

more systematic and effective ways of learning vocabulary.

Encompassing interactive vocabulary activities into classes takes extra time for the teacher. However, interactive activities becomes easier the more the teacher design them. By the end of the treatment, students not only have a clearer understanding of how to go about learning new vocabulary item, but also they usually have more confidence in their ability to actually do so.

Interactive vocabulary activities can motivate students. Motivation is found to be a important factor in learning everything. Moreover, the old techniques of teaching vocabulary can be replaced by interactive vocabulary activities. The students, as well as their teachers, are tired of routine ways of teaching words as repetition and memorization. By using interactive vocabulary activities, teachers and students can get rid of boring classrooms. Since vocabulary is a very important part of the language, a teacher must equip herself/himself with up-to-date techniques and activities of teaching vocabulary items.

### Notes:

1. Courtright
2. Wesolek
3. A Comprehension English Language Test for Learners of English
4. 1100 Words You Need to Know
5. Iran Language Institute, Tehran
6. 1100 Words You Need to Know

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study was determined based on the nature of the study, which was the comparison between vocabulary achievements of the two groups of students. The *t*-observed value of the comparison of experimental and control participants' mean scores on the post-test is 12.26, which at 58 degrees of freedom and .05 level of significance, is much higher than the critical value of *t*, i.e., 2. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control mean scores of the participants. The mean scores of the experimental and control groups were 116.00 and 98.36, respectively. In other words, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

According to Hatch and Farhady (1981), the statistical analysis of T-test could help the researcher be confident that the differences between the performances of the two groups were not due to chance or sampling error. The following table displays the descriptive statistics of the experimental and control participants' mean scores on the post-test.

Table 1: The t-test for post-test scores

Group	No.=30	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard Error Mean
Experimental		116.00	5.28	.96
Control		98.36	5.83	1.06

In order to check the validity coefficient of the teacher-made vocabulary test of post-test, the Pearson correlation coefficients was calculated between the scores of the experimental and control groups on the CELT, the criterion test, and the teacher-made vocabulary test of post-test. The following table displays the correlation coefficients between the scores of the experimental and control groups on the CELT and post-test. The coefficient denoted by asterisks is significant at

.01 levels (2-tailed) of significance.

Table 2: The correlation coefficients between the experimental and control participants' scores on the CELT and post-test

Scores on the CELT No.=60	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.884*
Scores on the Post-test No.=60	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.884*	1.000

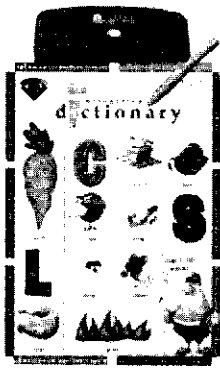
\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the findings of the study, it is safe to claim that the teaching of vocabulary through interactive vocabulary activities has had a significant impact on the performance of the participants.

## Conclusions

According to Zimmerman (1997b), traditional individual exercises such as filling in the blank or matching words and definitions are not enough for effective word learning. Based on her study, she indicated that interactive and communicative vocabulary activities can lead to better word learning. In her study, the students, had a separate vocabulary class that met three hours per week and used a vocabulary-building textbook. Students also read self-selected and assigned reading passages and engaged in activities that required them to use the vocabulary words they were learning while interacting with one another. Her students performed significantly better on a post-test than students in a control group.

Students know vocabulary development is essential to learn English, but often they do not have a clear understanding of how to go about learning vocabulary. Helping students understand the matured a task they are facing, giving them the tools to learn vocabulary effectively, and making them work with the words instead of simply going over fill-in-the-blank exercises or correcting a matching quiz can help them develop



students might have studied at lower levels. So, students at the upper-intermediate level needed more opportunities to practice using new words on their vocabulary lists. Students had to wait quite some time for another opportunity to encounter new words. So, they needed opportunities to practice using words on their vocabulary lists to use them later.

Interactive vocabulary activities allowed learners to refine their knowledge of word usage. The researchers tried to include both oral and written activities with each set of new words, with the written work preceding the oral work. The treatment contained many activities suitable for group work. The researchers selected two or three examples of different contexts that each new vocabulary item was used and distributed among the participants. The purpose of this exercise (different contexts) was exposure.

At the upper-intermediate levels of reading and writing, students spent a lot of time working on paraphrasing. Part of good paraphrasing was changing the grammatical structure of a sentence, but the participants could benefit from a vocabulary activity that challenged them to use different forms of the vocabulary words. The purpose of this exercise (pre-paraphrasing) was expansion.

The participants also were given the beginning of a sentence and asked to complete it in a way that obviously indicated they knew the meaning

of the word. The participants needed some examples to understand this concept. Grammatical usage problems could surface by this exercise and could also be refined. The purpose of this exercise (finish the sentence) was expression and / or expansion.

The students showed their knowledge to use several of the new words in a single context. The participants worked in pairs to discuss the vocabulary items together in order to use them appropriately. This exercise could be done in writing or orally. The purpose of this exercise (stories and role-plays) was expression and / or expansion.

The participants also chose questions that contained a vocabulary word or words. They had a few minutes to think and read their question. They had to answer it using the new word or a related form. Other students listened to see if a vocabulary word was used and if it was used appropriately. This exercise was done in small groups. The purpose of this exercise (real-life questions) was expression.

The students were urged to use the vocabulary words in a longer piece of writing. The purpose of this exercise (extended writing) was expression.

The teacher addressed individual's questions and misunderstandings as the need arose avoiding extensive explanations or lectures, made herself available as group activities took place, and listened to participants' production. On the other hand, the teacher used definitions, synonyms, matching items, and fill-in-the blank exercises, only when confusion arose for the control group.

To ensure that the students would not encounter the new words outside the classroom, the researchers selected the words from a book<sup>6</sup>, not available to the students.

## Data Analysis

The statistical analysis conducted in the present

themselves using the target words in class. According to Courtright and Wesolek (2001), for each level the teacher can present activities that relate to each of the purposes above.

Considering the current paucity of research evidence about the factors influencing EFL vocabulary learning, the present study aimed at probing the possible effects of interactive vocabulary activities on the EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The following question motivated the present study:

*Question: Do interactive vocabulary activities have any significant effect on the vocabulary learning of upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners?*

To examine the above research question, the following corresponding null hypothesis was formulated:

*Ho: Interactive vocabulary activities do not have any significant effect on the vocabulary learning of upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners.*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Sixty female students participated in two groups of thirty in this study. The participants were selected on the basis random sampling from among the students of 11th level of ILI. The research started with some intact classes, 30 learners being assigned to the control group and the other 30 to the experimental group. In each group, only those designated students were considered as the participants, and the rest of the classes, although participating in class activities, were ignored in the final analysis of data. The age range of the participants was from 20 to 30.

### **Instrumentation**

Three devices were used in this study: a CELT, a 195-item multiple choice vocabulary test, and a 150-item multiple choice vocabulary test. The

CELT was used for the assessment of the participants' language propiciency level and homogeneity. The 195-item multiple choice vocabulary test was also administered before the onset of the study to ensure the participants' unfamiliarity with the to-be-instructed words. The 150-item multiple choice vocabulary test was administered as the post-test, which was the same as the pretest, except for those words that the learners were familiar with, to assess the participants' achievement after the treatment.

## **Procedure**

The two classes recieved five weeks of instruction: two sessions a week, each session 30 minutes. The number of words taught was 15 words in each session. In both groups, the participants had to learn the new words in the classroom. The materials were collected at the end of each session.

Throughout the treatment, the teacher of the experimental group divided the class instruction as follows: 20% administrative tasks (e.g., test administration) and 80% samll group or pair activities. The same reading passages as those instructed to the control group were used for the experimental group. The texts used in these classes, concentrated on the words tested in this study. All vocabulary words were gathered from the students', reading passages and were put on a list. Students found most of the basic information about the words using a good English-English dictionary.

At the inception of the treatment, the researcher spent a little more class time going over part of speech, the meaning of each word in the context of the reading passage versus the other meanings the word might have, and related word forms (noun form, verb form, etc.). In class, students quickly went over this information. The new vocabularies were used less frequently than words



classes. Vocabulary learning is usually incorporated into other classes, especially reading. In these classes, words are defined only in passing, or students may engage in more traditional individual exercises such as filling in the blank or matching words with definitions. According to Zimmerman (1997b), these activities are not enough for effective word learning. She proposed interactive and communicative vocabulary activities, which have three important assumptions:

1. Word learning is a complex task.
2. Some word learning occurs incidentally as a result of context-rich activities such as reading.
3. Word knowledge involves a range of skills, and word learning is facilitated by approaches that provide varied experiences (i.e., with reading, writing, speaking, and listening. p.22)

Zimmerman's study (1997b,p.25) set out the following parameters for teachers who would design interactive vocabulary activity lessons. In her vocabulary classes, each lesson was to include the following:

1. multiple exposures to words;
2. exposures to words in meaningful contexts;
3. rich and varied information about each word;

4. establishment of ties between instructed words, students experience, and prior knowledge; and
5. active participation by students in the learning process.

While reading, teachers may not have time to include all of these elements in a single lesson; keeping them in mind can help creating interactive lessons. For example, using a computer search of a newspaper or magazine on the internet can yield a word used in several contexts. Students can often learn much about a word's usage from seeing it in various contexts. This activity would cover both parameters one and two. Parameter five is particularly important to keep in mind; the students must be active, not passive, learners.

According to Zimmerman (1997b), interactive vocabulary activities can be designed to fulfill any of the following purposes:

1. Exposure (Zimmerman's concept of clarifying 'word meaning and illustrate appropriate usage')
2. Expansion (her concept of 'using appropriate word form in context')
3. Expression (her concept of demonstrating 'word knowledge in either oral or written original expression using the target words')

While each of the three purposes should be covered at each level of language proficiency, the proportion of class time spent on activities for each purpose will vary according to the language proficiency level of the students. At the beginning level, the teacher tends to spend more time clarifying the meaning or exposing students to the words and refining usage. At the intermediate level, the teacher spends a lot of time refining and expanding, as well as expressing the word. At the high-intermediate and advanced levels, the teacher finds students can work on the first two purposes more independently, and this provides them with more opportunities to practice expressing

vocabulary teaching is to keep motivation high. Two common techniques for teaching vocabulary are "visual" and "verbal" techniques. Visual techniques refer to those techniques as "demonstration" and "illustration", and verbal techniques, to "dictionary use", "synonyms and antonyms", "word formation", and "use of context."

There is an extensive body of literature comprising a wide-ranging continuum of arguments, studies, and suggestions about the proper role of vocabulary instruction. In this regard, Coady (1997) identified four main positions on the continuum of literature dealing with vocabulary instruction. Most describe a widely varying number of approaches, methods, and techniques dealing with vocabulary instruction and/or acquisition such as "context alone", "contextual acquisition research", "strategy instruction", "strategy research", "development plus explicit instruction", "empirical instructional research", and "classroom activities."

In the literature concerning vocabulary learning and teaching, some advantages are enumerated for the use of classroom activities. These are best exemplified by a number of practical handbooks for teachers, such as Allen's *Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary* (1983), Gairn and Redmans's *Working with Words* (1986), Morgan and Rinvulcri's *Vocabulary* (1986), and Nation's *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* (1994). These handbooks almost exclusively emphasize practical classroom activities without necessarily advocating a particular methodological approach. In other words, these activities could probably accompany almost any method.

Allen (1983), for example, suggested that vocabulary is best learned when the learner perceives a need for it. She categorized students' general needs by the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of instruction. The major activities for beginners involve classroom-based

communicative activities, e.g., pictures and games. At the intermediate level, small groups are given such activities as task work and simplified reading. For advanced students, she recommended dictionary work, morphological training, and comprehension work on reading passages.

Good vocabulary development activities tend to exploit some or all of the following (Cunningworth, 1995):

- semantic relations-word groups according to meaning, synonyms, hyponyms, opposites
  - situational relations-word sets associated with particular situations, e.g. sport, transport, politics
  - collocations-words commonly found in association, e.g. food and drink, for better or worse, also noun+preposition links and phrasal verbs (verb+particle links)
  - relationships of form (often referred to as 'word building'), e.g. long, length, lengthen. (p.38)
- Concerning the large body of research about

techniques or activities of presenting and teaching vocabulary, one comes to the conclusion that little has been done to find out the most effective vocabulary activities. However, there are some studies whose aim has been to identify and classify interactive vocabulary activities used by language learners at different proficiency levels (see for example, Mills & Salzman, 1995; Zimmerman, 1997b; Coutright & Wesolek, (2001).

Considering language learning conditions, in which learners usually memorize word lists, it appears that students should be presented with interactive vocabulary activities to be better able to learn and interact with vocabulary. Moreover, students frequently ask how they can learn vocabulary in an effective way. They usually find vocabulary learning difficult and say that they cannot remember many of the words they have learned.

In many schools, students do not have the opportunity to take intensive vocabulary-building



Gordon (1984) indicated that learning is most effective when it develops from the interests and motivations of students. In this case, one requirement is that students should get involved in classroom activities with less dependency on the textbook.

In the last fifteen years or so, some language-teaching experts and instructors have published articles and books that advocate vocabulary instruction. The result is an extensive body of literature comprising a wide-ranging continuum of arguments, studies, and suggestions about the proper role of language vocabulary instruction (Coady, 1997). There are also a widely varying number of approaches, methods, and techniques dealing with vocabulary instruction and/or acquisition.

### Review of the Related Literature

Vocabulary is central to language, as Zimmerman (1997a) noted, and words are of critical importance to the typical language learner. One cannot learn a language without vocabulary (Krashen 1989; Nation, 1990). Nevertheless,

researchers and teachers in the field of language acquisition have typically undervalued the role of vocabulary, usually prioritizing syntax or phonology as central to linguistic theory and more critical to language pedagogy (Zimmerman, 1997a).

Until recent years, vocabulary was a neglected area of foreign language teaching, but it has gained its due recognition in the last few years, as realization came that sustained communication is virtually impossible without access to a relevant and fairly wide range of vocabulary. It is often asserted that, particularly at lower levels, students can communicate more effectively with the knowledge of vocabulary than with the knowledge of grammar.

Much of the vocabulary in foreign/second language textbooks must be learned. Without it, no one can speak or understand the language. The question is what teachers can do while presenting the textbook words. According to Hatch and Brown (1995), there are numerous types of approaches, techniques, exercises, and practices that can be used to teach vocabulary, but teachers must decide what types would be best for their students and their circumstances. In this regard, Rivers (1986) mentioned "as language teachers, we must arouse interest in words and a certain excitement in personal development in this area.

... We can help our students by giving them ideas on how to learn vocabulary and some guidance on what to learn" (p. 463). Rivers (1981) further added that in order to decide which technique to use, the teacher should see whether the chosen technique (a) achieves the objectives, (b) maintains the interest and enthusiasm of the learners, and (c) suits to all types of students. Allen (1983) said that "vocabulary is best learned when someone feels that a certain word is needed" (p. 17).

On the whole, there are many techniques available for vocabulary teaching but the key in all

probable advantage of using interactive vocabulary activities for vocabulary learning. Two homogeneous groups of students, who were attending 11<sup>th</sup> level of ILI<sup>5</sup>, served as the participants in two groups of thirty, a control group and an experimental group. The participants were all female and their age range was 20-30.

To assure the criterion of homogeneity, the researchers selected 60 students from among 90 learners based on the results obtained from a CELT test of English proficiency. The participants were the students of six randomly selected classes from ILI. A pretest of vocabulary was also administered at this stage to ensure the novelty of to-be-instructed words. The participants were then dichotomized into an experimental and a control group, each comprising 30 students. The students in the control group received traditional vocabulary activities, whereas the participants in the experimental group were instructed to use the interactive vocabulary activities. At the end of the term, a teacher-made test was given to the students to determine the influence of treatment on the experimental group.

Drawing on the t-test, the research came up with the t-observed value that was much greater than the t-critical value at the .05 levels of significance. So, the null hypothesis stating that interactive vocabulary activities do not have any significant effect on the vocabulary learning of upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners was rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that interactive vocabulary activities are among other influencing factors in improving the participants' vocabulary learning.

**Key Words:** communication, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), interactive vocabulary activities, interactive vocabulary instruction.

## Introduction

Vocabulary as a major component of language learning has been the object of numerous studies, each of which has its own contribution to the field. Finding the best way of learning the words deeply and extensively is the common objective of most of those studies. However, one effective way for achieving this goal is somehow neglected in the field. Using a variety of activities, such as interactive vocabulary activities, can reinforce the teaching points without boring the students.

The view that vocabulary is secondary in importance for successful language learning has now really changed. Although vocabulary teaching and learning were ignored, to a great extent, in certain methods of language teaching for some decades, there is now a widespread agreement upon the need for language learners to improve their knowledge of vocabulary (Allen, 1983; Laufer, 1986; Coady, 1997; Zimmerman, 1997; Shand, 1999).

Not surprisingly, vocabulary presents a serious

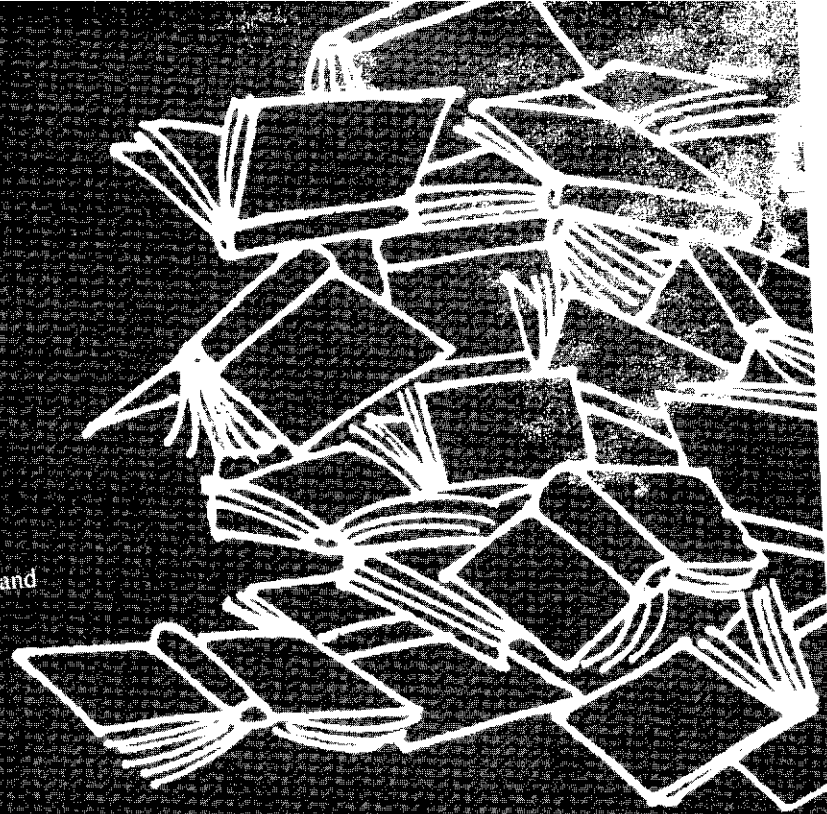
linguistic obstacle to many non-native English students. They must learn thousands of words that speakers and writers of English use. In a study of L2 university students by Meara (1984), lexical errors outnumbered grammatical errors by 4:1. Similarly, a survey of L2 university students found that they identified vocabulary as a major factor that held them back in academic writing tasks (Zimmerman, 1997a).

Laufer (1988, as cited in Zimmerman, 1997a) also argued that if fluency is understood as the ability to convey a message with ease and comprehensibility, then vocabulary adequacy and accuracy matter more than grammatical correctness.

These studies indicate that communication relies upon the mastery of appropriate vocabulary. Therefore, teachers and educators should revise the old procedures of teaching vocabulary. Perhaps they had better break the routine of classroom drills and grammar translation methodologies.

Other studies by McDonald and Rogers-





## چکیده

پژوهش حاضر به بررسی آثار احتمالی بهره‌گیری از فعالیت‌های تعاملی زبانی بر یادگیری واژگان زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی از سوی زبان‌آموزان ایرانی پرداخته است. فعالیت‌های مزبور در راستای تحقق اهدافی نظیر: تشریح معانی واژگان و کاربرد صحیح آن‌ها (Exposure)، درج واژه صحیح در متن (Expansion) و نمایش دانش زبانی به صورت شفاهی یا کتبی از طریق واژگان زبان هدف (Expression) به کار می‌رود. هر یک از اهداف یاد شده بایستی در سطح مهارت زبانی و نسبت به زمان صرف شده در زمینه فعالیت‌های مربوط به آن، مورد توجه قرار گیرد. مدرس سطوح ابتدایی یادگیری زبان، زمان بیش‌تری را صرف تشریح معانی واژگان و کاربرد آن‌ها می‌نماید. مدرس سطح متوسط نیز زمان بیش‌تری را صرف تشریح کاربرد واژگان یا Expansion و بسط کاربرد آن یا Expression می‌کند. از سوی دیگر، مدرس سطح پیشرفته با توجه به استقلال زبان‌آموزان در زمینه‌ی به‌کارگیری اهداف پیشین فرصت بیش‌تری را برای بهره‌گیری از زبان هدف در محیط کلاس می‌نماید. بنا به عقیده‌ی کورت رایت<sup>۱</sup> و وسولک<sup>۲</sup> (۲۰۰۱ م.)، مدرس می‌تواند فعالیت‌های مربوط به هر یک از اهداف یاد شده را در کلاس درس ارائه کند. از این رو، نمونه‌ای شامل ۹۰ زبان‌آموز انتخاب شد که در نهایت پس از انتخاب تصادفی که با توجه به نتایج آزمون (CELT)<sup>۳</sup> صورت پذیرفت، به ۶۰ نفر کاهش یافت. نمونه‌ی ۶۰ نفره‌ی مزبور نیز به دو گروه شاهد (۳۰ نفر) و آزمایش (۳۰ نفر) تقسیم شد. پیش از شروع کار، آزمون اولیه (pretest) از زبان‌آموزان به عمل آمد تا از میزان آشنایی آنان با لغات برگرفته از متون کتاب ۱۱۰۰ واژه<sup>۴</sup> اطمینان حاصل شود. سپس در کلاس‌های گروه آزمایش، فعالیت‌های تعاملی زبانی به عنوان آزمایش مورد نظر ارائه گردید. گروه شاهد نیز بر اساس روش سنتی، تمریناتی نظیر پر نمودن جای خالی (fill-in-the-blank) و جورکردنی (matching items) را به انجام رسانید. نتایج این پژوهش بیانگر این نکته بود که فعالیت‌های تعاملی زبانی بایستی به عنوان عاملی مؤثر در پیشرفت یادگیری واژگان انگلیسی توسط زبان‌آموزان ایرانی مورد توجه قرار گیرد.

کلید واژگان: انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی، فعالیت‌های تعاملی زبانی، آموزش تعاملی.

## Abstract

This paper reports on a study which investigated the effects of interactive vocabulary activities on the upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The study intended to find out the