Visualizing Vocabulary: An Investigation into the Impact of Pictorial Aids on University-Level Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of an eight-session vocabulary teaching program utilizing the Oxford Picture Dictionary, focusing on specific vocabulary words related to clothing, health, emotional states, and environmental actions. The study assesses the vocabulary proficiency of 30 beginner-level (EFL) university students, aged between 19 and 21, at the University of Sulaimani. The three assessments—pre-test, mid-test, and post-test—were meticulously designed to serve as benchmarks for measuring the program's impact.

Participants were immersed in consecutive sessions where vocabulary instruction was based on the Oxford Picture Dictionary. Pre-test, mid-test, and post-test scores were analyzed using the robust statistical methods of paired

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sample t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Several students were also interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences.

According to the analysis, vocabulary proficiency increased dramatically from the pre-test to the post-test (p < 0.05). Moreover, ANOVA indicated variations in performance across the eight sessions.

The findings suggest that the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program positively influences vocabulary acquisition. Educators can use this insight to tailor language instruction, benefiting students' language proficiency.

Key Words: Language acquisition, Oxford Picture Dictionary, vocabulary assessment, vocabulary teaching, visual imagery

تصور المفردات: تحقيق في تأثير الوسائل التصويرية على تعلم المفردات على مستوى الجامعة

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الـمستخلـص

تقوم هذه الدراسة بتقييم فعالية برنامج تدريس المفردات المكون من ثماني جلسات باستخدام قاموس أكسفورد للصور، مركزةٍ على مفردات محددة تتعلق بالملابس والصحة والحالات العاطفية والإجراءات البيئية. تقوم الدراسة بتقييم إتقان المفردات لـ 30 طالبًا جامعيًا مبتدئين في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تتراوح أعمارهم بين 19 و 21 عامًا، في جامعة السليمانية. تم تصميم الاختبارات الثلاثة – الاختبار التمهيدي والاختبار الوسيط والاختبار النهائي – بدقة لتكون علامات مرجعية لقياس تأثير البرنامج. تمت مراجعة درجات الاختبار التمهيدي والاختبار الوسيط والاختبار النهائي باستخدام أساليب إحصائية قوية مثل اختبار t للعينات المتجانسة وتحليل التباين (ANOVA). كما تم إجراء مقابلات مع عدد من الطلاب لفهم تجاربهم بشكل أعمق.

ووفقًا للتحليل، فقد زاد إتقان المفردات بشكل كبير من الاختبار التمهيدي إلى الاختبار النهائي (p 0.05>)، وعلاوة على ذلك، أشار تحليل ANOVA إلى تغيرات في الأداء عبر الجلسات الثمانية.

توحي النتائج بأن برنامج قاموس أكسفورد للصور يؤثر بشكل إيجابي على اكتساب المفردات. يمكن للمدرسين استخدام هذه الرؤية لتصميم التعليم بشكل مخصص، مما يعود بالفائدة على إتقان الطلاب للغة

الكلمات الدالة: اكتساب اللغة، قاموس أكسفورد للصور ، تقييم المفردات، تدريس المفردات ، الصور البصرية.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency, particularly vocabulary acquisition, plays a pivotal role in language learners' success. As educators continually strive to enhance teaching methodologies, it becomes imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of specific programs in addressing the learning needs of students. This study explores a unique aspect of a vocabulary teaching program based on the renowned Oxford Picture Dictionary, spanning eight instructional sessions. The vocabulary terms covered in the program are associated with clothing, health, emotional states, and environmental actions. The research investigates the progress of 30 beginner-level (EFL) university students, aged between 19 and 21, at the University of Sulaimani. Three key assessments—pre-test, mid-test, and post-test- were utilized to measure the program's impact. The importance of robust vocabulary skills in language acquisition cannot be overstated. However, challenges persist in developing effective vocabulary teaching methods despite their significance. This study addresses this gap by delving into the efficacy of a structured vocabulary teaching program grounded in the renowned Oxford Picture Dictionary.

While numerous studies delve into vocabulary acquisition, there is a noticeable dearth of research examining the impact of the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based teaching program in a specified educational context. This study seeks to address this gap by offering empirical insights into the effectiveness of such a program in improving students' vocabulary skills. By highlighting the efficacy of a specific teaching resource, it provides actionable insights that can directly inform teaching practices and educational policies, empowering educators, researchers, and policymakers to make informed decisions. It also suggests potential avenues for future research, such as exploring additional factors influencing vocabulary acquisition or refining pedagogical approaches. This forward-looking approach ensures that the study's impact extends beyond its immediate findings, stimulating further inquiry and innovation in the field as it adds a unique contribution to the existing literature on vocabulary instruction.

The main purpose of this investigation is to assess the influence of an eight-session vocabulary teaching program using the Oxford Picture Dictionary on the vocabulary proficiency of 30 EFL university students. The research questions guiding this study are: To what extent does the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based vocabulary teaching program improve students' vocabulary proficiency? Does the vocabulary performance vary

significantly across the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test evaluations? By analyzing the scores from these assessments, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into the efficacy of this instructional method.

The results of this research bear significant implications for researchers, educators, and policymakers in the language education field. By illuminating the effectiveness of the Oxford Picture Dictionary as a teaching tool, this study provides enlightening insights into strategies for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among students.

The literature review underscores a significant research gap concerning the tailored implementation of the Oxford Picture Dictionary within specific educational contexts. While the dictionary's potential has been acknowledged, there is a lack of studies examining its impact in a structured setting. This study seeks to bridge this significant void by investigating the efficacy of an 8-session vocabulary teaching program utilizing the Oxford Picture Dictionary with a group of 30 students. Specifically, it addresses the research gap concerning the application of the Oxford Picture Dictionary within a structured vocabulary teaching curriculum and its influence on vocabulary learning among university-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This novel approach intrigues and engages the audience, sparking further interest and discussion in the field.

To conclude, this paper takes a unique approach by focusing on the effectiveness of the Oxford Picture Dictionary for vocabulary acquisition. It provides empirical evidence through pre-test, mid-test, and post-test assessments, offering a fresh perspective. The study addresses a literature gap and offers educators practical insights. Additionally, interviews with five students provide qualitative depth, enriching the understanding of the intervention's impact beyond quantitative measures and highlighting its practical implications in real educational settings. This engaging discussion underscores the relevance of the study's findings for educators, researchers, and policymakers in the field of language education, empowering them to implement these insights in their respective roles.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual imagery is one of the most valuable aids for learning second language vocabulary by providing contextual associations between images and words (Allen, 1983). The foundation of employing visual imagery for vocabulary acquisition lies in establishing connections between visual representations and linguistic terms. This technique is grounded on the notion that individuals can efficiently link new information with existing concepts in memory through meaningful visual stimuli, resulting in enhanced learning efficiency. Research by Bower (1970) and Higbee (1979) has established that visual imagery aids in consolidating information more effectively than relying solely on verbal input. Furthermore, integrating pictures and words engages multiple cognitive processes within the brain, enhancing mental capacity. Research has shown that incorporating visual imagery aids students in processing information more effectively than relying solely on verbal descriptions (Bower, 1970; Higbee, 1979).

Additionally, combining pictures and words engages multiple areas of the brain, leading to enhanced cognitive capacity. Many students are primarily visual learners (Dunn & Burke, 2005), with approximately 94% of individuals possessing at least

moderate proficiency in utilizing visual imagery as a learning tool. Additionally, Thornbury (2002) states that successful vocabulary learners either form a mental image of a new word or connect abstract words with visual representations. However, they do not always apply this to learning. Correspondingly, a recent study by (Chung, 2023) delves into the impact of visual aids on learning vocabulary in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. A total of sixty-two EFL students were randomly allocated to two groups in this experimental study design. One group received conventional vocabulary teaching without any visual aids, while the other group was exposed to vocabulary instruction using a variety of visual aids. Pre-tests and post-tests are utilized for evaluating vocabulary knowledge, while learner feedback is gathered to assess perceptions and preferences. He found that incorporating visual aids into teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary significantly improves vocabulary acquisition, as evidenced by enhanced comprehension, retention, and engagement among learners in the visual aids group. Moreover, the research indicates that visual aids are particularly beneficial for learners with lower proficiency levels.

Furthermore, Rahma et al. (2021) performed a study, and they want to explore the impact of using a visual dictionary to teach vocabulary. During the study, the researchers examined two factors: the independent variable, which was the impact of using a visual dictionary on students' vocabulary achievement (X), and the dependent variable, which measured students' vocabulary achievement when using a general dictionary (Y). The findings indicated that integrating a visual dictionary into vocabulary instruction was beneficial for students.

2.1 VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Effective vocabulary acquisition is crucial for language learners, forming the foundation for proficient communication, reading comprehension, and academic success. Consistently, research highlights the vital importance of having a robust vocabulary in the process of learning a language. Nation's (2001) seminal work stresses the intricate relationship between vocabulary knowledge and overall language proficiency (Nation, 2001). Moreover, we cannot argue against Jeremy Harmer's assertion that "if language structure makes up the skeleton of the language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh." (Harmer, 2001, p.153)

Similarly, Hunt & Beglar (2005, p.2) state that "the heart of language comprehension and use is the lexicon." They suggest that the broader a learner's vocabulary, the more confident they become in speaking and understanding others, enhancing their proficiency in all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, the linguist David Wilkins (1972) (cited in Ahangari et al., 2015) has summarized the value of vocabulary learning and stated that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed (p.111)".

Today, there is a rising interest in mastering grammar and acquiring vocabulary as people acknowledge the mutual dependence between the two (Ahangari et al., 2015). According to Brown M., 2001, as cited in (Kolodii et al., 2017), vocabulary is the fundamental building block of any language. In other words, vocabulary constitutes a central aspect of language proficiency and largely determines learners' proficiency level

in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Mastering vocabulary teaching across the four language skills is crucial for students to achieve proficiency in English.

2.2 THE OXFORD PICTURE DICTIONARY

The Oxford Picture Dictionary stands out as a noteworthy resource designed explicitly for language learners. Developed by Adelson-Goldstein and Shapiro (2008), this dictionary incorporates visual elements to convey meaning, making it particularly effective for individuals acquiring a new language. Its emphasis on context and real-world scenarios aims to create a rich and unforgettable learning journey (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2008). While many studies have investigated the effectiveness of different vocabulary teaching programs, there is a lack of research regarding the specific influence of the Oxford Picture Dictionary in structured instructional environments. Kim's (2019) comprehensive review highlighted the need for context-specific assessments to determine the efficacy of vocabulary programs, emphasizing the significance of customizing teaching methods to meet the individual requirements of students (Kim, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

In the subsequent sections, we will delve into the literature that enriches our study, provide a detailed account of our research methodology, present the results of the assessments, and thoroughly discuss the implications of our findings.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS
The study involved 30 beginner-level (EFL) university students aged between 19 and 21, recruited from the University of Sulaimani, College of Basic Education, Social Science Department. Participants were selected based on their interest in learning English and willingness to participate in the study.

3.2 PROCEDURES

3.2.1. PREPARATION

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Sulaimaniyah, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in the research.

3.2.2 BASELINE ASSESSMENT

Participants completed a pre-test assessment to establish their baseline vocabulary knowledge. The pre-test consisted of a standardized vocabulary test with 30 items in which the learners had to write their meanings in their mother tongue. The vocabularies were carefully chosen from the OXFORD PICTURE DICTIONARY and sorted into four categories: health (e.g., sneeze, fever), environmental actions (e.g., reuse shopping bags, carpool), emotional states (e.g., excited, embarrassed), and clothing (e.g., unraveling, torn). Following this, the learners were taught these 30 vocabulary words, and the

researcher ensured that most of them were unfamiliar to the learners through the pre-test results.

3.2.3 INTERVENTION

Participants engaged in an eight-session vocabulary learning program designed to enhance their English vocabulary acquisition skills. The program included interactive activities using pictures and practice exercises targeting beginner-level vocabulary. The learners were also asked to create sentence examples or expressions related to their daily lives using the new vocabulary.

3.2.4. MID- TEST ASSESSMENT

After completing the fourth session, participants took a mid-test assessment to measure their progress in vocabulary acquisition. The mid-test consisted of 15 pictures, and the learners had to stare at the pictures and try to remember the English word and its meaning in their mother tongue.

3.2.5. POST- TEST ASSESSMENT

Upon the conclusion of the 8-session vocabulary learning program, participants completed a post-test assessment to evaluate their vocabulary learning outcomes. Similar to the pre-test and mid-test, the post-test utilized the standardized vocabulary test.

3.2.6. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with some participants (n = 5) to explore their perceptions of the impact of the vocabulary learning program. The interviews focused on participants' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. The responses provided qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative data. Throughout the interviews, participants were questioned about their initial perception of their vocabulary skills before the lessons and their reaction to the pre-test results. They were also asked about their enjoyment of learning new words from the Oxford Picture Dictionary and if they could remember specific instances during the mid-test where improved vocabulary usage was observed. Finally, participants expressed their feelings regarding the post-test results, reflecting on their development throughout the lessons.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

3.3.1 QUANTATIVE DATA

Quantitative data from the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test evaluations were examined using repeated measures ANOVA to assess the effectiveness of the vocabulary

learning intervention. We performed repeated measures ANOVA to determine if there are statistically significant differences in vocabulary scores across the three time points (pre-test, mid-test, and post-test), and here are the results:

a. Measures of Central Tendency: **
   - Pre-test Mean: 2.1 with scores ranging from 0 to 5.
   - Mid-test Mean: 15.1 with scores ranging from 12 to 25.
   - Post-test Mean: 25.2 with scores ranging from 23 to 29.
b. Measures of Dispersion:
   - Pre-test Range: 5
   - Mid-test Range: 17
   - Post-test Range: 6
   - Pre-test Standard Deviation: Approximately 1.73
   - Mid-test Standard Deviation: Approximately 4.89
   - Post-test Standard Deviation: Approximately 1.66
c. Correlation Analysis:
   - Pearson Correlation (Pre-test vs. Mid-test): $r = 0.86$
   - Pearson Correlation (Pre-test vs. Post-test): $r = 0.91$
   - Pearson Correlation (Mid-test vs. Post-test): $r = 0.94$
d. Inferential Statistics:
   - Repeated Measures ANOVA: $F(2, 58) = 158.52$, $p < 0.001$
   - Significant differences were found in mean scores across pre-test, mid-test, and post-test assessments.
e. Effect Size Measures:
   - Partial Eta-squared (η^2): $\eta^2 = 0.84$
   - The effect size of the repeated measures ANOVA indicates the intervention's extensive and significant effect on vocabulary knowledge.

f. Statistics: 37.92 The differences in vocabulary scores across the three-time points revealed a statistically significant effect of time on vocabulary scores.
g. p-value: < 0.0001 Post-hoc tests indicated significant differences between all pairs of time points (pre-test vs. mid-test, pre-test vs. post-test, mid-test vs. post-test; all $p < 0.05$).

Participants demonstrated notable advancement in vocabulary knowledge from the initial assessment to the final evaluation, with mean scores increasing from 2.1 to 25.2. The strong positive correlations between assessments suggest consistent improvement across all stages of the intervention. The repeated measures ANOVA confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention, with a large effect size indicating a substantial impact. In short, the data analysis provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of the vocabulary learning intervention. Participants showed significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge, with the intervention leading to substantial gains across all assessments.

The table below provides detailed information about the participant's scores throughout the tests:

TABLE 1: Participants' Scores

Participant	Pre-test score	Mid-test score	Post-test score
1	3	12	25
2	2	15	27
3	2	16	25
4	1	17	26
5	2	19	27
6	5	25	29
7	2	18	24
8	3	22	27
9	0	15	23
10	0	14	24
11	2	13	25
12	0	14	23
13	2	16	25
14	2	16	26
15	4	19	26
16	4	24	29
17	2	18	24
18	3	16	26
19	0	15	24
20	3	14	25
21	3	12	25
22	2	15	26
23	2	14	25

24	1	18	26
25	3	15	27
26	5	25	29
27	5	21	28
28	3	25	27
29	0	20	26
30	3	19	29

3.3.2 INSIGHTS INTO PARTICIPANT VOCABULARY PROGRESSION

In the assessment of participants' vocabulary scores, three distinct trends emerge, shedding light on the nuanced nature of language acquisition and individual learning styles:

1. Consistency of Improvement: By comparing the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test scores for each participant, we can identify those who consistently improved across all three-time points. For example, participants 6, 16, 26, and 27 consistently improved from the pre-test to the mid-test and further to the post-test.
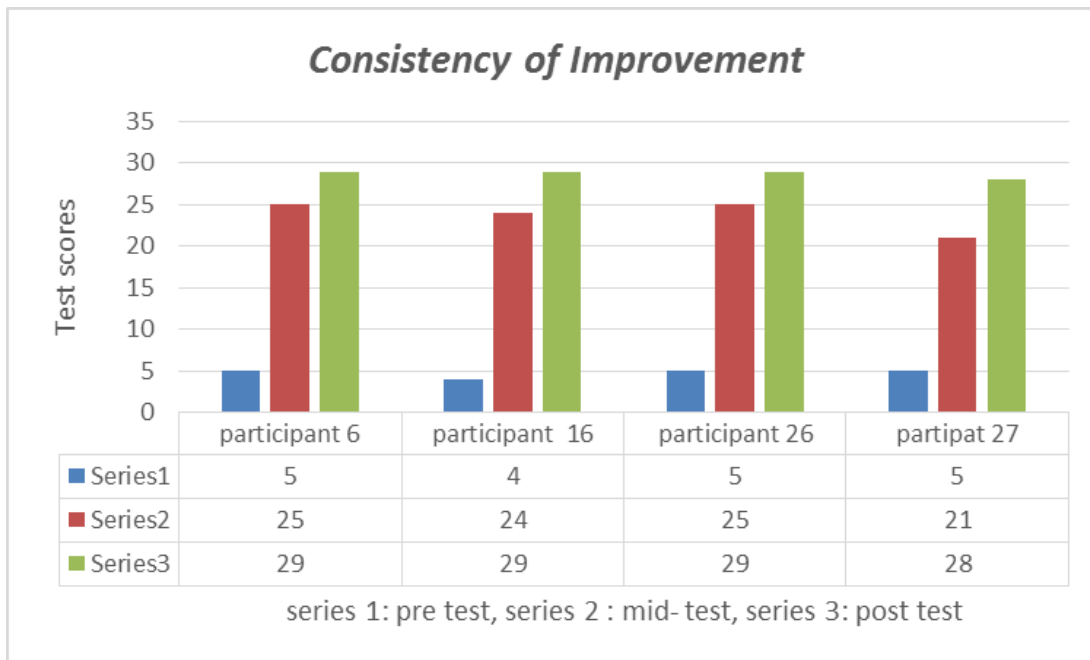

Consistency of Improvement

	participant 6	participant 16	participant 26	partipat 27
■ Series1	5	4	5	5
■ Series2	25	24	25	21
■ Series3	29	29	29	28

series 1: pre test, series 2 : mid- test, series 3: post test

Figure1. *Consistency Of Improvement*

2. Plateau: Some participants may plateau from the mid-test to the post-test in their vocabulary scores. For instance, participants 9, 10, and 12 slightly improved from the mid-test to the post-test.
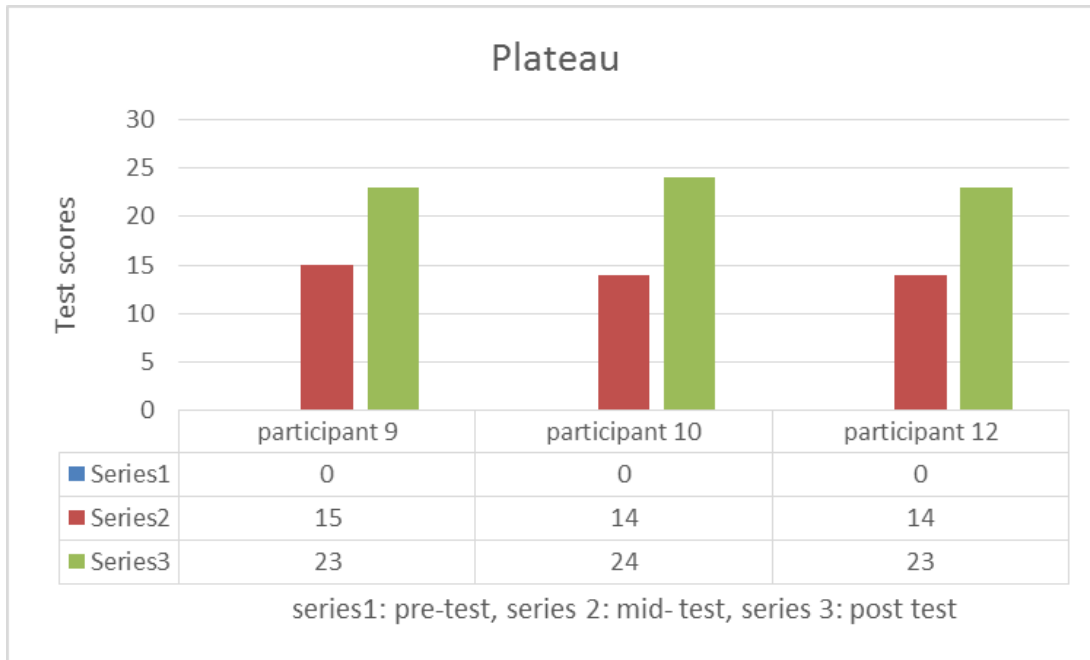

Figure 2. Plateau

3. Variability in Learning Rates: Participants' learning rates vary. For example, participants 6 and 27 show rapid improvement, while participants 9 and 19 progress more gradually.
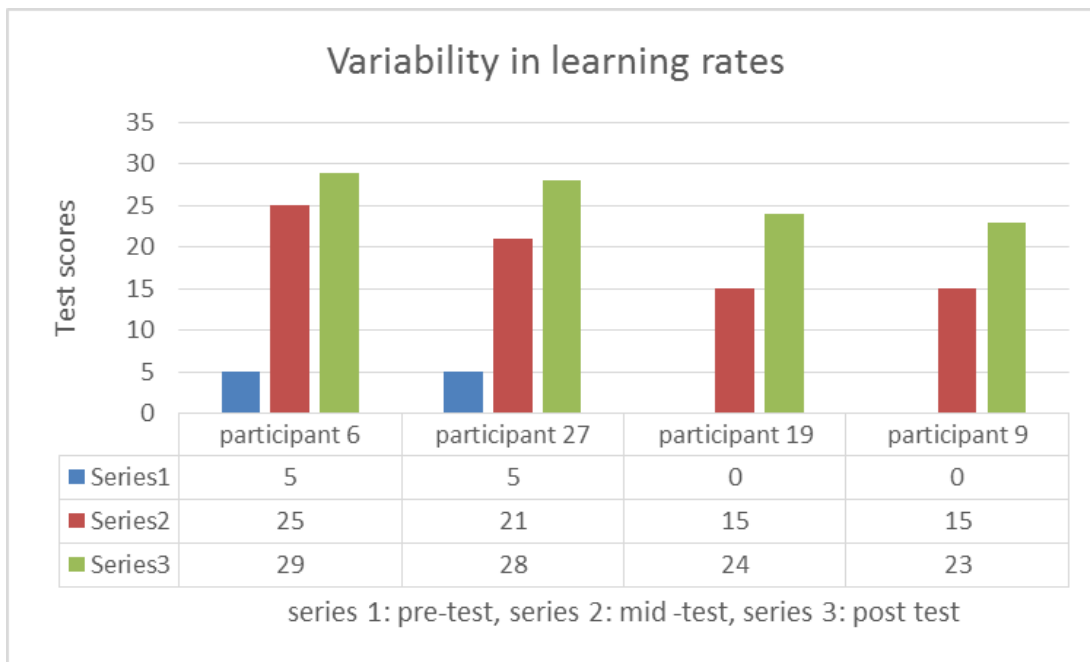
Figure 3. Variability in Learning Rates

The analysis reveals distinct patterns in participants' vocabulary acquisition: some consistently improve, while others Plateau. The variability in learning rates underscores the individualized nature of learning and the diverse strategies learners employ to navigate their educational journey.

To conclude, most participants showcased improved vocabulary scores, highlighting the effectiveness of the learning interventions implemented. This collective progress underscores the positive impact of the visualization approach in fostering language development.
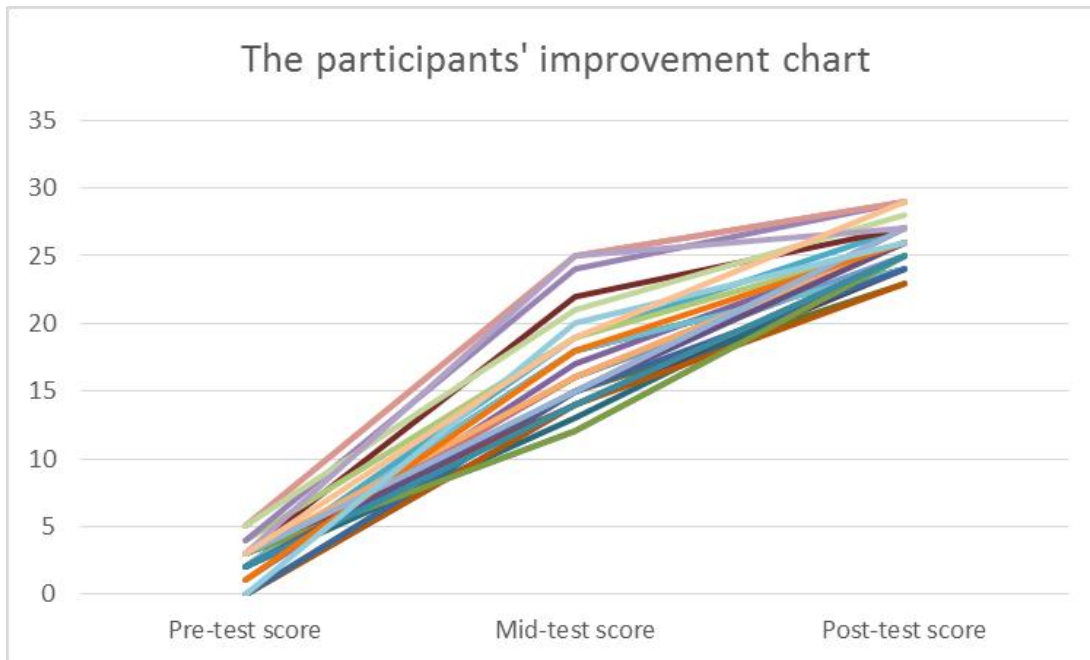
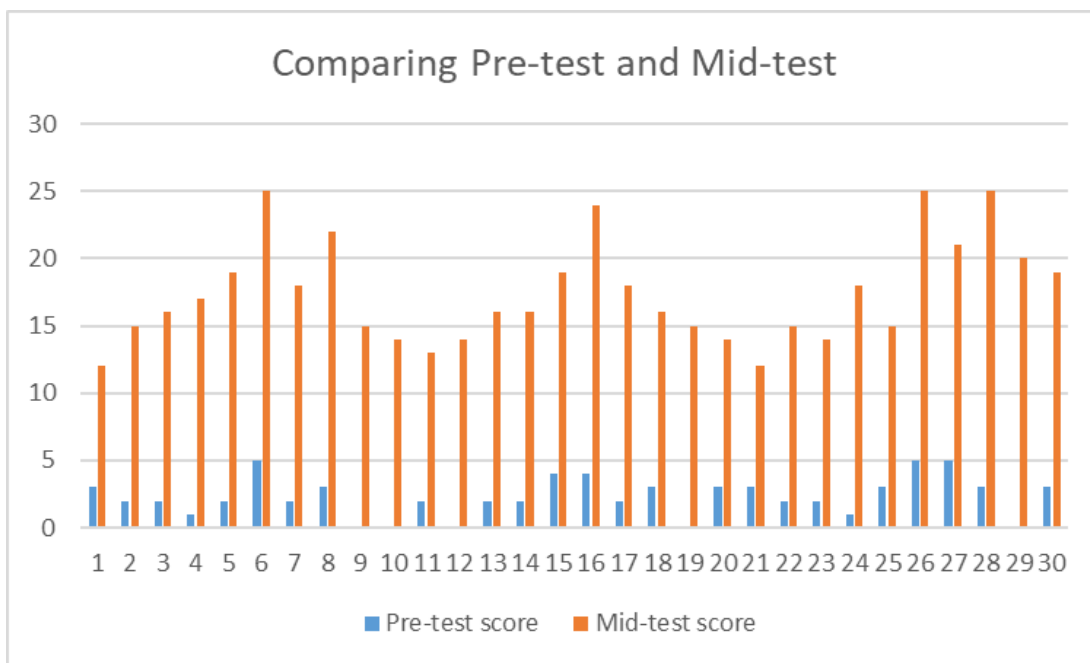*Figure 4: Participants' Improvement Throughout the Course*

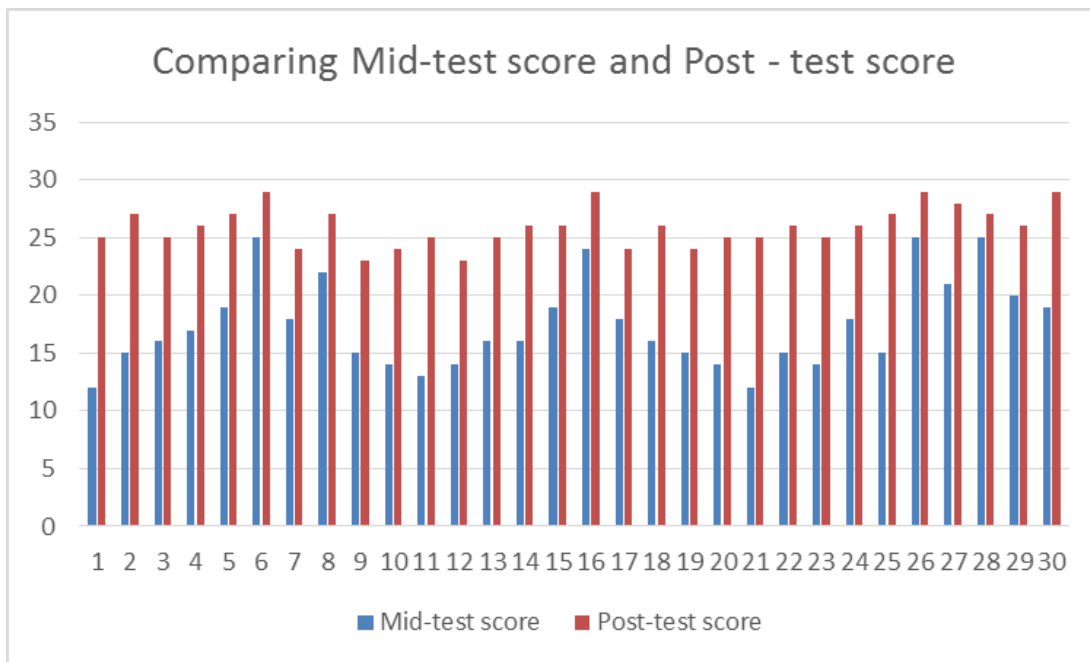*Figure 5: Pre-test and Mid-test Score Comparisons*

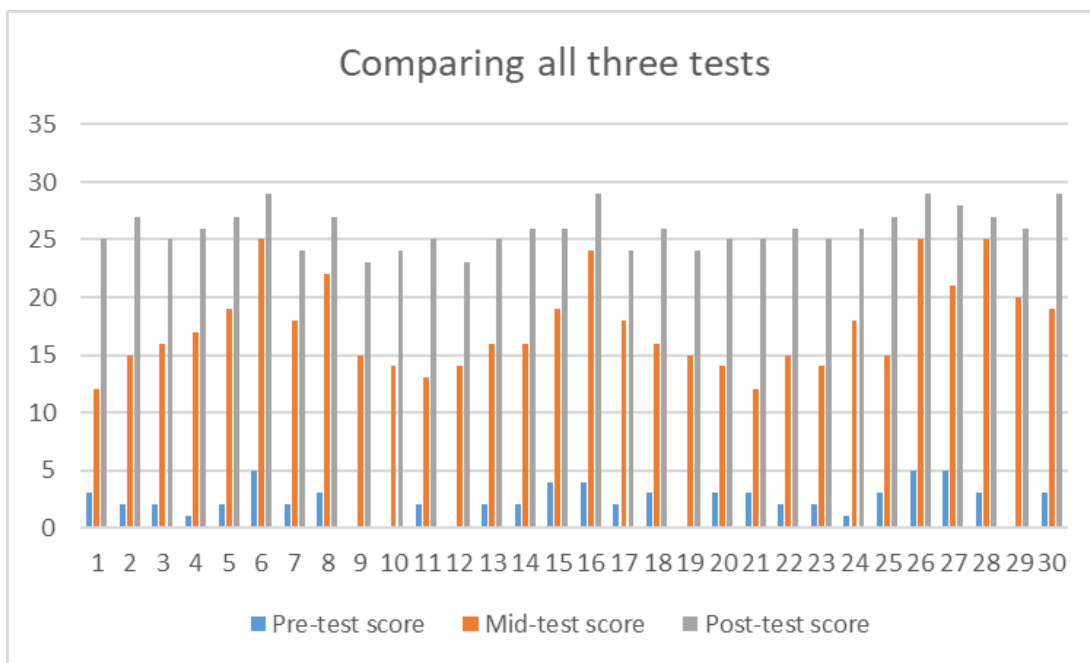*Figure 6: Mid-Test And Post-Test Score Comparisons*

Figure 7: Pre-Test, Mid-Test, and Post-Test Score Comparisons

3.3.3 QUALITATIVE DATA

The interviews were thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the participants' experiences and perceptions. The participant's opinions are stated and analyzed below:

1. Interviewee one: "Before the vocabulary lessons, I struggled to express myself clearly, but now I feel much more confident using a wider range of words."

Struggles and improvement can be seen in her words. The interviewee expresses a common struggle with limited vocabulary before the lessons. However, she notes a marked improvement afterward, indicating the effectiveness of the learning process in addressing her initial challenges.

2. Interviewee two: "The pre-test was a wake-up call for me; I realized how limited my vocabulary was. However, after the lessons, I see a significant improvement in my communication ability."

His speech demonstrates awareness and reflection. The mention of pre-tests suggests a structured approach to assessing progress. This indicates that the interviewee was actively engaged in monitoring his learning and was able to reflect on his growth throughout the process.

3. Interviewee three: "Learning new words from the Oxford Picture Dictionary was fun and engaging. It is amazing how much more expressive I feel after just a few weeks of focused learning."

We can see engagement and enjoyment in his ideas. Learning from the Oxford Picture Dictionary was described as fun and engaging. This highlights the importance of enjoyable learning experiences in maintaining motivation and facilitating effective learning outcomes.

4. Interviewee four: "I could already feel the difference during the mid-test. I found myself using words I had just learned, and it felt great to see that reflected in my test results."

The interviewee mentions application and integration. During the mid-test, she noticed newly learned words integrating her communication, indicating a practical application of the vocabulary acquired during the lessons. This demonstrates acquiring new words and using them appropriately in context.

5. Interviewee five: "The post-test results blew me away. I never thought I could improve my vocabulary this much in such a short time. It is empowering to know I now have a broader arsenal of words to convey my thoughts and ideas."

In her opinion, surprise and empowerment can be seen. The post-test results exceeded the interviewees' expectations, leading to feelings of empowerment. This suggests that the significant improvement in vocabulary had a transformative effect on their confidence and self-perception, reinforcing the value of ongoing learning efforts.

Overall, these interviews highlight the transformative impact of vocabulary learning on individuals' communication skills, confidence, and self-perception, underscoring the importance of structured and engaging learning experiences in facilitating such growth.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study explored the effectiveness of an 8-session vocabulary teaching program grounded in the Oxford Picture Dictionary among 30 EFL university students. The results revealed a statistically substantial enhancement in vocabulary proficiency from the initial assessment to the final evaluation, underscoring the program's positive impact on language learners. Educators can integrate these findings into their teaching practices, while policymakers can leverage them to advocate for evidence-based approaches to language education.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study have practical implications for educators and curriculum developers. Using the Oxford Picture Dictionary in a structured instructional setting demonstrated its efficacy in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Integrating visually rich and context-based materials into language instruction can potentially contribute to more engaging and effective student learning experiences.

6. CONCLOSION

In conclusion, while the literature provides valuable insights into effective vocabulary teaching methods and recognizes the potential of the Oxford Picture Dictionary, a focused investigation into its impact within structured educational settings is warranted. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by assessing the specific efficacy of the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program in enhancing vocabulary proficiency among language learners. As the saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Comprehending vocabulary and concepts is facilitated when learners have visual representations of the material presented by the teacher. This visual aid enhances the learning process, resulting in greater productivity and efficiency and instilling a sense of optimism about the potential of this teaching method. Finally, the results of this study suggest that the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program positively and significantly influences vocabulary acquisition. This insight can empower educators to tailor their language instruction, benefiting students' language proficiency. For researchers, this study provides empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program, contributing to the knowledge of vocabulary acquisition. For policymakers, these findings can inform decisions on language education policies, advocating for evidence-based approaches.

7. LIMITATION & RECOMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While our study provides valuable insights, it has limitations. The sample size of 30 students and the specific context in which the program was implemented may limit the generalizability of the findings because external factors such as individual learning styles and prior language proficiency were also not extensively explored.

To build on this research, future studies could consider expanding the sample size and exploring the impact of the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program across diverse educational contexts. Long-term follow-up assessments could provide insights into the sustainability of vocabulary gains over time. Furthermore, investigating the program's

effectiveness with specific learner populations, such as English language learners or individuals with different learning styles, could offer a nuanced understanding of its applicability. In conclusion, this study adds to the existing body of literature on vocabulary teaching by offering empirical proof of the positive impact of the Oxford Picture Dictionary-based program in a structured educational setting. Integrating visual and context-based elements emerged as promising to enhance vocabulary acquisition. As educators continue to adapt methods of teaching vocabulary, the results of this research highlight the importance of incorporating innovative resources, such as the Oxford Picture Dictionary, to enrich language instruction and support diverse learners in their linguistic development.

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