



## The Effect of Different Types of Glosses on Incidental Vocabulary Learning Of Iranian English Learners

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### Abstract

Vocabulary plays an essential role in acquiring the second language which constitutes an enormous task for language learners. In this regard, it is clear that there is a link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. However, more knowledge of vocabulary seems to pave the way for better reading comprehension and also more reading can lead to more vocabulary knowledge if learners pay attention to unknown words in the text. For this purpose, the present study aimed at investigating the effect of glosses on vocabulary learning during reading comprehension task. Thus, three groups of Goharshad high school students in Zahedan were selected. Each of which included 30 participants who were exposed to three types of glosses. The first group had no gloss and only the selected words were boldfaced. The second group had L1 gloss in which the Persian equivalent of the boldfaced words was written in the margin of the reading comprehension task. The final group had L2 gloss with explanations, definitions and examples. The results of the study showed that the group which had L2 gloss with explanations outperformed other group. The significant difference between the groups may signify the fact that English classes should not be overwhelmed with L1 use of language.

**Keywords:** gloss, explanation and definitions, reading comprehension, vocabulary retention



## Introduction

Second language learners would like to experience the pleasure of reading effortlessly and fluently in the target language without having to look every single unknown word in their dictionaries.

Schmidt's Noticing Theory suggested that conscious attention is crucial in language learning. There needs to be the opportunity for learners to notice the form in the input so that they can improve their learning process and change input into intake. It is a common fact among many language learners that they cannot notice some unknown words in texts and thus, would not be able to notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. According to Schmidt (2010), "In the simplest terms, people learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to". Thus, there should be a kind of way to draw learner's attention to the form of language. One way to achieve this goal is through glosses by which it is possible to modify the input and increase the opportunity for learners to notice.

In this respect, for example, Yangquan examined the effect of multimedia glosses on vocabulary learning while Xu (2010) investigated the question of how the three different types of glossing, i.e. glossing in both Chinese and English, glossing in Chinese, glossing in English, exert effects on the incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. However, Ko (2012) believed "more studies comparing L1 and L2 glosses are necessary" and maintained that the reason is "that the comparisons between L1 and L2 are still limited". Thus, there is still a gap in the area of glosses and vocabulary learning. The current study aims to examine the effect of quality of glosses in retention of vocabulary and investigate the effect of different types of glosses (namely, L1 gloss, L2 gloss with 3 or 4 definitions and synonyms, and no gloss condition) on vocabulary learning of EFL learners.

Nowadays, glosses are not limited to only verbal forms. They are integrated with multimedia forms such as pictures, videos, and sounds (Yoshii, 2006). There are different kinds of multimedia glosses, such as textual, visual, both textual and visual, or auditory (Yanguas, 2009). In line with Yanguas, Chun and Plass; state that annotations can be provided through text, pictures, videos and sound. Any learning that takes place in a multimedia environment relates to the type of annotations processed and the depth of experience with them. Hence, it is important to investigate which types of multimedia glosses have the most impact on the process of language learning in general and on vocabulary learning and reading comprehension in particular.

Brett (1997) tried to investigate the effects of multimedia on listening comprehension. Three different media including audio, video, and multimedia were used for the study. He selected 49 learners to complete audio and video comprehension and language recall tasks and 43 learners for multimedia comprehension and language recall tasks. The result revealed that using multimedia leads to more comprehension and recall than audio or video plus pen and paper.

Investigating the impact of multimedia glosses on reading comprehension, Lomicka (1998) conducted a study with 12 students. The participants were divided into three groups, each included four participants. The first group read the text with no glosses, the second group with access to traditional glosses and the third group read the text with access to all glosses (definition in French, images, references, questions and translations in English). The result indicated that full glossing of computerized texts causes a deeper level of text comprehension.

Jones conducted two studies to examine the effects of pictorial and written annotations on second language vocabulary learning in multimedia environment, with 80 participants. There were four aural multimedia groups: a control group that received no annotations and three



treatment groups with written annotation, pictorial annotation and written-pictorial annotation while listening. In the first study, the treatment groups outperformed the control group without annotations, in the second study, participants performed better when the mode of testing matched the treatment mode.

In another study, Zoi, Bellou, and Mikropoulos investigated the effects of multimedia glosses on vocabulary learning in German as a second language with elementary school pupils. Unknown words were glossed under three conditions: text translation from German into Greek, presentation of the word in German and its translation pronounced in Greek, and word interpretation using a picture. 31 students participated in computer-based learning activities. The outcome revealed that the aural annotations of unknown words had positive effects on vocabulary learning.

Measuring the impact of glosses on reading comprehension, Farvardin and Biria (2012) conducted a study with 120 undergraduate students (36 males and 84 females) majoring in English Teaching at Azad University of Najafabad. They used three kinds of glosses in their study: single gloss in participants' first language (SL1G), single gloss in participants' second language (SL2G) and multiple-choice gloss (MCG) in participants' second language. The participants read the texts under one of these three conditions.

They drew on the mental effort hypothesis of Hulstijn. The results of their study showed that MCG group outperformed the SL2G group in learning vocabulary, and SL2G group had the best performance in reading comprehension.

At the other end of the spectrum, Jacobs, DuFon, and Hong found that glossing did not significantly affect recall in general. These researchers explored the effect of vocabulary glossing on recall and vocabulary learning as well as the attitudes and preferences for the two types of gloss investigated (English and Spanish glosses). The main findings in this study were that glossing did not significantly affect recall, although there was a trend that favored students who had access to glosses. However, post hoc analysis of the scores on the recall measure showed that those students with higher proficiency recalled more if they had had access to a glossed word. In the translation task, those who had glosses outperformed those with no access to glosses. Regarding vocabulary learning, superior scores for those students who were presented with glosses disappeared after four weeks.

### **Statement of the problem**

The effect of different types of glosses on language and, particularly, in incidental learning has been investigated and so many issues related to that have been addressed. Despite all the rich literature in this issue, there are still some problematic aspects related to the effect of glosses on incidental learning. In this regard, the quantity and quality of explanations and synonyms in glosses, L1 glosses, and only-synonym glosses for the margin of reading comprehension tasks have remained as a problem which needs to be solved. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the effect of different types of glosses, namely L1 gloss no gloss, and L2 gloss with some explanations, examples and definitions on incidental vocabulary learning. It is necessary to note that the last type of gloss insists on establishing the context other than the one in the reading comprehension test in which the learner can see the lexical item in other sentences and examples. In addition, it is essential to note that the results of the study will be examined in immediate post-test and delayed post-test which happens two weeks after the time when procedure was conducted.



### Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for the present study:

1. Is there any significant difference among having different types of glosses and vocabulary learning?
2. Is there any significant difference among having L1 glosses and no glosses?
3. Is there any significance difference among having L2 glosses and no glosses?
4. Is there any significant difference among having L2 glosses and L1 glosses?

### Research hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference among having different types of glosses and vocabulary learning?
2. There is no significant difference among having L1 glosses and no glosses.
3. There is no significance difference among having L2 glosses and no glosses.
4. There is no significant difference among having L2 glosses and L1 glosses.

### Significance of the study

Role of glosses in incidental language learning has always been a controversial and at the sometimes hot debate. A bulk of research has been conducted on different types of glosses such as pictorial gloss, glosses in different parts reading comprehension test and so on. However, some parts need more investigation and more needs to be done in order to come up with a sound conclusion about the use of glosses in vocabulary learning. In this regard, few studies, if any, have been conducted about the amount of glosses and a combination of different types of glosses in vocabulary learning. Thus, the present study tries to fill this gap and examine the role of different types of glosses namely, L1 gloss, single synonym gloss in L2, L2 glosses with 3 or 4 definitions and synonyms, and no gloss condition on vocabulary learning of EFL learners. Moreover, few studies examine such effect on immediate and at the same time delayed pos-tests. A very major contribution of the study could be related to language teaching in real life situations, particularly vocabulary teaching. When trying to teach vocabulary to students, teachers could decide with more awareness about their choice of glosses in language classroom.

### Glossing

Glosses, in general, are vocabulary guides during reading; they offer additional information beyond text and thereby assist the learner as a mediator between learner and text .

However, within the scope of second language learning, glosses can be defined as information on important words through definitions or synonyms . Glossing can be situated in the context of recent work on the reading process , and learning strategies . "Glossing strengthens the bottom-up component of the reading process. In fact, "t is one of several possible repair strategies that readers can use when they recognize comprehension breakdowns".

The two most important functions that glosses may serve are with reading comprehension and vocabulary learning . There are several advantages in using glosses: Firstly, glosses provide definitions of low-frequency words.

According to Parry, "vocabulary teaching takes a good deal of time, and it is simply not economic to spend precious minutes on items whose chances of reoccurrence are only ten in a million". Secondly, glosses can get across new words so accurately that prevent incorrect guessing which could result if they were left with only context to guide them.

Several researchers have confirmed the difficulty of deriving meaning from context. Thirdly, they can minimize interruptions while reading is in process resulting from students looking up words in a dictionary or asking the teacher or other information sources for help. Fourthly, glosses can make a meaningful relation between prior knowledge and new information in text. Fifthly, glosses would allow for greater autonomy and individualization on the part of learner because



different students will have problems with different vocabulary items. And finally, glossing can assist vocabulary learning through the rehearsal involved in the process which thereby helps students learn the vocabulary: students leave the text to check the gloss of the unknown vocabulary, repeat the word or phrase to themselves in order to hold the meaning in memory until they get back to the original unknown word .

Twaddell (1973) goes as far as to suggest that selecting comprehensible reading materials for beginning- or intermediate-level learners is very difficult without the use of glosses. He believes that the overwhelming majority of words in a language appear in low frequencies and, thus, remain unknown to learners until they reach high levels of proficiency; for them "anything that would be interesting and worth reading ... would require a much larger vocabulary than is available, so that tremendous sacrifice in either speed or comprehension would have to be made" . Very recently, HeeKo (2012) made a comparison between no gloss, L1 gloss, and L2 gloss conditions. The study showed that glossed conditions were superior over no gloss one in both immediate and delayed tests.

Glossing, however, has been roundly criticized for it disallows inferred meaning. Laufer and Hulstijn, for example, argue that inferred meanings are more likely to be retained than meanings provided by glosses. Likewise, Nassaji considers lexical inferencing as one of the central cognitive processes involved in reading comprehension and defines it as ...making informed guesses about the meaning of unknown words based on the available linguistic and non-linguistic cues in the text...Lexical inferencing has also been found to be closely associated with incidental vocabulary learning, that is learning vocabulary through reading natural texts .

Much lexical development in both L1 and L2 appears, in effect, to occur while learners attempt to comprehend new words they hear or read in context. Nassaji (2004) further enumerates some factors which have the potential to affect success in lexical inference; included are the nature of the word and the text that contains the word, the extent of textual information that the text presents, the learner's ability to use extra-textual cues, the importance of the word to comprehension of the text, the degree of cognitive and mental effort the task engages, the learner's attention to the details of the text as well as the preconceptions the learner may have about the possible meaning of the word. Overall, based on mental effort hypothesis, inferring requires effort, and the greater the mental effort the more likely information will be recalled and retained. In this sense, single glosses would be of little use especially for long-term retention of new words.

In his attempts to remove the foregoing disadvantage associated with using single glosses, Hulstijn (1992) suggested the use of multiple-choice glosses, that is, provision of several gloss (or equivalent) options for a target word. Multiple-choice (or MC) glossing, as he argues, combines the advantages of inferring and single glosses. It reduces the difficulties presented by insufficient context as well as the possibility of making incorrect inferences . It also requires some degree of mental effort and attention on the part of the learner in order to infer the correct option and thereby triggers a deeper level of processing which, in turn, could enhance word recall and retention.

### **Glossing on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning**

It is known that the key to reading well is to have adequate vocabulary knowledge. Word knowledge can be an important factor on reading and students who are able to achieve some degree of reading comprehension also have more word learning through the reading process.

Schmidt stated that incidental vocabulary learning during reading can take place when the learner's primary intention is to complete another task, such as to read and understand a text, and not to learn new words . But instructional interventions are often an effort to draw learner



attention briefly away from the primary task of reading and toward the form and meaning of the new word, potentially decreasing the cognitive resources needed for text comprehension or briefly interrupting the reading process.

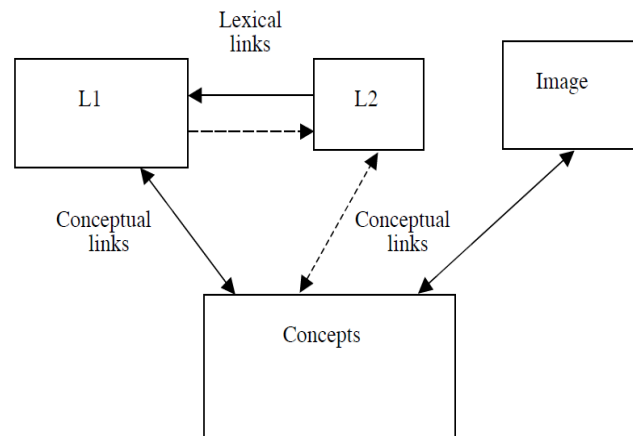


Figure 1. Revised hierarchical model with image source: adapted and modified from Kroll and Stewart (1994).

### Traditional Gloss

Glosses are used as a technique for vocabulary learning and better comprehension. They are a substitute for the dictionary. "Glosses are many kinds of attempts to supply what is perceived to be deficient in a reader's procedural or declarative knowledge". The concept of glossing dates back to the Middle Ages and traditionally was referred only to a short definition or note to facilitate reading comprehension. Providing an L1 or L2 definition for words is a traditional way of glossing. But glosses can be beyond just translations or explanations of hard words.

Glosses can be used as a strategy for learning vocabulary, and many researchers have consensus that glossing is an influential approach for improving vocabulary learning. As Yoshii (2006) states, glosses enhance incidental vocabulary learning in comparison with non-gloss condition.

### Gloss and Reading Comprehension

There are a number of studies about the effect of glossing on reading comprehension. Glossing, as a type of input modification, facilitates vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. Glossing makes L2 reading more effective. It assists reading comprehension by providing additional information, such as definition and synonyms. Lomicka (1998) investigated the effect of glosses under three conditions: full glossing, limited glossing, or no glossing. She confirms that full glossing may promote a deeper level of text comprehension. Ko (2005) also investigated the effect of different kinds of glosses (no gloss, L1 glossing, L2 glossing using qualitative and quantitative measures) on reading comprehension. He found that L2 glosses were more influential than L1 glosses.

Glosses act as a mediator between text and the learner by providing additional information about difficult words and facilitate both reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. There are many advantages for glosses in learning a new language, according to Hong, the presence of gloss can reduce student's burden of dictionary consultation, avoid the interruption of reading process and prevent learners from making wrong inference for the unknown words in the particular context. Thus, gloss can not only ensure learners' exact understanding of the text but also help learners know the meaning of the new words. Nagata (1999) points to four advantages of marginal glosses:



1. Using marginal glosses is easier than using dictionary.
2. They motivate learners to notice and attend to target words based on the notion of consciousness-raising and input enhancement.
3. Contribution to the meaning-form connection by connecting word to meanings is another advantage of it, and 4. they trigger learners to do lexical processing by frequent referring to target word and glosses, and this helps the retention of words. Likewise, Ko(2005) enumerates three advantages for glossing:

First, glosses can help readers know new words better by preventing wrong guessing. Second, glossing may lessen interruption during the process of reading. Third, glosses can help readers to create a relationship between prior knowledge and new information in the text. Fourth, glosses allow readers to become more autonomous with less dependence on their teacher. In addition, they do not interrupt the reading process since the definition is easily available in the text. Furthermore, Koren (1999) avows that glossing is the easiest way to learn the meanings of words when they are in context, but he refers to some disadvantages of using glossary as follows:

1. Glossary has to be prepared by the teacher, or written for each text, or found in specific text books, contrary to the use of dictionary that can be done independently by the students.
2. A reader who depends on a glossary is not likely to become an independent reader, and she/he always needs a text prepared for them; so glossary can be a stage in the learning process.
3. There is no evidence to confirm that using glossary leads to the retention of word meaning.

### **Research Design**

The design of the present study is quasi experimental. One-way ANOVA was used in the pre-analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests the hypothesis that the means of two or more populations are equal. ANOVAs assess the importance of one or more factors by comparing the response variable means at the different factor levels. The null hypothesis states that all population means (factor level means) are equal while the alternative hypothesis states that at least one is different. To perform an ANOVA, you must have a continuous response variable and at least one categorical factor with two or more levels. ANOVAs require data from approximately normally distributed populations with equal variances between factor levels. However, ANOVA procedures work quite well even if the normality assumption has been violated, unless one or more of the distributions are highly skewed or if the variances are quite different. Transformations of the original dataset may correct these violations.

For example, you design an experiment to assess the durability of four experimental carpet products. You put a sample of each carpet type in ten homes and you measure durability after 60 days. Because you are examining one factor (carpet type) you use a one-way ANOVA.

If the p-value is less than your alpha, then you conclude that at least one durability mean is different. For more detailed information about the differences between specific means, use a multiple comparison method such as Tokay's.

The name "analysis of variance" is based on the approach in which the procedure uses variances to determine whether the means are different. The procedure works by comparing the variance between group means versus the variance within groups as a way of determining whether the groups are all part of one larger population or separate populations with different characteristics. Minitab has different types of ANOVAs to allow for additional factors, types of factors, and different designs to suit your specific needs.

### **Participants**

90 first-year students of Goharshad high school in Zahedan participated in this study. The participants were in the same level of proficiency in terms of vocabulary knowledge according to



the pretest conducted to them. The participants were homogenous in terms of grade level and age as well. They mainly aged 16 and there were 90 females in the study.

### **Instruments**

3 types of glosses will be presented to the 3 groups participating in the study. One single reading comprehension task will be given to all groups in which there are 3 reading comprehension questions. The difference lied in the type of glosses given to the students. After the reading comprehension task, students will be given a matching vocabulary test in which they are supposed to match the words selected in the reading comprehension with their English definition in the left column.

### **Data collection procedure**

90 students were selected and examined in the study. First of all, in the beginning of the class, they were said that there would be a reading comprehension task for them and through the given time, they read the text and answered its following questions. There were three groups with the same test conditions while the only difference was attributed to the types of glosses they have. Later in the end of the session, the teacher asked again to answer some vocabulary questions. There were the same vocabulary questions for all of the three groups and they were supposed to answer the questions. The tests were collected and measured by SPSS software which you can see in the following chapter.

#### *Group one*

In the first group, no glosses are presented in the right margin of the paper and only the selected words were typed in boldface style. Students are not told that they are going to be tested on the boldfaced words later.

#### *Group Two*

In the second group, participants are presented with the same reading comprehension task while there were bilingual glosses in the margin in which Persian translation of the boldfaced words were written. Again, the same matching vocabulary test was given to them.

#### *Group three*

In the third group, participants were given the same reading task with L2 glosses with explanations, examples and definitions in order to see how it would have an effect on their vocabulary learning.

### **Data analysis**

In order to analyze the data, one-way ANOVA test was conducted on the scores collected from the students to see whether there is a significant difference among different types of glosses. In so doing, in the beginning the student had a reading comprehension task and they were supposed to answer the question. No one was aware of the fact that there would be a vocabulary test which was matching test and moreover, the students in all groups had the same reading task and the same vocabulary test. However, the only difference lied in the fact that each group had a different type of gloss and one group having no glosses and only the selected words in reading comprehension were bold. At the end of the session the teacher administers the matching vocabulary test and collects the data. Two weeks later, the same matching test will be conducted to them again.





## Results

First of all, a pretest was conducted in order to see whether there is a difference among the groups before conducting the experiment. There must be a kind of pre analysis of groups and their performance in order to be able to infer the results obtained in the posttests.

The results of the pretests of ANOVA were shown in Table 1. The ANOVA was conducted between groups and also within the three groups. The results showed that sum of squares in between groups were 11.158 with the degree of freedom of 3 while the mean square was 3.719. Within groups, the sum of squares was 639.433 with 87 degree of freedom.

ANOVA					
Score					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.158	2	3.719	.675	.569
Within Groups	639.433	87	5.512		
Total	650.592	89			

**Table 1 .The pretest / Anova on the groups of the study.**

Table 2 indicated the posttest results as you can see in the following. As it was shown, there were three groups called no gloss, L1 gloss and multiple glosses in which the number of participants was 30. The mean for the first group was 7.300 with the standard deviation of 2.937. The second group, L1 glosses, the mean was 12.26 with the standard deviation of 2.164. In the multiple glosses group the mean was 12.100 while the standard deviation was 3.077.

Descriptive								
Score								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
No gloss	30	7.3000	2.93786	.53638	6.2030	8.3970	1.00	15.00
L1 gloss	30	12.2667	2.16450	.39518	11.4584	13.0749	9.00	15.00
Multiple Gloss	30	12.1000	3.07773	.56191	10.9508	13.2492	.00	15.00
Total	90	9.8750	3.47031	.31679	9.2477	10.5023	.00	15.00

**Table 2 . Posttest /Anova& Post Hoc.**

Table 3 shows the posttest ANOVA for the three groups which indicate that the sum of squares for between groups was 644.092 with the degree of freedom of 2. The mean square for between groups was 214.697 which was acceptable. on the other hand, the sum of squares for within groups was 789.033 with the degree of freedom of 87. The mean square for the within group was 6.80.



ANOVA					
Score					
	Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	644.092	2	214.697	31.564	.000
Within Groups	789.033	87	6.802		
Total	1433.125	89			

**Table 3 .Posttest ANOVA for the three groups.**

The results of the analysis showed that the effect of multiple glosses on vocabulary learning was significant. However, the effect of no gloss and L1 gloss was not significant and it failed to show any important effect. Interestingly, multiple glosses had strongly significant effect on vocabulary learning. Thus, learners who had reading comprehension tasks in which there were glosses with multiple definitions and explanations performed better than others.

The multiple comparison conducted signified the effect of all of the groups on each other which you can see on Table 4. By drawing our attention to Table 4, we can realize that multiple glosses had significant effect on vocabulary learning and retention while other types of glosses could not show such a significant effect.

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No gloss				.		
	L1 gloss	-4.96667*	.67340	.000	-6.8771	-3.0562
	Multiple Gloss	-4.80000*	.67340	.000	-6.7104	-2.8896
L1 gloss	No gloss	4.96667*	.67340	.000	3.0562	6.8771
	Multiple Gloss	.16667	.67340	.996	-1.7438	2.0771
Multiple Gloss	No gloss	4.80000*	.67340	.000	2.8896	6.7104
	L1 gloss	-.16667	.67340	.996	-2.0771	1.7438
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

**Table 4 . Multiple Comparisons**



### Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of different types of glosses on vocabulary learning. For this purpose, 90 high school students from Zahedan were conveniently selected and divided into three groups of 30 participants. The first group was given no gloss while the words were only boldfaced. The second group was given L1 gloss while the third group had L2 glosses with explanation, definition and examples. The results indicated that the L2 gloss group significantly outperformed other groups in remembering vocabulary items.

These results are consistent with Bowles (2004) who found that both traditional and computerized glosses aided in noticing significantly more target forms when compared to a control group but found no difference between gloss groups. She claimed that those findings are not surprising, given that glosses are designed to draw the reader's attention and help in comprehending unknown vocabulary items. Along the same lines, in the present study, no significant differences between gloss groups were found. Cognitively, it could be argued that glosses that present the information visually or textually might cause readers to process information through different channels and, therefore, differences in processing might be feasible (Mayer, 1997 and elsewhere). However, as in previous studies (Bowles, 2004; Lomicka, 1998; Rott & Williams, 2003) analyses of the think-aloud protocols allowed an insight into participants' cognitive processes as they interacted with the glosses, which provide a possible explanation of these results: all multimedia annotations in this study aided respondents in noticing the target vocabulary items at a low level of awareness.

### Limitations of the study

Among the limitations of the study, one could refer to the population participated in the study. There was limited number of participants who were in the study.

Another limitation is the fact that the type of sampling method used in the study was not random and needed to be unbiased. Thus, it could be said that the type of sampling method used was limited to convenient sampling in which only female participants were included.

The final limitation of the study was related to the types of glosses we used. For instance, it was possible for us to use other types of glosses such as English single synonym, pictorial, multiple choice, etc.

### Suggestion for future research

1. Accompanying music with picto-textual glosses in comparison with picto-textual glosses alone may be another suggestion.

2. Static picture and video clip may have various effects on learning language; hence taking their differences into consideration is a new area for research.

3. Another suggestion can be the relationship between the amount of attrition and retention of vocabulary in a multimedia environment.

4. The sample size in the present study was small and confined to high school students. So this research can be conducted with a larger sample and with students at higher level of proficiency.



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