

Investigating the Effect of Using pictures on Improving Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

Due to the findings of memory studies pictures are kept in mind more effectively than words. For instance, a list of pictures is recalled easier than the relevant words (Carpenter & Olson, 2011). Thus the current study was an attempt to examine the effect of pictures on improving Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. Sixty female elementary level learners participated in the quasi-experimental study which completed in one academic semester. The results of the study indicated that using pictures as instructional tools is an influential method for vocabulary teaching. That could be due to their role in activating both visual and verbal memory of the learners. Through making use of pictures learners knew how to connect the images to corresponding verbal levels. Derived from the nature of pictures; in using them there was a relaxed atmosphere and it was really important, since anxiety impedes learning. The other point was the element of self confidence which enhanced in the students of the experimental group; because they learnt easily and somehow effortlessly hence they found themselves successful and efficient. Enhancement in self- confidence helps learners to be autonomous, which is an important element in the process of learning in general and language learning in particular.

1.1 Introduction

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is an English language-idiom. That's right since pictures are effective instruments for improving English, particularly if you are a visual learner. . Vocabulary is fundamental entrance to a language, and is the main point in learning a language but language beginners are not that much successful in using methods that might be helpful to them in learning the words. (Zahedi &Abdi, 2012). Vocabulary knowledge is an essential part of foreign language learning and use that's why the meanings of new words are heavily accentuated. Recently it is indicated that teaching vocabulary is possibly problematic since many teachers are not certain about best methods for vocabulary teaching and sometimes don't know where and how to begin to put an instructional stress on word acquisition (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). It is really central how many words you know in speaking or writing or reading in a foreign or second language. Consequently instructors must focus on creating significant instructions for language learners. The more words language users know the more they will be able to comprehend what they hear, and read, and consequently they will be able to write efficiently. Learning vocabulary seems to be one of the easiest steps in learning a language however in effect it is one of the trickiest things to do. This is even more demanding when it comes to foreign language learners with their partial access to language and inadequate opportunity to use learnt words in real situations (Yongqi Gu, 2003). Learning to think is seriously important in learning a language, in reality these days teachers typically use methods that students are passive in the process of learning, hence when it comes to use new words in real situations students experience many problems; it looks as if words are not kept in long term memory through using traditional methods. Having a way to connect the concepts with images might be effective in enhancing vocabulary learning.

1.2 Research Question and Hypotheses

RQ:

Do using pictures result in improving Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

RH:

Iranian EFL Learners' vocabulary learning will be improved through using pictures.

NH:

There are no significant differences in the effect of pictures on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Vocabulary

One of the basic pointers of students' achievement in school, on standardized tests, and certainly, in life, is their vocabulary. The cause for this is just that the knowledge anybody has about a topic is rooted in the vocabulary of that information (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). Word knowledge has been repeatedly viewed as influential means for second language learners since limited words in a second language hinders successful communication. On highlighting the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000) asserts that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language" p. 55). Seifert (2016, p. 1) gives 5 reasons why vocabulary is so important:

“1 It improves Reading Comprehension. Research has shown that kids need to understand 98% of the words they read to understand what they are reading. Improving vocabulary skills will improve their understanding of novels and textbooks.

2 .It's important to language development. Children who develop a rich vocabulary tend to be deeper thinkers, express themselves better and read more. Improving language and literacy skills early in life will help them be more successful academically and communicatively.

3 .Communicating ideas; Successful communication or "saying what you mean" is dependent upon a good vocabulary base. Using the right words when talking makes you a more effective communicator.

4. Expressing yourself in Writing. Having a good vocabulary to draw from can help you write more effectively. Students need to use a more formal tone when writing – not conversational language – and to do that, they need a richer vocabulary to tap into those words we don't use when we speak.

5. Occupational success. Researcher Johnson O'Connor found that "a person's vocabulary level is the best single predictor of occupational success."* Success in the business place depends on your communication skills”.

Nation (2001) further illustrates the association between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary allows for language use and, on the other hand, language use causes enhancements in vocabulary knowledge. It can be said that poor vocabulary repertoire is a kind of deficiency. For the sake of comprehending what we hear and read, and moreover with the intention of communicating successfully with other people, vocabulary size is really crucial (Shoebottom, 2013). On the importance of vocabulary knowledge in communication Wilkins (1972) states "“without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (as cited in Schmitt, 2010, p.3). According to Schmitt a large vocabulary is requisite for someone to make use of language in preferred manner, as it was talked about people employ language for communicating, conveying thought and sharing beliefs. Hence there is an imperative point here, *the size of vocabulary that would be appropriate for language users to use language productively and without breaks*, is of great significance. In English vocabulary size causes limitations on the types of texts someone can read, in other word there is close association between numbers of words we know, and how successful we are in different language skills (Nation & Meara, 2002).

On the significance of vocabulary, Krashen (1989) asserts that "a large vocabulary is of course, essential for mastery language"(as cited in Schmitt 2010, p.4). Rubin and Thompson (1994) point at the function of vocabulary in communication: "One cannot speak, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words. Vocabulary is at the heart of mastering a foreign language". Nguyen and Khuat (2003) also have faith in the importance of

vocabulary in foreign language learning (as cited in Thuy, 2007). Tsubaki (2012) states the three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge: (a) partial and precise knowledge, (b) depth of knowledge, and (c) receptive and productive knowledge. Precise knowledge concerns with knowing correctly, while partial knowledge can be imprecise and incomplete.

Nation (1990) explains deepness of knowledge as how well items are acquired. The receptive-productive dimension is interconnected with the receptive skills of reading and listening and the productive skills of writing and speaking. Language researchers and language teaching professionals are supposed to mull over what knowing a word means, and decide what type of knowledge learners need to expand through particular class activities (as cited in Tsubaki, 2012). Alderson (1984) on the significance of vocabulary knowledge in language use affirms: "what would appear to show is that the size of one's vocabulary is relevant to one's performance on any language tests, in other words, that language ability is to quite a large extent a function of vocabulary size" (as cited in Schmitt, 2010, p.5).

Investigators have concentrated on the multidimensionality and complication of word knowledge, expressing that knowing a word entirely must take in a variety of linguistic knowledge ranging from pronunciation, spelling, and morphology and to knowledge of the word's syntactic and semantic connections with other words in the language, linking knowledge of antonym, synonymy, hyponym and collocation meanings (Haastrup & Henriksen, 2000).

The most comprehensive accounts of word knowledge were those given by Nation (2001). Nation (1990) listed eight different categories of knowledge that are obligatory to know a word, however afterward adjusted it, adding up a ninth aspect 'word parts'. Nation (2001) explained the nine aspects of vocabulary knowledge as follows:

1. Knowledge of the spoken form of a word
2. Knowledge of the written form of a word
3. Knowledge of the parts in a word which have meaning
4. Knowledge of the link between a particular form and a meaning
5. Knowledge of the concepts a word may possess and the items it can refer to
6. Knowledge of the vocabulary that is associated with a word
7. Knowledge of a word's grammatical functions
8. Knowledge of a word's collocations
9. Knowledge of a word's register and frequency

While according to Laufer, B. 1997:

"The most important aspects of word knowledge:

1. Form (spoken & written, i.e. spelling & pronunciation)
2. Word structure (common derivations, inflections)
3. Syntactic pattern of the word in a phrase and a sentence
4. Meaning
 - ❖ Referential (what non-linguistic entity in the outside world the word refer to)
 - ❖ Affective (connotation of a word, e.g. spinster, which unlike single woman is associated with old age, isolation, or sadness)
 - ❖ Pragmatic (suitability of the word in a particular situation, e.g. 'I have three offspring' would be unsuitable in an everyday conversation)
5. Lexical relations of the word with other words:
 - ✓ Synonymy (e.g. *bide / conceal*)
 - ✓ Antonym (e.g. *single / married*)
 - ✓ Hyponymy (e.g. *flower / rose*)

6. Common collocations (*e.g. a high probability, but a good chance*)” (as cited in Laufer, 1997, p.1).

Now the important question is how much vocabulary does a foreign language user need to know?

As cited in Kulikova (2015): about 80 years ago Ogden (1937) asserts that 850 words might be enough for students to produce millions of ideas. Though this number of words would be adequate for expressing a number of ideas in a very easy way, it wouldn't be enough for understanding a native speaker's language production. Kulikova further adds that current research states that a learner have got to know many more words for understanding the written or spoken discourse. Laufer (cited in Kulikova 2015) proposed that for reading comprehension, a learner have got to know around 95% of the lexical items in a text to productively deduce the rest of the words. Bonk (cited in Kulikova 2015) reported that the same 95% of the words allows most participants to attain good comprehension of listening passages. On the other hand, Hu and Nation (cited in Kulikova 2015) persisted that knowledge of 98–99% of the words is essential, particularly for written discourse. To count up how many words a learner is to know to comprehend 95% or 98% of discourse, we are to know how many words structure 100% – the number of words that native speakers know. Nation (cited in Kulikova, 2015) asserts that most successful studies guesstimate the vocabulary size of an educated English native speaker as 17,000–20,000 word families, but L2 learners do not essentially need to know that much vocabulary. For diverse genres, 98% coverage consists of 6,000-9,000 word families. Literally speaking the English Language has a very large vocabulary, predicted to be between 450,000 and 750,000 words (Tompkins, 2005). According to Montgomery (2007), there are four types of vocabulary: □ Listening □ Speaking □ Reading □ Writing. She further explains them as follows:

Listening Vocabulary:

“The words we hear and understand. Starting in the womb, fetuses can detect sounds as early as 16 weeks. Furthermore, babies are listening during all their waking hours – and we continue to learn new words this way all of our lives. By the time we reach adulthood, most of us will recognize and understand close to 50,000 words. (Stahl,Tompkins) Children who are completely deaf do not get exposed to a listening vocabulary. Instead, if they have signing models at home or school, they will be exposed to a “visual” listening vocabulary. The amount of words modeled is much less than a hearing child's incidental listening vocabulary” (p.9).

Speaking Vocabulary:

“The words we use when we speak. Our speaking vocabulary is relatively limited: Most adults use a mere 5,000 to 10,000 words for all their conversations and instructions. This number is much less than our listening vocabulary most likely due to ease of use”. (p.9-10)

Reading Vocabulary:

“in our speaking vocabulary. This is the 2nd largest vocabulary IF you are a reader. If you are not a reader, you cannot *grow* your vocabulary “(p.9-10).

Writing Vocabulary:

“The words we can retrieve when we write to express ourselves. We generally find it easier to explain ourselves orally, using facial expression and intonation to help get our ideas across, then to find just the right words to communicate the same ideas in writing, our writing vocabulary is strongly influenced by the words we can spell” (p.9-10).

2.2 Pictures

As mentioned by Hill (1990), “the standard classroom” is usually not a very suitable environment for learning languages. That is why teachers search for various aids and stimuli to improve this situation. Pictures are one of

these valuable aids. They bring “images of reality into the unnatural world of the language classroom.” (Hill 1990, p. 1). Pictures not only bring images of reality, but also are able to function as fun building blocks in the class. Occasionally it is astonishing, how pictures might change a lesson, albeit only employed in additional exercises or just to engender the atmosphere. Pictures gather a broad variety of use not only in getting vocabulary, but also in many other facets of foreign language teaching.

Wright (1990 as cited in Joklova 2009) displayed it through an example, namely he utilized one compiled picture and exemplified the likelihood of use in five very different language areas. The mentioned case in point demonstrates utilizing pictures in teaching organization, vocabulary, functions, situations and all four skills. Moreover it is pointed out that “potential of pictures is so great that only a taste of their full potential can be given” in his book (as cited in Joklova 2009, Wright 1990, p.6). In other words nearby lessons where pictures receive the major emphasis, they might be used simply as a “stimulus for writing and discussion, as an illustration of something being read or talked about, as background to a topic and so on” (Hill 1990, p. 2).

However, “pictures have their limitations too” (as cited in Joklova 2009, McCarthy 1992, p. 115). For instance in teaching vocabulary, pictures are not appropriate or adequate for representing the meaning of all words. It is difficult to exemplify the meaning of some words, particularly the abstract ones such as ‘happiness’ or ‘impact’. Consequently, in some cases, additional instruments are used to display the meaning, or different pictures might be complemented by other instruments.

Using pictures as instructional tools in language teaching settings are supported by lots of reasons. As Wright (1990, p. 2, cited in Joklova 2009) pointed out, “they are motivating and draw learners’ attention”. Furthermore, Wright (1990, p. 2 as cited in Joklova 2009) puts emphasis on the fact that pictures provide a sense of the context of the language and offer a stimulus. Pictures are appropriate for every group of learners from different age or level, and can be used in a variety of ways. As Hill (1992, p. 2 as cited in Joklova 2009) asserts, “What is done is limited only by the preparation time available, the visuals to hand and the imagination of the individual teacher.”

Hill (p.1 as cited in Joklova 2009,) reported a number of benefits of pictures, for instance **availability** -we can obtain them in magazines, on the internet, etc.); they are **economical** (not expensive), usually free; they are personal namely educators decides on them ; **flexibility** - effortlessly set aside, practical for a variety of activities like drilling, comparing, etc. they are “always fresh and different”, which means they are produced in a range of formats and styles and furthermore the learner time and again speculates what will come next (cited in Joklova 2009, Hill 1990, p.1).

In her thesis Joklova (2009) also studied the effect of pictures on vocabulary teaching. It is reported that: Pictures are of great role in students’ motivation and interest. Pictures are admirable instruments for expressing of meaning, above all about particular things. They are more effective if used significantly namely in conjunction with other activities. Joklova further adds that this effect is further increased when they are joined to other tools such as songs. This is particularly true for competitions and puzzles. The uniqueness of pictures also makes them more memorable. In another study Shoari and Davatgari (2015), examine the effect of drawing relevant pictures on Iranian young EFL Learners’ L2 vocabulary performance, they reported that

“through drawing pictures the relevant information of each word will be processed at deeper levels not at shallow levels. For instance if someone was shown a car without having chance to focus on, s/he would remember just some general features of that car, while if the same person had a chance to focus on it s/he would remember more details about it, that is processing would occur at deeper levels and more information on a word will be stored. The second point of which is mostly true with younger learners is the issues of self-confidence, it means when learners are asked to draw something to learn what are to learn, they feel doing something important and they feel more safe and confident, thus they will be more autonomous language learners/users”(p.201).

3. Methods

3.1 Design of the study

The design of the present research is quasi-experimental, that is without randomization.

3.2 Participants

Sixty female Iranian EFL learners with an age range of 7-13 participated in this inquiry of which done in one academic semester. All the students were from Turkish background. They were selected from 4classes.

3.3 Context of the Study

The context of the study is Alborz Language Institute Tabriz, Iran. In this institute a course consists of 20 sessions which meet two times a week. The source book of the institute is Interchange series by Professor Jack C. Richards (who is an internationally recognized authority on English-language acquisition, teacher training, and materials design. A well-known lecturer and consultant, he has taught at universities in the United States, China, Singapore, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, and Brazil. Professor Richards' many successful publications include the *Interchange* series, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, and *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*).

3.3 Instruments

For collecting quantifiable data the researcher derived benefit from the following instruments.

One language proficiency test of which was performed before starting the program, a pre-test of which was conducted on subjects' vocabulary performance. All of the words were selected from the source book of the learners. And a post-test of which was for measuring the effectiveness of the using pictures.

3.4 Research Variables

The independent variable of the study is pictures and the dependent variable was vocabulary learning.

3.5 Research Procedure

Prior to conducting the investigation a language proficiency test was conducted to the both groups- experimental and control - including Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The *Cambridge Mover* listening paper is of five parts with 25 questions. The reading and writing is of 6 parts, and there are 40 questions. Movers' speaking has four parts. After deciding on the homogeneity of the proficiency level of participants, a pre-test was conducted to determine the vocabulary knowledge of the participants before the treatment, namely for reassuring comparability of two groups of Experimental and Control on their word knowledge, since there shouldn't be statistically significant pre-existing differences between two groups at the beginning of the study. Then the program was started. The researcher selected the words she planned to teach from interchange book (Intro), then in the experimental group she used pictures for teaching them while in the control group there was no treatment and words and their meanings were given to learners. Afterwards they were asked to memorize them. It is worth mentioning that in the experimental for teaching the abstract terms the researcher made use of pictures which imply those abstract concepts. This continued for twenty sessions. After that one post-test on learners vocabulary knowledge was conducted. The collected data has been analyzed by means of SPSS, and the results were inferred and described.

4. Results

The collected data was analyzed by means of SPSS and the research question and hypotheses are answered in this part.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	16.8444	30	0.75965	0.13709
	Pretest	12.2221	30	1.16687	0.21477

Pointed out in the Table1, the experimental group of the study had a mean score of 12.22 ($SD=1.16$) in the Vocabulary pretest. The group, on the other hand, obtained higher scores ($M=16.84$, $SD=0.75$) in the Vocabulary posttest. It is safe to argue that there was a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest to Posttest following the treatment sessions.

Table 2. Paired Samples Test-Experimental Group

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Posttest - Pretest	4.57744	1.00631	.18379	4.19077	4.94255	24.875	29	.000

Table 2 represents that the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 4.57 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.19 to 4.94. It is also designated that the mean increase in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t(29) = 24.85$, $P = .000$). Hence, the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2 Posttest	12.8611	30	.91277	.16699
Pretest	12.0377	30	1.06611	.19477

Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the control group. In a short look, it can be perceived that there was not a statistically significant increase in the Vocabulary scores from Pretest ($M= 12.03$, $SD= 1.06$) to Posttest ($M= 12.86$, $SD=0.91$).

Table 4. Paired Samples Test-Control Group

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Posttest - Pretest	.80000	.40655	.07117	.64807	.95199	10.777	29	.000

According to the Table 4, the mean increase in Vocabulary scores was 0.80 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.64 to 0.95. The mean increase in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ($t(29) = 10.77, P = .000$). In respect of the experimental group, the control group performed much poorly in the Vocabulary posttest though.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics-Pretest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Experimental	30	12.2221	1.16687	0.21477
Control	30	12.0377	1.06611	0.19477

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the Vocabulary pretest. The experimental and control groups of the study had a mean score of 12.22 ($SD=1.16$) and 12.03 ($SD=1.06$) in that order. To be precise, the two groups did not perform in a different way in the pretest and they were homogeneous in terms of their vocabulary performance.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test-Pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.057	.812	.470	58	.647	.13388	.28957	-.45702	.71571
	Equal variances not assumed			.470	5.744	.647	.13388	.28957	-.45711	.71581

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 0.13 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.45 to .71. The results reported no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = .470, p = .647$. Consequently, the two groups performed homogeneously in the Vocabulary pretest.

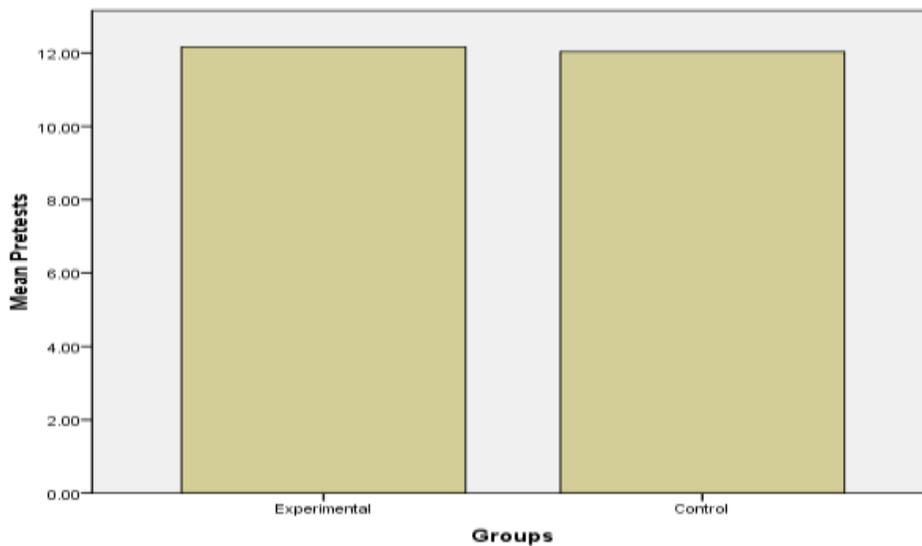


Figure 4.1. pretest

The Figure also demonstrates the homogeneity of the two groups in the Vocabulary pretest. Both groups exhibited quite equal performances in the pretest.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics-Posttest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest Experimental	30	16.8444	0.75965	0.13709
Control	30	12.8611	.91277	.16699

Consistent with the descriptive statistics shown in the Table7, the experimental group performed much better than the control group in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean score for the former was 16.84 ($SD=0.75$) whereas for the latter the mean score is 12.86 ($SD= 0.91$).

Table 8. Independent Samples Test-Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	2.855	.097	18.183	58	.000	3.90000	.21453	3.46061	4.34779
	Equal variances not assumed			18.183	55.610	.000	3.90000	.21453	3.46021	4.33977

Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the statistics scores of the two groups in the Vocabulary posttest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 3.90 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.46 to 4.34. The results revealed significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups

in the Vocabulary pretest $t(58) = 18.183, p = .000$. Therefore, the Null hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported.

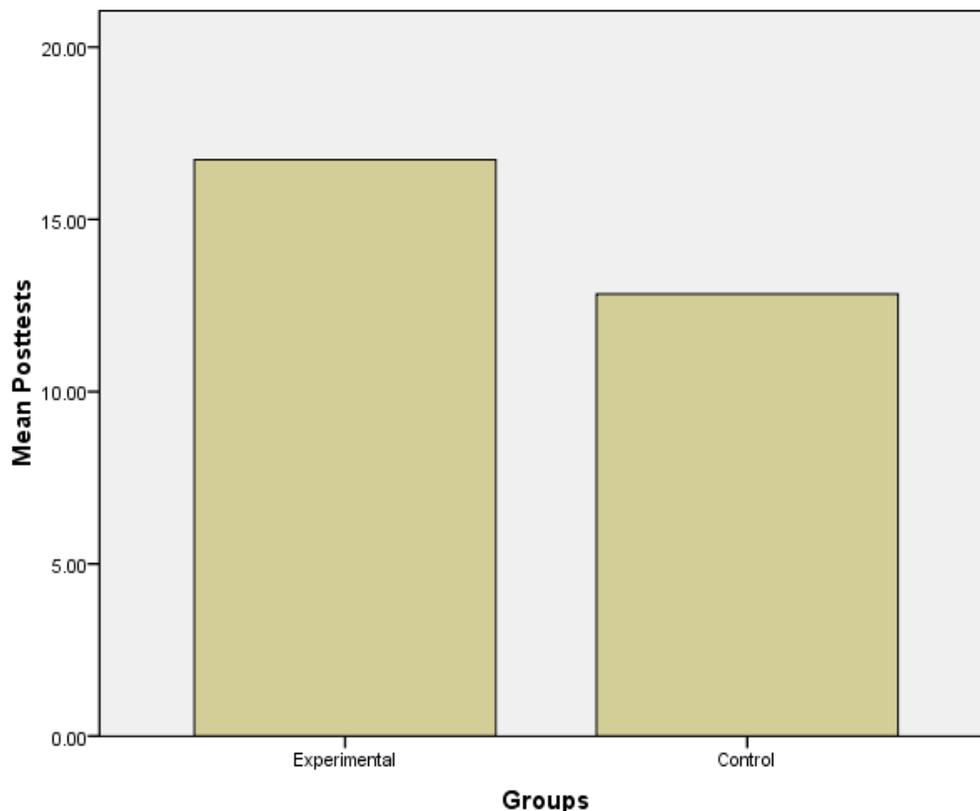


Figure 4.2. Posttest

The figure further displays the significant difference in the Vocabulary posttest that the two groups of the study performed. The experimental group scored higher than the control group in the posttest.

5. Implications and Limitations

The findings of the present study have suggested a number of points that need to be taken into account by EFL teachers, educators and textbook writers, and syllabus designers. Making use of pictures is recommended for successful learning, in EFL classes. It is particularly important for LD students (students having learning disabilities). Given that LD students suffer from inability to recall the meanings of words; through using pictures they knew how to make associations between concepts and realities, as a result they learnt successfully. Through making use of pictures, students felt more secure in class, and this might be derived from the nature of pictures which have fun for learners. It is evident that in such a relaxed situation learning was really enhanced. Regarding the limitations of the study the age of the learners (7-13), the gender of them (female) and their language proficiency level (elementary) were serious limitations which put obstacles in making use of the findings for larger populations. It can be understood that further studies should include learners from various age ranges, male gender and other proficiency levels. The last but not least point is that some length-wised investigations are required for comparing

the effectiveness of using pictures with other instruments and also for clarifying the continuing effects of pictures on word acquisition.

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