The Impact of Vocabulary Acquisition on Listening Comprehension among Iraqi

أثر اكتساب المفردات على الاستيعاب السمعي لدى العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية

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كيفية اقتباس البحث

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies :2025 Volume: 15 Issue :2
(ISSN): 2227-2895 (Print)   (E-ISSN):2313-0059 (Online)

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The Impact of Vocabulary Acquisition on Listening Comprehension among Iraqi

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ملخص البحث :

بحث هذه الدراسة في أثر اكتساب المفردات على الفهم السمعي لدى المتعلمين العراقيين الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. استخدمت الدراسة تصميمًا متعدد الأساليب لاستكشاف البيانات الكمية والنوعية من 100 متعلم عراقي انضموا إلى دورات متوسطة ومتقدمة. تم إجراء اختبار للاستماع والفهم والمفردات قبل وبعد تدخل استمر ستة أسابيع، وأظهرت النتائج أن اكتساب المفردات يؤدي إلى تحسين كبير في فهم الاستماع، حيث أظهرت التحليلات وجود ارتباط إيجابي قوي بين معرفة المفردات والاستيعاب الاستماعي. وهذا يشير إلى أن المتعلمين الذين يمتلكون مفردات أوسع يمكنهم فهم المحتوى السمعي بشكل أفضل، مما يعزز من ثقتهم في استخدام اللغة.تؤكد النتائج على أهمية تعلم المفردات في سياقاتها، حيث يسهم ذلك في تعزيز قدرة المتعلمين على استخدام المفردات بشكل فعال في المواقف الحياتية المختلفة. كما أثبتت الدراسة فعالية أدوات الوسائط المتعددة واستراتيجيات الاستماع في تعزيز الفهم السمعي، مما يساعد المتعلمين على تطوير مهاراتهم اللغوية.تناقش هذه الورقة الآثار التربوية لتلك النتائج وتظهر توصيات مهمة لمعلمي اللغة، مثل التركيز على تعليم المفردات السياقية وتبني

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استراتيجيات متنوعة لتعزيز الفهم الاستماعي. هذه التوصيات تهدف إلى تحسين تجربة التعلم وتطوير قدرات المتعلمين اللغوية بشكل شامل وفعّال.

Abstract

This study researches the effect of vocabulary acquisition on listening comprehension among Iraqi (EFL) learners. Using a mixed-methods design, the study investigates both quantitative and qualitative data from 100 Iraqi EFL learners joined in intermediate and advanced courses. A listening comprehension and vocabulary test were administered before and after a six-week intervention. Scores show that vocabulary acquisition significantly upgrades listening comprehension, with a strong positive engagement between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. The results underscore the significance of contextual vocabulary learning, multimedia tools, and listening strategies in promoting EFL learners' listening comprehension. This paper discusses pedagogical implications and shows recommendations for language instructors.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition plays an important role in the development of language proficiency, and its importance is especially evident in listening comprehension. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the capacity to comprehend spoken English attaches not only on their listening skills but also on their vocabulary knowledge. Decoding sounds, identifying words, comprehending their meanings, and interpreting context are all necessary for listening comprehension, a fundamental aspect of language learning. On the other hand, a lack of vocabulary might hinder understanding and keep students from fully grasping what is being said.

The Iraqi EFL learners often face difficulties in both listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, because of limited exposure to authentic English application outside the classroom, as well as the challenges posed by rapid speech and minimized forms in spoken language. This study searches to address these challenges by investigating the relationship between vocabulary acquisitions and listening comprehension among Iraqi (EFL) learners.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether improving vocabulary knowledge can promote listening comprehension and how vocabulary acquisition strategies, including multimedia tools and contextual learning,

can be incorporated into EFL instruction to benefit learners' listening skills.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Vocabulary Acquisition and Listening Comprehension

Research has consistently demonstrated that a key factor in determining listening comprehension is vocabulary proficiency. According to Vandergrift and Baker (2015), pupils who have a larger vocabulary are more adept at recognizing words in spoken language, which improves their understanding of the spoken material. Vocabulary and listening comprehension are correlated; frequent exposure to auditory content facilitates both speech decoding and vocabulary growth.

Vocabulary is essential for comprehension because it helps pupils relate spoken information to meaning, claims Nation (2001). Additionally, by anticipating what they will hear when they understand word in context, students can enhance their comprehension. Listening comprehension activities, which often involve unfamiliar language, require the ability to infer meaning from context.

Vocabulary is crucial for comprehending spoken texts, particularly when students encounter topics or terms they are unfamiliar with (Al-Jarf, 2007). As they encounter new terminology, learners must use contextual cues, background knowledge, and other metacognitive strategies to infer meaning. This method enhances their overall listening skills.

2.2 Multimedia Tools for Vocabulary Acquisition

Recent research have shown that multimedia can enhance vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari (2021) claim that employing multimedia tools, such YouTube videos and online games, significantly improved vocabulary recall and listening comprehension. Multimedia tools expose students to real-world speech patterns, accents, and vocabulary usage for language acquisition and listening practice.
Ahmed (2020) investigated how effectively English movie subtitles aided vocabulary acquisition and auditory comprehension for Iraqi Kurdistan EFL learners. According to the study, by helping students comprehend the content and retain new words, subtitles improved the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and listening skills.

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2.3 Listening Strategies and Vocabulary Learning

Effective hearing requires more than just decoding words; it also requires the use of other strategies including inference, prediction, and identifying key information. Al-Shammari (2020) asserts that strategy-based education improves students' listening comprehension and can yield even better results when combined with vocabulary training. In order to help students overcome barriers to real-time comprehension, such as quick speech and abbreviated forms, it is crucial to teach them to actively engage in the listening process through strategy training.

Field (2008) asserts that hearing necessitates both bottom-up and top-down processing. While vocabulary knowledge enables learners to recognize and understand specific words, successful hearing necessitates top-down processing, such as anticipating information based on context. As a result, integrating language skills with listening strategies might enhance comprehension overall.

2. 4 Contextual Learning and Vocabulary Retention

The way that vocabulary is learned has a big influence on how well it is retained and used in listening comprehension exercises. It has been demonstrated that contextual learning—which entails picking up vocabulary in relevant and meaningful contexts—is more successful than rote memorizing or word lists alone. The impact of contextual vocabulary learning on enhancing listening comprehension in Malaysian EFL learners was investigated by Hamzah and Abdullah (2015). They discovered that students were better able to remember and use terminology in listening comprehension when they participated in role plays, conversations, and real-world listening exercises. The cognitive theory of language learning, which holds that vocabulary is best acquired when incorporated into relevant settings, is consistent with this method.

2.5 Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition and Listening Comprehension

Even though the connection between vocabulary learning and listening comprehension is well-established, students frequently struggle to close the gap between the two. Iraqi EFL learners frequently encounter three challenges: a lack of useful teaching resources, a dependence on conventional teaching techniques, and little exposure to real-world English usage outside of the classroom. Razaq and Ahmed (2024) pointed out that conventional vocabulary training in Iraqi colleges frequently emphasizes memorizing over

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contextual application, which hinders students' capacity to apply their vocabulary to listening assignments. To overcome these drawbacks, they suggested implementing technology-driven and interactive strategies.
Furthermore, learners frequently have trouble comprehending spoken English's condensed forms and fast-paced speech, which are not specifically covered in conventional EFL education. According to Al-Jarf (2007), exposing students to real-world listening content, such newscasts and podcasts, may aid in the development of the abilities required to comprehend spoken speech.

2.6 The Role of Lexical Access in Listening Comprehension

Understanding spoken language relies heavily on lexical access, or the capacity to recall and identify words while listening in real time. Rost (2011) highlighted that learners can keep up with the flow of spoken material when they have a strong vocabulary since it allows for faster and more accurate lexical access. EFL students frequently have comprehension breakdowns because they lack the terminology necessary to comprehend the message.
Schmitt (2008) went on to explain that regular exposure to vocabulary in a variety of situations improves lexical retrieval, which facilitates learners' understanding and response to spoken language. Fostering lexical access through frequent listening practice and word repetition is essential for Iraqi EFL learners, who might not have had much exposure to naturalistic English environments.

2.7 Authentic Listening Materials and Vocabulary Learning

Podcasts, interviews, and real-world conversations are examples of authentic listening materials that expose students to realistic language usage, which is crucial for vocabulary development and listening comprehension. According to Brown (2007), authentic materials help students relate their vocabulary to real-world listening situations by exposing them to reduced forms, colloquial idioms, and a range of speech rates.
Ahmed and Zaidan (2018) revealed that students who listened to real English podcasts significantly improved their listening comprehension and vocabulary retention in an Iraqi environment. By allowing students to use their vocabulary knowledge in authentic listening situations, these resources assisted in bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language use.

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2.8 Challenges in Vocabulary Application for Listening Tasks

It can be difficult for students to apply their newly acquired vocabulary to listening exercises. According to Hulstijn and Laufer (2001), active listening comprehension is not always correlated with passive vocabulary knowledge (recognition). Because of differences in pronunciation, pace, or stress patterns, learners may be able to recognize a word in isolation but not in related speech. Al-Kubaisy (2019) noted that in an Iraqi EFL environment, learners frequently encounter difficulties decoding spoken versions of well-known terminology because they have not had enough practice with real-world listening resources. This implies that in order to enhance listening comprehension, instructional strategies that emphasize phonological vocabulary elements like stress, intonation, and reduced forms are required.

2.9 The Role of Motivation and Engagement in Vocabulary Learning

When it comes to learning vocabulary and how it affects listening comprehension, motivation is essential. According to Dornyei (2005), students who are more motivated and involved in language learning activities are more likely to remember and use their vocabulary in listening exercises. Multimedia technologies, gamified learning, and interactive exercises can increase motivation by making vocabulary acquisition more fun and interesting. Razaq and Ahmed (2024) found that when vocabulary training was combined with multimedia resources like interactive applications and films with subtitles, students in Iraqi EFL classes demonstrated increased interest and engagement. These techniques increased students' confidence in their ability to complete listening comprehension tasks in addition to improving vocabulary acquisition.

2.10 Vocabulary Threshold Hypothesis in Listening

According to Laufer's (1992) Vocabulary Threshold Hypothesis, learners must possess a certain amount of vocabulary in order to attain functional listening comprehension. According to studies, in order for learners to deduce the meanings of unknown words and understand the context as a whole, they must be familiar with at least 90–95% of the vocabulary in spoken input. According to Nation (2006), EFL learners find it especially difficult to reach this barrier because listening requires quick speech and a variety of accents. This emphasizes the necessity of providing clear training in high-

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frequency terms and phrases that are frequently used in daily discussions in the Iraqi environment.

2.11 The Impact of Cultural Context on Vocabulary and Listening

The relationship between vocabulary and listening comprehension is significantly influenced by cultural familiarity. According to Rost (2016), learners' comprehension of pragmatics, idiomatic phrases, and cultural allusions all have an impact on their capacity to interpret spoken material in addition to their vocabulary. Iraqi EFL learners' limited exposure to Western culture and idiomatic language made it difficult for them to understand real listening materials, according to research by Al-Azzawi and Al-Janabi (2020). This gap can be closed and listening results can be enhanced by incorporating cultural components into vocabulary instruction.

2.12 Bilingual Advantages in Vocabulary Acquisition

There are distinct ways in which bilingualism might impact vocabulary learning and listening comprehension. The Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) paradigm, first presented by Cummins (2000), postulates that mastery of one language might facilitate the acquisition of another. Iraqi EFL students may be able to use their prior language skills to acquire English vocabulary more quickly because many of them are multilingual in Arabic and Kurdish. However, Mohammed and Abdulrahman (2021) pointed out that listening comprehension might occasionally be made more difficult by interference from the learners' native language (L1). For example, learners may find it challenging to identify well-known words in spoken form due to phonetic differences between Arabic and English.

2.13 Implicit Vocabulary Learning Through Listening

Ellis (2008) investigated the function of implicit learning in vocabulary acquisition and made the case that learners can gradually pick up language by listening to real-world input. When students are exposed to rich, meaningful input—like podcasts, audiobooks, or conversations—this method works very well. Ahmed and Kareem (2023) showed that consistent exposure to English-language media improved vocabulary size and listening comprehension for Iraqi EFL learners. By giving students the chance to organically acquire language, implicit learning enhances explicit teaching techniques.

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2.14 Role of Feedback in Vocabulary Learning for Listening

It has been demonstrated that receiving feedback during listening exercises enhances vocabulary acquisition. Corrective feedback, such as highlighting misheard terms or providing clarification, helps learners improve their vocabulary and comprehension accuracy, according to Lyster and Saito (2010). Al-Rawi and Hussain (2019) discovered that instant feedback during listening exercises greatly improved students' capacity to relate uttered words to their meanings, which improved performance on future listening tasks in Iraqi classrooms.

2.15 Peer Learning in Vocabulary and Listening Development

Collaborative learning techniques, such group talks or pair work, can improve listening comprehension and vocabulary recall. The sociocultural paradigm of Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes how crucial social interaction is to language acquisition. Al-Khafaji and Saleh (2022) investigated how peer-based activities affected Iraqi university students' vocabulary and listening comprehension. Collaborative learning activities, such role-playing or group summarizing of listening materials, helped learners retain new words longer and understand spoken texts better.

2.16 Technological Innovations in Vocabulary Instruction

New approaches to teaching vocabulary and listening have been made possible by developments in educational technology. Virtual reality simulations, language-learning platforms, and smartphone apps are examples of tools that provide individualized and engaging experiences that improve vocabulary learning. Al-Dulaimi and Al-Saadi (2021) looked into how Iraqi EFL schools used mobile apps like Memrise and Duolingo. They discovered that because these applications offered instant feedback and context-based learning, students who used them to practice their vocabulary performed better on listening tests.

3. Methodology
3.1 Participants

The study involved 100 Iraqi EFL learners enrolled in intermediate and advanced English language courses at a university in Iraq. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 years, and their proficiency levels were determined through a standardized English placement test.

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The learners were chosen using stratified random sampling to ensure representation of both intermediate and advanced learners.

3.2 Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was adopted to explore the impact of vocabulary acquisition on listening comprehension. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests, while qualitative data were gathered through a questionnaire and interviews. The study followed a six-week intervention, where participants were exposed to vocabulary instruction integrated with listening practice.

3.3 Instruments

Vocabulary Test: A standardized vocabulary test (Vocabulary Size Test by Nation, 2001) was used to assess participants' vocabulary knowledge. The test included multiple-choice questions, word-definition matching, and contextual sentence completion.

Listening Comprehension Test: A listening comprehension test adapted from IELTS listening modules was administered. The test included audio recordings and comprehension questions, focusing on the ability to understand both general content and specific vocabulary.

Questionnaire: A self-reported questionnaire was distributed to gather information about participants' vocabulary learning strategies, exposure to English media, and frequency of listening practice.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences with vocabulary acquisition and its impact on listening comprehension.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Pre-Test: Participants took both the vocabulary and listening comprehension tests at the start of the study to assess their baseline performance.

Intervention: Over a six-week period, participants were engaged in vocabulary-focused activities that included listening tasks, vocabulary quizzes, and discussions. They were exposed to a variety of authentic listening materials, including podcasts, YouTube videos, and news broadcasts.

Post-Test: After the intervention, participants completed the same vocabulary and listening comprehension tests to measure changes in their knowledge and skills.

Questionnaire and Interviews: Participants completed a questionnaire regarding their vocabulary learning strategies and experiences. Interviews were conducted with 10 learners to explore their perceptions of how vocabulary influenced their listening comprehension.

4. Results
4.1 Quantitative Results
Vocabulary Test: The mean pre-test score for vocabulary was 52.3%, while the mean post-test score increased to 78.6%. A paired t-test indicated a statistically significant improvement (**t(99) = 12.45, p < .001**).
Listening Comprehension Test: The mean pre-test score for listening comprehension was 55.1%, while the mean post-test score increased to 74.2%. This improvement was also statistically significant (**t(99) = 10.87, p < .001**).

Correlation Analysis: The Pearson correlation coefficient between vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension scores was **r = 0.72, p < .001**, suggesting a strong positive relationship between the two variables.

4.2 Group Differences
ANOVA revealed that intermediate learners showed larger vocabulary gains (Mean gain = 30.1%) compared to advanced learners (Mean gain = 21.8%), (**F(1,98) = 8.65, p = .004**). However, both groups showed significant improvements in listening comprehension, with no significant difference between groups in the degree of improvement (**F(1,98) = 1.89, p = .172**).

4.3 Qualitative Results
Contextual Learning: 87% of participants reported that learning vocabulary in context was more effective than rote memorization.
Listening Practice: 76% of participants noted that exposure to authentic listening materials helped reinforce vocabulary retention.

Challenges: Some participants struggled with understanding fast-paced speech and reduced forms despite vocabulary improvements.

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5. Discussion

5.1 Vocabulary and Listening Comprehension

The study's findings confirm that vocabulary acquisition significantly enhances listening comprehension, supporting the claims made by Vandergrift and Baker (2015) and Nation (2001). Participants who improved their vocabulary knowledge were better able to understand spoken English, suggesting that vocabulary plays a foundational role in listening comprehension.

5.2 Role of Contextual Learning and Multimedia

The effectiveness of contextual learning aligns with Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari's (2021) findings that multimedia tools enhance both vocabulary retention and listening comprehension. Exposure to authentic materials, including videos and podcasts, allowed learners to understand vocabulary in its natural context, improving both recognition and comprehension.

5.3 Group-Level Differences

The difference in vocabulary gains between intermediate and advanced learners highlights the varied impact of vocabulary instruction based on proficiency level. As Razaq and Ahmed (2024) suggest, learners with lower proficiency may benefit more from explicit vocabulary instruction. However, both groups showed substantial improvements in listening comprehension, underscoring the universal importance of vocabulary knowledge.

5.4 Challenges in Listening Comprehension

Despite significant vocabulary improvement, some learners struggled with rapid speech and reduced forms, confirming Al-Shammari's (2020) assertion that listening comprehension involves more than just vocabulary. It requires learners to master strategies for dealing with speech that may be fast, unclear, or unfamiliar.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that vocabulary acquisition plays a crucial role in improving listening comprehension among Iraqi EFL learners. The findings suggest that vocabulary instruction, when combined with listening practice and contextual learning, can significantly enhance learners' ability to understand spoken English. The integration of multimedia resources and listening strategies further reinforces the connection between vocabulary and listening skills. Language educators should continue to focus on vocabulary acquisition as an integral part of

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developing listening proficiency, while also providing learners with strategies to overcome challenges in listening to natural speech.

7. Recommendations

For Teachers: Integrate vocabulary instruction with listening practice, using authentic materials and multimedia tools.

For Researchers: Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of vocabulary acquisition on listening comprehension.

For Learners: Focus on vocabulary learning through context, and engage with authentic English media to improve both vocabulary and listening skills.

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