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USING POSTERS IN EFL CLASSROOM: AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CASE¹

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Abstract

It is assumed that vocabulary learning is an important component of learning a second or foreign language. There is also an agreement that it is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner. Since vocabulary knowledge is what foreign language learners most need, it is necessary to facilitate this process. The present study aims to determine the effect of posters on the vocabulary learning of students without any teacher instruction. It also aims to explore gender differences in learning vocabulary items on posters. The participants of the study include 54 fourth graders, studying at an elementary school in Muğla. The study was carried out during 2015-2016 academic year. The data were gathered by means of a vocabulary test containing 30 items that was used as the pre and post-test. Data analysis showed that posters in language classrooms helped vocabulary learning process. The mean score of the experimental group has increased from $M=6.72$ to $M=14.24$. Moreover, a significant difference was determined between the scores of females and males. The study showed that the post-test scores of females ($M= 16.15$) and males ($M=12.69$) were significantly different. It can be concluded that in foreign language classrooms utilizing from posters can be beneficial.

Keywords: posters, teacher instruction, peripheral learning, vocabulary

1. Introduction

Visual aids in classes are found to be beneficial since they draw attention and facilitate noticing (Çetin & Flamand, 2013). Allen, Kate & Marquez (2011) suggest that they supply the learners with an additional sensory perception. They are suggested in many approaches; in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for example audio-visual aids are highly utilized with the aim of drawing the attention of learners and making them more enthusiastic about the subject. In the Direct method, visuals help to convey the meanings of words or concepts.

One of the visual materials used in foreign language classes is educational posters which are used for various purposes. Visualizing the words or concepts via posters/pictures is a way of getting the attention of the learners. They are both visual and textual aids that can be hanged on classroom walls (Çetin & Flamand, 2013). By using them, teachers can visualize and contextualize the subject (Buell, as cited in Gezer, Şen & Alcı, 2012). Since vocabulary knowledge is one of the vital components of learning a foreign language and sufficient amount of vocabulary knowledge is necessary, in language classrooms posters are widely preferred by language teachers.

Regarding vocabulary learning, there are two main approaches; explicit/intentional and incidental vocabulary learning. Explicit learning is intentional and planned while incidental learning is a by-product process of doing something else (Hatch & Brown, 1995). Gass (as cited in Rieder, 2003) argued that it should not have been disregarded that vocabulary learning even incidental one require some extent of attention of the learners. Input does not necessarily need to be given intentional attention to become intake of learners. However, it is also stated that passive learners are more likely to be unsuccessful compared to the ones that pay attention to the stimuli (Schmidt, 2001). That's why, using posters, including relevant vocabulary and structures, during classes seems to have much better effect on vocabulary learning process.

Peripheral learning is another way of learning vocabulary items. Lazanov (as cited in Fatemipour, 2012) proposed the method named Suggestopedia, in which teachers support what learners like and “desuggest” what they dislike. Peripheral learning is one of the most important items in Suggestopedia method. It is defined as “... learning from the environment that the students are present in”. It is the learning process of students from presented materials even if they are not directed to them (Badri, Badri, & Badri, 2015). Çetin and Flamand (2013) introduced “Self-directed inferential learning” concept emphasizing active role of the students without any type of instruction. They accept that visuals or educational posters are good supporters for vocabulary learning; however, they go one step further and conclude that posters also trigger self-directed learning in which there is not any intentional direction for the students; they absorb what are presented on classroom walls.

A number of research studies in different educational settings regarding the role of posters in vocabulary learning have been carried out. Research studies can be generally analyzed in three different groups: (1) Studies that investigated how teachers and students benefitted from poster in EFL/ESL classrooms (Al Mamun, 2014; Dolati & Richards, 2010; Osa & Musser, 2004; Zerín & Khan, 2013). (2) Studies that investigated the effect of posters/peripheral learning on vocabulary learning of the students (Badri et al., 2015; Çetin & Flamand, 2013; Gezer, Sen, & Alçı, 2012). (3) Studies that investigated the effect of peripheral learning on motivation and spelling skills of students and how the amount of peripheral learning affected the learning process of the learners (Fatemipour, 2013; Mohamadpur, 2013; Rokni, Porasghar & Taziki, 2014).

Al Mamun (2014) investigated how learners and teachers benefitted from audio-visual materials. The researcher used observation and interview method and concluded that both sides favored the use of audio-visual materials thinking that they were beneficial for both teaching and learning process. According to interview results, teachers believed that such materials were useful in language classroom to teach four skills. In another study, Dolati and Richards (2010) concluded that visual materials and peripheral learning significantly enhanced English classrooms and teachers preferred to utilize visuals to facilitate learning/teaching process. Osa and Musser (2004) searched for the value of posters in educational setting and they concluded that posters created a more stimulating and interesting environment for learning. Zerín and Khan (2013) analyzed the effect of poster-making activity in English classroom in primary level Bangladesh setting. They concluded that poster making made classes more dynamic and positive. Another conclusion was that posters helped to improve language proficiency.

As for the effect of posters/peripheral learning on vocabulary learning studies carried out in different contexts found similar results. Çetin and Flamand (2013) concluded that using posters resulted in self-directed learning in the experimental group. Similarly, in Badri et al. (2015), students in the experimental group benefitted from the posters and increased their

vocabulary level. Gezer et al. (2012) searched for the effect of posters to teach idioms to university students. They also looked for gender effect on utilizing posters. They concluded that peripheral learning is helpful to teach idioms; however, they did not find a significant difference between male and female participants.

In the third category the researchers, who examined the effect of peripheral learning on motivation and spelling of the learners, noticed that peripheral learning could facilitate spelling (Rokni et al., 2014). In Mohamadpur's (2013) study it was found out that posters increased learners' motivation and the best motivator was posters. Fatemipour (2013) compared ESL and EFL contexts to understand the effect of the amount of peripheral learning. He analyzed Iranian and Indian university students and suggested that EFL learners should be provided with as much visual stimuli as possible to enhance learning.

In second language learning/teaching, gender was used as a variable in some studies (Gezer et al., 2012; Llach & Gallego, 2012; Soureshjani, 2011) and inconsistent results were obtained. To give examples, Soureshjani (2011) found that males and females use different learning strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words. However; Llach and Gallego (2012) studied the amount of vocabulary size of males and females and found that there was not a significant difference in size and vocabulary development of males and females. In this quasi-experimental research study, female learners seemed to gain more vocabulary than males in the first weeks of the study, though. Similarly, in the Turkish context, Gezer et al., (2012) in their study stated that the existence of difference between males and females during learning idioms through posters was not determined.

Research on the effect of posters and the role of peripheral learning is limited. The main goal of this study is to determine the effect of educational posters on vocabulary learning in foreign language classes. As a secondary aim the role of gender on self-directed vocabulary learning was investigated. Although there are some studies on the effect of posters on vocabulary learning, the present study particularly focuses on elementary school students'. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were designed.

1. What is the effect of educational posters on vocabulary learning without any instruction?
2. Does vocabulary learning via peripheral learning differ in terms of gender?

2. The Study

In this study a quasi-experimental research design (control group design) was employed. Control group design allows the researchers to ensure that any change is the result of treatment, not anything else. This is much easier for EFL classroom when compared to ESL classrooms. In order to measure the effect of treatment, pretest/posttest design was employed. This design leads researchers to determine the immediate effect on the participants (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

2.1. Setting and Participants

This study was carried out during the spring term of 2015-2016 education year at a state elementary school on the western coast of Turkey. The participants were 54 4th grade students, 27 females and 27 males, studying at Dumlupınar Primary State School in Muğla. The mean age of the participants was 10. The control group consisted of 25 students, 14 females and 11 males, while experimental group included 29 students, 13 females and 16 males. The background of the students (socioeconomic, cultural) was not very different from one another. They were all beginner learners of English. There were not any students who needed special education or with severe health problems such as seeing or hearing.

Convenience sampling method was employed to select the participants. There were 5 different 4th grade classes in this school. One of the classes was on the first floor, one was on the third floor and three were on the second floor of the building. In order to prevent the participants in the control group from being exposed to posters, the students in the classes on the first and on the third floor were included.

2.2. Instruments

A vocabulary test was designed by the researchers by examining samples (Çetin & Flamand, 2013; MEB-achievement tests) used by other researchers and getting expert support. The test included four main parts as A B C D, targeting 30 vocabulary items in total. The number of items in each part is written below.

Part A / 8 items: Circling the English word for the given picture

Part B / 7 items: Matching English words with their Turkish equivalents

Part C / 8 items: Writing Turkish equivalents of the English words

Part D / 7 items: Filling in the blanks with the English words given in the table

The same test was used as the pre-test and the post-test to see the differences in the vocabulary knowledge of the learners in two different groups. The pictures used in pre and post-tests were not the same pictures as in the posters in order to prevent learners to memorize the visuals. The aim was to increase reliability. They were different pictures but they represented the same word.

Five posters were used in the experimental group. The posters were designed by researchers utilizing photos and pictures from the Internet. The words were selected from concrete items instead of abstract terms in order to prevent any misunderstanding. Each poster had a theme or context (in kitchen, by the lake, in the grocery store, while cooking, in the park). There were six words in each poster. The researchers were sure that participants had not encountered target words before. The length of the poster is the same for all (50cm), but the width of the posters varied slightly. They had nearly the same sizes.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

As data collection procedure, pre-test and post-test were applied. The pre-test was applied in two classes simultaneously without any prior announcement to students. The posters were hanged on the walls of the experimental group for three weeks. The students did not receive any teacher direction or explicit teaching about the posters during three weeks. The posters were not included in the planned activities. The aim was to determine the effect of posters and self-directed inferential learning on the participants. The same test was applied as the post-test after three weeks in both of the classes again to see if there was a difference between two groups.

Data were analysed using SPSS 22. As there were only two groups to compare, independent sample t-test and paired sample t-tests were used aiming to see if there was any significant difference between the groups. The analysis of the data were put under categories and presented in the tables in the results section.

4. Findings and Discussion

The first phase of results part is about pre-test and post-test results. Independent t-test statistics were used to see the difference between control and experimental group regarding means of pre-test scores.

Table 1. *Independent sample t-test for pre-test results*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
Control Group	25	6.88	1.856	.371	-1.863	52	.068
Exp. Group	29	8.07	2.685	.499			

As shown in Table 1, means of two groups are close to each other and there is not a significant difference in pre-test ($p=.068$). That's why it is assumed that there is homogeneity in terms of vocabulary knowledge of the participants.

Table 2. *Independent sample t-test for post-test results*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
Control Group	25	6.72	2,227	.445	-8.662	52	.000
Exp. Group	29	14.24	3.814	.708			

Independent sample t-test results for post-test illustrates that the existence of posters on class walls in the experimental group during 3 weeks created a significance difference between control and experimental groups in terms of test results. Control group's mean has decreased because some participants have got lower scores in post-test than pre-test ($M_1= 6.88$ $M_2= 6.72$). On the other hand, regarding post-test scores of experimental group, there is a significant difference ($p=.000$). Mean of experimental group has increased from 6.72 to 14.24.

In order to see whether there is a difference according to the sections/question types in the exam, the difference between two group's test results were disaggregated by the sections of the test. There is significant difference only for section A (choosing word for given picture) ($p<. 001$). The means of the sections were analyzed and it was found that Section A got the highest scores while Section D got the lowest scores. It may be discussed that only hanging posters does not guarantee that student can use the words in some sentences/contextualizing the words. The learners seem to need different strategies or exercises to do better in Section D. Therefore, the researchers stressed that educational posters should be utilized in EFL classes. They are beneficial on their own but if they are supported with some exercise or teacher instruction, the learners may internalize them more easily. The study of Alemi and Tayebi (as cited in Rokni et al., 2014) showed that students actually paid some attention in order to learn vocabulary items peripherally. The authors also concluded that peripheral learning could be achieved through posters; however, if they were supported with some vocabulary exercises (intentional learning) then the process could be more effective. Input did not necessarily need to be given intentional attention to become intake of learners. However, it was also stated that passive learners were more likely to be unsuccessful compared to the ones that pay attention to the stimuli (Schmidt, 2001). That's why active use of posters during classes seemed to have much better effect on vocabulary learning process.

Table 3. Paired sample t-test of pre-test results for control group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pre-test	25	6.88	1.856	.371	.679	24	.504
Post-test	25	6.72	2.227	.445			

Table 4. Paired sample t-test of pre-test results for experimental group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pre-test	29	8.07	2.685	.499	-9.651	28	.000
Post-test	29	14.24	3.814	.708			

Paired sample t-test, as illustrated in Table3 and Table4, revealed that there is not a significant difference ($p=.504$) between the results of pre and post-tests for control group. However, for experimental group there is a significant difference ($p=.000$) between pre and post-tests. These results show that posters have an important effect on the results of vocabulary tests and they facilitate self-directed L2 vocabulary learning. Although the posters were not supported with teacher direction or any vocabulary exercise, they helped learners to gain some vocabulary items.

Similar results were observed in Çetin and Flamand (2013) and Mohamadpur (2013), Larsen- Freeman and Anderson's (2011) studies. The existence of educational posters was found to be beneficial for vocabulary learning process without teacher direction. Rokni et al. (2014) have also found that the learners can learn more easily when they do not intend it. Therefore it seems reasonable to hang posters to let the students learn vocabulary items without much support. Moreover; Badri et al. (2015) concluded that posters should be facilitated to enhance the capacity of learning in EFL classes. They found a significant difference between experimental and control group regarding post-test results meaning that exposure to posters peripherally have a positive effect on vocabulary learning.

Table 5. Independent sample t-test of pre and post-test for experimental group

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pre-test	Female	13	8.46	2.184	.606	.703	27	.488
	Male	16	7.75	3.066	.766			
Post-test	Female	13	16.15	2.267	.6292	.692	27	.012
	Male	16	12.69	4.159	1.040			

In order to gain deeper knowledge about the effects of posters, gender effect on test results is also analyzed. This analysis is done only for experimental group since the aim is to see the effect of posters regarding genders of the participants. The results are illustrated in Table5 that shows there is a significant difference between male and female participants' post-test results. To understand the effect of posters, firstly pre-test of experimental group was analyzed regarding gender. It is shown in Table5 that there is not a significant difference

between female and male participants' test results ($p=.488$). On the other hand the difference in post-test scores of female and male participants is significant ($p=.012$). To summarize, this difference shows that females have benefited posters more than males. Gender creates differences in social and cognitive areas. Research studies found out that females are more capable of acquiring first and second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Gender differences issue in EFL and ESL classrooms have been examined by researchers (Gezer et al., 2012; Llach & Gallego, 2012; Soureshjani, 2011). However, study results are inconclusive. Some studies resulted in favoring one gender to another regarding EFL success while some studies take gender as ineffective on EFL&ESL process (Llach & Gallego, 2012). The results change according to individual, social, cultural and linguistic factors. The present study reached the conclusion that female learners did significantly better than male ones which shows that girls utilized posters more than boys. However, Gezer et al. (2012) concluded that posters were beneficial for English idioms learning while peripheral learning doesn't differ in terms of gender. However; in their study university students were examined. The situation may be different for primary level.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effect of educational posters on vocabulary learning in a primary level EFL class. The results indicated that existence of posters without teacher direction ended with an increase in mean score of the experimental group. That means educational posters can be effective visual aids to teach EFL vocabulary at primary level. Findings of the present study are important since vocabulary knowledge is a vital component in foreign language education.

The second point that the researchers looked for was gender effect on utilizing the posters. Post-test data analyses showed that mean score of females was higher than mean score of males in the experimental group. Female participants were found to benefit educational posters more than males. That finding was compatible with the idea that girls are more prone to learn a foreign language than boys.

Researchers concluded that existence of educational posters facilitated self-directed learning process. Another conclusion was that girls benefitted posters more than boys did. Students may not need teacher direction or instruction to utilize posters, but if posters are used in class activities, the effect of them can be more significant. More research studies are needed to prove this suggestion. A third group exposing to teacher direction/instruction about the posters may be added in a further study.

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