

## The Effect of Using L1 Reading Comprehension Task on Iranian EFL Learners' L2 Reading Comprehension Test Score

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is an attempt to study the effect of using L1 reading comprehension task on the students' L2 reading comprehension. The data of the present article was collected through a randomly classified data collection process: A TOEFL test was administered to all sophomore B.A. students studying at Islamic Azad university of Iran, Tonekabon branch to measure the students' language proficiency level and to homogenize them. From among all of them, a total of 20 students were randomly selected and divided into two groups namely control and experimental group; each group covering 10 subjects. Then, a pretest was administered to both groups and after teaching L1 reading comprehension to the experimental group for ten sessions, a posttest was given to both groups. The posttest was as the same as the pretest. Next, the data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and then the Pearson correlation test and independent samples test were run by SPSS. The results confirm the null hypothesis of the study showing that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of both control and experimental group, hence demonstrating that L1 reading comprehension task does not have any effect on L2 reading comprehension test score.*

**Keywords:** Top-down processing, bottom-up processing, reading comprehension, reading strategy, task S

### INTRODUCTION

Reading is the most usable skill that plays a significant role in improving readers' language proficiency, especially in a foreign language setting. Actually, EFL learners rely on this skill to acquire knowledge as the foreign language is seldom spoken outside the classroom. The students tend to handle reading without adequate skillfulness, and this negatively affects their reading efficiency and causes comprehension deficiencies.

In these settings the majority of students tend to dig on a written print struggling in a word-by-word reading, sticking at every unknown word. This makes it more difficult to grasp the meaning of what they read and causes them to get struck on individual words which may not be essential to the general understanding of a text. In Iran many students still have problems in reading comprehension. Some parts of problems of students are from the understanding of topic which is implied or they have problems in the knowledge of language and culture of second language. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of using L1 reading comprehension as an independent variable on students' L2 reading comprehension as a dependent variable. That is the researcher wanted to clarify whether L1 reading comprehension has an effect on students' L2 reading comprehension test score or not.

English is taught as a foreign language in our country and most of the teachers are non-native speakers of English. Teachers seem to do some amounts of code switching in the teaching process and it seems that most of them are not aware of their own practices. Reading

in L1 and L2 is of great importance and the role of Language proficiency is also important in L2 reading development.

### **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE**

This study is expected to have theoretical and practical importance, as described below:

1. It is important to get an insight into the effect of L1 reading comprehension on EFL learners' L2 reading comprehension.
2. This study may lead to the improvement of EFL learners' L2 reading comprehension.

Reading is a basic life skill and the lack of reading comprehension affects student's academic growth. Reading is the corner stone of a child's success in school and through life. Without the ability to read, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will be lost. Reading is at the heart of all formal learning. Student's success or failure in reading at early grades resonates throughout the rest of their lives, because reading with comprehension is the foundation of all content areas, it is vital that the diversity of needs relating to reading comprehension be met. It must be assumed that it is not the fact that we give the students the chance to read, but that we instruct them how to understand, how to comprehend and how to use strategies that will help them comprehend what they are reading, as they read for any specific content area.

Alderson proposes two hypotheses in L1 and L2 reading weakness:

1. Poor reading in a foreign language is due to a poor reading ability in the first language. Poor first- language readers will read poorly in the foreign language and good first language readers will read well in the foreign language.
2. Poor reading in a foreign language is due to inadequate knowledge of target language.

A teacher should use assessment information to identify the specific types of reading problems a student has, and should choose effective strategies about reading comprehension:

The research question of the present study is: Does L1 reading comprehension task have any effect on L2 reading comprehension test score? And, the hypothesis of the present study is that L1 reading comprehension task does not have any effect on L2 reading comprehension test score.

An often cited study on reading is that of Grabe and Stoller [1], who investigated the reading processes of fluent native speakers. Unlike Grabe and Stoller [1] and Koda [2] studied the differences between first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) reading.

Birch [3] raised the metaphor of an expert decision maker to portray the complex decisions required of an L2 reader. His proposition of complex decisions is supported by Koda [2], who argues that "prior literacy experience, limited linguistic sophistication, and dual language involvement" caused variations in L2 reading, and that L2 reading is a "complex and multidimensional construct" (p. 3). Both Birch [3] and Koda [2] agree that L2 reading involved L1 transfer, which is not only about linguistic structure, but also about worldview, reading style, and reading strategy.

L2 researchers have been interested in the degree to which linguistic knowledge as opposed to L1 reading competence or general cognitive abilities impacts L2 reading comprehension. As Carrell [4] points out, "students" apparent reading problems may be problems of

insufficient background knowledge [content, formal, and linguistic]" (P.245). By referring to theories of second language acquisition and reviewing the recent literature, it can be seen that the first language of learners (L1) has a necessary role in all aspects of language instruction. This indicates that the bilingual approach' is gaining more support by incorporating the students' L1 as a learning tool and also as a facilitator for an efficient communication.

A study conducted by Koh [5] to show the effects of familiar context on student's reading comprehension supports the notion that one's comprehension of a text depends on how much relevant prior knowledge the reader has about the subject matter of that particular text. He went further to suggest that students must be made conscious of what is involved in successful reading. In other words, they must activate their content schemata for the recreating of meaning from the text rather than focus on the word-for-word deciphering which characterizes much ESL reading material.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were students of English as a foreign language at B.A level majoring in English translation at Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, Iran. The participants were sophomore students. From among all of the students studying at this university, 20 students were randomly selected and divided into two groups namely control and experimental group; each group covering 10 subjects. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 28.

### **Materials**

In order to investigate the effect of L1 reading comprehension task on L2 reading comprehension test score, first a test of TOEFL was administered to the students to homogenize the population. The test had 100 questions which fell into different categories. Thirty questions were listening, twenty questions were structure, twenty questions were vocabulary and thirty questions were reading comprehension. Teaching L1 reading comprehension was done in 10 sessions. Five L1 reading texts were chosen and taught in the class. Then, a pretest was administered consisting of a reading comprehension of L2 with 5 questions in multiple-choice form. The posttest was the same as the pretest. In each pretest and posttest, the subjects were given 15 minutes to answer the test. The inter-rater reliability of test is 0.67. And, the test is valid because it has been extracted from Longman TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) written by Deborah Phillips, [6].

### **Procedures**

In order to eliminate the effect of intervening factors on the results of the present study, a standard TOEFL test was administered. This test was paper-based TOEFL (PBT) and had 100 questions including listening, structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The students were asked to answer these questions in 140 minutes.

The researchers themselves administered this test at the Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon branch. There is not any guessing correction in scoring this test. Thus, a correct answer has one point and incorrect answer does not have any point. Then the students were divided into groups based on their scores. Both groups were given a pretest. The pretest was administered by the researchers which included L2 reading comprehension with 5 questions in multiple-choice form. They were asked to answer them in 15 minutes. And then the experimental group was taught L1 reading comprehension in 10 sessions.

Then posttest was administered to both groups. The posttest was L2 reading comprehension with 5 questions in multiple-choice form in 15 minutes. Each item both in pretest and posttest had four alternatives (three distracters and one correct answer). And each question had four points.

### Methods of Analyzing Data

The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and then the Pearson correlation test and independent samples test were run by SPSS. The pretest and posttest of control group were calculated by Karl Pearson (correlation coefficient) and pretest and posttest of experimental group were also calculated by Karl Pearson (correlation coefficient) and posttests of both groups (control and experimental) were calculated by independent samples test:

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis of the Data

Descriptive analysis of pretest and posttest of control group and experimental group were as follows:

**Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the pretest (PR) and posttest (PO) of the control group of the study**

<i>Test</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
PR reading comp.	10	12.4	5.48	30.04
PO reading comp.	10	9.2	4.23	17.95

**Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the pretest (PR) and posttest (PO) of the experimental group of the study**

<i>Test</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
PR reading comp.	10	13.2	5.67	32.17
PO reading comp.	10	12.4	4.78	22.93

### Inferential Analysis of the Data

The pretest and posttest of control group has been calculated by Pearson correlation test as shown in the table 3 below:

**Table 3. The Pearson correlation test for the pretest (pre) and posttest (po) of control group.**

<i>Pearson</i>	
expre	cpo
correlation	.283
Sig. (2 – tailed)	.428
N	10

Based on the above table, it can be stated that there is a positive correlation between pretest and posttest of the control group but since the obtained significance is 0.283 in comparison

with 0.05 level of significance in behavioral sciences and it is higher than 0.05, it can be inferred with 95% confidence that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control group.

The pretest and posttest of experimental group has been calculated by Pearson correlation test as shown in the table 4 below:

**Table 4. The Pearson correlation test for the pretest and posttest of experimental group.**

<i>Pearson</i>		
		expo
expre	correlation	-.151
	Sig. (2 – tailed)	.678
	N	10

Based on the table4, it can be stated that there is a positive correlation between pretest and posttest of the experimental group but since the obtained significance is -.151 in comparison with 0.05 level of significance in behavioral sciences and it is higher than 0.05, it can be inferred with 95% confidence that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the experimental group.

The Independent Samples Test for the pretest of both control and experimental groups is given in table 5 below:

**Table 5. Independent Samples Test for the pretest of both control and experimental groups**

<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>						
<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
					Lower	Upper
.321	18	.752	.80000	2.49444	-4.44062	6.04062

Based on the results above (table 5) , it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest of the control group and that of the experimental group in that the obtained significance is 0.752 which is higher than 0.05 level of significance in behavioral sciences.

The Independent Samples Test for the posttest of both control and experimental groups is presented in table 6 below:

**Table 6. Independent Samples Test for the posttest of both control and experimental groups**

<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>						
<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
					Lower	Upper
1.5	18	.131	3.200	2.022	-1.047	7.427

Based on the results above (table 6), it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference between the posttest of the control group and that of the experimental group in that the obtained significance is 0.131 which is higher than 0.05 level of significance in behavioral sciences.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study aimed at examining the effect of using L1 reading comprehension strategy on student's L2 reading comprehension. The results of this study show that L1 reading strategy cannot facilitate L2 reading comprehension. Some researchers such as Yamashita [7] and Zwaan & Brown [8] have shown that L2 language proficiency and L1 reading ability problems interfere with reaching the L2 reading comprehension. Research Studies into relationship between L1 and L2 reading comprehension have generally agreed that there is a certain kind of linguistic threshold that strongly affects the transfer of L1 reading ability to L2 reading comprehension.

Alderson [9] has put forward two hypotheses concerning the relationship between L1 and L2 reading abilities: the linguistic interdependence hypothesis and the linguistic threshold hypothesis. The linguistic interdependence hypothesis, in its simple form, proposes that L1 reading ability transfer to L2 reading comprehension. It assumes that there is a common underlying cognitive ability between L1 and L2, and it implies that we do not need to learn reading in L2 if we have a certain level of L1 reading ability. According to this hypothesis, transfer happens automatically.

The linguistic threshold hypothesis (Cummins, [10]) proposes that a threshold level of L2 language ability is necessary before L1 reading ability transfer to L2 reading comprehension.

This implies that L2 learners need to acquire some basic linguistic knowledge before they are able to read in L2. Alderson [9] integrated the two hypotheses mentioned into a question: "Reading in a foreign language: a reading problem or language problem? Here a language problem refers to a weakness in the knowledge and skills required for processing L2 linguistic properties, i.e orthographic, phonological, lexical, syntactic and discursal knowledge specific to L2, while "reading problem" refers to a weakness in what is called higher level mental operations such as predicting, analyzing, synthesising and retrieving relevant background knowledge which are assumed to operate universally across languages. Alderson [10] proposed a tentative conclusion for this question: the difficulties in L2 reading derive both from a language problem and a reading problem; L2 reading is more like a language problem at the lower levels of L2 proficiency and is more a reading problem at the higher levels of L2 proficiency. Thus the evidence supported the linguistic threshold hypothesis.

The results of present study confirm the linguistic threshold hypothesis. The result of this study was of great importance and could interest researchers to do this study more comprehensively and they could use the result of this study to do other pieces of research on related topics.

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