

Iranian Language Learners' Attitude, Motivation and Performance toward Learning
Vocabulary Using Computer Assisted Language Learning

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“To my beloved Father, Mother, Brother and Sisters”

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Iranian students' attitude, motivation and their performance in using web-based Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to learn English language vocabulary. This study included three questionnaires: the student background questionnaire, the questionnaire on student attitude toward the use of computers, and the questionnaire on student motivation. They addressed the following research questions: (1) what are the students' attitudes toward using the computer to learn English vocabulary. (2) what are the students' motivations toward using computer to learn English vocabulary. (3) what are the students' performances toward using computer as an aid instruction to learn vocabulary. The respondents of the study were Iranian college postgraduates from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the questions concerning students' attitudes and motivation with the web-based CALL program. Sample-paired T-test was used to explore the students' performance before and after the treatment. The results of the current study led to some interesting findings with some implications, future pedagogy, and future research. The study showed that the respondents possessed high attitude and motivation towards English using computer. Students also showed a good performance in learning the English language vocabulary, and students of higher attitude and motivation in learning tend to learn English language vocabulary through CALL. The research showed that web-based CALL could be used in the ESL to improve the students' interests and confidence to learn English by using computer.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji sikap, motivasi, dan prestasi pelajar Iran terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Ingeris berbantuan computer (CALL) bagi pembelajaran pembendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini terdiri daripada tiga soal selidik: soal selidik latar belakang pelajar, soal selidik ke atas sikap pelajar terhadap penggunaan komputer, dan soal selidik tentang motivasi pelajar. Mereka menangani persoalan kajian seperti berikut: (1) apakah sikap pelajar terhadap penggunaan komputer untuk mempelajari perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Ingeris. (2) apakah motivasi pelajar terhadap penggunaan komputer untuk mempelajari perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Ingeris. (3) apakah prestasi pelajar terhadap penggunaan komputer sebagai arahan bantuan untuk mempelajari perbendaharaan kata. Responden kajian adalah pelajar pasca siswazah Iran dari Universiti Teknologi Malaysia di Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Statistik deskriptif telah digunakan untuk menyiasat persoalan tentang sikap dan motivasi pelajar terhadap Pembelajaran Bahasa Ingeris berbantuan computer. Ujian-T sampel-berpasangan telah digunakan untuk meneroka peningkatan prestasi pelajar sebelum dan selepas rawatan. Keputusan kajian terkini membawa beberapa penemuan menarik dengan beberapa implikasi, pedagogi masa depan, dan penyelidikan masa depan. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden mempunyai perantaraan sikap dan motivasi yang tinggi terhadap pembelajaran Ingeris berbantuan computer. Pelajar juga menunjukkan prestasi yang baik dalam pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris, dan sikap dan motivasi pelajar yang lebih tinggi dalam pembelajaran cenderung untuk mempelajari perbendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris melalui Ingeris berbantuan computer, terdapat perbezaan statistik yang signifikan bagi sikap dan motivasi pelajar. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa Ingeris berbantuan computer berasaskan web boleh digunakan dalam ESL untuk meningkatkan kepentingan dan keyakinan pelajar untuk belajar bahasa Inggeris di dalam suasana pembelajaran yang baru.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study investigates how students identify and use computer technology in vocabulary learning. The study specifically explored student attitudes, motivation and performance through the use of computers in learning vocabulary. In order to achieve these purposes, this chapter discusses the background of study, statement of the problem and the significance of this study. It also covers the objectives and research questions of the study.

1.1 Background of Study

The most useful skill among the other skills for students to develop their satisfaction feeling in understanding a text is reading (Hill and Holden, 1990). Krashen (cited in Hill and Holden, 1990) state that reading is an important source of comprehensible input and can make a significant contribution to competence in a foreign language. Students who do more pleasure reading are better readers and in fact have a greater vocabulary competence. He also emphasizes that students may make better progress in reading comprehension and vocabulary development through extensive reading

than in traditional instructional reading. Thus learning foreign language through extensive reading provides the opportunity of learning without pressure, and motivates students in better learning. Goodman and Burke (cited in Tierney, Readence and Disher 1985) also agrees on extensive reading, they state that the readers are encouraged to make judgments in natural reading situations. They also explain that pleasure reading helps to develop students' consciousness of effective reading from easy to difficult material. Therefore, readers may become familiar with the unknown words.

Large amount of reading may help in vocabulary learning, learners need to repeatedly encounter the same words to reinforce the learning of the words (Nation, 2001). This provides the foundation for large amounts of extensive reading at the appropriate level so that learners have repeated opportunities to meet the words to be learned. A number of studies also report the significant role of vocabulary in extensive reading in a foreign language (Huckin and Coady 1999).

Therefore, the role of vocabulary in second and foreign language learning has been the subject of a great deal of research in recent years. A review of the research shows that vocabulary learning has turned its focus toward issues such as the meaning of the word, the number of words that every speaker know and the way to learn them. The results of these studies have exposed that vocabulary learning and teaching need a systematic approach (Carter & McCarthy, 1988; Taylor, 1990; Coady & Huckin, 1997; Stoller & Grabe, 1993; Laufer, 1986; Nation, 1990, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; Nattinger, 1988). Among the many methods and approaches applied to vocabulary learning and teaching, the use of technology has gained added importance recently.

Many instructional tools were utilized by English language teachers to develop the general and academic vocabulary of students and one of the fastest-growing areas is the use of technology to help students learn easily and enjoyably. Through daily improvement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the use of technology has gained an important place in vocabulary learning and offers a great variety of learning possibilities (Tam, 2000). This development of technological innovation will change the image of the

classroom in the twenty-first century (Cox et al, 1999). This phenomenon influences education to facilitate teaching and learning. Technology is used in almost every aspect of teaching and learning (Means, 1994). Therefore, a number of researches have been done on the relationship between linguistic knowledge (especially English) and computer variables in vocabulary learning.

One of the best ways to evaluate a new teaching and learning instruction is students' opinion. Students' attitude and their motivation towards learning are two major factors that influence the decision of whether students can successfully adapt to the new CALL program, especially in the Iranian context where students are teacher-dependent on class. Thus, in order to understand the students' behavior toward computers, an investigation into the attitudes and motivation toward the use of technology seems necessary. Since attitude and motivation are both concerned with the learners' achievements, the relationship of these two factors with students' English proficiency, especially learning vocabulary, is also being explored in this study. Therefore, one of the aspects of this study is to evaluate Iranian students' foreign language learning attitude, motivation and performance toward using computers as an instructional aid to teach English language vocabulary. The other aspect is to discover whether the computer can be helpful in providing effective practice to support vocabulary learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Reading is an essential academic skill; student's reading fluency is the foundation of all curriculum areas (Whitehurst, 2007). Poor reading skill influences confidence and success, which are two essential elements of students' motivation (Frederick, 2009). Through the researcher observation, Iranian students who enter higher education and universities are unprepared for the level of work required. They suffer from poor vocabulary and face difficulties in their studies because of their insufficient basic skills. There are many factors that might cause the Iranian academic students' low proficiency in

English. One of the major problems is that most universities in Iran concentrate on the two basic skills of speaking and listening, so the importance of reading is being ignored. The lack of vocabulary is another factor; learning vocabulary is one of the major problems of foreign language learners. The importance of vocabulary knowledge has been neglected or considered as a secondary emphasis (Twaddell, 1973; Richards, 1976; Wilkins, 1974; Judd, 1978; Morgan and Rinvoluceri, 1986; Paker, 1989 and Carter and McCarthy, 1988). On the other hand, learning a language mainly it means learning vocabulary, and the way to use them in an appropriate way. Since vocabulary is not the only important component on in language learning, its value should not be undeniable. As Wilkins (1974) states, "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed".

Moreover, in the opinion of the researcher, many Iranian academic students have major difficulties with reading because both teachers and students do not pay attention to reading and think that reading is not an important skill among the other skills. Since reading skill and vocabulary have a strong relationship, the students are weak and unable to guess the meaning of the words in context in order to understand the reading or express themselves in English (Tozcu & Coady, 2004). The lack of Iranian academic students English vocabulary knowledge caused that they are unable to understand the text. The students' low tendency to learn vocabulary is due to the limitation of language input and practice with the target language (Canale & Swain, 1980). Several factors influence this issue and one of them may address the inefficiency of current tools used in teaching vocabulary and the other one may relate to the lack of activities offered by teachers. Therefore, there are many interesting ways to teach vocabulary, and this study focuses on the use of computers in learning the English language vocabulary.

Although many researchers have conducted studies on the effectiveness of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs and despite the widespread influence of technology on education, the use of computers in the Iranian educational system is still relatively new. The students are not familiar with utilizing CALL programs

to achieve their purposes in class. There are many factors that might cause this problem. One might be attributed to Iranian academic students' motivation towards the use of computers in English classes. It is believed that students' motivation influences the success of using instructional tools in the classroom to teach vocabulary. Another factor is academic students' attitudes toward using new instructional tools; this is because an ESL/EFL learner's motivation to use computers in language learning is affected by his or her attitudes towards using it to teach vocabulary.

Given the importance of identifying students' motivation and attitudes towards computer-assisted language learning to learn English vocabulary, this study has investigated Iranian academic students' motivation and attitudes towards the English language besides examining their performance to learn English language vocabulary. The lack of studies on academic students' motivation and attitudes in Iran society are additional motivating factors driving the present study.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

There are three basic purposes in this study. The first one is to investigate the attitude of Iranian EFL students when they use computer-assisted language learning, and learns English language vocabulary; the second is their motivation toward using computer-assisted language learning to support English language vocabulary; and the third is to investigate students' performance and their vocabulary improvement toward using computer-assisted language learning.

In this study, the researcher has been shown the importance of using computer instruction in learning and teaching and explore on whether computers can be a good facilitator in helping teachers. So this is the essential reason that encourages the researcher

to conduct this study on the vocabulary improvement of Iranian EFL learners through the use of computers. She believes that computers are suitable tools in providing a chance for meaningful language practice to learn English, which enables the students to develop a positive attitude and increase their motivation level to perform better in their academic level.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To investigate students' attitude toward using computers to learn English vocabulary.
- To identify the students' motivation toward using computers to learn English vocabulary.
- To examine the significant differences of students' performance toward using computers to learn English vocabulary.

1.5 Research Questions

The research aims to address the following questions:

- What are the students' attitudes toward using computer to learn English vocabulary?

- What are the students' motivations toward using computer to learn English vocabulary?
- Is there any significant difference in students' performance toward using computers to learn English vocabulary?

1.6 Significance of Study

The Ministry of Education in Iran has invested funds to facilitate integrating computer technology in schools (Kousha & Abdoli, 2004). The investigation of the students' attitude, motivation and their performance toward using computers to learn English language vocabulary will help the curriculum designer and teachers have a better understanding of the necessity of integrating new technologies into the traditional classroom. The findings of the current study will provide valuable knowledge as to the implications for integrating computers into the design of English as a foreign language curriculum in Iran.

Computers can be instructional tools to help students practice vocabulary to support their reading skills outside the classroom. The present study will provide valuable data on students' attitudes, their motivations in vocabulary improvement, and their performance through the use of computers for extensive reading even outside the classroom in an effort to utilize what they have learned.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study explored students' attitudes, motivation and their performance when using computers in particular online English Websites, in learning the English language vocabulary. Now, in many schools, computer technology, Internet and web-based resources offered teachers and learners vast resources and opportunities for language teaching and learning. These resources can only be achieved through students' use of technology in developing materials in learning. Accepting and using new instruction depends on the learners' opinion, in fact learners' opinion can be a very important indicator of students' adaptation of a new technology in learning is learner's attitude. So the results of this study may be useful in identifying students' attitudes towards and approaches to use the computer technology provided the resources and the reasons behind these attitudes. The relationship between attitude and motivation has been considered as a key concern in language-learning research. The learners' attitude determines the learners' motivation to learn a language. The study and its results might also suggest better ways to motivate students to use computer resources in learning language. This study also aimed to provide evidence on whether students can learn more vocabulary through using computer instructions and to investigate whether there is any significant discrepancy in vocabulary growth between the vocabulary test before treatment and vocabulary test after treatment.

In order to accomplish the purpose of the study; the study drew from a sample of academic postgraduate students in Intensive English Course (IEC) classes in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). These IEC students are of different nationalities. For this study only 30 Iranian students were chosen as respondents of this study, and all respondents were currently in their first year of study.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

To help the readers understanding the terms used in this study, definitions of the terms are presented as below.

English Foreign Learner

EFL a person whose English is not the official and dominant language in their area, but it is taught widely as a school subject. In this study Iranian student only involved.

Attitude

Persons' feelings, thoughts and behaviors toward a category, class or set of phenomena or cognitive object is defined as an attitude (Miyashita, 1991). In this study, attitude refers to students' feelings toward computer-assisted language learning.

Motivation

According to Lifrieri (2005) most people would certainly mention motivation as of the most influential factors in any individual levels of success such as language learning. In this study, motivation will refer to the students' effort to learn through computer-assisted language learning.

Performance

Performance is conceptualized as the achievement of goals. According to Rosenshine & Stevens (1986) performance can provide information on accuracy of work, and it may include corrective information.

Self-Access Language Learning

The Self- Access allows students to use the facilities on their own; they attend to the digital language laboratory for language learning. Students have opportunities to develop their language through using computers (<http://sps.utm.my>).

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is defined as learners' learning language through computer technologies in any context (Egbert 2005).

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