A Comparative Study of the Effects of Songs and Pictures on Iranian EFL Learners' L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

Vocabulary is vital to English language teaching since without adequate vocabulary repertoire students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111–112). As a result, this study which was conducted in one of the institutions of Tabriz. Iran aimed at investigating the comparative effects of pictures and songs on vocabulary learning. Sixty-eight senior male EFL learners participated in this quasi – Experimental study, all of whom were studying in their final academic semester. There were two groups one of which was taught new words through pictures while the other one was taught the same words through songs. One pre-test was administered before the study and one post-test after program for measuring the effectiveness of the treatments. The results have been analyzed by SPSS indicated that clustering is more effective than pictures; this was so because the words which are interrelated in their meaning reinforce the learning and recalling of the other. It can be said that through using clusters of words the relevant schema is activated in effective manner.

Keywords: pictures, songs, vocabulary acquisition

INTRODUCTION

According to Pikulski and Templetion (2004), it is impossible to overemphasize the power of words; they literally have altered and will continue to alter the course of world history. Possibly the greatest tools we can offer students for succeeding, not only in their education but also normally in life, is a large and adequate vocabulary repertoire and the effective strategies for learning them. Our ability to functioning today's complex social and economic worlds is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge. Psychologists, linguists and language teachers have been concerned vocabulary learning strategies for long time. Vocabulary familiarity has vital role in learning and using a language. Vocabulary is essential way in to a language, and is the

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major tip to learn a language but language beginners are not so good in using methods that are constructive for them in memorizing the words. (Zahedi and Abdi., 2012). It is so central that how many words you know in speaking or writing or reading in a foreign or second language. Therefore lecturers need to pay attention to have significant vocabulary instructions for language learners. The more words you know the more you will be able to comprehend what you listen to, and read, and so you will be able to write efficiently. Learning vocabulary seems one of the easiest steps in learning a language but actually it is one of the most difficult things to do. This is even more challenging when it comes to foreign language pupils with incomplete and limited exposure to language and not having sufficient occasion to use learnt words in genuine life. Consequently they have profound problems, for example in reading skill; undoubtedly that reading is one of the most important parts of experiencing a foreign language. Lecturers, linguists, and language teachers tried to study vocabulary learning strategies. There are so many studies about the maintenance of words that are results of using special vocabulary strategies, this shows the effects of a variety of strategies in how of teaching (Yongqi GU, 2003). According to above declarations, there is a major gap in vocabulary learning in second and foreign language learning. Furthermore, most of instructors still confounded to use proper techniques for teaching vocabulary. In order to fill a small piece of this gap, this research was conducted.Certainly vocabulary is the most essential step in the process of language learning/ teaching. That is when there is not an acceptable repertoire people experience serious problems in sharing their ideas and thoughts. In the majority of the cases this yields in physical aggressiveness. In general the lack of word knowledge is a kind of flaw. While listening or reading have serious problems in understanding new concepts when students don't know how to find the relevant words from their mental dictionaries. These troubles can make it complicated for a student to learn as quickly as someone who doesn't have similar problems. Normally these students are at risk of being identified as disable learners. It seems the learnt items don't go into long-term memory, perhaps because they are not learnt in efficient manner. Accordingly there is strong need for more successful strategies in teaching/learning process. In this study the researcher aimed at doing this act through comparing the effectiveness of the songs and pictures.

Review of literature

Pictures/Clusters and Vocabulary learning

Photos as an ingredient of visual aids are utilized as a method in teaching English vocabulary at elementary schools. Pictures that can be drafts, drafts, graphs, comic, poster, cartoon, board drawing, and picture in newspapers, magazines, posters, family photograph, calendars, wall chart, Slides, diagrams and maps are widely used as media. According to Webster, picture is an image or similarity of a thing, person, scene, duplicated, on flat surface, particularly by painting, of photography; a metal image or impression; an idea. (Webster, 1983)Pictures can be employed to explain the meaning of vocabulary items. Virginia French says that for helping students to understand the meaning of a word, picture is practical. (Virginia French, 1983)Hill 1990 believes that:

"The standard classroom" is usually not a very suitable environment for learning languages. That is why teachers search for various aids and stimuli to improve this situation. Pictures are one of these valuable aids. They bring "images of reality into the unnatural world of the language classroom". (Hill1990p.1) Big picture are extremely useful tools in presenting and drilling forms of new words, given that they draw learners' mind and make these often uninteresting activities more pleasurable. And that is accurately what teachers need when presenting new language to grasp their learners' full concentration, to increase their interest in the presented subject and therefore their motivation as well. At the same time pictures in particular and visual aids in general enable students to link the implication of the words with real-world images immediately. When using pictures in donation, it is effortless to engage learners actively and to join the presentation with controlled application. The presentation of vocabulary with pictures can be done in plenty of diverse ways, for example in retelling a narrative or just simply based on a set of vocabulary for a meticulous topic (Jakolva, 2009).

One of the more usual results in remembrance investigation is that pictures are remembered better than words. For example, when shown a list of easily named pictures vs. their equivalent verbal labels, participants frequently have an easier time recalling the names of the pictures compared with the verbal tags (Paivio and Csapo, 1973). Jiang (2014) worked on learning vocabulary through using pictures of which reported significant change in vocabulary learning of the participants. According to Sholihah (2009), who's worked on the effect of pictures on vocabulary learning; Based on the activities of training English vocabulary through pictures at the fifth grade learners of SDN Tugu Jebres, the writer will give details on the power of using pictures application in the teaching /learning process. They are as follows: 1. to advance the students' motivation .The development of the students' vocabulary is fairly important. The students' enthusiasm to learn English gets better when they are exposed to the pictures. The students are very passionate to join the lesson, including answering the question and responding the teacher' explanation. Then, high motivation makes the improvement of students' vocabulary. 2. To draw the Students' attention Pictures are practical to focus the Based on the activities of training English vocabulary through pictures at the fifth grade learners of SDN Tugu Jebres, the writer will give details on the power of using pictures application in the teaching /learning process. They are as follows: 1. to advance the students' motivation .The development of the students' vocabulary is fairly important. The students' enthusiasm to learn English gets better when they are exposed to the pictures. The students are very passionate to join the lesson, including answering the question and responding the teacher' explanation. Then, high motivation makes the improvement of students' vocabulary.2. To attract the Students' attention Pictures are useful to focus the attention of the students on what the text says by helping him to imagine it. When using pictures, the students depend on the pictures and neglect to understand the context. When the students are attracted to the pictures, they will pay attention more to learning English. Pictures have an important function as aids to learning simply because they attract students' attention and help encourage them to focus on the subject in hand.3.

Pictures help the students to memorize the vocabularies. It is central to make certain that the pictures are not vague; they should hold only what the word means. Using picture is an effort to help students to understand and comprehend something clearly and easily. However, teaching using pictures have an important role in the understanding of meaning. It means that using picture has an impact on the memorization of the vocabulary learning.4. To make the teaching learning activity more interesting Teaching English vocabularies by using picture is the process of making the students more active and interested in English class. The use of pictures could give a pleasant condition in teaching and learning activity, as the students do not get tired of in having English class. It could make the teaching learning activities run well. The explanation above shows that using pictures in the teaching English vocabularies are a good technique to improve the students 'vocabularies. As the result, the score of English is increasing well. It can make a conclusion that using pictures is necessary and effective in the teaching English vocabulary. Concentration of the students on what the text declares by helping him to imagine it. When using pictures, the students depend on the pictures and neglect to understand the context. When the students are attracted to the pictures, they will pay attention more to learning English. Pictures have an important function as aids to learning simply because they attract students' attention and help encourage them to focus on the subject in hand.3. Pictures help the students to memorize the vocabularies

It is important to make sure that the pictures are not ambiguous; they should contain only what the word means. Using picture is an effort to help students to understand and comprehend something clearly and easily. However, teaching using pictures have an important role in the understanding of meaning. It means that using picture has an impact on the memorization of the vocabulary learning.4. To make the teaching learning activity more interesting Teaching English vocabularies by using picture is the process of making the students more active and interested in English class. The use of pictures could give an enjoyable situation in teaching and learning activity, as the students do not get bored in having English class. It could make the teaching learning activities run well. Shoari and Farrokhi (2014), also worked on the effects of organizers in the form of the pictures and clusters in vocabulary learning, they also reported significant effects of pictures in word acquisition. They believe that recalling of one word reinforces the recalling of the other one, they also stated that it is of significant effect on word recalling of students with learning disabilities since they cannot make connections between words and relevant concepts. Semantic mapping is one kind of Graphic Organizers that is making use of cluster of words with their pictures when possible. Zahedi and Abdi (2012) consider that semantic mapping is one of the most practical methods that can aid pupils of any level in learning vocabulary. They affirmed that semantic mapping takes the associations of a material to consciousness for deepening, receiving and learning vocabulary points. Semantic mapping results in making nets for new words (Zahedi *et al.* 2012). Zahedi and Abdi worked on semantic mapping on 40 feminine students of 19 to 27 in Miandab University. They conclude that, semantic mapping (as a strategy that supported by depth of processing), results in profound level of processing

and, as a result better recall (Zahedi *et al.* 2012). Gairns and Redman (1986) gave supports for the effectiveness of grouping words, based on semantic features in giving an effective way for learning (Thinkhlam, 1997). Al-Jabri (2005) reported effects of clustering of L2 words. Hassan Soleimani (2012) studied the effects of clustering new words on vocabulary learning. He reported the significant effects of clustering (Soleimani, 2012).

Songs and Music

There are some works on the effects of using genuine materials, such as instructional games, songs and stories, on improving students' learning but empirical supports are also required (Razmjoo,et.al, 2012). Plato considers that "musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten...making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful" (cited in Stansell, 2005). Based on Yuliana (2003)'s statement; playing a song is pleasant for learners and, because words are repeated several times, learners are able to memorize them easily. Another feature of songs is that they are learnt by heart and consequently bring about learners 'development. Due to the melody of the songs, they ease learning and, music aids learners in developing the cognitive skills and in improving language skills. Through singing songs, children learn rhyme and vocabulary (Yuliana, 2003). The application of the music in the ELT is not new mission. Bartle (1962) and Richards (1969) or Jolly (1975), and other researchers have been working on the effect of melody in language learning because of its linguistic, and motivational advantages (as cited in Engh, 2013). There are number of studies of which establish powerfully the affirmative effectiveness of the melody on a range of language fields. In Audio Lingual method of the language teaching music was employed so as to reduce the negative effects of repetitiveness of the practices of the 1950s to 1970s. It was supposed that making use of music lead to a relax state for mind, and as a result improve learning (Lozanov, 1978).

Most of the learners listen to music when they are reading perhaps because they think that music helps them to concentrate on tasks, but some people believe that music is a kind of distracter, and ends learning. There are also other supporting evidences for effectiveness of music on first/second/ foreign language acquisition by (Katchen, 1988). It was also reported that music processing and language processing are situated in the same area of the brain (Maess and Koelesh, 2001). According to Ayotte (2004); "music and language share the same auditory, perceptive, and cognitive mechanisms that impose a structure on auditory information received by the senses" (p.10). Music is a kind of language parcel that links the cultures, but there is an imperative point here, that pop songs are more efficient in ESL environments, because, for example: first of all these songs are at 11-year-old native speakers' level and, as a result simple vocabularies will be more suitable for ESL learners, the lyrics are repetitive within each song, and because the words mostly are short, as a result vocabulary learning would be facilitated. These songs are conversational and are sung at more or less slow same rate with frequent pauses, and give more chance to understanding (Murpley, 1992). Martin et al

(1988) studied the effect of the music and discovered that during listening to the background music students' scores increased considerably. Kiger (1989) demonstrates that, students' scores in comprehension tests raised through using soft music and rhythmic music. Li (2008) is one of the researchers who examined the consequence of making use of music on vocabulary learning. In his experimental study he reported that China's learners' scores enhanced considerably in the effect of the using songs .Huy LE (2007) states that music is very effective in improving all language skills. Music is widespread factor in all societies. Language and communication are also universal (Salcedo, 2002). Alipour et.al (2012) also examined the role of the songs on vocabulary learning. In their study they wanted to find the effect of songs on upper-level learners. The outcomes of the research powerfully support the effectiveness of songs on teaching words. According to Richman (1993) there are three types of human vocalization. Expressive sounds for instance sighing crying, laughingand…, speech and singing (cited in Salcedo, 2002, p 2).Kahraman (2008) worked on the role of songs on listening comprehension, and found that regardless the origin of the singer, songs improved listening comprehension. Utilizing songs lower the cognitive load during learning. Cognitive load means: The total cognitive activity imposed by task/ problem on working memory. Zoghi and Shoari(2015), also are among the researchers worked on the effects of songs on word learning. They also reported statistically significant enhancement in the results of the post-test in song group, they are believe in the positive effects of songs due to the cresting a relaxed atmosphere.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

RQ: Are there any significant differences between the effects of songs and pictures on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

H_0: There are no significant differences between the effects of songs and pictures on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning

METHOD

Design of the study

The design of the study is quasi-experimental, that is to say there was not randomization. The Independent variables of the study are songs and pictures and dependent variable is vocabulary learning.

Participants

A total of 68 language learners (all male) with an age range of 7-14 participated in this study. The participants were from Turkish background. The participants were chosen from 7classes. Previous to the program, a language proficiency test of listening, speaking, reading, and writing was conducted in order for assuring their proficiency levels. A pre-test of vocabulary knowledge was administered to the both groups for their comparability. Then the program was started.

Context of the Study

The subjects of the study were selected from one of the institutes of *Tabriz, Iran*. In this institution a course consists of 17 sessions which meet three times a week. New Parade series of Mario Herrera and Theresa Zanatta is the source book of this center. The books are for promoting the interaction in various contexts. The course consists of teaching new subjects, listening materials, words, function and grammar. Communication is one of the most important points of L2 teaching in this organization. Materials are utilized to activate listening comprehension and accordingly communication.

Instruments and Materials

In order to gain quantifiable data to obtain the results of the study, the researcher made use of the subsequent instruments and materials: In order to assuring the homogeneity of proficiency level of the participants, a language proficiency test was performed. The *Flyers* listening test consists of five sections with 25 questions. The reading and writing has 6 parts, and there are 40 questions and *Flyers* speaking is of four parts. A pre-test was accomplished in order to assure the comparability of both groups, on their word knowledge. After finishing the sessions, the researcher administered a post-test for measuring the efficiency of the treatment. In one group the researcher made use of cluster of pictures and in the other one, songs were applied as instructional tools.

Procedure

At the beginning of the study in order to assuring the proficiency level of the participants one language proficiency test was administered, and 68 subjects that were approximately at same level have been selected for the study. After that one pre-test on learners' word knowledge was conducted then the program was started. In one group the researcher made use of songs as instructional tool and in the other one the same items have been taught through relevant pictures (clusters of pictures). At the end of the program one post-test was administered to both groups. The collected data has been analyzed by SPSS; since there were two groups the researcher applied t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are two research questions in this study, the researcher tried to find that which one of the treatments was more effective in vocabulary learning of the learners. Let's answer the first question about the effectiveness of songs. As the Figure 1 implies there are no changes in the scores of pre-test and post-test.
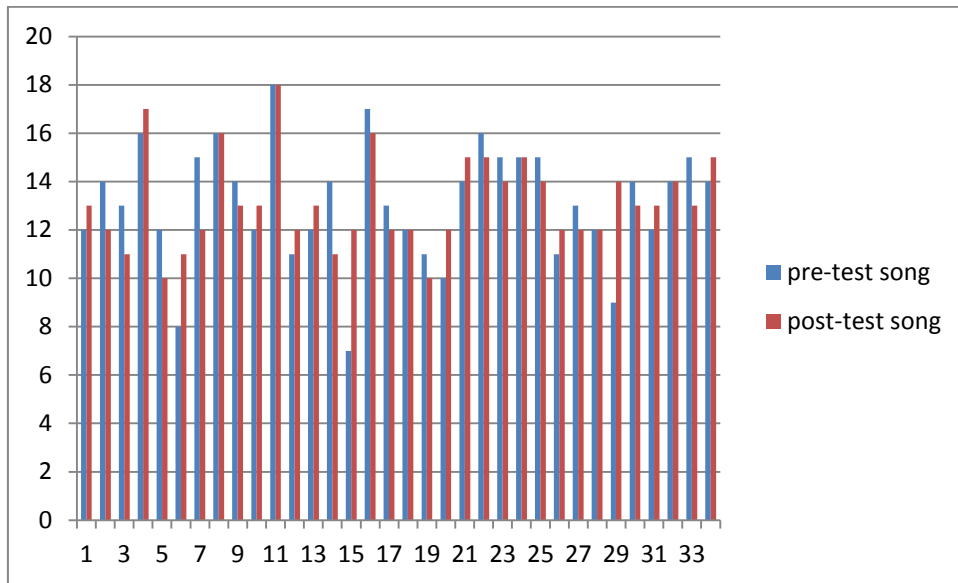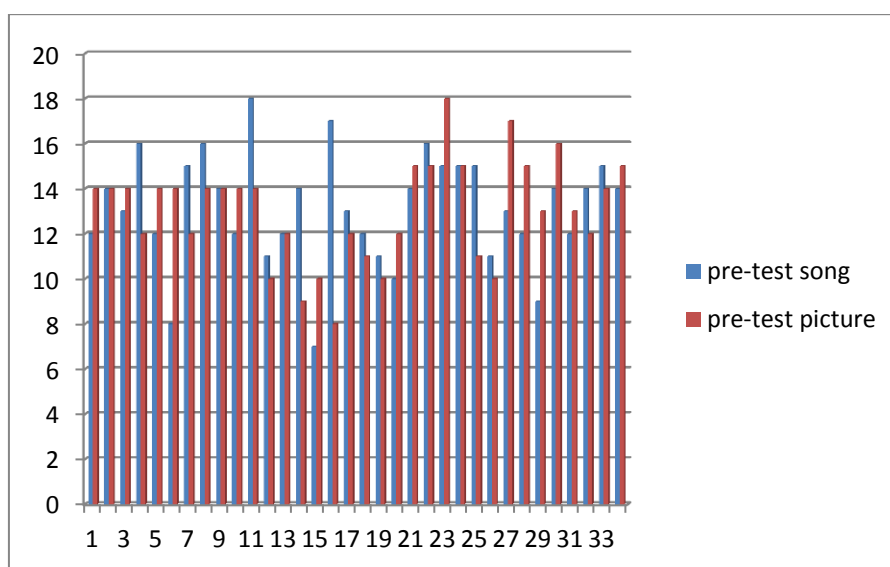
Figure 1. Pre-test and post-test song group

Thus by looking at the Figure 1 even one can conclude that songs were not effective instructional tools for vocabulary learning. Then about the second question as Figure 2 indicates the changes of the scores are clearly significant.
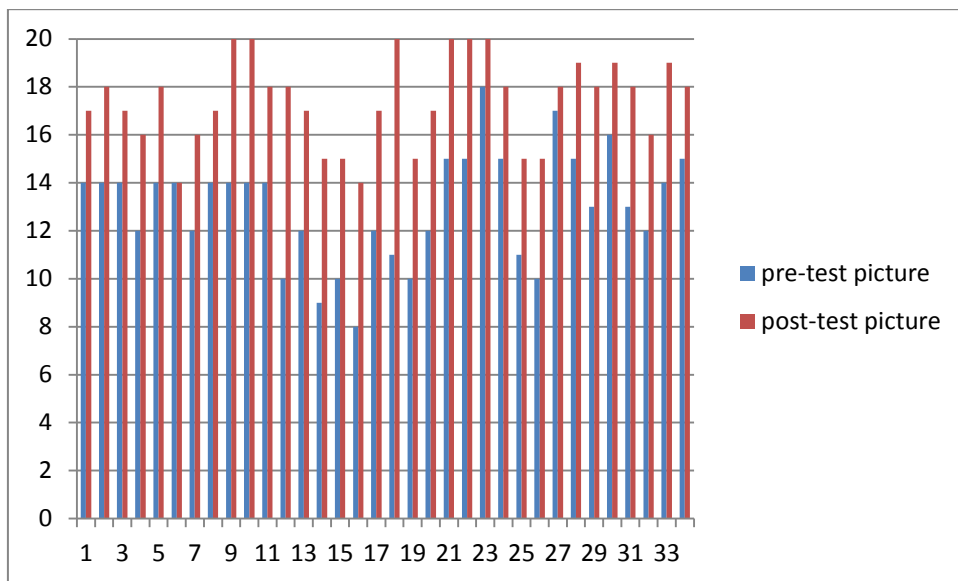
Figure 2. Pre-test and post-test Picture group

It is noteworthy that according to Figure 3 both groups were approximately of the same scores at the beginning of the study.

Figure 3. Pre-tests of the Song and the Picture group

The mean score of pre-test for the song group and picture group are 13.12 and 13.02 respectively. While mean of post-test for song group and picture group are 13.14 and 17.41 respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on vocabulary post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Min	Max
Picture group	34	17.41	.91	15	20
Song group	34	13.14	1.04	10	16

Mean score of the picture group is considerably higher than that of song group. For deciding on the significance of the difference an independent sample t-test was run. The results are as follows.

Table2. Results of Independent samples t-test for both groups

	Leven's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. 2 tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Diff.	Lower	Upper
Equal var. assumed	.000	1.000	7.109	66	.000	2.52	.34	1.80	3.24
Equal var. not assumed			7.109	65.602	.000	2.52	.34	1.80	3.24

As table 2 indicates there is statistically significant difference in post-test results of both groups, thus null hypothesis has been rejected ($P < 0.05$). That is pictures are more effective instructional tools than songs for vocabulary learning. Since the results of song group were surprising because researcher didn't find any study of which reported fail in learning through songs, thus the results do not support the other studies. In the case of picture group the results were in agreement with the works of Virginia French, (1983)

who believes that pictures are practical tools for teaching. The results also supported the findings of Jakolva, (2009). He reported that vocabulary learning increases significantly through applying pictures as tools. The findings also are in line with the findings of the Sholihah (2009) that reported positive effectiveness of the applying pictures for teaching vocabulary. The conclusion of the study also provided a support for the work of which has done by Shoari and Farrokhi (2014), in that the participants link the concepts of which were relevant together thus learnt them in meaningful manner and also recalled them when they needed to do so.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study in the case of the song group were surprising, because the researcher believes that since songs would result in relaxed atmosphere would enhance learning, but maybe the gender of the participants was effective in not gaining the desired results of the song group. In this study, picture group outperformed in posttest. Pictures help learners to make meaningful connections among concepts and words, so no need for rote learning of words. It is a kind of contextualized learning. Teachers and text book writers through making use of pictures can aid learners to learn more efficiently than other unsuccessful ways. The main limitation of the study that limits its generalizability is the gender of the participants, (male) other studies on female learners also are required. The second point is the number of the subjects that was not sufficient for generalizing the results to a wider population of learners. The last point is that some longitudinal studies are to be involved for measuring the long-term effects of the treatments.

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