THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT VOCABULARY LEARNING AND THEIR SOURCES OF VOCABULARY LEARNING: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to gather information about vocabulary learning beliefs from 607 high school students by using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 34 items. After collecting the data, the students were categorized as inexperienced or experienced groups, on the basis of their language institute experience. The result of Pearson Correlation Coefficient revealed that there was a positive relationship, both in experienced and inexperienced students, between the students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning although it was not significant in inexperienced students. Inexperienced and experienced students differed far more than they resembled each other; they differed significantly in 5 out of 6 belief categories about vocabulary learning (p<.05).

Keywords: Beliefs, High School, Institute Experience, Vocabulary Learning

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an increasing number of investigations have focused on language learning beliefs in the field of applied linguistics. Researchers have begun to recognize the set of assumptions and interpretations that learners bring with them to the language classroom (Horwitz, 1999; Wenden, 1986). These researchers have argued that learners have positive contributions to make the language lesson. Understanding their contributions is essential for effective teaching and learning because they are likely to influence the learning process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Wenden (1986) proposes that if we are to discover what characterizes successful language learning, we need to discover what students believe or know about their learning and provide activities that would allow students to examine these beliefs and their possible impact on how they approach learning.

Wong and Nunan (2011) found out that to help less effective language learners, attitudinal change was critical because the main difference between the more effective and less effective learners was attitudinal.

In the context of Iran, most of the students complain about the heavy burden of words. In reading and listening sections, they are awed by the many unknown and unfamiliar words and they cannot understand the underlying message. In other words, their competence in the target language is being held because of their limited vocabulary. With a limited vocabulary they cannot rely on the strategy of guessing the meaning from context (Fakher Ajabshir,2011).

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The significance of this study is that it can shed light on Iranian experienced and inexperienced high school students' problems regarding the beliefs that they hold as learners toward vocabulary learning. The findings of this research may help teachers to better understand and consequently meet the expectations that different learners have for their English class.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between high school students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning?

2. Is there any relationship between experienced high school students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning?

3. Is there any relationship between inexperienced high school students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning?

4. Is there any difference between experienced and inexperienced high school students in terms of their beliefs about vocabulary learning?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants, aged from 14 to 18, were randomly selected from among high school students in Babol, Iran in the academic year of 2012. The sample consisted of 607 (304 male and 303 female) high school students from grade One, Two and Three. The gender proportions of the respondents were 50.1 for % male and 49.9 % for female.

Instrumentations

The instrument used in this study for eliciting vocabulary learning beliefs and vocabulary development sources is a vocabulary learning questionnaire (VLQ) that is a part of Dakun and Gieve's (2008) vocabulary learning questionnaire. Dakun and Gieve's questionnaire consists of three sections plus personal information: beliefs about vocabulary learning, sources of vocabulary learning and vocabulary learning strategies with 21, 13 and 84 items respectively. In the present study, the third section of Dakun and Gieve's questionnaire is not included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains 34 statements related to the following two areas: 1) beliefs about vocabulary learning with 21 items; and 2) vocabulary learning sources with 13 items.

The subdivisions for learner's beliefs and source of vocabulary learning are as follows:

1. Learner's beliefs about vocabulary learning

   a. Difficulty perception with 3 items
   b. Importance perception with 3 items
   c. Knowing a word with 3 items
   d. Learning through memorization with 6 items
   e. Learning through use with 3 items
   f. Learning through reading with 3 items

2. Sources of vocabulary learning

   a. Classroom learning with 4 items
   b. Independent learning with 6 items

    c.   Daily communication with 3 items

A five-point Likert scale was adopted for the questionnaire.

Procedure

The Dakun and Gieve's questionnaire was translated into Persian. Then the translated version was given to two language experts to review and give comments on the felicity, intelligibility, and faithfulness of the translated items. Based on the comments, some minor changes were made to the translated versions. Before the final administration, piloting was conducted on fifty students to check the clarity of the language used in the questionnaire and to check content validity and to estimate the time required to fill in. Some of the students were asked to comment on the comprehensibility and clarity of the statements of the questionnaires they had filled in. To check content validity, the students were also requested to comment on the content of the statements in belief and source categories as a way to establish the statements were measuring what they claimed to measure.

The feedback from the students resulted in rephrasing some statements so as to make the meaning of the statements clearer. The piloting showed that the questionnaire took an average of 20 minutes to complete. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach alpha. The alpha reliability for the questionnaire was found to be .823 suggesting that the questionnaire enjoyed a satisfactory reliability index. Finally, the questionnaires were administered to all the participants of the study by the researcher.

After collecting the data, the students were divided into two major groups of experienced and inexperienced students. The researcher's definition for experienced ones deals with those who had passed at least two years in extra-curricular classes in language institutes, and the inexperienced students as those who hadn't had any extra- curricular classes in language institutes or their experience in extra-curricular classes in language institutes was less than two years. Then the experienced students were divided into two further groups: the group who was still attending extra-curricular classes in language institutes and the group who had abandoned extra-curricular classes in language institutes.

Data Analysis

To analyze the research questions separately, the researcher investigated the relationship between variables of this study by means of Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Then one way ANOVA was conducted to find out the differences between experienced and inexperienced high school students regarding vocabulary learning beliefs.

RESULTS

Investigating the Research Question One

In order to test the relationship between them, Pearson correlation Coefficient was run. Table 1 illustrates descriptive information of students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning and Table 2 shows the correlation matrix between students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning.

Table 1. Descriptive findings of variables in general

Statistics	*Total*	
Variables	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
Vocabulary learning	75.53	7.46
Source of vocabulary learning	41.75	6.93

Table 2. Correlation matrix between students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and sources of vocabulary learning

Variable	Source of Vocabulary Learning
Vocabulary Learning	0.16*

0.01P** ‹

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient in table 2 shows that there is a positive relationship between students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning.

Investigating the Research Question Two

In order to answer this question, Pearson correlation Coefficient was run again.

Table 3 below illustrates descriptive information of experienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning and Table 4 shows the correlation matrix between experienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning.

Table 3. Descriptive findings of variables in experienced students

Statistics	Experienced Students	
Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary learning	74.79	6.95
Source of vocabulary learning	44.17	6.19

Table 4. Correlation matrix between experienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning

Variable	Source of Vocabulary Learning
Vocabulary Learning	0.34*

0.01P**‹

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient in Table 4 below shows that there is a positive relationship between experienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning.

Investigating the Research Question Three

In order to answer this question, Pearson correlation Coefficient was run once more.

Table 5 below illustrates descriptive information of inexperienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning and Table 6 shows the correlation matrix between inexperienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning.

Table 5. Descriptive findings of variables in inexperienced students

Statistics	Inexperienced Students	
Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary learning	76.55	8.18
Source of vocabulary learning	39.71	6.81

Table 6. Correlation matrix between inexperienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and sources of vocabulary learning

Variable	Source of Vocabulary Learning
Vocabulary Learning	0.13*

0.01P**

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient in Table 6 shows that although there is a positive relationship between inexperienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning, it is not significant.

Investigating the Research Question Four

In order to answer this question, one way ANOVA was run. The results of the analysis are presented in the following tables.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of experienced and inexperienced students in terms of their beliefs about vocabulary learning

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Importance Perception	Never	232	12.1379	1.93351
	Abandoned	157	11.6433	1.98395
	Attending	218	11.6422	2.09244
	Total	607	11.8320	2.01597
	Model Fixed Effects			2.00484
Difficulty Perception	Never	232	9.7974	2.74570
	Abandoned	157	9.0573	2.50190
	Attending	218	8.5367	2.25577
	Total	607	9.1532	2.57006
	Model Fixed Effects			2.51557
Knowing A Word	Never	232	10.6293	1.92738
	Abandoned	157	10.6815	1.79757
	Attending	218	10.8624	1.81630
	Total	607	10.7265	1.85471
	Model Fixed Effects			1.85486
Words Should Be Memorized	Never	232	21.9397	3.32325
	Abandoned	157	20.8599	3.48708
	Attending	218	20.4450	3.67946
	Total	607	21.1236	3.55340
	Model Fixed Effects			3.49690
Words Should Be Learned Through Use	Never	232	10.7974	2.25388
	Abandoned	157	10.9936	1.94968
	Attending	218	11.2936	1.95716
	Total	607	11.0264	2.08150
	Model Fixed Effects			2.07384
Learning Words From Reading	Never	232	11.2500	1.84168
	Abandoned	157	11.8025	1.77388
	Attending	218	12.0138	1.89707
	Total	607	11.6672	1.87249
	Model Fixed Effects			1.84469

Table 8. The results of a one-way ANOVA analysis of experienced and inexperienced students in terms of their beliefs about vocabulary learning

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Importance Perception	Between Groups	35.157	2	17.578	4.373	.013
	Within Groups	2427.703	604	4.019		
	Total	2462.860	606			
Difficulty Perception	Between Groups	180.582	2	90.291	14.268	.000
	Within Groups	3822.169	604	6.328		
	Total	4002.751	606			
Knowing a Word	Between Groups	6.534	2	3.267	.950	.387
	Within Groups	2078.069	604	3.441		
	Total	2084.603	606			
Words Should be Memorized	Between Groups	265.821	2	132.911	10.869	.000
	Within Groups	7385.912	604	12.228		
	Total	7651.733	606			
Words Should be Learned Through Use	Between Groups	27.895	2	13.948	3.243	.040
	Within Groups	2597.683	604	4.301		
	Total	2625.578	606			
Learning Words from Reading	Between Groups	69.440	2	34.720	10.203	.000
	Within Groups	2055.338	604	3.403		
	Total	2124.778	606			

As it can be seen in the Table 8, since the results of F are significant we can conclude that there are significant differences between experienced and inexperienced high school students in all the subdivisions of these learners' beliefs about vocabulary learning except the subdivision of 'knowing a word'. In order to understand whether the mean differences are significant in the subdivisions of the learners' beliefs about vocabulary learning, Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc test was run.

Multiple Comparisons

Table 9. Lsd Post-Hoc Test of Experienced and Inexperienced Students in Terms of Beliefs about Vocabulary Learning

Dependent Variable	(I) Experince	(J) Experince	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Importance Perception	Never	Abandoned	.49462*	.20719	.017
		Attending	.49573*	.18911	.009
	Abandoned	Never	-.49462*	.20719	.017
		Attending	.00111	.20985	.996
	Attending	Never	-.49573*	.18911	.009
		Abandoned	-.00111	.20985	.996

Dependent Variable	(I) Experince	(J) Experince	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Difficulty Perception	Never	Abandoned	.74009*	.25997	.005
		Attending	1.26072*	.23729	.000
	Abandoned	Never	-.74009*	.25997	.005
		Attending	.52063*	.26331	.048
	Attending	Never	-1.26072*	.23729	.000
		Abandoned	-.52063*	.26331	.048
Words Should Be Memorized	Never	Abandoned	1.07978*	.36138	.003
		Attending	1.49470*	.32985	.000
	Abandoned	Never	-1.07978*	.36138	.003
		Attending	.41492	.36603	.257
	Attending	Never	-1.49470*	.32985	.000
		Abandoned	-.41492	.36603	.257
Words Should Be Learned Through Use	Never	Abandoned	-.19622	.21432	.360
		Attending	-.49616*	.19562	.011
	Abandoned	Never	.19622	.21432	.360
		Attending	-.29995	.21708	.168
	Attending	Never	.49616*	.19562	.011
		Abandoned	.29995	.21708	.168
Learning Words From Reading	Never	Abandoned	-.55255*	.19064	.004
		Attending	-.76376*	.17400	.000
	Abandoned	Never	.55255*	.19064	.004
		Attending	-.21121	.19309	.274
	Attending	Never	.76376*	.17400	.000
		Abandoned	.21121	.19309	.274

*. The Mean Difference Is Significant At The 0.05 Level

The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores of students' beliefs in terms of 'Importance Perception' revealed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and experienced students, both abandoned and attending groups, (p< 0.05). However there was no significant difference between experienced students (i.e. abandoned and attending groups) (p= 0.996)**.**

The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Difficulty Perception' showed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and experienced students (both abandoned and attending groups) (p< 0.05). Besides, there was a significant difference between abandoned and attending groups (p< 0.05)**.**

The results of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Words should be Memorized' also revealed that there were significant differences between not only inexperienced and attending group but also inexperienced and abandoned group(p< 0.05).However there was no significant difference between abandoned and attending groups (p= 0.275)**.**

The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Words Should be Learned through Use' showed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and attending groups

(p< 0.05)**.** However, neither were there significant differences between inexperienced and abandoned groups (p= 0.360) nor between abandoned and attending groups (p= 0.168).

Moreover, the results of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Learning Words from Reading' revealed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and experienced students (p< 0.05). However, there were no significant differences between abandoned and attending groups (p= 0.274)**.**

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Question One

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient showed that there was a positive relationship between students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning. That is to say, the higher scores of beliefs about vocabulary learning were associated with the higher scores of their sources of vocabulary learning and vice versa.

Research Question Two

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient showed that there was a positive relationship between experienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning. Therefore we can conclude that the higher scores of beliefs about vocabulary learning were associated with the higher scores of their sources of vocabulary learning and vice versa.

Research Question Three

The result of Pearson correlation Coefficient showed that although there was a positive relationship between inexperienced students' beliefs about vocabulary learning and their sources of vocabulary learning, it was not significant. In other words they do not make benefits of vocabulary learning sources efficiently.

Research Question Four

A one-way ANOVA analysis revealed that experienced and inexperienced high school students differed significantly (p<.05) in 5 out of 6 belief categories, except the category of 'knowing a Word'. Vocabulary seemed to carry more importance in the mind of the inexperienced students in their learning English compared with the two other groups (NEVER M=12.1379, ABANDONED M=11.6433, ATTENDING M=11.6422, P=.013). The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Importance Perception' revealed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and experienced students, both abandoned and attending groups (p< 0.05). However there was no significant difference between experienced students (p= 0.996)**.**Most of the students (88.8%, item 20) believed that vocabulary was very important to the learning of English. This finding is consistent with Dehghan Harati's (2011) and Ghobadi Mohebi and Khodadady's (2011) studies which claimed that the subjects (students) of their studies also attached great importance to the role of vocabulary in learning English.

Although 79.4% of the students (item 2) believed that it needed a lot of endeavors to learn new vocabulary, only 30.2 % of the students (item 19) considered vocabulary learning as difficult. The complex task of vocabulary learning seemed more difficult to the inexperienced students than the two other groups and they believed that it needed a lot of efforts to learn new vocabulary (NEVER M=9.7974, ABANDONED M=9.0573, ATTENDING M=8.5367, p=.000). The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Difficulty Perception' showed that there were significant differences among all the three groups. This finding is in line with

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Ghobadi Mohebi and Khodadady's (2011) study; they found out that the students saw English as an easy language and believed "Iranians are good at Learning English". They were reported having more self-confidence, comparing with Americans.

Relative to the inexperienced students, experienced students especially attending group believed less in memorization of words (NEVER M=21.9397, ABANDONED M=20.8599, ATTENDING M=20.4450, p=.000) but more in learning them through use. The results of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Words should be memorized' also revealed that there were significant differences not only between inexperienced and attending group but also between inexperienced and abandoned group (p< 0.05). However there were no significant differences between both groups from experienced students (p= 0.275)**.** In the other words, both attending and abandoned groups had rather the same idea in terms of memorization of words. The finding of the present study is in contrast with Rashidi and Omid's (2011) and Gu and Johnson's (1996) findings. The present study found out that 91.7% of the students believed that repetition was the best way to remember words. But Rashidi and Omid (2011) found out that the learners believe rote learning (RL) was an effective way of learning EFL vocabulary, but not the best way. They saw that reviewing well and having structured review were more effective for them to learn more vocabularies. Gu and Johnson (1996) conducted a study about Chinese students in China and found contradictions to popular beliefs about Asian learners. The participants did not use memorization; rather, they used more meaning-oriented strategies.

In addition, the experienced students especially attending group reported a firmer belief that words can be picked up by using them saying that when you come across a word several times in different contexts, you will know what it means (NEVER M=10.7974, ABANDONED M=10.9936, ATTENDING M=11.2936, p=.040). The findings of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Words Should be Learned through Use' showed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and attending groups (p< 0.05)**.** However, there were significant differences neither between inexperienced and abandoned groups (p= 0.360) nor between abandoned and attending groups (p= 0.168).

The students in attending group had a stronger belief that words should be learned through reading (NEVER M=11.2500, ABANDONED M=11.8025, ATTENDING M=12.0138, p=.000). They supported the idea that one could expand his/her vocabulary simply through reading a lot. However, they did not consider guessing words in context as one of the best ways to learn vocabulary. The results of LSD post-hoc test scores in terms of 'Learning Words from Reading' revealed that there were significant differences between inexperienced and both groups from experienced students (p< 0.05). However there were no significant differences between both groups from experienced students (p= 0.274)**.** This finding is consistent with Huckin and Coady's (1999, pp.189-190) study who warned us that "guessing from context has serious limitations. It is still seen as an important part of vocabulary-building, especially among advanced learners, but it requires a great deal of prior training in basic vocabulary, word recognition, meta-cognition, and subject matter". However, the findings of the present study are in contradictory to those of Dehghan Harati's (2011) study; the majority of the students (85%) in this study were in favor of guessing the meaning of a word they did not know.

The results of one-way ANOVA revealed that inexperienced students tend to believe that vocabulary should be memorized while experienced students tend to believe that words should be learned through use and reading. This difference can be attributed to two reasons. First, inexperienced students studied in an input-poor environment while experienced ones studied in a rather input-rich environment so that they could change their passive vocabulary

knowledge into active vocabulary knowledge. Second, the inexperienced students were under a stronger influence of educational thinking in high schools, which conceives learning as the aggregation of content. Thus, to the inexperienced students, to be a good learner is to know more so that the ability to reproduce previously learned content quickly and accurately becomes the criterion for good learning (Dakun and Gieve,2008).

Based on the above results, it can be said that inexperienced and experienced students differed far more than they resembled each other in their vocabulary learning beliefs. For the inexperienced students, vocabulary seems to assume slightly more importance in their English learning, which is accounted for by the fact that teaching in educational system in high schools is mostly based on Grammar Translation Method and in order to be successful you should have a good command of vocabulary and grammar. Though the experienced students reported that it was a complicated job to learn new words, they did not consider it as difficult as the inexperienced students. This may be due to the fact that the experienced students learn English in institutes with English input much more abundant than that in high school that they pick up words incidentally without much conscious effort through role plays, pair work, group work and watching films.

IMPLICATIONS

A pedagogical implication can be suggested here which could be useful to educationalists and language teachers: Training EFL learners to guess from context. In this study we find out that the Iranian high school students use less frequently than the ESL students as clues to guess at the meanings of unfamiliar words. This relates to the fact that reading comprehension strategies including skimming and/or guessing from context are neither taught nor explained in high school in Iran until the grade Four. Hence, the students need to be given instructions on how to deal with unknown words they are likely to encounter elsewhere such as in reading other than in a word list.

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