THE IMPACT OF NEGOTIATED LESSON PLAN ON INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS' VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract:

The current study investigated the effect of the traditional lesson planning determined by teachers and the negotiated lesson plan (NLP) on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. To this end, a copy of Solution Placement Test was administered to 47 learners, and 36 participants at the intermediate level of language proficiency were homogeneously selected. They were then divided into two groups of 18 participants as the experimental and the control groups. Next, the vocabulary pretest was conducted to measure the participants' vocabulary knowledge and check the homogeneity of the groups at the beginning of the treatment. The learners in the experimental group shared their ideas in small groups, had the key role and enjoyed shared-decision making deciding what they would do for the next sessions of the course. The learners in the control group had no role in determining the course materials. The result of data analysis based on their pretest and posttest scores of vocabulary showed that the participants of the experimental group became better vocabulary learners after receiving NLP treatment compared to those in the pre-determined lesson plan that received unnoticeable results from the pretest to the posttest. The teachers and the material developers need to consider the negotiated lesson planning into account so that the issue of learner involvement in instructional materials is paid attention to.

Keywords: EFL learner, negotiated lesson plan, vocabulary knowledge

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1. Introduction

Interaction between teachers and students during teaching/learning sessions and the language during these interactions form the main source of language input besides instructional materials from textbooks and workbooks. Research has shown that appropriate input and suitable contexts for interaction among students can lead to successful L2 learning (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018).

In comparison to pre-determined or product-oriented syllabuses, the content of negotiated or process-oriented syllabus was completely unknown before its development (Clarke, cited in Peyvandi, Azarnoosh & Siyyari, 2021) and its development is an on-going process occurring through negotiation between teachers and students and depends upon their joint decisions about education (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018). This meaning-focused program is responsive to the wants and needs of the learners and engages them in the process of learning and decision-making and this involvement makes them more motivated, creative and committed to the course. Learners must learn and use language creatively to develop beyond the rudimentary stages (Marashi & Khatami, 2017).

In NLP, the teacher's role is more that of a facilitator than an instructor; the students are active participants in the learning process. The teacher helps to guide the students, manage their activities, and direct their learning. Being a teacher means helping people to learn. NLP builds on students' intuitive understanding of what they need out of their education, creating meaningful learning environments where students are engaged and motivated (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018).

2. Literature Review

Moving from a behaviorist approach to planning for teaching toward a constructivist approach to designing for learning requires that dialogue be real in the pre-service education classroom. Prospective and beginning teachers benefit from experiencing constructivist learning and having the process of designing for learning made visible by mentors. The dialogical model of lesson planning emphasizes context-dependency but also sees planning itself as a practice (John, 2016). Building a learning community will develop trust and encourage risk-taking. Learning to become a teacher is sharing and learning from experiences in close cooperation with practice teachers and teacher educators (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2016).

Planning for teaching is an imperative and essential division of the overlapping activity of teaching. Learning how to plan for instruction is still challenging teacher educators in their attempts to find effective ways of supporting prospective teachers. Lesson planning and preparation to improve teaching competencies have long been recognized by educational institutions as an integral part of teacher preparation worldwide (Kizlik, 2018).

Studies that have dealt with several pedagogical parts of teacher preparation programs reinforce the view that the pedagogical aspects of teacher preparation matter, both for their effects on teaching practice and for their ultimate impact on student achievement. Some evidence suggests that coursework in content methods matters for teacher effectiveness (Wilson, 2015). Rahimi (2014) investigated the kinds of skills and linguistic knowledge teachers resort to implementing their lesson plans in class. Studies have shown that the clear identification and organization of content outcomes will result in the acquisition of this same content by the students. However, the articulation of objectives, although necessary, is far from sufficient when planning for teaching (John, 2016).

Pellegrino (2014), proposing problem-posed syllabi, believes that in effective learning environments, educators must pay close attention to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners bring into the classroom. These factors and preconceptions provide a broader understanding of the learner's needs divided by Hutchinson and Waters (2015) as necessities (what the learner has to know to function effectively), lacks (what the learner knows and does not know already) and want (what the learners think they need). Allwright (2017) looks at the issue of instructional materials from the learner involvement view. He argues that the structure of course books should have the flexibility to be changed and adapted by learners. In other words, the learners should have a hand in the designing process.

The view of the negotiated syllabus incorporates a solid foundation for both linguistic development and social empowerment (Hall, 2014). A negotiated syllabus involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions in the curriculum design process. It is a way of giving high priority to the recognition of learner needs within a course and to the need to continually adjust courses while they are running to suit changing needs and circumstances. Negotiated syllabuses are also called process syllabuses (Breen, 2017).

According to McCarten (2017), it is essential that student-centered lesson planning run the instruction around students' readiness, interests, and learning preferences that empowers them to drive their learning. As such, this study intended to investigate the effect of NLP on L2 learners' vocabulary building. The main goal was to know if the learners could contribute to the lesson planning phase, and how this contribution would affect their performance in L2 vocabulary learning by posing the following question;

- Does negotiated lesson plan have any statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge?

3. Method

3.1. Design of the study

This study employed a quasi-experimental design of a quantitative research paradigm to test whether utilizing NLP or pre-determined lesson plan (PDLP) had any statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. The

participants of the study were chosen from intact classes and were assigned to one experimental and one control group. The independent variables referred to negotiated or lesson plans and pre-determined lesson plans. The dependent variables referred to the vocabulary knowledge of the participants.

3.2. Participants
The initial number of participants in the current study included 42 language learners who were taking English-speaking courses at Safir English Language Institute in Rasht, Iran. Thirty-six language learners were selected non-randomly based on Solutions Placement Test (SPT). The learners were from both genders with Persian as their native language with the age range of 18-24.

3.3. Procedures and instruments for data collection and analysis
Based on the results obtained on SPT, 30 participants were selected as the main sample. Next, they were divided into two equal groups including an experimental group of NLP and a control group of PDLP. Next, the researchers conducted the pretest of vocabulary both to measure the participants' vocabulary knowledge and to check the homogeneity of the groups at the beginning of the treatment. It is worth mentioning that the validity of the test was sought by asking institute teachers about the test items (experts' opinions). In so doing, a copy of the test was given to the teachers in question. It took a week until they judged the test based on the lessons covered and matched it with the contents of the lessons. The reliability of the test was also calculated through test-retest reliability within a 10-day time period. The value of test-retest reliability was .89, which showed an acceptable reliability level.

In the NLP group, the teacher's role was more that of a facilitator than an instructor; the learners were active participants in the learning process. The teacher helped the learners, managed their activities, and directed their learning. The learners' intuitive understanding of what they needed out of their education, created meaningful learning environments. They also shared their ideas in small groups that were set by the teacher to brainstorm, write notes, and ask questions about the given topic of the course. Therefore, the learners had a key role and enjoyed shared-decision making.

In the PDLP group, the teacher presented the vocabulary and asked the learners their meanings. In case they did not know the meanings, the teacher provided them with the meanings of the vocabulary. The learners learned the words individually and were not allowed to seek help from their peers or the dictionary. The learners had no role in determining the course materials. Having finished the treatment in eight sessions, the posttest was administered to measure the participants' vocabulary knowledge to gauge their performance scores in comparison to the pretest scores.

4. Results

In order to show that the participants were nearly at a similar level in terms of their vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the study, the pretest was administered to both groups. The main purpose of implementing the pretest was to mark a reference point from which the participants' performance on the posttest could be evaluated. As shown in Table 1, the means and standard deviations of the pretest scores for both groups were one way or another indistinguishable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Vocabulary Pretest Scores

Groups	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
NLP G.	17.8124	15	6.23598	1.85413
PDLP G.	18.1452	15	5.42189	1.21431

For the vocabulary test administered at the onset of the study, the mean scores for the PDLP and NLP groups were 18.12 and 17.81, respectively. The degree of scatteredness of the scores for the PDLP group was slightly smaller than that of the NLP group (SD $_{NLP\ group}$ = 6.23, SD $_{PDLP\ group}$ = 5.42). Similarly, the descriptive statistics for the posttest means of the vocabulary test are presented in Table 2. It presents the values of the means and standard deviation along with the standard error of the mean for the two groups on the vocabulary posttest.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Scores of Vocabulary Posttest

Groups	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
NLP G.	23.15	15	6.65214	1.87954
PDLP G.	19.89	15	5.54129	1.54126

Based on Table 2, the mean score of the NLP group ($_{NLP\ group}$ = 23.15) was (3.26) points higher than that of the PDLP group ($_{PDLP\ group}$ = 19.89) in the vocabulary posttest. Moreover, the standard deviation for the two groups was nearly the same (SD $_{NLP\ group}$ = 6.65, SD $_{PDLP\ group}$ = 5.54).

To see if there was any statistically significant difference in the learners' vocabulary knowledge before receiving treatment, an independent-samples t-test was run for the pretest scores. To examine the uniformity assumption of variance for the pretest means, an independent-samples t-test was run based on the pretest scores. The pre-condition for using parametric test such as t-test is the homogeneity of variances observed in the mean scores of the study groups. In so doing, the Levene's test for the equality of variances tested whether the variances of scores for the two groups were the same for the vocabulary test. Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for the sample.

Table 3 displays the results of the t-test for the pretest scores indicating no statistically significant difference in the learners' vocabulary knowledge prior to their receiving the treatments (t = .222 with df = 28, $p_{\text{vocabulary test}}$ = .066 ≥ .05).

Table 3: Results of the Independent-Samples T-test on the Vocabulary Pretest Means

t-test for Equality of Means							
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
Groups	N	df.	SED	t	sig.(two-tailed)	Lower	Upper
NLP & PDLP	30	28	.40054	.323	.07778	-.54840	.68172

As can be seen, the significance value for the t-test was higher than the 0.05 alpha level for the pretest means. According to the result of the independent-samples t-test in Table 3, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in the vocabulary pretest (p > 0.05). The performance of both groups was almost the same. That is, for the pretest of vocabulary, there was no statistically significant difference in scores for the PDLP (M =18.14, SD = 5.42) and NLP group [M = 17.81, SD = 6.23; t (323) = .28, p = 0.777, two-tailed]. As a result, the non-significant *p-value* revealed that the population means were similar at the beginning of the study. In other words, the two groups were approximately at the same level of proficiency in terms of their vocabulary knowledge in the pretest administered at the onset of the study before the treatments.

In order to calculate the possible effect of treatment on the dependent variable of vocabulary knowledge of the participants, another independent-sample t-test was run to show the results of the post-test of vocabulary. In addition, the result of Levene's test (homogeneity of variances) for the post-test scores was also not significant at the .05 alpha level. Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was justified for the post-test scores as well.

An independent-samples t-test was also run based on the results of the post-test of vocabulary to gauge the degree of the participants' differential performances at the end of the experiment. It was implemented to make a comparison between the NLP and PDLP groups in terms of their performance after supplying the specific treatment and intervention program for the NLP group. Table 4 shows the results of this comparison.

Table 4: Results of Independent-Samples T-test on the Scores of Vocabulary Posttest

t-test for Equality of Means							
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
Groups	N	df.	SED	t	sig.(two-tailed)	Lower	Upper
NLP & PDLP	30	28	.32547	32.475	.000	8.54216	9.85124

As mentioned, the independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the post-test scores for PDLP and NLP groups for the vocabulary test. As it was indicated, there was a statistically significant difference in scores for PDLP (M = 19.89, SD = 5.54) and NLP group (M = 23.15, SD = 6.65; t (32) = 28, p = .00 ≤ .05 two-tailed). In other words, the two

groups were significantly different in terms of their vocabulary knowledge in the tests administered at the end of the study. In order to investigate the participants' progress within groups, a paired-samples t-test was also run, which showed the participants' progress from the pretest to the posttest as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of Paired-Samples T-test Statistics for Vocabulary Test for Both Groups

Groups				Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Vocabulary	PDLP group	Pair 1	Pretest scores	18.14	15	5.42	1.85
			Posttest scores	19.89	15	5.54	1.54
	NLP group	Pair 1	Pretest scores	17.81	15	6.23	1.21
			Posttest scores	23.15	15	6.65	1.87

The mean score of the NLP group for the vocabulary test improved from (M = 17.81) in the pretest to (23.15) in the posttest; that of the PDLP group progressed from (M = 18.14) in the pretest to (19.89) in the posttest. Thus, it is clear from the mean difference in the posttest of the NLP and PDLP groups that the vocabulary knowledge of the participants in the NLP group improved compared to the vocabulary knowledge of the participants in the PDLP group.

In order to show if the paired differences for both groups were significant, another paired-samples t-test was run as presented in Table 6. Based on its results, although both PDLP and NLP groups proceeded in the posttest, this improvement was statistically significant merely for the NLP group but not for the PDLP group (P $_{NLP group}$ <.05, P $_{PDLP group}$ ≥ .05). In other words, the NLP group made a noticeably higher progression as compared to the PDLP group in the vocabulary posttest.

Table 6: Results of Paired-Samples T-test of
Vocabulary Posttest of PDLP and NLP Groups

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest (NLP) - Posttest (NLP)	-.5.34	1.8547	.231	-7.8854	-.1.547	-3.319	14	.005
Pair 2	Pretest (PDLP) - Posttest (PDLP)	-1.75	1.4257	.425	-6.4236	-.9.541	-3.388	14	.000

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

The results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of the vocabulary of the NLP and PDLP groups. Thus, the vocabulary knowledge of the participants in NLP group improved compared to that of the participants in the PDLP group.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at investigating whether traditionally practiced lesson planning determined by teachers and NLP improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. According to the results of the posttest scores, NLP turned the participants into better vocabulary learners compared to the participants in the pre-determined lesson plan that received unnoticeable results from the pretest to the posttest.

The findings of the current study are supported by Allwright (2017) who looks at the issue of instructional materials from a learner-involvement view. In supporting the significant effect of the negotiated syllabus on learners' learning, he argues that the structure of the course book should have the flexibility to be changed and adapted by learners. Thus, as found in the current study, learners should have a hand in the designing process, and their interaction, negotiation or negotiated preparation of the lessons, and needs analysis need to be considered.

The findings of the current study are also in line with what Richards and Lockhart (2017) found in their study investigating the effect of the negotiated syllabus. It can be reasoned that learners learn a language successfully if they are able to have some input into what and how they are learning. Another reason is the fact that involving learners in shaping the overall lesson plan or syllabus has a strong effect on motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to the course.

In the meantime, Breen's (2017) investigation of the negotiated syllabus is supported by the findings of the current study because the learners in the negotiated lesson planning had a strong say in what kind of topics and what kind of material they worked with as it was practiced in the current study, which allowed teacher and learners to negotiate the syllabus during the course. Besides, in both studies, the negotiated syllabus involved the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions in the curriculum design process.

Furthermore, Candlin's (2014) investigation of the process syllabus supports the findings of the study as he suggests that the issues of learnability and social ownership of the syllabus can only be approached through the learners themselves. Similar findings show that learner negotiation and renegotiation of the syllabus throughout the course of lessons involve not only asking learners their views and trying to incorporate them but a whole process of teacher-learner interaction in producing the best syllabus that corresponds to the needs of the learners.

This study also gains support from the findings of the study done by Blumberg (2018). They also found that in the negotiated syllabus, there was an increased student engagement with the content that resulted in increased student learning and long-term retention. The similar findings of the studies result from the fact that highlights interaction practiced in both studies by the learners promotes learner involvement in developing instructional materials, which is the possible key to learning.

6. Conclusion

From the findings of the present study, it may be concluded that the instruction of vocabulary through negotiated lesson planning would be more effective. Based on the finding that an increase in the level of learners' involvement in lesson planning resulted in their vocabulary gains, learners should be involved in more designing tasks in which their active participation in classroom conduct would be needed.

Ongoing and dynamic needs analysis during the course is very practical. That is, the learners can be given a series of items that may describe their wants. They choose and rank these individually and then in a group. They report their ranking to the teacher. This will help the teacher in planning a class program as well as arranging individualized or small group work. The ELT syllabus should aim to enable learners to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Therefore, the central design can thus be understood as a learner-focused and learning-oriented perspective. These factors and preconceptions provide a broader understanding of the learner's needs and necessities (what the learner has to know to function effectively), lacks (what the learner knows and does not know already) and want (what the learners think they need).

However, lack of knowledge or experience with the syllabus on part of the learners is a critical issue. That means that learners may not know enough about the range of options they could choose from and thus may make unimaginative choices. However, a gradual introduction of a negotiated syllabus or lesson planning would help learners overcome this problem because a negotiated syllabus involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions in the curriculum design process. It is a way of giving high priority to the recognition of learner needs within a course and to the need to continually adjust courses while they are running to suit changing needs and circumstances.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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