

FLASH CARDS VERSUS ANIMATED CARTOONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

As a consequence of the rapid development in science, technology and media, foreign/second language teaching field has gained much improvement in the recent years. Especially, the function of language classes has changed dramatically. Particularly, the use of video and TV has grown rapidly due to the increasing focus on communicative aspects of language use. This study was attempted to investigate the effect of using flash cards in comparison to educational cartoons on vocabulary learning of the intermediate English as a Foreign Language learners. After administrating a vocabulary pretest all 44 participants of the study were randomly selected to form the experimental and comparison groups of the study. In the experimental group the participants were taught through the using of Magic English cartoons, while the participants of the comparison group were taught through the use of flash cards. After the instruction a post test was administered to both groups. The result of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups. Therefore, it was concluded that the use of Magic English series could improve the students' vocabulary knowledge.

KEYWORDS: vocabulary learning, flash cards, animated cartoons

INTRODUCTION

Language is made up of words. Vocabularies are the most important tools for expressing thoughts and meaning. Therefore, the study of vocabulary has taken the central place in teaching-learning activities in every language. Traditionally, vocabulary instruction involves having students look words up in the dictionary, write definitions, and use words in sentences (Basurto, 2004). Bromley (2007) believes that although word lists, teacher explanation, discussion, memorization, vocabulary books, and quizzes frequently are used to help students learn new words, but these methods ignore what research and theory deals with learning and teaching new

words, since vocabulary is a principle which acts as a provider of comprehension, fluency, and achievement.

A lot of scholars and researchers like Scrivener (2010), Decarrico (2001), Pesce (2013), Subhash Mothe (2013), and many others have discussed on the new approaches, techniques, exercises and practices which are novel and help teachers to teach vocabulary in a effective way for example: substitution (synonyms and antonyms), collocations, idioms, crossword puzzles, realia (showing actual objects and showing models like maps, furniture, utensils, clothes, toys...), demonstrations and showing pictures (flash cards or posters...), drawing pictures, role play, and using video to produce of target vocabulary. This paper tries to explore the effectiveness of utilizing videos like magic English cartoons and flash cards in teaching new vocabulary to intermediate levels of language proficiency learners.

Teaching vocabulary

Based on Swan and Walter (1984), acquisition of vocabulary is the largest and most significant task that the language learners encounter with. As Pavicic (2003) notes, teachers should deal with a way to improve students' abilities to explore, store and usage of vocabulary items and create activities and tasks to help students to build their vocabulary and develop strategies to learn the vocabulary on their own.

Richards (1976) states that knowing a word involves knowing:

- The meaning(s) of the word
- Its spoken and written forms
- What “word parts” it has (e.g., any prefix, suffix, and “root” form)
- Its grammatical behavior (e.g., its word class, typical grammatical patterns it occurs in)
- Its collocations
- Its register
- What associations it has (e.g., words that are similar or opposite in meaning)
- What connotations it has
- Its frequency.

Nation and Meara (2010), discuss about how vocabulary should be learned, they also mention some strategies as well; from meaning-focused input or comprehension (listening and reading) through extensive reading program and repetition, and from meaning-focused output or productive skills (speaking and writing) via designing speaking activities , group working, using annotated pictures or definition, writing party.

Actually learning vocabulary occurs incidentally or intentionally or as formal and informal learning (in the literature). Based on studies of many researchers and scholars like Saragi, Nation and Meister (1978), Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985), in terms of language acquisition, incidental learning is said to be an efficient way of learning vocabulary from context. They believe that incidental vocabulary learning encourages students to learn vocabulary through extensive reading and also through guessing the meaning of words from contextual clues without having the intention of doing so, such as when picking up new words during free reading. Ahmad

(2011) quotes from O' Harra (2004) that context is the situation and surrounding of a word, so when we listen to someone's talk, the context of a word is the speech that includes the word. According to Nation (2001), extensive reading is an enjoyable reading situation that a teacher motivates students to select what they want to read for themselves from reading materials based on the level they can understand.

On the other hand Marsick and Watkins (1990, p.12) introduce formal learning or intentional vocabulary learning as being "typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured". Wesche and Paribakht (1999) also define intentional vocabulary learning as learning new words while intending to do so, for instance when a learners study a list of target words or complete activities in a workbook while working to learn a set of new target words.

Flashcards

Based on Teaching and Applied Linguistics dictionary, flashcard is a card with words sentences or pictures on it, used as an aid or CUE in language lesson. To Palka (1988), Flash cards have been used in teaching English as second language not only for teaching vocabulary but also for teaching propositions, articles, sentence structures, tenses, and phrasal verbs. Ervin (1988) also declares that they are useful aids to teach students and practice their vocabulary development and completion drills in the learning of foreign language. According to Culyer (1988) flashcards facilitate developing word recognition if students are poor readers. Brown (2000) believes that learners often encounter with and exposure to new words by flashcards and most students continue to utilize them to review it afterwards. He states that one main advantage of flashcards is that they can be used almost anywhere and anytime. The result of the studies of Ehri and Roberts (1979) concerning whether first graders learn printed words better in contexts or in isolation, indicated that context-trained children learned more about the semantic identities of printed words, while flashcard-trained children could read the words faster and learned more about orthographic forms. Also in a recent study regarding the use of flashcards, Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2011) considered the effects of using flashcards and word lists on EFL students learning of foreign language vocabulary. The result of their study indicated that flash cards could lead to better learning than word lists for many reasons as new words can easily be practiced broadly with flashcards, learners are able to separate cards into several categories based on their difficulty level, it helps them review difficult words more frequently than easy one, working with flashcards improves vocabulary retrieval because learners are offered with an L2 word and its definition on the other side of the card, finally, they can easily practice new words and recall their meanings in as much as the words appear on two different sides of the card.

Video

Based on Çakır (2006), video materials have grown rapidly due to increasing the quality of language teaching in the classrooms. Danan (2004) claims that audiovisual materials enhanced with captions or subtitles may function as a powerful educational tool in many ways like improving the listening comprehension skills, facilitating language learning by helping students visualize what they hear and increase language comprehension and leading to greater depth of processing. Rice and Woodsmall (1988) investigated that television program with voice-over narration novel words considerably promote students lexis. According to Karakas and Sariçoban

(2012), animated cartoons are innovation as language input as well. In their study it has been found that, watched movies will leads to language development at a significant level and no matter whether participants watched the movies with subtitles or without them since the gains of participants were thought to be the result of contextual aids of cartoons. But they state that the actions, signals of hands and arms, as well as facial expressions might facilitate the understanding of the target verbs when accompanied with subtitles. Verhallen, Bus, & de Jong, (2006) confirm that multimedia presentation reinforces the children learning a second language, the influences of multimedia like video for promoting the vocabulary learning is inconclusive. They state that even if vocabulary is not taught directly in the multimedia condition, the evidences show great gains in vocabulary. Silverman and Hines (2009) notice that multimedia like videos that contains live action, animation, voice-overs, text, and music, supports the vocabulary development of English language learners. They believe that the effects of video on learning vocabulary could depend on children's age and interest in specific content, the type of words introduced through the educational programming, the nature of the content itself, or the setting of the television program viewing (i.e., at home or in school).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study addresses the following question:

“Does using animated cartoons have any significant impact on students' vocabulary learning?”

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants of the study comprised of 44 students from one language institutes with intermediate level of language proficiency in Mashhad, Iran. They had been selected through a Preliminary English Test language proficiency test and randomly assigned in two independent groups. One group practiced flashcards (comparison group), and the other group practiced Magic English videos (experimental group). They had four hours of English per week and totally they took part in 10 sessions of treatment. They were EFL learners with homogeneous language proficiency. Since the gender was not considered as a moderator variable for this study, only male students were chosen.

Materials

A flashcard or flash card is a set of cards bearing information, as words or numbers, on either or both sides, used in classroom drills or in private study. On one side there is a picture and on other side the written form of that picture is available. All the pictures are colorful and understandable. Magic English series are English animated cartoons created by Walt Disney Company. Disney Magic English is a fun way for children to learn the English language along with their favorite Disney characters! It brings educational adventures to life with stories, songs, and games! Disney's Magic English makes learning fun and enjoyable – just like playing a game! Each part of the program has been developed in close collaboration with highly qualified education specialists in the English Language.

Instrument

Three kinds of instrument were utilized in this study. The first one was a Preliminary English Test which was considered as proficiency test to check the students' knowledge of vocabulary. It contains vocabulary questions in different types like multiple choice items, fill in the blanks, and matching the pictures to the words. The participants had to do it in 30 minutes. Cronbach's Alpha was used in order to estimate the reliability quotients of this test. The reliability indices revealed that it enjoyed high consistency and the measures were above the index of $\alpha=0.80$, which fell within a range of an acceptable estimation of the reliability. The second instrument was a pre- test which was administered before the treatment. And the last instrument was a post -test resembled to pre- test from different aspects like item difficulty, number of items, administered after the treatment

Procedure

At the beginning of the study, researchers had administered a Preliminary English Test as a proficiency test to make certain of the homogeneity of the students. Since they had to employ the treatment on two groups, they assigned the participants in two groups. A vocabulary pre-test was administered to make sure of their homogeneity in terms of vocabulary knowledge. The participants of the experimental group worked through Magic English cartoon. Every session, after a warm up discussion, the video had been played to them. For the first time they watched it completely with no pauses. For the second time the teacher made pauses part by part and asked questions about the new vocabularies and invited the learners to repeat that word altogether. In order to ensure about understanding that word, she asked them one by one to repeat it. Sometimes the teacher herself clarified the meaning of words if needed. The same procedure had been applied for the comparison group, but through flashcards. It means that after warming up, the teacher showed the flashcards one by one and again those repetitions, iterations and practices were replicated as in experimental group. After 10 sessions, a post test was administered and data analysis was done to recognize the output and utility of each method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After administrating the Preliminary English Test to 44 students, descriptive statistics was obtained. Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the language proficiency test that was used for the homogenization of the participants. The mean and the standard deviation equaled 59.05 and 9.01, respectively. They were then randomly divided into experimental and comparison groups.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Homogeneity Test

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewedness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Total Valid N	44 44	44	48	82	59.05	9.01	98.31	.56	.21	.13	.48

Since the study concentrated on vocabulary learning, and to check the homogeneity of the experimental and comparison groups at the beginning of the experimentation, a vocabulary test was administered to both groups as a pre-test, and an independent *t*-test was performed on the two groups test scores. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups on the Vocabulary Pre-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test Comparison	22	9.45	2.03
Experimental	22	11.05	3.41

Regarding the mean scores of two groups there was no significant difference, but in order to be sure of close homogeneity of two groups, a *t*-test was run. It showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental and comparison groups in terms of their vocabulary knowledge. Table 3 manifests the results:

Table 3: Comparison between Variances and Means of the Two Groups on the vocabulary Pre-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	t critical	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Pre-test Equal variances assumed	99	.001	0.25	42	2.02	1.056	0.38	-1.44	3.04

As it has been shown in table 3, the *t*-observed value for the comparison of the means of two groups was 0.25 at 42 degrees of freedom, which was lower than the *t*-critical of 2.02. Thus it could be claimed that the two groups were not significantly different in terms of vocabulary knowledge before undergoing the treatment.

After ten sessions of instruction, both groups were given a similar post-test. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the two Groups on the Vocabulary Post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-test Comparison	22	13.22	3.05
Experimental	22	18.92	4.13

To see whether the treatment was effective or not, the means of two groups were compared through a *t*-test. As it has been shown in table 5, the *t*-observed value was 5.52 at 42 degrees of freedom which was higher than the *t*-critical of 2.02. Thus, it was concluded that the students' achievement of vocabulary in the experimental group was significantly greater than that of the comparison group.

Table 5: Comparison between variances and Means of the Two Groups on the Vocabulary Post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	F critical	t	df	t critical	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	0.02	6.10	5.52	42	2.02	5.70	1.08	-6.35	1.06

Discussion

The current study aims to investigate the impact of flashcards and video cartoons on improvement of vocabulary learning among pre-intermediate language proficiency pupils. The finding of the research demonstrates that in comparison with flashcards, utilizing Magic English video had significantly improved and facilitated learning vocabulary among learners. According to Mayer (2002), Video is a kind of multimedia material which contains verbal and nonverbal presentations, exhibiting simultaneous images, narration and, on-screen text. Comparing video with traditional English teaching materials such as paper-printed and listening dominant materials, it can be found that although some materials like flashcards provided learners with situations to encounter vocabulary repeatedly. But since in video cartoons there is a mixture of animations, picture-like dynamic images with sounds and happy songs, and consequently they are more attractive for students especially in younger children. Moreover, Danan (2004) claims that audiovisual materials enhanced with captions or subtitles may function as a powerful educational tool in many ways. For example,

- (1) they improve the listening comprehension skills of second/foreign language learners;
- (2) facilitate language learning by helping students visualize what they hear and
- (3) increase language comprehension and lead to additional cognitive benefits, such as greater depth of processing (p. 67).

However, Danan (2004) also reports that many language teachers are against their use in audio visual materials. This might be because they fear that cartoons may distract learners' attention, especially that of lower-level learners, from the actual spoken language to written text and create a sense of laziness on the part of students.

CONCLUSION

This paper was generally an attempt to assess the effectiveness of using animated cartoons in vocabulary learning of a group of Iranian English as a Foreign language students. The first part of the article dealt with reviewing the related literature on using flash cards and videos in the classroom. The second part was an attempt to elaborate on the experiment and the results. And finally the present study proves that using educational cartoons especially Magic English series are useful devices in language learning and teaching, especially in vocabulary learning and teaching for younger learners. In addition to this, animated cartoons play an important role in lowering the affective filter, which psychologically affects one's learning. For example, we feel comfortable since it is easy for us to get meaning from foreign language cartoons with subtitles and captions. This assumption was supported by Koskinen *et al.*, who examined the effects of captioned videos on incidental reading vocabulary knowledge and confirmed that captioned videos considerably improved the reading vocabulary knowledge of the participants (cited in Yüksel & Tanrıverdi, 2009).

It goes without saying that every study faces a number of limitations which can not be avoided. Since the researchers used a modified version of Preliminary English Test as the proficiency test, it was not verified in terms of reliability, the same is true about the vocabulary pre and post- tests. Another limitation of this study refers to the term generalizability. Since the researchers had access to a limited number of participants, which may decrease the generalizability of the findings.

Though many researches have been carried out towards the use of videos and cartoons as a growing field of study in language learning and teaching, there are still so many works left to be done. For future studies the researchers suggest exploring the effect of using cartoons and videos on teaching and learning grammar.

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