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Improving Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Oral Narrative Task Performance in Terms of Accuracy, Fluency and Complexity by Awareness Raising Through Semantic Fields

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Abstract

The effects different awareness-raising techniques might have on language learners' performance have been studied by many researchers. The present study specifically focused on improving EFL learners' oral narrative task performance in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity by awareness raising through semantic fields. The participants in the study included 40 intermediate learners whose initial homogeneity in terms of language proficiency was assessed via a Preliminary English Test (PET). They were further randomly assigned as one experimental group and one control group, each comprising 20 participants. The amount of instructional time was 17 sessions, during which the participants in the experimental group received an awareness raising technique through 'semantic fields'. Before and after the treatment, an oral narrative test was administrated. The results of the data analysis revealed that the experimental group which received the awareness raising technique outperformed the control group in three measures of accuracy, fluency and complexity on their performance. The participants showed significant improvements in language proficiency as they retold the narratives. The findings of the present study can create the floor for researchers to go deep through the EFL contexts and find more about the probable effects awareness raising techniques might have on language learning and teaching.

Keywords: awareness raising, narrative task, oral narrative, semantic fields, task performance, accuracy, fluency, complexity

Introduction

During last decades, attention to task performance in language learning has been prominently increasing. Tasks have been documented to play a significant role in language learners' oral and written performance (Kuiken & Vedder, 2012). Thus, improving proficiency in language has been sought to be highly related to application of tasks. According to Ellis (2003), tasks provide evidence of learners' ability to use their L2 knowledge in real time communication. This conceptualization highlights the substantial role of tasks in language teaching research as well as pedagogy. Learners may not be successful to develop the proficiency required for effective communication unless they are given opportunities to practice such samples, which are elicited by either oral or written 'tasks' (Ellis, 2003). Narration of a story in spoken and written forms is among the tasks which occur in response to some kinds of stimulus including either a picture strip or a short film.

To date, the contribution of narrative proficiency to language learning has been one of the priorities of research. Storytelling whether oral or written leaves back effects on overall language proficiency (Berns, Blaine, Prietula, & Pye, 2013). Research carried out by Sullivan and Brown (2015) revealed that learners who read for pleasure improved in subjects as math, vocabulary and spelling compared to those who did not show inclinations to read. According to Paul (2012), reading a story aloud helps improving grasp of syntax and sentence structure. Samantaray and Linguistics (2014) described storytelling as a technique to attract learners' attention and concentration. Accordingly, based on this technique it is feasible to encourage prediction and expectation of events. As learners find an opportunity to predict the consequences of an event, their comprehension, enjoyment and happiness are provoked. Therefore, learners make significant improvements in their language use if they apply this technique in language learning (Samantaray & Linguistics, 2014). Thus, the environment in the classroom is converted to a productive one along with plenty of learner participation and concentration.

As a kind of task, narratives encourage learners to tell the sequences of a disrupted event. As in communication duel focus on form and meaning is intended, the learners carry on the burden of spontaneous conversation in

task performance. This immediacy is augmented by the limitations in human processing capacity and priority of meaning over form (VanPatten, 1990), resulting in difficulty in drawing learners' attention and raising their awareness to focus on linguistic forms as well as semantic features. This challenging issue has opened new areas in research.

In narratives, compared to daily conversations, the learners require more complex language and higher level thinking. So as to raise the learners' awareness of the event, the vocabulary must be explicit, pronoun references are required to be clear, descriptive language must be used and the storyteller must tell the story in a logical sequence (Petersen, Gillam, Spencer, Gillam, & Research, 2010). While there are various ways to provoke learners' consciousness of the structure of the language, in the present study, it was raised by means of a semantic awareness raising technique named *semantic domains*.

Semantic awareness is regarded by Koda and Zehler (2008) as a major component of metalinguistic awareness for second language learners. It refers to the knowledge about organization of meaning in language and the sensitivity to different semantic domains. Semantic awareness is comprised of awareness of words, of breaking compound words down into their root words and of breaking down sentences into words. Ukrainetz (2006) believes that semantic awareness also involves the ability to match written words to spoken words.

The origin of semantic field theory goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century to structuralist ideas to the study of lexicon of languages (Humboldt, 1836; Herder, 1772). It holds that a semantic field is not formed in isolation but in association with other semantically related words. This creates a cluster of meanings creating a semantic filed. Mackey (1965) defined the concept of a semantic field as "being made of basic key-words, which command an army of others" (p.76). As each word could be in the center of a web of associations radiating in all directions, a web of hundreds of meanings is formed. Words like *fiction* and *briefcase* might have as many such associations as follows:

1. anecdote, fable, narrative, nonfiction, novel
2. bag, baggage, case, dispatch, folder,

The first set all denotes concepts that include *a kind of story*, while the words of the second set denote *things to carry objects*. These two sets form two different semantic fields.

Recently, researchers have started to consider the significance of semantic field theory to develop the language skills and specifically language proficiency. It is very difficult for language learners to remember all the English words at the same time since some words are very similar and look alike such as *classical* and *classic, astonishing* and *astounding,* etc. This reveals the fact that language words are related to each other and they make a thorough lexical system. As semantic field theory concentrates on the connections of words in a specific web of associations, proper application of semantic field theory would result in easier English vocabulary learning (Gao & Xu, 2013).

Zhou (2001), approaching the concept from a different angle, refers to semantic field as lexical field or domain. Accordingly, it is regarded as how to combine words with interrelated meanings dominated by one certain concept. In a semantic area, a network of hundreds of associations may be found. Each word is capable of being in the center of a variety of associations stemming out in all directions. A word like *can* might have many such associations as *bottle*, *container*, *box*, etc. Drawing learners' attention to these associations might ultimately influence their language production.

Research in several areas reveals the significance of semantic organization in vocabulary learning and language production. Linguists, researching in the area of memory and recall, have highlighted the superiority of recalling the data that have been organized into logical semantic categories (Bower, Clark, Lesgold, & Winzenz, 1969). Recently, researchers in EFL have also investigated semantic field relationships and have presented concrete examples of how semantic field methodology can be applied in the classroom (Gao & Xu, 2013).

Researching into educational EFL contexts such as Iran reveals the fact that after several years of language studies, learners have terrible mistakes in oral and written production although most of the class time is allotted to teaching grammatical points (Behroozi & Amoozegar, 2014). The problem lies in the fact that such contexts suffer from the deficiencies which mainly

stem from the methodology of the teachers set aside the material the students are provided with, the shortage of time and the degree of exposure to language outside the classroom (Dolati & Mikaili, 2011). To deal with the problem which might originate from the methodology of the teachers, the researcher made attempts to find ways of helping learners improve their oral narrative proficiency through raising their semantic awareness.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, few studies have been done in Iranian context investigating the impact of semantic awareness raising techniques on intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance. So, in this study, the researcher intended to fill this gap and explored this under-investigated area by studying the impact of semantic awareness raising techniques on oral narrative task performance of intermediate EFL learners in Iran.

To test the research hypothesis, that is, semantic awareness raising through semantic fields significantly affects Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance, the researchers tried to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Does semantic awareness improve fluency on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance?

RQ2: Does semantic awareness improve accuracy on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance?

RQ3: Does semantic awareness improve complexity on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance?

Method

Participants

This study was carried out in a Foreign Languages (FL) School among male English learners in Kermanshah, a city in the west of Iran. The reason to carry out the study in a male FL school was that it is against the law to have mixed-sex classes in FL schools in Iran. The participants' language background was Kurdish and Farsi and they were 13 to 18 years old. The sampling procedure was convenience sampling. After administering an English Test (PET), to homogenize the students, 40 participants whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected. Then, the participants who were in an intermediate level were

randomly assigned to two groups: one control group and one experimental group.

Instruments

The selected course book was titled Steps to Understanding written by Hill (2004). The book contains 120 short stories in four levels; introductory (750-headwords), elementary (1000 headwords), intermediate (1500 headwords) and advanced (2075 headwords). This book is at the 750-headword level, and all the levels are very carefully graded covering not only vocabulary, but also idioms and grammar. Each story is about 150 words long, and some of the stories contain one or two words outside the grading. The reason that the researcher selected a book containing short stories is that short language samples appropriately indicate the improvement in learners who retell the stories (Heilmann, Miller, & Nockerts, 2010).

This study made use of 3 measurement instruments to collect information on the participants' language proficiency level and their ability to narrate short stories orally.

1. A preliminary test of English, Oxford Placement Test, was used to determine the proficiency level of the learners and to homogenize them. The PET exam is either paper-based or computer-based. For the purpose of this study the paper-based was used since it is available easily and there was no need to a computer. Also, the probable difficulties while taking the test online were prevented. Moreover, the paper-based form could be taken in the favorite time and place.

2. The pre-test consisted of a picture story and participants were required to tell a story orally based on a set of pictures (9-12) taken from Hill (2004) which was presented to them on paper. It was administered after homogenizing the participants and before the treatment.

3. An oral post-test checking the student's ability to retell short stories was administered a week after the treatment to measure the relative effects of awareness raising through semantic fields on the learners' ability to narrate short stories orally. The post-test, also, consisted of a picture story including a set of pictures. The participants were required to retell the story based on the pictures. The same as pre-test, the post-test, also,

measured the accuracy, fluency and complexity of the samples of language the participants produced orally.

To ensure the reliability of the scores both in the pre-test and post-test, all performances were scored by two raters and reliability was calculated, which came out to be acceptable.

In picture stories, validity was determined in terms of the ambiguity residing in picture sets. Research has repeatedly shown the significance of selecting picture cues which possess significant pull for the motive in questions (Pang, 2010) and the need to consider the cue strength of the various component images is well-documented (Brunstein & Maier, 2005). It is not clear how much there should be the amount of pull and cue strength of picture set to ensure right amount of ambiguity. Accordingly, Ramsay and Pang (2013) emphasized that there is a need to balance the competing concerns of pull and ambiguity of short stories. Thus, picture sets should exhibit moderate ambiguity if validity is to be ensured. Thus the researchers negotiated convergent and predictive validity of the selected picture stories with a panel of three experts to ensure the validity of the picture stories.

Procedure

The preliminary English Test (PET) was administered in the first session of instruction to homogenize the students. Forty participants whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected. Then, the classes were randomly assigned to two groups: a control group and an experimental group, each including 20 learners. The course book (Steps to Understanding) then was used as the medium of instruction in both control and experimental groups. For the purpose of the present study, the 17 session treatment began following the pretest. Each week two sessions were held and each session lasted for 70 minutes for 8 running weeks. The classes were taught by the same teacher who was a PhD candidate of TEFL.

In the control group, to practice understanding and speaking English, the learners listened to the teacher or a CD. Then, they read the story at first in chorus with the voice on the CD, and then aloud. To check the learners' understanding of the short stories and their command of vocabulary and grammar, the learners were required to answer certain number of exercises such as short answer questions following the short stories orally.

The experimental group received the treatment on awareness raising based on 'semantic fields'. To apply this technique, the researcher instructed the learners so as to receive training in specific associations that the control group did not receive: the learners were required to substitute a keyword for a related word. During the treatment, the researchers tried to predict such key-words for 17 short stories and provide associations for them. Thus, the researchers had to predict the key words in advance of holding the treatment sessions. The researcher selected the basic key-words in each short story alone before the class started or in cooperation with the learners at the beginning of the class. Thus, a key word was centered on the board around which as many as possible associations could be contributed. For example, a word like *belief* might have as many such associations as *intention*, *opinion*, *idea*, thought, and the like. Although the short stories were graded, their difficulty level was controlled by readability formula, the results of which showed high readability. Then, the audiotaped data were transcribed and coded. The participants' oral performance in the narrative tasks was measured in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity.

Following Bygate (2001) who defined t-unit as "a finite clause together with any subordinate clauses dependent on it", the data were collected. As to Housen and Kuiken, (2009), fluency was measured by counting the numbers of repetition, false starts, reformulations, and replacement per t-unit. Number and lengths of pauses were not taken into account in this study as measures of fluency due to the large number of participants. To measure accuracy, the researchers followed Skehan and Foster (2005) for whom accuracy was reflected by calculating incidents per t-units: the higher the number the less accurate the language. Following Kawauchi (2005), complexity was measured by counting the number of words per t-units. In other words, the complexity of the language use depended on the rate of words used in the language. As there are different types of words in the language, the researchers only counted the number of content words and not nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives.

Then all performances were scored by two raters and inter-rater reliability was calculated. For validity the researcher discussed the results with some experts and they chose this way of measurement as an appropriate way of evaluation.

Design

The design of the study was quasi-experimental with pre-test, post-test, and control group. The independent variable of the study was semantic awareness and the dependent variables were accuracy, fluency, and complexity.

Results

The first step in the data analysis was to check the reliability of scores both in the pre-test and post-test. All performances were scored by two raters and then reliability was calculated for two sets of scores. The inter-rater reliability in the pre-test was determined by looking at the percentage of agreement between the two raters. The inter-rater reliability check on the two raters yielded coefficients ranging from .88 (oral accuracy) to .86 (oral fluency) and to .90 (oral complexity). So, the average percentage of inter-rater reliability for the six measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity was .88 showing a high inter-rater reliability.

The inter-rater reliability of the post-test was also determined by looking at the percentage of agreement between the two raters. Alpha Cronbach, in this phase, produced coefficients ranging from .85 (oral accuracy) to .84 (oral fluency) and to .88 (oral complexity). Therefore, the average percentage of inter-rater reliability for the three measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity was .85, again, showing a high inter-rater reliability in post-test.

In this study, four measures of fluency namely "number of repetition", "false starts", "reformulations" and "replacements" were taken into account. All of these components were counted and added and then divided by t-units. For accuracy measurement, the total number of the ungrammatical cases was divided by t-units. So for these two measures, the lower the number is, the better the performance will be. To measure complexity in initial and post performances of language learners, the occurrences of the number of content words per t-units were taken into consideration.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics to compare the differences between the means of the control group and experimental group with regard to oral proficiency in narrative task performance. It shows the means of the two

groups in both pre-test and post-test in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity.

Table 1
Means of the Control Group and Experimental Group

Groups	Variables		N	Mean	Std Deviation
Control	**Oral fluency**	Pre	20	1.24	0.37
		Post	20	1.2	0.28
	Oral accuracy	Pre	20	1.65	0.31
		Post	20	1.65	0.3
	Oral complexity	Pre	20	45.55	5.05
		Post	20	44.7	5.58
Experimental Group	**Oral fluency**	Pre	20	1.26	0.34
		Post	20	1.99	0.37
	Oral accuracy	Pre	20	1.56	0.27
		Post	20	1.65	0.29
	Oral complexity	Pre	20	46.45	5.76
		Post	20	59.5	10.28

 **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As Table 1 shows, in oral narrative task performance, the mean of the control group in pretest is 1.24 in oral fluency, 1.65 in oral accuracy and 45.55 in oral complexity. In the post-test the mean of the control group is 1.2 in oral fluency, 1-65 in oral accuracy and 44.7 in oral complexity. Table 1 also shows that the mean of experimental group in oral narrative task performance in pretest is 1.26 in oral fluency, 1.56 in oral accuracy, and 46.45 in oral complexity. In the post-test the mean of experimental group is 1.99 in oral fluency, 1.65 in oral accuracy, and 59.5 in oral complexity.

In every study, to choose an appropriate statistical test to analyze the data, it is required to evaluate the normality and non-normality of the distributed data. To this end, in this study Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used. As Table 2 shows both in the pretest and the post-test, Kolmogorov Smirnov test determines that in the two groups the level of the significance in fluency, accuracy and complexity in oral narrative task performance is more than 0.05. This shows normality of the distributed data. So, in this study the parametric tests used for the variables were appropriate.

Table 2

Kolmogorov Smirnov Test to Determine the Normality of the Distributed Data

Groups	Variables		test	Sig.
Control	Oral fluency	Pre	0.81	0.51
		Post	0.94	0.33
	Oral accuracy	Pre	0.86	0.44
		Post	1.16	0.13
	Oral complexity	Pre	0.63	0.8
		Post	1.43	0.53
Experimental	Oral fluency	Pre	0.8	0.53
		Post	1.15	0.13
	Oral accuracy	Pre	0.73	0.65
		Post	0.68	0.74
	Oral complexity	Pre	0.56	0.9
		Post	0.49	0.97

To test the research hypothesis, that is, semantic awareness through semantic fields significantly affect the learners' oral narrative task performance, three measures of fluency, accuracy and complexity were taken into consideration. Regarding fluency, the numbers of words per t-units were counted. To measure accuracy the number of error-free t-units per t-units were calculated. The t-units free from grammatical, lexical or spelling errors were counted as error free t-units. To measure complexity, the number of S-nodes per T-units was counted. In this regard, the number of content words in a narrative was divided by the total number of words.

To do the analysis, the researchers used Levene's test to assess the equality of variances for a variable calculated for two groups. The results of Levene's test are shown in table 3.

Table 3
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

Variables	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Oral fluency	0.00	1	38	0.94
Oral accuracy	0.47	1	38	0.49
Oral complexity	2.26	1	38	0.14

As the amount of *p*-value in Table 3 is larger than 0.01, it means that the equality of covariance has not been violated. The amount of p > 0.05 in all the cases confirms the equality of the variance for all cases.

Table 4
Multivariate Tests[a]

	Value	F	Sig
Wilks` Lambda	0.08	125.95	0.00

The results in Table 4, F (125.95) and P (.00) and Wilks' Lambada equals .05 indicate that there is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group post test scores.

Table 5
Tests of Between-subjects Effects

Variables	F	df	Sig
Oral Fluency	214.96	1	0.01
Oral Accuracy	186.15	1	0.01
Oral Complexity	125.03	1	0.01

The results of the analysis in Table 5 shows that for all of the three measures of fluency (F =214.96, p=0.01), accuracy (F= 186.15, p=0.01) and complexity (F= 125.03, p=0.01), the difference between the control group and experimental group is statistically meaningful.

Table 6

Comparing Proficiency in Both Control and Experimental Group

Variables	Group	Mean	Std Error
Oral fluency	Control	1.20	0.02
	Experimental group	1.99	0.02
Oral accuracy	Control	1.56	0.03
	Experimental group	1.65	0.03
Oral complexity	Control	45.16	1.41
	Experimental group	59.04	1.41

A short look at the mean scores of two groups in Table 6 suffices to address the three research questions. The first research question tries to investigate the effect of semantic awareness raising on the learners' fluency in oral task performance. It becomes clear that in the fluency measure the mean score of the experimental group (1.99) is higher than the control group (1.20), which is an indication of the outperformance of this group to the control group. The second research question investigated the improvement in accuracy of experimental group narrative task performance. Similarly, the higher mean score of the experimental group's accuracy measure (1.65) shows that this group has outperformed the control group (1.56) in this aspect of performance. The third research question examined the complexity as a measure of participant language proficiency. The results reveal that experimental group has outperformed control group as the mean of experimental group (59.04) is higher than the mean of control group (45.16). Therefore, the three research questions are positively addressed and the research hypothesis stating that semantic awareness has a significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative task performance is confirmed.

Discussion

Oral performance in a foreign language such as English has always been a problematic issue. Achieving an accurate and fluent command of spoken

language has proved a daunting task for many language learners in EFL contexts such as Iran. To be able to serve as a proficient language speaker, a language learner needs to be both accurate and fluent. Accuracy, fluency and complexity as three measures of language proficiency are required to be taken into consideration in oral task performance. The present study was carried out to investigate the influence of the 17-session course framed around awareness raising through semantic fields on EFL learners' oral narrative task performance.

The results of the analysis revealed a significant difference between the experimental group participants' performance before and after the treatment, as well as between the performance of the experimental and control group in the post-test. The participants of the experimental group outperformed the participants of the control group in three aspects of the oral performance, that is, fluency, accuracy and complexity. In the case of accuracy, the number of errors in the oral narration of short stories decreased after the treatment. Considering four measures of fluency, they were strongly influenced by the independent variable, that is, semantic awareness. All these four measures positively decreased as a result of the dependent variable. With regard to complexity, the number of content words increased as a sign of improvement in the performance of the experimental group participants.

Previous research indicates that narrative skills are essential tools in social interactions (Duinmeijer, de Jong, & Scheper, 2012), in academic activities (Heilmann et al., 2010; Petersen, Gillam, Spencer, & Gillam, 2010) and in reading achievement (Paul & Smith, 1993). So, embedding them in an interactive learning context is of paramount importance. Couched in this conceptualization, this research was carried out to investigate the development of accuracy, fluency and complexity (AFC) in language performance as a result of awareness raising through semantic fields applied in foreign language classes in Iran. Specifically, the result of the present study indicated that the awareness raising activities influence the foreign language learners' retelling short stories significantly.

Although the results varied across individual participants, overall, the findings of this study demonstrated that the use of awareness raising technique had a positive effect on the oral narrative performance of

intermediate language learners. As this study is amongst the first studies investigating the effect of semantic awareness on oral narrative task performance, it cannot be extensively supported by the results obtained from other findings. However, the results of the present study are in line with Zohrabi and Abasvand (2014) who emphasized the importance of awareness raising strategies on the improvements in accuracy and complexity of L2 output.

Regarding the increased quality of production by awareness raising tasks, the findings of this study corroborate those of Nostarinia and Roustayi (2014) who stated that such awareness raising activities led to improvements in overall L2 language ability. Additionally, the current study results support the notions of *noticing hypothesis* and *explicit teaching.* While the learners deliberately, with the assistance of the teacher, attended to form through identifying different *story grammar elements* and *word order correction*, they outperformed those only exposed to implicit instruction.

One major contribution from awareness raising techniques has been for accuracy in L2 production. Therefore, language learners in an EFL context can benefit from such techniques not only in their classes but also in authentic situations. Moreover, such findings could be useful for instructors as they can be sure what they work upon as techniques will remain in the language learners' minds and their influence can last in learners' minds for a long time. The results also support the findings of Ruhi (2001), Pica (1985) and Rahimpour (2001) that increasing consciousness will consequently lead to greater attention to form and planning in production.

Learners are the major stakeholders in the process of learning on whom the burden of learning lies more than others (Nunan, 2015). Theoretical and empirical perspectives (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2016; Benson, 2013) underscore the role of dynamically engaging learners in evaluating their competencies. Like all other aspects of the learning process, the engagement of language learners in creating semantic fields, the outcome of which is learning how to learn, helps learners move form the other-regulation toward autonomous learning (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). These awareness initiatives

could be attainable through teachers' mediation while making semantic fields.

An interesting finding from the present study is related to the contribution of semantic fields to vocabulary learning.   Vocabulary is one of the important components of language. The efficiency of vocabulary learning greatly determines the success of language learning. The size of one's vocabulary directly affects the development of his/her linguistic competence. As semantic fields contribute to expanding the repertoire of learner's vocabulary this consequently leads to improvements in language proficiency (Gao & Xu, 2013).

The use of high-frequency words was prevalent in this study. The learners made errors in their oral narrative tasks due to the lack of experience or development or lack of exposure to low-frequency words. When this occurs, they might overextend the use of a high-frequency words (Bedore & Pena, 2008). This was revealed in some of the transcripts of the experimental group in the current study. One example of this overextension was seen in one of the learner's transcript. It appeared that any time the participant wanted to say 'said', 'told', 'ordered' and 'asked', he used 'said'.

Nearly all participants in the study overextended high-frequency words as they transited between utterances. Words such as 'and', 'and then', and 'so' were the first words of most utterances in the story retells throughout the oral narrative transcripts. The learners used such words whenever they found themselves incompetent in language production. Another point which is worth mentioning is that all participants and the teacher reported their pleasure and enjoyment while listening to the short stories and working together. All the participants and the teacher rated the treatment in this study as favorable and appropriate and they agreed that the intervention might make long lasting improvements in their oral narrative performance.

The results obtained from present study provide implications for curriculum planners, EFL syllabus designers and language teachers to develop appropriate material for pedagogical purposes. Meanwhile, it presents techniques for language learners to promote their proficiency in language. It is believed that Communicative ESL teaching alone is inadequate to improve proficiency in language learners (Williams, 1995) and that task-based teaching instruction can be a compromise for this

inefficiency. Teachers and learners should be aware of methodological techniques needed to link theories in language to their practical realizations. They could explore possibilities to innovate techniques to improve learners' performance in language.

In the view of such a practical need in second language pedagogy, raising learners' awareness of semantic features of language as semantic fields by means of focus on form activities could improve meaningful communication. Thus, such practices can be incorporated into a meaning-oriented instruction. Curriculum planners should investigate feasible ways to design appropriate tasks where learners' awareness can be easily raised through creating links between form and meaning. This later on could serve as practical suggestions and a desire for EFL teachers to think of awareness raising techniques which assist learners improve not only communicative fluency but also grammatical accuracy.

Syllabus designers and textbook writers can include parts as script stories in school textbooks which provide rooms for teachers to apply awareness raising techniques in language learning classes. So, they can incorporate semantic raising in their methodology as it could improve intermediate narrative skills of the learners to a great extent. Due to the effectiveness of applying such a technique, as found in the present study, educational policy makers can hold in-service classes to train teachers how to apply awareness raising techniques in their classes. The reason is that this is a skill which needs teachers to be trained how to use it correctly and efficiently, otherwise the results will be reverse. For researchers, it illuminates the future research on this less investigated area creating the floor for them to go deep through the EFL contexts and find more about the probable effects semantic awareness might have on language teaching and learning.

Awareness raising activities which may improve oral performance have opened new avenues of research. The present study only took the effect of semantic raising techniques on oral production of EFL language learners. Additionally, the effects awareness raising techniques might have on the other language skills such as reading and writing as well as listening can open new areas for investigation. While the results of this study demonstrate that awareness raising can improve the narrative proficiency of Iranian EFL

intermediate learners, findings from the current study suggest several areas for future research. To be able to evaluate the difference between learners at different level of competency, comparative studies of different proficiency levels can be carried out.

Declaration of interest: none

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