

Measuring the Impact of Using Cloze Procedure Exercises to Develop Vocabulary Repertoire of Iraqi EFL Learners at the Intermediate Stage

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of using Cloze Procedure Exercises in expanding the vocabulary range of Iraqi EFL learners at an intermediate level. The study employed a post-test-only experimental approach. The sample was a random one that consisted of 71 second intermediate male students from a high school in Baghdad, Directorate General of Education, Rusafa III. They were assigned into two groups: an experimental group (CG) taught using Cloze Procedure Exercises, and a control group (TG) taught according to traditional method. The study was conducted to investigate whether Cloze-deletion-type exercises might be more effective in improving vocabulary achievement of the learners than traditional teaching. Two tests including a Multiple-Choice Cloze test and a C-Test were used to assess learners' vocabulary performance. The outcomes showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group, suggesting that context embedded Cloze task fostered learners' ability to infer meaning, recall words and increase comprehension. These results indicate that Cloze Procedure Exercises are useful for vocabulary learning and promoting active involvement. The study suggests that EFL classes

should integrate Cloze-based approaches to promote interactive, contextualized and functional vocabulary learning in the Iraqi context.

Keywords: Cloze procedure, Vocabulary development, EFL learners, Intermediate stage, Contextualized exercises

قياس أثر استخدام تمارين التتمة (اختبار الحذف) لتطوير مخزون المفردات لطلاب اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق للمرحلة المتوسطة

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الملخص

بحثت هذه الدراسة في قياس أثر استخدام تمارين التتمة (اختبار الحذف) لتطوير مخزون المفردات لطلاب اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق للمرحلة المتوسطة. اتبعت الدراسة تصميمًا تجريبيًا يعتمد على اختبار بعدي فقط، وشملت عينة مكونة من ٧١ طالبًا في الصف الثاني المتوسط من مديرية تربية بغداد الرصافة الثالثة. تم تقسيم المشاركين إلى مجموعتين المجموعة التجريبية التي تم تدريسها باستخدام تمارين اختبار الحذف والمجموعة الضابطة التي تم تدريسها بالطريقة التقليدية. هدفت الدراسة إلى تحديد ما إذا كانت الأنشطة القائمة على اختبار الحذف تعزز تعلم المفردات بشكل أكثر فعالية من التعليم التقليدي. تم استخدام أداتين لقياس أداء الطلاب في المفردات: اختبار الاختيار المتعدد و اختبار الحذف الجزئي. أظهرت النتائج تفوق المجموعة التجريبية على المجموعة الضابطة، مما يشير إلى أن إشراك الطلاب في أنشطة اختبار الحذف السياقية ساعدهم على استنتاج المعاني، واسترجاع الكلمات، وتعزيز الفهم. وتبرز النتائج أن تمارين اختبار الحذف تعد استراتيجية فعالة لتحسين تعلم المفردات وتعزيز المشاركة الفعالة للمتعلمين. وتوصي الدراسة بدمج تقنيات الإكمال الناقص في الفصول الدراسية لتطوير مفردات تفاعلية، ذات معنى، ومبنية على السياق لدى المتعلمين العراقيين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تمارين الإغلاق، تطوير المفردات، متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية، المرحلة المتوسطة، تمارين سياقية.

1.1.Introduction

The vocabulary of a language is, after all, the key to understanding any text. It is also regarded as a method of transmitting and learning the four skills. So, vocabulary learning is necessarily at the heart of first language (L1) acquisition and also second language (L2) acquisition.

Vocabulary has not always been widely acknowledged as a key area of language teaching, but interest in its role in L2 learning has recently developed significantly (Read, 2004) and specialists are now advocating its place at the forefront of both teachers' and learners' attention. From the growing number of experimental studies and pedagogical literature, it is clear that there is a rapidly increasing interest in this topic.

The best-known reduced test is the Cloze Test presented as a psychological device by Taylor (1953) for measuring readability. The theoretical framework underpinning the cloze test is The Law of Closure from Gestalt psychology which constitutes the theoretical basis of the cloze procedure (Taylor, 1953). The cloze test process is accomplished by omitting the words, in the passage, according to some rules. The participants were asked to: Symmetry: let the subjects complete the following broken series.

Ajideh & Mozaffarzadeh (2012) identified two limitations for the cloze test; "provision of the list of choices and decreasing number of items in the test". Multiple-choice cloze as an alternative to the cloze was suggested by Ajideh & Mozaffarzadeh (2012) to compensate for the deficiencies of the cloze. Multiple-choice cloze test allows enough placement accuracy, for ease of testing and scoring time and a restricted choice range (Baghaei & Ravand, 2016).

The cloze test has been found to be valid when the validity correlation is calculated for all word types in a square root transformation . Several methods to the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge exist. Some of them are assumed to harness the context to encourage incidental learning and others rely on decontextualized , explicit learning (Feng 2024).

It is then only by seeking out and considering other theories of what the cloze procedure does that one can explain why doing the cloze may affect students' vocabulary repertoire. The use of the cloze procedure

requires learners to draw on all their combined skills and energy in order to fill missing information in a text, through various dimensions of their language as vocabulary source and discursive competence.

1.2.Statement of problem

Iraqi EFL Intermediate School Students encounter obstacles in learning vocabulary from reading it. The reason for this is the nonexistence of appropriate strategies applied by teachers to teach vocabulary. This research attempts to investigate the influence of cloze test technique on intermediate school students' achievement in vocabulary learning.

The researcher, in his role as an educational supervisor, also observed that intermediate EFL students appeared confused because they did not know the meanings of certain vocabulary items such as canals, railway banks– seeds– upset and fresh. These words were essential for understanding the overall meaning of the passage. This difficulty may be attributed to their limited experience in learning content and function words, as well as their derivatives and inflections.

1.3.Research questions and hypothesis

RQ1. Does Use Cloze Procedure Exercises have any impact on the development of vocabulary Repertoire?

RQ2. Does using Cloze Procedure exercises significantly improve the vocabulary repertoire of Iraqi EFL learners at the intermediate stage?

H01–There is no statistically significant difference between the experimental group, who is taught according to the Using Cloze Procedure Exercises techniques and the control group who is taught according to the classical teaching method on students' development of vocabulary Repertoire.

2.1. Related Literature

Various suggestions have been offered as to what knowing a word involves. Qian's (2002) interrelated model, based on the combined merits of previous models of vocabulary knowledge, posited vocabulary

knowledge as four interconnected dimensions: (a) size, (b) depth, (c) R organization and (d) transfer from receptive to produce skills. Providing words in context enhances students' learning of English word in all four aspects, using the cloze procedure as an instructional tool might be an effective way for contextualized vocabulary teaching.

2.2. Concept of Cloze Procedure

The name of word "cloze" traces back to 1953 when Taylor was attempting design suitable reading materials for native students. He invented the term as a note of "closure," a concept common in Gestalt psychology.

Gestalt psychology, which originated in Austria and Germany at the end of the 19th century, became particularly popular with respect to visual perception. The advocates of this movement such as Wertheimer (1880–1943), Kohler, (1887–1967) and Koffka (1941–1989) pointed out that the pattern of stimuli is important to determine perceptual experience from a theoretical view point.

The theory implies that perceivers are naturally inclined to see final figures where none exists. One typical instance of vision is noticing that a collection of relatively small elements form an incomplete geometric pattern, a so-called pattern with closure. A person having acquired the perception of an object will perceive that object as such, even though it contains some points which are not included in the patterns or closures. If it is possible to remove language from a piece of language, then by the same application one can learn how to use a piece of language. The reasoning applied on natural science is simply projected to processing of language: If someone has developed a competence for using something, that person will be able to supply the missing pieces in perception process even though some deletions or blanks are left (Taylor 1953).

A great number of L1 and L2 teachers use cloze procedure. The cloze procedure is defined here as such purposeful omissions, made by the teacher with an intention to instruct through reading. The simple and somewhat mechanical nature of the cloze procedure that it "works, can be understood by non-specialists, has a mechanical simplicity", is "direct and easy to apply" (Taylor 1953, 432) would have strong allure for both experienced and neophyte teacher.

But few teachers are aware that it is the cloze procedure's deceptive simplicity that makes it so tricky. The indiscriminate application of the cloze procedure in EFL is doomed and it is a questionable way to try to improve reading/writing. It's about as likely to work well as the general approach (of shooting at some kind of target) (Wilawan, 2023). Teacher needs to know why it is possible to use the cloze procedure consist of reading.

Its successful use in the classroom requires thoughtful selection, preparation, and presentation of text. Taylor(1950) indicates that cloze procedure is that type of a technique in which words are deleted from a passage with the help of word-count formula and lot of other criteria. This is a passage that is given to students, who fill in the blanks as they read to build understanding from the text. This process can also be suitable as a diagnostic reading assessment tool.

Conaway & colleagues(2024) proposes that examining passage retellings for ideas recalled might be a more sensitive measure of comprehension. Finally, comprehension processes expected to be influenced by cloze tasks were delineated in terms of the transfer feature theory of processing in reading.

As Darwesh (2010) notes that the cloze procedure, to the classroom teacher, was a tool with many applied uses. Studies of its methodology have found it to be simple to construct and objective in scoring. Chatel(2001) states that the cloze procedure is a general learning

training method and can be applied as reading comprehension instruction. Closure describes the human tendency to create closure – complete words – when reading fragments of a word, a sentence or any other familiar language pattern.

2.3. Advantages Cloze Procedure

Nation (2022) also added that the Cloze Procedure enables a teacher to teach and reinforce the strategies, skills, and concepts taught in virtually every reading program. In whole group instruction, many students are learning strategies that they cannot implement with success as the text is too challenging. When students are provided with numerous opportunities to apply learned strategies in text that is at their instructional level, they can attend more fully to strategic problem solving which features all cueing systems: meaning, structure, and visual information. Key benefits include:

1. Teaches learners to use context clues in discovering the meanings of unfamiliar words which directly strengthens their vocabulary knowledge.
2. Encourages active reading for meaning helping students focus on understanding new words and how they function in context.
3. Provides practice in predicting language patterns allowing students to infer word forms and meanings based on sentence structure.
4. Raises students' awareness of how vocabulary works within context making them more skilled at guessing and confirming meanings while reading.
5. Develops awareness of sentence and paragraph organization guiding students to identify how signal words and connectives affect vocabulary use and meaning.
6. Encourages attention to textual clues such as headings subheadings and graphics that support understanding of vocabulary in content areas.

7. Promotes discussion and active use of vocabulary as post-exercise interaction helps students use newly learned words orally and in meaningful contexts.

8. Provides teachers with insights into students' vocabulary comprehension and their ability to use language effectively (Nation 2022).

Such advantages make the Cloze Procedure an effective tool for enhancing vocabulary development among EFL learners, especially at the intermediate stage.

2.4. Principles of Cloze Procedure

It has been widely discussed that the cloze procedure takes different forms as—random deletion (every – nth word), limited cloze (deleted words are randomly listed in the margin, selected deletion (by deleting chosen words/parts of a word such as verbs or nouns), "word length clues", Macco cloze (deleting an entire story part) and oral [cloze] (the teacher reads a passage aloud containing omitted content words – students provide responses).

2.5. The teaching Process of Cloze Procedure

Based on Taylor (1950) that there are several types of teaching with the selection process through Cloze Procedural, as follows:

a– CUT: Choose a section that is self-contained and of appropriate length for the grade level being tested. Would be well to give them the hose tests (A) in both of these readings, and if A still gives positive apparitions which B fails at, discontinue use of A for time being. Use material easily read by the scholars.

b– Do not edit the first and the last sentences, as well as any punctuation marks.

c– Make sure that the words omitted are carefully chosen using a word-count formula (i.e., every 5th word) or other must exclude. To test students' understanding/nature of the topic or their capacity to draw

upon semantic cues, delete content-bearing words (nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs). Like the former test, you look for evidence of how students use syntactic cues here by deleting some conjunctions and prepositions (and helps).

d– In the final product, complete all blanks in to make all blanks the same length and so that you do not inadvertently supply information about one blank when working on another and creating new visuals.

e– Read the whole paragraph before they fill in the gaps.

f– Try to convince the students to fill each blank when they can.

g– The time needed to complete this test is limited only by the need to keep track of it.

2.6. Previous Related Studies

Table (1) Discussion of the Previous Studies

No	Research Title	Researcher(s) & Year	Country / Context	Sample (Size, Stage, Gender)	Method / Design	Instrument(s)	Statistical Tools	Main Findings
1	The Effect of Sentence-Making, Composition Writing, and Cloze Test Assignments on EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning	Zeinab Talebzadeh & Mohammad Sadegh Bagheri (2011)	Iran – Pre-intermediate EFL female learners	102 female learners (pre-intermediate level)	Experimental – three groups (sentence-making, composition writing, cloze test)	Researcher-made vocabulary pre- and post-tests	ANOVA, paired t-test	All assignments improved vocabulary learning; the composition writing group performed best, while cloze and sentence-making groups showed similar gains.
2	Variants of Cloze-Test-Based Tasks and Vocabulary Achievement	Zachary Farouk Chai, Suyansah Swanto & Wardatul Akmal Din (2020)	Malaysia – Primary school EFL learners	Primary school learners (exact number not reported)	Experimental – comparison between cloze-based and non-cloze-based tasks	Vocabulary achievement test	Independent & paired t-tests	Cloze-test-based tasks significantly enhanced learners' vocabulary achievement compared to traditional activities.
3	Using Cloze Procedure to Enhance Vocabulary Retention of Intermediate EFL Learners	Ahmed Al-Harbi (2021)	Saudi Arabia – Intermediate EFL learners	80 intermediate learners (mixed gender)	Quasi-experimental – two groups (cloze vs. traditional exercises)	Researcher-made vocabulary retention test	t-test, descriptive statistics	Cloze exercises group showed significantly better retention of vocabulary than traditional exercises group.
4	The Role of Cloze Tests in Developing Vocabulary Knowledge among Iraqi EFL Learners	Noor Kadhim & Haider Abbas (2022)	Iraq – Secondary school EFL learners	90 learners (45 male, 45 female)	Experimental – pre- and post-test design	Vocabulary test, questionnaire	Paired t-test, ANOVA	Cloze tests had a positive impact on learners' vocabulary knowledge; male and female learners benefited equally.

3.1. Methodology

The study employed a post-test-only experimental approach.

3.2. Participants

The study sample is 2nd grade intermediate school male students in Baghdad, Directorate General of Education, Rusafa III in the academic year (2022–2023). This sample has been selected randomly and distributed into two groups: experimental (36) and control (35). It is clearly reflected in the following table (2) below:

Table 2: Study Sample

Group	Section	No of Subjects
CG	A	35
Exp	B	36
<i>Total</i>		71

3.3. Equivalence of the Study Subjects

To ensure the more comparable treatment groups, the investigator made an effort to regulate a couple of variables which can influence the results of experiment. These factors were age, sex and parents' educational level. All the subjects of both groups have been found not to be significantly influenced by such variables.

3.4. Test Construction

After reviewing previous studies and literature related to his research and in a serious attempt to attain the aims of this study, the researcher conducted an experiment using a post-test. Below is a detailed description of the research instruments, including their construction, validation, and administration. Two varieties of cloze tests (Multiple-Choice Cloze and C-test) were used in this study.

Multiple-Choice Cloze Test

A multiple-choice cloze (MC cloze) test was designed to measure and develop learners' vocabulary repertoire. The title of the passages was a Tour of London. The test was constructed from English for Iraq (Second Intermediate Grade), which provided an authentic passage for

the assessment. The passage was adapted into an MC cloze format consisting of 10 items, each with four alternatives, only one of which was correct. The deletion procedure followed the guidelines of Oller and Jonz (1994), whereby the first and second sentences were left intact, and the deletions began with the (7) word of the second sentence.

C-test

The C-test like cloze test was constructed out of two short passages extracted from authentic sources. The titles of the passages were *Camping at Stonehenge* and *The Football Match*. The test was constructed from English for Iraq (Second Intermediate Grade), The C-test was constructed by using Darwesh (2010) rule of two. The first and last sentences of each text were left intact and the deletion began from the second word of the second sentence. The second half of every second word was deleted and if a word had only one letter it was skipped. Also, if a word had an odd number of letters, the larger half was removed. The constructed C-test had 20 items.

3.5. Pilot Testing, Validity, and Reliability of the Instruments

Both instruments (the MC cloze test and the C-test) were piloted with a sample of 40 students who shared similar characteristics with the target population. The piloting aimed to identify potential problems such as unclear items, wording difficulties, and timing issues. The pilots suggested that the instruments could be completed in 40–45 minutes (mean). The difficulty of the MC cloze test and C-test were 49.4 approximately calculated by the pilot sample. The piloting demonstrated that the guidance provided was clear, with easy to understand instructions for learners. Content validity was ensured by the examination of both instruments, to assess their appropriateness for the content area, through a panel of EFL specialists in terms of texts and items to fulfil the study aims. The tests were then administered with

minor changes appropriate to enhance the precision and utility of the tests before final application.

The reliability of the instruments was tested by two complimentary methods. The first of these was Cronbach's Alpha that served to establish the internal consistency of the test items at initial administration. The findings revealed that Cronbach's Alpha was at 0.91 a relatively high value which means the items correlated with each other well and measure the same construct consistently. The second procedure was the Test-Retest method, in which the instruments were administered twice to the same sample with a planned time interval, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between the two administrations. The obtained value was 0.88 reflecting strong temporal stability of the tests. Based on these measures, it can be concluded that the instruments demonstrated a high level of reliability, combining both internal consistency and stability over time, which enhances the credibility of the findings derived from their use.

3.6. Administration and Scoring of the test

The final versions of the tests were administered with one week interval. Therefore, data collection lasted two successive weeks. The allocated time for completing each test was 40 minutes. Before starting to do the test, the participants were provided with a complete instruction both in English and Arabic.

The scoring method for MC cloze test and C-test was exact word method. It can be said that in all tests the scoring method was objective, so that obtained scores are reliable. The MC test was scored like usual multiple-choice items and each item had one point. In the C-test also each item had one point. In the current study it was decided to tolerate the spelling problems in the C-test which did not changed the meaning and part of speeches of the words. If these two occurred, the written word did not gain any score.

4.1. Interpretation of Results

To verify the validity of the hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test, the t-test for independent samples was used to compare the means of both groups. The results obtained are shown in Table (3) below:

Table 3-test Statistics of the Study Subjects' Scores on the Achievement

Group	No. of subject	Mean	S.D.	t-Value		D.F.	Level of Significance
				Computed	Tabulated		
EG	36	٢٥.٠٢٧٧	١.٨٧٤	10.47	2.00	69	0.05
CG	35	١٩.٢٨٥	٢.٦٨٥				

As shown in Table (3), the computed t-value (10.47) is greater than the tabulated t-value (2.00) at the 0.05 level of significance and with 69 degrees of freedom. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The mean score of the experimental group (25.02) is higher than that of the control group (19.28), which clearly shows that the students in the experimental group, who were taught through Cloze Procedure Exercises, outperformed those in the control group who were taught by the traditional method. This might be due to the effect of the Cloze Procedure on improving the learners' word-stock. The method trains students to predict and infer the missing words based on context, so that they can acquire and memorize the second language vocabulary more easily. These results support the prior research emphasis regarding the positive effects contextual/interactive course delivery brings to vocabulary learning. However, it can be said that the Cloze

Procedure is a helpful instrument for developing the vocabulary of intermediate Iraqi EFL students by facilitating better comprehension and retention through active involvement.

4.2. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the effects of employing cloze procedure exercises in learning vocabulary on expanding the vocabulary knowledge of Iraqi EFL intermediate learners. The aim of the research was to find out if students practicing cloze-based tasks will achieve a better vocabulary learning by participating in them than receiving instruction classically. According to the findings of post-test, the group exposed to cloze exercises performed better in vocabulary achievement than the traditional method. This indicates that cloze tests are an effective practice to develop the vocabulary acquisition and to facilitate more meaningful language learning among Iraqi EFL learners.

What the cloze measures: The great advantage of the cloze procedure in vocabulary testing is that it combines internationalization and contextualization. Learners do not just have to memorise heads but also process meaning and syntax in context. This active process of reception and production encourages deeper cognitive load, that ultimately leads to improved retention and easier retrieval of the new words learnt. The findings obtained in this research implicate that the cloze procedure facilitates language learning in terms of recognition of form and meaning, at least to some extent.

The results are consistent with the results of Chai, Swanto & Din (2020), Al-Harbi (2021) and Kadhim & Abbas (2022) who also found that cloze-based activities have significantly enhanced learners' vocabulary learning, recall and motivation. Likewise, the present study in conjunction with their work added to evidence that vocabulary learning within its context and through reciprocal interaction is more successful in the long-term. However, this study at least partly contradicts

Talebzadeh & Bagheri (2011), who found that the smallest English L2 gains were in cloze exercises and greater differences (+4%–5%) between composition writing vs both vocabulary and grammar. However, both consistencies of two studies confirm the effectiveness of cloze-type tasks in facilitating learners successfully using new words.

4.3. Conclusion

The general findings empirically confirm that the use of cloze procedure can be a feasible and effective teaching method in EFL classes. Not only does it support vocabulary development, but it also supports the development of critical thinking skills, problem-solving ability and a connection between reading and writing. Pedagogically, the presence of cloze exercises would add interactivensess, purposefulness and context at a time when this is rarely encouraged in vocabulary learning via rote processes.

These results indicate intermediate EFL teachers should include cloze procedure exercises as part of their regular vocabulary instruction practices. Exercises that match the level and requirements of learners should be compiled by the teachers (eg, easy or difficult) to meet the proficiency of the learners. What's more, in textbooks prepared by both curriculum designers and textbook writers, cloze-based materials are recommended to offer as vocabulary and reading comprehension programs. In this way, students would increase not only their vocabulary range, but also enhance their overall language proficiency from single word learning to meaningful and communicative uses of English.

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