The Effect of Reading Comic Strips on Incidental Vocabulary Learning of Young Language Learners

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ABSTRACT: *Knowing vocabulary has an essential and determining role in learning of foreign language. The usages of correct method concerning this essential problem can consolation vocabulary learning. This research studied the effect of reading comic strips on incidental learning and retention on young language learners. To do this research, the researcher conducted an experimental research in which 39 young language learners aged between5 to 10 took part. They were pretested in order to determine their proficiency level. And 40 unfamiliar words as the treatment were selected. Afterwards, the new words in texts through comic strips were read in the classroom without any focus and emphasis on them. After finishing the course, all the learners took part in immediate posttest; about two weeks later participants took part in a delayed-posttest and the overall score were measured. Inferential statistics through a paired sample t-test were employed to analyze the data to find out whether using comic strips was effective in in learning vocabularies or not. The findings revealed that young learners could extend their vocabulary knowledge through the treatments, and there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two posttests which implied that learned lexical items were not decayed over two-week time*.

KEY WORDS*:* comic strips, incidental learning, young learners, vocabulary learning and retention, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a challengeable task and learning a foreign language is considered as a complicated process. Language learners should learn language skills such as, reading, listening and writing. The most important influence on successful communication is possible through learning vocabularies. According to Shoebottom (2014) as you know more words, then better you'll be able to grasp what you hear and read, and the better you'll be able to express yourself whether speaking or writing. Words are the currency of communication; speakers will be unable to exchange

information or ideas with each other without words. One of the predominant crucial responsibilities of English language novices is memorizing new vocabularies. For example, as Lang (2009) stated because words play such an essential part in communicating sentiments, emotions, and ideas, vocabulary deficiencies can lead to understanding issues; therefore, many students struggle with English vocabulary learning. Not just learners, but teachers of English are also bothered by vocabulary teaching. Also Ellis (1997), mentioned vocabulary knowledge as a predicator of learners' discourse understanding because it allows learners to pattern grammatical rules in their minds. Cary (2004) mentions the importance of study of vocabulary as the heart of language teaching in terms of syllabus organization, learner performance education, and the supply of learning materials. Fu (2009) stated that vocabulary difficulties could lead to comprehension difficulties. Since language learning style for vocabulary learning is one of the important factors determining how the students remember a second or foreign language vocabulary better, it can help language teacher select more effective methods and type's instruction with a close relation to these learning style preference.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

In fact, second language learning mainly depends on vocabulary and so finding a best method of teaching students new vocabulary is most important. Researchers differ in their opinions as to which method is the best and produces the best results. Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) conclude from their study that a substantial proportion of vocabulary growth demonstrated during students' school years are acquired incidentally from context during silent reading. Jenkins, Matlock, and Solcum (1989) studied two approaches to vocabulary instruction and stress the need for direct and indirect instruction to improve students' vocabulary. The problem with these methods is the time involved as well as the question of their effectiveness. Incidental learning and intentional learning are two instructional techniques which were determined by many scholars in their studies for the vocabulary learning. According to Hucking and Coady (1999), a considerable amount of the acquiring vocabulary by children in their L1 is incidental. The process of learning anything without direct purpose is known as incidental learning. It is also learning one thing while intending to teach another (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Many researchers focused on incidental learning in learning process and they believe that intelligible presentation can provide students with learning. This presentation could be provided through different skills like reading or listening activities .

In real life English, it is considered that learning a language should be enjoyable, therefore what better way to learn the English language than through comic strips? A comic strip is defined as a series of pictures that narrate a story. Many researchers are interested in comic strips because they are communicative, popular, accessible, and

readable, as well as because they integrate aesthetic perception with intellectual inquiry (Harvey, 1994; Inge, 1990; O'Sullivan, 1971; Swain, 1978; Waller, 1991).

EFL learners encounter with many difficulties which is about learning and retention of L2 vocabularies. Also they have problem in learning the meaning of the new words or the words that they can't recall them in their long-term memory. This makes less vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, it is the responsibility of language teacher to help students remove the problem and find a correct technique in teaching. As we know, children at an earlier age make an image of everything they see, hear, or even read; since knowing the vocabulary is the main alphabet of language learning, the first step in teaching a language is therefore the proper instruction of the vocabulary. In recent years, a large number of vocabulary learning strategies have been suggested which can be effective for long-term memory retention, if teachers/learners apply them properly.

Comic strips can be a very good source of vocabulary learning in the classroom. Today there is a tendency to use the media for educational purposes. Although the comics are not integrated in the process of educational system, comics can also be used as great and significant exercises in a number of ways. After studying the many researches, it turns out that many researchers found out large issues involving incidental vocabulary learning through many ways, but in the present study it was tried to examine the effect of comic strip stories on incidental vocabulary learning which it seems be an attractive technique to learn vocabulary. Because the studies conducted on comic strips in language teaching have been limited, this study attempts to take a new step in the field of vocabulary training using this method.

METHODOLOGY

The Design of the Study

This study used just one experimental group pretest and immediate posttest and delayed post-test design based on PPVT (the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) to gain broader perspectives on EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies. The participants of the study included 39 male and female kids studying English at Kadus Institute in Rasht, and Eshragh Institute in Tehran. Ms Jourabchian in Kadus Institute taught reading through comic strips to 10 students who were between 5 and 10 years old. MS Jahandidi taught two classes, totaling 18 students whose age ranged from 5-8. Mr. Razmi's class included 11 students with an age range of 6-9. They were elementary users of English having a little previous exposure to the English language. There was only one experimental group. Prior to experiment, they were pretested in order to determine their proficiency level. All participants took part in a vocabulary test. Testing included a list of words that was supposed to learn and all students in their own class were in a group.

Materials

Some pictorial reading texts developed by the researcher as the instructional instrument and a test adapted from the "The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test" as the testing instrument. 40 new content words (nouns) were inserted in the texts. All these words

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were assumed to be unknown to the language learners based on the teacher's knowledge of the students. At the beginning of the research, in order to diagnose the students' level of knowledge, a Pre-Test was used. The tests was prepared based on " The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the 2007 edition of which is known as the PPVT-IV, is an untimed test of receptive vocabulary for Standard American English and is intended to provide a quick estimate of verbal ability and scholastic aptitude." To make sure about the groups' level of proficiency and their general language ability a pre-test administered. The test was adapted to students 'age and EFL context. It consisted of some multiple choices or fills the gap items or matching word with images which selected were from the stories that was supposed to teach to students.

As for treatment, the participants just in one group studied reading. The reading was based on two cartoons (SpongeBob and Madagascar) .each reading consisted of one page in 6 or7 small sections. The students should read the comics in home and also in class and there wasn't any focus on new vocabularies.

Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data, the following procedure was carried out. Before starting the main treatment process, at the first session, the pre-test was administered; the paper was handed to students, then they were asked to choose the correct answers or choose the correct pictures in their test sheets. Accordingly, firstly in an orientation meeting with young learners, they were asked about their two popular cartoons. It should be noted that one cartoon was in serial form and the other one in separated episodes. Of the two selected cartoons for children, a number of new vocabularies were selected and all the participants took part in a vocabulary test (pre-test). With the help of supervisor once the reliability of tests was measured. Comic strips were (re)written and drawn by the researcher using vocabularies used in the cartoon. In every session the incidental learning method was utilized. Some particular procedures in data collection were performed in the classroom in order to assess when testing performed and how the treatment administered?

Answering these questions in data collection procedure, some criterion of the comic strip was presented which carried out in the classroom.

1. Each story was available for learners in its day. Young language learners read the short passages of comics and then to make sure that they had understood the meaning of the passage they were asked to answer some comprehension questions about the comic strips.

2. The learners had to study just one story in a day. The time of presenting for each lesson was about 30 minutes.

3. The incidental learning process finished after 10 sessions and there was no access to more study.

To assess the effectiveness of the treatment, a post-test were given two days after the final session to check how much young language learners incidentally learned intended

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lexical items. About two weeks later, after the post-test, a delayed- posttest were employed to evaluate the effect of comic strips use on retention of the vocabularies .

At the end, the attitudes of children and parents towards this instructional strategy were asked. After the treatment the learners were asked to do a post-test with the same structure. The test sheets were collected, corrected and marked like the pre-test. A delayed post-test were administered two weeks later and corrected like the two previous tests.

RESULTS

Data Analysis and Findings

Descriptive Analysis of the data

To see if there was differentiation in results or not a posttest administered for comparing the group progress in terms of lexical knowledge. As, there were just experimental group in the study, the result of the immediate posttest and delayed-posttest were reported to SPSS software in order to compute the significance level and experimental group lexical knowledge were analyzed. For statistical tests the language learners' scores were entered into SPSS. A paired samples t-test was carried out to measure the effect of the status. These statistical tests mean to response the research questions. The purpose of the study was to inquire the effectiveness of reading comic strips on incidental vocabulary learning and retention of young language learners. It was essential to certify the proficiency level of group. As shown in the table 4.1, this was determined by pretest for which the mean values and standard deviations of scores were 9.43 and 2.59. The N is the number of students. (See table 4.)

Table 4.1. Paired t-test Results -Vocabulary pre-test

Group	N	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	39	9.435	6.726	2.59

Moreover, in order to know the proficiency level, "The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test" (PPVT) was given to 39 EFL for determining the learners' level. The test was consisted of 40 questions. After PPTV test were obtained, the result showed that they were at elementary level and similar background knowledge .

Table 4.2. Comparison of mean scores of both pretest and immediate post-test groups

Group	n	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	t	sig	df	Critical value
Pre-test	39	9.435	6.726	2.593				
Immediate post-test	39	20.359	45.92	6.776	-10.167	<0.0001	38	2.024

In comparing of the two groups of pre-test and post-test with a 99% confidence interval, if the t-statistic value was between 2.57 and -2.57, the hypothesis was rejected and there was no significant difference between the two groups which since the value of t was equal to -10.116, which was less than -1.96 and not in the intended interval according to the above table and due to the fact that the significant value was less than 0.05, therefore it could be concluded that the mean scores of the two groups of pre-test and post-test were significantly different, so that the mean score of the post-test group was higher than the pre-test group. The following figure illustrates the experimental groups' performance on pre-test and immediate post-test of vocabulary learning.
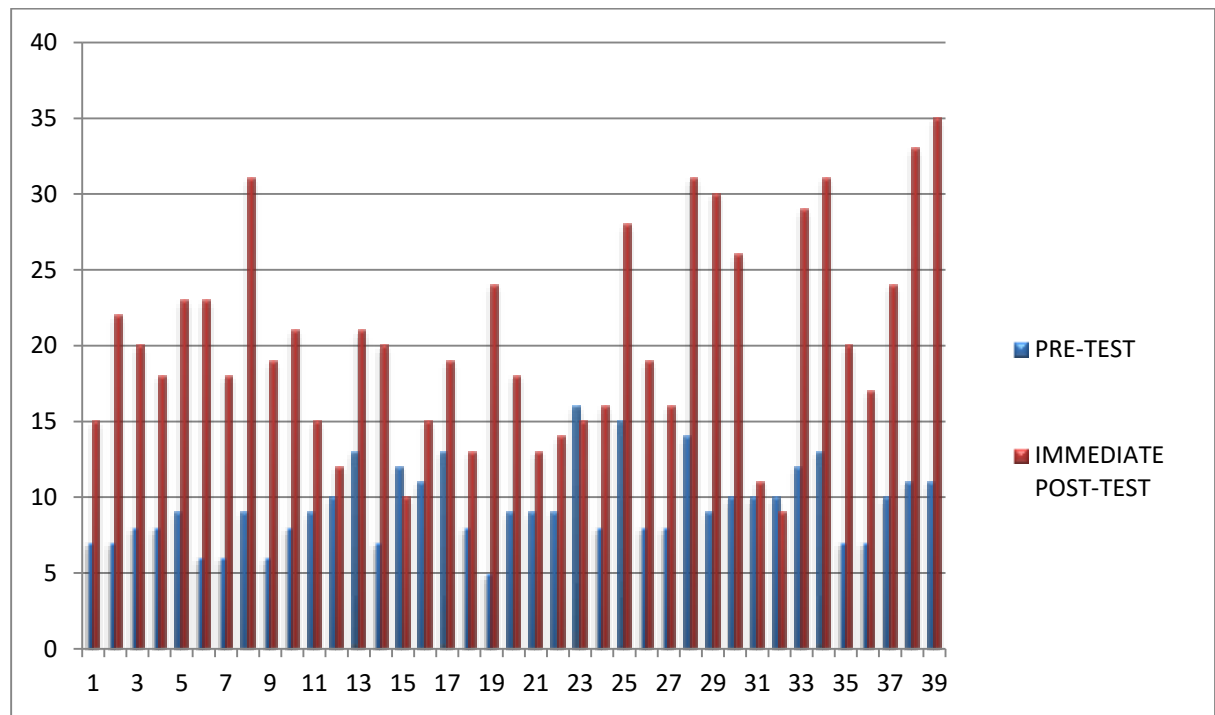
Figure 4.1: The comparison of students 'score in pre-test and immediate post-test

The absolute value of the calculated t exceeded the critical value (10.1607>2.024). Accordingly, the mean score of the immediate post-test far exceeded the pre-test.

Simply put, achieved p value at .05 level of significance was .000 (Sig. <0.05), showing a significant difference between two groups' performances in the vocabulary test.

Table: 4.3. Comparison of mean scores of both immediate post-test and delayed post-test groups

Group	n	mean	variance	Standard deviation	t	sig	df	Critical value
post test	39	20.359	45.92	6.776				
delayed-posttest	39	20.512	45.203	6.723	-1.182	0.224	38	2.024

The means of Group 1 and Group 2 (immediate post-test and delayed post-test) are not significantly different at p < 0.05 . Comparing the two groups of post-test and delayed-posttest with a 99% confidence interval, if the t-statistic value is between 1.96 and -1.96, the hypothesis was rejected and there was no difference between the two groups which since the value of t was equal to -1.183 and not in the intended interval according to the above table and due to the fact that the significant value was more than 0.05, therefore it could be concluded that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of post-test and delayed-posttest groups, although the mean score of the delayed-posttest group was slightly higher than the post-test group, but learning has been done.The following figure illustrates the experimental groups' performance on immediate post-test and delayed post-test of vocabulary learning.
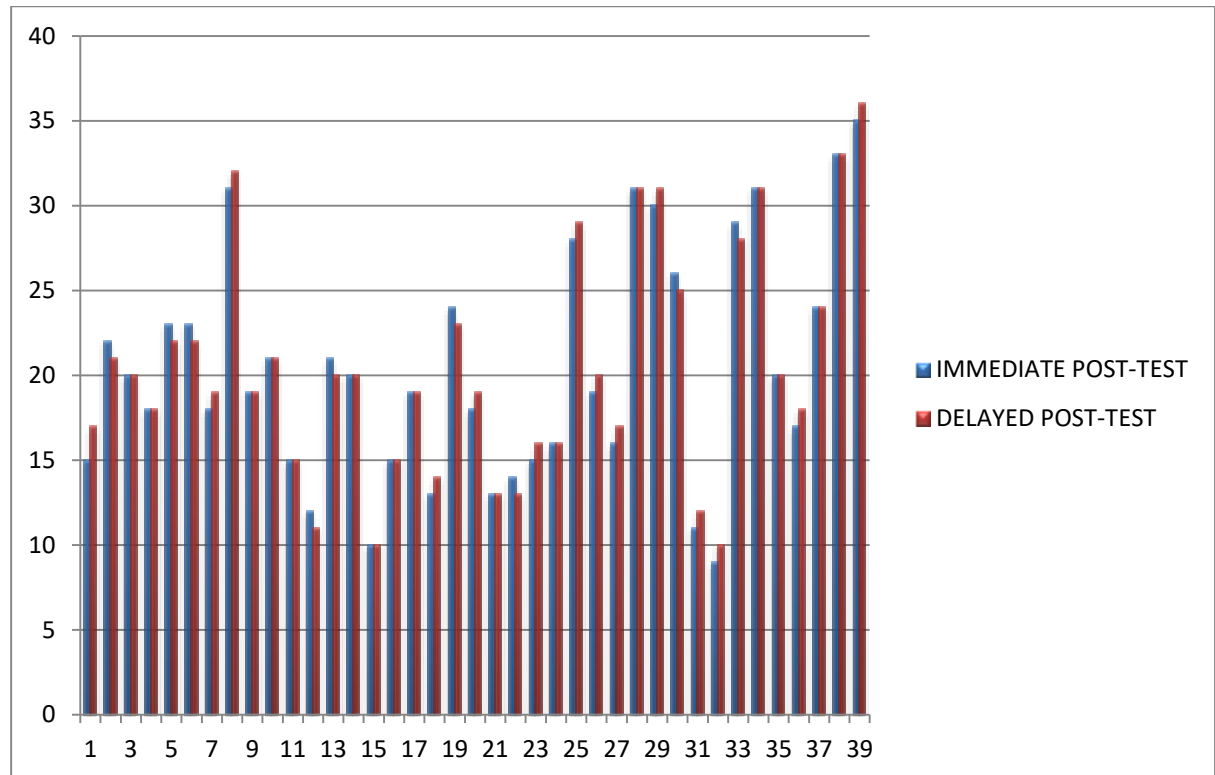
Figure 4.2: The comparison of students 'score in immediate post-test and delayed post-test

The absolute value of the calculated was smaller than critical value (1.1826<2.024), so the means were not significantly different, but learning has done.

DISCUSSION

This chapter presented the data analysis procedures that were carried out in this study and reported the findings obtained from the statistical analysis. This study examines the effect of reading comic strips on incidental vocabulary learning and retention of young language learners. In this section, the data analysis will be provided according to the research question and hypothesis :

RQ1: Does reading comic strips have any significant effect on vocabulary learning of young language learners?

RQ2: Does reading comic strips have any significant effect on vocabulary retention of young language learners?

RQ3: What attitude do young learners, their parents, and the instructor have towards reading comic strips?

In order to investigate the above mentioned research questions, the following hypothesis is presented:

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RH 1: Reading comic strips does not have any significant effect on vocabulary learning of young language learners.

RH 2: Reading comic strips does not have any significant effect on vocabulary retention of young language learners.

As the finding of the study showed and based on the pre-test results, at the beginning of the research all the 39 participants in the study were at the same level of vocabulary knowledge. It means they were elementary users of English having a little previous exposure to the English language. Also the results of immediate post-test demonstrate, there was a considerable difference in participants' performance after the treatment. The young language learners' immediate post-test scores were better than pre-test scores. It means that experimental group had progress in learning new words; it should be considered the group was being taught through comic strips. In addition, the results through a paired sample t-test to analyzing the data realized that using comic strips was effective in learning vocabularies. The analysis of the data – two group scores: pre-test and immediate post-test scores - indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups' performances in the vocabulary test. The learning has taken place and the learners liked the comic strips techniques and enjoyed using it. According to the results and comparison between the immediate post-test and delayed post-test, findings revealed that the superiority of comic strips strategy and young learners could extend their vocabulary knowledge through the treatments.

The finding of the study supported the view that use of comic strips demonstrate to be effective in learning vocabularies. Since retention of words in a long time was an important point, a delayed post-test was administrated. According to the results and comparison between the immediate post-test and delayed post-test, it revealed there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two posttests which implies that learned lexical items were not decayed over two-week time.

Due to the analysis of the data, the second null hypothesis in this study could be statistically accepted because it was proved that comic strips strategy couldn't comfort retention lexicon.

Adopting an extra complicated context, Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2011) evaluated the impact of both reading sort and frequency of word occurrences. Two task conditions: exposing readers to the target words through reading, as "focus on form" condition, and the other as "focus on forms" condition exposes readers to the target words by reading representation plus various word-focused exercises. Within the reading and works out the target words appeared 2–3, 4–5, 6–7 times. In the study, the word meaning was tested, and it became obvious that reading combined with word-focused exercises going beyond reading alone when words appeared four times or more in both meaning cognition and recall. In any case, indeed the most uttermost meaning retention was 63.5 percent for verification and 34.5 percent for recall when readers were exposed to the target phrases 6–7 times. This demonstrates that reading, as well as a large number of interactions with the target words in word-focused tasks, leads to

meaning recognition rather than meaning recall. The retention level for form production is expected to be even lower.

 Jean Brewster, Gail Ellis and Denis Girard (2002) inquire guidelines of English language learning at preliminary level from various perspectives, arguing that it is critical to accentuate that within the European Union, teaching English to young learners is part of a larger picture of a foreign language learning policy in which it has been proposed that EU citizens have a personal document called a European Language Portfolio (ELP). They add that as long as the policy and the preliminary of teaching English to young learners is considered within the above document, several conditions need to be met

According to research on vocabulary instruction (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Ellis, 1994), children learn the majority of their vocabulary indirectly through engaging in oral language on a daily basis, listening to adults read to them, and reading wide-spreading. Furthermore, vocabulary can be taught directly by introducing particular words before reading, allowing opportunities for active interaction with new words, and exposing the vocabulary in a variety of contexts. Vocabulary improvement necessitates children to learn unusual words and be able to use them effectively. It also includes teachers to manage the use of different strategies.

The data of the present research suggested that effective vocabulary improvement is a complex process which requires a combination of instruction and support of learning strategies use. It requires strategies of instructing lexicon effective in making a difference students to deal with complexity of word knowledge, such as abundant exposures to lexicon items, teaching how to effectively use a dictionary, teaching students word structure, the meaning of prefixes, suffixes and root words, meaning of words in a sentence and word relationships, and developing students' ability to infer word meaning in the context. Students' strategic preparing of vocabulary (Cook, 2001; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Graves Watts-Taffe, 2002) could empower them to be adaptable and strategic learners (Griva, Alevriadou & Geladari, 2009), that is to be deliberately mindful of lexicon technique use, so that "they can use strategies on their own to determine the meaning of unknown words" (Burns, 1999: 201).

Implication to research and practice

The results of the present research can be useful for English language teachers who are more engaged with young language learners and are more willing to use various methods rather than traditional methods. Also, the content providers and designers can be beneficiary of the current study's results to improve their quality of their contents.

CONCLUSION

As it was mentioned before, the young language learners' immediate post-test scores were better than pre-test scores. It means that experimental group had progress in learning new words; it should be considered the group was being taught through comic strips. In addition, the results through a paired sample t-test to analyzing the data

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realized that using comic strips was effective in learning vocabularies. As a conclusion, there was a significant difference between two groups' performances in the vocabulary test. The learning has taken place and the learners liked the comic strips techniques and enjoyed using it. According to the results and comparison between the immediate post-test and delayed post-test, findings revealed that the superiority of comic strips strategy and young learners could extend their vocabulary knowledge through the treatments. Finally, by carrying out the present study, it was shown that considering comic strips as a part of teaching material can be beneficial and should not be ignored in the process of learning and teaching vocabulary particularly as young age level.

Future research

It can be recommended that new group age can be included in further studies in terms of using comic strips. Also, by focusing on comic strips on other parts of language skills rather than vocabulary, more extensive results can be obtained in new researches.

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