

Please cite this paper as follows:

Kazemi Kheirabadi, N. (2023). Effects of Explicit Vocabulary Instruction on Improving L2 Learners' Writing Skill and Their Short and Long-term Retention. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 11 (46), 135-150.

Research Paper

Effects of Explicit Vocabulary Instruction on Improving L2 Learners' Writing Skill and Their Short and Long-term Retention

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Received: November 21, 2021

Accepted: February 02, 2022

Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of explicit instruction aimed at improving vocabulary on the writing proficiency and long-term retention of new vocabulary among second language (L2) learners. The achievement was accomplished through the administration of a fill-in-the-blank assessment, which included 30 individual words and 6 lexical phrases, to a group of 30 EFL students at an upper-intermediate level. Subsequently, these students engaged in a reading exercise centered around the topic of 'Bull Fighting' and subsequently crafted a paper titled 'A Cruel Sport'. The results demonstrated a notable enhancement in the quantity of terms actively utilized in their writing following the focused vocabulary teaching. The statistical analysis revealed that the participants were capable of retaining the newly-acquired language even after a considerable amount of time had elapsed since the lesson. This study presents comprehensive information on these findings and provides suggestions for L2 teachers, asserting that although comprehending a word does not inherently result in its active utilization, learners possess the capacity to enhance their active vocabulary and accurately employ recently acquired words. Explicit training in vocabulary is advantageous for converting recognition vocabulary into productive language during immediate writing tasks and enhancing retention. Nevertheless, consistent and regular practice in utilizing recently learned vocabulary is necessary for it to become effective in long-term written expression.

Keywords: Explicit vocabulary; Short and Long-term retention; Vocabulary, Writing skill

تأثیر آموزش واژگان صریح بر بهبود مهارت نوشتاری زبان آموزان L2 و حفظ کوتاه مدت و بلندمدت آنها

هدف اصلی این مطالعه ارزیابی تأثیر آموزش صریح با هدف بهبود واژگان بر مهارت نوشتاری و حفظ طولانی مدت واژگان جدید در بین زبان آموزان زبان دوم (L2) بود. این موفقیت از طریق اجرای یک ارزیابی پر کردن جای خالی، که شامل ۳۰ کلمه فردی و ۶ عبارت واژگانی بود، برای یک گروه ۳۰ نفری از دانش آموزان زبان انگلیسی در سطح متوسط به دست آمد. متعاقباً، این دانش آموزان درگیر تمرین خواندن با محوریت موضوع «جنگ گاو نر» شدند و متعاقباً مقاله‌ای با عنوان «یک ورزش بی‌رحمانه» تهیه کردند. نتایج افزایش قابل توجهی را در کمیت اصطلاحات مورد استفاده فعالانه در نوشتار آنها به دنبال آموزش واژگان متمرکز نشان داد. تجزیه و تحلیل آماری نشان داد که شرکت کنندگان قادر به حفظ زبان تازه آموخته شده حتی پس از گذشت زمان قابل توجهی از درس بودند. این مطالعه اطلاعات جامعی را در مورد این یافته‌ها ارائه می‌کند و پیشنهادهایی را برای معلمان L2 ارائه می‌کند، و ادعا می‌کند که اگرچه درک یک کلمه ذاتاً منجر به استفاده فعال از آن نمی‌شود، زبان آموزان این ظرفیت را دارند که دایره واژگان فعال خود را تقویت کنند و کلماتی را که اخیراً به دست آورده‌اند را به‌طور دقیق به کار ببرند. آموزش صریح در واژگان برای تبدیل واژگان تشخیص به زبان سازنده در طول کارهای نوشتاری فوری و افزایش ماندگاری مفید است. با این وجود، تمرین مداوم و منظم در استفاده از واژگان اخیراً آموخته شده برای مؤثر واقع شدن آن در بیان نوشتاری طولانی مدت ضروری است.

کلمات کلیدی: واژگان، واژگان صریح، مهارت نوشتاری، حفظ کوتاه مدت و بلند مدت.

Introduction

For second language learners, writing is an undoubtedly challenging task (Richards, 2002). It is a remarkable achievement to be able to express thoughts coherently and accurately in a second language, especially considering that many native English speakers struggle with this skill. In fact, research has shown that a lack of lexical competence can be a basic hurdle for those learning a foreign language (Astika, 1993), as vocabulary is a crucial factor in specifying the quality of writing (Walters & Wolf, 1996).

Studies in psychology have also demonstrated that vocabulary is essential for proficiency in both native and foreign languages (Pawley & Syder, 1983). As such, it is crucial for language trainees to build a robust vocabulary repertoire in their second language in order to effectively comprehend and produce language. Vermeer (2001) supports this notion, stating that vocabulary knowledge is closely linked to success in L2 learning and is often used as a benchmark for language proficiency.

Despite the significance of vocabulary, it has been undervalued in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) according to Zimmerman (1994, as cited in Coady & Huckin, 1997). In many cases, it has not been given the attention it deserves in language teaching and learning. However, research has shown that vocabulary learning is a crucial aspect of overall language acquisition. As Rivers (1981) points out, regardless of how well a student understands grammar or pronounces the second language, effective communication will not be possible without an adequate vocabulary.

In addition, Richards (2002) emphasizes the vital role of vocabulary as a cornerstone of language skills, stating that it is the foundation for the language skills. Therefore, students who struggle with writing in a second language are likely to have inadequate knowledge of vocabulary (Raims, 1985). This is supported by the evidence from Iran, where many English language learners have a strong grasp of grammar but struggle with writing.

This highlights the importance of a holistic approach to language learning, where the abilities to read and write are interlinked rather than taught separately. In the EFL environment, traditional methods have often placed more emphasis on grammar and structure rather than developing students' lexical resources for effective reading and writing (Richards, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an approach that integrates both skills in order to foster successful language development.

Literature Review

The topic of vocabulary instruction in SLA as a cognitive process is often overlooked in the literature (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In fact, Dell (1997) points out that vocabulary was not given much attention in mainstream curricula or language teaching theory textbooks during the 1970s and 1980s. It stressed the learning of the rules and functions of the language, rather than specific vocabulary items. In most language learning methods, only the necessary words were taught in the first part of the lesson in order to explain the language or engage students.

One of the basic reasons for the absence of focus on vocabulary teaching is the belief that it is a waste of time, as students will naturally learn words through exposure to the language (Harris & Snow, 2004). It is often assumed that there are a limited number of words that students need to know and they will acquire them naturally through correct instruction. However, research has demonstrated that a high amount of second language vocabulary is learned spontaneously, primarily through spoken text.

Despite these findings, there is a widespread belief that actively teaching vocabulary is not necessary as it may hinder the learning process by taking away from valuable instruction time. Nonetheless, recent theories in language learning suggest that limiting exposure to vocabulary



may actually impede development in other areas of language, such as grammar. Therefore, it is essential to consider the impact of vocabulary teaching on overall language proficiency. While some may argue that vocabulary is not crucial to language learning, research suggests that it plays a significant role in overall language development. Simply relying on exposure and absorption may not be enough for students to fully grasp a language. Therefore, it is vital for teachers to consciously and effectively incorporate vocabulary instruction into their language teaching methods.

In his work, Alderson (2000) asserts that comprehending a text requires readers to simultaneously process multiple levels. At all reading levels, mastery of vocabulary is undoubtedly essential for students (Mart, 2012). Without an extensive range of expressive words, meaningful communication in L2 is not achievable, regardless of a student's proficiency in grammar or pronunciation. However, research suggests that vocabulary instruction presents challenges because many teachers lack confidence in effective teaching practices and struggle to determine where to focus their instruction for word acquisition (Alqahtani, 2015; Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). Personal experiences as a teacher in preparatory school and at the tertiary level show that vocabulary retention and reading comprehension are common struggles for students.

Furthermore, Nation (2001) points out that forgetfulness is most common immediately after learning new vocabulary, emphasizing the need for early repetition. Additionally, it is worth noting that repetition should not simply involve exposure to the word's form and meaning, but rather repeated effort in retrieval, which better simulates real-world language use (Nation, 2001). Ultimately, studies recommend contextual repetition of a word five to seven times throughout the course of diverse discourses to aid in most learners' understanding.

Experts in vocabulary suggest that the term 'incidental' should not be used in the context of implicit learning, as it implies acquiring knowledge of vocabulary without a conscious effort (Hulstijn, 2001), without any formal or informal assessment (Nation, 2001), and through independent consumption of written, spoken, or visual material (Stæhr, 2008), with a focus on the content rather than the language itself (Schmitt, 2010). Arndt and Woore (2018) note that both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction have a specific purpose. Therefore, incidental learning is often viewed as a secondary outcome of communicative language tasks (Hulstijn, 2001) in authentic interactions using the L2.

According to Laufer (2017), a balanced approach that combines explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction is necessary, typically through meaning-focused input, also known as intensive vs. extensive instruction. Laufer (2017) argues that L2 learners need to encounter target words at least ten to twenty times through extensive reading or listening, making it nearly impossible for implicit meaning-focused instruction alone to cover all the required words, thus highlighting the importance of explicit instruction that focuses on individual words.

What does Vocabulary refer to and what is the definition of a Word?

The skill to effectively apply words in written or spoken sentences is known as vocabulary knowledge, which can be assessed through a multiple-choice test that measures understanding of the meanings of selected items. Generally, knowing the meaning of unknown words is associated with the skill of connecting form and meaning. However, when evaluated with a simple yes/no test, some L2 learners may mistakenly believe they know the words. Despite being familiar with a word's existence in the desired language, individuals may still have difficulty understanding its definition and therefore have trouble incorporating it into a sentence. The amount of tokens found in a text is the same as the overall count of word forms, including repetitions, but the number of types represents the total number of distinct word forms, resulting in a repeated word being counted only once.



When considering grammar, it is essential to add inflectional endings to a base form without altering its meaning or word class. This combination of the base form and its inflected forms is known as a lemma in the realm of vocabulary. When determining the number of words (types) in written or spoken language, the first step is usually to lemmatize the tokens, treating inflected forms as instances of the same base form.

However, base words not only have inflections but also have derived forms that can change the word class and introduce a new meaning. These groups of related word forms that share a common meaning are referred to as word families. Properly differentiating between word forms and word families is essential when measuring vocabulary size. The variability in estimates of a native speaker's vocabulary may be attributed to some researchers counting word forms while others focus on word families (Read, 2000). These distinct meanings within a single word form are crucial to be included in separate word families.

Vocabulary Knowledge

According to Nation (2001), words are not separate entities in language, but rather they are interconnected and form part of more complex systems and levels. He emphasizes that learning individual words and learning systems of knowledge are two distinct processes. One of his main points is that native speakers continue to expand their vocabulary knowledge throughout adulthood, in contrast to their relatively stable grammatical competence. To truly know a word means understanding its syntactic behavior. This involves not only knowing the word's surface form, but also understanding its potential derivations.

Additionally, knowing a word also entails being aware of the network of associations it has with other words in the language. The remaining six assumptions pertain to different aspects of what constitutes knowing a word.

1. The understanding of a word involves awareness of its likelihood of appearing in speech or writing, as well as the types of words commonly associated with it.
2. Comprehending a word necessitates an understanding of its contextual constraints and how it functions in different situations.
3. Familiarity with a word encompasses knowledge of its syntactic behavior.
4. Being knowledgeable about a word includes awareness of its underlying form and potential derivations.
5. Knowing a word encompasses understanding its connections to other words in the language.
6. The comprehension of a word involves understanding its semantic value.
8. Understanding a word involves knowing its various definitions and interpretations. (Richards, 1976, p.83)

The body of assumptions mentioned here has often been considered a general structure for understanding vocabulary, despite the fact that Richards did not originally intend it to be so and it is not as all-encompassing as it may appear. However, it does accentuate the intricate process of acquiring vocabulary, which goes beyond simply memorizing a word's definition, as noted by Meara (1996b).

Nation (1990) included multiple additional elements into Richards' original listings. Nation has included in the table a differentiation that is not explicitly stated in Richards' presumptions: the ability to understand vs. the ability to produce (table 1).

Table 1*Elements of word knowledge (Nation, 1990, p.31)**Key: R = receptive P = productive*

Form:		
Spoken form	R	What is the word's pronunciation?
	P	How do you say the word?
Written form	R	What is the visual appearance of the word?
	P	What is the word's spelling and written form?
Position:		
Grammatical patterns	R	What are the possible occurrences of the word?
	P	What are the required usage patterns for the word?
Collocations	R	What are the words or word types commonly found before or after the given word?
	P	What are the essential accompanying words or word types for this word?
Function:		
Frequency	R	What is the frequency of the word?
	P	How frequently should the word be utilized? Where would we typically encounter this word?
Appropriateness	R	In what contexts can this word be utilized?
	P	What are the possible occurrences of the word?
Meaning:		
Concept	R	What is the definition of the word?
	P	Which term accurately conveys this definition?
Associations	R	What other associated terms come to mind?
	P	Are there alternative options for substituting this particular word?

Nation categorizes word understanding into three distinct parts: understanding of structure, understanding of significance, and understanding of application. Each of these segments contains further subdivisions. Understanding word forms can include recognizing the visual representation of a word, or its written form, as well as its auditory counterpart, or phonological form. Nation expands on this concept by also including knowledge of word components, such as prefixes and suffixes, which can alter the meaning of a word. The comprehension of word meaning can be further divided into three categories. The first category relates to the ability to connect a word's form to its significance, which can be challenging in a foreign language as it often involves linking a word in that language to its translation in one's native language. The remaining two categories, concepts and referents and associations, highlight the idea that a word in one language may have multiple translations and connotations when translated into another language.

The concept of word usage is also segmented into three distinct categories. The first involves understanding the grammatical function of a word and its role in connecting with other words. The next category explores collocations, where certain words are frequently found alongside others and are deemed to be closely associated. This breakdown of knowledge also aligns with the differentiation between receptive and productive proficiency. In Nation's classification, each section within his framework is further divided into receptive knowledge (marked with an R) and productive knowledge (marked with a P). According to Nation, mastery of a word's spoken form encompasses the ability to both recognize it when spoken and effectively utilize it to convey meaning (2001, p.41).

Receptive to Productive Continuum

According to Melka (1997), the general belief is that individuals must comprehend words before being able to use them effectively. However, it would be more beneficial to view this process as a

continual development from understanding words to using them proficiently, indicating varying levels of knowledge or familiarity with a word. When it comes to incorporating new vocabulary, writing offers a platform for greater experimentation compared to speaking, providing students with the opportunity to utilize resources such as dictionaries and more time. This extra time available to writers may even allow them to activate infrequently used but more suitable words from their passive vocabulary, which have not yet been fully integrated into their active vocabulary (Corson, 1997). Additionally, Sugawara (1992) discovered that when learners write new words in context at least once, it boosts their confidence in utilizing those words in the future and is beneficial for improving both their understanding and use of vocabulary. Extensive research has consistently shown that a lack of vocabulary is the main obstacle in foreign language writing (Raimes, 1985; Leki & Carson, 1994), and that proficiency in vocabulary is a crucial factor in determining the overall quality of composition (Astika, 1993). Laufer's (1994) studies have demonstrated that university students make progress in this area by incorporating more academic vocabulary into their writing. Similarly, Leki and Carson (1994) found that second language learners identified a deficiency in vocabulary as the leading factor hindering the quality of their writing.

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary

There are two main theories for acquiring vast vocabulary knowledge in order to excel in English: The Input Hypothesis (IH) and the Output Hypothesis (OH). Krashen, a notable supporter of the IH, believes in indirect instruction and the acquisition of vocabulary through comprehensible input and reading. According to Krashen (1989), reading and comprehending text is the most effective way for both first and second language learners to acquire new words. In accordance with this hypothesis, Krashen suggests that the more time students spend reading, the higher their performance will be on vocabulary tests.

On the other hand, the OH maintains that simply understanding the context is not sufficient for building comprehension. Instead, it advocates for repeated exposure to vocabulary within engaging content as the key to expanding word knowledge. An essential component of this process is an individual's motivation towards the subject matter and the text itself (Krashen, 1989). OH proposes that language is learned through language production, where successful verbal attempts reinforce the language used and unsuccessful attempts prompt the speaker to adapt their language in the future.

Implicit Teaching and Learning

Psychologists draw a crucial line between implicit and explicit learning, with the former requiring the absence of conscious effort in the learning process. According to this definition, the learner does not deliberately test hypotheses or search for structure in the language being exposed to. Language teaching further confuses these two concepts, often using them interchangeably. Incidental learning, which is defined as the process of learning new words while focusing on understanding their meaning instead of the goal of learning, blurs the line between implicit and incidental learning. This method may seem effective for learning foreign words, as it introduces them without the student having to actively participate in the learning process. This type of learning can also occur without the student even realizing they are studying. One commonly accepted definition, proposed by Hacking and Cody, suggests that incidental word acquisition occurs through communicative activities such as reading, listening, and interaction that focus on meaning. In a study on vocabulary acquisition and retention among German students in non-native English-speaking countries, Rott (1999) looked into the effects of exposure through reading, with two, four, and six exposures. Hulstijn, Hollander, and Greidanus (1996) also



studied advanced French students in Dutch non-native English-speaking countries, and found that providing a bilingual dictionary or additional information improved comprehension for one-word terms. In a study on the role of selection in incidental vocabulary learning, Ellis and He (1999) found that when learners have the opportunity to use new vocabulary in a communicative context and are able to choose the words themselves, they are more likely to retain the words compared to solely relying on incidental learning.

Explicit Teaching and Learning

According to the output hypothesis, the utilization of direct instruction is necessary for effectively teaching new word definitions. This approach employs skill-building techniques that require deliberate methods and strategies, moving students from rote memorization to analytical understanding of word components (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Advocates of explicit vocabulary instruction assert that practicing and repeating vocabulary is the key to mastery (Willis, 2008). As such, vocabulary instruction must provide ample opportunities for students to witness and hear words in context and actively use, discuss, and connect new words to their existing vocabulary knowledge.

Vocabulary instruction aims to target two main types of words: unfamiliar words that have broad applicability and are likely to appear in various contexts, and words that are key for comprehending specific concepts in a particular subject area, such as those found in science textbooks. In order to achieve this goal, teachers should make sure to provide explanations for the meaning of words, while students should engage in activities such as completing exercises, consulting dictionaries, and reflecting on the meanings. However, besides briefly addressing aspects like spelling and pronunciation, the focus should be on allowing learners to encounter and use the word in a meaningful way. This type of explicit learning is characterized by being of a more conscious nature, with the learner actively creating and testing hypotheses in order to identify patterns or apply established rules. The quality of the mental processes involved plays a significant role in the success of explicit learning.

Approaches to Writing Pedagogy

Over the past few years, language learning trends have greatly influenced the way writing is viewed. Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2006) note that the changing approaches to language learning, including 'the environmentalist,' 'the innatist,' and 'the interactionist' perspectives, have played a significant role in shaping the development of writing patterns.

Writing from the Environmentalist Standpoint

The importance of writing in language learning was largely disregarded until the late 1960s, mostly due to the prevalent influence of environmentalist ideologies. These ideologies, rooted in structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology, perceived language as synonymous with speech and viewed the process of language acquisition as a mechanism of stimuli, responses, and reinforcements (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2002). As a result, writing was deemed secondary to speaking and was defined solely as an orthographic representation of it. It was believed that mastery of spoken language and its associated orthographic conventions was a prerequisite for learning to write, as discrepancies between spoken sounds and written symbols could impede the acquisition of spoken language (Silva & Matsuda, 2002).

According to this language learning theory, writing was seen as a reinforcement of grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, ultimately aiding in achieving oral proficiency. Consequently, many language programs focused on teaching writing by emphasizing the development of language skills, with a strong emphasis on formal accuracy. Instruction typically involved imitating predetermined sentences and practicing manipulations of them. Furthermore,



writing tasks were carefully regulated to avoid interference from students' first language (Kroll, 2001). As a result, the role of the teacher was largely to instill concepts of correctness, believed to stem from repetitive practice of grammatical structures.

Writing from Innatist Standpoint

During the 1960s, the focus on attention to form in writing underwent a shift towards the compositional process due to the emergence of Chomsky's (1965) innate theory (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2002). By using the Think-Aloud Protocol technique, one researcher delved into the cognitive processes involved in writing and uncovered that the stages of writing are not necessarily sequential but can be recursive and involve creativity. This realization led to the most prominent theory suggested by Flower and Hayes (1981), who proposed a cognitive model of reflexive writing. As Kern (2000) elaborates, writing is no longer seen as a passive tool for recording thoughts and ideas, but rather as a dynamic process that generates and explores new ones (p. 121). Therefore, the primary responsibility of teachers is to develop students' writing skills, promoting creativity and teaching strategies for writing, revising, and editing (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). Furthermore, in this approach to writing, errors are seen as a natural part of the process and are only addressed in the final stage.

Writing from Interactionist Standpoint

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, as interactive methods for language learning gained influence, there was a shift towards considering the socio-cultural setting in which writing occurs (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2002). This was particularly evident in the development of information analysis as a means of understanding writing. The concept of Writing Behavior then emerged as a theoretical framework. Furthermore, the importance of cultural factors in writing was highlighted by the emergence of alternative discourse studies (Connor, 1996), which emphasizes cross-cultural research in the analysis of L2 writing. This perspective views writing as a communicative activity and serves as the foundation for teaching this skill. As such, writers must acquire a set of communication skills in order to write effectively within a specific context.

Writing Instruction Based on Communicative Competence Framework

In 1972, Hymes proposed the concept of communicative competence as a counter to Chomsky's concept of language competence. Hymes argued that having a deep understanding of language's internal structure was insufficient; understanding how to effectively use language to achieve communication goals was also essential. Therefore, within this framework of communicative competence, the skill of writing plays a critical role in facilitating its development (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2002). This paper highlights the importance of writing in communicative competence and its interplay with other components by providing brief explanations of four competences encompassed within communicative competence.

a. Discourse Competence: In order to produce a successfully written text that suits its communicative purpose and setting, writers must possess discourse competence which enables them to effectively utilize discourse elements (as outlined in Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell's 1995 study). This includes understanding and employing cohesion (such as references, substitutions, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical chains), coherence (and its indicators), as well as being familiar with the conventions of written genres (as discussed by Scarcella and Oxford in 1992).

b. Basic Elements of Written Communication: Linguistic competence encompasses essential components of written communication, including lexicon, grammar rules, and mechanics conventions. Writers must have a grasp of vocabulary and its varying meanings in different



contexts (Kern, 2000). The mastery of this competence is crucial in creating grammatically sound sentences (Silva & Brice, 2004).

c. **Understanding Pragmatic Competence:** Pragmatic competence involves comprehending the intention behind a speech act, taking into account the situational and participant variables and politeness considerations (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). This plays a significant role in effective communication.

d. **Cultural Writing Skills:** Cultural writing skills involve understanding how to effectively produce written texts in a specific sociocultural environment. In order to write competently within a particular culture, writers must be familiar with the rules and expectations of that community and develop cross-cultural understanding because different cultures have their own distinct norms and customs (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995).

e. **Strategic** Apart from the mentioned abilities, writers must also possess strategic writing skills that involve both learning and communication techniques (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). These skills require the capability to learn and implement writing strategies effectively, as well as communication tactics to overcome language obstacles. This can involve techniques like paraphrasing, restructuring, or even directly translating from one's native language (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995).

The objective of this research was to evaluate the growth of students' active vocabulary knowledge following explicit instruction and its application in a writing assignment. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1. Does the use of explicit vocabulary instruction lead to the improvement of writing quality as far as the short-term recall of newly-learned words is concerned?

RQ2. Does the use of explicit vocabulary instruction lead to the improvement of writing quality as far as the long-term recall of newly-learned words is concerned?

RQ3. Does completing a post-reading writing task lead to a shift from receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary?

Methodology

Research Design

This was an experimental study that employed a quantitative research method to assess the effectiveness of explicit vocabulary instruction on L2 learners' writing ability and vocabulary retention. The study utilized a pre-test-post-test experimental design with a treatment group of 30 upper-intermediate EFL students who were randomly assigned. As a pre-test, participants completed a fill-in-the-blank vocabulary test to measure their baseline knowledge. Then, the treatment group received an explicit vocabulary instruction session focusing on targeted words. Following this, as a post-test, participants engaged in a reading activity using the words and wrote a composition to apply their vocabulary. Retention was analyzed by assessing usage after a period of time. Statistical analyses of t-tests were conducted on the pre-test, post-test, and retention measurement scores to determine any significant differences. The quantitative experimental study aimed to provide empirical evidence on whether explicit vocabulary instruction could improve L2 learners' ability to integrate new words into their productive writing and retain these words longer-term.

Participants

Thirty upper-intermediate students, chosen from a group of 100 male students aged 21-25 at Kamal Language Institute in Tehran, underwent the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) (Allen, 2004) to determine their proficiency levels and qualify for a research project. These students had previously completed writing tasks but were now embarking on their first extended writing assignment focused on a specific topic related to a reading activity. To support their organization



of the target vocabulary, the participants were provided with a four-column sheet where they could note down the vocabulary items after receiving post-reading instruction and before starting their writing. The initial part of the sheet required them to fill in blanks in sentences using the given target vocabulary, carefully adhering to instructions to use each word or phrase only once. The vocabulary test was not returned to the students until the conclusion of the project.

Procedures

In a single 90-minute session, the researcher utilized a standard reading instruction method to educate the students on a reading passage. After a brief introduction to the topic, she read the passage out loud to the class and paused at pertinent points to clarify vocabulary and provide further context. The vocabulary was also written on the board. The completed exercise was returned to the students the following day and on the third day, they completed a writing task on the topic 'A Cruel Sport' without the use of dictionaries, the reading passage, or assistance from peers or the teacher. The researcher then marked any correctly used target vocabulary items with checks and highlights, and offered no other feedback. The day after, the researcher provided instruction on the target vocabulary to the participants.

The teacher assisted students who were unable to provide the designated term (through cooperation and comprehension). The teacher recorded the term on the board (to illustrate its meaning or spelling). The students elucidated the definition to the teacher, who then prompted other students to further clarify the meaning (through compromise and understanding). The teacher permitted students to discuss and validate or refute their peers' suggested meanings (through communication and understanding). The teacher reinforced each student's interpretation by reiterating it and providing real-life examples that were not directly related to the writing topic (to define and contextualize the word meanings). Furthermore, the teacher highlighted any discrepancies in meaning among words or phrases (such as 'viewers,' 'audience,' and 'spectators' or 'serious injuries' versus 'fatal injuries') (to demonstrate comprehension). Diverse contexts were presented where students had to determine the most suitable word (through negotiation and understanding), and they were also tasked with identifying the word's part of speech (such as 'injured' and 'injury') (through cooperation and comprehension). Ultimately, the teacher modeled the accurate pronunciation of all target items at the conclusion of the lesson (to listen to the word), and students echoed each word after the teacher (to articulate the word). The designated vocabulary items were introduced in the same sequence as they would appear in the writing frame. Once all target items were taught, students received their own writing frame to transcribe the vocabulary items onto it.

The students were directed to utilize a frame to structure their paragraphs and were allowed to incorporate any desired target item into their writing, as long as it was coherent. The post-instruction writing was evaluated and distributed back to the students the following day. They were then given the opportunity to compare their writing before and after instruction and revise any sentences containing vocabulary mistakes in their post-instruction pieces. Upon obtaining consent, the investigator obtained writing frames, initial compositions, and final compositions from the participants. Following implementation of vocabulary instruction, the pupils fulfilled a postponed writing assignment 23 days afterwards (specifically, 21 days subsequent to feedback being provided). A writing frame was projected on the whiteboard, with the students instructed to retrieve as many desired vocabulary terms as they could and document them on the margin of their paper prior to commencing their compositions. The same ground rules were upheld, with no referencing dictionaries, reading materials, or receiving aid from classmates or instructors. The compositions were subsequently gathered, assessed, and each accurately-utilized vocabulary term was attributed a sole point.



Data Analysis and Results

Based on the information in Table 2, the value for t -observed (31.000) is of great significance at the probability level of $p = .000$. In simpler terms, the students did not utilize the familiar terms in their written assignments. As a result, the initial null hypothesis stands, proving that completing a post-reading writing task does not lead to a shift from receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary.

Table 2

T-test results for vocabulary test and pre-instruction writing activity

	Paired differences				Sig. (2-tailed)	df
	Mean	SD	SEM	t		
Vocabulary pre-instruction		2.07	.365	.067	31.000	29

In order to determine if the students utilized any of the recognized vocabulary in their writing, their results on the post-reading pre-instruction writing activity were compared to their performance on the vocabulary test. The descriptive statistics for both tests are included in Table 2, and Figure 1 visually portrays the means.

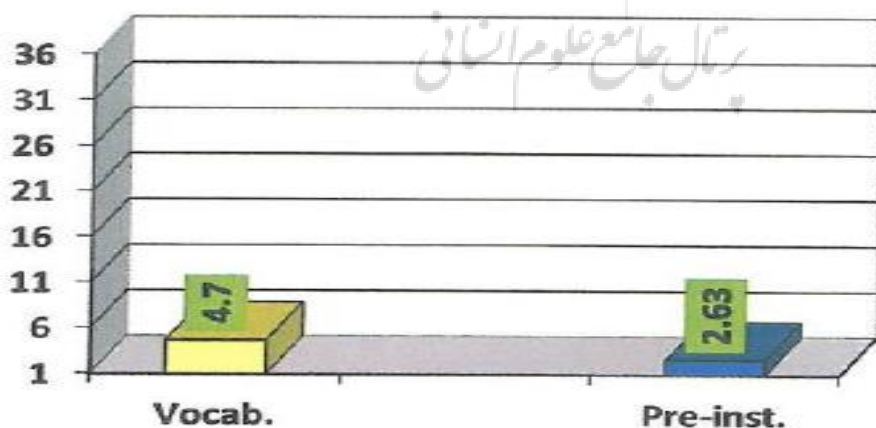
Table 3

Descriptive Statistics results on Vocabulary Test and Delayed writing activity

Task	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Vocabulary	4.70	30	2.037	.372
Delayed	5.30	30	2.602	.475

In order to determine the significance of this inconsistency, a matched-pair t -test was carried out. Table 2 displays the outcomes of this t -test. To verify the notion that direct vocabulary instruction has no effect on the transition from receptive to expressive vocabulary, an examination of participants' performances on the vocabulary assessment and writing task after the instruction was required. The descriptive data for both tasks are presented in Table 3, and Figure 2 illustrates the mean scores in the form of a bar graph.

Figure 1



As it can be seen in the above table, the means of the two tests are different.

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics: Students' Scores on Vocabulary Test and Post-instruction Writing Activity*

Task	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Vocabulary	4.70	30	2.037	.372
Post-instruction	6.77	30	2.825	.516

Table 4 displays a clear distinction between the two tasks. To determine the statistical significance of this difference, another matched-pair t-test was conducted. Table 5 depicts the results of this t-test.

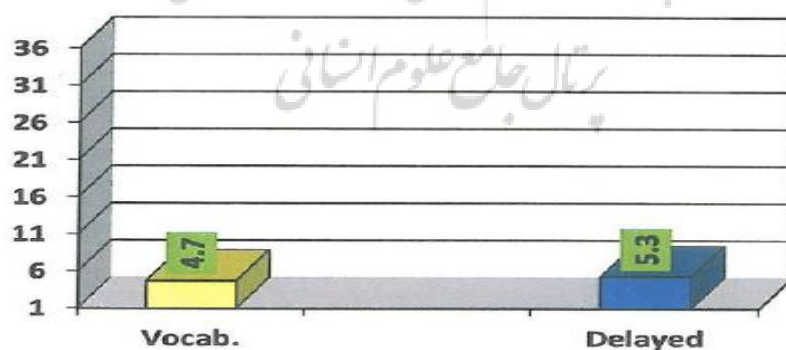
Table 5*T-test results for Vocabulary Test and Post-instruction Writing Task*

	Paired differences				Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	SEM	t	
Vocabulary post-instruction	-2.07	1.617	.295	-6.998	.000

It is evident from Table 5 that the t-observed ($t_{\text{observed}} = -6.998$) is significant at a probability level of $p = .000$, indicating that the difference between the two tasks is statistically significant. In other words, the results suggest that the second null hypothesis, which claims that there is no effect of active and productive vocabulary and newly learned vocabulary on the quality of delayed writing, can be rejected. To further investigate this relationship, the participants' vocabulary test scores were compared with their delayed writing scores. Descriptive statistics for these two tasks are presented in Table 6, while the scatter plot in Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this relationship.

Table 6*Descriptive statistics: students' scores on vocabulary test and delayed writing activity*

Task	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Vocabulary	4.70	30	2.037	.372
Delayed	5.30	30	2.602	.475

Figure 2*Means for Vocabulary Test and Delayed Writing Task*

According to Table 5, there is an observed distinction between these two groups of scores. Nonetheless, the table does not establish the statistical significance of this difference. To address this, a third matched-pair t-test was utilized, the outcome of which is presented in Table 6.

Table 6*T-test results of Vocabulary Test and Delayed Writing Task*

	Paired differences				Sig. df	(2- tailed)
	Mean	SD	SEM	t		
Vocabulary post-instruction	-.60	1.567	.286	-2.097	29	.045

According to the numbers in Table 6, the t-observed value shows a significant discrepancy in scores ($p = .045$), meaning that the individuals retained the recently-acquired words even after some time had passed since the lesson. As a result, we must reject the third null hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results, it has been revealed that foreign language learners often have difficulties with writing due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge (Astika, 1993). Vocabulary is a crucial aspect in determining the quality of writing for these learners (Walters & Wolf, 1996). Despite this, there has been limited investigation on the use of vocabulary in writing among learners (Laufer, 1994). The data collected confirmed that the participants had a significantly lower knowledge of productive vocabulary compared to their receptive vocabulary. These results are in line with similar studies by Laufer (1998), Brown and Payne (1994), and Verhallen and Schoonen (1998), indicating that productive vocabulary tends to be lower than receptive vocabulary. However, this study challenges the belief of Laufer and Paribakht (1998) that learners with higher recognition vocabulary will also possess a larger active controlled vocabulary in writing. It was found that learners do not automatically apply their recognition vocabulary in their writing. Nevertheless, explicit vocabulary instruction can help expand their active controlled vocabulary. The first research question explored whether receptive vocabulary knowledge can be transferred into productive use through a post-reading-writing task. However, a matched-pair t-test showed that students rarely used newly acquired vocabulary in their writing. On the other hand, the second research question focused on the possibility of transforming recognition vocabulary into productive vocabulary through explicit instruction. This was supported by the findings of Nation (2001), who suggested that consciously directing learners' attention towards vocabulary items or strategies can improve vocabulary learning.

As discovered by a 1983 study conducted by Duin, explicitly teaching vocabulary has been proven to increase the use of appropriate words in context, known as the 'word awareness' effect. This type of instruction motivates learners to be more mindful of their word choices in subsequent writing, leading to a higher quality of content and sentence structure. Our own study involved comparing the vocabulary test scores of participants before and after receiving instruction, and the results showed improvement in their writing. A similar approach to vocabulary instruction was taken by Lee in 2003, where he examined the writing of 65 secondary school students. His findings showed that explicit vocabulary instruction resulted in a higher usage of targeted words in their post-writing tasks. This suggests that explicit vocabulary instruction can significantly increase productive vocabulary knowledge, allowing students to effectively utilize their vocabulary when producing written texts.

Furthermore, when considering the impact of newly-learned vocabulary on delayed-writing, Laufer and Paribakht (1998) found that increased exposure to new vocabulary through explicit instruction can lead to improved long-term retention. In our own study, the mean scores for both the vocabulary test and delayed-writing task indicated that participants were able to retain the newly-learned vocabulary even after some time had passed since the instruction. This supports the notion that explicit vocabulary teaching can assist students in effectively utilizing their vocabulary knowledge when writing, leading us to reject the third null hypothesis.



This study was concluded by focusing on a limited set of target words and addressing various essential questions related to second language (L2) recognition and the examination of productive vocabulary. These inquiries centered around assessing the effectiveness of learners' vocabulary knowledge in a specific context, the disparity between their recognition and productive vocabulary when writing about a specific topic, and the immediate and long-term effects of explicit instruction on their vocabulary usage in writing. The findings showed that explicit instruction on vocabulary helps in converting recognition vocabulary into productive vocabulary, both in the short-term writing task and in memory retention. However, although explicit instruction is successful in enabling learners to use newly acquired vocabulary productively in writing, it is also prone to being forgotten, therefore requiring additional practice to maintain and further develop this new vocabulary. Consequently, it is crucial for EFL learners to be taught how to use their existing recognition vocabulary and newly acquired vocabulary productively in a writing task, as well as how to incorporate lexical variation and variation in lexical frequency to enhance the quality of their written work.

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