The Impact of Cooperative Performance on the Cloze Test on the Development of Vocabulary Knowledge

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Abstract

Given the importance of vocabulary knowledge in foreign language learners’ performance in other skills, this study investigated the impact of cooperative performance on the cloze test on the development of Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary is needed for expressing meaning and using the receptive and productive skills. We should teach what words mean and how they are used in different contexts, and convictions are strong among many language professionals that contextualized vocabulary learning is more effective than learning words in lists. One way to present words in context is using a cloze test. The cloze test was originally developed as a measure of reading comprehension; however, some researchers believe that gains in vocabulary knowledge might also result from the use of cloze procedure as a teaching technique. Besides, a shift from competitive and individual learning to cooperative learning in recent decades has led to a change in teaching methodology. Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. In order to check whether the use of cooperative work on cloze passages promotes vocabulary knowledge, the researchers gave a homogenizing proficiency test to one hundred students studying English as a foreign language at the intermediate level in a language Institute in Tehran. Based on the results of the test, 70 students were chosen as the main subjects of the study and divided into two experimental and control groups, each with 35 students. Ten rational cloze tests were constructed using the passages from different books taught in different pre-intermediate courses with some of their content words deleted following the rational cloze procedure principles. The students in the experimental group worked cooperatively on these passages in order to retain the deleted words, and the teacher provided assistance and feedback when necessary. The control group received the same passages in their intact form as reading comprehension texts, and the teacher helped them with difficult words by encouraging them to use the context to guess their meanings or by giving them near equivalents in English. At the end of the semester, a post-test was administered on the basis of the taught vocabularies to both groups. The statistical analysis of the results indicated that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. Besides, the experimental group expressed great satisfaction in the use of this technique for vocabulary learning. All in all, it was concluded that cooperative performance on cloze tests can be very useful in increasing students’ treasure of vocabulary.