



The Effect of Content-Based Instruction and Collaborative learning Instruction on the Development of the Metaphorical Competence of Iranian Upper- Intermediate EFL students

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Abstract

The current study aimed to investigate the effects of Content-Based Instruction and Collaborative learning instruction on metaphorical competence. The initial participants of the present study were 75 upper-intermediate EFL learners who were given an OPT the results of which were used to select 60 learners. The 60 learners were chosen and divided into three groups each consisting of 20 students and given a pretest of metaphorical competence. Next, the first experimental group was exposed to Collaborative learning teaching of metaphors. The second group was taught the target metaphorical expressions through Content-Based instruction. The control group was exposed to the conventional method of teaching. The findings of the statistical test of one-way ANOVA indicated that both Content-Based instruction and Collaborative learning instruction significantly affected the metaphorical competence of EFL learners. However, no significant difference was found between the Content-based and Collaborative learning instruction in improving L2 learners' metaphorical competence. Based on the findings of the present study, it is suggested that metaphorical language be taught via Content-Based instruction and/or Collaborative learning as both of these methods were found effective for teaching metaphorical language.

Keywords: Metaphorical language, Competence, Collaborative learning, Content-Based instruction



Introduction

The significance of metaphors in language is undeniable. Metaphorical language is widely prevalent in the everyday communication of native speakers (Gibbs, 1994). Furthermore, scholars like Danesi (1992) and Ellis (1997) argue that second language learners must equip themselves with the necessary skills and understanding to proficiently use and comprehend metaphorical expressions. This proficiency holds immense value as it not only serves as a gauge of fluency among second language learners but also aids their integration into the cultural and social dimensions of the language. Metaphorical expressions, as highlighted by Lennon (1998), can even function as efficient tools for saving cognitive efforts during processing and can act as strategies to manage discourse flow.

Researchers and experts have asserted that mastering the appropriate usage of metaphorical expressions in second language learning is a significant challenge for L2 learners. When it comes to exploring the utilization of figurative language in second language contexts, empirical studies have primarily been driven by pedagogical considerations regarding the correct application of humor (Deneire, 1995; Schmitz, 2002), irony, sarcasm, idiomatic expressions (Cooper, 1999), metaphors (Danesi, 1992), and various other forms of figurative language.

According to Rashtchi (2010), English instructors frequently encounter issues in their classrooms that hinder the language learning process. In traditional teacher-centered environments, teachers often express concerns about the challenges posed by large class sizes, student inattentiveness, insufficient outcomes relative to the input provided, and disappointing academic achievements despite teachers' dedicated efforts to enhance language acquisition. Within such classroom settings, the teacher typically assumes a dominant speaking role, orchestrates activities, and evaluates student performance while striving to engage their focus on the ongoing classroom activities.

A crucial solution involves diminishing students' reliance on the teacher, which can be achieved through content-based instruction (CBI) or immersive activities. Such an approach ensures the active engagement of all students in the language learning process simultaneously. Given that content-based instruction holds a vital role in language utilization and serves as a primary avenue for second language acquisition, its prominence as a pedagogical approach should be considerably elevated. However, in practice, it hasn't garnered the requisite attention it deserves. Moreover, a substantial body of literature exists on communicative and content-based teaching and learning, frequently in the context of adult ESL classes.

One of the problems in EFL teaching and learning is related to learners' expectations and learning style. In a study, Burrows (2008) conducted a research in EFL contexts and argued that learners were used to learning in a teacher-centered education system which tended not to encourage learner autonomy or high level of active participation. The issue in Iran's educational system lies within English instruction. English education often focuses solely on theoretical learning, detached from practical communication. The prevalent approach to teaching English in Iranian high schools is teacher-centered and lacks a communicative orientation. This is primarily due to the fact that English instruction is largely geared towards preparing students for college entrance exams.

In junior high schools, many Iranian English teachers argue that the existing teaching methodology aligns well with the goal of excelling in these entrance examinations. However, while there are students who aspire to enhance their practical English communication skills, the majority of Iranian English teachers prioritize the conventional objective of preparing students for college entrance exams. As a result, the emphasis remains largely centered on exam-based learning rather than fostering effective English communication abilities.

In light of these challenges, numerous Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers are shifting their focus from conceptualizing content to the practical application of content-based instruction (CBI). This shift is driven by the observed effectiveness of CBI methodology within classroom contexts. The significance of learning English and achieving communicative competence is particularly pronounced in countries like Iran. In such settings, the absence of exposure to native English speakers and authentic



resources underscores the shared recognition among students and teachers of the paramount importance of English language acquisition.

Therefore, applying effective ways or techniques through which learners can better learn and better communicate seems an important enterprise.

Language proficiency is a complex concept encompassing various levels of abilities and domains (Carrasquillo, 1994). Specifically, speaking involves an interactive process of constructing meaning, encompassing the production, reception, and processing of information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Among these abilities, speaking is notably challenging for both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The skill of effective communication in a new language, while adhering to its grammatical, contextual, social, and cultural nuances, presents persistent difficulties for EFL learners.

In a similar vein, while numerous researchers have explored the role of metaphor and metaphorical language in second language (L2) learning, limited attention has been given to the pedagogical approach needed for instructing metaphorical language and the potential impact of formal instruction on metaphor acquisition.

Given the relative neglect of metaphorical language in L2 curricula, learners encounter substantial challenges in comprehending and generating metaphorical expressions. This predicament arises partially from the scant consideration given to teaching metaphorical expressions within the L2 classroom context. This issue appears to be more pronounced in materials designed for Iranian students, as these materials often prioritize academic reading skills. Consequently, metaphorical expressions tend to receive minimal attention from developers, especially concerning Iranian students.

Although several studies have been carried out to explore the efficacy of Collaborative learning instruction in presenting L2 structures, little has been documented, regarding the efficacy of that in the development of metaphorical competence in L2 learners. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the possible effects that these two instructions will have on development of metaphorical competence in L2 learners. This study would be valuable for and conducive to L2 teaching to realize which teaching instruction (i.e., Collaborative learning or Content based) is more practical.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does Content-Based instruction have significantly affect on Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners' metaphorical competence?

RQ2: Does Collaborative learning instruction have significantly affect on Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners' metaphorical competence?

RQ3: Is there any significant difference between the Content-based and Collaborative learning instructions in improving L2 learners' metaphorical competence?

Method

The initial participants of the present study were 75 upper- intermediate EFL learners in International Towheed School in Dubai. These 75 learners were given an OPT the results of which were used to select only those learners whose scores fell within the range of +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean. To this aim, 60 learners were chosen and divided into three groups each consisting of 20 students.

The following instruments and materials were used in the present study:

The first test was an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) which was a 50-item test to check the proficiency of the students to see all of them were homogeneous in terms of overall language proficiency.



At the second step after assigning student to three different groups (Two experimental groups and one Control group) the learners were given a pretest, this pretest contained 40 multiple-choice items and the metaphorical expressions and idioms were selected from Oxford Idioms and Phrasal Verbs (2011, the upper-intermediate level).

The items were constructed based on correct answer format, not best answer format which means each item had one and only one right answer. The constructing of the tests was based on Writing Good Multiple-Choice Exams by Dawn M. Zimmaro, Ph.D. University of Texas – Austin.

For the instruction phase, 12 reading passages each in one section every week was conducted. The reading passages were selected from the book English Idioms in Use (2002, the upper intermediate level). The metaphorical expressions were printed in bold in the original texts.

At the end a posttest which was the same as the pretest was given to the learners. The test items were only different concerning their orders and also the order of the alternatives to nullify the practice effect.

The pretest and posttest were developed from Oxford Idiom and Phrasal Verbs (2011, the upper intermediate level), which is a famous and standard book in regard to Idioms and expressions and also the constructed tests and its items were modified, revised and finalized by two university professors so the content validity of the pretest and posttest was assured.

For the reliability of tests as, they were piloted on 30 upper intermediate students in Pardise Danesh English Institute in Tehran and characteristics of each item such as Item Facility (IF) and Item Discrimination (ID) were calculated and due revisions were made to the items which did not have appropriate indices. Moreover, the reliability of the tests was also calculated using Cronbach's Alpha and the pretest and posttest had acceptable reliability indices of .78 and .82, respectively.

Procedure

First the three groups were given a pretest, then one of the experimental groups was exposed to the content-based instruction of teaching metaphors included in 12 reading passages. For this purpose, participants were provided with metalinguistic explanation, that is, either a piece of etymological information, as imparted from the teacher, was provided to them or an attempt was made to get the participants to find the Persian equivalents of the expressions in question. Also, the participants were initially given some idea of what conceptual metaphors were.

The second group was taught the target metaphorical expressions in the same text but through Collaborative instruction as explained below.

For this purpose, the same expressions were taught based on Collaborative instruction. In this case the class was divided into three phases: pre-phase, collaborative cycle and post-phase. In the pre-phase phase, there were three objectives, first one was to activate prior knowledge of the students related to the text and expressions, and second objective was to motivate students, so the instructor introduced the topic and then he/she read through the text once without explaining any expression. The last thing in the pre-phase was explaining the students the collaborative activity which were going to be given to them in the collaborative cycle phase.

During-collaborative phase, the students were engaged in completing three different activities, Since the instruction phase was reading passages including expressions and metaphors, based on each passage, three different activities were implied, first activity was Road Trip task, in this activity the teacher asked the students to be in groups of three and plan a trip using the expressions and metaphors they had learned. When they were done, the teacher had them present their trip to the class.

Then, the class, as a whole, voted on which trip they were going to take, the second activity that was used, was that the teacher gave students different cards with the expressions and their meaning written on them, the students tried to match each card with its explanation, again this activity took place in groups. The third activity was that we put students in different groups, each group was asked to discuss the dictated expression and metaphors and predict and “assemble” a possible story by creating sentences with the taught expressions and metaphors then they shared and discussed their story with other groups and alternatively one student of each group presented the story to the whole class. And finally in post phase, they gave a report to the class.

The control group was through the usual classroom instruction. At the end of the treatment, all groups took the posttest.

Results

In the process of selecting participants and ensuring their homogeneity in terms of metaphorical competence, the initial step involved utilizing the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to gauge English language proficiency. The subsequent Table 1 provides descriptive statistics detailing the OPT scores of the initial 75 participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of 75 Students on OPT

Variables	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing				
OPT	75	0	38.6667	2.63210	28.00	45.00

As explicitly elucidated in chapter three, participants with scores below and above the mean score ± 1 standard deviation were excluded from the study, resulting in the establishment of a homogeneous group of students in terms of language proficiency. The subsequent Table 2 presents statistical information concerning the 60 students whose scores fell within the mean score ± 1 standard deviation.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Participants on OPT After Removing the Students with Scores Below and Beyond Mean Score ± 1 SD

Variables	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing				
Homogenized	60	15	39.32	1.98	30.00	43.00
OPT						

Following the selection of 60 learners who exhibited homogeneous language proficiency, they were subsequently divided into three groups, each containing 20 participants. These groups underwent a pretest assessment of metaphorical competence. To ensure homogeneity in terms of metaphorical competence prior to the treatment, a One-way ANOVA analysis was conducted on the pretest scores of the three groups. The descriptive statistics for the groups' pretest scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Groups in Terms of Pretest Scores

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum	
Content based	20	16.9000	1.86096	.41612	13.00	20.00
Collaborative learning	20	16.8500	2.23120	2.66112	12.00	23.00
Control	20	16.5500	2.16370	.48382	11.00	20.00
Total	60	16.7167	1.98376	.25610	11.00	20.00



Before running ANOVA, it was necessary to make sure that the data sets met the assumption for this test. The main assumption for ANOVA is the normality of the scores. Table 4. displays the results of Levene’s test for the pre-test Scores.

Table 4

Results of Levene’s test for the Pre-test Scores

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.255	2	17	.124

As seen in the table above, the sig equals .124 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05 indicating that the normality assumption is met. Table 5 demonstrates the results of ANOVA.

Table 5

Results of ANOVA on Pretest Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.233	2	.617	.152	.859
Within Groups	230.950	57	4.052		
Total	232.183	59			

The outcomes of the ANOVA analysis (as presented in Table 5) demonstrated that the groups did not exhibit statistically significant differences in terms of their pretest scores, with an F-value of 0.152 and a significance level of $P \leq 0.05$. Consequently, it was deduced that the participants in the study were successfully homogenized concerning their metaphorical competence prior to the commencement of the treatment. Following this homogenization, the participants underwent the treatment intervention. Upon the completion of the treatment, the three groups were administered the posttest evaluation of metaphorical competence, the results of which were utilized to address the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

To investigate the research questions of the current study, a One-way ANOVA was run on the posttest scores of the three groups. Table 6 displays the results of Levene’s test for the post-test Scores.

Table 6

Results of Levene’s test for the Pre-test Scores

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3.442	2	17	.321

As seen in the table above, the sig equals .321 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05 indicating that the normality assumption is met. Table 7 demonstrates the results of ANOVA.

Table 7*Result of ANOVA On the Posttest Scores*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	332.033	2	166.017	39.404	.000
Within Groups	240.150	57	4.213		
Total	572.183	59			

The ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference among the three study groups, with an F-value of 39.40 and a significance level of $P \leq 0.05$. This finding indicates that notable differences existed between the groups, suggesting that at least one group surpassed the performance of the other two groups, or one of the groups stood out. To pinpoint the precise nature of the distinctions between the groups, a post hoc test using Tukey's method was conducted. The outcomes of this post hoc analysis, presenting the results of multiple pairwise comparisons, are detailed in Table 8.

Table 8*Result of Multiple Comparisons by Tukey Test*

(I) Method	(J) Method	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Tukey HSD	Content based	Control	-4.75000*	.64909	.000	-6.3120	-3.1880
		Collaborative learning	.45000	.64909	.768	-1.1120	2.0120
	Control	Content based	4.75000*	.64909	.000	3.1880	6.3120
		Collaborative learning	5.20000*	.64909	.000	3.6380	6.7620
	Collaborative learning	Content based	-.45000	.64909	.768	-2.0120	1.1120
		Control	-5.20000*	.64909	.000	-6.7620	-3.6380

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Based on the results of the multiple contrasts analysis, it was observed that the Content-based instruction group demonstrated superior performance compared to the control group. This suggests that Content-Based instruction had a significant impact on enhancing metaphorical competence among Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners. Additionally, the collaborative learning group also exhibited better performance than the control group. This implies that Collaborative learning instruction significantly influenced the enhancement of metaphorical competence among Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners.

However, the findings indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the effects of Content-based and Collaborative learning instructions on improving metaphorical competence in L2 learners. In other words, the two instructional approaches produced similar results in terms of their impact on metaphorical competence enhancement.



These conclusions collectively highlight the effectiveness of both Content-Based and Collaborative learning instructions in enhancing metaphorical competence among Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners, while also suggesting the comparative similarity of outcomes between Content-based and Collaborative learning approaches in this particular context.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate if Content-Based instruction has a significant effect on Iranian EFL upper- intermediate learners' metaphorical competence. Moreover, the study aimed at finding if Collaborative learning instruction has a significant effect on Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners' metaphorical competence. Finally, the study sought to explore any significant difference between the Content-based and Collaborative learning instructions in improving L2 learners' metaphorical competence. The results derived from the statistical analysis revealed that both Content-Based instruction and Collaborative learning had a noteworthy impact on enhancing the metaphorical competence of EFL learners. Nevertheless, there was no notable distinction observed between the effects of Content-Based and Collaborative learning approaches in terms of improving the metaphorical competence of L2 learners. The positive effect of Content-based instruction on metaphorical competence of the participants of the study was not far from expectations. Besides, there are empirical studies supporting the efficacy of Content-based instruction. The studies by Lyster, R., & Ballinger, S. (2011), Short, D. J., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007), have all pointed to the effectiveness of Content -based learning in various aspects of language learning. The helpfulness and benefits of Content-based instruction were fully discussed by Tedick, D. J. (2015). They argued that through Content based instruction both process and product are equally dealt with.

The positive effect of Collaborative learning instructions on the metaphorical competence can be justified on the grounds that the explicit teaching of metaphorical competence has certain theoretical advantages for learners. With respect to positive effect of Collaborative learning , the findings of present study are in line with Fernández Dobao, A. (2012), Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999) They all believe that language content needs to be taught collaboratively in order to be effective.

Conclusion

According to the obtained results some pedagogical implications can be suggested for Iranian context of foreign language learning. The very first one is that metaphorical competence and the way it should be taught needs to be further emphasized in language classes. In addition, it is suggested that metaphorical language should be taught via Content-based instruction and/or Collaborative learning instruction as both of these methods were found effective in the current study. The above implications require attention by various people involved in the world of language teaching. For instance, material developers and syllabus designers need to incorporate the metaphorical language activities in a Content- based format and also Collaborative learning should be easily encouraged through these activities. In parallel, foreign language teachers need to be well prepared to handle metaphorical language instruction which puts further responsibilities on the shoulder of teacher trainers and teacher education systems.



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