



The Effect of Free-Writing on Iranian Young EFL Learners' L2 Learning

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Abstract

Words are the most central actors in the process of language learning. The number of words you know is the determinant of your fluency in language use. Consequently, the current study which was conducted in one of the institutes of Iran aimed at investigating the role of free-writing in L2 vocabulary learning. The researcher picked 60 female learners and divided them into two groups of experimental and control, 30 in each group. The results provided strong support for the effectiveness of the free-writing in vocabulary learning. The mentioned role of free-writing might be due to the fact that when learners are free to write anything they like; they get more motivated. The increased motivation leads to a more relaxed atmosphere and thus enhances learning.

Keywords: free-writing, Iranian young EFL learners, vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

Words are the fundamental elements of language use. Plenty of evidence proposes that the vocabulary size of a learner is extremely predictive of his whole language ability (Gu 1994). Individuals cannot communicate productively without a rich vocabulary repertoire. Imperfect vocabulary knowledge is a big obstacle that impedes students from learning a language (Zhihong, 2000, cited in Subekti & Lawson, 2007:485). Vocabulary learning has got much interest in the field of second language acquisition. The way words are learned is really influential. In late 1980s and 1990s lots of studies were expanded in this area, researchers tried to discover the meaning of effective and efficient in short term and long term vocabulary learning (Cartner & Nunan, 2002, p.43). Deliberate vocabulary learning is a crucial part of vocabulary learning program. Schmitt (2008) argues that though research has revealed learning can occur through incidental experience intentional vocabulary learning almost for all time brings about greater and faster gains as well as enhanced retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary

The influence of words cannot be downgraded; they truly have changed and will continue to change the world history. Perhaps the best tools we can give learners for proceeding, not only in their learning but also more in general in their life, is an outsized, rich vocabulary and the required skills for employing those words. Our ability to carrying out today's multipart social and economic worlds is mightily influenced by our language skills and word knowledge. Over and above the critical significance of vocabulary for achievement in life, a large vocabulary is more particularly "predictive and reflective "of high levels of reading success (Pikulski& Templeton, 2004). Vocabulary is essential to English language teaching since without adequate vocabulary learners cannot understand others & would not be able to state 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 issue reveals that even without grammar, with a quantity of practical words and expressions, we are able to 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. Students frequently distinguish the significance of vocabulary to their language learning. As Schmitt (2010) stated, "learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books" (p. 4). Teaching vocabulary assists students comprehend and communicate with others in English. Course books and teachers similarly are likely to treat vocabulary just in passing while the grammatical syllabus takes major phase. However, knowing the words in a piece of discourse eases understanding which in turn lets the grammatical modeling to get more clear (Ellis, 1997). Vocabulary is the major mode for learning a language. Words are foundations of language. Vocabulary is a vital constituent of language use. The important effect of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been highlighted recently (Zahedi & Abdi, 2012).

In early 1930s, it was found that there is association between English word knowledge and success in life. Achievement in earning and management was associated with vocabulary scores. When the vocabulary knowledge is not adequate, people experience difficulty in expressing their thoughts and ideas and this usually results in physical aggressiveness. It can be stated that inadequate word repertoire is a kind of imperfection. According to Schmitt (2010), a large vocabulary is vital for any user of a language to utilize language in a long time, as it was stated people make use of language for communicating, conveying thought and sharing beliefs. Consequently, there is a significant point here, the size of vocabulary that would be appropriate for someone to use language fruitfully 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).

Writing

Writing well is skill that everyone is expected to master with the purpose of being victorious in written production. Writing well means; handing over thoughts, ideas, and facts in simple and clear language. The skill of writing is not something that is taught significantly to us in school. But to get expert at it is crucial with the intention of surpass at both academic and professional levels. Good writing skills are very important for university students because of the following explanations. As a preface it might be said that students with good quality of writing abilities are of advantages over others. They normally score better than the other students since they can fruitfully express what they have learnt in the written evaluation. It doesn't matter which course you follow the fact is that the significance of writing well cannot be undermined. For example, students of medicinal plants are to have knowledge of technical writing as s/he would be required to inscribe technical manuscripts. For writing research articles, it is essential for you to be able to put forth the right details and information. Also, the research paper must be free from spelling and grammatical errors. If you are not doing well in writing, consequently you would not be able to do this assignment properly. Good writing skills are also obligatory for getting profession. These days; the employers try to find good verbal and writing abilities in the applicants. Every profession necessitates effective communication, and good writing skills are essential. These are required for making donations and reports. Momentarily if your writing- skills are not at a satisfactory level then you must learn these skills so that would assist you in studies and future occupation (Shoari & Davatgari Asl,2015).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

The current study aims at finding answer to the following questions:

Research question: Does free-writing enhance Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

Null hypothesis: There are no significant differences in the effect of free-writing on Iranian young EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

Alternative hypothesis: Iranian EFL Learners' vocabulary learning will be improved through free-writing.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of sixty elementary female language learners with an age range of 9-15 participated in this study. The participants were picked from Turkish backgrounds from 7 classes of the Irandoostan in Tabriz. The proficiency level of the participants was pre-intermediate.

Context of the Study

The participants were selected from Jahad institute. In this institute each course consists of 15 sessions which gather three times a week. "*Interchange*" series are the main source books there.

Design of the study

The design of the study is quasi-experimental, namely without random assignment. Typical experimental study takes in a control group for the case of comparing the results of treatment. The independent variable of the research is free-writing and the dependent variable is vocabulary learning.



Instruments

For collecting scientific data the researcher utilized the following instruments:

One language proficiency test (PET) was run for assuring the proficiency level of the contributors. The other instrument was pre-test of vocabulary that was carried out for proving that there were not meaningful preexisting differences on the word knowledge of the participants. Towards the end of the study one post-test was executed on the students' vocabulary knowledge.

Procedure

Prior to opening the program language proficiency test was given to both groups, with the aim of guaranteeing their proficiency levels. Subsequently one pre-test on vocabulary knowledge was done. Then the examiners started the program. The target words were from the source books of the participants. The words were taught through free-writing in the experimental group. However, in the control group the same words were taught through traditional instruction. To be exact new words and their connotations in learners' mother tongue were given in each session, and they were asked to learn them by heart. The students utilized dictionaries in their own way. At the end of the study one post-test has been administered for measuring the effectiveness of the intervention. The collected data was analyzed by means of SPSS. Given that there were two groups in the study the researchers made use of t-test for comparing the results, and measuring the efficiency of the treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyzed data is depicted in this section in detail.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	16.8844	30	0.72111	.13905
	Pretest	12.2255	30	1.15444	.21594

Indicated in the Table1, the experimental group of the study had a mean score of 12.22 ($SD=1.17$) in the Vocabulary pretest. The group, however, scored higher ($M=16.88$, $SD=0.73$) in the Vocabulary posttest. It is safe to claim that there was a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest to Posttest as a result of the treatment.

Table 2. 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	4.54660	1.00639	.18375	4.17095	4.95222	24.955	29	.000

Table 2 represents that the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 4.56 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.19 to 4.94. It is also indicated that the mean increase in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t= (29) = 24.95$, $P= .000$). Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Posttest	12.9311	30	.92287	.17779
	Pretest	12.1992	30	1.09622	.19596

Table3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for the control group. By a brief look, it can be noted that there was not a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest ($M= 12.19$, $SD= 1.06$) to Posttest ($M= 12.93$, $SD=0.91$).

Table 4. Paired Samples Test-Control 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	.80000	.40688	.07424	.64905	.95196	10.997	29	.000

According to the Table 4, the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 0.80 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.64 to 0.95. The mean increase in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t = (29) = 10.77, P = .000$). Regarding the experimental group, the control group demonstrated much poor performance in the Vocabulary posttest though.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics-Pretest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	30	12.2255	1.15444	.21594
	Control	30	12.1992	1.09622	.19596

Table 5 portrays the descriptive statistics for the Vocabulary pretest. The experimental and control groups of the study had a mean score of 12.22 ($SD=1.17$) and 12.19 ($SD=1.06$) respectively. To be precise, the two groups did not perform differently in the pretest and they were matched in terms of their vocabulary performance.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test-Pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.057	.812	.460	58	.647	.14433	.28994	-.44907	.72371
	Equal variances not assumed			.460	5.711	.647	.14433	.28994	-.44715	.72272

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 0.14 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.44 to .72. The results disclosed no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = .460, p = .647$. For that reason, the two groups performed homogeneously in the Vocabulary pretest.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics-Posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	30	16.8844	0.72111	.13905
	Control	30	12.9311	.92287	.17779

According to the descriptive statistics shown in the Table, the experimental group performed much better than the control group in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean score for the former was 16.88 ($SD=0.72$) whereas for the latter the mean score is 12.93 ($SD= 0.93$).

Table 8. Independent Samples Test-Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Post test	Equal variances assumed	2.841	.097	18.191	58	.000	3.70000	.21431	3.49040	4.22929	
	Equal variances not assumed			18.191	55.610	.000	3.70000	.21431	3.49040	4.22949	

An additional independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of the two groups in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 3.70 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.49 to 4.22. The findings exposed statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = 18.191, p = .000$. Therefore, the Null hypothesis of the study is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis has been supported. The results of the study provide strong support for the effectiveness of the free-writing in vocabulary learning.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation put forward some fundamental issues that need to be taken into account by language teachers and syllabus designers; the most important one is the reality of being deeply engaged in the process of vocabulary acquisition which is supported by involvement load hypothesis. Therefore, it is really central for teachers to involve learners in these tasks for aiding them to be good learners. The second point which is commonly true with EFL learners is “enhancing self-confidence”, that is even as learners are asked to write to learn in free style they practice doing something important and they feel more secure and certain so they get more self-directed language users. The last point is that there is a truly peaceful atmosphere when the tool of learning was the act of free writing. Similar to any other study there were also some matters with the present study which put impediments to generalizing the results. For instance, the level of the subjects is one of the brightest ones. For sure for portraying a more general view of the results further studies on other levels are required. The next point was that all the participants of the current study were female, other studies on male pupils is needed too.

The final matter is the number of members which is a severe restriction in the efforts for generalizing the results. It is advised for further studies to check reasonably the effect of different writing types like composition, diary, and article writing on vocabulary learning. For coming to a decision on the potential effect of writing on vocabulary acquisition, it is possibly better to have studies with delay post-test. It is recommended to work on the effect of the article writing on word acquisition, the effect of the composition on vocabulary learning, but with both gender and various proficiency levels.

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