

The Effect of Diary Writing on Improving Iranian Young EFL Learners' L2 Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

It is generally recognized that vocabulary is a most vital step in the process of language learning. The quantity of words someone knows is of great role in this way the more words you know the better you will be able to comprehend what you hear and what you read, and consequently you can write in a more effective manner. Thus, the current study aimed at investigating the effect of diary writing on improving vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners. Sixty female learners (at pre-intermediate level) participated in this quasi-experimental study which lasted one academic term and carried out. There were two groups; one as experimental in which the new words were taught through writing diaries, and the other as control in which learned the same words through traditional instruction. A PET test was administered at the beginning of the study to both groups. Afterwards for ensuring the comparability of the learners' word knowledge-before the program- a pre-test of vocabulary was administered, and after the program for measuring the effectiveness of the intervention one post-test was taken. The results of the study have provided strong support for the diary writing, since through writing the diaries with new words, learners have been deeply engaged with the act of learning them.

Keywords: diary writing, Iranian young EFL learners, vocabulary learning, traditional instruction

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning has received much interest in the field of language acquisition. The most important point here is that, how words are learned. In late 1980s and 1990s so many research studies have been developed in this area, researchers attempted to find the meaning of effective and efficient in short term and long term vocabulary learning (Cartner & Nunan, 2002). The importance of vocabulary has been highlighted for EFL learners, because of their limited exposure to language and not having enough opportunity to use learnt items in real situations (Yongqi Gu, 2003). Writing in context, with a focus on vocabulary use, is an instrument for general second language

development (Muncie, 2002). According to Corona, Spangenberg, and Venet (1998) concur: "At any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is evident" (p.26). Vocabulary training does not mean only teaching single words. It denotes the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which put across a particular meaning; the way individual words perform within phrases, sentences (Celik & Toptas, 2010). Deliberate vocabulary learning is a fundamental part of vocabulary learning agenda Schmitt (2008) argues that while research has revealed learning can occur through incidental contact, intentional vocabulary learning almost at all times yields in better and faster gains as well as better maintenance. Studies which evaluate incidental vocabulary learning with direct vocabulary learning demonstrate that direct learning is more competent since deliberate vocabulary learning is goal- directed.

Writing and Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary is essential to English language teaching since without sufficient vocabulary learners cannot realize others and will not be able to affirm their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that "... while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111–112). This concern makes known that even without grammar, with a quantity of useful words and expressions, we would communicate. Lewis (1993) argued, "Lexis is the core or heart of language" (p. 89). Particularly as students develop greater fluency and expression in English; it is significant for them to get more productive vocabulary awareness and to expand their own personal vocabulary learning strategies. It can be stated that inadequate word repertoire is a kind of imperfection.

According to Schmitt (2010), a large vocabulary is essential for any user of a language to use language in a long time, as it was stated people make use of language for communicating, conveying thought and sharing beliefs. Accordingly there is a noteworthy point here, the size of vocabulary that would be appropriate for someone to use language successfully and without any fail, is of great value. In English vocabulary size yield in restraining the types of texts someone can read. In other words there is a very close relationship between numbers of words you know, and how well you are in different language skills (Nation & Meara, 2002, p. 46). Nosratinia et al (2013), examined the comparative effect of keeping a vocabulary notebook with definitions and a vocabulary notebook with pictures on extrovert and Introvert EFL Learners vocabulary retention, they found that keeping vocabulary notebooks with pictures was of a significant effect on extrovert EFL learners' vocabulary retention. They considered that since all learners were homogenized concerning their English reading and writing proficiency and then randomly allocated to the four groups prior to the intervention, the final significant difference between the achievements post-test might be attributed to the difference in the types of vocabulary strategy they applied. They have found that the extrovert students keeping notebooks with pictures went on better than the extrovert students keeping notebooks with definitions on the post-test of vocabulary retention.

Hashemzadeh (2012) worked on the effect of exercise types on EFL learners' vocabulary retention as well. She reports that about the impact of recognition exercises and production exercises on EFL learners' vocabulary retention, recognition exercises - fill- in the blank, and matching- were more effectual than production exercises - paraphrasing, and glossing. Consequently, teachers are informed to provide more chances for the learners to carry out vocabulary by using recognition exercises rather than production exercises in their classes. Additionally, the results designated that learners' scores in immediate tests were better than delayed tests.

Shoari and Davatgari (2015), furthermore worked on the effect of making sample sentences on improving vocabulary learning, they reported details that through making sample sentences first of all learners have been inspired, since they were free in type of sentences of which they were asked to produce. These factors resulted in a relaxed environment for learners, and this eased the process of learning in significant manner. The findings of the study signified that there was significant difference in the effect of making sample sentences on vocabulary learning. Tajeddin and Daraee (2013), moreover studied Vocabulary acquisition through written input, they have stated that reading alone is sufficient for vocabulary learning. Walters and Bozkurt (2009) worked on the effect of writing composition on vocabulary learning. They inquired learners to write compositions by means of indented words every week. In the initial analysis of them, they arrange compositions into two groups, those that included the use of any target word and those that did not. They found that in experimental group students used target words every week but in control group did not. They disregarded the spelling mistakes as far as they could get which word was intended. When students used one target word more than one time, they counted it only one time. The results of their study supported the progress in target words use of the learners.

Goya *et al*, (2011) studied on the effect of writing composition on vocabulary learning. The subjects were asked to inscribe one essay per week and this process sustained for 8 weeks. Their participants had 20 minutes for writing each of them. Participants had to write two pieces. The results of their study specified that there was close relationship between topical familiarity and new words use of the participants. In keeping with Ahmad's findings (2011) vocabulary learning via writing might not be so efficient, because he considers that learners are likely to go through rote learning. He discovers vocabulary learning based on synonyms, antonyms, word substitution, multiple choice, scrambled words and crossword puzzles is not successful. He states that a very few words of which learned by these ways get moved into active process. Controlled composition is result of the audio-lingual approach. Writing is strengthening for vocabulary learning. When learners need to use the learned words in different texts, they would be deeply kept in the process of learning and this is sustained by involvement load Hypothesis. Through writing new words learners intentionally notice the words and there is no uncertainty that what is noticed becomes intake. The underlying assumption of the effect of writing on vocabulary learning is writing to learn, which sees writing as a means for learning. It is supposed that writing results in L2 development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Q1. Does diary writing have any effect on Iranian young EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

Q2. Does diary writing result in any improving Iranian young EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

H1. There are no significant differences in the effect of diary writing on Iranian young EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

H2. There are no significant differences in the effect of diary writing on Iranian young EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

The design of the present research is quasi-experimental, that is without randomization. The independent variable of the research was diary writing and the dependent variable was vocabulary learning.

Participants

Sixty language learners with an age range of 9-14 contributed in this investigation of which lasted for one academic semester. All the participants were from Turkish background. They were decided on from 6 classes. The participants were students of the one of the Gol institution at Tabriz, Iran.

Instruments

In order for gathering experimental data the researcher made use of the following materials:

One language proficiency test (PET) which was run earlier than starting the program, a pre-test of which was conducted on subjects' word knowledge. All of the words were chosen from the term book of the learners. And a post-test of which was for measuring the effectiveness of the diary writing.

Procedures

The researcher conducted- for assuring the homogeneity of the level of the participants before opening the program -one language proficiency test on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Afterward one pre-test on word knowledge of the subjects was carried out for verifying the comparability of both groups. Subsequently the program was started. In the experimental group the researcher provided the pupils with notebooks which then should be filled by writing the daily activities of the participants. The subjects were asked to make use of the new words in their diaries. Participants needed to write as precisely as possible their daily activities. After 12 sessions, one

post-test was ordered to both groups. The collected data has been analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The answer for the loaded question of the study is yes, given that truly the scores of the post-test in the experimental group have varied significantly. Let's go to the second and the main question of this investigation. It is merit to declare that both groups were around the same level of the word knowledge at the beginning of the study it can be got from the means of both groups in pre-test for experimental group 12.15 and for control group it was 12.55, whilst in post-test that of experimental group increased to 16.67 with SD of 0.78, while in control group it continued approximately in the same line i.e. 12.66 with SD of .92 .

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	16.6722	30	.789588	.13705
	Pretest	12.1555	30	1.16688	.21688

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Posttest	12.6644	30	.923367	.16655
	Pretest	12.5522	30	1.04480	.19411

In the subsequent table it is pretty evident that the experimental group unlike control group, high scored in the post-test.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test-Experimental Group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest	4.77744	1.00820	.18242	4.12089	4.86248	24.444	29	.000

Table 2 represents that the mean increase in vocabulary scores was 4.77 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.12 to 4.86. It is also clarified that the mean improvement in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t = (29) = 24.44, P = .000$). Consequently the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported. It is apparent that the results of the current study are in agreement with the findings of the scholars like; Walters & Bozkurt (2009), Goya *et al*, (2011), Nosratinia *et al* (2013), Shoari & Davatgari (2015), which all reported apparently positive effectiveness of the writing regarding its role in making the language users to be profoundly engaged in the process of acquiring new words.

These claims are seriously supported by Involvement Load hypothesis. Here also the researchers have found that learners were deeply and efficiently engaged in the act of word learning and as a result word-retention. But the findings of the present study do not provide support for the findings of the Tajeddin & Daraee (2013), who have reported that reading alone is more satisfactory for vocabulary learning.

CONCLUSION

The current inquiry suggests some vital points that need to be taken into consideration by language tutors and syllabus designers, first one and mainly the most important one is the reality of deeper engagement in the process of word-acquisition. Thus it would be important for teachers to involve learners in such activities to be more successful learners. The second tip of which is most frequently true with EFL learners is enhancing self-confidence, it implies whilst learners are inquired to write to learn in free manner, they experience doing something chief and they feel more safe and confident, therefore they got more autonomous language learners/users. The last but not the least is that there is an actually calm atmosphere when the tool of learning was the act of free diary writing. Like any other study there were also some issues with the current study which put an obstacle to generalizing the results. The first one was the level of the subjects (pre-intermediate). Surely for taking a broad view of the results further studies on other level also are required.

The second point was that all the participants were female, other works on male learners is necessary as well. The last issue is the number of participants which is a serious limitation in the attempts for generalizing the results. It is recommended for further studies to examine comparatively the effect of different writing types (one sentence, one paragraph, composition, article writing) on vocabulary learning. It would be more helpful to study the role of writing in advance level learners' (both male & female) word acquisition. For coming to a decision on long-term effects of writing on vocabulary acquisition, it would be better to have studies with delay post-test.

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