A Good Way for Teaching Vocabulary

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Abstract

The present research was intended to investigate the effectiveness of foreign language vocabulary acquisition through pictures and short stories. The subjects were divided into four groups as follows:

a) 15 males in age range of 8-10

b) 15 females in age range of 8-10

c) 15 males in age range of 20-30

d) 15 females in age range of 20-30.

All the participants came from the same linguistic background. In all the groups vocabulary items were presented through pictures and short stories. The treatment of the study took five sessions. The researcher used two similar tests as pretest and posttest. Each of them consisted of 40 vocabularies. After the treatment, the posttest was administered. Then the statistical technique of two-way ANOVA was utilized to analyze the collected data. The results revealed that:

1.   Both pictures and short stories are useful in teaching vocabulary items.

2.   Vocabulary acquisition is more facilitated through the use of pictures than short stories.

Key words: vocabulary, picture, short story

1. Introduction

Although vocabulary has been the subject of many studies, few researchers have revealed the effective techniques of vocabulary teaching. In this paper, the researchers aimed to do that. Different techniques are used by teachers, such as teaching the word through lists, translation, context, realia and so on. Vocabulary is an inseparable part of any language learning process. It would be impossible to learn a language without vocabulary. "If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh" (Harmer 1993.153). We should keep in our mind, as Ur (1996) stated, one item of vocabulary can consist of more than a single word, e.g. 'mother-in-law' consist of three words and still expresses one idea (p.60). Poor vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL students is a matter of serious concern among those in and around education. Therefore, this study presents short stories and pictures methods in order to find one of the most effective techniques of vocabulary teaching. The best way of teaching can be helpful for teachers, because by using it students and adults learn vocabulary items better.

English is the international language, which is used throughout the world and also English is used in many fields of life such as: in politics, economics, sociology and education. Therefore, English as a language in international communication is clearly needed by many learners to deliver thought and interact in a variety of situation.

Edward (1997) believed vocabulary is one of the important aspects in teaching a language. Therefore, student must keep on learning words as they learn structure and as they practice sound system". Laufer (1997) stated that vocabulary learning is at the heart of language learning and Language use. In fact, it is what makes the essence of a language. Raimes (1983) pointed out that pictures can help the teachers and students in teaching and learning vocabulary, and other components of Language. As a matter of fact pictures can help students to imagine the real Object. There are several advantages of pictures, such as availability in magazines or on the internet. They are cheap, personal(teachers selects them), flexibility- easily kept, useful for various types of activities(comparing, etc), they are always fresh and different, which means they come in a variety of formats and styles and moreover the learner often wonders what comes next (Hill,1990). There are many reasons for using pictures in language teaching. They are motivating and draw learners' attention. And also pictures, being suitable for any group of learners independently on age or level, can be used in lots of various ways.

O'Harra (1984) claimed that context is the statement that includes the word. Sometimes we read words in a written context. So, the paragraph may tell us what the new word means, or enough clues may be provided in the sentence which contains the word; or even one or two nearby words may explain the meaning of a new word we find in the text when reading.

Haji Maibodi (2008) pointed out "Language students need large amounts of comprehensible input, and reading materials provide the most readily available source. Baleghizadeh and et.al. (2011) stated that "there are many techniques employed by teachers in teaching vocabulary and they can improve their learners' knowledge of vocabulary by helping them in building a large number of words to choose from anytime they want to

convey their intended message in different contexts." Therefore, familiarize English learners with useful strategies is necessary for them to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

Rashidi and et.al. (2010) pointed out "Recent research on second language vocabulary learning confirms the great contribution of reading to incidental vocabulary learning (Nagy, Anderson, and Herman, 1987). "During reading, new word meanings are derived and learned even though the purpose is not the learning new vocabulary" (Swanborn and de Glopper, 2002, pp. 95-6). Collie and Slater (1991), list four advantages of using short stories for language teachers. "First, short stories are practical as their length is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions. Second, short stories are not complicated for students to work with on their own. Third, short stories have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes. Finally, short stories can be used with all levels (beginner to advance) all ages (young learners to adults) and all classes" (p.196)

Because of the significant role and effect of vocabulary in language learning, moreover the present study, several studies have been done by educational researchers in this area, e.g. Mohseni-far (2008) has revealed that "vocabulary acquisition can be best conceived as a process in which L2 learners negotiate word meaning from a text level to a word level. This shift is necessary so that the learner can form a mental connection between the word form and his/her meaning premise." Haji Maibodi (2008) has done a research around current topic and concluded that "the narrative text genre is more effective than an expository genre especially during the beginning stages of language learning."

Bromley (2007) in his research about vocabulary instruction has reached to this conclusion "overuse of dictionary hunting, definition writing, or teacher explanation can turn students off learning new words and does not necessarily result in better comprehension or learning. Word learning is a complicated process. It requires giving students a variety of

opportunities to connect new words to related words, analyze word structure, understand multiple meanings and use word actively in authentic ways. The goal of vocabulary instruction should be to build students' independent word learning strategies that can empower them for lifelong learning."

In line with the pedagogical objectives of the study, the present researcher has formulated the following hypotheses:

1.   The use of pictures and short stories is very effective in vocabulary acquisition.
2.   Vocabulary acquisition through pictures differs significantly from vocabulary acquisition through short stories.

2. Methodology

2.1. Subjects

The participants of this study were 60 children and adults (30 males and 30 females). They were selected randomly from some elementary and high schools of Arak (one of the industrial cities of Iran). Children were divided into two groups as: 15 males and 15 females within the age range of 8-12. The adults were also divided into 15 males and 15 females within the age range of 20-30. By the use of proficiency test, the current researcher homogenized the subjects' proficiency level.

2.2. Instruments

The different instruments used in this thesis include:

1.   **A Background questionnaire** that elicits demographic information concerning the subjects' socio-educational backgrounds.

2.   **A vocabulary test** that used as a pre-test before the treatment and also post-test after the treatment. It was contain 40 vocabulary items. Exactly 20 relevant pictures and a short story that used in the part of treatment of this research, too.

2.3. Procedure

Students were divided into 4 groups as follows:

a) 15 males in age range of 8-10

b) 15 females in age range of 8-12

c) 15 males in age range of 20-30

d) 15 females in age range of 20-30.

All these groups were invited to take part in pretest which took half an hour. Through a pilot test on the 40 mentioned words the present researchers separated the total number of appropriate words according to the subjects' level. Its reliability was also estimated by the KR-21 formula. After that, teacher taught the words in three sessions. Each session took one hour and a half. Some of the identified words were presented by pictures while some others were taught in short stories. At the end of the treatment, the subjects were invited to take part in the post-test. On the basis of these tests the efficacy of the two methods of vocabulary teaching was determined.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1

The mean of English vocabulary acquisition through pictures and short story between males and females

Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
picture- post test	male	30	16.3667	3.53781	.64591
	female	30	14.7667	3.57851	.65334
short story-post test	male	30	13.6333	4.02992	.73576
	female	30	12.8000	3.80924	.69547

Figure 1
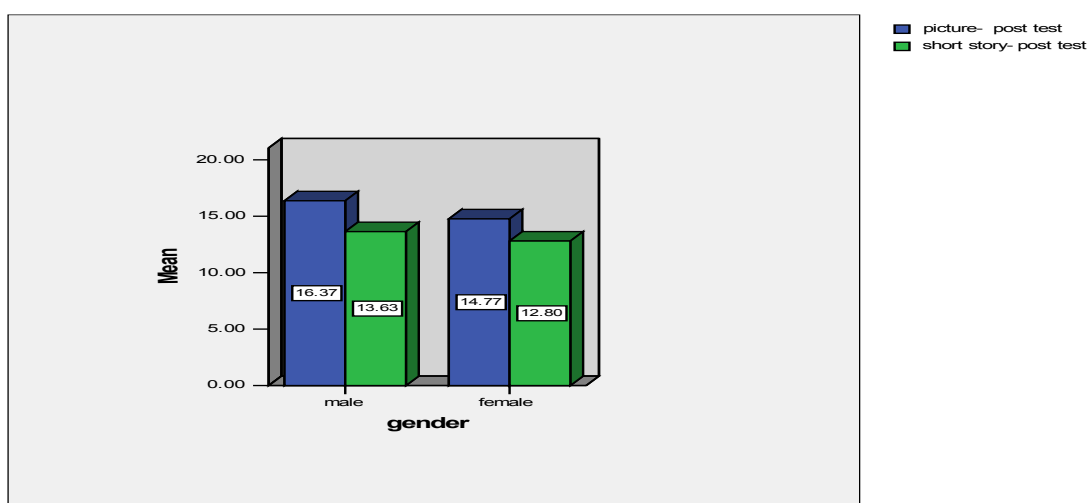
As shown in table 1, there is a difference between males and females mean scores on "picture posttest" (16.36 and 14.76) and "short story posttest "(13.63 and 12.80). These scores have proved that both males and females have performed better in picture-posttest than in short story one.

Table 2

The mean of English vocabulary acquisition through picture and short story between children and adults

Group Statistics

	age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
picture- post test	children	30	16.6000	2.98964	.54583
	adults	30	14.5333	3.93686	.71877
short story-post test	children	30	14.3333	3.98561	.72767
	adults	30	12.1000	3.55596	.64923

Figure 2
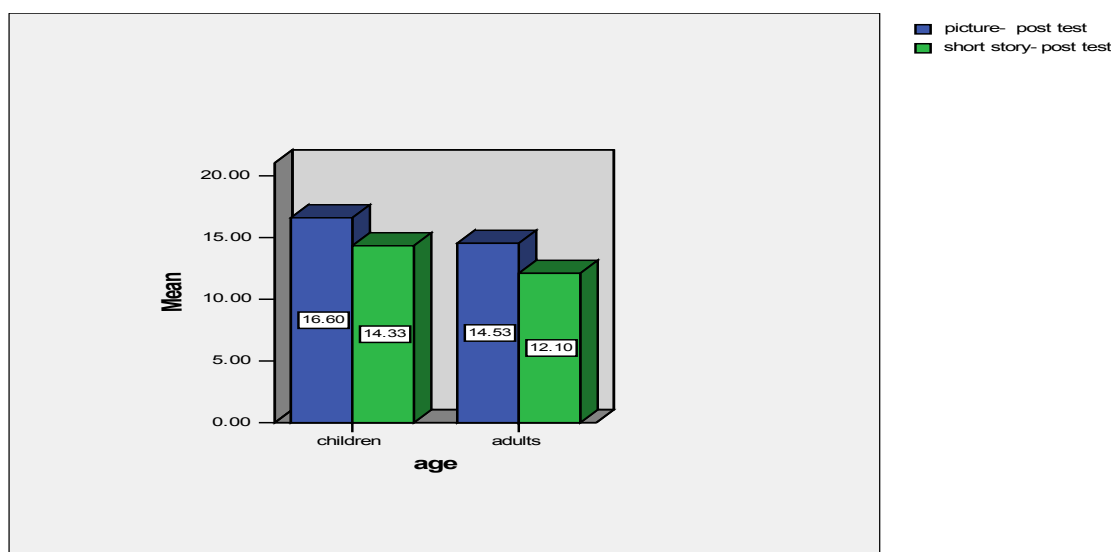
Table 2 indicates the difference between children and adults in picture-posttest and short story-posttest. Children have performed better in acquiring vocabulary through the use of pictures rather than the use of short story. That is the same with adults in both the use of pictures and short story in vocabulary acquisition. That is, adults who learned vocabulary through the use of pictures surpassed the adults who learned the vocabulary through the use of short story.

Table 3

The use of pictures and short stories is very effective in vocabulary acquisition.

T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pre test	3.2667	60	1.13297	.14627
	post test	28.7833	60	7.01594	.90575

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre test - post test	-25.5167	6.86305	.88602	-27.2896	-23.7438	-28.799	59	.000

According to table 3, it was understood that the mean score of posttest ($\bar{x}$=28.78) was significantly more than that of pretest ($\bar{x}$ =3.26). As sig=0 < 0.05, the assumption of equal mean in pretest and posttest was rejected. So the H1 is accepted. It means that both pictures and short stories have effect on vocabulary acquisition.

Table 4

Vocabulary acquisition through pictures differ significantly from vocabulary acquisition through short story

T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	picture- post test	15.5667	60	3.61900	.46721
	short story-post test	13.2167	60	3.91040	.50483

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	picture- post test & short story-post test	60	.736	.000

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	picture- post test - short story-post test	2.35000	2.74834	.35481	1.64003	3.05997	6.623	59	.000

Another T-test was done to examine second research hypothesis (vocabulary acquisition through pictures differ significantly from vocabulary acquisition through short stories). Table 4 "paired samples statistics", shown that the mean score of pictures ($\bar{x}$ =.56) was more than that of short story ($\bar{x}$ =13.21). Table "paired samples correction" confirmed the correlation between these two variables. According to "paired sample test" sig =0 < 0.05 therefore, the supposition of equal mean in picture and short story was rejected. Hence, the second hypothesis was accepted.

Regarding the third hypothesis (learners' age and gender have effect on their English vocabulary acquisition), the researcher applied two-way ANOVA to analyze related data. There must be two stipulations to use this statistic analyses:

1- The dependent variable is normally distributed in each group.

2- Variance in the dependent variable is the same in all cells.

Univariate Analysis of Variance

Between-Subjects Factors

		Value Label	N
age	1.00	children	30
	2.00	adults	30
gender	1.00	male	30
	2.00	female	30

Table 5

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Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: post test

age	gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
children	male	30.2667	7.34328	15
	female	31.6000	5.86515	15
	Total	30.9333	6.56497	30
adults	male	29.7333	6.99456	15
	female	23.5333	5.37011	15
	Total	26.6333	6.89069	30
Total	male	30.0000	7.05153	30
	female	27.5667	6.88168	30
	Total	28.7833	7.01594	60

As the table 5, "descriptive statistics ", shows the mean score of vocabulary acquisition in children ($\bar{x}$ = 30.933) is higher than that of adults ($\bar{x}$ = 26.633). Mean score of females is ($\bar{x}$ = 31.6) and in males is ($\bar{x}$ = 30.266). The difference is not statically meaningful. That is even though the mean scores of females were higher than that of males, indicated that females outperformed the males on vocabulary acquisition. But in adults this difference was statistically meaningful. The mean value in males was $\bar{x}$ =23.53 that indicated males were better than females in learning vocabulary. Finally, it is understood that males' mean score ($\bar{x}$=30.00) were higher than that of women ($\bar{x}$ =27.56) in vocabulary acquisition.

4. Conclusion and Implication

The main aim of the present study was to reveal the best and useful way of teaching English vocabulary items to children and adults. To carry out this study, first 60 participants (males and females) were randomly selected from elementary and high schools of Arak. A pretest was administered to all subjects, then the treatment was applied for three sessions. After a week break, the subjects were invited to the posttest. Statistical analysis including t-

test, two-way ANOVA and descriptive statistic revealed that there were significant differences in teaching English vocabulary through pictures and short story.

In this research, there were two hypotheses as given below:

H_1- *The use of pictures and short stories is very effective in vocabulary acquisition.*

H_2-*Vocabulary acquisition through pictures differs significantly from vocabulary acquisition through short story.*

The results and findings of the statistical analyses are as follows:

1. H_1 was accepted, indicating that both pictures and short stories are useful in teaching vocabulary items.

2. H_2 was accepted. It means the use of picture in teaching vocabulary is more effective than that of short story.

 In order for the learners to achieve the best results, all teachers must equip themselves with up-to-date techniques. So, the results of present research can be valuable for language teachers and those dealing with foreign language teaching. Also, it is useful for parents to know how help their children to learn vocabulary better. In addition, people can know in every level of age, which method is more helpful.

Therefore, the best way to teach English vocabulary items is the use of picture. Based on the results of the current study, it was found out that:

1. The use of pictures makes class more active and alive.

2. The use of pictures could attract the students' curiosity in learning vocabulary.

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