

An Investigation into the Effect of Portfolio Assessment on Iranian High/Low Self-Regulated EFL Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge at Pre-Intermediate Level

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important parts of second language acquisition. This study tried to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment on Iranian high/low self-regulated EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge at pre-intermediate level. To carry out this study, 90 female learners aged between 16-22 were chosen from Tabarestan language school located in Noshahr, Iran. They took OPT test (Oxford Proficiency Test) and after giving the self-regulation questionnaire 60 of them were selected as the main participants of the study. They arranged in two classes, one class consisted of 33 high self-regulated learners and the other class consisted of 27 low self-regulated learners. The participants in each class were randomly assigned to experimental and control group. The pretest was administered to measure participants' vocabulary knowledge. The experimental group received treatment. Both control and experimental groups attended 7 sessions with the same instructional material. The control group received the traditional assessment while the experimental group received portfolio assessment, i.e., they were asked to provide a folder of writing tasks as portfolio, with providing feedback by teacher. At the end of the course, the posttest was administered. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between the performance of the experimental group who had the portfolio assessment and the control group who received traditional assessment. Also the results revealed that there was no significant difference between the high and low self-regulated EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Key Words

Vocabulary Knowledge, Portfolio Assessment, Self-Regulation

Introduction

Nowadays second language learning plays crucial role among students with different nationalities. Celce Murcia mentioned “Learning a language involves gaining control in and the development of different skills (namely, reading, writing, listening and speaking). Whatever the focus of any instructional program, two features are highly essential to the process of acquiring and using language: vocabulary and grammar”. (as cited in Amirian, Mallahi & Zaghi,2015, p.30)

“The field of second language (L2) teaching has undergone many fluctuations and shifts over the years”. (Celce Murcia, 2014, p.3) Some researchers believe that learning vocabulary is a very necessary factor in language learning. "Vocabulary plays a greater role in communication than the other components of language. Also the lack of needed vocabulary is the most common cause of students' inability to say what they want to say during communication activities "(Chastain, 1988, p.327). Also Celce Murcia believed that “word learning is incremental, that is, information about a word is gathered gradually over time. Effective vocabulary instruction can address the incremental nature of word learning by including the following: repetition, spaced repetition, opportunities to focus on both meaning and form, engagement, interaction and negotiation”. (p.291)

Language teachers are trying to encourage students to learn new words. “Likewise, all learners and teachers know that motivation promotes success and achievement in L2 learning and that students who experience high amounts of an external or intrinsic drive or need to learn, will achieve higher levels of proficiency than students with low levels of drives. In practice, this means that educationalists may attempt to increase students’ motivation by providing tasks and materials which students may experience as interesting and appealing”. (Laufer&Hulstijn, 2001, p.2) Portfolio assessment is a useful tool which helps learners and teachers in second language teaching and learning.

According to Longman Dictionary portfolio is “a purposeful collection of work that provides information about someone’s efforts, progress or achievement in a given area. It is a learning as well as assessment tool”. (p.443). “The portfolio is used not only as a document of evidence but also as an effective learning tool”. (Elango, Jutti& Lee, 2005, p.511) As one of the key factors in any educational system is assessment, portfolio is one of the alternative assessments that today's

are used in pedagogical settings. According to Stiggins (2001), "a portfolio should tell the story of a student". (as cited in Erlandson, p.1)

Also there are different kinds of psychological factors that can have positive effect in learning, one of these factors is self-regulation. " With the increasing focus on learner responsibility in education, self-regulated learning attracted noteworthy attention over the last decades from people of different fields such as primary education, science education, math education in different educational settings" (BanuInan, 2013, p.1).

Many studies have been conducted on self-regulated learning and its elements. Baumeister and Vohs (2008) state that "self-regulation refers to a person's ability to change his/her behavior. The quality and existence of these actions would alter in relation to some goals, ideas and norms no matter whether their stem would have public or internal anticipation. In general human behavior flexibility and adaptability will increase during self-regulation process"(as cited in Zarei&Hatami, 2012, p.2).

Literature review

The importance of vocabulary in language teaching and learning was widely accepted and many authors have focused on the necessity of learning vocabulary in language domain. In the early 1980s, little attention was paid to vocabulary learning in researches conducted at the time and severe criticism was raised over the neglect of vocabulary research. For example, Meara (1982) stated that "This neglect is all the more striking in that learners themselves readily admit that they experience considerable difficulty with vocabulary, and once they have got over the initial stages of acquiring their second language, most learners identify the acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest source of problems" (as cited in Hogben & Lawson, 1996, p. 102).

Despite this trend, vocabulary was not completely ignored in language teaching, even in the greatest days of Communicative Language Teaching's popularity. Some researchers and commentators have referred to the significance of vocabulary acquisition for language learners since they believed that learners' problems with words would affect their efforts to communicate with people.

Afterwards, the importance of vocabulary in language teaching and learning was widely accepted and many authors have focused on the necessity of learning vocabulary in language domain. Laufer (1997) noted that "Vocabulary is no longer a victim of discrimination in second

language learning research, nor in language teaching. After decades of neglect, lexis is now recognized as central to any language acquisition process, native or non-native. What many language teachers might have intuitively known for a long time, that a solid vocabulary is necessary in every stage of language learning, is now being openly stated by some second language acquisition (SLA) researchers” (as cited in Ahlam, 2016, p .4).

Later, the advocates of vocabulary knowledge referred to its importance in language teaching and learning from other perspectives. Steven Stahl (1999) pointed out that “Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can ever be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. Instruction in vocabulary involves far more than looking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence” (as cited in Mart, 2012, p. 177).

Thus, the interest in vocabulary knowledge has increased and vocabulary opened its “central and essential” position in researches and discussions over learning a language (Shen, 2003, p. 189). There are various kinds of techniques through which vocabulary can be taught. In order to be effective and influential, the technique should be applicable that means to be taken place in a classroom. Techniques must be in consistence with a method and in harmony with an approach (Anthony, 1986, as cited in Aksoy, 2006, p. 15).

Despite usefulness of various techniques and opportunities, some researchers believed that some of them never provide an opportunity for learners to learn new words on their own, for example copying vocabulary’s definition from flashcards or dictionaries do not make a creative and meaningful learning. Some authors as Nichols and Rupley (2004) believe that vocabulary learning becomes influential and meaningful if learners make a link between the existing lexical items and their background knowledge. They proposed vocabulary portfolio as a different types of techniques which can help and promote vocabulary self-knowledge among learners (Nasiri, Baftani &Zarei, 2014, p. 39).

For many years, teachers and educators used traditional teaching and assessment methods and techniques in the process of learning and teaching a language, some of which reported ineffective and inefficient. Therefore, in the development of posts method era, there was a paradigm shift from product-based assessment to the process-based assessment in the learning processes.

Portfolios have been widely used in the area of foreign language and second language learning in a bid to help learners acquire the language and promote their learning and is considered as “a useful teaching and learning tool in language learning classrooms” (Apple & Shimo, 2006, p. 77). Berimani and Mohammadi (2013) investigated the effect of portfolio assessment on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners. The results from comparing the pretest and posttest of the participants showed that the portfolio-used group outperformed the control group in vocabulary knowledge. They used portfolio assessment as a teaching, learning and assessment tool to improve the vocabulary knowledge of the learners.

Ok (2014) studied the effect of keeping a portfolio on learners’ progress in language and vocabulary. For this study, 46 freshman learners attending the Department of English Language Teaching in Turkey had to provide the reflective essays in which they reported their views on the portfolio process as well as their development. The findings showed that the portfolio-keeping process as a part of the Advanced Reading-Writing Course provided the ground for them to develop their level in writing with respect to language and vocabulary use. Moreover, the students reported that developing portfolio helped them build their self-confidence in language and vocabulary use.

As Zimmerman (2002) stated, “self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills” (p. 65). According to him, “self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are oriented to attaining goals” (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65).

Since the introduction of self-regulation and its learning set, many researchers have investigated the possible relevance of it on vocabulary learning. For instance, Hatami and Zarei (2012) conducted a study on the relationship between self-regulated learning components and L2 vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. The analysis of data indicated no significant relationship between self-regulated components and vocabulary knowledge, but the relationships between the same components and reading comprehension knowledge of Iranian EFL learners were reported a mixed result (p. 1939 & 1943).

Moreover, Amirian, Mallahi and Zaghi (2015) investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL students’ self-regulation capacity for vocabulary learning and their vocabulary size. The result revealed no significant relationship between the two variables measured by these instruments.

However, the results of the multiple regressions indicated that the metacognitive control compared to the other subscales made a better contribution to the prediction of learners' vocabulary size" (p. 29).

Methodology

Participants

In this study 90 female pre- intermediate EFL learners aged between 16-22 were selected from Tabarestan language school located in Noshahr. They were selected through an English proficiency test (OPT), based on their scores which fell one standard deviation above and below the mean of their OPT scores. Then 60 learners were selected based on the self-regulation questionnaire as the main participants of the study. Then the participants randomly assigned to two experimental and two control groups. They arranged in two classes, Class A, high self-regulation, consisted of 17 participants as Experimental group and 16 participants as Control group and class B, Low self-regulation, consisted of 13 participants as Experimental group and 14 participants as Control group.

Instrumentation

The OPT was administered for determining the proficiency level of the participants. The book "Steps to Understanding" by Hill (2004) was used as the instructional material. The book involved graded funny stories arranged based on the frequency of the vocabularies. Only 13 chapters of the stories (13 short stories) were covered during the course and 84 new unknown words were taught by the teacher. A test of vocabulary was made by the teacher involving 84 vocabularies from the book "Steps to Understanding". The vocabularies were out of the context in the form of multiple choice questions. This test was administered to measure the primary level of vocabulary knowledge and also detect what vocabulary items the participants were not familiar with so that they could be included within the instruction plan. In this study the self-regulation questionnaire of Miller & Brown was used. The questionnaire was consisted of 63 items that the participants should answer them. In order to facilitate students' understanding, the questionnaire was translated to Farsi. A Vocabulary achievement posttest was made by the researcher involving 65 multiple-choice items based on 13 short stories of the book "steps to understanding" which was used as the material for treatment. Regarding the item analyses

procedure, no item was removed. It consisted of 65 out-of-context vocabulary items. The test was administered at the end of the course.

Procedure

At the beginning of the study the researcher administered the OPT test and 90 participants whose scores on the test fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were considered as the pre-intermediate level participants. They participated in English language classes twice a week and 90 minutes in each session. All of them had already covered the book 'Top notch 1'.

After the administration of the OPT the self-regulation questionnaire was given to the participants in order to find out high and low self-regulation level. After the administration of the questionnaire among 60 participants, 27 participants were considered as low self-regulated and 33 participants were considered as high self-regulated. Then each group was randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The high self-regulated class consisted of 17 participants as experimental group and 16 participants as control group. Low self-regulated class consisted of 13 participants as experimental group and 14 participants as control group.

Then the researcher intended to find out participant's unknown vocabularies from the known vocabularies and to measure vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, she administered a vocabulary test to remove the known vocabularies from the test. The teacher-made vocabulary test consisted of 84 items but 19 items were participants' known vocabulary so the researcher removed the known items from the test. The experimental group who had portfolio treatment but the control group did not have portfolio treatment and evaluated by traditional testing.

In the treatment stage, we had two classes including four different groups consisting of two control groups and two experimental groups. The participants practiced short story writing and matching task and writing antonym and synonyms as the task in both experimental groups. Each experimental group consisted of 17 high self-regulated and 13 low self-regulated female students. Each session started as follows:

At first session the teacher explained to the participants in the experimental group about the portfolio assessment and the procedure during the course. At the beginning of the class the teacher read the short story from the book "steps to understanding". The new vocabularies were taught by reading the short story and students just listened. After reading the passage the teacher wrote the new words on the board and the meaning and pronunciation of new words were given

by the teacher. Then she asked the participants in the experimental groups to write the new words on the paper and write their synonyms and antonyms. She also gave each participant of experimental group a matching task for new vocabularies that she taught. At the end of each class the teacher wanted the participants in the experimental group to make a short story by these new words for the next session.

Therefore, each student in the experimental group wrote three papers in each session and the teacher kept the papers. The teacher provided each learner in the experimental group a folder of their tasks as a portfolio. Each folder consisted of all assignments and papers of the experimental group including their own short story, matching task paper, the paper of synonyms and antonyms.

During the implementation of portfolio assessment, the teacher read all the papers patiently and carefully and evaluated the content of the papers separately and provided feedback and comments. After each class participants gained the feedback and comments from the teacher one by one and corrected their mistakes. Therefore, the participants were aware of their own weaknesses and strengths in the class.

The control group in this study in low self-regulated and high self-regulated level did not have portfolio as a task and they received traditional testing.

At the end of the course which took 7 sessions and 13 short stories of the book were taught, participants took vocabulary posttest. Vocabulary posttest consisted of 65 multiple-choice of the pretest and each item was given one point.

The scores of vocabulary pretest and posttest were compared to find that whether there was significant difference between the performance of two experimental and two control groups or not and also to find that whether portfolio assessment differs with self-regulation or not.

Methods of Analyzing Data

The descriptive statistics in this study will be included the calculation of the mean and standard deviation of individuals' scores on OPT and vocabulary test. To address all two null hypotheses, Paired samples t- test and Two-way ANOVA will be run to measure the effect of using portfolio tasks on vocabulary achievement of the learners.

Results

In this regard, the results of the paired-samples t-test are taken into consideration in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, the results of ANOVA are presented.

The result of the Paired-Samples t-tests

Table 4.1. Descriptive analysis of pretest and posttest of Vocabulary of High self-regulated learners in the Experimental group

GROUPS	Mean N	Std. Deviation
PRE H-SELF	11.50	1.23
POST H-SELF	14	1.18

The descriptive statistics show that the mean value of the high self-regulated learners in the experimental group on the pretest measure of vocabulary is 11.50 with a standard deviation of 1.23. However, the mean value of these learners in the posttest is higher than their pretest scores (Mean=14, SD= 1.18). Table 4.2 presents the result of the paired-samples t-t-test for the high self-regulated learners in the experimental group.

Table 4.2. Paired-samples test for the High self-regulated learners in the Experimental group

Paired Differences						
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 Experimental Group						
Pretest-Posttest	2.50	1.42	.21040	7.15	14	.000

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on high self-regulated students' scores in the experimental group on the vocabulary measure. There was a

statistically significant increase in vocabulary scores from pretest to posttest, $t(14) = 7.15$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed). Table 4.3 displays the result of the descriptive statistics of the Low self-regulated learners prior and after the experiment.

Table 4.3. Descriptive analysis of pretest and posttest of Vocabulary of Low self-regulated learners in the Experimental group

GROUPS	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PRE L-SELF	11.50	13	1.24
POST L-SELF	13.50		1.12

The data reveals that the mean value of the low self-regulated learners in the experimental group on the pretest measure of vocabulary is 11.50 with a standard deviation of 1.24. However, the mean value for the low self-regulated learners in the posttest is higher than their pretest scores (Mean=13.50, SD= 1.12). Table 4.4 presents the result of the paired-samples t-t-test for the low self-regulated learners in the experimental group.

Table 4.4. Paired-samples test for the Low self-regulated learners in the Experimental group

Paired Differences						
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Paired1 Control Group						
Pretest-Posttest		2	2.02	.14523	6.12	14 .001

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on low self-regulated students' scores in the experimental group on the vocabulary measure. There was a statistically significant increase in vocabulary scores from pretest to posttest, $t(14) = 6.12$, $p < .001$.

0005 (two-tailed). Table 4.5 displays the result of the descriptive statistics of the High self-regulated learners in the control prior and after the traditional instruction.

Table 4.5. Descriptive analysis of pretest and posttest of Vocabulary of High self-regulated learners in the Control group

GROUPS	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PRE H-SELF	11.50	15	1.58
POST H-SELF	12.20		1.14

Table 4.5 depicts high self-regulated learners' performance on vocabulary ability test in the control group. The High self-regulated learners had the mean value of 11.50 for the vocabulary before the instruction. Their mean value after the instruction was 12.20 for the High self-regulated learners in the control group after the instruction. This indicates that in comparison to their mean values for vocabulary prior to the experiment, there is a small degree of change in their performance on the vocabulary test after the instruction.

Table 4.6. Paired-samples test for the High self-regulated learners in the Control group

Paired Differences							
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Paired1 Control Group							
Pretest-Posttest	.70		1.52	.14256	1.54	14	.021

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the traditional instruction on High self-regulated students' scores in the control group on the vocabulary measure. There was not a statistically significant difference in vocabulary scores from pretest to posttest, $t(14) =$

1.54, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed). Table 4.7 displays the result of the descriptive statistics of the Low self-regulated learners in the control prior and after the traditional instruction.

Table 4.7. Descriptive analysis of pretest and posttest of Vocabulary of Low self-regulated learners in the Control group

GROUPS	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PRE L-SELF	11.50	15	1.03
POST L-SELF	11.87		1.51

Table 4.7 depicts low self-regulated learners' performance on vocabulary ability test in the control group. The Low self-regulated learners had the mean value of 11.50 for the vocabulary before the instruction. Their mean value after the instruction was 11.87 for the Low self-regulated learners in the control group after the instruction. This indicates that in comparison to their mean values for vocabulary prior to the experiment, there was not so much change in their performance on the vocabulary test after the instruction. Table 4.8 presents the result of the paired-samples t-t-test for the low self-regulated learners in the control group.

Table 4.8. Paired-samples test for the Low self-regulated learners in the Control group

Paired Differences							
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Paired1 Control Group							
Pretest-Posttest	.37	1.41	.14578	.645	14	.064	

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on low self-regulated students' scores in the control group on the vocabulary measure. There was not a statistically significant difference in vocabulary scores from pretest to posttest, $t(14) = .645$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed).

The result of Two-way ANOVA

Descriptive statistics

The intent of the study was to examine the effect of portfolio assessment on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary ability with high and self-regulation. Before taking the main results of ANOVA in Table 4.10 labelled as Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, an assumption of ANOVA needs to be checked. It is essential to check the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances Table to see if the assumption of equality of variance has been violated.

Table 4.9. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

	df1	df2	Sig.
2.45	3	56	.245

Table 4.9 summarizes information about the result of the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances. In this case, the assumption has not been violated because the Sig. value is .24, which is much larger than the cut-off of .05. The main ANOVA results are presented in Table 4.10.

4.10. Tests of between Subjects -Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Corrected Model	10253.142 ^a	3	39.456	745.201	.000	.852	
Intercept	120.145	1	1258.256	345.658	.000	.701	
Group	64.014	1	64.014	145.324	.000	.521	
H/L S	22.897	1	22.897	2.452	.071	.148	
group * H/L S	5.750	1	5.750	85.125	.000	.402	
Error	1.456	56	.000				
Total	15457.140	60					
Corrected Total	131.250	59					

a. R Squared = .76 (Adjusted R Squared = .86)

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to assess the effectiveness of two programs in developing vocabulary ability for High self-regulated and Low self-regulated participants. The independent variables were the type of program (portfolio assessment, traditional skill-based learning) and learners' self-regulation: High and Low. The dependent variable was scores on the vocabulary posttests, administered following completion of the intervention programs (Time 2).

Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. The results indicated that there was a significant interaction effect between groups and the Self-regulation. $F(1, 56) = 85.125, p < .0005$, partial eta squared = .40. The main effect for two types of the program was statistically significant: $F(1, 56) = 145.324, p = .000$ with a large effect size of .52; however, the main effect for high and low self-regulation was not statistically significant: $F(1, 56) = .071, p = .000$. These results suggest the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group on vocabulary ability test. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the experimental group was significantly different from the mean score of the control group. The findings also showed that there is not any significant difference between High and Low self-regulated learners after the instruction.

Table 4.11. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.763	.763	65

The vocabulary posttest was administered to 30 students in order to pilot the test. The reliability of the test was estimated .76. Regarding the item analyses procedure, no item was removed.

Null Hypothesis Testing

The results indicated that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group on the vocabulary test. In addition, the results revealed that there were no significant differences in vocabulary knowledge of high self-regulated and low self-regulated EFL learners.

Therefore, based on the results of the study, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected, and the second null hypothesis was retained at the .05 level of significance.

Discussion

Considering the fact that not enough research has been done in order to investigate the effect of alternative assessment techniques especially portfolio assessment on vocabulary knowledge in Iran EFL contexts, it has been the need for more research in the field of portfolio-based instruction.

The results of this study and comparing the pretests and posttests of experimental and control groups revealed that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group on the vocabulary test. In addition, comparing the posttests of high and low self-regulated groups showed that the instruction did not make any significant change between high and low self-regulated learners.

Regarding the first research question, this study found that using portfolio assessment by experimental groups improved learners' vocabulary knowledge. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of other studies which were related to the effect of portfolio assessment on learners' vocabulary knowledge and other skills of second language learning.

The findings of this study are in agreement with the results reported by other studies for instance, Berimani and Mohammadi (2013) that showed the significant positive effect of portfolio assessment on students' vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, the study showed the students can recognize their strengths and weaknesses and move to meaningful learning.

On the other hand, Valencia (1990) suggests that, when compared to recent studies of habitual standardized and quantitative assessments, portfolio assessment provides important evidence towards correct and valid assessment of student achievement. Also according to Calfee and Perfumo (1993), "portfolio assessment used in one lesson improves students' interests towards learning, their motivation and confidence levels, and eventually serves students to be lifelong learners". (Nassirdoost & Mall-Amiri, 2015, p.39)

Also regarding the second research question of this study, the findings revealed that there is no significant difference between high self-regulated and low self-regulated learners' vocabulary knowledge. As Winne (1996) believed that "Self-regulation is considered as an aptitude which is

improvable and can be influenced by experience and instruction. Considering the effect of portfolio assessment on self-regulated learners, it has also been found that learners who consciously use learning strategies and monitor their performance perform better than those who are less cognizant to do so". (e.g., Coxhead, 2006; Nyikos& Fan, 2007, as cited in Amirian, Mallahi&Zaghi, p.32,33)

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