The Effect of Using Instructional Conversation Method on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract— The present study mainly focused on the impact of Instructional Conversation (IC) method on reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate high school learners. To accomplish the study,71 high school learners studying English. In order to determine their homogeneities in reading comprehension, a reading comprehension test was given to them. Then they based on their own scores, 45 students assigned two experimental groups and one control group, each include 15 students. Control group are taught through the traditional method, first experimental group are taught through Instructional Conversation method and second experimental group received Instructional Conversation with traditional method. After instruction, a post-test was given to them. The findings reveled differences in the performance of the three groups of the study. Based on the result of these study, adopting integrated approach (instructional conversation method plus traditional method) is more useful for increasing reading comprehension of the students.

Index terms— Instructional conversation method, Traditional method, Reading comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

Krashen [1] and Cummins [2] emphasize the importance of social interaction in the second language acquisition process. The emergence of newer studies documenting the potential value of interactive instruction. [3], [4]. Ronald Thrap and *Ronald* Galimore [4] named the term "Instructional Conversation" (Talk about text). During ICs, teacher talk significantly less, students talk significantly more and the actual content of lesson is more likely to be mutually shaped and defined by student and teacher understanding [5]. The goal of ICs is promoting learning through conversation.

Deficiency in the reading comprehension ability students has become a concern to teachers, so we are responsible for increasing reading comprehension of our students through different methods .This study aim to control the effects of factors such as learners' background knowledge and misunderstanding during reading on reading comprehension. The absence of such information about reading comprehension constitute problems, which has motivated the present study. According to Instructional Conversation we can control these factors. Iranian students may not be motivated to participate in Instructional Conversation, but we can motivate them to conversation through pre/mid/post reading questions. It includes yes/no questions, true/false and multiple choice items.

A. Research Question

What is the difference in the post-test scores of Iranian EFL students taught using the instructional conversation and traditional method, instructional conversation alone and those taught using the traditional method?

B. Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the post-test scores of Iranian EFL students taught reading comprehension using instructional conversation and traditional method, instructional conversation alone and those taught using traditional method.

There are significant difference between IC method and other traditional methods. Because through IC students learn to interact with the reading in productive fashion so as to determine meaning. The goal is to reach at level at which they have confidence in their ability to overcome temporary or partial lapses of understanding to continue conversation until they have understand the writer's general meaning.

This study used an experimental design. Three groups of third-grade Iranian EFL students participated in the study. Participant were assigned to two experimental groups (were taught through IC alone and

combination of IC and traditional method) and a control group (were taught through traditional method). All groups received a pre-test and a post-test. Only the experimental groups received the treatment.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Wilen [6] and colleagues examine various types classroom discussion and their effects on students learning. Wilen argues that class discussion "an educative, reflective, and structured group conversation with students". Jonson Caudill [7] studied Mobile Technology and its applications in instructional conversation (USA). He concluded that, as an component of instructional conversation, mobile learning (mLearning) provides learners with opportunities to engage in discussion from almost any location, at any time, making the conversation much more natural and beneficial to the group. Hilary P.Ruston and Paula J.Schwanefluged [8] at another research, studied the effects of a conversation intervention on the expressive vocabulary development of pre-kinder garden (Athens). Mead [9] promotes an approach in which the teacher divides the students into small group for discussion. Each student writes a sentence about the reading selection and justifies what he has said. Finally, the teacher serves as discussion leader for entire class as they comment about important aspect of the reading. Cazaden [10] classroom talk in which ideas are explored rather than answer to teachers' test questions provided and evaluated.

In the past language teachers have given students very little assistance with reading other than to teach them grammar and vocabulary. Conceiving of reading as an active mental process greatly expands the reader's role since primary responsibility for meaning shifts from the text itself to the reader. Thus, language teachers now have a much greater range of possible procedures to follow *prior* to, *during*, and *after* the reading assignment to assist students to read effectively. [11]

Pre-reading

The purpose of pre-reading is to motivate activities is to motivate the students to want to read the assignment and to prepare them to be able to read it. Prepared students can complete the assignment better with less effort, and they are able to participate more fully and with greater satisfaction. [11]

Ringler and Weber [12] call pre-reading activities *enabling activities* "because they provide a reader with the necessary background to organize activity and to comprehend the material …. These experiences involve understanding the purpose(s) for reading and building a knowledge base necessary for dealing with the content and structure of the material."

During reading

Ringler and Weber [12] students need to be aware of their level of comprehension as they read, and they need to learn to create meaning by asking the proper questions or initiating needed compensatory strategies. Research results indicate that many students are not aware that meaning is the goal of reading and that many students read without being aware that they are not comprehending what is happening. (e.g. making the story map (consist of main ideas and sequential details, comparison and contrast, or causes and effects [13] as they read).

Post-reading

Post-reading activities clarify the meaning of any unclear passage and their relationship to the author's overall massage. The teacher should encourage students to ask any questions that may have about the reading at this point in the class. They should realize that subsequent activities require a comprehension of the reading and that the teacher wants them to understand the reading and participate in these activities. The teacher's task is to clarify problem passage by focusing on meaning whenever possible without calling the students' attention to grammar and vocabulary expect as a last resort.

Stauffer [14] advocates three types of teacher questions: (1) What do you think? (to make students think), (2) Why do you think so? (to cause them to think about their opinions), and (3) Prove it! (to force them to present evidence for their conclusions). He calls this questioning technique the "WWP approach,". Which he says frees the teacher "from the tyranny of right answers."

A. What is Instructional conversation?

Instructional conversation stand in contrast to many relatively "traditional" forms of teaching that are based upon the assumption that the teacher's role is to help students what the teacher already knows and can do. ICs, on the other hand, represent an approach to teaching that is more in keeping with the contemporary shift toward a "constructivist" curriculum. According to constructivist views, students are expected to activity *construct* their own knowledge and understanding- for example, by making connections, building mental schemata, and developing new concepts from previous understanding- rather than passively *receive* knowledge transmitted by their teacher .In this sense , ICs can be seen as consistent with perhaps this most important shift in mainstream educational thinking since the "Back to Basic" movement of the 1970s.

Instructional conversation assume that students themselves must play an important role in constructing new knowledge and in acquiring understandings about the world. Thus the teacher plays the role of facilitator rather than transmitter. Accordingly, rather than provide step-by-step instruction designed to produce right answer to correct performance, the teacher in IC encourages expression of students' own ideas, build upon information students provide and generally

guides students to increasingly sophisticated levels of comprehension.

B. *Elements of Instructional Conversation*:[15]

1. **"Thematic focus":** Teacher selects a theme on which to focus the discussion and has a general plan for how to "chunk" the next permit optimal exploration of the theme.

2. **"Activation and use of background knowledge and relevant schemata".** Teacher either "hooks into" or provides students with pertinent background knowledge and schemata necessary for understanding a text, wearing the information into the discussion.

3. **"Direct teaching".** When necessary, teachers provides direct teaching of a skill or concept.

4. **"Promotion of more complex language and expression".** Teacher elicits more extended student contributions by using a variety of elicitation technique: Invitations to expand, questions, and pauses.

5. **"Promotion of bases for statements or positions".** Teacher promotes students' use of text, pictures and reasoning to support an argument or position, by gently probing: "What makes you think that?" or "Show us where it says. "

Conversational:

6. **"Fewer "known-answer" questions".** Much of the discussion centers on questions for which there might be more than one correct answer.

7. **"Responsiveness to student contribution".** While having an initial plan and maintaining the focus and coherence of the discussion , teacher is also responsive to students' statement and the opportunities they provide.

8. **"Connected discourse".** The discussion is characterized by multiple, interactive, connected turns: succeeding utterances build upon and extended previous ones.

9. **"Challenging, but non-threatening, atmosphere".** Teacher creates a challenging atmosphere that is balanced by a positive affective climate. Teacher is more collaborator than evaluator and students are challenged to negotiate and construct the meaning of the text.

10. **"General participation, including self-selected turns".** Teacher does not hold exclusive light to the determine who talks; students are encouraged to volunteer or otherwise influence the selection of speaking turns.

C. *Characteristics of Instructional Conversation:* [15]

Teacher facilitates.

Draw from prior or background knowledge.

Many different ideas encouraged.

Build on information provided by students.

More student involvement.

Extensive discussion.

Fewer black and white responses.

Guided understanding.

D. *A model of Instructional Conversation:*

Vygotsky [16] and Rogoff [17] had an great impact on the development of an Instructional Conversation model. Children's early language learning arise from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activity with other members of given culture. From this collaborative activity, language itself develops as a 'tool' for making meaning (Vygotskyan zone of proximal development). Similarly the second language learner has an opportunity to create yet more tools and new ways of meaning, through collaborative activity with other use of target second language. The concept of the Zone of Proximal development links processes of instruction, organized learning and 'naturalistic' development or acquisition. Application of the Zone of Proximal Development to SLL assumes that new language knowledge is jointly constructed through collaborative activity, which may or may not involve formal instruction and meta talk, and then appropriated by the learner.

E. *What might appear as an excellent discussion conducted by a teacher and group of students*?

"instructional conversation" is, first, interesting and engaging. It is about an idea or concept that has meaning and relevance for students it has a focus that, while it might shift as the discussion evolves, remains discernible throughout. There is a high level of participation, without undue domination by any one individual, particularly the teacher … Teachers and students are responsive to what others say, so that each statement or contribution builds upon, challenges, or extends previous ones. Topics are picked up, developed, elaborated…. Strategically , the teacher(or discussion leader) question, prods, challenges, coaxes- or keep quiet. He or she clarifies and instruct when necessary, but does so efficiently, without wasting time or words. The teacher assume that, the discussion proceeds at an appropriate pace-neither too fast to prohibit the development of ideas, nor too slowly to maintain interest and momentum. The teacher knows when to bear down and draw out a student's ideas and when to ease up, allowing thought and reflection to take over. Perhaps most important, the teacher manages to keep everyone engaged in a substantive and extended conversation, weaving individual participants' comments into a larger tapestry of meaning." [15]

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A total number of 71 female third-grade students at an high school in MeshkinShahr, Iran participated in the study. A standard achievement test includes four texts with 20 reading multiple choice items was administered to determine the homogeneity of the subjects. The students whose scores one above and below of the mean score were selected. Therefore, the final subjects of the study consisted of 45 students. They were later divided into three groups (each group includes 15 students).

Control Group (1) : Traditional method.

Experimental Group (2): Instructional conversation method alone.

Experimental Group (3): Instructional conversation method + traditional method.

B. Materials and Instruments

First of all, a standardized achievement test was given to 71 students. Those students who scored one above and below of mean were chosen as the subjects of this study. The instruments used in the study consisted of five reading passages were chosen from their course book (five sessions). Each sessions lasted 1:15 hours was held one times a week. At the end of the treatment, a post-test similar to the pre-test was administered to the participants in three groups. the post-test consisted of four texts and 20 reading questions (control group received the same test).

C. Procedure

The texts used in this study were extracted from third-grade high school course book. The treatment period lasted for five 1:15 hours sessions, in each of which the participants were exposed to one text. In first Experimental group, each reading group meeting was carefully planned to include a pre-reading questions or two, setting purpose for reading, possible mid-reading discussion points, and post-reading question. Whit each question, we encouraged students volunteer responses, and then asked those who had not responded whether they had anything to add. Later , we gave inferential questions or asked a brief summary of the text. For example, students read "what is computer?" (Appendix A). We began the instructional conversation by explaining that in this text, we read benefits of computer. Then we asked "what do you know about computer?

When then read, about halfway through the book. We stopped the reading, asked "what are the different things that computers can perform? " . Two students responded . We finished the text. We asked the kids to respond the   text comprehension questions. Three students responded (the use of the native language was not allowed in the class; therefore, English was used in all the activities). For control group, we read text through traditional method. At first we introduced a text, read it and translated sentence by sentence to Persian. For second experimental group, we used both instructional conversation with translating all sentences into Persian (the use of the native language allowed in the class).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to investigate whether the differences among the means were statistically significant, a ANOVA   analysis was performed on the data. The results of this analysis showed that there were significant differences between performance of the participants in the control group and two experimental groups. TABLE I displays the descriptive statistic for the three groups.

TABLE I. Descriptive statistics for the three groups of the study

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control Group (1)	15	15.47	1.187	.307	14.81	16.12	14	18
Experimental Group (2)	15	15.58	1.356	.350	15.12	16.62	14	18
Experimental Group (3)	15	17.13	1.457	.376	16.33	17.94	15	19
Total	45	16.16	1.492	.222	15.71	16.60	14	19

The TABLE II indicates, the observed p-value was estimated to be (.004). This level of significance was less than the expected p-value (p= .05) which was set to test the research hypothesis. In other words, concerning the use of instructional conversation method, the participants who took both instructional conversation and traditional method showed to be superior in the reading comprehension to those who received instructional method alone and traditional method. So the research hypothesis was rejected.

TABLE II. The results of ANOVA for the research hypothesis

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22.711	2	11.356	6.342	.004
Within Groups	75.200	42	1.790		
Total	97.911	44			

TABLE III. The results of the Tukey HSD (multiple comparisons)

Group (1) Group (J)	Mean Differences (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Group (1) Group (2)	-.40	.489	.694	-1.59	.79
Group (3)	-1.67*	.489	.004	-2.85	-.48
Group (2) Group (1)	.40	.489	.694	-.79	1.59
Group (3)	-1.27*	.489	.034	-2.46	-.08
Group (3) Group (1)	1.67*	.489	.004	.48	2.85
Group (2)	1.27*	.489	.034	.08	2.45

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

To test this research hypothesis, the statistical analysis of comparison using the Tukey HSD test was conducted. The results of this analysis are represented in TABLE III. As the results in Table III show, there is significant difference between performances of students of the three groups. The observed p-value estimated for the Group 1 and Group 3 (p= .004) and Group 2 and Group 3 of the study were less than the level of significance (p= .05) (The observed p-value estimated for the Group 1 and Group 2(p= .694) of the study more than the level of significance (p= .05) set for the research. The research hypothesis that claimed that there is no significance difference in the post-test scores of learners' taught reading comprehension using instructional conversation and traditional method , instructional conversation alone and those taught using traditional method was rejected.

V. DISCUSSION

The aims of this study was to examine whether instructional conversation method would have influence on the reading comprehension of students or not. Instructional conversation has been defined as " the genre of productive interactive verbal strategies used by educators to engage their learners in active thinking , negotiation of meaning, and, consequently, learning." [4]. The instructional conversation is "dialogue between teacher and learners in which the teacher listens carefully to groups of students' communicate intent, and tailors the dialog to meet the emerging understanding of the learners." [4]

Findings of the study confirmed the findings of the other studies that have found the effect of instructional conversation beneficial in reading comprehension of EFL learners. [19], [7], [8]. This findings are in line with the Vygotskyan Zone of Proximal Development [16], "the difference between the child's development level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."

VI. CONCLUSION

The data from this study confirmed benefits of instructional conversation on increasing reading comprehension of second language learners. After five-weeks, the students in the experimental groups performed well in reading comprehension post-test, while control group did not. Moreover, significant differences are found between performance of two experimental groups. The findings of the study indicated that combination of instructional conversation and traditional group (group 3) obtained significantly higher mean scores in comparison to instructional conversation alone.

On the whole, the reading comprehension test indicated that combination of the two methods , namely instructional conversation and traditional method, was most influential in helping to second language students to increase reading comprehension. As Oyetunde [20] and Williams [21] said "no one method of the teaching holds the answer for all purpose and situations".

Educational Implications

Instructional conversation is a new mode of instruction that focuses on "the interactive nature of reading", rather than a passive way of receiving information from the text through word identification and task analytic learning (as cited in Dole [22]; Rumelhart [23]. It contains a number of questions that help students construct their learning style from a dependent to an independent way with planning, monitoring, motivation and self-regulation. Students profit from this effective, meaningful and self-regulated learning.

The final implication of this study goes to teacher-training programs. The aim of such programs should be familiarizing teachers with beneficial effects of using instructional conversation on learners' progress.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study poses several limitations. First, this study was conducted with short duration of the experiment.

Second , this study was conducted with a small sample size and also are needed to replicate this study with larger sample size and longer periods of time. Third, this study also controlled for gender. A similar study could investigate the effect of instructional conversation on reading comprehension of male students.

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Appendix A

WHAT IS A COMPUTER?

Computers are changing all our lives and also old ways of doing things with their superhuman speed. They come in different sizes from very large to small pocket-sized ones. They can almost be used in any field of activity. No one can deny their influence and importance.

Computers are used to design different things. They are used in giant airplanes and modern cars. All spacecrafts which are orbiting out through space are controlled by computers.

In addition to helping us to work better, computers are opening new fields of endeavor. Perhaps the most important is in medicine where computers are helping doctors to research disease chemists to design drugs and disabled people to learn skills. But how is the computer able to perform so many different tasks?

A computer dose all these tasks by means of processing the information. It can do all this because it is programmable. This means that it can be given instructions, called programs, which tell it exactly what to do. By feeding in different programs, computers can be switched from one job to another. Furthermore, computers can also be programmed to do many separate tasks at the same time. The central computer of an airline, for example, is constantly busy by sending and receiving information to and from offices and airports around the world.