



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Vocabulary Learning and Retention in Light of Textual and Aural Input Enhancement

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The present study focused on the effect of textual input and aural input enhancement on Iranian intermediate English learners' vocabulary learning and retention. This study adopted a quasi-experimental design. 60 intermediate English learners from high school were selected as the participants. To ascertain the homogeneity of the students, a placement test was administered to establish the participants' homogeneity prior to the study. Next they were randomly divided into two experimental groups and one control group. A pretest of vocabulary was administered to all groups. After that the experimental groups received textual enhancement and aural input. While, the control group received no treatment. After sixteen sessions, immediate posttest of vocabulary, similar to pretest was administered to all participants. Delayed posttest of vocabulary was given two weeks later. The results of ANOVA analysis and paired sample t-tests revealed that using textual input enhancement and aural input led to better performance of the participants in the vocabulary learning and retention ($p < 0.05$). However, the extent of improvement that occurred was not the same for the two experimental groups; that is, textual enhancement input would help learners, more in learning and retention of vocabulary than aural input.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning, Vocabulary Retention, Input Enhancement, Textual Input Enhancement, Aural Input.

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Introduction

The acquisition of vocabulary is considered a crucial component of learning a foreign language. Vocabulary is vital for developing fluency and sufficient lexical knowledge. According to Coady and Huckin (1997), learners need to acquire a substantial vocabulary to attain competency in language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English language learners (ELLs) who experience slow vocabulary development struggle to comprehend texts at grade level compared to their English-speaking peers. Such students are likely to perform poorly on assessments and may be at risk of being diagnosed with learning disabilities (August, Carlo et al., 2005). Moreover, second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learners often face challenges such as learning and retaining new vocabulary items or recalling words. To teach as effectively as possible, it is important to understand how words are remembered, stored in students' minds, and organized within long-term memory. Therefore, being able to remember and recall new, unfamiliar words is a significant step toward success. Learners often struggle to retain vocabulary learned in the past and face difficulties in expanding their vocabulary. In fact, the issue of how to teach vocabulary has attracted much attention, with many books and articles published on various techniques designed to help learners acquire words more easily and effectively (Farrokh & Sharifi, 2019). Since learning occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible, message-oriented input, input enhancement is an effective technique for teaching different aspects of a target language, including vocabulary, to second language learners.

According to Sharwood Smith (1993), input enhancement involves attempts to direct the learner's attention to specific linguistic forms in the target language. Input enhancement manipulates the input to attract learners' attention to the target feature. Textual enhancement refers to the use of different typographical features, such as changes in color, font style, italics, boldface, or underlining, to highlight certain forms (Wong, 2005). On the other hand, aural input enhancement involves manipulating listening materials, for example, by increasing the volume of target items or including pauses before and after the target items. Gascoigne (2006) suggests that an "aural equivalent of textual enhancement" can be achieved through stress, intonation, or gestures. Many second language researchers have proposed textual and aural input enhancement as effective strategies for promoting language learning in areas such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing (Sharwood Smith, 1993; Shook, 1994; Kim, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Jensen & Vinther, 2003; Izumi, 2002; Wong, 2005; Gascoigne, 2006; Petchko, 2011; Sauer, 2017; Baleghizadeh, Yazdanjoo, et al., 2018).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of textual input enhancement versus aural input enhancement on vocabulary learning and retention. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Q1: Do textual input and aural input enhancement significantly affect Iranian intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' vocabulary learning?

Q2: Do textual and aural input enhancement significantly affect Iranian EFL learners' retention of vocabulary over time?

The hypotheses of the current study are as follows:

H01: Textual input enhancement and aural input enhancement do not have a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

H02: Textual input enhancement and aural input enhancement do not have a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' retention of vocabulary over time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary is a central component of language proficiency, significantly influencing how well learners interact with one another. This makes the acquisition of a large body of vocabulary critical for effective communication. Vocabulary teaching has been the subject of substantial debate throughout its history, with traditional methods, such as the decontextualized memorization of vocabulary lists, now largely discredited. While there is consensus on how vocabulary should not be learned, there remains considerable controversy regarding the most effective teaching methods. Recent advances in linguistic theory, computer-based language corpora, and strategy-based instruction have sparked the development of new approaches to vocabulary teaching, further fueling discussions on optimal techniques (Zimmerman, 1997; Nunan, 1999). Laufer (2003) argues that prioritizing more effective methods and strategies is essential for enhancing vocabulary learning outcomes. One strategy that has gained significant attention is textual input enhancement (TIE), which involves visually modifying text to make linguistic forms more salient. Shook (1994) investigated the effects of TIE on Spanish grammar learning, finding that students exposed to enhanced text performed better on production and recognition tasks than those in the control group. Similarly, Baleghizadeh et al. (2018) examined the effects of TIE on academic vocabulary learning among Iranian EFL learners. Their results showed that participants exposed to enhanced text significantly outperformed their peers in both immediate and delayed vocabulary tests, indicating the effectiveness of TIE in promoting vocabulary retention.

Other studies have explored specific techniques within TIE. For instance, Izumi (2002) investigated the impact of bold, shadowed, and enlarged fonts on noticing

relative clauses among adult ESL learners. While participants demonstrated increased attention to the target forms, no measurable learning gains were observed. Similarly, Petchko (2011) examined incidental vocabulary learning using enhanced non-words in English texts and found no significant differences in recall or recognition between enhanced and unenhanced conditions. Sauer (2017) compared three types of TIE—bold-printing, L2 glossing, and their combination—on vocabulary learning. The combination of bold-printing and glossing yielded the highest gains in form recognition, though results for meaning recall were mixed. Peters (2012) demonstrated that typographic salience, such as bold typeface and underlining, improved learners' recall of both single words and formulaic sequences. However, Lee (2007) noted that while TIE benefits vocabulary acquisition, it may negatively impact comprehension.

Aural input enhancement, involving auditory modifications such as increased volume, repetition, or speech stress patterns, has also been investigated for its impact on vocabulary learning. Cho and Reinders (2013) found that enhanced auditory input improved learners' knowledge of passive structures in English, regardless of the specific type of enhancement employed. Similarly, Kim (1995) examined the effects of slower speech and increased pauses on Korean learners' comprehension of connected speech. Although learners showed improved perception of tonic syllables, no significant differences were observed in overall comprehension between enhanced and normal-speed conditions. Martinez et al. (2022) underscored the role of stress patterns and repetition in learning phrasal verbs, demonstrating that these auditory enhancements significantly improved vocabulary retention.

Recent studies have highlighted the potential of combining textual and aural input enhancements to enhance vocabulary learning. Vu and Peters (2020) compared three modalities—reading-only, reading-while-listening, and reading with textual input enhancement (TIE)—and found that incorporating TIE significantly boosted vocabulary acquisition, especially when presented in engaging contexts. Digital tools have further expanded the scope of TIE. For example, Hosseini and Bagheri (2021) demonstrated that bold and colored fonts in online texts enhanced vocabulary retention, supporting the effectiveness of digital textual enhancements. Studies by Johnson and Kim (2021) and Zhang and Chen (2023) further highlight the benefits of multimodal approaches, integrating textual and aural enhancements to improve retention and comprehension among learners. These findings suggest that multimodal strategies are promising for fostering vocabulary acquisition and comprehension in second language learners.

METHOD

The current study employed a quasi-experimental design, where participants were non-randomly selected, homogenized, and then their intact classes were

randomly assigned to one control group and two experimental groups. This design aimed to address the research questions effectively. The steps of the study are illustrated in the following diagram:

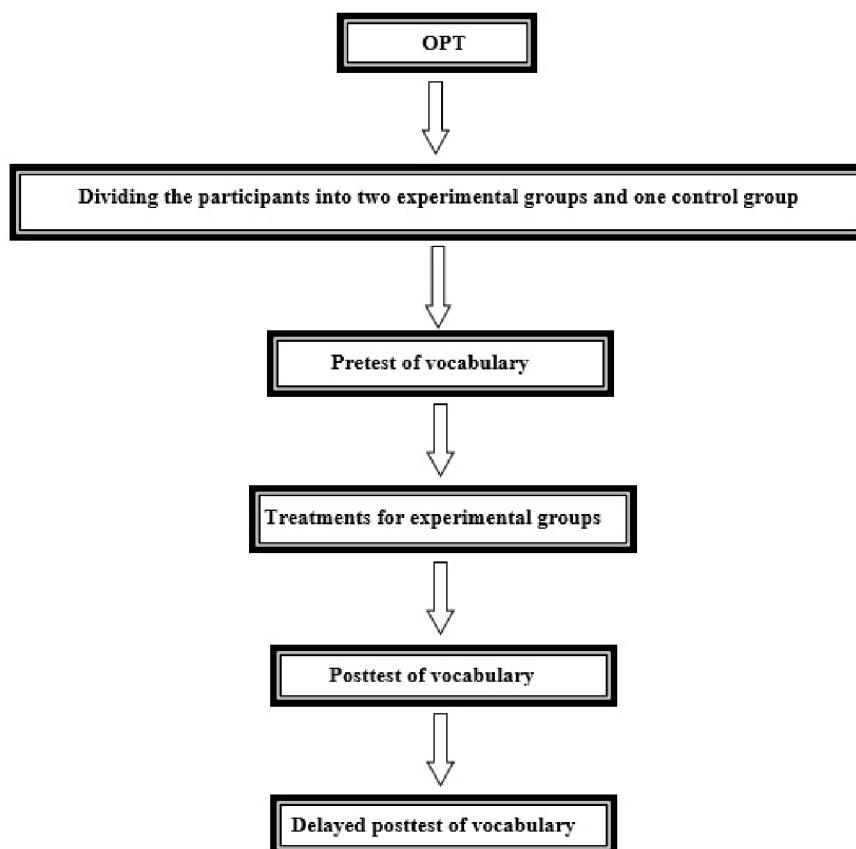


Figure 1. The Design of the Study

Participants

The study involved 60 Iranian intermediate male students, aged 15 to 18, from three intact classes at Aboureihan High School in Lahijan, Iran. Forty students were randomly assigned to the experimental groups, while the remaining 20, with similar characteristics, formed the control group. To ensure homogeneity among participants, a modified version of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered prior to the study. The writing section was excluded from the test, which consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions assessing grammar and vocabulary, as well as a reading passage with 10 graded comprehension questions. Students scoring within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected for the study. The experimental groups participated in 16 sessions of treatment, which

included textual enhancement and aural input. The control group received no treatment and acted as a placebo group.

Instruments

To address the research questions, the following instruments were utilized:

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To ensure homogeneity between the groups, a modified version of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to assess participants' language proficiency. The test included 50 multiple-choice questions evaluating grammar and vocabulary, as well as a reading passage with 10 graded comprehension questions. This instrument provided a clear understanding of the students' proficiency levels and ensured comparability between groups.

Pretest, Immediate Posttest, and Delayed Posttest

To gather quantitative data, a vocabulary pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest were administered:

The pretest was conducted before the treatment to identify any initial differences in vocabulary knowledge between the experimental and control groups. It consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions taken from *English Vocabulary in Use - Intermediate*, with a total score of 20 points. A pilot study involving 15 learners was conducted prior to its administration. The reliability of the pretest, calculated using the KR-20 method, was 0.84, indicating an acceptable reliability index. The test duration was 50 minutes. Following the treatment, an immediate posttest and, two weeks later, a delayed posttest were administered to all groups to evaluate the effects of the intervention. The posttests used the same items as the pretest but with a rearranged order to mitigate pretesting effects. The reliability of the posttests was also estimated at 0.84, indicating acceptable reliability. The content validity of the tests was confirmed by three instructors who evaluated the test instructions, the relevance and arrangement of the questions, alignment with research goals, and the appropriateness of the allotted time.

Procedure

This study was conducted during June and July 2022. Sixty male high school students from three intact classes were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. To ensure homogeneity, all participants took the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Following this, a vocabulary pretest was administered to all groups to measure their baseline vocabulary knowledge. The first experimental group received textual input enhancement. In this method, target vocabulary words were visually highlighted by using boldface, underlining, capitalization, or italics to draw attention to the words within the text. The second experimental group was exposed to aural input enhancement. In this condition, the target vocabulary was presented through audio recordings that were manipulated to emphasize the new words. Techniques included inserting pauses and slowing down the pronunciation of the target words, ensuring learners had sufficient time to process and understand the items. The control group, on the other hand, received no specific treatment and served as a comparison group. A placebo strategy was employed, where the teacher introduced new vocabulary by reading the text aloud, pronouncing the target words, translating them into Persian, and completing the

associated exercises without any additional input enhancement techniques. After 16 instructional sessions, an immediate posttest identical to the pretest was administered to all groups to assess the short-term effects of the treatments. Two weeks later, a delayed posttest was conducted to evaluate vocabulary retention.

FINDINGS

To ensure the selection of homogenous participants regarding their general language proficiency, the standardized Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to 60 male high school students. Based on the OPT criteria, 60 intermediate EFL learners who scored 22 or higher in the grammar and vocabulary section and 8 or higher in the reading section were selected as the main sample for the study. The results of the OPT for these 60 learners are summarized in the following table:

Table 1

OPT Statistics		
N	Valid	60
	Missing	0
	Mean	31.7364
	Std. Error of Mean	.58167
	Std. Deviation	6.21547
	Variance	38.518
	Minimum	20.00
	Maximum	45.00

Table 1 presents the results of the group statistics for the OPT scores, which were used to select intermediate participants. Measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (variance and standard deviation) were calculated for the general English proficiency test. The descriptive statistics reported in the table pertain to the 60 male EFL learners.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Pre Test by Group					95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Aural input	20	25.60	2.583	.578	24.39	26.81
Control	20	20.00	4.013	.897	18.12	21.88
Textual enhancement input	20	25.45	5.414	1.211	22.92	27.98
Total	60	23.68	4.866	.628	22.43	24.94

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of students in each group. According to the table, there are 20 participants in the textual enhancement group, 20 in the control group, and 20 in the aural input group. Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the vocabulary scores of the three groups, including the mean and

standard deviation. Additionally, the test of homogeneity of variances is introduced in the subsequent table.

Table 3
Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Vocabulary			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
4.898	2	57	.312

The homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test, which examines whether the variance in scores is equal across the three groups. The significance value (Sig.) of the test must be greater than .05 (e.g., .08, .28) to confirm that the assumption of homogeneity of variance has not been violated. In this study, the Sig. value was .312, which is greater than .05. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfied.

Inferential analysis of the data

A one-way between-groups ANOVA is employed when there is one independent variable with three or more levels and one continuous dependent variable. The term "one-way" indicates the presence of a single independent variable, while "between-groups" signifies that different participants are assigned to each group. In this study, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the research hypothesis: *Using textual enhancement and aural input does not have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development.*

Table 4
ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	407.233	2	203.617	11.726	.000
Within Groups	989.750	57	17.364		
Total	1396.983	59			

The table provides the between-groups and within-groups sums of squares, degrees of freedom, and other related statistics. The key column is labeled "Sig." (representing the p-value). If the Sig. value is less than or equal to .05 (e.g., .03, .001), this indicates a statistically significant difference in the mean scores on the dependent variable among the three groups. However, this result does not specify which groups differ from each other. To identify the specific group differences, the results of the post-hoc tests are presented in the table labeled *Multiple Comparisons*. These tests provide pairwise comparisons between the groups. In this study, the overall Sig. value was .00, which is less than .05, indicating a statistically significant difference among the groups. Having established this significance, we can now examine the post-hoc test results conducted using SPSS (Version 22) software.

Table 5
Multiple comparisons Tukey HSD

(I) three groups	(J) three groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Aural input	Control	5.500	1.328	.306
	Textual enhancement input	.140	1.319	.993
Control	Aural input	-5.700*	1.319	.000
	Textual enhancement input	-5.550*	1.319	.000
Textual enhancement input	Aural input	-.150	1.319	.993
	Control	5.450	1.319	.230

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

This table is used only if a significant difference is found in the overall ANOVA, meaning if the Sig. value is equal to or less than .05. The post-hoc tests in this table indicate exactly where the differences among the groups lie. The column labeled *Mean Difference* should be examined, and if an asterisk (*) appears next to the values, this indicates that the two groups being compared are significantly different from one another at the $p < .05$ level. The exact significance value is provided in the column labeled *Sig.*

In the results presented, only the textual enhancement and aural input groups show a statistically significant difference from one another. Additionally, two paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare pretest and posttest scores, in order to assess the effectiveness of the treatment. The results of these tests are presented in the following tables.

Table 6
First Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pretest aural input	17.9000	20	2.16673
	posttest aural input	26.4500	20	2.52305

This table illustrates the mean and standard deviation for the first pair in the present study, aural input group.

Table 7
Second Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Pretesttextual enhancement input	18.2500	20	2.37577
	Posttest Textual enhancement input	28.5500	20	3.46552

This table presents the mean and standard deviation for the second group in the study, the textual enhancement input group. Two weeks later, a delayed vocabulary test was administered to assess whether the participants performed similarly or differently in the delayed vocabulary test. Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics for the delayed vocabulary test.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics for Delayed Vocabulary Test

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
AI	20	17.75	5.677	8	29
TEI	20	22.63	7.772	14	38
Con	20	12.70	4.552	14.6	22

As shown in Table 8, the means of the three groups differ: the AI group has a mean of 17.75, the TEI group has a mean of 22.63, and the control group has a mean of 12.70. To determine if these differences are statistically significant, another one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results of this ANOVA are presented in Table 9.

Table 9
ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1020.243	2	511.117	13.660	.000
Within Groups	2144.360	57	37.820		
Total	3164.573	59			

Table 10
The Results of Scheffe Post hoc Test for AI, TEI and Con Groups

Groups	Mean Difference	Sig
Control	10.10*	.000
Textual enhancement input	4.95*	.046
Aural input	-5.15*	.036
Textual enhancement input	-10.10*	.000
Aural input	4.95*	.046
Control	10.10*	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 10 presents the results of the post-hoc test, which shows that the differences in performance among the three groups on the delayed vocabulary test were statistically significant. Specifically, the textual enhancement input group outperformed both the aural input and control groups, and the aural input group

performed better than the control group. Based on the findings from the ANOVA analysis and paired-sample t-tests, it was revealed that the use of the aforementioned input methods led to improved vocabulary test performance. Participants who received textual enhancement and aural inputs performed better on the posttest, leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis. Furthermore, the second hypothesis concerning the delayed vocabulary test was also rejected. These results suggest that presenting vocabulary in different formats can enhance retention.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effects of textual input enhancement (TIE) and aural input enhancement on vocabulary learning and retention, with results showing that both techniques significantly improved outcomes ($p < 0.05$). However, TIE demonstrated a stronger impact on both vocabulary acquisition and retention compared to aural input enhancement. These findings are consistent with previous research and further support the effectiveness of input enhancement techniques in second language learning.

The literature highlights the crucial role of attention and noticing in vocabulary learning, with Laufer (2003) emphasizing the importance of effective strategies to facilitate these processes. Textual input enhancement, which involves typographic modifications such as bolding, underlining, and font changes, has consistently been shown to help learners focus on target linguistic forms. Studies by Shook (1994), Baleghizadeh et al. (2018), and Sauer (2017) confirm that TIE enhances learners' ability to recognize and retain vocabulary items. Similarly, Peters (2012) noted that typographic salience aids in the recall of both individual words and formulaic sequences—findings that align with this study, which shows superior performance in the TIE group.

A possible explanation for TIE's stronger impact lies in its ability to provide a stable and visually distinct reference for learners. As supported by dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1986), the integration of visual and verbal stimuli strengthens memory encoding, thereby enhancing vocabulary retention. Additionally, TIE encourages learners to revisit and process target items more deeply, which further promotes long-term retention. Sauer (2017) also observed that textual modifications, such as bolding and glossing, led to higher gains in vocabulary form recognition, supporting the potential for further optimization of TIE techniques.

In contrast, while aural input enhancement is effective, it primarily relies on auditory modifications such as increased volume, stress pattern emphasis, and repetition. Studies by Cho and Reinders (2013) and Martinez et al. (2022) found that these techniques improve learners' knowledge of specific linguistic structures and enhance vocabulary retention by drawing attention to phonological and prosodic features. However, the transient nature of auditory input may limit its effectiveness

in long-term retention compared to the more permanent visual cues provided by TIE. For example, Kim (1995) observed that while aural enhancements like slower speech and pauses helped learners perceive key speech elements, they did not result in significant improvements in comprehension.

The differential effectiveness of TIE and aural input enhancement highlights the modality-specific cognitive processes involved in language learning. Textual input enhancements may be more effective for promoting noticing and retention of vocabulary forms, while aural enhancements are better suited for enhancing contextual understanding and pronunciation. This distinction suggests that combining both modalities could offer complementary benefits. Vu and Peters (2020) found that integrating reading with TIE¹ and listening significantly improved vocabulary learning. Additionally, recent studies (e.g., Johnson & Kim, 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2023) advocate for multimodal approaches that harness the strengths of both textual and auditory inputs in digital learning environments.

The practical implications of these findings are substantial. Language instructors and curriculum designers can integrate TIE techniques, such as bolding and underlining, to enhance vocabulary learning in reading tasks. At the same time, aural enhancements like stress pattern emphasis and repetition can be used to support listening tasks, particularly in communicative contexts. The increasing accessibility of digital tools facilitates the seamless integration of these techniques, as demonstrated by studies like Hosseini and Bagheri (2021), which highlight the effectiveness of digitally enhanced texts in improving vocabulary retention.

For effective retention of the received input, it is essential to transfer information accurately from working memory to long-term memory. Therefore, foreign language (FL) and second language (L2) learners must engage with the information actively, interacting with it in meaningful ways (Schmitt, 1990). One effective method to capture learners' attention is input enhancement, which involves making selected elements of a language salient. These techniques draw attention to aspects of the language that learners aim to acquire.

However, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size was small, which means the generalizability of the findings should be approached with caution. Additionally, the study was limited to intermediate-level learners, and the results may not apply to learners at other proficiency levels. Another limitation is the age range of the participants, which was between 15 and 18 years; hence, the findings may not be applicable to learners outside this age range. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on male learners, and future research could include both genders to enhance the generalizability of the results.

¹ Textual Input Enhancement

Conclusion

Textual input enhancement and aural input enhancement are effective tools in English language classrooms, improving students' vocabulary learning and retention. These findings may encourage teachers, especially those relying on traditional methods, to adopt more practical techniques. By applying textual and aural input enhancements, teachers can motivate students to engage more consciously with vocabulary, leading to better memorization and learning.

Additionally, these results may be useful for curriculum developers and syllabus designers. By integrating input enhancement techniques into teaching materials, they can better address learners' needs, providing more opportunities for intentional and incidental vocabulary acquisition. This approach can enhance learners' ability to retain and quickly recall vocabulary, resulting in significant improvements in vocabulary learning and retention.

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پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی تأثیر تقویت ورودی متنی و شنیداری بر یادگیری و ماندگاری واژگان زبان‌آموزان ایرانی سطح متوسط زبان انگلیسی انجام شد. این مطالعه از طرح شبه‌تجربی پیروی کرد. تعداد ۶۰ زبان‌آموز سطح متوسط زبان انگلیسی از دبیرستان به‌عنوان شرکت‌کننده انتخاب شدند. به‌منظور حصول اطمینان از همگنی دانش‌آموزان، پیش از آغاز مطالعه یک آزمون تعیین سطح برگزار گردید تا سطح یکسان شرکت‌کنندگان تأیید شود. سپس آن‌ها به‌طور تصادفی در دو گروه آزمایشی و یک گروه گواه قرار گرفتند. پیش‌آزمون واژگان برای تمامی گروه‌ها اجرا شد. پس از آن، گروه‌های آزمایشی تحت آموزش با استفاده از تقویت متنی و ورودی شنیداری قرار گرفتند، در حالی که گروه گواه هیچ مداخله‌ای دریافت نکرد. پس از شانزده جلسه، پس‌آزمون فوری واژگان مشابه پیش‌آزمون برای همه شرکت‌کنندگان اجرا شد. پس‌آزمون تأخیری واژگان دو هفته بعد برگزار گردید. نتایج تحلیل واریانس و آزمون تی جفتی نشان داد که استفاده از تقویت ورودی متنی و ورودی شنیداری به عملکرد بهتر شرکت‌کنندگان در یادگیری و ماندگاری واژگان منجر شده است ($p > 0/05$) با این حال، میزان بهبودی که رخ داد برای دو گروه آزمایشی یکسان نبود؛ به این معنا که تقویت ورودی متنی نسبت به ورودی شنیداری به یادگیری و ماندگاری واژگان در زبان‌آموزان کمک بیشتری می‌کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: یادگیری واژگان، ماندگاری واژگان، تقویت ورودی، تقویت ورودی متنی، ورودی شنیداری.

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