

## The Effect of Making Weblogs on Elementary Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Development

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the effect of making weblogs on male and female elementary Iranian EFL Students' Vocabulary Development. Thirty three EFL learners aged from 15 to 18 participated in this study in Jahade-Daneshgahi in Sahneh. Two groups, as a control and experimental group, were selected by the researcher. A quasi-experimental design was used for the present study. To ensure the criterion of homogeneity, a PET test was administered. At the first session, a pretest was administered and at the end of the course a posttest was administered. In the experimental group, vocabulary was taught and after that the teacher asked learners to make weblogs and use those words in their weblogs, while in the control group after teaching the vocabulary, students wrote sentences with those vocabularies on paper (paper-based). There was a two-month interval between the pretest and posttest. The result of the statistical procedure confirmed the superiority of the experimental group to the control group, and as a result it was confirmed that making weblogs helped to improve the vocabulary development of EFL learners.

**Keywords:** weblog, vocabulary, elementary learners, EFL learners

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Language is a means of communication which is used by humans to communicate and interact with each other. By language, people express their ideas and emotions. In order to live in the world, we must name things. Names are essential for the construction of reality. Vocabulary plays an important role in improving our skills in English. The challenge of acquiring vocabulary for a mastery of language has been one of the most important focuses in teaching and learning a language. Learning a foreign language can play a significant role in everyday interactions. Knowledge of vocabulary is supposed as the backbone of learners' competency which facilitates learning of other language tasks as well. Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign (Decarrico, 2001). "Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972). One thing that

students, teachers, material designers, writers, and researchers can all agree upon is that learning vocabulary is an essential part of mastering a second language (Schmitt, 2008). However, the best means of achieving good vocabulary learning is still unclear, partly because it depends on a wide variety of factors (de Groot, 2006). Celce-Murcia (2002) considers vocabulary learning central to language acquisition. Rubin and Thompson (1994) considered the significant role of vocabulary in communication as stating that “one cannot speak, understand, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words”. It has been suggested that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also aim at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge (Morin and Goebel, 2001). So, learning vocabulary is a very important part of learning a language. The more words you know, the more you will be able to understand what you hear and read, and the better you will be able to say what you want to when speaking or writing. Until now, many strategies for learning vocabulary have been used and their usefulness in learning of vocabulary has been proved based on findings, but it is not clear which strategies are more useful for learning vocabulary. The importance of learning vocabulary in foreign language teaching cannot be neglected at all. The development of technology in recent years has offered new solutions to the limitations of the traditional methods. Language learning has nowadays moved beyond its traditional form. The use of technology has gained an important place in learning. For many years, weblogs have been considered as an online free space for computer users to implement in different fields. By using weblogs, students can also share a posted topic, not just with a teacher, another classmate, or the whole class, but also possibly with any eager reader online. They have the chance to reconsider the chosen words and phrases in more time and in a quite relaxed condition without any stress and anxiety. By writing and posting on a personal weblog, students can really feel a sense of “ownership” (Yang et al., 2005; Lowe and Williams, 2004). Weblogs or blogs have gained a noticeable place in the online community and gradually have been applied for educational goals as an aid for language learning and teaching (Campbell, 2003; Johnson, 2004). Recent studies on educational uses of weblogs show that blogs can be used in education effectively and students’ attitudes to blogs is very affirmative, (Du and Wagner, 2005; Glogoff, 2005). Blog provides learning opportunities for learning English by the types of tasks the students engaged in (Kavaliauskiene, et al., 2006). New modern ways have been sought for the use of information technologies in foreign course and how these technologies to be transferred in more effective way.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the following sections some literature concerning learning vocabulary and weblog have been explained.

### *A. Importance of Vocabulary*

It is without a doubt that vocabulary is the key to all the language skills; speaking, reading, writing and listening. A person with a limited vocabulary will never be able to speak,

write, read or understand a language effectively. In second or foreign language learning in particular, vocabulary plays a significant role serving to become the prerequisite for communication; for both receptive and productive skills. A receptive skill means a form of communication which focuses on vocabulary inputs via listening and reading. In other words, learners need to have an adequate vocabulary to comprehend the input. Fijin, (2009) mentioned "in order to gain reasonable comprehension of a text and to be able to guess the meaning of unknown words from a context, learners need to know at least 95% of the running words in the input." Thus, learners who possess limited vocabulary would also yield a limited comprehension of the text. On the other hand, a productive skill is when learners use words to convey meaning. As cited by Mart (2012) referring to what Wilkins (1972) emphasized, "Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". This means that vocabulary is used productively through speaking and writing which in turn can be effective if learners have enough vocabulary.

### *B. Aspects of Vocabulary Knowledge*

The concept of a word can be defined in various ways, but three significant aspects teachers need to be aware of and focus on which are form, meaning, and use. According to Nation (2001), the form of a word involves its pronunciation (spoken form), spelling (written form), and any word parts that make up this particular item (such as a prefix, root, and suffix). An example for word parts can be seen with the word uncommunicative, where the prefix un- means negative or opposite, communicate is the root word, and -ive is a suffix denoting that someone or something is able to do something. Here, they all go together to refer to someone or something that is not able to communicate, hence uncommunicative. Nation (ibid) stated that meaning encompasses the way that form and meaning work together, in other words, the concept and what items it refers to, and the associations that come to mind when people think about a specific word or expression. Use, Nation noted, involves the grammatical functions of the word or phrase, collocations that normally go with it, and finally any constraints on its use, in terms of frequency, level, and so forth. When teachers teach vocabulary to build students' knowledge of words and phrases, helping them learn any and all of these different components assists them in enhancing their English vocabulary knowledge and use.

### *C. The Process of Learning New Vocabulary*

Muensorn and Tepsuriwong (2009) stated the three stages proposed by (Nation, 2001) which may contribute to a learner's learning of a vocabulary item namely noticing, retrieval and creative or generative use. The first stage involves identifying and giving attention to the words as an item to be learned. Laufer (1997) believes that this is an important stage as it affects the extent to which the word is picked up and learned. Thus the more words involved in learning, the deeper the level of processing and memorizing will take place. The second stage, retrieval is where learners recall the learned words from their memory. Nation (2001) indicates that most research found learning to be optimized when retrieval is spaced rather

than massed. It can be said that this stage contains recalling knowledge in the same way it was originally stored. Learners may recognize the forms and meanings of the words they learned and uses of the words in new contexts.

Creative or generative stage is where learners have enough vocabulary in that they can use words for communication as the words learned become active and is used effectively and productively in different contexts. It can be either productive or receptive, and is believed to be an important contributing process in first and second language vocabulary teaching (Nation, 2001, p.68). In order for it to be achieved, learners have to know enough about the words; meanings, forms and uses. These aspects are significant as learners need to practice using the vocabulary learned actively to enhance both retrieval and creative use.

#### *D. Weblogs in English Language Learning*

In recent years, interest in using blogs in classroom has been increasing due to the advancement of technology. Weblog is also gaining popularity in English language learning context. Most of educational institutions fully support the use of computer technology as a tool for language learning. Weblogs may have powerful means for developing English language teaching and learning for many reasons. Weblogs offer authentic learning environment through real communication. In writing, the audiences are not only teachers but also peers including other people outside the classroom, a global audience. Therefore, weblogs can motivate students to write more, they can write both academic and non academic. Through blogs, students can write and comment on their friends' writing, they can discuss and share their common interests and individual differences. When using blogs, students can get feedback from other audiences; they have an opportunity to read things in which they are interested and write things they really want to.

According to Mynard (2007) a blog is a powerful tool for language instructors to encourage students to express or reflect their ideas on their learning experience and add their comments to their friends' blogs to encourage further reflection. Blogs also integrate students into the world of interconnected media; they become familiar with using blogs both as a writer and a reader. Blogs also provide a great value in developing critical thinking skills, writing skills and information literacy (Richardson, 2006). As a teacher, weblogs can provide a bridge between lessons. Teachers can post materials that recycle and review vocabulary and topics presented during lessons. As well, blogs can save the teacher time as information about schedule changes, homework assignments etc. (Campbell, 2003). Galien and Bowcher (2010) asserted that using the blogs provides students an additional as well as motivating opportunity since they publish their works in a non-judgment fun environment. Moreover, blogs provide increased and more balanced students communication and they allow the shy, quieter students to have more time to consider what to write and to formulate their responses.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### *A. Participants*

The experiment was run with 33 male and female students in Jahade-daneshgahi in Sahneh. They were divided into two classes. One of the two classes with 17 students was assigned as the experimental group according to their opportunity in accessing the Internet, and the other class served as control group with 16 students. The average age of the students was 16 and their level of English was supposed to be elementary. They were trained how to make a weblog.

#### *B. Instrumentation*

The research instruments in this research were a pre test and a post test (the same as the pre test) that were researcher made, a 20 multiple-choice vocabulary test, According to Coefficient Alpha formulae, the reliability was 0.71 and a PET test for determining the participants' level of language proficiency.

#### *C. Procedure*

After dividing the students into two groups, first the participants of the experimental group were required to make a weblog page by using the free and user-friendly blog provider, blogfa. For this group, the first session was allocated to familiarizing the students with general skills to use the computer and to help them understand and use the weblog. After registration, students exchanged their weblog addresses with their teacher and the rest of the participants. The students were instructed to be attentive to comment on their classmates' posts. It was explained to them that making weblogs would be a part of their overall course assessment and that it would make up 50% of their final grades. It was an out-of-class activity that the students did on their own page. They were made aware that the instructor would be reading their weblogs. In addition, the students were also told that they could refer to the instructor if they encountered any problems with their weblogs.

After teaching lesson one in the class, as an assignment the teacher got the students to write sentences about jobs in their weblogs and to comment on their classmates' post. The other seven lessons were taught in this way and after each session, the students were asked to make sentences with the vocabulary they had learned, and to post them on their weblogs.

The teacher acted as a facilitator, and she checked all posts and comments. If students wrote sentences incorrectly, the teacher gave them feedback.

The same content was covered for the control group. In the control group, the teacher taught these lessons and asked the students to write sentences according to vocabulary in each lesson as an assignment on paper, and then the teacher corrected them (paper based).

#### IV. RESULTS

In the following parts, the obtained results of the study which have been used in the discussion section have been explained.

Table 1 shows Levene’s test of equality of error variances. As it can be seen, this test indicates equality of error variances and the assumption is met. Interaction of the pretest and group which isn’t significant means that the slopes of regression lines are equivalent. Of course, ANCOVA results show a significant difference between mean scores. In other words, making weblogs has a significant effect on vocabulary development; therefore the research hypothesis is rejected.

Table 1. Levene’s of Equality of Error Variance

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.077	1	31	.783

Based on the table 1, it may be inferred that the two groups have been homogeneous at the beginning of the experiment. Thus the obtained results which have made the two groups different are because of the application of the treatment in the experimental group.

Table 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	197.571 <sup>a</sup>	3	65.857	69.862	.000
Intercept	80.607	1	80.607	85.509	.000
Group	9.559	1	9.559	10.141	.003
Pre	127.392	1	127.392	135.138	.000
Group * Pre	3.240	1	3.240	3.437	.074
Error	27.338	29	.943		
Total	8482.000	33			
Corrected Total	224.909	32			

One of the other assumptions of covariance analysis is the equality of regression lines for the experimental and control groups. This assumption is investigated and shown in Table 2 illustrated above.

Figure 1: A Comparison between the Performances of the Two Groups

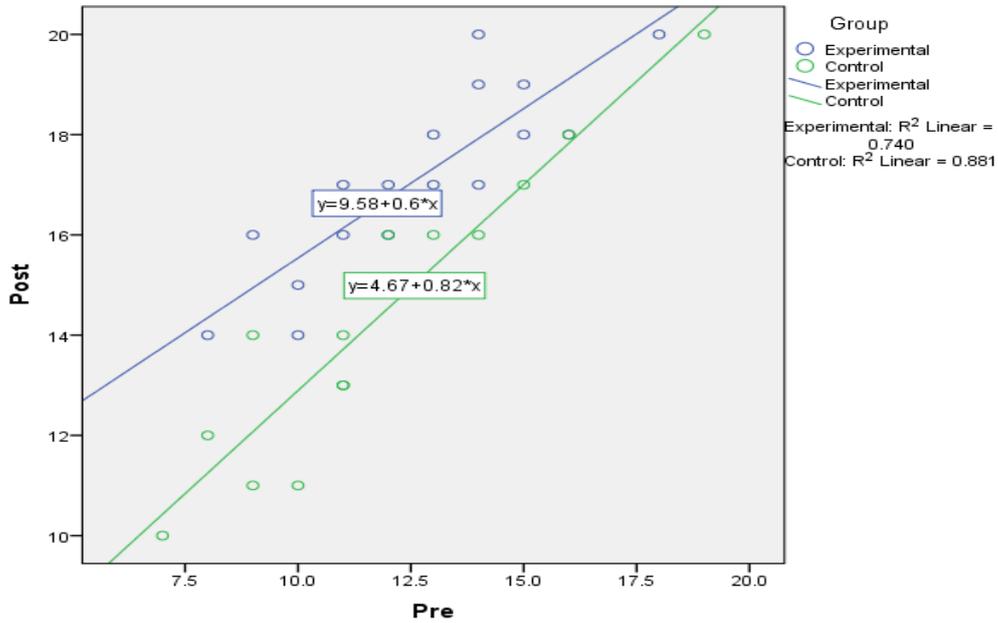


Figure 1 also indicates that the experimental group has outperformed the control group as far as using weblogs in vocabulary learning is concerned.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	17.12	1.833	17
Control	14.44	2.732	16
Total	15.82	2.651	33

Table 3 suggests that there is a difference between the control and experimental groups of the study. But it is not clear that the difference is significant or not. Table 4 which is a complementary part of table 3 shows the difference in details.

Table 4: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	194.331 <sup>a</sup>	2	97.166	95.330	.000	.864
Intercept	77.514	1	77.514	76.050	.000	.717
Pre	135.124	1	135.124	132.571	.000	.815
Group	36.386	1	36.386	35.699	.000	.543
Error	30.578	30	1.019			
Total	8482.000	33				
Corrected Total	224.909	32				

Table 4 shows covariance analysis for comparison of mean scores of the control and experimental groups with no significant effect of pretest on the posttest. In other words, covariance analysis shows true effects of the experiment. As it is seen, the control and experimental groups have a significant difference in their vocabulary development.

## V. CONCLUSION

Blogging increases students' interest, motivation and confidence. Interestingly, students' awareness of a 'real' audience with weblogs being publicly accessible encouraged them to monitor their writing. In conclusion, weblogs can provide an exciting and motivating learning environment where students have a sense of ownership and readership. Weblogs can be used to create social interactions between students and the instructor, students and their peers, and students and a global audience.

Blogs are recommended to foster students' English language development in a genuine learning environment.

The following points could be taken as the advantages of weblogs in teaching vocabulary. Using weblogs could help learners:

1. To read each others' posts.
2. To interact and comment on each others' posts by challenging each other's thoughts and views.
3. To write posts in response to each others' posts.

4. To increase the sense of community in a class.

Making weblogs can help foster a feeling of community between the members of a class, especially if learners are sharing information about their interests, and are responding to what other students are writing.

5. To encourage shy students to participate.

There is evidence to suggest that students who are quiet in class can find their voice when given the opportunity to express themselves in a blog.

6. To have an online portfolio of the students' written work.

There is much to be gained from students keeping a portfolio of their work. One example is the ease at which learners can return to previous written work and evaluate the progress they have made during a course.

7. To help build a closer relationship in large classes.

Sometimes students in large classes can spend all year studying with the same people without getting to know them well. A blog is another tool that can help bring students together.

Making weblogs offered a useful learning environment that gave the students a chance to create a strong sense of community in which they could participate actively while learning. Most importantly, they could practice the language, in an authentic learning environment. Students often learn as much from each other as from instructors or textbooks but making weblogs offers another mechanism for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and acquisition. They also learned from their peers and themselves; thus this promoted self learning. Self-learning signals students' ability to be independent and thus become their own 'player' in the learning process. Bloggers in language learning created better postings and attracted new readers. Using blogs to support student learning was very successful. The students improved their grammar editing skills, showed an increase in motivation and became more autonomous learners. Clearly, blogs could be a very useful and adaptable learning aid that promoted student centered learning. The challenge for educators is to determine how to appropriately integrate blogs into curricula to best meet their students' needs.

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