The Effect of Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task on Iranian EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Since the beginning of language studies, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers have been searching for effective ways of improving learners’ language skills. This study aimed at investigating the effects of Grammatical Consciousness Raising task on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ reading comprehension ability. So, two groups of experimental (N=30) and control (N=30) were randomly chosen out of 120 girl learners (chosen by taking part in a proficiency test) in BINT Al HODA High school (first period) EFL learners, Ilam, Iran. A grammar test was the determined instrument for gathering the scores of pre-test. The control group followed its routine procedure in English classes. However, the task of using Consciousness Raising grammar was applied for the experimental group members during their English classes as assignment. This experiment occurred in six weeks, twelve forty minute sessions. Then, all students in both groups answered the questions of post-test. The statistical analysis related to T-test was done on gathered raw scores. Data from this study demonstrate a significant role of using Consciousness Raising in improving reading comprehension ability of the participants in the experimental group. The findings of this study may help the learners to enhance their independent English language learning and improve their reading comprehension ability by using Consciousness Raising Task. All steps of this study will also be beneficial for EFL teachers who are searching ways of improving of reading comprehension their students.

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1. Introduction

Language is so vast and varied that we can never provide learners with a viable and comprehensive description of the language as a whole. In the 1970s and 1980s a good deal of the research into language learning suggested that, given exposure to the language, learners could be left to work out the grammar for themselves. Formal instruction was seen as contributing very little to learning. Such views are associated particularly with Krashen (Krashen and Terell 1983).

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Current concern with Consciousness Raising (CR), however, is largely a reaction against approaches to language learning which played down the contribution of instruction. One of the early attempts to define C-R (Sharwood-Smith 1981) specifically addresses Krashen’s work. Rutherford's (1987) Second Language Grammar: Learning and Teaching is a landmark in the development of C-R and there are many recent contributions; some (eg James 1994) taking universal grammar (see Shortall, Paper 4) as a starting point, others (eg Ellis 1992) taking a more general approach. A highly accessible introduction to the notion of C-R is to be found in Ellis (1993).

1.1. What Is Consciousness Raising?

Consciousness Raising (CR) is an approach to language teaching. Teachers might use CR tasks as their main approach or only occasionally. To raise something to consciousness means to make someone aware of something. CR tasks are thus designed to help learners notice something about the language that they might not notice on their own. They are typically asked to reflect on it, their conscious knowledge and understanding (their LA) of how the usually by talking to peers. CR tasks can help build language works, grammatically, socially, culturally.

CR tasks can, however, be much less controlled and more open ended. I will give some examples below. What they all have in common is that they involve learners noticing a target structure or function in a text (written or spoken) and drawing some kind of conclusions – not necessarily a rule - from what they have noticed. A good way to begin is to use texts which are already part of the syllabus. The students can use highlighters, for example, to pick out particular grammar features (e.g. “highlight the comparative adjectives”). This begins to train them to notice the relevant grammar in the input.

1.2. What are the purposes of CR grammar tasks?

The ultimate purpose of most language teaching is to help learners acquire the target language to a point where they can use it accurately, spontaneously and fluently. CR tasks cannot do that on their own. Depending on the context, the teacher might opt to combine CR tasks with meaning focused oral tasks or writing activities. Within such settings, CR grammar tasks have several purposes:

1-to direct learners’ attention to grammar features they might not notice on their own
2-to help learners make form – meaning connections
3-thereby, to help learners acquire conscious knowledge which they can use to understand input and monitor their own output
4-to make learners more autonomous by developing their analytical ability

A natural tendency we all have is to focus on meaning before form. Learners will naturally notice content words first, but may not pay much attention to function words such as prepositions and conjunctions, and endings, for example for tense and number.

1.3. Statement of the problem

Consciousness Raising (CR) is an approach to language teaching. Teachers might use CR tasks as their main approach or only occasionally. To raise something to consciousness means to make someone aware of something. CR tasks are thus designed to raise the learners’ Language Awareness (LA) (Svedberg 2009, 2012). The immediate aim of CR tasks is to help learners notice something about the language that they might not notice on their own. They are typically asked to reflect on it, usually by talking to peers. CR tasks can help build their conscious knowledge and understanding (their LA) of how the language works, grammatically, socially, culturally. According to studies conducted, it has been found that, So far as a professional, that here aren’t studies so far in The Effect of Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task on EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension in ILM BINT AL HODA High school (first period) girl students. The surveys focus on relief and fled with references to the research topic has been spent. Due to the nature of the research topic, intends to engage in a comprehensive review of the subject of the application.

1.4. Significance of the Study
This study makes teachers and learners familiar with a specific way of teaching and developing Reading Comprehension by using Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task. And this study is provided for teachers and learners who have a general interest in English language learning and teaching Reading Comprehension ability by using Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task in Iranian schools. The result of the study can help teachers to improve their teaching strategies and can help students increase their Reading Comprehension ability by using Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task.

1.5. The Question of the Research

The following research question motivated the study:
Is there any significant relationship between using Consciousness Raising Tasks and Reading Comprehension improvement of ILAM BINT Al HODA High school (first period) EFL learners?

1.6. Hypothesis

Corresponding to the above research question, the present study is going to test the following null hypothesis:
There is no significant relationship between using of Consciousness Raising Tasks and Reading Comprehension improvement of ILAM BINT Al HODA High school girl students.

2. Literature Review

Research on the Effect of Grammatical Consciousness Raising Tasks on Reading Comprehension: Several studies have explored the effectiveness of consciousness raising tasks. One study was conducted in Japan by Foots and Ellis (1991, as cited in Peterson, 1997) in which they compared the effectiveness of consciousness raising tasks with traditional teacher-fronted grammar lessons. The subjects were young Japanese adults, half of whom were studying at a junior college and the other half at a university. The grammar lesson and the task were identical in content, both presenting word order of direct and indirect objects following specific verbs. In the task group, students were divided into groups of four, and each student was given a card with a sentence written on it. Each student would read his or her card to the group, and then the group decides if that sentence was correct or incorrect. Students were not allowed to show their cards to each other. But they could ask each other for repetition or clarification as needed.

Foot’s and Ellis conclude that the task appeared to have functioned equally well as the grammar lesson in the short term, and was only slightly less effective in maintaining proficiency than the grammar lesson after 2 weeks...Foote and Ellis agree that the quality of interaction was limited. The negotiations made by both groups (college and university) were found to be qualitatively limited in either language and consisted of asking whether a sentence was correct or incorrect, asking for repetition of a sentence, part of a sentence, or a single lexical item or making a comprehension check.

In another study, Yip (1994) investigated whether consciousness-raising tasks can help ESL learners overcome errors in the usage of ergative verbs. Subjects were advanced ESL students at the American language Institute at the University of Southern California.

The author concluded that using the consciousness raising method in teaching can be effective in teaching the ergative construction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

Since this research included experimental and control groups with pre-post test, the used design of this study is a test.

The first step in conducting this research was dividing students in two groups: control group and experimental group. Then both groups took a proficiency test to ensure their homogeneity. After the pretest, students in both
groups were exposed to an instructional program. The control group was instructed through the use of pattern drill practice and the experimental group through the use of grammatical CR activities and tasks. After the treatment, both groups took a grammar post-test. Then a t-test was run to detect differences between the means of the two groups.

3.2. Subjects

In the research, the participants are 60 girl in ILam BINT Al HODA High school (first period). The sample size is formula based on the Cochran is one of the most successful methods in the standard sample is obtained. In this method, according to statistics, the population size of 120 individuals from the learners, the sample size of 60 students. This participants are with age range of 14 to 15 years.

Furthermore one teacher (a colleague ) helped the researcher to implement the study and to collect data.

3.3. Instruments

In this study, as the first instrument, a proficiency test was used to select 60 students at the same level among 120 high school girl students in ILam BINT Al HODA High school (first period), which was a 40-question multiple-choice test. In this study to elicit data from respondents, the researcher employs a test. Reading comprehension is operationally defined as the participants' obtained scores on a piloted teacher made reading comprehension posttest based on the topics of the course book , lasting 10 minutes to answer, and comprises two reading comprehension passages each followed by ten and five comprehension questions respectively, and there will be totally 15 comprehension questions. Considering 1 point for each question, the total score will be 15. Also the post-test consists of 20 questions on the grammar of the course book 3th grade. The pre-test consists of 20 questions based on the grammar of the course book 3rd grade. The pre-post test of grammar, consisting of a sentence and four choices. The respondents select one choice. In this study the course book of third Grade English Language is used and grammatical structures (adverbs and modals) have been working.

3.4. Materials

The materials used in this research are a course book (third Grade English Language) and tools such as some computers, projector.

Also, library information, reviewing studies on similar samples available, the use of articles in magazines and journals, websites of Persian and English languages were the materials which the researcher used in the study. The control group were conducted in traditional techniques such as course book, white board and so on.

3.5. Procedures

The procedures of analyzing data for experimental and control groups are presented below:

3.5.1. Data collection methods

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data collected can be obtained. Therefore, due to analytical and descriptive nature of the study, in order to collect data about different strategies used by students, two test would be prepared and quantities coded. In some cases, however, seems to be required observation technique.

The population of the 120 students taking the researcher intends to examine a community sample of 60 persons from acquiring subject. Sample consisted of 60 high school girl students in English language with age range of 14 to 15 years.

The researcher with helping a colleague applied a proficiency test to select the sample at the same level (60 samples from 120 populations). Then, the pre-test including 20 Item was held. Then during the conducting research which took about six weeks, both groups were to improve their reading comprehension ability in sessions that were held twelve forty minute sessions. In this time, the control groups' members were conducting in classes with traditional techniques.
After treatment period, the groups were evaluated. The post test consists of 20 Item on grammar and comprises two reading comprehension passages each followed by ten and five comprehension questions respectively and there were totally 15 comprehension questions. Considering 1 point for each question, the total score were 15.

4. Results

After ending the instructional courses of two groups to investigate the effectiveness of Consciousness Raising Tasks on EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension, the students were evaluated and raw scores were gathering. The data were be analyzed through SPSS to find out The Effect of Grammatical Consciousness Raising Task on EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension in ILAM BINT Al HODA High girl students.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

In this section the researcher presents a table that including the indexes such as mean (M), standard deviation (S.D) and variance (V).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E. G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.03</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>9.89</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to the table 4.1 the mean scores of pre-test for both groups are at the same levels. That means, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of both Experimental and Control groups.

<table>
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<th>S.D</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E. G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.78</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>11.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>12.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the table 4.2 the mean scores of the Control group is 13.25 and Experimental group is 15.78. With pay attention to these amounts can be said the mean scores of Experimental group is higher than the mean scores of the Control group.

4.2. Inferential Statistics

In this section, the research hypotheses considered. To consider the effectiveness of Consciousness Raising Tasks on EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension improvement of learners, the independent T-test used to compare the scores of both Control and Experimental groups.

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</table>

This table showed that the differences in the pre-test means between the control group (M=13.03, S.D=3.94) and the experimental group (M=13.14,S.D=3.81) was not significant, because the P value (0.76) was higher than 0.05.
There for the null hypothesis was confirmed and it was concluded that, before the beginning of the treatments, both the experimental and control groups were of the same level at their Reading Comprehension ability.

Table 4. T-test statistics on the differences between the Experimental and Control groups in post-test scores:

<table>
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<td>13.25</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table showed that the differences in the post-test means between the control group (M=13.25, S.D=4.66) and the experimental group (M=15.78, S.D=4.57) was statistically significant, because the P value (0.04) was lower than 0.05. Therefor, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was significant differences between the post-test score of the two groups and it was indicated that the students using educational treatment (experimental group) performed significantly better than the group having traditional one (control group).

5. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to address the effectiveness of Consciousness Raising Tasks on Reading Comprehension of learners in the classroom. The 60 learner participants in this study divided into two groups. The experimental group’s scores were compared with control group's scores. Utilizing control groups in the experimental studies is a good way to achieve external and internal validity. Assigning control groups in experimental studies can confirm the internal validity, as well as the external validity; hence, the results can be interpreted and generalized with confidence.

In general, reading comprehension of the experimental group improved. Findings indicated that using Consciousness Raising Task is effective in improving EFL reading comprehension of learners. This result can be more approved by this evidence that there was a significant difference between the means of pre-post tests. The means of the post-tests were higher than pre-tests. One possible explanation of such result is that positive and correct use of such learning strategy by students help them to enhance their reading comprehension proficiency. Also, T-observed were much greater than T-critical.

The role of literature, in general and CR in particular, in ELT classroom has always been advocated because of various advantages this use can offer for EFL teachers and learners. Literature makes learning English an enjoyable and attractive process for EFL learners. Using CR task encourage language acquisition and students’ language awareness.

Moreover, using CR in this approach is an active process inducing students to find rules of grammar instead of teaching of rules explicitly. The students would not feel bored with the environment. This would as well lead to greater concentration on learning materials. Since in this approach teacher is not the sole presenter of materials, students would take an egalitarian attitude towards him/her and so the classroom would be a friendly atmosphere where optimal learning occurs. This positive social atmosphere is assumed to increase learning much more than where learners receive instruction through traditional approaches. With regard to this, the teacher puts the burden of learning rules of grammar on the learners' shoulders.

In the present study, CR as one method learning grammar motivated the students in developing their reading comprehension proficiency. An important aspect of successful literature learning in EFL situation is absence of stress.

It is proved that the use of the CR tasks has many pedagogical benefits and they are also enjoyable among the EFL learners. Studies have also proved that using CR has the potential to greatly increase an EFL learners’ reading comprehension ability. The use of CR in EFL classrooms for improving reading comprehension of EFL learners is a naturalistic, enjoyable, low-cost and highly effective method. And it should be recommended for all EFL teachers and learners. However, this does not mean that using CR should replace all other methods of grammar teaching; rather it should be used in addition to those methods in order to boost development further. EFL teachers need to understand that an effective reading comprehension practicing program needs to be principled. And as it is accepted
that CR Task is a powerful pedagogic method in order to promote EFL learners’ reading comprehension improvement by making the process more enjoyable and meaningful.

Using CR has the potential not only to involve EFL students in enjoyable reading comprehension experience but also to develop their linguistic ability. Although for almost all the students in this study, using short story was an unprecedented experience, they did not fear for such a challenge.

They had some doubt in their ability to handle the anticipated difficulty of using CR grammar, but their attitudes were generally positive. After this period, they demonstrated improvement not only in attitudes, confidence, and interest, but also in their perceived reading comprehension ability.

The results of the present study indicated that the participants’ syntactic knowledge can also be improved by this technique because the researchers considered several factors and criteria in scoring the tests of grammar that were mentioned there. The participants showed a significant increase in confidence while performing the reading comprehension task and made fewer mistakes on their posttest.

Consciousness-raising (CR) task is a new way of teaching grammar developed incommunicative contexts although little has been written on the effectiveness of CR tasks in EFL setting. In order to provide effective instruction, it is necessary for teachers of EFL to examine the factors, conditions, and components that underlie CR effectiveness. Thus, this study aimed at understanding the extent that using CR effect reading comprehension proficiency among Iranian girls students. It seems that Iranian students tend to be motivated more instrumentally than interactively. This research began with the assumption that teaching strategy of using CR could enhance the high school language learners' reading comprehension ability. The results indicated that the instruction of the strategy of using CR did affect language learners' reading comprehension ability. CR promote students' motivation and this makes them more interested in classroom participation. Seemingly, it is not easy to stimulate these students to take part in classroom activities since some of them do not have information about it and they are not interesting. After finishing the course of study and by analyzing the data, it was found that CR as an instructional method had a positive impact on reading comprehension participation of English learners in experimental group.

References