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تأثير الكفاءةُ اللغوية والسياق و اللا سياق في المعرفةِ الاشتقاقية الإنتاجية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغةً أجنبية في العراق

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الملخص

تحاول الدراسة الحالية استقصاء أثر الكفاءة اللغوية، والسياق، وغياب السياق في معرفة المتعلمين العراقيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من الناحية الإنتاجية. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، استخدم الباحث تصميمًا مختلط المنهج، تضمن اختبار تحديد المستوى السريع من جامعة أكسفورد، واختبار المعرفة الاشتقاقية الإنتاجية، بالإضافة إلى مقابلة شبه منظَّمة. شارك في الدراسة 120 طالبًا عراقيًا من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات، وجرى توزيعهم عشوائيًا على مجموعتي التعلم بالسياق و التعلم من دون سياق، وفقًا لمستويات كفاءتهم اللغوية. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب ذوي المستوى العالي في الكفاءة اللغوية أدَّوا أداءً أفضل في تكوين الكلمات المشتقة، وأن التعلم بالسياق عزَّز الكفاءة الصرفية لديهم، إلا أنهم واجهوا صعوبات دلالية. أما الطلاب ذوو المستوى المنخفض في الكفاءة اللغوية، فقد واجهوا تحديات تتعلق بتأثير اللغة الأم وأخطاء في استخدام اللواحق. تُبرز الدراسة أهمية دمج عوامل الكفاءة اللغوية والسياق والخلفية اللغوية في تعليم المفردات، وتقترح اعتماد تعليم قائم على السياق يتلاءم مع مستوى كفاءة المتعلم والسياق المحلي لاستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التأثير، الكفاءة اللغوية، السياق، اللا سياق، الاشتقاق، المعرفة الإنتاجية

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The Effect of Language Proficiency, Context and De-context on the Derivational Productive Knowledge of Iraqi EFL Learners

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Abstract

The current study attempts to investigate the effect of language proficiency, context and de-context on Iraqi EFL learners' productive knowledge. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher used a mixed-method design comprised Oxford Quick Placement Test, Derivational Productive Knowledge Test and semi-structured interview. 120 Iraqi university EFL students participated and were distributed randomly to contextualized and decontextualized learning groups according to their proficiency level. Findings revealed that students in high proficiency level performed better in forming derived words and contextualized learning enhanced morphological competence. However, they faced semantic difficulties. Students in low proficiency level had challenges with L1 transfer and affixation errors. The study highlights the importance of integrating proficiency , context and linguistic background factors in vocabulary instruction. It suggests advocating context-based instruction tailored to learner proficiency level and local speaking EFL context.

Keywords: effect, language proficiency, context, de-context , derivation, productive knowledge

Introduction

Background

In the realm of language learning and teaching, derivational productive knowledge is considered as one of the most important and fundamental aspects of learning a language (Iwaizumi & Webb, 2021). Foreign language learners who learn English as a second language (ESL) need derivational productive knowledge to build their vocabulary effectively. Creation of new words, which is done by adding prefixes and suffixes, as Nation (2016) asserts is a powerful mechanism of increasing vocabulary, as well as enhancing communication skills and language proficiency. The current study investigates the effects of language proficiency together with contextualized and decontextualized learning approaches on Iraqi English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' development of derivational knowledge to enhance our understanding of EFL vocabulary learning in non-Western Arabic-speaking context.

To master derivational morphology proficiency, EFL students need to understand how forms and meanings and syntactic roles of affixes operate. The linguistic difference between Arabic and English creates challenges for Iraqi students when they learn English derivational morphology. The root-based non-linear morphological system of Arabic exists in contrast to English which depends on linear affixation (Al-Haydan, 2020). The different word-formation patterns between English and Arabic causes difficulties for learners to move from their first language (L1) to second language (L2) since they struggle with using prefixes and suffixes to create words (Alolaywi, 2022).

The educational system of Iraq makes these challenges more severe because EFL instruction relies heavily on teacher-directed grammar-translation approaches (Audil & Mustafa, 2024). Such educational methods focus on memorization instead of active practice which restricts students from applying their derivational knowledge in authentic situations (Al-Omairi, 2020).

The teaching program mainly focuses on reading and grammar instruction at the expense of productive language skills such as writing and speaking which results in affixes being recognized better than they are actually used (Dehham, 2016).

The process of contextualized learning provides better morphological understanding when students learn words through meaningful settings. Students develop a stronger understanding of the word for example "decision" when they see it in a sentence because it relates to "decide." Memorizing affix lists out of context does not provide students with the chance to learn to apply what they have learned (Masrai, 2016) .The restricted availability of genuine English content for Iraqi students forces them to rely on decontextualized approaches which fail to teach them the precise differences between "-ity" and "-ness" and between "un-" and "in-."

The level of the language proficiency is what defines the degree of the derivational knowledge in learners. According to Levesque et al. (2017), students who have a higher level of language proficiency are more metalinguistically aware and flexible in their affix usage. The proficiency level of Iraqi students varies because different areas of the country experience unequal opportunities for quality education and English language instruction. Students with lower English proficiency experience difficulties in forming complex words but advanced learners demonstrate better accuracy in their use of affixes (Shi et al., 2025).

Research about these factors exists globally yet investigations about Iraqi learners remain relatively few. A particular study is necessary due to their different barriers and a low exposure to English. Therefore, the current study was aimed to investigate how proficiency levels and educational environments influence Iraqi EFL students' ability to use derivative word patterns effectively in their writing. Research outcomes will develop teaching methods along with vocabulary building strategies for English foreign language learners in comparable educational environments.

Statement of the Problem

The mastery of derivational morphology stands essential for both English fluency and accuracy yet Iraqi EFL learners face this as their main obstacle (Salih, 2021). Learners face three fundamental obstacles which create their challenge with this task. These challenges are poor language proficiency and teaching methods which do not position language in context and also lack of exposure to natural English speech. A combination of these factors prevents learners from achieving morphological competence while obstructing their ability to communicate effectively (Enayat & Derakhshan, 2021).

The main issue stems from learners' basic language abilities which prevent them from using derivational rules effectively. The traditional grammar-translation teaching methods used by Iraqi students result in weak productive language skills during writing and speaking activities (Audil & Mustafa, 2024). The conventional techniques applied in the Iraqi EFL settings mainly involve rote memorization rather than effective communication that makes students identify affixes but fail to use them practically. A student who recognizes “development” will face challenges when creating a sentence that uses this word as “The development of technology has changed our lives” (Al-Omairi, 2020). Accordingly, as the purpose of the study, this research is intended to examine how proficiency affects derivational usage while developing teaching approaches to fill the knowledge gap.

The learning environment plays a major role in determining how vocabulary is learned. In EFL context like Iraq that use traditional educational methods, students learn English through mechanical drills and lists of affixes instead of actual usage examples. However, a review of the conducted studies indicates that authentic context-based learning helps students both remember words better and use them properly (Webb & Nation, 2017). According to (Mohammed-Marzouk, 2012) the Iraqi educational system focuses on repetitive teaching methods which provide students with limited opportunities to apply affixes in genuine communication situations. The absence of meaningful examples in learning materials leads students to make frequent mistakes between similar words such as “productivity” and “production” as well as incorrect affix usage because they lack experience with natural language input.

The connection between proficiency levels and educational learning environments remains poorly understood in academic research. Advanced learners receive better benefits from contextualized instruction yet beginners need direct teaching of affix rules (Masrai, 2016). The uniform educational methods used in Iraq do not satisfy students with varying abilities which disadvantages both those who need extra help and those who require more challenge. The profound knowledge of the impact of proficiency on instruction in specific contexts is a key factor in creating better teaching strategies that suit the levels of learners.

The peculiarities of the Arabic root-based morphology introduce extra challenges complicating the learning process. English employs a different word formation system than Arabic since it relies on affixes instead of Arabic's root-based method (Al-Haydan, 2020). Students from Iraq commonly misapply rules by creating words like “decideful” from “decisive” and they often mix up affixes between “unaccurate” and “inaccurate” but these errors are not typically examined in existing research. This research aims to bridge this research gap by providing better understanding about Arabic-related errors and transfer issues which will help develop better teaching approaches.

The research integrates the analysis of the level of proficiency and the context , and instructional strategies to come up with teaching strategies that improve student accomplishments. The study recommends the integration of context-based input materials together with teaching approaches that adjust to student proficiency levels to boost learners' derivational skills. The study provides essential knowledge about Arabic-speaking learners to EFL research while addressing an understudied population.

Significance of the Study

The study is two-fold in its importance since it has both theoretical purpose and practical use in instruction of English in Iraq and other EFL contexts. The study investigated the productive use of derivational morphology among Arabic-speaking learners which represents a research area that needs more investigation. The focus of this study was not the conventional recognition of the affixes but rather the creative usage of the affixes in communication as a critical attribute towards building vocabulary richness and fluency. The emphasis on productive morphological use represents an essential pedagogical evolution that addresses Iraqi classrooms because they mostly use passive teaching methods.

The study presented the Integrated Derivational Competence (IDC) Model which demonstrates how language proficiency works alongside instructional context and L1 morphological interference. In this framework of analysis, the researchers can examine individual factors and the overall effects of the factors. Decontextualized input exposure to learners with low proficiency results in fragmented morphological understanding while learners with higher proficiency levels achieve better results through contextual instruction. The IDC Model provides researchers with a fresh perspective to analyze learning difficulties experienced by Arabic native speakers when moving from their native L1 to English. This research produced direct implications which educators can apply in their teaching practices. The study contradicts the conventional rote learning practices in Iraq by encouraging learning styles that connect learning to context and facilitate meaningful communication. Narrative texts, dialogues, and task-based learning activities are some of the activities used to build student knowledge and application of affixes. The research supports modern SLA theory which recommends teaching through meaningful inputs with authentic materials instead of separate drills for forms.

The study provided knowledge about the impact of contextualized teaching methods on students with varying skill levels which remains an understudied topic in Arabic-speaking language education. The study demonstrated that structured semi-contextual instruction suits beginners but advanced learners perform better when they receive authentic learning materials. The research presented some evidence to justify customized teaching methods that are in line with student preparedness levels.

The research expanded our knowledge about linguistic aspects which exist between different languages when teaching L2/FL morphology.in addition, the results of the study presented essential guidance for teaching vocabulary to students who come from Semitic language origins. It also presented findings that hold relevance for education policies. The research provided English education system modernization in Iraq by offering data-based recommendations for curriculum development and teacher education programs and assessment protocols. The study promoted an educational approach which balances form and meaning with recognition and production skills.

Research Questions

1. How does English language proficiency affect Iraqi EFL learners' performance in producing derivational forms?
2. To what extent does contextualized vocabulary instruction enhance derivational productive knowledge among Iraqi EFL learners compared to decontextualized instruction?
3. How does the level of English language proficiency influence Iraqi EFL learners' ability to produce morphologically complex words in derivational tasks?

Review of the Literature

The acquisition of L2 vocabulary depends heavily on derivational morphology

EFL learning relies on derivational morphology where students are taught to come up with new words by attaching prefixes or suffixes to already existing words (e.g., "create" " creation", and "uncreative") (Kau, 2023).Nation (2016) considers derivational knowledge as an essential indicator of vocabulary depth which demonstrates learners' skill to create new words and build their vocabulary. Students must learn derivational morphology because this skill is vital to reach communicative competence through its ability to generate complex morphological words which appear in different linguistic situations such as transforming "responsible" into "responsibility" to say "She took full responsibility for the project." Learners face challenges when mastering derivational morphology because they need to understand the form (e.g., affix spelling) as well as the meaning (e.g., semantic differences between "-ness" and "-ity") and syntactic rules (e.g., changes in word part) of prefixes and suffixes (Webb & Nation, 2017). Learning becomes more challenging for EFL students due to restricted English exposure combined with educational methods that emphasize recognition over generation (Masrai, 2016).

A review of the related literature confirmed the fundamental role of derivational understanding in L2/FL learning. For instance, Masrai, (2016) reported that EFL learners from Saudi Arabia who demonstrated high morphological awareness produced the nouns from adjectives by adding appropriate suffixes such as "generosity" from "generous" more accurately than their peers. The research indicated that knowledge of derivations leads students to become better language learners because it helps them work with word families efficiently. In addition, the research by Zhang and Koda (2013) showed that L2 reading and writing performance depended on morphological awareness because learners who understood derivations could read and write complex words in academic materials. Students who know the association between word families like "decide", "decision" and "indecisive" are in a better position to read and write essays and

discussions. The majority of studies about English derivational morphology processing in second language learning have focused on Indo-European and East Asian language learners (Boudelaa & Marslen-Wilson, 2015) but no research exists on how Arabic-speaking learners especially Iraqi learners process these linguistic elements. The identified gap matters because Iraqi EFL learners deal with multiple language-related educational issues as reported in the introduction .

Derivational morphology is also complex in that it varies among languages. The English word structure is based on concatenative affixation by linear addition of affixes to base words to create regular patterns (e.g., "happy" to "happiness") .Arabic language which is the native language of Iraqi learners operates through a root-based non-concatenative system that uses consonant-vowel patterns to create words (Boudelaa & Marslen-Wilson, 2015). FL morphological acquisition becomes more challenging for Iraqi learners because they need to learn English affixation processes without matching L1 equivalents. Therefore, this study becomes essential because research on Arabic-speaking EFL learners' derivational knowledge remains scarce which motivates the investigation into their struggles with these challenges in proficiency and learning environments.

Language Proficiency and Derivational Knowledge

Higher language proficiency helps develop productive derivational knowledge since more proficient learners demonstrate better metalinguistic understanding and better morphological abilities. Advanced Saudi EFL learners according to Masrai, (2016) performed better than lower-proficiency students in derivational tasks through their proficient understanding of affix functions and syntactic rules which enabled them to form words like "productivity" from "productive." According to Kimppa et al. (2019) advanced proficiency helps learners implement morphological rules for spontaneous communication thus enabling them to form "unhappiness" in “His unhappiness was evident.” Students who have lower proficiency experience challenges because their weak syntactic understanding and limited vocabulary depth leads to mistakes such as overgeneralization (*decideful instead of "decisive") and inappropriate affix use (Alolaywi, 2022)

The relationship between proficiency and derivational knowledge stands as a crucial factor in Iraqi EFL education because students from different educational backgrounds face varying proficiency levels due to unequal access to English education and differences in teacher qualifications and student exposure to English. Ahmed (2020) indicates that numerous students in Iraqi secondary and tertiary education struggle with productive skills at a low level thus preventing them from using derivational morphology in their writing and speaking. A lowly proficient student is able to identify all suffixes " ment" correctly in a structured work but fails to form out the "government" correctly in a sentence such as "The government issued new policies" . According to Al Amaya and Esmaeil, (2023) Iraqi learners show a significant difference between their receptive understanding of affixes in reading tasks and their ability to use these affixes in free communication. The research questions of this study focus on proficiency differences because they want to know how proficiency affects Iraqi learners' ability to create derivations and if higher proficiency helps learners overcome morphological production difficulties.

The relationship between proficiency level and learning environment together with L1 influence creates additional challenges for students learning derivational forms. Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) explain that students with advanced language skills learn better when learning occurs in context because their ability to recognize morphological patterns helps them extract this

information from genuine texts. The teaching methods used in Iraqi classrooms typically lack context so lower-proficiency students must depend on direct instruction (Rezaee et al., 2018). Research on this dynamic within the Iraqi context remains limited so this study was essential to fill this knowledge gap.

Contextualized versus Decontextualized Learning

The learning environment affects how well students learn vocabulary especially for derivational productive knowledge. Contextualized learning engages students in vocabulary acquisition as they read authentic texts and participate in conversations and communicative activities that offer semantic and syntactic hints in morphological acquisition (Sukying, 2020; Yasin et al., 2016).Webb and Nation (2017) explain that meaningful exposure helps learners discover both word meanings and their application patterns thus promoting their ability to generate new derivational forms. For example, it can be put in this way that students can learn how “decide” relates to “decision” through reading “She made a quick decision” which helps them use this relationship when writing or speaking. According to Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2014) students who received graded readings with contextualized content perform better in vocabulary tasks and achieve higher results in producing words like “responsibility” from “responsible” when compared to peers who use decontextualized methods.

When students study words in isolation or memorize grammar rules and vocabulary lists without context they develop little productive knowledge since they need real-world application cues (Laufer & Rozovski-Roitblat, 2014). The Iraqi EFL classroom teaching methods primarily use decontextualized approaches which focus on vocabulary memorization and rule learning instead of promoting creative language use (Audil & Mustafa, 2024). He also claims that students are unable to use derivational morphology in communicative contexts since they are aware of suffixes but struggle to construct "education" in the sentence of "Education is a priority". Al-Omairi(2020) notes that Iraqi students demonstrate good performance in controlled language activities such as matching exercises yet their skills do not translate to free-writing abilities thus demonstrating the shortcomings of decontextualized learning.

The research questions for this study investigate how contextualized learning impacts Iraqi students' derivational knowledge when compared to decontextualized teaching methods. Webb and Nation (2017) show that contextualized learning works better according to global research but Iraqi learners face specific obstacles such as restricted English media access and limited communicative instruction according to (Masrai, 2016). The study fills this research deficiency by evaluating contextualized learning methods in Iraq's educational environment which relies on traditional approaches.

Cross-Linguistic Influences: Arabic and English Morphology

The extensive differences between Arabic and English morphological systems create major obstacles for Iraqi EFL students to master derivative language elements. The Arabic language uses roots along with non-combining patterns to generate words from consonant and vowel patterns like the root “k-t-b” produces words like “kitāb” (book), “kataba” [he wrote], and “maktab” (office) (Vaknin-Nusbaum & Saiegh-Haddad, 2020). On the other hand, as Boudelaa and Marslen-Wilson (2015) explains, English follows a concatenative approach by adding linearly-based prefixes or suffixes to base words such as “happy” to “happiness” or “unhappy” . Therefore, it can

be concluded that the different structural patterns between Arabic and English create difficulties for L1 to L2/FL morphological knowledge transfer because Iraqi learners lack matching concepts in Arabic for English affixation processes. In addition, it can be exemplified that the formation of "productivity" from "productive" using the suffix "-ity" lacks an equivalent in Arabic language which may cause learners to experience confusion or make mistakes.

Vaknin-Nusbaum and Saiegh-Haddad (2020) confirm that L2/FL morphological processing of Arabic-speaking learners shows signs of L1 interference through incorrect application of root-based patterns to English words and improper affix selection because of unfamiliarity with concatenative systems. The Iraqi learners come up with "productiveness" rather than" productivity" since they are wrongly adding the suffix "-ness" in a bid to conform to non-existent patterns of noun formation in Arabic (Alsakkaf, & Al-Mekhlafi, 2023).According to Ahmed et al (2025), Arabic EFL students demonstrate similar mistakes through their use of “decideful” instead of “decisive” which stem from their knowledge of Arabic and English language structures. Masrai, (2016) explains that Arabic learners experience semantic difficulties when differentiating between "production" and "productivity" because their native language depends on context to show meaning differences instead of using suffixes. The problems faced by Iraqi students who learn through multiple languages become worse because these students have minimal English knowledge and their teachers rarely teach the differences between Arabic and English word structures (Souadkia, 2017). EFL instruction in Iraq according to Hamadany (2018) does not handle Arabic morphological aspects so students must memorize English word forms.

The Iraqi EFL Context

The Iraqi education system provides specific obstacles to develop students’ ability to create new words since English serves as a foreign language while students have few chances to learn through authentic conversations or meaningful communication. As it was mentioned earlier, as Audil and Mustafa (2024) point out, the typical teaching methods in Iraqi EFL classrooms follow traditional teacher-led approaches such as grammar-translation where students focus on memorizing vocabulary lists and grammar rules instead of creating meaningful language. Direct uses of derivational morphology are not accessible to students due to the existing pedagogical practices that do not allow students to study this type of language use. The findings of Al-Omairi, (2020) show that Iraqi students succeed at identifying fixed parts in controlled assessments yet perform poorly at producing them during free-flowing spoken interactions thus showing a difference between their ability to receive and generate language.

The Iraqi educational program emphasizes reading and grammar education so students receive few opportunities to use productive language tasks that help them develop their derivational morphology skills (Ahmed, 2020) . Iraqi students lack access to authentic English materials including media and native speakers and digital content because of which they rarely see derivational forms in real-life situations (Masrai, 2016). A student who memorizes the word "decision" will not be able to understand the relationship between" decision" and "decide: unless they come across the sentence: "Her decision was final". These limitations require researchers to examine EFL learners in Iraq specifically because international studies on second/foreign language morphology do not address the particular circumstances of Iraqi education and culture.

Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Study

Research on second language vocabulary learning shows steady growth yet it fails to address essential aspects especially for Iraqi EFL students. Research on derivational morphology focuses primarily on students who come from Indo-European and East Asian backgrounds while ignoring the unique challenges Arabic-speaking learners including Iraqi students face (Boudelaa & Marslen-Wilson, 2015). The research requires special attention to understand how Iraqi students understand derivational forms due to the different morphological structures between Arabic roots and English suffixes. The relationship between language proficiency and context-based versus context-free learning is not commonly studied in EFL classrooms that use traditional decontextualized teaching methods in Iraq.

The existing research lacks specific studies about Iraqi EFL students' derivational knowledge despite their unique linguistic background and cultural environment. This mix of the Arabic-English structural differences, coupled with the traditional instructional practices of Iraq and limited access to authentic material creates barriers that require further research. The study will address the gaps in existing knowledge by examining proficiency level relative to context and decontext to ensure development of effective approaches in enhancing derivational knowledge in EFL classes in Iraq and significant contributions in the study of applied linguistics.

Method

Research Design

The present research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to determine the interactions of the two variables that are English proficiency and instructional strategies in building derivational productive knowledge among Iraqi EFL students. The research was a combination of a quantitative study based on proficiency-based comparisons and instructional interventions and qualitative study based on interview and textual analysis to examine the perceptions and patterns of errors among learners.

Participants

This research involved 120 undergraduate students of the Iraqi public university system. To select the required participants for the study, the study used stratified purposive sampling to choose 40 participants at each proficiency level i.e., low, intermediate, and high to maintain equal distribution. To ensure the proficiency level reliability of the groups, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was used to assess English proficiency and classify learners into CEFR levels A2–B1 for low proficiency and B1–B2 for intermediate and B2–C1 for high proficiency. The participants fell within the age range of 18–22 years old and the sample consisted of equal numbers of male and female students. The participants were native Arabic speakers who had limited contact with English-speaking environments at the time of the study which minimized the effect of confounding variables. It is also worth mentioning that the study followed and observed all the required ethical standards using participant consent collection while maintaining confidentiality.

Instruments

In order to conduct the study and gather the required data, different instruments and materials were used as the following:

First of all, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was used as the proficiency assessment instrument to establish learners' English ability levels and ensure their initial proficiency homogeneity. The test provided a standardized and reliable proficiency classification through its grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension sections.

As the second instrument used in the study, the researcher utilized the Derivational Productive Knowledge Test (DPKT) to assess participants' derivational productive knowledge. The test was composed of 30 items spread across three sections. The first section requires the learners to do sentence-based gap-filling exercises to insert the correct derived forms. The second section of the test requires the students to form various derived forms of base words using word-formation prompts. The third section of the test requires learners to use derivational forms in short written paragraphs. The test selects target affixes including "–ion", "–ness", "–able" and "–un" based on Nation's (2016) typology. The test was piloted with a small group of participants to confirm that it was reliable, Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.80$, before being content validated with EFL experts. It is worth mentioning that the accuracy score represented the percentage of correct form derivations across all test items and fluency was determined by counting the number of unique correct derivational words in the open-ended writing section with a maximum score of 30.

Later, two sets of instructional materials were implemented for manipulation of learning conditions. The instructional materials were contextualized through graded readings combined with authentic texts and communicative activities such as discussions and role plays. These materials introduced derivational forms in use by i+1 level texts that give proper challenges to students without overwhelming. The decontextualized materials referred to affix charts as well as vocabulary lists and word-formation exercises typical of conventional instruction in Iraqi classrooms.

As the last instrument that was used for qualitative data collection, the researcher used semi-structured interviews which explored learners' experiences and perceptions. The interview questions investigated derivation difficulties while assessing the value of learning activities and examining the impact of prior knowledge on the process. The interview questions underwent modifications from Masrai, (2016) while receiving evaluations for their clarity and contextual appropriateness. And finally, the error analysis framework based on Boudelaa and Marslen-Wilson (2015) was modified to classify derivational errors which appeared in test answers. The framework enables a thorough assessment of learner barriers, as it classifies the overgeneralization, incorrect affixation and L1 interference.

Procedure

The study was conducted during a period of 12 weeks. During week one all the participants took the OQPT test to determine their proficiency level. After the homogeneity of learners based on their proficiency level, a random distribution method was used to assign learners from the same level between contextualized and decontextualized learning groups.

Each group received eight 90-minute instructional sessions between weeks two through nine. During the contextualized learning sessions participants worked with authentic English content while they read excerpts and analyzed derivational word usage in context before participating in discussions or role plays to practice their target derivational forms. The lesson materials introduced 10-15 affixes per week in scaffolded lessons that accumulate the exposure of students.

In the decontextualized group, students were taught English by use of vocabulary lists and morphological charts and isolated exercises comprising of affix matching activity and sentence completion. The study participants in both conditions practiced word memorization and word transformations by rule with the same target affixes to ensure that the tasks can have an equal amount of content.

After the treatment phase of the study, the DPKT was administered to all participants in week ten under controlled examination settings. The evaluation was based on correct word formation and various derivative forms that students form when they are given an open-ended task. Two independent raters evaluate responses by using Cohen's kappa for inter-rater reliability test which resulted in a 0.90 reliability index.

Finally, the study used semi-structured interviews with thirty participants who representing all proficiency levels and learning conditions during the last two weeks. The interviews which lasted between 15 to 20 minutes were recorded with participants' consent. The researcher simultaneously examined errors found in DPKT responses to identify recurring problems along with their potential sources of difficulty.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for quantitative data analysis. A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine if proficiency level affects DPKT scores followed by Tukey's post-hoc tests to evaluate group variations. In additions, an independent-samples t-test evaluated the differences between learners who receive contextualized or decontextualized instruction with Cohen's d measures effect sizes. The relationship between the learning condition and the proficiency level was tested using the two-way ANOVA model.

Continuing with the data analysis, thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step model was applied to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews. The two researchers perform double-coding of transcripts to verify their inter-coder reliability. The frequency and types of errors identified during error analysis enabled researchers to explain both test results and interview findings. The combination of test scores with error patterns and interview data created a strong basis for validating and interpreting study results.

Results and Findings

The DPKT contained 30 items which included 10 gap-filling tasks and 10 word-formation tasks and 10 open-ended writing tasks. The measurement of accuracy was done by the percentage of correct derivational forms where the maximum score was 100% and measurement of fluency by the number of derivational forms students generated in the open-ended tasks with the maximum being 30. The inter-rater reliability was high (Cohen's kappa = 0.92) and Cronbach's alpha for the DPKT was 0.85 which confirmed reliability. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS with $\alpha = 0.05$ as the significance level. The total number of valid derivational forms generated in open-ended tasks is represented by fluency scores and accuracy scores show the proportion of correct responses in all test sections.

To find the answer to the first research question which addressed how English language proficiency affect Iraqi EFL learners' performance in producing derivational forms, the researcher used one-way ANOVA to evaluated DPKT accuracy and fluency scores between the three proficiency levels (low, intermediate, high). The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 *Mean DPKT Scores by Proficiency Level*

Proficiency Level	*N*	*Accuracy M (SD)*	*Fluency M (SD)*
Low	40	55.8 (10.4)	15.7 (4.2)
Intermediate	40	70.1 (9.5)	20.3 (3.8)
High	40	85.4 (8.2)	25.6 (3.1)

The results indicated significant differences for accuracy, $F(2, 117) = 68.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.54$, and fluency, $F(2, 117) = 52.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.47$, with large effect sizes.

Table 2 *One-Way ANOVA Results*

Measure	*F (df)*	*p-value*	*Effect Size (η^2)*
Accuracy	$F(2, 117) = 68.42$	$p < .001$	0.54
Fluency	$F(2, 117) = 52.17$	$p < .001$	0.47

To conduct a pairwise analysis, the Tuckey post hoc test was implemented on the data. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 *Pairwise Analysis*

Comparison	*Measure*	*Group 1 (M, SD)*	*Group 2 (M, SD)*	*p-value*	*Result*
High vs. Intermediate	Accuracy	High (85.4, 8.2)	Intermediate (70.1, 9.5)	p < .01	High > Intermediate
High vs. Intermediate	Fluency	High (25.6, 3.1)	Intermediate (20.3, 3.8)	p < .01	High > Intermediate
High vs. Low	Accuracy	High (85.4, 8.2)	Low (55.8, 10.4)	p < .01	High > Low
High vs. Low	Fluency	High (25.6, 3.1)	Low (15.7, 4.2)	p < .01	High > Low
Intermediate vs. Low	Accuracy	Intermediate (70.1, 9.5)	Low (55.8, 10.4)	p < .01	Intermediate > Low
Intermediate vs. Low	Fluency	Intermediate (20.3, 3.8)	Low (15.7, 4.2)	p < .01	Intermediate > Low

Post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests revealed that the high-proficiency group ($M = 85.4$, $SD = 8.2$ for accuracy; $M = 25.6$, $SD = 3.1$ for fluency) performed better than the intermediate group ($M = 70.1$, $SD = 9.5$; $M = 20.3$, $SD = 3.8$) and low-proficiency group ($M = 55.8$, $SD = 10.4$; $M = 15.7$,

SD = 4.2), with all pairwise comparisons significant (p <.01). The intermediate group also outperformed the low-proficiency group (p <.01). The results indicate that more advanced Iraqi EFL learners are much more competent in the generation of derivational forms, which validate the hypothesis and fits well with the results of Masrai, (2016), who referenced that morphological competence is improved with proficiency.

Furthermore, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the effect of contextualized vocabulary instruction and decontextualized instruction on derivational productive knowledge of Iraqi EFL learners.

Table 4 *Mean DPKT Scores by Learning Condition*

Learning Condition	*N*	*Accuracy M (SD)*	*Fluency M (SD)*
Contextualized	60	78.6 (12.3)	23.1 (4.5)
Decontextualized	60	62.7 (11.8)	17.8 (4.1)

Tables 3 shows the mean score and standard deviation of accuracy and fluency in contextualized and de-contextualized learning conditions. To check the difference, an independent samples t-test was carried out.

Table 5 *Independent t-test Comparing Scores by Learning Condition*

Measure	*t (df)*	*p-value*	*Effect Size (Cohen's d)*
Accuracy	t(118) = 7.82	p < .001	1.42
Fluency	t(118) = 6.95	p < .001	1.27

The independent samples t-test compared DPKT scores of the student learning in the contextualized (n = 60) and decontextualized (n = 60) conditions. Based on the results and findings of the study, it was revealed that the contextualized learning approach produced better results than decontextualized learning in both accuracy and fluency measurements with t(118) = 7.82, p <.001, d = 1.42 and t(118) = 6.95, p <.001, d = 1.27 respectively. The contextualized group scored higher on average (M = 78.6, SD = 12.3 for accuracy; M = 23.1, SD = 4.5 for fluency) than the decontextualized group (M = 62.7, SD = 11.8; M = 17.8, SD = 4.1).

Table 6 *Percentage of Error Types by Learning Condition*

Learning Condition	*Total Error Rate (%)*	*L1 Interference (%)*	*Incorrect Affix (%)*	*Overgeneralization (%)*	*Semantic Errors (%)*
Contextualized	22.4	20	25	40	15
Decontextualized	37.6	35	30	10	25

The results of error analysis indicated that the contextualized group made fewer mistakes (M = 22.4%) than the decontextualized group (M = 37.6%) and the contextualized group made fewer L1 interference errors (20% vs. 35%) and semantic errors (15% vs. 25%). Table 6 presents the error rates according to the learning condition.

These findings showed that contextualized learning materials have a considerable positive influence on derivational productive knowledge, which proves the hypothesis and confirms the results of Webb and Nation (2017), who note the importance of contextual cues in the acquisition of vocabulary.

In a next step in investigating the effect of the mentioned instruction types, the researcher used a two-way ANOVA analyzed DPKT accuracy scores to determine how proficiency levels and learning conditions interacted.

Table 7 *Mean DPKT Accuracy Scores by Proficiency Level and Learning Condition*

Proficiency Level	*Contextualized M (SD)*	*Decontextualized M (SD)*
Low (A2-B1)	60.3 (9.8)	51.3 (10.2)
Intermediate (B1-B2)	76.5 (8.7)	63.7 (9.1)
High (B2-C1)	89.2 (7.1)	81.6 (8.5)

Regarding the difference between the mean scores in different proficiency levels, the scores were compared using a two-way ANOVA test.

Table 8 *Two-way ANOVA Comparing Mean DPKT Accuracy Scores by Proficiency Level and Learning Condition*

Effect	*F (df)*	*p-value*	*Effect Size (η^2)*
Proficiency (Main Effect)	F(2, 114) = 65.33	p < .001	0.53
Learning Condition (Main Effect)	F(1, 114) = 60.12	p < .001	0.34
Interaction (Proficiency × Learning Condition)	F(2, 114) = 8.45	p = .001	0.13

The analysis revealed significant main effects for proficiency F(2, 114) = 65.33, p <.001, η^2 = 0.53 and learning condition F(1, 114) = 60.12, p <.001, η^2 = 0.34 and a significant interaction effect F(2, 114) = 8.45, p =.001, η^2 = 0.13. The contextualized condition produced better results for all proficiency levels but the largest improvement occurred among high-proficiency learners who achieved 89.2 (SD = 7.1) in contextualized learning compared to 81.6 (SD = 8.5) in decontextualized learning and the smallest improvement occurred among low-proficiency learners who reached 60.3 (SD = 9.8) in contextualized learning versus 51.3 (SD = 10.2) in decontextualized learning. The findings indicate that contextualized learning increases derivational knowledge at all levels of proficiency, with higher benefits being observed among higher-proficiency learners as confirmed by the findings of Masrai, (2016).

To conduct the error analysis, the open-ended research questions received insights from qualitative data which included error analysis of DPKT responses and thematic analysis of interviews (n = 30 participants, 10 per proficiency level, equally split between learning conditions). The error analysis method of Boudelaa and Marslen-Wilson (2015) classified errors into four categories which included overgeneralization and incorrect affix selection and L1 interference and semantic errors. Two researchers conducted thematic analysis on interview transcripts.

Table 9 *Percentage of Error Types by Proficiency Level*

Proficiency Level	*Total Error Rate (%)*	*L1 Interference (%)*	*Incorrect Affix (%)*	*Overgeneralization (%)*	*Semantic Errors (%)*
Low (A2-B1)	44.2	38	30	20	12
Intermediate (B1-B2)	29.9	25	28	35	12
High (B2-C1)	14.6	15	20	25	40

The error analysis results in Table 9 showed distinct patterns based on proficiency levels. The error rate reached its highest point at M = 44.2% among A2-B1 learners who made 38% L1 interference errors such as "decideful" instead of "decisive" and 30% incorrect affix selection errors like "happyness" instead of "happiness". The error rate for B1-B2 learners reached M = 29.9% with 35% of errors showing overgeneralization (e.g., "productiveness" instead of "productivity") and 25% L1 interference. The error rate for B2-C1 high-proficiency learners reached its lowest point at M = 14.6% with semantic errors (40% such as "production" instead of "productivity") and minimal L1 interference errors (15%).

In addition, the interview revealed that proficiency-related challenges were the main focus of the discussion. The low-proficiency learners had trouble understanding the rules of affixes because one of them explained, “I don’t know why ‘happy’ becomes ‘happiness’ but not ‘happyship.’” The intermediate learners were aware of some of the rules but they were not able to apply them correctly as one of them said, “I can guess some words, but I mix up ‘-ity’ and ‘-ness.’” The high-proficiency learners were able to demonstrate metalinguistic awareness as one of them explained, “I think about the sentence structure to choose the right form, like ‘responsible’ or ‘responsibility’.” These findings were consistent with Masrai (2016) and demonstrated that the greater the proficiency of language use the more the ability to derive words by providing a better metalinguistic awareness and less L1 interference.

The interview results showed that contextualized learners preferred authentic texts and communicative tasks because one learner explained that reading stories helped her understand how “decision” fits in sentences thus she used it better. Decontextualized learners experienced difficulties with memorization because one student mentioned “I learned lists but I forget which affix to use when writing.” The contextualized condition benefited high-proficiency learners the most because they found context helpful according to one student who stated “Seeing ‘responsibility’ in a text made it easier to use in my essay.” Similar to the findings of Webb and Nation (2017), the research showed that contextualized learning enhances derivational knowledge through semantic and syntactic cues which benefits learners with higher proficiency levels

Discussion

The study provides essential knowledge regarding how English proficiency level and instructional context affect Iraqi EFL learners' ability to produce derivative forms while addressing the research questions and explaining the relationship between linguistic and pedagogical elements and cross-linguistic factors.

For the first objective of the study, it examined how English proficiency affects Iraqi EFL students' production of derivational forms. The findings indicated that an increased level of proficiency results in an increase in accuracy and more fluent performance in derivational tasks due to an increase in metalinguistic awareness. Advanced learners demonstrated superior abilities to modify affixes in context because they showed high confidence in their selection when considering sentence structure. Low-proficiency learners faced difficulties with basic affix rules and created errors by using Arabic morphological patterns which resulted in expressions such as ‘decideful’ instead of ‘decisive’. This is consistent with the framework by Nation (2016) that

describes the development of vocabulary depth, such as derivational knowledge, which is built along with proficiency to the extent of allowing advanced learners to manage complex morphological structures in an efficient way.

Furthermore, qualitative data showed that proficiency levels determine the types of mistakes students make since low-proficiency learners make L1-based errors while intermediate learners apply affixes incorrectly and high-proficiency learners produce subtle semantic mistakes. The observed patterns confirm the findings of Kimppa et al. (2019) who indicate that proficiency advancement leads learners from form-based to meaning-based morphological competence. These findings demonstrate the requirement for instructional approaches that match student proficiency levels when teaching Iraqi EFL students at different stages of development.

Contextualized Instruction's Role

As the second objective of the study, it was examined if contextualized vocabulary instruction produces better derivational productive knowledge than traditional decontextualized approaches for vocabulary instruction. The study showed that students who were given authentic texts and communicative tasks performed better than the students who were taught using traditional memorization strategies. Learners that received contextualized instruction reported seeing words like decision in meaningful sentences allowed them to comprehend and use derivational forms corroborating to Webb and Nation (2017). The interview data showed that decontextualized learners experienced challenges with remembering appropriate affixes during writing activities.

The results of the contextualized instruction group were better in terms of error reduction as the authentic input helped them learn the English affixation patterns more effectively and lessen the need for Arabic root-based morphology. The study supports Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2014) by showing that authentic tasks enhance productive knowledge through their ability to connect form to meaning. The study demonstrated the necessity why Iraqi EFL classrooms should transit away from their conventional grammar-translation teaching methods because it supports context-focused instruction.

Morphological Complexity Across Proficiency Levels

In addition, the study evaluated how proficiency impacts students' ability to create morphologically complex words in their production. The research data showed low-proficiency students encounter major problems from their native language background which leads them to make errors such as 'happyness' or 'decideful' because Arabic is a non-concatenative language system (Vaknin-Nusbaum & Saiegh-Haddad, 2020). Intermediate learners demonstrated understanding of affix rules yet they used incorrect forms (productiveness instead of productivity) because they had not fully acquired these concepts. High-proficiency learners produced mostly semantic errors by confusing close linguistic forms between production and productivity thus indicating their transition to meaning-focused difficulties. The research of Zhang and Koda (2013) confirms these findings claiming that advanced L2 learners progress to sophisticated morphological awareness which targets semantic meanings instead of form-based errors.

Learning conditions interact with proficiency levels of students

All students benefited from contextualized instruction yet the learning benefits depended on their proficiency level. The authentic texts delivered the most educational benefits to high-proficiency learners because these learners utilized contextual signals to improve their derivational precision while increasing their fluency. Low-proficiency students achieved some progress through learning activities yet the extent of their improvement remained limited because they needed additional linguistic resources for understanding complex input. The study is in line with Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) showing that advanced learners obtain more effective morphological pattern extraction from real materials yet beginners need direct teaching for their foundational understanding of language.

The findings indicate that Iraqi EFL instruction should follow a multi-level approach; it should teach affixes explicitly to beginners and use contextualized tasks with advanced learners. The adaptable educational method addresses the uniform decontextualized instructional practices presently used in Iraq which do not address different student proficiency levels (Ahmed, 2020).

Implications

Theoretically, the research findings support Nation's (2016) vocabulary depth framework because they demonstrate how students develop their knowledge of derived words through their increasing proficiency level. The study demonstrated that contextualized input improves productive knowledge acquisition among learners who possess adequate linguistic abilities according to Webb and Nation's (2017) principles. The study confirms Boudelaa and Marslen-Wilson's (2015) cross-linguistic interference theory by showing how Arabic morphological rules make English word formation harder particularly for beginner learners. The IDC Model introduced here presents an innovative system to study proficiency effects together with contextual elements and L1 interference patterns which establishes groundwork for Arabic EFL studies.

The practical outcomes demand changes to the present EFL teaching methods in Iraqi educational institutions. The current English language teaching approaches that use grammar-translation methods need to give way to real-life materials including stories and conversations which develop derivational knowledge. The instructional method should be aligned with learner proficiency; using explicit rules and forms instruction for low proficiency learners and task-based activities for intermediate and advanced learners to construct contextual application. Teachers need to explicitly teach students how to identify and compare morphological differences between Arabic and English. The suggested changes should guide educational curriculum development and teacher training toward evidence-based SLA practices that will improve English language education in Iraq.

Limitations

The concentration of the study on university students could make its results less relevant for secondary school students. In addition, the twelve-week intervention period might not accurately demonstrate long-term learning progress and the written assessments used here may not show how derivational skills work in spoken contexts which could have different cognitive requirements.

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