



The Effects of using Pictures on EFL Learners' Vocabulary Retention

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Abstract

Innovation is necessary for improvement. This inspirational saying triggered the author to try new things for enhancement. This study explored the effect of using pictures to instruct vocabulary in EFL classrooms. At the same time, the EFL students' attitudes toward this instruction were also examined. To have the data for the study, a group of 70 seventh-graders at Duyen Hai Ethnic Boarding Junior High School in Tra Vinh province were recruited as participants. The study had two parts. The first part of the study dealt with the intervention of vocabulary instruction in the two groups of students. 35 students were chosen for the experimental group, and the other 35 for the control group. The experimental group was exposed to vocabulary instruction with pictures while the control group was taught with the traditional vocabulary teaching method (without using pictures). Both groups had undergone the pretest, posttest, and delayed tests. The results showed that both groups' scores on vocabulary tests improved, but the experimental group's scores were higher than that of its counterparts. Then, the study also had the result of the experimental students' attitudes toward the intervention of using pictures to teach vocabulary. They had a positive attitude toward this teaching strategy. Finally, based on the results of the study, some suggestions and limitations of the study were proposed.

Keywords:

*Attitudes
Effects
Using pictures
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1. Introduction

Nowadays, English is considered an international language, which is used to communicate between people around the world. In Vietnam, most people use English as a foreign language for studying and business transactions with their partners worldwide. Due to those reasons, English has been taught at different levels of education from primary education to tertiary education as a compulsory subject. According to the National Foreign Language Project 2020, the primary purpose of teaching and learning English is to develop the learners' communicative competence based on learner-centered communicative teaching methods (Pdfcoffee, 2022).

In learning a foreign language, the primary goal of many learners is to acquire the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other components of language including vocabulary, structure, pronunciation, etc. In the early stages of second/foreign language learning, vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of any language that needs to be discussed with great care and attention. It plays a vital role in language learning. Wilkins (1972) claimed that without vocabulary, little information is conveyed, and

limited information is gained with limited grammar. It is essential to know the vocabulary to learn the four skills. Vocabulary is one of the essential aspects of learning English and nothing can be transmitted without vocabulary. Therefore, learning vocabulary is an essential component of learning new languages in general and is the first step in learning English in particular.

According to English teaching and learning theory, the ability to use English combines knowledge and skills. Vocabulary knowledge, therefore, plays a vital role in improving language proficiency. [Sadiku \(2005\)](#) reported that a learner cannot master the four skills unless he masters the vocabulary. It is evident that the more vocabulary English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have, the fewer barriers they meet in their communication. [Della and Hocking \(1992\)](#) confirmed the importance of vocabulary in communication. In particular, with some grammar, learners can speak fluently, but without vocabulary, learners find it challenging to identify the information they are trying to express. Therefore, the role of vocabulary knowledge in improving the four skills cannot be denied. Likewise, students need a good vocabulary for simple communication. Vocabulary education is an important area for students because vocabulary is crucial in foreign language learning. [Cameron \(2001\)](#) found that vocabulary plays a vital role in young learners' language acquisition. Therefore, teaching vocabulary to young learners should not only convey words and meanings but also help them memorize words. Great attention must be taken to applying appropriate teaching methods and techniques. Moreover, regarding biological and psychological characteristics, children tend to connect to their environment. They are more interested in real-life reflection materials and objects than abstract concepts. In addition to teaching methods and supportive strategies, teaching materials in general and visual aids, in particular, are essential for improving vocabulary retention for young learners.

Teaching vocabulary for young learners using visual aids in general and pictures, in particular, is one pedagogical approach that attracts the attention of not only English teachers but also many learners who are concerned. Using pictures to teach vocabulary is considered to be an effective way to motivate EFL learners, and using pictures is considered one of the teaching methods that are commonly used in the teaching and learning process. [Chesla](#) (as cited in [Al-Khresheh, Khaerurrozikin, and Zaid \(2020\)](#)) said humans are very visually oriented, so they can remember much better when we can see, hear or read visual things.

To find out an applicable and practical teaching method that I hope to help increase the vocabulary learning outcomes here, the researcher would like to research the effects of using pictures on EFL learners' vocabulary retention was conducted and guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent do pictures affect EFL learners' vocabulary retention?
2. What are the EFL learners' attitudes toward using pictures in learning vocabulary?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Vocabulary

2.1.1. Definitions of Vocabulary

In foreign language learning, vocabulary is a critical component that provides the foundation for learners' success in other skills such as: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. There are several ways to define vocabulary. The term vocabulary refers to the words that are known or used by a particular person or used in a language or subject, according to the [Cambridge University Press \(2022\)](#). [Hatch and Brown \(1995\)](#) defined vocabulary as a list or collection of specific language terms that could be used by individual speakers of a language. In other words, the vocabulary of someone is the total number of words he/she understands and uses when talking about a specific subject. [Cameron \(2001\)](#) states vocabulary is considered one of the important areas of language knowledge for language acquisition learners. Furthermore, [Mart \(2012\)](#) expressed that the important organ and the flesh of language are vocabulary.

In brief, there are a variety of ways to define vocabulary. It is a set of meaningful words and plays a significant role in helping language learners to communicate. As seen, without it, a speaker cannot say anything about that language.

2.1.2. Kinds of Vocabulary

According to [Nemati \(2010\)](#) there are active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary is words or phrases that are used by learners in their speech and writing. It is often referred to as a productive language. Passive vocabulary is words or phrases that are grasped and understood while listening or reading. It is called receptive vocabulary. Besides, [Hatch and Brown \(1995\)](#) confirmed that vocabulary has two types which are receptive vocabulary and effective vocabulary. All words that individual learners can recognize and understand when it is used in context rather than created, it called receptive vocabulary. [Alqahtani \(2015\)](#) emphasized that the words that learners recognize when they see or meet when reading a given text but do not use in speaking and writing are known as receptive vocabularies. It is essential that learners can understand, pronounce words correctly, and use them in a constructive way either orally or in written form.

2.1.3. The Role of Vocabulary in Language Learning

The main purpose of language teaching and learning is to communicate through the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. [Laufer \(1997\)](#) argued that vocabulary is a necessary foundation in all stages of

language learning. Therefore, vocabulary is considered an additional component of the above skills. Knowledge of vocabulary is a necessary part of the language that learners need to communicate successfully besides a wide range of grammatical structures. This is true in teaching and learning foreign languages.

The role of vocabulary is confirmed indirectly through the problems that lack vocabulary brings, including that learners find it difficult to acquire and use language effectively (Goulden, Nation, & Read, 1990).

It is brightening that in helping people communicate as well as in creating many different types of discourse, vocabulary plays a heavy role. Effective teaching and learning a foreign language depends greatly on vocabulary background. Therefore, vocabulary must be an important aspect of foreign language teaching methods.

2.2. Vocabulary Retention

2.2.1. Definitions of Vocabulary Retention

According to Cambridge University Press. (2022) "Retention" refers to the continued use, existence, or possession of something or someone. Retention mentions the conscious procedures that can include rote learning, practice, and associative learning. Meaningful learning is distinguished from rote learning in the Theory of Meaning Learning (Ausubel, 1968). He posited that rote learning is the essential process of acquiring material as disconnected and approximately isolated entities. It involves memorizing items that have little or no relevance to existing cognitive structures.

In contrast, meaningful learning allows learners to relate the new material to related items in their previous knowledge. It involves the mental storage of items that have little or no relation to existing cognitive structures.

2.2.2. Kinds of Retention

When talking about retention, one soon refers to memory. There are two types of memory. According to Norris (2017) short-term memory is mainly used to activate long term memory. To have long-term memory, short-term memory must be acquired first. Then, once long-term memory exists, it needs short-term memory to activate it for recognition of things around.

2.2.3. The Process of Vocabulary Retention

The goal of vocabulary learning is to transfer lexical information from short-term memory, where it resides during language manipulation, learners need all the linguistic information learned and transferred into long-term memory. Although there are different types of memory such as verbal memory, visual memory, etc., memory operation comprises three processes, namely encoding, rehearsal, and retrieval (Richards, 2006). Similarly, Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) show that the storage model includes encoding, storage, and retrieval. They explain that encoding is the process of converting information into a form that can enter your memory; furthermore, storage is explained as the period of keeping information for different periods. The final stage, retrieval, is the stage where specific information is located and accessed when it is needed at a later time.

Moreover, Nation (2001) advocated that oral repetition of a word, and learning definition, is not as effective as having to recall its form. He explained that with new words we need to practice and review what we have learned; otherwise, the new input will be gradually dropped in memory. Stevick (1996) indicated that words must be recommended and applied many times in different situations. Because of this, learners can put learned vocabulary into their long-term memory. In addition, Davis and Squire (1984) described that giving students time to process new information is important. Short-term memory takes as little as a few seconds to process stimuli, while long-term memory takes longer. In other words, the teacher talking continuously for a long time does not mean a good teaching process, and perhaps this process does not allow students to absorb the learning process and thereby needing plenty of time to help learners retain the knowledge of things.

2.3. Pictures

2.3.1. Definitions of Pictures

Pictures are a type of visual aid that can be used more effectively to develop and maintain motivation in creating a positive attitude toward English and to teach or reinforce language skills. Multiple definitions of pictures are given by some authors as follows:

According to Wright (1989) "Using pictures is not only one aspect of the method, but also through the representation of places, objects, and people and it is a fundamental part of the total experience to recognize and visualize things more effectively" (p. 29). Based on such definitions, both the students and teachers can make use of pictures to help to teach more interesting and effective and to help the students to learn faster and retain longer. There is a popular saying a long time ago "One picture is worth a thousand words". The picture is one of the education media that supports teaching-learning process in the classroom, which can be seen as a precious means of teaching using images of reality in the unnatural world of the language classroom (Hill, 1990). Likewise, Harmer (2001) said frequently teachers were found to use many forms of pictures such as using their drawings, book pictures, newspaper and magazine pictures, or photographs to facilitate learning. According to Felma (as cited in Sari (2017)) pictures can be used to motivate students to learn and thereby

helping them to think positively about their learning. Additionally, pictures help make students have a feeling of liking to strive and thrive in their studies.

In general, pictures are used as one type of visual aids to support the classroom teacher to build their interesting lessons and to appeal their students to their lessons. In addition, if students can use pictures correctly, they can maximize their vocabulary learning and can memorize such loads of learned vocabulary in a long term.

2.3.2. The Role of Using Pictures in EFL Learning and Teaching Context

Teachers should be always aware that teaching English to EFL students is not an easy task, and they need competence and professional skills to implement a great number of tasks in the classroom. Then, teachers can think of using pictures to optimize their teaching tasks. As known, pictures play an important role in teaching and studying English as a foreign language or as a second language. According to Gerlach (1980) pictures have plenty of benefits. For starters, photos are inexpensive and widely available, and they can assist in avoiding and correcting falsehoods. Second, they provide opportunities for everyone in the community to interact. Finally, pictures motivate students to study, read, and investigate more, as well as help them focus their attention and make better critical judgments.

As can be seen, pictures are regarded as a favorable visual teaching approach that helps facilitate the curiosity and enthusiasm of learners to develop a good attitude towards English learning and teaching and more specifically in teaching and learning language vocabulary.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

The participants recruited for the study were 70 seventh graders, including 22 males and 48 females. Class 7/2 was assigned as the experimental group consisting of 10 males and 25 females, and class 7/1 was selected as the control group including 11 males and 24 females. The ages of the students range from 12 to 13 years old.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments were used in this research including a pretest, a posttest, a delayed test, an attitudinal questionnaire and semi-structured interview to collect the data. They were asked to do multiple choice questions in the post-test and the words to be tested were about the learnt words they encountered in class. The purpose of a delayed test aimed to compare the student's long-term vocabulary retention. It was also used to explore whether the participants in the experiment group were able to remember the learnt vocabulary with pictures. To collect the data on the participants' attitudes towards using pictures, the author designed a five-point Likert scale to measure their degree of agreement: 1 is for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for no idea, 4 for agree, and 5 for strongly agree. The students were free to choose the scale that best describes their opinion. An interview with eight randomly selected students was also conducted to obtain more ideas on using pictures to learn vocabulary. The question is "Why do you want your teacher to use pictures to teach you vocabulary?"

3.2.1. Pretest, Post-Test

According to Dimitrov and Rumrill Jr (2003) the preferred way to compare participant groups and assess the degree of improvement that occurs as a result of therapies or procedures is pretest-posttest designs.

To make sure that the participants' present knowledge of vocabulary prior the intervention, a pre-test of vocabulary was implemented for both the control and experimental groups. Vocabulary was chosen based on the wordlist in the student textbook for the seventh graders. In the pre-test, the students in both groups were asked to take a multiple-choice question test. Thirty new words were extracted from the English textbook for seventh graders published by Education Publishing House were used in the test, and the students had 15 minutes to complete the test. After analysis of the result, it showed that the participants in both control and experimental groups did not do the test well and both groups' scores were not different, showing that they had quite similar level of vocabulary knowledge.

After a 10-week intervention, a multiple-choice question post-test adopting these similar 30 new words from the pre-test was conducted. These thirty words were selected to be tested as they were unknown to the students in both groups of the students. Each correct response is worth 1.0 mark. Hence, 30 marks is the total score of the test. The students had 15 minutes to complete the test.

3.2.2. Delayed Post-Test

Then, after two weeks from the date of taking the post-test, a delayed test was also applied to test these same vocabulary items in the form of multiple choice questions, but the letter of the correct answer in the test was replaced. The purpose is to see if they could remember the learnt words to obtain evidence for their retention.

3.2.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used in this current study to collect data on the participants' attitudes towards using pictures to learn vocabulary. In this present research, the questionnaire is offered to collect data on students' attitudes toward using pictures on teaching EFL learners' vocabulary retention. There were 10 items to explore the students' attitudes towards using pictures to learn vocabulary. The participants were instructed to decide whether they strongly disagree, disagree, express a neutral idea, agree, or strongly agree with the items in the questions.

3.2.4. Interviews

The interview was applied as the author wanted to see how the randomly selected participants responded to the questions related to their attitudes toward using pictures as a vocabulary learning strategy provided by their instructor. Eight of the students in the experimental group were invited for the interviews.

3.3. Research Design

The study, the first aim is to explore the effects of using pictures to enhance EFL learners' vocabulary retention, and the second aim is to find out the students' attitudes toward using pictures to teach and learn vocabulary to ammoniate vocabulary retention. To achieve the goals of the study, the study developed an experimental qualitative orientation in which a pre-test of vocabulary was conducted to eliminate any known words by the two groups of students. The test was in the form of asking the students to write the English meaning for the target Vietnamese vocabulary. Then, the study used lesson plans to teach vocabulary using only pictures in an experimental class while he used a mixed method to teach vocabulary such as using pictures, situations, examples, antonyms/synonyms and translation) to teach the students in the control group. Finally, a post-test of learned vocabulary was conducted to test the two groups of participants (both experimental and control) to see how they did with the test. The test was in the form of multiple choice questions. Next, a delayed post-test was applied, and the students were asked to take the posttest. Then, a quantitative method was also employed. The experimental group was invited to take part in an attitudinal survey to see how they thought about their teacher's use of pictures to teach vocabulary in their class. Finally, eight experimental students were invited to join the interviews.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Participants' Vocabulary Retention within the Two Groups Before and After the Intervention

The Descriptive Statistics Test was run to get the data on the EFL learners' vocabulary retention information before and after the intervention. The data are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Descriptive data of students' vocabulary retention within the control group.

Tests done by control group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest control	35	2	10	7.06	1.846
Post-test control	35	17	25	20.40	2.117
Delayed-posttest control	35	15	23	18.51	2.063

As can be clearly seen from [Table 1](#), the data of the descriptive test showed that the mean scores of the post-test ($M=20.04$) and delay post-test ($M=18.51$) were much higher than that of the pre-test ($M=7.06$). It can be inferred that after the intervention the students' vocabulary retention of the control group was much improved.

Similarly, the Descriptive Statistic test was also conducted to identify the mean scores of the experimental group's pre-test, post-test, and delayed posttest results. The data are summarized and presented in [Table 2](#) below.

Table 2. Descriptive data of students' vocabulary retention within the experimental group.

Tests done by experimental group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Experimental	35	4	9	7.09	1.245
Post-Test Experimental	35	19	29	24.09	2.716
Delayed-Posttest Experimental	35	17	27	22.03	2.706

The mean score of the post-test ($M=24.09$) was much higher than that of the pre-test ($M=7.09$). In addition, the mean score of the delayed post-test ($M=22.03$) was higher than that of the pre-test but lower than that of the post-test. It can be concluded that after the intervention, the vocabulary retention of the experimental group was remarkably improved.

The progress of vocabulary retention of both the control and experimental group can be summarized in [Figure 1](#).

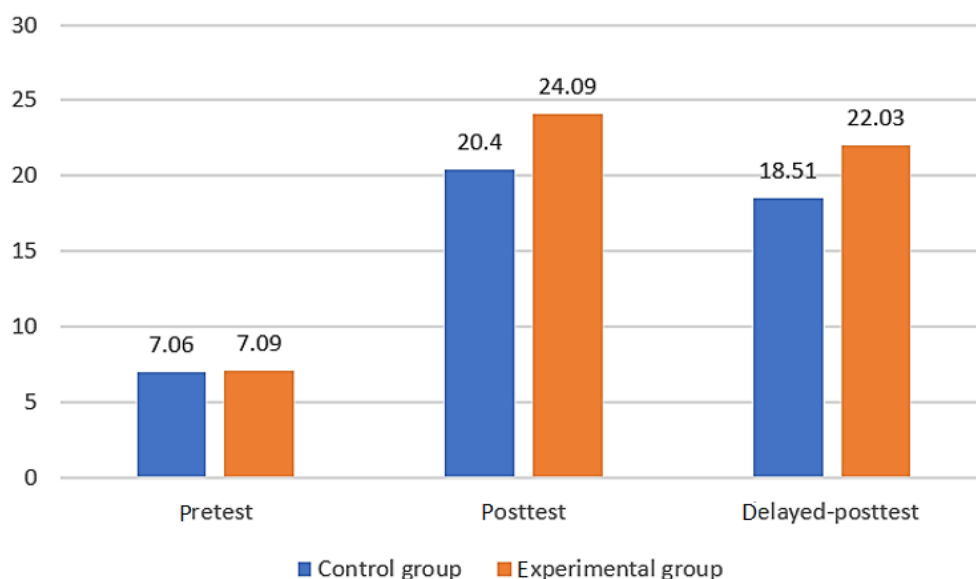


Figure 1. Summary of participants' mean scores on vocabulary retention before and after the study.

Figure 1 makes it very evident that, prior to the intervention, the mean scores of the control and experimental groups were nearly identical at 7.06 and 7.09, respectively. This low score indicated that the participants in the two groups knew little to nothing about the meanings of the words that would be introduced during the study. In contrast, after the intervention, the mean scores of the post-test of the control (M=20.40) and the experimental group (M=24.09) were higher than that of the pre-test in the two groups. The findings showed that both groups' vocabulary retention increased after the study.

Table 3. Paired samples T-test results of the pre-test and post-test.

	Mean	SD: Standard deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.(2- tailed)
			Lower	Upper				
Pretest control Post-test control	-13.343	2.496	0.422	-14.200		-12.485	-31.621	34
Pretest experimental-Post- test experimental	-17.000	3.404	0.575	-18.169		-15.831	-29.544	34

Table 3 illustrates the significance of mean difference of both groups. To do this, a Paired Samples T-test was run to check whether there was a significant difference between the result of the pre-test and post-test of the two groups. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean score of the pre-test and post-test in the control group ($t=-31.621$, $sig.=0.000$). At the same time, the results also indicated that the pre-test and post-test results in the experimental group were significantly different from that of the control group. It can be concluded that after the treatment both groups gained improvement in vocabulary retention, but the experimental group was found to be highly improved.

4.1.2. Participants' Vocabulary Retention between the Two Groups Before and After the Intervention

Comparison of participants' 'vocabulary retention between the two groups before the intervention and presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of the two groups before the intervention.

Vocabulary test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	Sig.
Pre-test	Control	35	7.06	1.846	-0.029	-0.076	0.940
	Experimental	35	7.09	1.245			

From Table 4, it can be seen that the mean score of the experimental group before the treatment (M = 7.09; SD = 1.245) and that of the control group (M = 7.06; SD = 1.846) are found to be very equal. It can be noticed that there is no difference between the two groups when compared ($t = 0.029$, $sig. = 0.940 > 0.05$). In other words, before the treatment, there was no difference in the initial vocabulary knowledge of the two research groups.

Comparison of participants 'vocabulary retention between the two groups after the intervention.

Table 5. Comparison of the two groups after the intervention.

Vocabulary test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	Sig.
Post-test	Control	35	20.40	0.117	-3.686	-6.332	0.000
	Experimental	35	24.09	0.716			
Delayed post-test	Control	35	18.51	0.063	-3.514	-6.110	0.000
	Experimental	35	22.03	0.706			

From the data shown in **Table 5**, it can be clearly seen that there was a significant statistical difference in the results of the posttest ($t=-6.332$, sig. $0.000 < 0.05$) and delayed posttest ($t=-6.110$, sig. $0.000 < 0.05$) of the control group and the experimental group after the treatment. It can be concluded that the participants' vocabulary retention had improved after the study.

4.1.3. The Experimental Group's Attitudes toward Vocabulary Learning Strategy they had Experienced

Before spending more time analysing individual responses of the experimental students, the author carried out the reliability of the questionnaire. **Table 6** showed the result of this purpose.

Table 6. Statistical reliability of the questionnaire.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.782	10

As can be seen in **Table 6**, the responses of the experimental students are reliable enough for deep analysis with the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.782 for 10 items in the questionnaire.

Table 7. Students' attitudes towards using pictures to teach vocabulary.

Statements	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD.
1. Using pictures to teach vocabulary makes me feel liking to study English more.	35	2.00	5.00	4.0286	0.78537
2. I like my teacher to use pictures to teach vocabulary every lesson.	35	3.00	5.00	4.0857	0.61220
3. I myself like guessing the meaning of vocabulary using pictures.	35	2.00	5.00	4.2000	0.79705
4. I like taking part in all learning vocabulary activities using pictures.	35	2.00	5.00	4.0000	1.00000
5. The way my teacher used pictures to introduce vocabulary helps me learn vocabulary faster and easier.		1.00	5.00	4.2857	0.92582
6. The way my teacher used pictures to introduce vocabulary helps me remember vocabulary longer.		3.00	5.00	4.1429	0.60112
7. I like the way my teacher used pictures to review learnt vocabulary as it helps me memorize it better.		3.00	5.00	4.2857	0.57248
8. I like the way my teacher used pictures to test learnt vocabulary in the exam papers.		1.00	5.00	4.2571	0.95001
9. When I learn vocabulary through pictures, I feel motivated.		3.00	5.00	3.8571	0.87927
10. Overall, I definitely like to study vocabulary with pictures.		3.00	5.00	4.4571	0.70054

Table 7 depicts the descriptive analysis result of the experimental students' responses to the the attitude questions. Overall, the experimental students have a very positive attitude towards the use of pictures to support learning vocabulary. Only one item (Item 9: 'When I learn vocabulary through pictures, I feel motivated', $M=3.8571$, $SD=.87927$) out of ten items obtained the mean score just below the scale 4 - at the agreement point. Although so, this mean score is still quite close to the scale 4. The majority of the items tend to receive higher agreement of the participants as follows. They are Item 3 "I myself like guessing the meaning of vocabulary using pictures" received the mean score of 4.2000 and its standard deviation of .79705. Item 5 "The way my teacher used pictures to introduce vocabulary helps me learn vocabulary faster and easier" obtained the mean score of 4.2857 and its standard deviation of .92582. Item 7 "I like the way my teacher used pictures to review learnt vocabulary as it helps me memorize it better" attained the mean score of 4.2857 and its standard deviation of .57248. Item 8 "I like the way my teacher used pictures to test learnt vocabulary in the exam papers" was awarded the mean score of 4.2571 and its standard deviation of .95001.

Item 10 “Overall, I definitely like to study vocabulary with pictures” obtained the mean score of 4.4571 and its standard deviation of 0.70054.

4.1.4. Interview

Student 01 said “Learning vocabulary with pictures helps me learn the words easier, and it can also help me easily think about an intended word”. This student also added that “It is easy to remember and it’s interesting”.

Student 02 stated “Learning vocabulary with pictures makes the lessons more interesting and it helps us remember words well”.

Student 03 stated “Learning vocabulary with pictures is interesting. In addition, I find it easier to learn vocabulary with pictures, so I can remember it better”.

Student 04 said “I find it easy to understand new words when I see pictures describing them”.

Student 05 stated “I can recognize vocabulary easily if I see the picture describing it and I can guess the meaning of it, too. Then, I can remember the words well”.

Student 06 said “Using pictures to learn vocabulary helps me remember it longer”.

Student 07 stated “As pictures are colorful, so they help learners to be creative and remember vocabulary easier”.

Student 08 stated “Instead of only copying new words from the board, with pictures learners find it to guess the vocabulary easier and memorize it longer. However, I prefer to learn vocabulary with pictures download from the Internet to those in the textbook”.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Research Question 1: To What Extent do Pictures Affect EFL Learners’ Vocabulary Retention?

First, the author would like to discuss the intervention of this use of method (using pictures to teach vocabulary). When learning a foreign language, the educators expect their students to learn at best. Yet, to learn at best, both the teachers and students have to try their best. This is cooperation between them. Then, in this thesis, the author, also a teacher in a secondary school at the Khmer Secondary Boarding school at Duyen Hai district, Tra Vinh province really wanted to help his students to develop their English so that they can advance their study at high school and university later. However, many aspects of a language need to be taught and improved, which takes time. Thus, in this thesis, the author was only able to try developing his students’ English vocabulary, so he investigated a teaching strategy called “vocabulary learning strategy”, which he believed to help enhance vocabulary learning and retention. In this study, the author invited 70 students who were at grade 6, and they were in two different classes. The experimental class consisted of 35 students and the control class had 35 students. The control group students learned vocabulary with the teacher, who used the traditional method (without using pictures), and the other group, experimental group, learned vocabulary with the teacher, who used pictures to instruct the vocabulary in the pre-teach vocabulary session. The result showed that both groups were improved. However, the mean score of the experimental group was slightly better at doing the vocabulary post-test (the post-test score of the control: 25, the post-test score of the experimental: 29). In addition, after 4 weeks of the vocabulary instruction (after taking the post-test), the mean scores of the students in both groups were still high. Again, the mean score of the experimental group were slightly higher than that of the control group students (the delayed post-test score of the control: 23, the delayed post-test score of the experimental: 27).

Through this result, using pictures to teach vocabulary continues to prove its positive side. As stated earlier, the students in the experimental group were instructed vocabulary using pictures. In this class, the teacher taught them to look at the pictures and guided them to think of the target words that they could guess from seeing the pictures. They were, in addition, instructed to pay attention to everything they could see in the picture and to the core point seen in the picture. If one student guessed incorrectly, the others students were invited to stand up and guessed the meaning and think of the words based on the pictures. Then, when the students were able to guess the meaning and even could spell the words correctly, the teacher gave them a big hand. It was interesting to see the students laugh with each other, which made the class more fun. Once the students guessed the words correctly based on the pictures, the teachers read the words aloud 2 times and asked them to repeat the words 2 times with the whole class. Then, the teacher tried to invite 2 or 3 students randomly to stand up read the words again individually. With clear pictures and with repetition, the students were predicted to memorize the words longer, and they were able to do the vocabulary tests better.

With a ten-week of instruction of the target vocabulary using pictures, the result of the study was rosy. The improvement of vocabulary memorization by the experimental group after the instruction matches with many previous studies. Mansourzadeh (2014) conducted the comparative study to improve the participants’ vocabulary enhancement. This researcher used two methods for comparison: using pictures and audio-visual aids to instruct vocabulary. The finding showed that the students who benefited from the class using pictures had higher scores of vocabulary tests than those instructed with other audio-visual aids. Then, the present result also aligns with Rohman (2016) who tested the effectiveness of the two teaching methods: using pictures and non-using pictures to instruct vocabulary. The result showed that the seven graders, who benefited from the class using pictures, had better scores than those in the non-picture using class.

The current finding is also supported by many other researchers. Adnan Rasheed and Abid Elah Mohammed (2007) found that using pictures to vocabulary worked with a group of the fifth-primary graders. Carpenter and Olson (2012) found the participants in their study learned better when they learned vocabulary with pictures rather than with vocabulary translation. They also discovered that the students had more confidence in recalling the meaning of the learned words looking at pictures. The current finding also aligns with Darabi, Azizifar, and Gowhary (2017) who discovered that using pictures to instruct vocabulary to language learners was better than using other means of instructions, such as explanation, definitions, using synonyms and antonyms. Maritha and Dakhi (2017) also had a positive result after the intervention of using pictures to teach vocabulary. The participants had a better score on vocabulary test than their pre-test score. Handayani (2018) discovered that the participants in the study had positive effects on their vocabulary acquisition after the intervention. Jatmiko and Jauhari (2018) found the participants in the experimental group in their study outperformed their peers in the control group. The experimental group benefited the use of picture vocabulary learning strategy while the control group did not. The current study also accords with Carolina (2019) who tested the participants with daily vocabulary. The experimental students took the vocabulary instruction class while their peers in the control learned vocabulary with the teacher who used the traditional method. Then, this researcher found the experimental students outperformed their control peers. This present study also reflects the study conducted by Bates and Son (2020) who found the improvement of vocabulary in the experimental students who benefited from the vocabulary instruction class, while their peers in the control group were inferior.

In contrast, the author found some difficulties in his class. First, during instruction, some students at the back did not pay much attention to lecture, which made him have an uncomfortable feeling while teaching. This can negatively affect the excitement in teaching. Second, some students were not much good at pictures. Sometimes, some of them could not guess the words through pictures as they said the pictures were strange to them. This can be true for some, but it is hard to have all the pictures that are familiar to all students in class as not all students have experienced similarly in their lives, which more or less influence the way that they think about the meaning of the pictures. These difficulties are in line with the advice given by the authors like McCarthy (1990) who advised that when using pictures to teach vocabulary, the user has to be aware of the clearness of the pictures which help the learner guess the words easily and correctly. Thornbury (2004) thought that the picture user should not use pictures to teach abstract words since it is hard for the learner to guess the meaning, and it may disappoint the picture user. Then, Bates and Son (2020) considered that some images are hard to understand. When images are chosen for the teaching aid, they should be clear and describe the true meaning of the target pre-teach words. Therefore, the author of this thesis had selected the pictures carefully to teach the pre-teach words in each class session. Then, in a ten-week of instruction, the target words which were used in the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test were taught through using pictures, and other words in the lessons were instructed using other means, such as explanation, giving examples, and definitions. At the same time, the learners in the experimental class had to learn many other things in their class, such as learning other vocabulary, grammatical structures, and doing grammar and reading exercises. Thus, in a ten-week time, the authors hoped the experimental students were able to master all these target words at the end of the instruction and in a longer term.

4.2.2. Research Question 2: What are the EFL Learners' Attitudes toward the use of Pictures in Learning Vocabulary?

This finding is aligned with that found by Al-Ja'afari and Region (2009) whose participants (the fifth, sixth graders, and their English teachers) were in support of using pictures to assist in learning vocabulary. They thought pictures could help bring excitement to the classroom. In addition, pictures help them memorize vocabulary. These students' attitude is also similar to that of the teachers found in (Dolati & Richards, 2012). The teachers regarded the importance of using pictures to stipulate the learner's vocabulary learning. Maritha and Dakhi (2017) found the participants were interested in learning vocabulary using pictures. Maritha and Dakhi (2017) also found the participants in their study were pleased with vocabulary learning strategy. They showed their positive opinion toward the use of pictures to guide vocabulary learning. Handayani (2018) experimental students expressed their interest in the vocabulary learning sessions. They were enthusiastic about the sessions of using pictures to instruct vocabulary. The participants in the study conducted by Bates and Son (2020) also had a positive attitude toward learning vocabulary through pictures. Finally, the current finding also aligns with Pertiwi (2021)'s study which investigated the effectiveness of using pictures to instruct vocabulary. In terms of vocabulary test achievement, the experimental students who studied with the instructor who applied pictures to their vocabulary teaching sessions outperformed those who studied with the teacher who did not apply pictures to teaching vocabulary.

In the same vein, the participants in this study, who were randomly chosen for the interviews, also provided the study with many supportive views on using pictures to learn vocabulary. As reported in the result section, eight students were selected and their responses were seen to prove what they had rated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale. That means they agreed pictures can help them learn vocabulary. Now the author would like to briefly discuss their points of view on using pictures to learn vocabulary. Many had the same idea that using pictures helps them learn new words easily and helps them remember the words better. Remarkably, most of them also considered that learning vocabulary with pictures is interesting. One

student said they could learn how to describe the vocabulary by seeing pictures. One student confirmed that she could memorize the words easily through pictures. One student considered pictures are colorful, which made them creative. Interestingly, one student preferred pictures on the Internet instead of those in the text books.

Although so, the classroom should bring some negative sides of using pictures to teach vocabulary to their students. In fact, it is difficult to use pictures to teach abstract words as mentioned by [Thornbury \(2004\)](#). Pictures work best when they are used to teach concrete words. [McCarthy \(1990\)](#) said pictures could not convey all the intended meaning of all words (as known words can be concrete or abstract, words can be used for communication purposes, words can be about technical issues). Finally, not all words can be easily taught using pictures as the target meaning cannot be understood by picture description as mentioned by [Bates and Son \(2020\)](#). This study also found eight words were not suitable to explain through pictures.

All in all, the study found that pictures were used in teaching simple or concrete words and the majority of the participants were young learners although some studies were about the EFL learners. Therefore, when using pictures to teach simple and concrete words, pictures can maximize their effectiveness of learning vocabulary.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1. Conclusion

The thesis entitled “The Effect of Using Pictures on EFL Learners’ Vocabulary Retention” was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of using pictures to teach vocabulary to a group of the sixth-graders at a Khmer boarding secondary school in Duyen Hai, a rural district in Tra Vinh University. The author recruited a group of 70 students from this school, and they were in two different classes. The experimental class consisted of 35 students, and the other class comprised a group of 35 control group students. They were all invited to take the pre-test for the study. The author administered the pre-test to see their knowledge of the chosen vocabulary that was going to be used as the pre-test vocabulary during the school term. The test result showed that both groups lacked knowledge of these vocabularies and produced a quite low result. Then, the author designed his own lesson plans for each group; one group benefited from the class using pictures to instruct the target vocabulary, and the other attended the class applying the traditional method. The intervention took place in 10 weeks with full participation of the students in the first semester. The result showed that when the students in both groups were instructed either with the picture-strategy or without picture-strategy had much improvement. This showed that the students cooperated and both methods worked well. The only difference was that the experimental student group seemed to slightly surpass their peers in the control group. Then, as the aim of this study was to see the students’ ability to retain the words that they learn from both classrooms, the author had the students in both groups to sit the delayed post-test. They were all able to participate, and the result was seen quite positive in both groups. However, their vocabulary retention ability seemed weaker. After two weeks, they were unable to do the test as well as they did in the post-test.

The second research question to be found in this thesis is about the students’ attitudes toward use of pictures to learn vocabulary. The study employed 10 questions to ask them about this. The result showed that the students agreed with the usefulness of using pictures to instruct vocabulary. All the questions received the level of “agreement”, from Scale 4, and only one statement obtained just close to Scale 4, but it was also considered “agreement”.

In order to make the thesis result less biased, the author also had eight students participate in the interview. They volunteered for the study. The questions mainly focused on the vocabulary learning strategy using pictures to instruct vocabulary. These eight experimental students had two common ideas that were concluded here. The first idea, they considered that using pictures to teach vocabulary in class helped them memorize the words better. In this thesis, the post test result has proved such statement to be true. Then, they said that using pictures to teach vocabulary helped them to retain the words that they have learned. But, in fact, in this study, they seemed not to do well at the delayed post-test because their scores were lower than those in the post-test. This delayed test was carried out just two weeks after the intervention. However, if the delayed post-test had been carried out in a long term, their vocabulary retention might have reduced more. Therefore, this retention ability should be further investigated.

Finally, the experimental students seemed to be interested in the teacher’ use of pictures to teach vocabulary. Many of them said they were happy with this strategy. They said “Using pictures to teach vocabulary is interesting”. Thus, pictures not only help improve the learner’s ability to memorize the vocabulary learning process, but also bring the learners’ motivation to learn the language.

5.2. Suggestions

5.2.1. For Language Teachers

First, the classroom teacher needs to be a passionate and dedicated educator. Why? It usually takes time to select the vocabularies which are used to teach. The teacher has to take time to design colourful pictures which need colour copies and they may cost a lot. Then, if the school has better equipment like a hang-over

projector, it will condition the teacher well in both savings and making the pictures clear on the screen, so the students will feel happy to learn, and they will be able to recognize the meaning of the picture easily. As Felma (cited in Sari (2017)) mentioned, pictures can either motivate or demotivate the learners. As known, unclear pictures can demotivate the learner as he or she is getting upset with guessing the meaning. At the same time, (Harmer, 2001) also recommended that it depends on the teacher's ability to bring images to the classroom. Many teachers who are good at drawing can draw simple pictures on the board, which help them to save time, save money spent on printing colour photos and sometimes make the class laugh with such kinds of pictures.

Second, when selecting vocabulary to teach, the classroom teacher needs to think about concrete words first as they can be easily taught by many ways, not just using pictures. For example, the teacher can use the "realia" technique to teach vocabulary. This can be not less interesting, such as using a toy cell phone to teach the word "cell phone" or to teach the verb "to call", "to telephone" or "to make a phone call". This suggestion had been mentioned by Wright (1989) who had suggested many ways of teaching vocabulary.

5.2.2. For State-Schools

As the world is integrated and more students have run for learning English to improve themselves and to open more opportunities for themselves, the state-school should invest more money in installing modern equipment in classrooms so that both the teachers and learners can take advantage of it to facilitate their teaching and learning.

First, the school library should offer a variety of engaging visual aids in general, especially pictures pertaining to the new terms in the classes for both the teacher and pupils to use if necessary in order to help students activate and self-improve their prior knowledge.

Second, the state-school should buy more projectors to help bring visual, vivid colorful lessons into place. As known, with clear pictures and scripts, the learners will be able to get to the main points easily and make them motivated in learning.

Third, the state-school should invest more money in installing the internet router in all the buildings so that both the teacher and students can have access to updated lessons and information related to their learning and teaching.

Finally, the state-school should install one large flat screen in each classroom so that both the teacher and students can use it to show lessons clearer and more vividly. They can watch illustration video clips and pictures on the screen. From there, they can understand the lessons better.

5.2.3. For Students

Students who are interested in visual aids will have more benefits from this strategy. However, what about students who are not interested in learning with visual aids? For example, those who are fond of note-taking will like to take notes instead of seeing things. So, the teacher can add some short explanation to the pictures as well to help such preference.

Pictures usually have target spots, so students' ought to be aware of these spots to get the meaning of the pictures. Thus, knowing such target spots, students will find it easy to get the meaning of each picture.

5.2.4. Limitations

This study has some limitations needed to be aware.

Firstly, the students in the state school usually do not have much time to study official English in class. They have only three periods or English instruction per week, and they also must study many other subjects in class. With this load of study, the students were unable to put all their effort and time in their English practice. Therefore, the participants in both classes seemed not to prioritize in their English. If they had had more time, and if they were not distracted by other subjects, they could have done better at the post-test and the delayed post-test.

Secondly, the author were only able to choose 30 words to teach with pictures in the experimental class and with the traditional method in the control class in a 10-week time, so it seemed that this vocabulary load is not large enough. For future research, it should bring this issue into discussion for more reliable results. If more words had been used, their retention of vocabulary could be more challenged.

Thirdly, the students must also learn other parts of the language, such as learning other grammatical structures which are integrated in the language skills. There are many of them which made them exhausted and distracted from my study sometimes. Thus, the study could have produced a better result if they were more focused on this study.

Fourthly, in order to see how the experimental students thought about the use of pictures to teach vocabulary, the author also had the experimental group answer the survey question. The result showed that they were pleased with this strategy. All the responses received the scale from 4 (except Item 9, $M= 3.8571$). However, the scale still falls in the range of agreement scale, which showed that these students prefer this strategy.

Fifthly, unlike a true experiment, this study, which is an experiment, may have some limits in terms of generalization to the entire population of secondary school pupils. The study had a small sample size, with

only 70 participants who were equally divided in both the control and experimental groups. Although the students shared some matching qualities with the population, such as level and proficiency, the findings cannot be applied to all secondary school students in Tra Vinh province or Vietnam in general.

Sixth, the experimental duration was limited because the treatment was only ten weeks long; therefore, it was unlikely to be long enough to evaluate whether or not the improvement could be consistent and sustained over a longer period of time.

Seventhly, some of the students who were not interested in taking the test or filling out the questionnaire simply gave their responses immediately and perhaps they did not give much thought about the answers to the questions in the three tests, and the questionnaire or even the interview. As a result, the results' reliability and validity may be influenced negatively.

Finally, after completing the questionnaire, the researcher noticed that pictures are sometimes more appropriate for primary students. Hence, future research can take all these limitations into consideration.

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