in Phillips^[30], linguistic explanations were also added. After treatment sessions, all the participants were asked to take part in a post-test1 and a delayed post-test, parallel forms of the pre-test. Delayed post-test was conducted after a week.

All the raw data regarding placement, pre-test and post-tests scores were transferred into SPSS and after checking the assumptions of germane analyses, statistical tests were conducted. The obtained results from descriptive and inferential statistics are elucidated in the following chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With respect to the experimental and control groups, a teaching scenario was provided to both groups. It was based on TOEFL iBT strategies which were proposed by Phillips^[30]. However, to the experimental group in addition to the provision of skills and strategies needed at the time of reading, some complementary linguistic explanations were also offered. Owing to the extra linguistic knowledge given to the experimental group, the results of post-test 1 and post- test 2 showed that this group outperformed on these tests. Table 1 and 2 in the previous chapter clearly indicate a significant difference at the level of $p < 0.05$ in posttest post- test 2. However, such significant difference does not exist at their pretest results between experimental and control groups. The findings point out that the group (experimental group) which was provided with some explanations about grammatical knowledge and some linguistic information in general was able to get better results or in other words, could understand the reading texts in the given iBT significantly better than the control group. It can be concluded that the answer to the first research question is yes or in other words the first null hypothesis is rejected. The focus is on the number of the sessions used to provide

Table 2: Group = control statistics^a

Parameters	Homogenization			
	score	Pretest	Post_Test1	Post_Test2
N Valid	27	27		
27	27			
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	44.37	19.96	20.30	20.37
SE of Mean	0.487	0.348	0.333	0.407
Median	45.00	20.00	20.00	20.00
Mode	45	19 ^b	19	19 ^b
SD	2.529	1.808	1.728	2.115
Variance	6.396	3.268	2.986	4.473
Skewness	-0.160	0.945	0.469	0.735
SE of Skewness	0.448	0.448	0.448	0.448
Kurtosis	-0.688	0.088	-0.674	0.088
SE of Kurtosis	0.872	0.872	0.872	0.872
Range	9	6	6	8
Minimum	40	18	18	17
Maximum	49	24	24	25
Sum	1198	539	548	550

^aGroup = Control, ^bMultiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

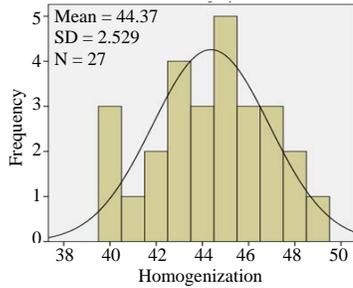


Fig. 1: Illustrates the scores distribution of placement test in control group

the extra linguistic explanations to the experimental group. In other words the quantity and the quality of 10 sessions and their effects on reading ability of the participants in understanding of the iBT reading texts are the matter of concern. Exactly the same results drawn from the data for the first research question are true to the second and third research questions. Two groups are considered statistically the same before treatment but in terms of their post-test 1 and post-test 2, there are significant differences. This shows that a 10-session treatment had the quality to raise the reading strategy awareness of the participants to monitor their reading skills to cope with understanding of the texts. In other words, linguistic-based awareness raising had a positive effect on iBT reading module performance. It should be pointed out that the participants selected for the study were at upper-intermediate proficiency level of language. They were equally distributed among the experimental and control groups. Their selection was based on the results of Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Their OPT scores were between 40-49 out of the total score of 60. Although, no other group of different language proficiency level was selected for the study to compare the result of that group with the upper-intermediate

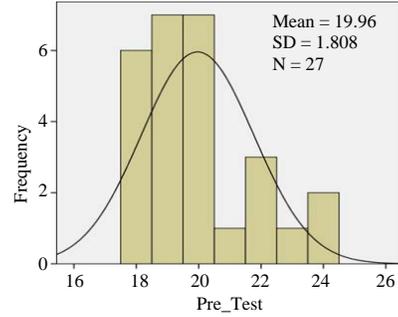


Fig. 2: Illustrates the scores distribution of pretest in control group

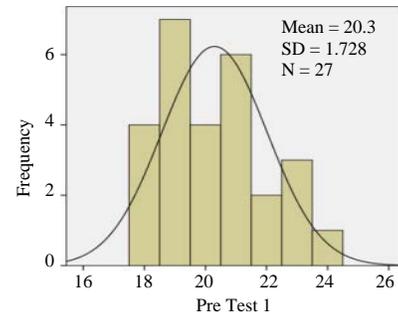


Fig. 3: Illustrates the scores distribution of post-test1 in control group

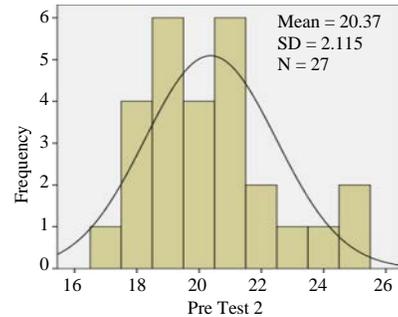


Fig. 4: Illustrates the scores distribution of post-test2 in control group

language level 2 chosen for the present study, it should be stated that the selected group was sensitive enough to the treatment offered to it (Fig. 1-4). Because as stated in response to the first three research questions, the experimental group in comparison to the control group achieved better scores. That means the language proficiency of the participants was high enough to be responsive to the intervention offered in 10 sessions of the treatment. They were linguistically competent enough to implement the linguistic-based awareness raising treatment to improve their strategies of reading to cope with iBT reading module.

Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics related to the control group. There were 30 participants in this group however considering different issues 3 of them resigned to terminate the study and therefore 27 achievements were analyzed and 3 were mentioned as mortality rate. In following table, the number of participants in placement test, pretest, post-test 1 and post-test 2, mean score of the tests (Placement out of 60, Pretest, Post-test1 and Post-test 2 out of 30), standard deviation, standard error of skewness and kurtosis, minimum and maximum of the scores were highlighted. Because the standard error of skewness and kurtosis are between 2 and 2, the distributions of all the scores are considered as normal.

Therefore, it can be mentioned that language proficiency plays a significant role in the obtained scores, i.e., it seems that the forth null hypothesis is rejected. In the design of the study different participants with different range of study courses were selected including from medicine, pharmacology and English departments. The significant levels are 0.636 and 0.139 which are >0.05 probability level set for the study. However, considering the results of post-test 1 and post-test 2, there are significant differences which are respectively 0.007 and 0.000. In Post-test 2 the same patterns of results have been achieved. A significant difference between Medicine and Pharmacology in contrast to English $p = 0.000$ and Medicine and Pharmacology in comparison to other majors as $p = 0.005$. However, there is no significant difference between English and other majors $p = 0.371$ which is larger than $p = 0.05$. All the above-mentioned results points out that the participant's majors interact with main effect of the study which is the application of linguistic-based awareness raising activities in the treatment and positive effects that majors can impose on reading ability of the participants in iBT reading module.

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is in fact the basic goal for ESL/EFL students in order to gain an understanding of the world and of themselves, enabling them to think about and react to what they read^[31]. This skill receives considerable attention when it comes to the standardized tests such as the TOEFL. Since, the 1970s, a variety of reading strategies and techniques have been adopted and supported by second language learning theorists to help students read effectively^[32]. Among these strategies, the most important ones include skimming, scanning, contextual guessing, skipping unknown or ambiguous words, critical reading and making inferences which are considered to be traditional reading skills^[32]. Linguistic-based awareness which has roots in consciousness raising and enhancing the students' understanding of the depth of language alongside the breadth, can be regarded as another approach to assisting

learners who wish to develop their reading skills. Interestingly while it can be assumed that having awareness of language at a deep level can hold important consequences for the EFL learners' use of language at different levels, to date, few research studies have been completed in the EFL context of Iran to examine the effect of this approach on mastery of reading comprehension skills. Moreover, a further question that merits investigation alongside this gap in knowledge is whether the effects of this approach to developing reading comprehension can be lasting and whether the effect can be moderated by any variables such as the students' proficiency level and major. Therefore, this study attempted to fill the gap and address a question the answer to which is of interest to the people who are concerned with TOEFL instruction in one way or another.

This study aims to find whether linguistic-based awareness-raising has a significant effect on reading achievements. For example when a learner is taught on the referents, some additional explanations are added to link his linguistic knowledge to the skills of iBT. Presumably, most of the participants for the present study are B.A. English students who passed linguistics 1 and 2 and are familiar with technical terms and explanations; therefore when referents are explained, some additional elucidations are proposed regarding pragmatic, text, cohesion, antecedent, anaphora and anaphora. Most of the scholars such as Ausubel^[8, 9] believe that unforgettable learning takes place when a learner can link the new knowledge to the old one and subsumes whatever he has learned. A trained iBT instructor who is graduated in one of the English-related fields can fulfill the mentioned objective.

Moreover, the TOEFL iBT is one of the important standardized tests which is taken by international students all over the world on a regular basis and high scores on the test can open up opportunities for students who are seeking admission to the accredited universities worldwide. The reading module of the TOEFL iBT has always been a difficult part of the test for the students and the TOEFL instructors have been exploring a wide variety of options to help TOEFL candidates master reading skills and develop the necessary ability to cope with this section of the TOEFL successfully. Although, many researchers have studied the effects of different techniques on developing the reading skills of EFL learners, hardly can one find studies investigating the effect of linguistic-based awareness on the reading module of the TOEFL. If it can be shown that linguistic-based awareness can have beneficial effects on learners' reading comprehension, the instructors might have an effective option at their disposal for working on the reading skills of the TOEFL iBT candidates. Therefore, the results might be of great use to the TOEFL instructors.

The main focus of the study has been to investigate the importance of awareness-raising activities in particular and its role when applied for making the EFL learners conscious to a linguistic-based syllabus, including the items like different sentence structures, tenses, word structures, etc. The effect of conscious-raising activities in terms of focusing on L2 linguistic knowledge on learner reading ability at the time of reading iBT texts can be considered as the main issue of the study. Therefore, the independent variable of the study has been linguistic-based conscious raising activities and the dependent variable has been the achievement the participants arrive at when they read the iBT texts. There are also some moderating variables that cannot be over-looked as they can play some moderating roles in this regard. The quality and the quantity of the intervention or treatment applied in the study and also the role of participant's language proficiency level and their major in the design of the study are outstanding. All these variables have been changed to research questions and hypotheses of the present probe. There is a rationale behind the inclusion of these parameters in the design of the study. Different scholars have pointed out that awareness-raising activities in language teaching are important. Some years ago Loughhead^[33] recommended awareness-raising and its value in L1 and L2 to assist learners to understand the metaphors. Nakatani^[34] showed that strategy training can improve the learner's oral proficiency test scores. Ishihara^[36] provided a series of awareness-raising tasks and their effects on 18 learner's pragmatic awareness was recognized Murray^[35] has focused on the effectiveness of awareness-raising activities and its relation to interpretive and meaning making of learners in reading activities.

Some lines of research like the present study can hold important pedagogical implications for practice and thus can certainly afford teachers insights to question the validity of some of their current pedagogical practices and instructional techniques not for the sake of abandoning them but to make them more effective. Based on the felt gap in previous studies and the need for continuation of previous research as well as the need to answer the questions that I as a teacher and a researcher had in mind, this thesis was written to report the findings of an experimental study that aimed to investigate the beneficial effects of linguistic-based awareness on the scores of the reading module of the TOEFL iBT. The results were in favor of the effectiveness of this approach in promoting reading comprehension specifically when certain variables are taken into consideration. From the results of this study, we can conclude that reading comprehension is partly a matter of conscious-raising activities. The more L2 EFL/ESL learners become aware of key reading components concluding L2 linguistic knowledge, the faster and more accurate they can handle reading

passages. If learners become conscious toward the L2 linguistic background knowledge, their minds get the necessary preparation to cope with the barriers of reading comprehension process. Because reading comprehension in L1 and L2 is somehow a matter of decoding process. This process focuses some challenges in terms of how to transfer the graphic symbols on a printed text to a phonemic sound for meaning elicitation. By providing the learners with a necessary L2 linguistic and even discourse information, we can activate their minds to prompt positively. In the present study the activation was carried out through a conscious-raising treatment and its positive role was manifested in their reading comprehension of iBT texts.

IMPLICATIONS

The logical explanation for the efficacy of linguistic-based awareness sessions for the experimental group can be attributed to the deeper understanding of language in general and reading comprehension in particular. It can be argued that since treatment sessions with metalinguistic information helps learners develop awareness at both levels of noticing and understanding, it is a better candidate for the promotion of second language learning. Therefore, the findings of this study support noticing hypothesis and the theories which emphasize the role of consciousness in second language learning.

Since, we live in a democratic society, then everyone can utilize his talents to make money and improve the society in different aspects, especially the education facet that is of paramount importance. A self-confident instructor who has taught English for 10 years might say "I'm qualified because of my experience" or a person who was born in the United States and has lived there for 15 years might say "I'm qualified as I'm a native speaker". Nevertheless, these are not cogent reasons. TOEFL as a standardized norm-referenced exam is in urgent need of a well-educated and qualified instructor because there are many issues in teaching TOEFL closely related to the field of linguistics such as pragmatics, schema and reference etc. that by experience or being a native speaker cannot be tackled. A person majoring in linguistics or TEFL can be the best option for the case providing him or her high qualification in general proficiency.

As discussed, there were two groups of participants in the present study, namely experimental and control. Two different teaching protocols were covered for each and then the gleaned scores of placement, pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2 were compared via bivariate and multi variate statistical tests. The obtained results showed that the teaching protocol for the experimental group combining the strategies of Phillips and linguistic-based explanations was more satisfying and the participants in the experimental group outperformed. In sum, if

the participants are placed at the beginning, then a well-qualified instructor is selected to teach and he adds linguistic-based explanations in his teaching, the output is praise-worthy not only for the participants but for the instructor and supervisor of the course.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to emphasize the need to interpret the results with caution and to consider them tentative. It is not possible to claim that this had absolutely no impact on the present study, although the researcher made every effort to keep an objective eye as a researcher throughout the study. The type of sampling in this study was not random sampling. The findings of the study could have been more robust if random sampling had been adopted. The participants in the experiments were at about upper-intermediate English level and confined to a particular type of students. Findings could differ with more or less advanced students and were only applicable to students with similar characteristics mentioned in the participant section of this thesis. It was not possible to control the participant's exposure in the control group to linguistic-based explanations outside the experiment.

SUGGESTIONS

This study opens up some interesting questions for further research. In the present study, there were two groups, namely experimental and control. By assigning more groups and allocating some other teaching protocols, some other bivariate and multi variate statistical analyses can be conducted. For example, the other experimental or control group can be added and instead of Phillips, other common TOEFL sources mentioned in chapter two are covered since the TOEFL sources can guarantee a specific score range. Phillips is the best choice to obtain 85-90, to achieve higher, other sources like Barron's or Nova should be studied.

As discussed in previous chapter, two categorical variables were included in the study, namely group and major. The other categorical variable such as gender can be added in the study and then conducting some other bivariate or multi variate statistical analyses are possible. In addition, if a number of participants or groups are added, some other statistical analyses focusing on frequency values like Chi-square, Cramer, Phi and etc. can be done to reveal other sides of the variables network. Negotiating with the participants of both groups revealed that learning and mastering the iBT TOEFL reading module was not too tough for them. They were satisfied with the questions and their obtained scores in the mentioned exams. A comparative study can be done regarding the reading comprehension module of IELTS and then the results can be compared and contrasted

because probably the most difficult section in iBT is speaking module which includes 6 different tasks with 6 different rubrics utilizing a software facilitation that the participants should record the voice and there is not any face-to-face communication with the examiner; however, surely the most difficult section in IELTS is reading. In most of the cases, the score of the participants in IELTS reading module is lower than the other modules of listening, speaking and writing.

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