

Effects of Using Triple Play Plus English on Vocabulary Learning Among Iranian Pre-Intermediate EFL Learners: Gender in Focus

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effects of using triple play plus English software on vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners and the difference between male and female learners. To this end, 40 Iranian male and female pre-intermediate EFL learners whose ages were between 8 and 11 years old participated in the study. The participants were randomly assigned to two equal groups of control and experimental and each group contained equal number of male and female learners. Before performing the treatment, the participants' vocabulary knowledge was assessed by administering a pretest. Triple Play Plus (TPP) software was used for teaching vocabulary to the participants of the experimental group while the participants of the group were taught by traditional methods. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the posttest and the scores of the participants in the experimental group were better. However, there was not a significant difference between female and male learners. The results of the study may offer practical implications for English teaching, vocabulary teaching, and curriculum development.

Keywords: Electronic Learning, CALL, Vocabulary, Vocabulary Learning, Triple Play Pus

Introduction

Vocabulary is generally defined as a system of words with their meaning explanations (Nation, 2001). A word is defined as a series of characteristics in which there is the mixture of its meaning, association, collocation, grammatical behavior, written form, and spelling (Schmitt, 2000). According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), vocabulary is defined as a set of lexemes, including single words, compound words and idioms.

Vocabulary is the important part of every language and can be considered as a component, which plays a central role in language learning. Vocabulary is the foundation of any language. Learning, whether first or second, starts with learning of words (Thornbury, 2004). Without broad vocabulary learning, even individuals who have mastered the grammar might experience the inability to communicate. Numerous foreign language learners know the sentiment of not having the ability to recollect the right word instantly in a discussion because of the limited range of vocabulary they know. This filling prevent learner from continuing learning English. On the other hand, vocabulary does help language learners to adjust sentences and communicate in important ways (Tosun, 2015).

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in the language teaching literature has been recognizable for about thirty years. CALL is defined as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 1997, p. 1). The purpose of CALL is to find alternatives to using computers for the aim of teaching and learning the language. Technology has the potential to play a significant role in foreign/second language teaching and learning. In other words, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has gained considerable attention from different entities including researchers and writers. CALL is a language learning and teaching approach in which the computer is used as a tool for presentation, assisting students, and evaluating material (Jafarian, Soori, & Kafipour, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Vocabulary learning has always been a problematic area for many Iranian EFL learners. Iranian students always complain about the difficulty of vocabulary learning task. A great number of them are bored with forgetting words in a short period of time (Fowle, 2002). Although words are very important and necessary, a few students have a wide range of words and most of the students feel difficulty in memorizing words (Lee, 2007). Unfortunately, for the lack of time in class, teachers cannot use productive ways to teach the words and also learners do not use effective and new approaches to memorize them and they just use old method which is just memorizing words and their meaning by repeating them. They should add extra methods to increase the range of words in their memories. Multimedia programs and interesting games can be used for this purpose. Learners will learn more words and also easier while they are matching pictures or watching videos or listening to music (Chou, 2014).

Review of Literature

Vocabulary as the building block of language learning is considered by some to be the most significant aspect of SLA (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). According to Harmer (1994), without grammar very little can be

transmitted, without vocabulary nothing at all can be transmitted. Harmer (1994) also stated that if language structures construct the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh. On the other hand, vocabulary plays an important part in the development and the continuing improvement of the listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

In recent years, computer technology has accelerated and facilitated vocabulary learning. To a large number of researchers (Bekleyen & Yilmaz, 2011; Gorjian, Moosavinia, Ebrahimi Kavari, Asgari, & Hydareei, 2011; Joseph, Watanabe, Shiung, Choi, & Robbins, 2009; Pahlavanpoorfard & Soori, 2014) educational software can contribute learning languages. During the past few decades, the number of teachers using computers in the language classrooms has been dramatically increased. In fact, the appearance of CALL provided a new outlook for vocabulary learning (Tabar & Khodareza, 2012). Computer assisted vocabulary learning is considered as one of the most application of CALL. This can be considered as a new tool for vocabulary instruction. Therefore, it has drawn the attention of teachers and researchers. As a result, many empirical studies have tried to apply computer-assisted vocabulary learning effectiveness on vocabulary achievement.

Hoogeveen (1995) mentioned some good points by using multimedia in language learning. First, learners reply to multimedia in a complex way and give the feeling of experiencing information instead of simply gaining it. Second, the man-machine has more friendly communication and relation. Third, learners feel more fun with multimedia and learning process becomes more interesting.

Nation (2001) claimed that, with the quick development in the use of technology and computers in language learning, computers makes a very effective approach of vocabulary learning, especially in confirming that learners' efforts are directed towards vocabulary that is necessary for them. Studies on vocabulary learning with the use of the computer have proved the effectiveness of electronic glossary or online dictionary in L2 vocabulary learning among learners in general (Al-Seghayer, 2005). Many researchers have claimed main evidence that multimedia have important effects on language learning because of rich and reliable comprehensible input (Al-Seghayer, 2005; Brett, 1997).

Silverman and Hines (2009) conducted the research on the use of Jing (a free computer application lets participants take a picture of what they watch on computer screen and also allows them to add notes and specify the picture) in English classes to teach new words in an interesting and fun way. The materials included a word test used to specify the learners' level of the target vocabulary before and after a teaching. In addition, an interview was performed to learn the learners' ideas about their studying experience. The consequences showed a main enhancement in the participants' post-test scores. It was also clear that the learners had a positive behavior about the use of computers and applications in words learning.

The findings of the research on computer-assisted vocabulary learning have significant impacts on software designs used for CALL (Naraghizadeh & Barimani, 2013). "By surveying vocabulary acquisition theories, guiding principles for the design of CALL programs for vocabulary have been suggested or the researchers have described programs they developed for vocabulary teaching" (Son, 2001, p. 31). These studies point to how software can be developed or used in CALL environments and how the students learn how to use CALL for learning vocabulary.

Research Questions

This study was performed to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Does using Triple Play Plus have a significant effect on vocabulary learning by Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?
2. Is there any significance difference between males and females in improving vocabulary knowledge using Triple Play Plus among Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were 40 Iranian male and female EFL learners. The participants had studied English at Gooyesh English Institute and Zabansara Institute, in Isfahan, Iran. The numbers of male and female learners were equal, it means 20 male and sixteen female learners were chosen randomly. The participants were randomly assigned into two equal groups of control (CG) and experimental (EG) and each group had equal number of male and female learners. Their ages ranged between 8 and 11 years old. The participants' overall English knowledge was assessed by the institutes and the results of the placement test indicated that they were all pre-intermediate EFL learners.

Instruments and Materials

The following instruments and material were employed for conducting the study.

Pretest and Posttest

A test was prepared which included 20 questions that were chosen randomly from the participants' final exam for that specific term and all were about vocabularies that they learned in that level. Learners had 20 minutes to answer the questions. It was performed to estimate the level of words for each learner and the results were saved for learners' records. After the pretest, Triple Play Plus was used to help learners to memorize more words. Finally, the same test as pretest was applied again to check the effects of using new game and that would be posttest. The reliability of the test was measured by KR-21 and it was revealed that the test had good reliability ($r = .86$). To make sure about the validity of the test, three experts who had Ph.D. degrees in TEFL were consulted and they confirmed its validity.

Triple Play Plus

Triple Play Plus English is a package includes CD, user's guide, plug-and-play microphone, and technical book that is designed for beginners to intermediate ESL learners and ages (8 to up). This game was designed by Carolyn B. Mitchell in 1995 and helps learners in listening, speaking, and reading. Triple play plus English is used for self-study, in classroom teaching, and also by researchers. The software includes 32 varied games, with six main topics. These consist of food, numbers, home and office, people, activities, and places and transportation. Triple Play Plus comes in some other languages such as Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, and Italian, but our focus is on English one (Mackey & Choi, 1998).

Procedure

At first, participants took a test which was a multiple choice questions test. After administering the test to the participants, they were divided randomly into two groups of control and experimental. Both groups consisted of equal numbers of female and male participants. The software was used for teaching and exercising new words to the participants of the experimental group. The software was used for this purpose at the end of each session for about 15 minutes. The learners in control group did not use the software and they learned words with the regular way. Flashcards and pictures were used for teaching and exercising new words to the participants of the control group and the learners learned the new words by listening and repeating method. The treatment lasted for 15 sessions and each was 90 minutes. After completing the treatment, a posttest was administered to all participants and the researcher analyzed their scores to test the effect of using Triple Play Plus on vocabulary learning. The results of the participants in the control and experimental groups were compared with each other to assess the effectiveness of the computer software. Moreover, the results of male and female learners in the experimental group were compared with each other to understand if there was a significant difference between male and female learners.

Results

Addressing Research Question One

The first research question focused on determining if using Triple Play Plus affects vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. To find answer to this research question, Independent-Samples *t*-test was conducted by the researcher to compare the results of participants in the control and experimental groups on the posttest. The results are shown in the following part.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Results of the CG and EG on the Posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores	Control	20	16.05	.887	.198
	Experimental	20	17.50	.513	.115

The table indicates that the mean score of the EG ($M = 17.50$) was greater than the mean score of the CG ($M = 16.05$). To figure out if this difference was statistically significant, an Independent-Samples *t*-test was conducted. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Independent-Samples t-Test for Comparing the Results of the CG and EG on the 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
Scores	Equal variances assumed	7.560	.009	-6.328	38	.000	-1.450	.229	-1.914	-.986
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.328	30.430	.000	-1.450	.229	-1.918	-.982

As the results show, there was a significant difference between the CG ($M = 16.05$, $SD = .89$) and the EG ($M = 17.50$, $SD = .51$) since the p value was lower than .05 ($p < .001$). It means the participants of EG were significantly better than the participants of CG.

Addressing Research Question Two

The aim of the second research question was to find out if there is any significance difference between males and females in improving vocabularies using Triple Play Plus among Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. To achieve this aim, the results of male and female participants in EG on the posttest were compared via an Independent-Samples t -test.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Male and Female Participants of the EG on the Posttest

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores	Female	19	16.74	.991	.227
	Male	21	16.81	1.078	.235

The results indicate mean scores of male and female participants of EG on the posttest. Female participants' mean score ($M = 16.81$) was slightly greater than male participants' mean score ($M = 16.74$) The Independent-Samples t -test was conducted to figure out if this difference was significant or not.

Table 4

Results of Independent-Samples t-Test for Comparing Male and Female Participants of the EG on the 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
Scores	Equal variances assumed	.103	.751	-.221	38	.826	-.073	.329	-.738	.592
	Equal variances not assumed			-.222	37.987	.825	-.073	.327	-.735	.590

According to Table 4, there was not a significant difference between male and female participants since the p value was greater than .05 ($p = .826$). Therefore, both male and female participants benefited equally from Triple Play Plus.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to Lee (2000) computer technology makes vocabulary learning an exciting process for language learners and consequently facilitates learning vocabulary. Another issue is related to the one to one interaction between the students and the computers which can make the vocabulary learning easier. In addition, this technology along with the Internet enhances the possibility of collaboration and cooperation among students and enable them to use the vocabulary they learn and memorize them better (Kaya, 2006). Another reason refers to immediate feedback from the computer when it corrects the mistakes committed by the students. Students were only people who could see the answers. Therefore, students do not have any fear for making mistakes. This

situation causes low affective-filter environment. Therefore, it facilitates language learning (Krashen, 1989).

These findings are in consistent with the results of the present study since in this study the participants who learned vocabulary by means computer were more successful the ones who learned vocabulary without computer. They learned English vocabulary easier and with less effort and its process was very interesting to them. The results of this study are also in line with the findings of previous studies (Abraham, 2008; Ahmadian, Amerian, & Goodarzi, 2015; Pahlavanpoorfard & Soori, 2014; Sharifi, Azizifar, Jamalinesari, & Gowhary, 2015; Wong & Looi, 2010) who stated that computer can facilitate vocabulary learning.

Sharifi, Azizifar, Jamalinesari, and Gowhary (2015) investigated the effects of Rosetta Stone Software on learning vocabulary by male and female Iranian elementary EFL learners. The results of their study indicated that both groups of participants learned many English words and there was not a major difference between the learners based on their genders. These results are in line with the findings of the present study in which the participants' vocabulary knowledge was improved considerably but there was not a significant difference between male and female participants.

Dehghani, Sadighi, and Seyari (2015) investigated the effects of computer-based learning on the improvement of male and female EFL learners' grammar knowledge. The results revealed that both male and female EFL learners' grammar knowledge improved significantly. Although male learners benefited more than female learners did, this difference was not significant at all. The findings of their study are approved by the results of the present study because there was not a significant difference between male and female participants' mean scores on the posttest and they benefited equally from the software,

Therefore, it can be concluded that computer software is fantastic material for teaching English vocabulary to EFL learners and it is beneficial for both male and female learners. It is recommended to implement computer software in EFL classes for teaching and practicing vocabulary to learners.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion the following points can be drawn as the conclusions of the study. First, Triple Play Plus is a very effective material for teaching English vocabulary to EFL learners especially children. This software teaches English vocabulary through numerous pictures and provides learners with many interesting games for practicing the words. Therefore, it helps children to learn so many English words easily and improve their vocabulary knowledge more effectively. Second, it can be concluded that this software is beneficial for both male and female learners and both groups can improve their vocabulary knowledge by the help of it. The pictures, which are used in the software, are interesting to boys and girls almost equally. Therefore, children of the both genders can use it to learn English vocabulary and improve their vocabulary knowledge.

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