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## **The Effect of Using TV Advertisements on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Acquisition and Listening Comprehension**

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### **Abstract**

In English classrooms, teachers face different problems in teaching vocabulary items and finding a way to improve listening comprehension. The purpose of this study is to find a more practical way to make vocabulary learning and listening comprehension easier. This study aims to investigate the effect of using TV advertisements on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and improvement of listening comprehension. So, a quasi-experimental design was adopted to implement the study. Therefore, 46 upper-intermediate level students participated in this study which proceeded throughout an academic term. To see the effect of the proposed method, a paired t-test was implemented on data by R programming as well as a two samples t-test to investigate if there was any difference between male and female learners' acquisition and comprehension. As a result, the use of TV advertisements had a positive influence on the learners' vocabulary acquisition and improvement of listening comprehension regardless of the learners' gender.

**Keywords:** EFL learner, TV advertisement, Vocabulary acquisition, Listening comprehension.

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## **Introduction**

Today, there is a general measure of agreement that 'knowing' a word involves knowing its spoken and written contexts of use, its patterns with words of related meaning as well as its collocation partners, and its syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse patterns. It means knowing a word actively and productively as well as receptively. Such understandings have clear implications for vocabulary teaching.

Vocabulary plays a very important role in learning a language. The more words one knows, the more he/she will be able to understand what they hear, and read, and as a result will be able to write in a more elective way. Vocabulary learning seems like one of the easiest steps in learning a language, but in fact, it is one of the most difficult ones to do. It even gets more crucial when it comes to EFL learners. These learners do not have sufficient opportunity to use a foreign language, and consequently face serious problems in learning and using words (Yongqi, 2003). As an essential skill for the language learning process, listening is extensively recognized (Goh, 2000; Mendelsohn, 2008). In order to have the process of decoding information which is very complex, stronger vocabulary competence is needed for listening comprehension. The example of research studies implemented in this field demonstrates that a faster and more effective word recognition than comprehending written input is needed (Matthews & Cheng, 2015) and they could be stated for this notion. The present study was conducted due to the lack of experimental research studies which intend to discover the role of vocabulary awareness in listening comprehension.

## **Review of the Related Literature**

### **Teaching Vocabulary**

Words are one of the most important parts of life. Undoubtedly, words change life continually and will continue to change it (Pikulski & Templeton, 2004). It was also proved that there is a very close relationship between English word storage and achievement in life. Low vocabulary knowledge is a kind of imperfection. Indeed, in order to get what someone is talking about or in order to perceive what is read, having acceptable word knowledge plays a crucial role (Shoebottom, 2013). Therefore, it can be specified that vocabulary knowledge plays a major role in learning a language.

On the importance of vocabulary, Wilkins (1972 as cited in Schmitt, 2012, p. 3) states “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. Recently the effectiveness of rich vocabulary knowledge has been emphasized (Zahedi&Abdi, 2012). Unfortunately, language learners who are not successful in developing word knowledge could not comprehend texts of various kinds in advanced levels.

Teaching a foreign language is not just a concern of presenting grammatical structures. Knowledge on how a word or phrase should be used in order to convey meaning is also equally important. Therefore, one of the most substantial aspects when learning a language is to master how to broaden vocabulary (Thornbury, 2000). In fact, the first aspect of language that any person learns in his or her mother tongue is related to a set of words which help them communicate. According to Thornbury (2000, p. 1), “language emerges first as words, both historically, and in terms of the way each of us learned our first and any subsequent language”. Consequently, the more words the learners know, the more fluent they become whilst utilizing a foreign language. As Folse (2008, p. 12) states, “basic level of vocabulary will allow learners to communicate some ideas to a certain degree, better communication can be accomplished when learners have acquired more vocabulary”.

Words do not exist in isolation in a language. In other words, words are interwoven in a complex system in which knowledge of various levels of a lexical item is required in order to achieve a sufficient understanding in listening or reading and produce ideas successfully in speaking and writing. Richards (1994) contends that knowing a lexical item includes knowledge of word frequency, collocations, register, case relations, underlying forms, word association, and semantic structure. Without sufficient input, which is vocabulary, students will not be able to speak that language properly. The importance of vocabulary can be noticed from the rise of dawn till the present day. Kin and Rodman (1974) specify that our concern should be focused not only on the acquisition of grammar and pronunciation, but additionally on the acquisition of the basic units of meaning: vocabulary or lexical of language.

To enable students to use EFL, they should be taught the convenient words for everyday conversations which are called ‘common words’. Students should be taught these kinds of words to be able to speak and convey their simple ideas. When such words are learnt, the new language can immediately be put to use (Rupley and Nichols 1999).

### **Role of TV advertisements in EFL learning**

Although TV commercial researchers have been supporting commercials as a language learning instrument, this source has never been actually established in the EFL classroom (Erkaya, 2005). Most of the studies which focused on the influence and efficiency of TV advertisements on English as a foreign language comprise classroom research and teachers' individual skills (Davis, 1997; Goldthorpe, 1993; Katchen, 1993). Using TV advertisements in the EFL classroom embrace lots of advantages for language teachers. For example, the size of TV advertisements is ideal for new language learners (Davis, 1997; Erkaya, 2005). In contrast with materials like TV shows or movies, TV commercials are not so long in a way that they make students bored. Additionally, they are selected easily since they do not last long.

Another great benefit is that TV advertisements embrace authentic content (Smith & Rawley, 1997). They have been constituted for native speakers and spoken in everyday English. In addition to this, not only the native speakers from one culture, but also TV commercials are created in many different English-speaking countries and make it possible for students to have access to a different types of English.

### **The Role of Vocabulary Knowledge in Listening Comprehension**

Although previous studies have recognized a strong and significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Ehsanzadeh, 2012; Qian, 2002; Stæhr, 2008), these studies (the results of these studies) cannot be generalized to listening comprehension. This is because "listening is not merely an auditory version of reading" (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002, p. 194). This is a strong motivation to discover the importance of the connection between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension.

More recently, Teng (2014) attempted to discover the predictive role of vocabulary knowledge in listening comprehension. There was a strong correlation between vocabulary load and listening comprehension as the findings in the study demonstrated.

### **The Significance of the Study and Research Questions:**

The main goal of the present study is to establish an understanding of the vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension of EFL learners through TV advertisements in Iranian context. Moreover, an attempt was made to examine whether using TV advertisements in class was an effective way of improving vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. Examining studies reported in the literature review section, one can reach the conclusion that the area of improvement of vocabulary learning and listening

comprehension in EFL classes still needs further research, especially in an EFL context like Iran.

1. Does utilizing TV advertisements have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?
2. Does utilizing TV advertisements have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?
3. Is there any relationship between the gender of the students and their improvement in vocabulary and listening comprehension?

## **Methodology**

### **Design of the Study**

This study has a quasi-experimental design and without random assignment. According to Cook & Campbell (1979) the quasi-experimental research is a research which resembles experimental research but is not completely the same as experimental research. Although the independent variable is manipulated, participants are not randomly assigned to conditions or orders of conditions (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Forty-six English language learners (27 females and 19 males) were involved in this study. Participants were divided into two groups: The first group was the control group (13 females and 10 males) who received no treatment and the second group was the experimental group (14 females and 9 males) who received treatment. The aim of the researchers was to teach unnecessary unknown vocabulary items during 15 sessions with and without treatment (some selected TV advertisements) and then compare the results of the two groups to investigate the effectiveness of the treatment or in other words the effectiveness of TV advertisements (independent variable) on vocabulary learning and improvement of listening comprehension (dependent variables).

### **Participants**

In this study the participants were selected from a well-known institute, in Tabriz, Iran. A total of 46 language learners (27 females and 19 males with an age range of 17-22) participated in the study. Students were selected from 4 classes which were 2 female and 2 male classes. Each course in this institute contains 15 sessions and there are three class hours a week. Teaching new topics, vocabulary, functions and improvement of listening skill are included in the course objectives. In order to have a further competence in communication, a

variety of social materials are used to activate vocabulary learning and listening comprehension. Participants' background languages are either Azeri as their mother tongue or Farsi language as the second language and official education language in Iran. Cambridge Flyer Proficiency Test was administered prior to starting the program in order to ensure that students' proficiency levels were homogeneous. The results of the proficiency test showed that all participants were at upper intermediate level.

### **Instruments**

In order to make sure that all of the students are at approximately the same level (i.e. Upper intermediate level) the first instrument employed in this study is the *Cambridge Flyer Proficiency Test*. The test was based on four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the beginning of the program, the researchers drew on two tests, a pre-test which was taken by the experimental group and control groups for comparability. At the end of the treatment, a post-test was administrated to measure the effectiveness of the TV advertisements on vocabulary learning and listening comprehension. Other materials were appropriate English TV advertisements to the level of the students, which were employed to teach the vocabulary items and help students in understanding and improving listening comprehension, to the experimental group.

### **Procedure**

#### **Stage1: warm up**

The initial stage was planned to appeal students' interest and create curiosity and activate their motivation as it is true with most of the activities. Researchers tried to accomplish this by generating a discussion context by means of open-ended questions so as to understand what the message they are trying to send is. Additionally, the discussion can begin by asking moral type questions about what is appropriate dress (such as asking the definition of appropriate dress). Still the teacher may want to create a survey or handout or develop predicting activities for this brainstorming activity.

#### **Stage 2: viewing**

##### **Silent viewing and prediction:**

The teacher started the commercial solely in the visual mode and put the following questions on a handout or on the board. The questions for this stage were provided in Table 1.

Table 1

*Questions in viewing Stage*

Brain storming	Eliciting background knowledge (vocabulary)
1. What is the advertised product in the commercial?	1. What is the purpose of the commercial?
2. What other elements do you see in the commercial?	2. Why does the advertiser use these particular elements?
3. Are there any new vocabulary in the commercial?	3. What are they?
4. What is the slogan of the commercial?	4. What message does the slogan try to communicate?

**Viewing: securing adequate comprehension**

The viewing phase was intended to focus students' attention on some aspect of the commercial relevant to the lesson being conducted: the content, the vocabulary. The teacher may show the TV commercial several times until she is certain that students understand the scenario and content. As students are viewing the commercial, teacher should ask for clarifications. Furthermore, the teacher may want to view the commercial merely in the visual mode initially to allow students to experience it with less input.

**Watching advertisement with sound and securing listening comprehension:**

The activities for the viewing stage require students to watch the commercial with a purpose. As with the previewing stage, the particular activities changed with the commercial being used. In the viewing stage, students first watch and listen to the commercials and write down what they comprehend about the advertisement. The teacher asks the students to take notes down on a paper if they hear any new words or phrases and try to explore their meaning by watching the whole advertisements while watching the advertisements. Students are given a text which is the whole advertisement passages in order to help them get the meaning on their own easily.

**Stage 3: Post-viewing**

The post-viewing stage was intended to engage students in using information from the commercials to evaluate what they learned and check their listening comprehension and integrate information. They had opportunities to ask questions regarding vocabulary, pronunciation, structures, and cultural themes. The post-viewing phase consisted of:

- Checking and learning the dialogs
- Checking the listening comprehension
- Assigning new vocabulary
- Practicing new vocabulary in group

The selected words were taught to the experimental group through listening and watching TV advertisements and to the control group through traditional instruction. Students in the control group were given the vocabulary items in English with their equivalents in their official educational language and second language (Farsi). They were allowed to use English-Persian dictionaries in their usual way, which is without special training. They were also permitted to ask the teacher to translate words when there was a need to do so. At the end of the program, one post-test was administered on the groups and all the collected data were analyzed by means of R programming.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **TV advertisement effect on vocabulary acquisition**

In order to measure the effect of TV advertisements on learners' vocabulary acquisition, a paired t-test was utilized in order to explore if there was a significant difference between learners' vocabulary score before and after the treatment for the experimental group and control group separately. Table 1 shows the output of the tests for both groups. It is seen from Table 1 that the mean value of the pre-test for both experimental and control groups are almost the same (around 80) while the corresponding mean values of the post-test for the experimental group (almost 85) is much higher than the control group (80.5). In order to investigate the significance of this improvement, the paired t-test was applied which employs the difference values between pre-test scores and post-test scores and compares its mean with zero.

The null hypothesis in the paired t-test was that the difference between the two tests is zero. Therefore, according to the p-values (almost zero 0.227 for the experimental and the control group, respectively), the difference between the scores of pre-test and post-test for the experimental group (4.87) is far from zero in contrast to the control group (0.35).

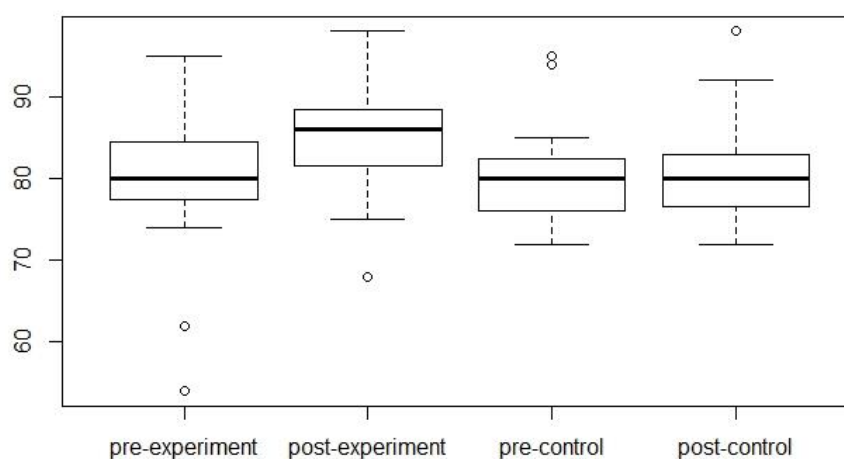
Table 1

*The descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test vocabulary scores for the experimental and control group and the results of the paired t-tests.*



Group	Test type	Mean	Standard deviation	t-statistics	p-value
Experimental	Pre-test	80.39	8.94		
	Post-test	85.26	7.23		
	difference	4.87	3.80	-6.13	0.000
Control	Pre-test	80.09	5.84		
	Post-test	80.43	5.96		
	difference	0.35	1.34	-1.25	0.227

In the following, to provide a visual representation of Table 1, the boxplots of Figure 1 indicate the scores of all groups within the same picture.



**Figure1:** The boxplots of pre-test and post-test vocabulary scores of the learners from both experimental and control groups.

### TV advertisement effect on listening comprehension

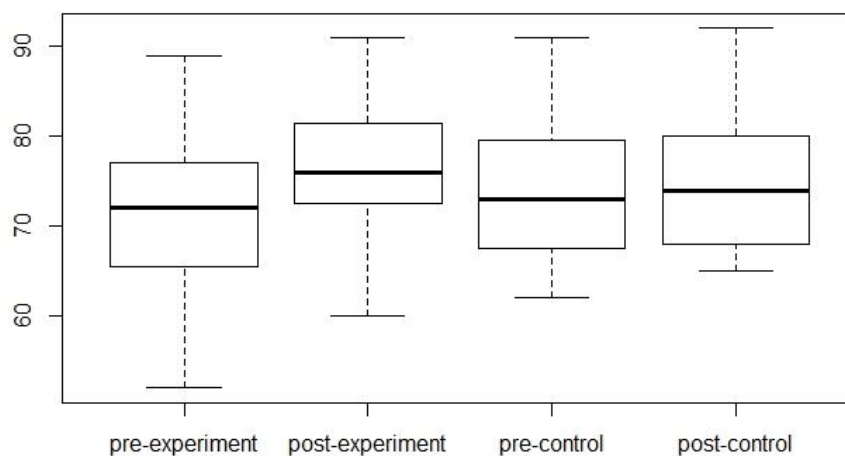
The same method was implemented to investigate the effect of TV advertisements on learners' listening comprehension. Similar to the previous hypothesis for the vocabulary improvement, for the listening comprehension the paired t-test was used as well to test if there was a change in the learners' listening comprehension score in the experimental group or not. In the following, Table 2 represents the results for the listening skill.

Table2

*The descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test listening comprehension scores of the experimental and control groups and the results of the paired t-tests.*

Group	Test type	Mean	Standard deviation	t-statistics	p-value
Experimental	Pre-test	71.61	8.82		
	Post-test	76.7	8.10		
	difference	5.09	4.48	-5.44	0.000
Control	Pre-test	73.96	8.07		
	Post-test	74.78	7.33		
	difference	0.83	2.41	-1.86	0.11

Based on the values of Table 2, the mean of listening comprehension scores of the experimental group before watching TV advertisements (around 72) was even less than control group results (almost 74) while the mean of the post-test listening scores for the experimental group (almost 77) was higher than the mean of the post-test listening scores of the control group (around 75). However, as mentioned earlier, the null hypothesis of the tests in Table 2 is that the difference between the mean value of the listening scores of pre-test and post-test equals zero which means TV advertisements had no effect on the learners' listening comprehension proficiency. It is obvious from Table 2 that the null hypothesis cannot be accepted for the experimental group in which the mean of the differences is more than 5 score unlike the control group in which the mean of the differences is less than 1 score. In conclusion, the experimental group learners' listening comprehension ability improved while it was almost the same for the control group. Moreover, Figure 2 demonstrates a graphical representation of Table 2 to provide a further understanding.



**Figure2:** The boxplots of pre-test and post-test listening scores of the learners from both experimental and control groups.

### Difference between genders in the improvement level of vocabulary and listening

For the third hypothesis which contemplates the equality of the vocabulary and listening comprehension improvement means for male and female learners, a two-sample t-test is (was) performed.

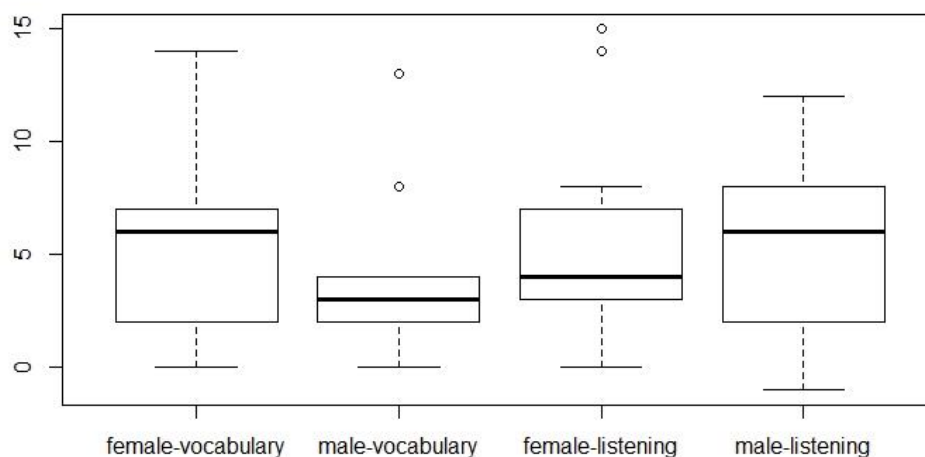
Table 3

*The descriptive statistics of the vocabulary and listening score improvements for the experimental group in terms of gender as well as the two-sample t-test outputs.*

Skill	Group	Mean	Standard deviation	t-statistics	p-value
Vocabulary improvement	female	5.28	3.81		
	male	4.22	3.92		
	t-test			0.64	0.53
Listening improvement	female	5.07	4.59		
	male	5.11	4.56		
	t-test			-0.02	0.98

According to Table 3, although the mean of the vocabulary score improvement is higher for female learners (5.28) than male learners (4.22), there is no statistically significant difference due to the high p-value (0.53). Similarly, in terms of listening comprehension, the difference between male and female score improvement is not statistically significant since the p-value is higher than 0.05.

To sum up, the scores of listening comprehension and vocabulary learning enhanced by using TV advertisements in the EFL class. On the other hand, there was no gender-based difference in the learner's improvement in terms of vocabulary and listening comprehension. To have a further understanding of the mentioned comparison between genders, Figure 3 represents the boxplot of the scores related to vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension improvement regarding different genders.



**Figure 2:** The boxplots related to the improvement of the scores for the vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension skills in terms of gender.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In spite of the fact that making use of authentic materials in classrooms is not a new technique, there is a limited number of studies on the effects of TV advertisements on lexis learning and listening comprehension. Tuzi et al. (2012) investigated the effect of TV advertisements on ESL/EFL learning. They discovered that TV ads are useful for language learning due to their inherent characteristics, i.e., the shortness of advertisements (30-50 seconds). They also specified that advertisements are created in many English-speaking countries and this results in providing the opportunity of having access to a variety of Englishes. They concluded that through using advertisements learners' language learning improved significantly.

Davis (1997) and Lee (1994) also found that students who were exposed to TV advertisements performed better in listening. They also claimed that students were of higher motivation for language learning. They refer to the contextual clues of advertisements which help learners to get the linguistic meaning of them. Ozdemir (2007) argued that it is better for teachers to utilize the original intent of advertisements and their cultural elements to teach critical thinking and culture. Fox (2002) also highlighted the role of advertisements in teaching/learning processes.

All of the studies which were conducted on the effects of TV advertisements on language learning support its crucial role on vocabulary learning and listening comprehension as well as other skills.

In this study the researchers attempted to investigate the effect of TV ads on improving vocabulary learning and listening comprehension. The statistical results revealed that there was a significant improvement in the performance of the learners in terms of both vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension through TV advertisements. The findings also reflected that there was no significant difference regarding the mentioned improvement in both of the skills between males and females.

The results of this study suggest a number of implications which need to be taken into consideration by EFL teachers, educators, textbooks writers, and syllabus designers. In order to have successful learning in EFL classes, advertisements can be recommended as a useful material. By this means, learners would learn that the essential factor in learning a foreign language is not only knowing the text itself, but also gaining knowledge to interpret it appropriately in order to respond to it correctly. Teachers can help the learners to be independent by knowing how to show the learners to improve different language areas instead of using solely textbooks. For further studies, researchers suggest that watching TV advertisements can be beneficial to learners' pronunciation, speaking skill and accent improvement.

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