



Impact of Discourse Analysis-Based Instruction on Iraqi EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning and Reading Comprehension Ability

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Original Research

Received:
4 April 2025
Revised:
17 April 2025
Accepted:
8 June 2025
Published online:
18 July 2025

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Abstract:

This study focused on investigating the effectiveness of instruction in discourse analysis in enhancing reading comprehension and vocabulary development in Iraqi EFL learners. It also examined variation in achievement in terms of three levels of proficiency—elementary, intermediate, and advanced—and learners' attitudes towards instruction in discourse analysis. Employing a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design, 120 Iraqi EFL learners at Baghdad's British Council took part in the study. Participants were grouped into experimental and control groups, with experimental group learners being instructed in discourse analysis. Oxford Quick Placement Test, tests in reading comprehension and vocabulary, and semi-structured interviews were utilized for collecting data. Statistical analysis showed a significant improvement in learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary following instruction in discourse analysis, with most significant improvements in reading comprehension and development in learners at an advanced level of proficiency. Qualitative analysis of the data through thematic analysis showed increased motivation, increased reading motivation, and enhanced critical thinking skills in learners.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Discourse analysis-based instruction; Reading comprehension; Vocabulary learning; EFL learners

Introduction

Reading constitutes a key skill undergirding academic achievement in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) environments. In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension (RC) is determined by a range of factors, such as background information, lexical skill, and reading strategy use (Peker and Ozkaynak, 2020; Perkins et al., 2013). For L2 learners, intelligible and comprehensible input is critical for language competency development, with increased prioritization placed on mastering meaning over grammar in written language (Zhang, 2012). Knowledge of vocabulary is significant in RC, with learners relying on background language competencies to make inferences about meaning. Rich lexical competencies are important for L2 learners in attempting to comprehend written texts; in its lack, inferring

meanings for unfamiliar words through contextual information proves particularly challenging (Chandran and Shah, 2019). In addition, background information about a subject, cultural information, and an appropriately challenging level of texts contribute to enhancing understandability of texts (Damayanti, 2019; Pomintel, 2023).

Reading proves an effective tool for incidental vocabulary learning (VL), in which new lexicon items become incorporated incidentally in the performance of a different activity, such as reading for meaning. This mechanism provides learners with an opportunity to encounter words in situ, and in doing so, consolidate form, meaning, and use (Shah et al., 2010). Empirical investigations reveal that even a single reading encounter with a word can contribute to a minor improvement in lexical competencies, but continuous encounters with a range of words in a variety of settings is critical for enhancing long-term recall and deeper

processing (Zudianto and Ashadi, 2021).

The cultivation of a strong vocabulary is critical for L2 learners, not only for reading but for enhancing writing, speaking, and communicative competency in general. Despite its critical value, mastery of the necessary vocabulary is a significant challenge for most learners. According to studies, learners need access to a range of several thousand-word families in order to use them in conversation effectively, or to understand texts at a satisfactory level (Ahmadi and Ismail, 2012).

The Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH) proposes a theoretical model for enhancing vocabulary acquisition through three factors: need, search, and evaluation. These factors specify cognitive processes learners go through when encountering unfamiliar terms. Deeper mental processing such as actively searching for a word's meaning and evaluating its use in a specific environment yields enhanced learning and recall (Elekaei et al., 2015).

In recent years, discourse analysis (DA) has become increasingly acknowledged for its utility in enriching both reading and vocabulary development in EFL settings. Instruction with a basis in DA prioritizes analysis of language use in specific settings, with consideration for factors such as cohesion, coherence, and pragmatic function. As a practice, it can have the potential to provide learners with a deeper, more contextualized awareness of language use in real-life settings, and therefore, a deeper level of vocabulary awareness and reading competency.

Literature review

Theoretical background

Reading comprehension is a challenging mental activity that entails reading and creating meaning out of printed text (Snow, 2002). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, reading comprehension is particularly challenging because learners have little language and background information. According to the interactive model of reading (Rumelhart, 1977), effective comprehension arises both through bottom-up processes (interpreting individual sentences and words) and top-down processes (making use of background information and whatever one knows in order to comprehend).

A lot of hypotheses have been proposed in an attempt to account for reading comprehension in second language (L2) environments. Schema Theory (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983) identifies background information in reading, stating that new information is understood in terms of one's background information. According to the Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1988), comprehension entails creating a mental model of the text through information both in and out of the text and one's background information.

Knowledge of vocabulary is particularly significant in reading comprehension. According to Nation (2001), several types of vocabulary information have been distinguished, including both receptive and productive types, with receptive information particularly significant in reading. The depth, in terms of one's familiarity with a word, and breadth, in terms of the number of words one knows, both contribute to reading comprehension (Qian, 2002).

According to the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, phonetics, orthography, and semantics of a word impact an individual's reading and comprehension skills (Perfetti and Hart, 2002). According to this theoretical model, enriching students' lexical knowledge can promote improvements in reading comprehension.

Discourse analysis and language learning

Discourse analysis is a study of language use in specific settings. It considers how meaning is constructed through language and social factors (Gee, 2014). In language instruction, discourse analysis enables one to understand how language is utilized in actual conversation. It extends grammar to explore larger speech and writing parts. A model for discourse analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1985). SFL considers language in terms of its social environments and its role in them. SFL provides a full model for analyzing texts, examining their meanings in terms of ideas (ideas, content), social relations, and structure.

Application of discourse analysis in language instruction is referred to as discourse analysis-based instruction. It enables learners to analyze texts in a critical manner. They examine cohesion, coherence, genre, and pragmatic function, for instance. The intention is to enable learners to comprehend language and become effective communicators in the target language.

Empirical background

Numerous studies have examined language instruction, such as reading and vocabulary, to explore how discourse analysis-based instruction aids learners. Sadeghi and Zarei (2013) examined how concept mapping, a discourse-based technique, impacted vocabulary instruction for Iranian EFL learners. In their investigation, learners who utilized concept mapping performed well in tests of vocabulary, both immediately following instruction and in follow-up tests.

Atai and Nazari (2011) examined the impact of instruction in discourse markers on reading comprehension and vocabulary development in Iranian EFL learners. According to their study, learners who received explicit instruction in discourse markers showed significant improvement in reading comprehension and vocabulary when compared with learners who received no such instruction. Ghaith and Harkouss (2003) examined the impact of using discourse analysis techniques on reading comprehension in Lebanese EFL learners and discovered that learners instructed with DA-based instruction performed better in reading comprehension tests compared to learners instructed with traditional instruction. Khatib and Safari (2011) examined the impact of explicitly instructing discourse structure on reading comprehension in Iranian EFL learners and discovered that learners instructed in discourse structure performed much better in reading comprehension tests compared to a control group.

Najarzadegan et al. (2018) examined the effect of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the critical thinking (CT) skills of 96 EFL undergraduates across high, mid, and low proficiency levels, using the "Watson and Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal" (WGCTA) and four weekly sessions

based on van Dijk's model. Results showed CDA enhanced CT, with high proficiency learners outperforming low and mid-level groups, though mid and low groups showed no significant difference. This suggests proficiency influences CDA's impact on CT. Similarly, Najarzagdegan (2022) investigated CDA's effect on RC in 96 EFL undergraduates, categorized by the Oxford Placement Test, using a TOEFL-based pretest and posttest after van Dijk's model training. One-way ANCOVA and Bonferroni tests indicated significant RC improvements, with high proficiency learners excelling over mid and low groups, and mid over low, highlighting proficiency's role in CDA's RC benefits.

Gap in the literature

Although previous studies have proven that DA-based instruction can contribute to reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, little work has been conducted in the Iraqi EFL environment. In addition, little work has examined the impact of DA-based instruction at various learner proficiency levels, and little work has examined learners' perceptions of the method. This study seeks to bridge these gaps through an examination of the impact of DA-based instruction on Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition at various learner proficiency levels and taking learners' perceptions of the method into consideration.

While Knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension is significant in EFL, yet many Iraqi learners continue to find them challenging. Traditional instruction tends not to expose learners to effective techniques for studying reading and challenging texts' vocabulary. There is a necessity for new approaches which can enable learners to comprehend language in use and enhance learners' skills in extracting meaning in written texts.

Such discourse analysis-based instruction could alleviate such problems by providing tools for studying language use and reading texts more profoundly. However, how far it is effective in the Iraqi EFL setting for learners who are variably skilled is an aspect that has not yet been comprehended.

Objectives of the study

The overall objectives of this study are defined below:

- To explore the impact of discourse analysis-based instruction on Iraqi EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition.
- To explore the impact of discourse analysis-based instruction on Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension skills.
- To assess whether the effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction varies with different proficiency levels (elementary, intermediate, and advanced).
- To investigate Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions about discourse analysis-based instruction.

Research Questions and Hypotheses The current study

aimed to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Do Iraqi EFL learners gain significant improvements in vocabulary learning through discourse analysis-based instruction?

RQ2: Do Iraqi EFL learners gain significant improvements in reading comprehension skills through discourse analysis-based instruction?

RQ3: Do significant differences in effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary learning occur with regard to different proficiency levels (elementary, intermediate, and advanced)?

RQ4: What are Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions about the effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction for reading comprehension and vocabulary learning?

H01: Discourse analysis-based instruction doesn't have a significant impact on Iraqi EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

H02: Discourse analysis-based instruction doesn't have a significant impact on Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension skills.

H03: There are no significant differences in effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary learning with regard to different proficiency levels.

Significance of the study

The current study possesses both theoretical and practical importance:

Theoretical significance

- It deepens our understanding of how discourse analysis-based instruction impacts vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension in EFL settings.

- It informs about the relation between proficiency levels and effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction.

The findings of the present study have the potential to inform the development of more general theory about reading comprehension and second language vocabulary acquisition.

Practical relevance

The findings can act as a useful tool for Iraqi EFL instructors and similar settings, allowing them to apply more effective instruction in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary instruction.

Moreover, these findings can inform curriculum developers and materials writers in developing materials and courses that embed discourse analysis principles. Besides, teacher training courses can have implications for the study's findings, highlighting the role of discourse analysis in language instruction.

Methodology

Research design

In the current study, a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was utilized to explore the effectiveness of instruction based on discourse analysis in enhancing Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition skills. The quasi-experimental quantitative design involved a pre-test-post-test-controlled group, and through it, an impact could be measured in relation to the discourse analysis-based instruction in contrast with a conventional instruction format. With such a structure, a well-planned comparison could be conducted in a rigorous manner in which participants in the experimental group received treatments derived from discourse analytics instruction. For the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with an objective of discovering learners' experiences and perceptions about the discourse analysis-based instruction format. With such a mixed-methods approach, a balanced view could be developed regarding both intervention effectiveness and learners' reported experiences.

Participants

The subjects in this study were recruited through a convenient sampling method at British Council in Baghdad, Iraq. 120 Iraqi EFL learners participated in the study, including both male and female learners between 15 and 25 years of age. To account for variations in language proficiency, participants were categorized into three proficiency levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. They were divided into two main groups of equal numbers: Experimental Group = 60 Control Group = 60. Further division of each was done according to the proficiency level as follows: Subdivided Experimental Group: EEG = 20 IEG = 20 AEG = 20 Control Group Subgroups: ECG = 20 ICG = 20 ACG = 20

This stratified division ensured that the proficiency levels were represented across the study and, by extension, allowed for a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention at varied learning levels.

Instruments

Several instruments were used to broadly capture the learning progress of the participants:

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT): This standardized test was carried out at the beginning of the study in order to identify the participants' level of proficiency and to form homogeneous groups regarding proficiency. The OQPT measures grammar and vocabulary knowledge through 60 multiple-choice questions.

Vocabulary Learning Test: The participants' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention was measured using a researcher-developed vocabulary test. It was a 50-item multiple-choice test of learners' understanding of key vocabulary items covered in the instructional materials.

Reading Comprehension Test: In addition, a reading comprehension test, developed by the researcher, was used to assess learners' reading comprehension skill both before and after instruction. The test consisted of four reading passages with 10 multiple-choice questions for each reading

passage. The questions were carefully selected to cover a variety of genres and difficulty levels that represented a range of proficiency categories in terms of diversity.

Semi-structured Interviews: To explore learners' experiences with instruction in discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample drawn from the experimental group. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions designed to seek learners' perceptions about the instruction, its strengths, and its weaknesses encountered during instruction.

Model of the study

In employing a pretest-posttest control group design, the study utilized a model represented in the following diagram:

Experimental Group(EG) : O1 → X → O2

Control Group Control : O1 → – → O2

where: O1 = Pretest (Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension)

X = Treatment (Discourse Analysis-Based Instruction)

O2 = Posttest (Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension)

The use of such a design helped the researcher in comparing both inter-group and intra-group variances in terms of vocabulary gain and reading comprehension both before and after intervention.

Procedure for data collection

Data collection took place through a series of carefully planned phases, each designed to assess learners' language skill in a systematic manner, monitor learners' progression, and gain in-depth insights into learners' experiences during instruction.

The initial stage involved administration of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). This uniform test was conducted in an attempt to determine the baseline level of proficiency in the use of the English language for the participants. By comparing performance, the researchers could classify the participants appropriately, and in doing so, maintain an even distribution of learners in both groups, experimental and control. Next, a pretest was conducted for all participants in both groups. By testing learners' current level of reading and vocabulary, a baseline for gauging future improvement in both groups was determined.

Next, in the stage of treatment, both groups underwent different instruction strategies. For ten weeks, an intensive training session, focused on instruction through discourse analysis, took place for each group, with three training sessions per week for concentrated practice. Instruction focused on the structural aspects of texts, use of discourse markers, and textual cohesion governing principles. By combining such instruction techniques, learners were encouraged to break down language in real-life settings, and in doing so, develop a deeper level of understanding and recall for vocabulary.

The control group, in contrast, continued with traditional instruction techniques, excluding explicit use of discourse analysis techniques. Traditional training continued for them,

providing a comparative basis for gauging effectiveness of instruction through discourse analysis techniques.

Once instruction reached its conclusion, a posttest, similar in format to the pretest, was conducted for all participants. By employing a similar format, the researchers could gauge improvement in reading comprehension and development in terms of vocabulary in both groups.

In order to enrich the quantitative results, a qualitative part was added to the study. A purposeful subset of experimental group participants took part in semi-structured interviews. These in-depth talks helped researchers explore learners' experiences, feelings, and observations about discourse analysis-based instruction, providing meaningful information about its impact in terms of factors that could not be measured through quantifiable tests.

Data analysis procedures

To assess the impact of discourse analysis-based instruction, a mixed-methods analysis combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. This mixed-methods model helped in a thorough analysis of both quantifiable learning achievement and learners' individual experiences with the instruction intervention.

Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative analysis started with a use of descriptive statistics, in which the pretest and posttest values were examined through use of measures of central tendency, including mean and standard deviation values. This helped in creating an overall summary of participants' performance both before and after intervention. To gauge effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction, independent samples t-tests were conducted. These statistics compared posttest values between experimental and control groups, and through them, researchers could conclude whether instruction intervention produced significant posttest and pretest differences in terms of vocabulary development and reading comprehension. In addition, paired samples t-tests were conducted in experimental group to analyze individual learners' improvement between pretest and posttest. By comparing these in-between group fluctuations, through its analysis, the study could calculate direct impact of discourse analysis-based instruction towards development in terms of vocabulary and reading comprehension.

To examine any variation in intervention efficacy at different levels of proficiency, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized. As a statistical tool, it measured performance improvement in learners grouped into three categories of proficiency: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. By employing such a process, information about the level at which learners at different levels of proficiency gained through instruction in terms of an intervention strat-

egy was derived. Thereafter, in an attempt to gauge the effectiveness of the measured impact, Cohen's *d* was calculated. As an effect size, it helped in gauging improvement in reading and development in terms of vocabulary, and in enhancing an intervention's concrete impact in real-life settings.

Qualitative data analysis

Apart from quantitative analysis, qualitative information derived through semi-structured interviews underwent theme analysis. Interviewee transcripts underwent thorough review with an objective of unearthing recurring trends and patterns in learners' experiences in terms of instruction in discourse analysis. Trends derived through such a process were grouped under general categories, such as learner motivation, value placed in instruction, and obstacles encountered in the learning process.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study provided a well-rounded analysis of discourse analysis-based instruction. The empirical findings from statistical tests were enriched by learners' personal insights, offering a more nuanced understanding of how this instructional approach influences vocabulary development and reading comprehension in an EFL context.

Results

Impact of discourse analysis-based instruction on vocabulary learning

In order to assess the effectiveness of instruction based on discourse analysis in terms of developing vocabulary, an independent samples t-test was conducted in comparing both experimental and control groups' posttest performance. The results can be seen in Table 1.

The results indicate a statistically significant difference in vocabulary learning between the experimental group ($M = 42.15$, $SD = 5.23$) and the control group ($M = 35.82$, $SD = 4.96$), $t(118) = 6.78$, $p < .001$. The large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.24$) suggests that discourse analysis-based instruction had a strong and positive impact on vocabulary acquisition.

To further examine within-group progress, a paired samples t-test was conducted for the experimental group, comparing pretest and posttest scores. The results are presented in Table 2.

The significant increase in scores from pretest to posttest ($t(59) = -15.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.76$) confirms that discourse analysis-based instruction led to substantial vocabulary improvement. The very large effect size ($d = 1.76$) indicates that learners benefitted significantly from the treatment.

Table 1. Independent Samples t-test Results for Vocabulary Learning.

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Experimental	60	42.15	5.23	6.78	118	< .001	1.24
Control	60	35.82	4.96				

Table 2. Paired Samples t-test for Vocabulary Learning (Experimental Group).

Test	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pretest	33.45	4.87	-15.62	59	< .001	1.76
Posttest	42.15	5.23				

Impact of discourse analysis-based instruction on reading comprehension

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the posttest reading comprehension scores of the experimental and control groups. The results are presented in Table 3.

The results reveal a significant improvement in reading comprehension in the experimental group ($M = 31.28$, $SD = 4.12$) when compared with the control group ($M = 26.75$, $SD = 4.35$), $t(118) = 5.93$, $p < .001$. The high effect size ($d = 1.08$) reveals that instruction guided through discourse analysis played a key role in enhancing reading comprehension skills. To analyze within-group progress in reading comprehension, a paired samples t-test was performed on the experimental group's pretest and posttest scores. The results are shown in Table 4.

The notable improvement in reading comprehension performance ($t(59) = -13.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.65$) attests to the effectiveness of instruction with a discourse analysis orientation in enhancing students' ability to work with and understand texts.

Effectiveness of discourse analysis-based instruction across proficiency levels

A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to explore variances in vocabulary and reading comprehension gain at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced learner levels. The results for vocabulary gain in learning are displayed in Table 5.

The results reveal a significant statistical difference in vocabulary improvement scores at different levels of proficiency, $F(2, 57) = 18.74$, $p < .001$, with a high effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.39$). This signifies that learner with different levels of proficiency experienced different degrees of improvement with regard to vocabulary, with high-proficiency learners having gained most significant improvements. The

information regarding reading comprehension improvement scores can be seen in Table 6.

The significant reading comprehension gain discrepancies, $F(2, 57) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.35$, serve to corroborate in part the claim that instruction based in discourse analysis is particularly beneficial for high-proficiency learners. Following post-hoc Tukey HSD tests, corroborative analysis confirmed that high-proficiency learners showed significant improvement in relation to both intermediate and beginning learners ($p < .05$).

Learners' views of instruction based on discourse analysis

A rich inductive thematic analysis of qualitative information collected through semi-structured interviews elicited three salient themes in relation to learners' views of the intervention:

–**Enhanced Textual Comprehension** – Participants showed an increased ability to analyze and interpret texts with increased effectiveness.

–**Increased Motivation and Engagement** – Participants voiced a renewed pleasure in reading and increased motivation for lexical development through contextual awareness.

–**Enhanced Critical Thinking Ability** – Analysis of discourse structures facilitated improvements in deeper analytic and inferential thinking capacities.

The analysis confirms the general value of instruction based in discourse analysis, its value extending beyond academic achievement and its contribution towards a deeper and engaged language development orientation.

Discussion

The results of this in-depth and thorough investigation yield strong and convincing evidence for the efficacy of instruction grounded in discourse analysis, particularly in terms of its impact on Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension

Table 3. Independent Samples t-test Results for Reading Comprehension.

Group	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Experimental	60	31.28	4.12	5.93	118	< .001	1.08
Control	60	26.75	4.35				

Table 4. Paired Samples t-test for Reading Comprehension (Experimental Group).

Test	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pretest	24.62	3.98	-13.87	59	< .001	1.65
Posttest	31.28	4.12				

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA Results for Vocabulary Gain Scores.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between Groups	1245.63	2	622.82	18.74	< .001	0.39
Within Groups	1896.35	57	33.27			
Total	3141.98	59				

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Results for Reading Comprehension Gain Scores.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between Groups	987.42	2	493.71	15.62	< .001	0.35
Within Groups	1802.56	57	31.62			
Total	2789.98	59				

capabilities and vocabulary acquisition skills. The significant discrepancies that were seen between the experimental group, who received instruction grounded in discourse analysis, and the control group, who did not receive instruction in such a manner, and the high effect sizes documented, firmly confirm that integration of the tenets of discourse analysis in language instruction can yield significant and meaningful improvements in such critical language capabilities.

In addition, the current study's findings concur with studies in the field, conducted in the past, that have consistently emphasized a range of positive consequences with regard to discourse analysis-based language instruction (e.g., Ghaith and Harkouss (2003); Khatib and Safari (2011)). The positive impact seen with regard to vocabulary acquisition can in part be credited to deeper cognitive processing experienced when learners are placed in a contextualized environment, a principle emphasized through the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Elekaei et al., 2015). By closely examining individual words' function in larger structures of discourse, learners can most probably develop a deeper and sophisticated level of comprehension regarding both word meanings and proper use. Moreover, improvements in reading comprehension capabilities can be understood through an increased concern with textual cohesion, coherence, and overall structure of discourse that was developed through instruction grounded in discourse analysis. Instruction of such a form can have prepared learners with more efficient strategies that are critical for processing complex texts and for effectively extracting meaning out of them, a fact supported through observations in studies conducted in the past (e.g., Atai and Nazari (2011)).

Moreover, the varying impact across learners' proficiency levels, with high-proficiency learners showing the greatest improvement, underscores the importance of considering existing language capabilities when implementing discourse analysis-based instruction. This finding suggests that learners with stronger language skills and developed metacognitive abilities are better positioned to leverage the analytical tools provided by this method. The observed proficiency-related differences in the current study align with findings

from Najarzadegan et al. (2018) and Najarzadegan (2022), who utilized CDA based on van Dijk's model. Their studies demonstrated that high-proficiency EFL learners benefited more from CDA in enhancing critical thinking and reading comprehension compared to lower proficiency groups. While the current study focused on vocabulary and RC gains through DA-based instruction, the consistency across these studies suggests that higher language proficiency facilitates deeper engagement with discourse-level features, whether through CDA or broader DA approaches. However, Najarzadegan et al. (2018) noted no significant difference between mid and low proficiency groups in CT gains, contrasting with the current study's and Najarzadegan (2022)'s findings of significant RC improvements across all proficiency levels, indicating potential variation in how discourse analysis impacts different skills.

The positive conceptions learners have about instruction derived through discourse analysis, revealed through the qualitative analysis, serve to lend additional justification for the effectiveness of such an educational practice. Reported improvements in motivation, engagement, and critical thinking are in strong agreement with the general aims of instruction through discourse analysis. What these findings imply is that such a practice can have positive payoffs extending even beyond improvements in immediate language competencies.

Conclusion

The present study has established powerful evidence regarding high potential that might be released in improving Iraqi EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension skills by instruction based on discourse analysis. It was found that the incorporation of discourse analysis principles into language instruction in a systematic way turns the process of learning not only more effective but also more meaningful. This approach to teaching encourages learners to engage with language in context; thus, furthering an awareness of how words function in discourse and improving the ability to interpret and analyze textual structures. Another important point well brought out is that

DA-based instruction proves to be more effective for higher proficiency learners because they have the necessary linguistic grounding to appreciate the critical enterprise with discourse-level features and draw deeper meaning from the texts.

While the effectiveness of DA instruction for high-proficiency learners is apparent, future studies should work towards developing this instruction for less proficient learners. Examining approaches that adapt discourse analysis techniques, such as simplifying discourse structures, augmented guided practice, and utilizing interactive scaffolding techniques, will also make their benefits accessible to beginners and intermediate learners. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are required that explore long-term effects of DA-based instruction on overall language development. Investigations into its effectiveness with regard to other language skills, such as writing, speaking, and listening, would become necessary to complete the picture that discourse analysis could contribute to holistic language proficiency. Addressing these aspects will go a long way in refining and expanding discourse analysis applications within EFL instruction so that future research could be made accessible and beneficial for a broader range of learners.

Implications of the study

The findings of the present study therefore carry some critical implications for English as a Foreign Language instruction along with certain associated pedagogic principles. Actually, a greater integration of discourse analysis can be done for almost all aspects of language education with a view to effective teaching-learning. Specifically:

Textbook writers and instructional material developers should therefore make a conscious effort to apply the principles of discourse analysis when developing learning materials. Effective embedding of authentic discourse, pragmatic awareness, and real-life language use in learning materials can allow students to learn more about language than perhaps any isolated grammatical rules. It enhances critical thinking, deep comprehension, and allows for an increase in the communicative competence of the learner.

DA-based methods should be taught in teacher education programs. Educators prepared with a strong grounding in DA approaches will be better able to lead students through more interactive and more meaningful, contextually rich language learning processes. Specialized workshops and hands-on training will prepare teachers to use the DA-based approach in the best way to gain better results in students' engagement and overall improvement of language proficiency.

Traditional views of language testing have been steeped in notions of structural accuracy and discrete-point testing. If DA-based instruction is to bring about deeper awareness of language, however, the practice of language testing may well need to be considerably refashioned. Assessments in the future will have to incorporate discourse-based evaluation procedures that test the ability of learners to interpret, produce, and interact with language in authentic communicative contexts. This way, testing methods can actually reflect the students' advancement in pragmatic and discourse

competence.

Limitations of the study

Though this study gives an insight into the role of discourse analysis in language instruction, the following limitations must be considered:

The research period is just ten weeks, and such a relatively short period constrains the measurement of the long-term impacts caused by DA-based instruction. Language development is a long process, and in further studies, this research shall be done in the form of longitudinal design to delve into discourse analysis for continued effects it will have on learners' proficiency for an extended period.

It targeted a certain group of learners in one single educational institution in Baghdad; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized into every different kind of educational setting, learner population, or cultural context. To enhance generalization, further research is suggested with varied institutions and regions for a wider and more representative sample.

Although it essentially explored the efficacy of DA-based instruction in the spheres of reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, it has immense and direct importance to the domain of language learning as a whole, not necessarily covering speaking, writing, and listening skills. It therefore remains open for future studies to establish in what respect a DA-based approach can impact such linguistic competencies as a necessary means for defining their pedagogical effectivity more comprehensively.

Suggestions for further research

It is of paramount importance to conduct longitudinal studies with a view to providing a deeper level of understanding regarding long-term consequences involved in instruction derived through discourse analysis. These in-depth studies should explore in a systemic manner how such an instruction model affects language development in terms of its dimensions over long-term periods of time. By closely following and tracking learners' development over several months, even years, researchers will have an opportunity to detect and discern trends in development, recall, and potential setbacks experienced in between. By following such a process, one will gain rich insights regarding long-term impact and efficacy that discourse analysis yields in language development processes.

Subsequent studies must make an earnest attempt at investigating in a deeper manner the efficacy of instruction derived through discourse analysis (DA) in a range of age groups and in a range of cultural settings. Since learners have disparate cognitive capacities, educational experiences, and sociocultural background, it is important to understand in a concrete manner through studies how instruction derived through DA addresses and accommodates specific requirements of disparate groups, such as learners in early years, adolescents, and adults. In addition, an examination of how dominant cultural values and conventions impact both acceptance and output generated through instruction derived through DA can contribute immensely towards fine-tuning pedagogical approaches. That such fine-tuning is important in terms of such approaches becoming relevant,

effective, and flexible in terms of a range of educational environments cannot be overestimated.

Since learners with lesser capacities for proficiency can face specific obstacles in dealing with discourse analysis, it is important for future studies to investigate in a meaningful manner in terms of instruction derived through DA in a manner that can effectively serve such learners' specific requirements. By isolating specific obstacles encountered by beginners and studying in a meaningful manner potential instruction adaptations, instructors will have a chance to develop focused approaches that make DA-derived instruction accessible and useful for all learners involved. By following such a path of inquiry, one must pay specific attention to techniques in terms of scaffolding, use of reduced-discourse materials, and incorporation of interactive and multimodal aids, with a view towards optimizing learner output for each participant involved.

In addition to its important role in reading and comprehension skill development, instruction in discourse analysis can have profound and long-term implications for other key language skills that are no less significant, such as speaking and writing. It is imperative that future research digs deeper and looks in detail at how instruction in discourse analysis can impact learners' skill in generating coherent and well-formed written texts and in producing effective and meaningful speech. By conducting meticulous observation and thorough analysis of students' development and improvement in such productive skills over a long period, researchers can effectively assess the efficacy and level to which discourse analysis methodologies enable improvement in overall language skill and communicative competency in a manner that can be measured and quantitated.

Authors contributions

All authors have contributed equally to prepare the paper.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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