The effect of application of picture into picture audio-visual aids on vocabulary learning of young Iranian ELF learners

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Abstract

The followers of audio-visualism state that applying audiovisual aids would lead to an improvement in learners’ vocabulary achievement. The aim of the present study was to examine the effect of audiovisual aids on the vocabulary learning of young Iranian EFL learners. The research was designed so that it would provide answers to the following question:

Do Picture into Picture audiovisual aids have any effect on the vocabulary learning of young Iranian EFL learners?

In order to answer the above question, two classes, each consisting of 30 learners, were selected at random. One of them was considered as the experimental and the other as the control group. To check the homogeneity of the subjects, a University of Cambridge Test consisting of 45 items was given to the subjects in the very first session. The vocabulary test (pre-test) was also given to the subjects in the first session and the post-test (vocabulary test) in the last session of the semester. After the first and during the succeeding sessions, the experimental group went through using audiovisual aids, i.e., watching and listening, watching and copying, listening and drawing, looking and drawing, and so on. The results obtained throughout the study indicated there was a significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

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1. Introduction

In order to live in the world, we have to name things. Without names, the existence of an object, phenomenon, or even people is too difficult to accept. Accordingly, vocabulary is the building block of any communication in which the structure takes the position of cement to hold these bricks together. Words of a language, as Zhan-Xiang (2004) believed, are just like bricks of a high building; despite quite small pieces, they are vital to the great structure. In fact, vocabulary is the most fundamental component, without which communication is not feasible.

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As Richards and Renandya (2002) argued, the status of vocabulary seems to be changing. For one thing, the notion of a word has been "broadened" to include lexical phrases and routines, and it has been suggested that in the initial stages of learning these play a primary role in communication and acquisition. In addition, access to lexical corpora has made it possible for applied linguists to access huge samples of language in order to find out how words are used, both by native speakers and by second language learners. Such research has enabled applied linguists to identify common patterns of collocation, word formation, metaphor, and lexical phrases that are part of a speaker’s lexical competence.

People who have experience in learning a foreign language know that vocabulary is always one of the major problems in language learning no matter one is at the beginning or at the end of language learning. Because it is possible for many learners to pronounce a lot of words sufficiently correctly and know at least some of the basic structures of the language but it is more difficult for them to possess a range of vocabulary that is wide enough to satisfy their needs in communication.

In Iran, according to the researcher's experience, the problem is that vocabulary is claimed to be considered and taught. But things are different when they come to the chalkboard: new words are taught mostly by providing Persian equivalents. The innovative methods are not introduced and practiced well. Students day and night complain that they do not know how to learn vocabulary and why they forget them very soon.

The results of these experiments triggered a somehow similar study with young Iranian EFL learners to determine whether using audiovisual aids will have any effect on their vocabulary development.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Vocabulary and vocabulary learning is an issue that almost all language educators have found important. We know that communication stops when we do not know the word(s) we need although we have mastered our grammar. So, we should not postpone vocabulary learning until we have mastered our grammar.

Thornburry (2002) stated, “If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words.” (p.114)

In the mid 1960s, three new technological aids came into general use in the classroom-language laboratory, portable tape-recorder and film strip projector. All these were greeted with euphoria in all modern language departments. Extensive use of tapes and equipment was revolutionary for language teachers. The potential offered to language teaching by tape-recorder was enormous - now possible to bring native speaking voices into classroom. Editing and self- recording facilities were now available (cited in Mirhassani, 2003).

Audiovisual approach marked the start of the technological age in language teaching and it did introduce important new element and emphasized the need for visual presentation and possibility of eliciting language from visual cues. It placed more weight on the use of foreign language in classroom by both teacher and pupil, and the language used was of greater practicality. More gifted teachers used new courses with great success -- moved forward to open -- ended question and answer work and extended dialog, designed their own supplementary materials, exercises and worksheets (Rivers, 1981).

In short, media help us to motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context. Media can also provide a density of information and richness of cultural input not otherwise possible in the classroom, they can help students process information and free the teacher from excessive explanation, and they can provide contextualization and a solid point of departure for classroom activities (Cameron, 2001).

The following statements by Celce-Murcia (2002) summarize the rationale for using media in the language classroom:

- Given the role media play in the world outside the classroom, students expect to find media inside the classroom as well. Media thus serve as an important motivator in the language teaching.
- Audio-visual materials provide students with content, meaning, and guidance. They thus create a contextualized situation within which language items are presented and practiced.
- Media materials can lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world.
Since the learning styles of students differ, media provide us with a way of addressing the needs of both visual and auditory learners.

The role that input plays in language learning is virtually uncontested. By bringing media into the classroom, teachers can expose their students to multiple input sources. Thus, while decreasing the risk of the students’ becoming dependent on their teacher’s dialect or idiolect, they can also enrich their language learning experiences.

With reference to schema theory, which proposes that we approach new information by scanning our memory banks for related knowledge, media can help students call up existing schemata and therefore maximize their use of prior background knowledge in the language learning process.

Finally, research suggests that media provide teachers with a means of presenting material in a time-efficient and compact manner, and of stimulating students’ senses, theory helping them to process information more readily.

2.1 Ways of Presenting the Meaning of New Items

According to Davies and Pears (2003), new words should not be presented in isolation and should not be learned by simple rote memorization. It is important that new vocabulary items be presented in contexts rich enough to provide clues to meaning and that students be given multiple exposure to items they should learn. More recently, computer programs that include the sounds of the words as well as illustrative pictures provide opportunity for practice with a variety of contexts, both written and spoken.

The next set of choices relates to the means of presentation. The following guidelines presented by Lewis and Hill (1990), are eight most commonly employed techniques in teaching vocabulary:

- Use pictures
- Use real objects
- Demonstrate
- Mime
- Define
- Exemplify
- Use synonyms
- Translate

2.1.1 Why Use Video?

As Harmer (2001) stated, there are many reasons why video can add a special, extra dimension to the learning experience:

Seeing language-in-use: one of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture and other visual clues. Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial expression. All such paralinguistic feature give valuable-meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply.

Cross-cultural awareness: video uniquely allows students a look at situations far beyond their classroom. This is especially useful if they want to see, for example, typical British 'body language' when inviting someone out, or how Americans speak to waiters. Video is also of great value in giving students a chance to see such things as what kinds of food people eat in other countries, and what they wear.

The power of creation: when students use video cameras themselves they are given the potential to create something memorable and enjoyable. The camera operators and directors suddenly have considerable power. The task of video-making can provoke genuinely creative and communicative uses of the language, with students finding themselves doing new things in English.

Motivation: for all of the reasons so far mentioned, most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks.
2.1.1. Research activities

Although recent years have been an increasing volume of literature on audiovisual aids and language teaching, there has recently been very little research into suitability and effectiveness of the media for this purpose. However, there have been studies in other fields notably, educational broadcasting research and communication studies, which though set in the domain of the first language acquisition and comprehension, may have relevance for English language teaching. With one or two notable exceptions, no one appears to be considering one of the main questions arising from the widespread of audio and audio-visual aids as a source of language input to the foreign language learner.

3. Method

We are living today in a rich audiovisual environment. As teachers, we must face the fact that this radically changes our students’ attitude towards language and language learning. This study tried to determine whether audiovisual aids have any effect on learning vocabulary among young Iranian beginner EFL learners. The null hypothesis in this research asserted that Picture into Picture audiovisual aids have no effect on the young Iranian EFL learners’ vocabulary learning. In trying to accept or reject the null hypothesis, the researcher employed different T-tests.

3.1. Subjects

In order to conduct the research project, the researcher selected sixty students, aged 7-12, out of eighty-six students from among four similar classes at a Language Institute in Aliabad Katool, Iran. Their mother tongue was Persian and all of them were beginner language learners. The subjects were divided into two classes of 30, one of which was considered as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

3.2 Instrumentation

To make sure that the present study enjoys the needed appropriateness, the researcher applied three instruments:

3.2.1 A University of Cambridge test

In order to check the homogeneity of the two groups, the researcher asked the subjects to take the University of Cambridge Test (Starters) in the first session. The test consisted of 45 items to which the learners had to answer in 45 minutes. This test is divided into two sections; these are Listening, and Reading and Writing. Each section contains:

| Section 1 | 20 minutes |
|-----------|------------|
| Listening |            |
| Part 1    | Listen and draw lines | 5 questions |
| Part 2    | Listen and write names or numbers | 5 questions |
| Part 3    | Listen and tick | 5 questions |
| Part 4    | Listen and color and draw | 5 questions |

| Section 2 | 25 minutes |
|-----------|------------|
| Reading & Writing |            |
| Part 1    | Put a tick or cross | 5 questions |
| Part 2    | Write yes or no | 5 questions |
| Part 3    | Write the words | 5 questions |

3.2.2 A proficiency test
This test, a vocabulary test, is a word bank consisting of all new vocabulary items in New Parade, Book 2 (Herrera, & Zanatta, 1999), was given to the subjects in the first session of the semester. The subjects were required to translate the given words into Persian. The goal here was to make sure what words were unknown to both groups.

3.2.3 An achievement test

This test, a vocabulary test, was administered both to the experimental group and the control group in the last session of the semester. The subjects were asked to translate the given words into Persian.

3.3 Procedure

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the researcher carried out the following procedure: in this study, the subjects were 86 female learners from among four similar classes.

In this research, three data gathering devices were employed: A Test of University of Cambridge, a vocabulary test, and an achievement test. Under testing conditions, the subjects were asked to take the Cambridge Young Learners' Test (Starters) consisting of 25 reading and writing items and 20 listening items in the very first session; the evaluation of the Cambridge test was perfectly objective because each item had only one correct response; 45 marks were assigned to the 45 items of the test which the subjects had to perform on.

Then, the researcher limited the subjects to 60 on the basis of their scores. The researcher selected the subjects whose scores were one standard deviation below and above the mean. The subjects were divided into two homogeneous groups, considering one as the control group and one as the experimental group. Each group included 30 homogeneous female learners.

Then, a vocabulary test (as a pre-test) which was a word bank consisting of all new words in New Parade, Book 2 (Herrera, & Zanatta, 1999), was administered to the subjects in both groups. Both groups were to translate all of those words into Persian. The goal here was to make sure what words were unknown to the subjects in both groups.

After the administration of the vocabulary test, about 47 words out of 200 words were excluded from the program because these words were already known to the subjects in both groups. Throughout the study, the researcher did not present and practice the words that both groups already knew.

During the study, the researcher taught each group in 30 sessions (each session 90 minutes). The control group sessions were held on odd days from 4-5:30 p.m. in class No. 101, and the experimental group sessions were held on even days from 4-5:30 p.m. at the same class.

During the 30 session instruction, the researcher presented and practiced all these unknown words through the curriculum book, New Parade, Book 2, to the subjects in the control group. In fact, the subjects in the control group were asked to fill in the blanks, look and match, listen and circle, read and write, draw and write, listen and point, think and write new words.

However, throughout the same period (30 sessions), the researcher presented and practiced all these unknown words through audiovisual aids to the experimental group. In fact, the researcher conducted the treatment through the following stages during each session:

1. Doing Preparation Activities

Learners can learn a lot through preparation activities because in so doing, they can think about what is going to happen, what they will deal with, and so forth. So, this technique can awaken students' curiosity (Harmer, 2001).

2. Fasting Forward Technique

The teacher presses the play button and then fast forwards the video so that the sequence shoots pass silently and at great speed, taking only a couple of minutes. When it is over, the teacher can ask students what the extract was all about. Thus, learners will get familiar with the theme of the new lesson and will activate their background knowledge (Harmer, 2001).

3. Playing the Sound Track at Normal Speed
At this stage, learners watch and listen to the sound track twice (without presenting the written form of the new vocabulary) (Harmer, 2001).

4. Silent Viewing Technique

The teacher plays the sound track at normal speed, but without the sound. Students have to guess what the new words are. When they have done this, the teacher plays the sound track with sound so that the learners can check to see if they have guessed correctly (Harmer, 2001).

5. Doing the Comprehension Exercises

At this stage, the teacher encourages the learners to watch and listen once more. When doing these exercises, the teacher stops the sound track, and the students repeat new vocabulary item to check that they have heard correctly (Harmer, 2001).

6. Freezing Frame Technique

At any stage during playing the sound track, the teacher freezes a picture and randomly asks the students to say the new vocabulary (Harmer, 2001).

7. Playing the Sound Track Followed by the Written Form of the New Vocabulary.

The learners see and hear the English word and copy the word into their vocabulary notebooks (Allen, 1983).

8. Pictureless Listening 1

The teacher covers the screen or turns the monitor away; the learners then listen to new vocabulary and have to draw what they hear (Harmer, 2001).

9. Pictureless Listening 2

The teacher turns the brightness control right down. The learners have to copy the new vocabulary into their vocabulary notebooks (Harmer, 2001).

10. Partial Viewing

One way of provoking the students' curiosity is to allow them only a partial view of the pictures on the screen without sound. The teacher covers half of the screen. Then the students have to guess what the vocabulary is (Harmer, 2001).

11. Communication Experience

With regard to the new vocabulary, the learners are asked to take paper and pencil, and to see how many pictures they can draw before the teacher says "Stop." While the learners are drawing, the teacher walks around the room and chooses a student who has made clear pictures. The teacher asks her to come to the front of the room with her paper, which she is not allowed to show to any of her classmates. **Teacher:** "Sara has drawn several pictures. How many? What are they? Let's guess in English."

As various learners offer guesses (ten pictures, four pictures, a dog, an orange, scissors, etc.), Sara looks at her pictures and accepts the guess if it is correct. If the guess is wrong, she corrects it. (For example: No, twelve
pictures. No, no dog). Finally, she shows her set of pictures to the class. Before returning to her seat, Sara points to the pictures she has drawn and asks her classmates in English to say what those pictures are (Allen, 1983).

1.2. Role Reversal

The teacher gets the learners to sit in pairs facing each other so that one of them can see the video and one cannot (there is no sound). The learners who can see, say the word and their partners copy the new vocabulary. After a while, the teacher stops the video and gets them to change places.

1.3. Looking and Drawing

The teacher plays the written form of new vocabulary on the screen while students draw pictures.

1.4. Looking and Writing

The teacher plays the sound track without sound, as well as the written form of the new vocabulary, while students copy new vocabulary in their notebooks.

1.5. Looking, Listening, Saying, and Writing

At this stage, learners watch and listen to the sound track again but without sound and the written form of the new words; they are to say and write down the new words simultaneously.

To be sure of the efficiency of the treatment, the researcher administered a post test, a vocabulary test, both to the experimental and the control group at the end of the semester. The scores based on the result of the pre-and post-test showed the impact of the two methods. Finally, a T-test was conducted to examine the differences of the mean score of the two groups.

In short, in the present study the aforementioned procedure was aimed at finding the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. In this study, the Picture into Picture audiovisual aids were considered to be independent variables, having a direct impact on the dependent variable, i.e. vocabulary learning.

4. Conclusion

Considering the df (degree of freedom) and the level of significance for two-tailed test, if the observed t is computed to be more than the t critical, in each one of the two groups, the null hypothesis is rejected, but if the observed t is computed to be less than the t critical, the null hypothesis is supported. Analysis of calculated T-test provides us with the judgment which allows us to accept or reject the null hypothesis of the present study.

Different T-tests were calculated to compare the means of the two groups on different tests. First, the means of the two groups on the University of Cambridge (Starters) Test were compared. The University of Cambridge test as stated above was given to the students at the beginning of the course to check the homogeneity of the subjects. Then, the means of the two groups on vocabulary test (pre-test) given to the students at the beginning of the program was also compared and the T-test showed no significant difference and confirmed their homogeneity. Then, to check the null hypothesis, the means of the two groups on vocabulary test (post-test) at the end of the course were also compared.

The results of the pretest and posttest which served as the statistical basis for the two groups and a T-test comparison of group means showed a t value of -12.175. The table of T-critical with 58 degree of freedom for .05 level shows T- critical of 1.96. The T-critical is smaller than the t observed -12.175 > 1.96. Our t value is high enough that we can safely reject the null hypothesis: "Picture into Picture audiovisual aids have a significant effect on vocabulary learning among young Iranian EFL learners."
Furthermore, the obtained t-value provided answer to the research question: "Do Picture into picture audiovisual aids have any effect on vocabulary learning among young Iranian EFL learners?"

The data supports a positive answer to such a question. All taken together, the data showed that the subjects in the experimental group did outperform those in the control group and accordingly the null hypothesis was rejected.

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