

# Impact of Explicit Vocabulary Instruction on Writing Achievement of Upper-Intermediate EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Studying explicit vocabulary instruction effects on improving L2 learners' writing skill and their short and long-term retention is the purpose of the present study. To achieve the mentioned goal, a fill-in-the blank test including 36 single words and 60 lexical phrases were administrated to 30 female upper-intermediate EFL learners. The EFL participants were asked to write a composition titled 'A Cruel Sport' after a reading activity on 'Bull Fighting'. Comparing this writing to the one written after target vocabulary instruction, it caused a significant increase in the number of vocabularies used productively in learners' writing. The statistical analysis revealed that in delayed writing, the participant retained the newly-learned vocabularies even sometimes after the instruction. Based on the obtained results, this research offers below suggestions for L2 instructors: 1) productive use of words is not guaranteed by word comprehension per se, 2) learners are not only able to increase the active vocabulary under their control but also use the words they just learned, 3) in a writing task which was immediately fulfilled through explicit vocabulary instruction, vocabulary recognition is converted into a productive one, improving retention and leading to productive use of newly learned vocabulary at the same time. This productiveness, however, is loss prone and more practice is needed in producing newly learned vocabulary.

**Keywords:** vocabulary knowledge, extent of vocabulary, depth of vocabulary, explicit vocabulary instruction, implicit vocabulary teaching

## 1. Introduction

Writing is undoubtedly a complicated skill to master for L2 learners (Richard, 2002). The difficulty stems from the fact that generating and organizing ideas and then translating them into readable text are time-consuming and long-sought skills even for native speakers. According to Richards (2002), the complex skills which are used in writing require L2 learners to not only focus on planning and organizing skills in a higher level but also on spelling, punctuation, word choice skills in a lower level. This difficulty is especially aggravated when, language proficiency is weak. Based on previous research, lack of vocabulary knowledge makes writing a difficult task for L2 learners (Astika, 1993) and vocabulary plays a crucial role in writing quality (Walters & Wolf, 1996). In addition, vocabulary is commonly considered as one of the main factors required for L2 proficiency as well. It is central to language and crucially important for L2 students.

Considering the vocabulary knowledge importance in SLA and foreign language learning, it would be worthy to define the kind of language knowledge that learners should have in knowing a word completely. Vocabulary knowledge consists of the spoken form of a word, the written form of a word, the grammatical function of a word, the collocational behavior of a word, the degree of frequency, the stylistic register constraints of a word, the conceptual meaning of a word, and the association of word with other related words (Nation, 2001). However, it is not easy to investigate all kinds of vocabulary knowledge simultaneously. In this research, the explicit vocabulary instruction effects on L2learners' performance in a composition task and its effect on converting their receptive vocabulary knowledge to the productive one have been investigated.

As Richards (2002) puts, vocabulary is of vital importance and a key part of language proficiency serving as a building block for learners' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Therefore, students who encounter problems when they write in a second language do not have enough vocabulary knowledge (Raims, 1985).

Despite having good account of grammatical rules, most Iranian EFL learners face serious challenges in writing. The inefficiency seems to be, to some extent, due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, especially productive vocabulary, and to a large extent, the inadequate emphasis placed on productive skills and the type of instruction they receive.

This study aims at (1) determining the extent of changes in receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of L2 learners after post-reading-writing task, (2) investigating the explicit vocabulary instruction effects on writing, and (3) to assess the value of explicit vocabulary instruction for the enhancement of EFL learners' writing. Current focus on oral acquisition of L2 research emphasizes on the importance of learner interaction and negotiation (De la Fuente, 2002). Therefore, the systematic instruction model presented here supports teacher directed interaction and negotiation based on vocabulary learning psycholinguistic principles which come next and present the multi-faceted point of view toward word knowledge:

- Seeing the word (visual or spelling representation),
- Hearing the word (pronunciation articulated by teacher),
- Understanding the vocabulary (denotation meaning and parts of speech, negotiation, explanation, and elaboration of meaning in connotation),
- Saying the word (repetition), and
- Using the word in context (writing).

The present research was trying to provide proper responses to the major questions of the effect of explicit vocabulary instruction on students' productive knowledge as well as post-writing exercises effects on changing receptive knowledge to productive one. The research questions and null hypotheses are stated as follow:

- 1) Does post-reading-writing task change the receptive knowledge vocabulary to productive one?
- 2) Does explicit vocabulary instruction change the receptive knowledge vocabulary to productive one?
- 3) Do active, productive and newly-learned vocabularies cause any changes in the quality of the delayed writing?

Below hypotheses were considered based on previously mentioned questions:

H0 1: Post-reading-writing task does not change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to productive one.

H0 2: Explicit vocabulary instruction does not change the receptive vocabulary knowledge to productive vocabulary.

H0 3: Active, productive and newly-learned vocabularies do not cause any changes in the quality of the delayed writing.

Results of this research will be beneficial to language teachers shedding light on the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction. Moreover, the findings are hoped to magnify the advantage of explicit vocabulary instruction in comparison with other types of vocabulary instruction.

Regarding ELT material developments, learning experiences can be planned in a way that educators have the opportunity to take advantage of explicit vocabulary instruction in pedagogically sound ways for the purpose of linguistic development.

The present research can provide a good basis for more research on the way we can help the L2 learners to improve their writing skills by using explicit vocabulary instruction. Moreover, it can pave the way to take the second step on working on applying different strategies to enhance learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Finally, we hope the findings of the present study would convince test designer to view explicit vocabulary instruction as an invaluable technique for language testing.

## 2. Literature Review

Most of the researches on second language acquisition as a general process pay little attention to vocabulary learning (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). This is not just a recent phenomenon. O'Dell (1997) commented that major books written about syllabus and language teaching theory lack vocabulary and lexis throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Its omission may have an even longer history. Wilkins' (1972) writing, at the beginning of the 1970s, dates the omission of writing back to the development of structural linguistics. Therefore, the role of vocabulary in language learning process, testing, and teaching has been marginalized (Milton, 2009) over the last fifty years or so, and as Meara (1980) describes, it turned into a Cinderella subject.

Milton (2009) mentioned three reasons for this. One is a product of the structural and other approaches to language teaching that have become highly pervasive in language teaching. Outside the arena of specialist vocabulary studies there seems to be a long-standing idea that words are just words, and that learning words is unsystematic. Vocabulary is unchallenging as a pedagogical or an academic issue, as a consequence.

As the second reason, he referred to teachers' belief about vocabulary, that it is possible to become highly proficient in a foreign language, and even a sophisticated user, with only very limited vocabulary resources.

The third reason is the widely held belief that time taken for explicit vocabulary teaching is wasted because 'few words "learned" or "taught" by direct instruction' are retained (Harris & Snow, 2004), and 'most L2 vocabulary is learned incidentally and mostly from oral input' (Ellis, 1994). Considering the aforementioned research, he stated that "the best way to deal with vocabulary, therefore, is not to teach it at all because learners will soak it up as though by osmosis from the language which surrounds them inside or outside class" (p.194). The evidence shows that the vocabulary learned from really incidental language encounter is usually trivial. It also shows that successful learners acquire large number of vocabulary from explicitly are taught words in the classroom. Seeing and using vocabulary in activities, through songs and in real contexts complete their learning.

A lexical knowledge definition is necessary for vocabulary acquisition research. This definition contains what is going to be investigated and which measurement instruments are going to be used. For example, when we use lexical knowledge by which we mean the ability to use words in well-written sentences or discourse, then we can't test the ability to recognize the meanings of selected items on a multiple-choice test to measure lexical knowledge.

There isn't any universal agreement on the lexical knowledge nature. A word is either "known" or "unknown" for a native language speaker (NS) and its knowledge is associated with the ability to relate form and meaning to each other. By using Yes/no questions to see whether the words are known or unknown as a measurement instrument (Meara & Buxton, 1987) we follow a binary approach to the knowledge of the words. although some of the adult second language (L2) learners donot understand what a word really means, while taking a yes/no test, they possibly see a word as "known" because they know it exists in the target language; other and usually more experienced ones are not sure whether the word should be considered as known when they are not able to use it in a sentence.

Considering the elusive concept of vocabulary, Kaivanpanah and Zandi (2009) stated that the first difficulty related to vocabulary is defining word knowledge. Laufer and Goldstein (2004) refer to earlier definitions of lexical knowledge by Nation (1991, 2001), Richards (1976) and Ringborn (1987) who describe lexical knowledge as the interrelated sub-knowledge sum: spoken and written form knowledge, morphological knowledge, collocational and grammatical knowledge, connotative and associational knowledge and social knowledge or other limitations in words usages.

As Qian and Schedl (2004) argued, it is clearly believed that L2 vocabulary researchers do not consider vocabulary knowledge as having a single dimension any more. Instead, it is generally believed that vocabulary knowledge is a multidimensional construct. Therefore, there are many types of knowledge involved in ability to use a word properly and effectively in a foreign language. In the same way that it should be clear what a word is to make estimates of vocabulary size and knowledge, it should be clear what vocabulary knowledge is. The choice of definition is likely to greatly affect the size of any estimate (Milton, 2009).

In defining "word", there are some basic points to be discussed. One is the distinction between tokens and types, which applies to any count of the words in a text. The total number of word forms equals the tokens number; this means we count the individual words by more than one frequency every time that they appear in the text. On the other hand, total number of the different word forms equals the number of different types of the words in the text; this means a word is counted only once no matter how many times it is repeated in the text. The type-token ratio (The relative proportions of types and tokens) is a widely used language development measure for language learners as well as native speakers.

The next issue refers to function and content words. Words like articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliaries, etc. are considered as function words and are seen as belonging more to the grammar of the language than to its vocabulary. Unlike content words-nouns, 'full verbs, adjectives and adverbs—they have little if any meaning in isolation and serve more to provide links within sentences, modify the meaning of content words and so on.

Another problem is that content words come in a variety of forms. For example, wait, waits, waited, waiting. They are regarded as different forms of the same word. Grammatically speaking, what is involved is adding

inflectional endings to a base form, without changing the meaning or the word class of the base. Lemma in vocabulary studies is defined as the base and inflected forms of a word altogether. When in a study researchers count words types number of a written or spoken text, one of the first steps is normally to lemmatize the tokens, so that inflected forms are counted as instances of the same lemma as the base form.

However, base words not only take inflectional endings but also have many different derivations creating a different word class (parts of speech) and new meaning.

We consider such a set of word forms which share a common meaning as a word family.

Distinguishing word forms and word families is particularly important in measuring of vocabulary size. One reason for the widely varying estimates of how many words a native speaker knows is that some researchers are counting word forms while others focus on word families (Read, 2000).

The next complicated matter related to “word” is homographs. These are single word forms that have at least two meanings that are so different that they obviously belong to different word families. One commonly cited example is the noun bank, which has two major meanings: an institution which provides financial services, and the sloping ground beside a river.

### **3. Methodology**

A tool for general second language improvement is performing a writing task during which attention is paid to vocabulary usage (Muncie, 2002). Based on conducted researches, writing quality is largely affected by lack of vocabulary (Walters & Wolf, 1996). And according to Astika (1993) foreign language learners encounters difficulty when writing if they lack vocabulary knowledge.

The present study aimed at comparing students’ productive knowledge of vocabulary before and after explicit instruction of vocabulary and applying them in a writing task. First, this chapter focuses on the characteristics of the students who participated in the study. Then, the study overall design is presented. Afterwards, the data collection instruments and procedures are illustrated. Finally, information with respect to the analysis of the data is provided.

#### *3.1 Participants*

To select students to participate in the research, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) (Allen, 2004) (see Appendix A) was administrated. 100 female students at the age range of 15 to 21 years at Hekmat language Institute in Isfahan, Iran participated in the test. According to students’ proficiency levels, 30 upper-intermediate students were selected to participate in the research.

Although the participants had some writing tasks previously, it was the first time the participants were asked to write an extended composition on a topic related to a reading activity. They also had to use specific vocabulary of the target language.

#### *3.2 Instruments*

In this section the instruments the employed in this research are described in detail and reason for each is provided.

##### *3.2.1 Oxford Placement Test*

Quick Placement Test (QPT) version 1, a type of Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used as a measurement instrument to determine participants’ proficiency levels. Allen believes (2004), the OPT can be administered easily and is really economical, and is an objectively scrabble test which its scores are consistently meaningful from the first level 1 (beginner) to higher levels. The chart of the level shows levels’ relationships which represent broad statistical correlations. It provides a very useful general guide that shows where is the learners place on a number of widely recognized overall language proficiency scales.

The OPT includes a sensitive and delicate measure of a number of important components of communicative performance, both knowledge and micro skills, in which all the items are derived from authentic situations and initially pre-tested on groups of native speakers. Allen (2004) also confirms that from one large multilingual sample to another, items have a high reliability and the particular items’ facility values and discrimination indices have a high consistency, given the same defined sample range and balance of levels within the sample though there can be significant variations item-by-item between different language groups. The OPT is indeed a very effective initial placement tool serving as a trustable measure for grading students in various levels, with a consistent record of predictive validity in respect of examination entry.

The test, generally consisted of 60 items, is divided into two parts (part 1 including 40 items and part 2 including

20 items). This test mainly examines a context's grammar, vocabulary and reading skills context. It involves a carefully selected range of items with facility values and discrimination indices designed to provide meaningful discrimination at each of levels identified by the Common European Framework (Allen, 2004).

### 3.2.2 Vocabulary Test

To assess L2 learners' recognition target vocabulary, before reading the text and vocabulary instruction we administered a vocabulary test. For this research, the researcher chose the modified version of a vocabulary test designed by Lee (2003). Here, we refer to the vocabulary items that are chosen correctly by the subjects as "vocabulary recognition", while we refer to the vocabulary that subjects used correctly in the post-reading writing task and delay writing task as "productive vocabulary". The vocabulary test consisted of two sections.

Section 1 included 30 questions, each of which has a blank which should be completed by a single word of the target language. We printed the sentences on three pages to make it organized and convenient. Every one of the papers contains 10 sentences. We provided 10 target words and 10 distracters (20 single words) on the right side of each page

Second part included 6 questions, each one containing a blank which should be completed by a lexical phrase of the target language. In the right column, six target lexical phrases and 6 distracters were provided. Distracters were selected by closeness criteria in spelling, pronunciation, or meaning with the equivalent items in target language (e.g. writing series instead of serious' audience instead of spectators; seriously wounded instead of seriously injured). We asked the subjects to fill each blank of the sentence with the most suitable word or phrase. Cruelty, arena, fans, barbarism, infuriating, prohibited, and performance were the seven target items chosen from the reading passage. The remaining target items were selected by the researcher based on their relevance to the topic and their frequency and usefulness in everyday communication about sports. We didn't count cruel in the title of the composition as a target item. According to Nation's (1984) word frequency levels we listed the following single words and lexical phrases of the target language. Words which are not listed in Nation are found classification are presented in West (1957), Rinsland (1954), and Thorndike and Lorge (1963) classifications.

First 1000 words:	serious, defeat
Second 1000 words:	injured, injury (ies), violent, violence, opponent, perform, performance, hero, worship
Third 1000 words:	collapse
University words list:	prohibit
Unlisted:	cruelty, cheer, bloody, effects (West,1957; Rinsland,1945) Thrash, champion, championship, fatal, arena, spectators, Furious (Rinsland, 1945). Mob, jeer, barbaric, barbarism, infuriate, infuriating, fatally, Negative (Thorndike, and Lorge, 1963).
Six lexical phrases:	hero worship, fatal injuries, serious injuries, fatally injured, seriously injured, negative effect

### 3.2.3 Reading Passage

The teacher-investigator adapted a 378-word reading passage from a sports article entitled "The Matadora and the Bull Fight" to remove possible effect of subjects' previous exposure to the published material. 8 questions followed the reading comprehension activity that needed to be answered using seven target vocabulary items used in the passage.

### 3.2.4 Post-Reading Pre-Instruction Writing

To determine the lexical level of language learners, the researcher asked them to write a text which contains 200 words in 40 minutes. The subjects were not allowed to use any dictionaries, the reading passage, and peer or teacher help.

### 3.2.5 Post-Instruction Writing

Students are required to write a text about Boxing in which all the learned words are applied properly. Writing took place in a ninety minutes session (fifty minutes of instruction and forty minutes of writing).

### 3.2.6 Delayed Writing

The participants were asked to complete a writing task 21 days after receiving feedback (23 days after

vocabulary instruction). With regard to the topic raised; students are required to write a text.

### 3.2.7 Writing Frame

After post-reading vocabulary instruction and before writing we provided the participants with a four-column sheet that the students recorded the target vocabulary items on it. We asked the participants to do that so that enables them to organize the vocabulary and focus only on vocabulary.

## 3.3 Procedure

### 3.3.1 Step One: Vocabulary Test

In order to assess L2 learners' target vocabulary recognition prior to the treatment, the same vocabulary test as that of Lee (2003) was applied. This test consisted of two separate sections. In section one, students were instructed to read the sentences and fill in the blanks with the provided target vocabularies. Section 2 including six questions had to be completed with lexical phrases.

Before the participants begin to answer, they read the instructions, the test sentences and vocabulary items (target and distracter items) very carefully and we asked them to use each word or phrase only once. They were not allowed to use dictionaries or ask for their peers' help. The participants received their vocabulary test papers not sooner than the end of the project.

### 3.3.2 Step Two: Reading Comprehension

The reading activity was performed a week after the vocabulary test to distinguish the the vocabulary test and the reading and writing activities' connection clearly. A reading passage was taught to the learners in one session by the researcher (90 min) who followed a normal reading instruction procedure. After a brief warm-up activity for the reading topic, the researcher read the passage aloud to the students; he paused at appropriate intervals to clarify new vocabularies or to elaborate contexts and wrote the vocabularies on the board. Then every learner was provided by an opportunity to read the half of the passage aloud. Then the learners were given a reading comprehension exercise to perform individually. They had to submit the exercise the same day. The papers were checked and returned to the students the next day to let them know their marks. Scores ranged from 6.5 to 10, without any penalty for grammatical errors. The researcher and his learners discussed answers and then the papers were given back to the researcher.

### 3.3.3 Step Three: Post-Reading Pre-Instruction Writing

The third day, the participants were asked to write a 200 words composition about "A Cruel Sport" as a pre-instruction writing task. They weren't allowed to use any dictionaries, the reading passage, peer or teacher's help.

They had 40 minutes to complete the writing task but they were done in 20 to 35 minutes. Boxing, wrestling, ice hockey, football, mountain climbing, bullfighting, skydiving and gladiatorial sports were the ones they chose to write about. The researcher scored the compositions and provided the participants only with a feedback on correctly used target vocabulary items.

### 3.3.4 Step Four: Explicit and Systematic Vocabulary Instruction

The next day, the the participants were taught the target vocabulary by the researcher. The researcher used the systematic instruction model (De la Fuente, 2002) of teaching vocabulary. Teacher-directed interaction and negotiation were supported by this model systematic instruction. The following word learning psycholinguistic principles underline the instructions and shows multidimensional view of word knowledge:

- See the word (visual or spelling representation),
- Hear the word (teacher modeled pronunciation),
- Understand the word (definitional meaning and part of speech, negotiation, explanation, and elaboration of meaning in context and relation with other words),
- Say the word (repetition), and
- Use the word in context (writing).

Applying this model, the researcher utilized the following tasks in his class:

- The teacher or investigator asked the students to offer a special word or phrase that can be expressed by particular concept (e.g. what do you call the people watching a boxing match?). If students can't find the word or phrase, the teacher help them understand by negotiation;

- The teacher-investigator represented the word or phrase visually (write it on the chalkboard)
- The students are asked to elaborate on the definitional meaning other students offer by the teacher (negotiation and understanding),
- Students are allowed to negotiate meanings offered by other students through confirming or disconfirming by the teacher (negotiation and understanding).
- The students' meaning is reinforced through its definition and clarification with similar but unrelated contexts to the writing topic by the teacher (defining and contextualizing word meaning);
- The teacher highlighted the meanings differences of words or phrases by showing contrast whenever possible, e.g. viewers, audience, and spectators, or serious injuries and fatal injuries (understanding);
- Different contexts were provided by the teacher and the students were asked to determine if a word is appropriate for a particular context, e.g. injured, hurt, and wounded (negotiation and understanding);
- The students were asked to find the part of speech of a particular word by the teacher, e.g. injured and injury, and;
- At the end of instruction, the pronunciation of all the explained words or phrases were modeled by the teacher (hear the word); and
- The teacher asked the students to repeat each word after him/her (say the word).

Teacher drew a framework for writing on the board. The teacher introduced some vocabulary items from the target language that was possible to appear in the framework. For example, first the teacher taught barbaric, barbarism, bloody, cruelty, and violent and wrote them in Column 1. After teaching all the target items, they were pointed to and their pronunciation were modeled by the teacher. The each item was repeated aloud by the class.

#### 3.3.5 Step Five: Post-Instruction Writing

We limited the topic to boxing so that all the writing is consistent. A writing frame was given to each subject in which vocabulary items were copied by the learners. The teacher asked the students to use the frame as a guide for their writing and to write clear paragraph no matter how many times they used a target item. This session (vocabulary instruction and writing) lasted ninety minutes (fifty minutes of instruction and forty minutes of writing). The students weren't allowed to use dictionary or look at the reading passage and ask for their peer/teacher's help.

The next day the teacher scored the post-instruction writings and gave it back to the learners. The subjects read and compared their two writings (pre-instruction writing and post-instruction writing) and corrected any sentences in the post-instruction writing that contained vocabulary errors. Then the the students gave back the writing frames including the target vocabulary items and the pre -instruction and post-instruction compositions to the researcher.

#### 3.3.6 Step Six: Delayed Writing

A delayed writing was performed 23 days after vocabulary instruction by the participants (21 days after receiving feedback). The researcher did not give new reading activities containing the vocabulary items from target language, or writing activities that needed specific vocabulary production from reading so that he can control their exposure to target vocabulary and familiarity with the task. The teacher drew a writing frame on the whiteboard and instructed the students to write any target vocabulary items that they could recall on the margin of their paper before writing their compositions. Again, they weren't allowed to access dictionaries, the reading passage, and peer or teacher help. The participants had 40 min to write. Then the writings were collected and scored; each correctly-used item was given one point.

### 4. Results

This research was an effort to evaluate the validity of three null hypotheses as follows:

H01. Post reading-writing task does not change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to the productive one.

H02. Explicit vocabulary knowledge instruction does not change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to the productive one.

H03. Active, productive, and newly-learned vocabularies do not cause any changes in the quality of the delayed writing.

To this end, 30 female upper-intermediate learners were selected and went through experimental treatments;

they wrote three pieces of writing in three different sessions. Then, their writings were scored. The following chapter presents the results of the comparison made between the writings.

H01. Post reading–writing task does not change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to the productive one.

In order to test this hypothesis, the learners' performance on the vocabulary test and on the post – reading pre – instruction writing task had to be compared to each other to find if they used any of the recognized vocabularies in their writing. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for scores of these two tests, and Figure 1 demonstrate the means in a graph.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the students' scores on vocabulary test and pre-instruction writing task

Task	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Vocabulary	4.70	30	2.037	.372
Pre-instruction	2.63	30	1.884	.344

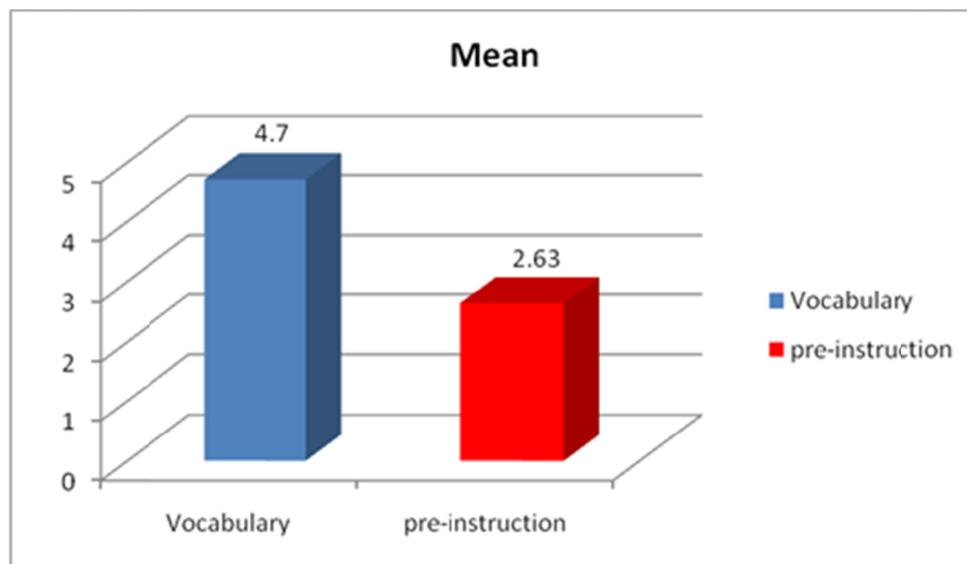


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the means for vocabulary test and pre-instruction writing task

As you can see in the above table, the means of the two tests are various. A matched pair t-test was used to determine whether this difference is statistically significant or not. The results of this t-test are showed in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the t-test for vocabulary test and pre-instruction writing task

Vocabulary–pre-instruction	Paired Differences					
	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	2.07	.365	.067	31.000	29	.000

According to the Table 2, the amount of t-observed (t-observed = 31.000) is meaningfully significant at level which probability equals  $p = .000$ ; it means the learners did not use the recognized words in their writing tasks. Hence, the first null hypothesis is maintained, that is, post-reading task does not change the receptive type of vocabulary to productive one.

H02. Explicit vocabulary knowledge instruction does not change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to the productive one.

Testing this hypothesis involved comparing the participants' scores on the vocabulary test and post-instruction writing. Table 3 reveals the descriptive statistics for the two tasks, and Figure 2 demonstrates the means in bar form.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the students' scores on vocabulary test and post-instruction writing task

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

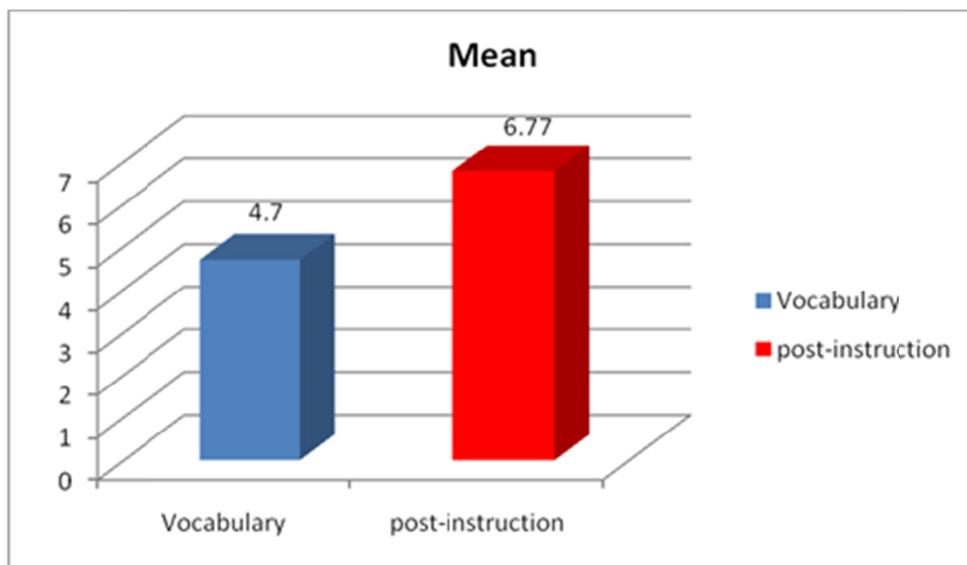


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the means for vocabulary test and post-instruction writing task

As you can see in Table 3, there is a difference between the two tasks. Another matched-pair t-test was needed to see if this difference was statistically significant or not. The results of this t-test are showed in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the t-test for vocabulary test and post-instruction writing task

Vocabulary-post-instruction	Paired Differences					
	Mean	SD	SEM	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	-2.07	1.617	.295	-6.998	29	.000

By scrutinizing the results in Table 4, one can easily see that the amount of t-observed (t-observed = -6.997) is crucial in probability level of  $p = .000$  the two tasks difference is statistically significant. Thus, the second null hypothesis is also rejected.

H03. Active, productive, and newly-learned vocabularies do not cause any changes in the quality of the delayed writing.

To test this hypothesis, the participants' delayed writings were compared with their vocabulary test scores. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of these two tasks, and Figure 3 presents the graphical representation of the means.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the students' scores on vocabulary test and delayed writing task

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

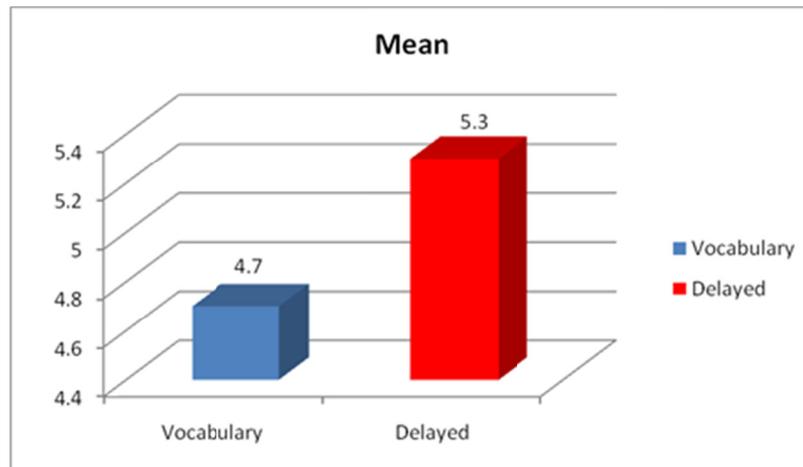


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the means for vocabulary test and delayed writing task

Table 5 shows a difference between the two sets of scores. Nevertheless, the table does not establish whether or not this difference is vital. In order to realize it, the third matched-pair t-test was employed. Table 6 indicates the results of this t-test.

Table 6. Results of the t-test for vocabulary test and delayed writing task

Vocabulary - Delayed	Paired Differences					
	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	-0.60	1.567	.286	-2.097	29	.045

The amount of t-observed, according to Table 6, denotes a statistically crucial difference between the two sets of scores ( $p = .045$ ); that is, the participants retained the newly-learned vocabulary even some time after the instruction. Therefore, the third null hypothesis is also rejected. The next chapter discusses the results in detail.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, the effects of vocabulary instructed explicitly on learners performance in a writing task and its effect on converting learners' receptive knowledge to productive one was investigated. Thus, this study was going to investigate the effects of explicit vocabulary instructions on EFL learners writing to see how productive vocabulary improvement takes place. The results are discussed in relation to the research hypothesis and the literature reviewed in chapter two. Moreover, the conclusions are made and some implications based upon the findings of the study are presented.

In this study, the effects of explicit vocabulary instruction on learners performance in a writing task and its effect on converting learners receptive knowledge to productive one was investigated. Thus, this study was going to investigate the effects of explicit vocabulary instructions on EFL learners writing to see how productive vocabulary improvement takes place.

Lexicon has received much lower attention in comparison with other parts of language in SLA research. This trend, however, has been changing recently (Bogaards & Laufer, 2004). However, numerous reasons show that lexis is important in second language acquisition. As a matter of fact, vocabulary is generally considered to be a

main factor for L2 proficiency (Schmitt, 1999).

Of all errors type, vocabulary errors are the most serious one for the learners (Politzer, 1978). Additionally, large corpora of errors consistently introduced lexical errors as the most common error among second language learners. Meara (1984) indicates that lexical errors outnumbered grammatical errors by 3:1 in one corpus. Moreover, for native speakers, lexical errors are more disruptive comparing to grammatical errors (Johansson, 1978). Gass (1988) seconded this argument, noting that grammatical errors generally result in structures that are understood, whereas lexical errors may interfere with communication.

Knowing a word, in one aspect is divided into receptive knowledge, which relates to reading and listening skills, and productive knowledge, which relates to writing and speaking skills. Most of the words a learner knows are in receptive states, for example the learner is able to retrieve and comprehend a particular language feature from reading (Nation, 2001); on the other hand, productive state is the ability to produce language form through speaking or writing. Even though receptive vocabulary develops through a variety of sources, Laufer (1998) pointed out that productive vocabulary does not necessarily develop in parallel. The final stage of vocabulary learning is converting receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary (Brown & Payne, 1994), and it certainly should happen in a writing course. Compared with speaking, writing involves more productive usage of new words considering the fact that learners have more time and accessibility to dictionaries when writing.

Acknowledging many Iranians EFL learners' problems with writing tasks, the inefficiency seems to be due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, especially productive one. Thus the effects of explicit vocabulary instruction on converting learners' receptive knowledge to productive one were investigated by the present study.

Numerous researches have shown that vocabulary is a major concern for many learners (Mercer, 2005). Laufer (1992) claimed that L2vocabulary knowledge contributes significantly to L2reading comprehension. Considering writing skill, research proved that foreign language learners will encounter writing difficulty if they lack vocabulary knowledge (Astika, 1993) and that writing quality is judged on the basis of vocabulary features (Walters & Wolf, 1996) however, the learners vocabulary use quality in writing has not been widely investigated (Laufer, 1994).

The data proved that the participant knowledge of vocabulary was much lower than their receptive one. The results were consist with those of Laufer (1998), Brown and Payne (1994) and Verhallen and Schoonen (1998) suggesting that productive vocabulary was much lower than receptive vocabulary. Laufer claims that receptive vocabulary develops through a variety of sources; however, productive vocabulary does not necessarily develop in parallel.

Unlike Laufer and Paribakh (1998) clarified that learners benefiting larger vocabulary recognition also benefit larger controlled active vocabulary in writing, this research has proved that learners do not use productive vocabulary recognition automatically, but after explicit vocabulary instruction they are able to increase their active controlled vocabulary. As the target vocabulary sample of this research is small, the results are indicative rather than conclusive.

With respect to the first research question, investigating change the receptive knowledge of vocabulary to productive one by post-reading-writing task, a matched-pair t-test was employed and it was found that learners rarely used learned vocabulary while writing. Laufer (1994), considering the size of receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, considers converting receptive vocabulary into productive vocabulary as the final stage of vocabulary learning. Hence, the first null hypothesis was proved.

According to the second research question after explicit target vocabulary instruction, recognition vocabulary become productive to what extent` the researcher applied Nation's (2001) findings indicating that by directing learners conscious attention to vocabulary items or strategies you can enhance vocabulary learning. In a study, Duin (1983) has found that explicit vocabulary instruction by creating "word awareness" effect lead to a greater use of contextually proper words, influence learners to pay more attention to their word choices in future writing, improving the content and enriching sentence structure.

In this research, a comparison was made between the participants' scores on the vocabulary test and post-instruction writing. The mean score in vocabulary exam and post-instruction writing were 4.70 and 6.77, respectively. In addition, by employing t-test, it was found that the difference was crucial. The results verify Duin's findings in case of greater use of words in their writing. Lee (2003) proposed a similar pedagogical approach to vocabulary instruction, he investigated vocabulary use in writing of 65 secondary school students. After being explicitly taught vocabulary items, he recognized that his students use more target vocabulary items in their post-writing task. To explain the significance, it is worthy to mention Corcon's (1997) opinion:

A greater experimentation of productive use of new words is provided by writing rather than speaking, because the students use resources such as dictionaries and time more. The more time available to the students the less frequent but more appropriate words may also be activated. The words not yet fully part of their active vocabulary but rather a part of their passive vocabulary (p. 699).

Thus, the second null hypothesis was rejected. That is to say, productive vocabulary knowledge increased after explicit vocabulary instruction and it is claimed that explicit vocabulary teaching does help learners to use their vocabulary knowledge in producing writing text.

On the subject of the third research question, to what extent does newly learned vocabulary cause changes in delayed-writing, Laufer and Paribakh (1998) claimed that increasing the number exposed to new vocabulary items, here employed by explicit teaching, may reinforce long-term retention. Successful passage of words from receptive to productive vocabulary may both be retarded by limited exposure and lack of practice. In this research, the main scores of vocabulary tests and delayed-writing revealed that the participants retained the newly-learned vocabulary even sometimes after the instruction which leads to rejecting the third null hypothesis.

## 6. Conclusion

Little attention is paid to vocabulary learning by much of the literature on second language acquisition as a general process (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). This is not just a recent phenomenon. O'Dell (1997) commented that vocabulary and lexis are absent from syllabus and theory of language teaching major books throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Their omission may have an even longer history. Wilkins' (1972) writing at the beginning of the 1970s suggests that omission of writing dates from the development of structural linguistics. The role of vocabulary in language learning process, testing, and teaching has been overlooked (Milton, 2009) over the past fifty years or so, and as Meara (1980) described, it turned into a Cinderella subject.

Of course, vocabulary is not an optional or unimportant part of a foreign language (Milton, 2009). The key component of language is words and there is no language without them. Recent language learning theory suggests that reducing the volumes of vocabulary acquired by learners may actually harm the development of other aspects of language (Milton, 2009). Richards (2002) showed that vocabulary is language proficiency key component and much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write is provided by words.

A key factor in every day oral and written communication and academic success is learners' vocabulary size which also has serious implications. This research conducted on a limited set of target vocabulary was going to answer some elementary questions in L2 recognition and productive vocabulary research. These questions were related to learners' vocabulary knowledge in a particular context, the distinction between learners' recognition and productive vocabulary in writing and a particular topic, the immediate and long-term effects of explicit instruction on learners' vocabulary use in writing. This research proved that word comprehension does not automatically predict productive use of the word, besides learners are able to expand their controlled active vocabulary as well as use newly learned words.

Moreover, writing and vocabulary knowledge enjoy a mutual relationship. That is saying, while writing is an excellent opportunity for enhancing and consolidating vocabulary, at the same time much research has shown that vocabulary is one of the most essential features of writing. Studies have consistently demonstrated that a lack of vocabulary is what makes writing in a foreign language most difficult (Leki & Carson, 1994), and vocabulary proficiency is perhaps the best indicator of overall composition quality (Astika, 1993).

Explicit vocabulary instruction paves the way for converting recognition vocabulary to productive vocabulary through immediate writing task leading to retention. Explicit instruction also helps newly learned vocabulary becomes productive in an immediate writing task, but it is subject to loss and more practice in the production of newly learned vocabulary is required. EFL learners have to be shown how to use their store of recognition vocabulary and new vocabulary in a production task and how lexical variation and variation of lexical frequency affect the quality of learners' writing. In the early levels of writing instruction, writing tasks can be reached from a vocabulary focus to help learners become familiar with thinking of vocabulary as part of writing process.

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