

***IN THE NAME OF GOD***



**SHEIKHBAHAEI UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**Vocabulary instruction through blended learning and  
multimedia softwares in Iranian EFL classes**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

**By**

**Sadegh Khalili**

**Supervisor**

**Dr. Mohammad Hassan Tahririan**

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# **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

## DEDICATION

*To my loving family*

*whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity*

*ring in my ears*

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## Abbreviations

CALL	Computer-assisted language learning
BL	Blended learning
EFL	English as a foreign language
OPD	Oxford picture dictionary

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of blended learning and multimedia softwares on Iranian EFL students' vocabulary learning. In addition, the present study tried to examine the extent to which multimedia softwares can be applied into EFL classes in Iran. It also attempted to find out students' attitudes toward using these softwares. To this end, 87 Iranian EFL learners at elementary level of language proficiency were assigned to three groups: the experimental, control, and constant groups. To be more cautious about the homogeneity of the experimental and control groups a vocabulary test was administered before the experiment. The experimental group received instructions through multimedia softwares, the control group received traditional instructions, and the constant group used worksheets prepared by their language school. The data were collected through a vocabulary posttest, a questionnaire, and classroom observations. The results indicated the great level of disparity between the two groups of learners regarding their acquisition of new vocabulary - in other words, multimedia softwares had positive effect on students' vocabulary learning. It was also found that participants generally had a positive attitude toward technology. In addition, learning with technology also showed positive activity engagement. Based on the current study, suggestions were made on how multimedia softwares can be adopted and incorporated more effectively in Iranian EFL classes.

# **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1. Preliminaries:

Recently application of computers and technology has been increasingly brought to EFL classrooms. Curriculum designers have tried to include computers and technology in educational curricula (Atai & Dashtestani, 2011). The general finding of the numerous studies in this field supports the fact that technology has the capacity to improve teaching and learning another language (Hermans, Tondeur, Van Braak, & Valcke, 2008). However, how to integrate technology in an engaging, effective, and interactive way is still a controversial issue.

Vocabulary knowledge is considered as the most important factor in academic achievement for second or foreign language learners (Bismonte, Foley & Petty, 1994; Evans, 1978; Laufer, 1996; Pellow, 1995; Pouwells, 1992; Tozcu & Coady, 2004; Watts & Bucknam, 1996). But as EFL teachers we see that learning vocabulary is not always easy or enjoyable for students; they constantly complain about their problems in remembering new words. In the following some of the students' reactions are presented:

- “I cannot speak fluently, I lack the useful vocabulary to express my ideas.”
- “I read lots of texts and stories and I check all the new words in my dictionary, my problem is that I forget them soon.”
- “I'd like to improve my vocabulary. Most of the time I cannot speak because of the missing words.”

By considering the potential capacities of technology in improving language learning, it is assumed that *blended learning* and *multimedia softwares* have positive effects on students' vocabulary learning. Therefore, this research is conducted to recognize the impact of blended

learning and multimedia softwares on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. In addition, the present study tries to examine the extent to which multimedia softwares can be applied into EFL classes in Iran. It also attempts to find out students' attitudes toward using multimedia softwares.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

In the process of foreign language learning, many students have difficulty remembering the words they learn. In our EFL classes many students know the importance of vocabulary and their problems as a result of their poor vocabulary knowledge. The problem may lie in the traditional methods of vocabulary presentation such as realia, dramatization, contrastive examples, hyponym, synonym, antonym, definition, and translation.

According to Thyberg (2010), consistency and engagement are crucial when it comes to language learning. Consistency means that a student must review language materials and practice new subjects daily in order to achieve proficiency. Not all students can attend English classes every day; therefore, they have little exposure to English. Engagement is the active participation of students as they study. As Anderson, Hamilton, and Hattie (2004) state, students often fail in the academic process because they do not engage in class activities. Our classes are usually equipped with traditional media such as books, videos, and tapes which do not require to engage and therefore can be boring and passive resources.

Blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and computer mediated instruction, is seen as one of the most important advancements of this century and a natural evolution of the



learning program (Thorne, 2003; Graham, 2006). Graham (2006) believes that blended learning “may even become so ubiquitous that we will eventually drop the word *blended* and just call it learning”. But this kind of instruction is not used appropriately in our EFL classes. In addition, as more and more institutes, which are growing like mushrooms, are trying to integrate multimedia and software into their educational programs, it is significant to have more comprehensive studies in this field.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The present study intends to investigate vocabulary instruction through blended learning and multimedia softwares in Iranian EFL classes. To this end, the following questions were formulated:

1. To what extent can blended learning through multimedia softwares help Iranian students' vocabulary learning?
2. To what extent can multimedia softwares be applied in teaching English as a foreign language?
3. What are the attitudes of Iranian learners toward the use of multimedia softwares in vocabulary learning?

### **1.4. Significance of the study**

By considering the potential capacities of technology and blended learning in improving language learning and the scarcity of studies in this field in the Iranian context, more research is required to shed light on the effect of CALL on L2 vocabulary learning; therefore, the

present study was planned to examine traditional and blended methods of vocabulary instruction in Iranian EFL classes.

## **1.5. Definition of the key terms**

A series of key words used in this study are defined below:

### **1.5.1. Blended Learning**

"A language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology" (Sharma & Barrett, 2007, p.7).

### **1.5.2. CALL**

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is any process in which learners use computers and, as a result, develop their language proficiency (Beatty, 2003).

### **1.5.3. Interactive Learning Environment**

According to a definition provided by Aleven, Stahl, Schworm, Fischer, and Wallace (2003), interactive learning environment is "computer-based instructional systems that offer a task environment and provide support to help novices learn skills or concepts involved in that task" (p.7).

### **1.5.4. Multimedia**

Integrated technology which stores and retrieves information in various media forms, combination of texts, graphics, audio, and video on a computer disk or the Internet (Hall, 1996; Tolhurst, 1995).

### **1.5.5. Educational software**

Educational software is computer software whose primary goal is teaching. It offers programs for pre-school children, which have a large entertainment component, and also straightforward typing tutors and programs that teach foreign languages (WordiQ, 2010).

## **1.6. Outline of the thesis**

This study is organized in five chapters:

In chapter one, introduction, the problem under study will be introduced; significance of the study and research questions will be presented as well. In chapter two, the relevant literature will be reviewed and discussed. In chapter three, the method of the study, the participants, as well as the procedure of data collection and analyses will be presented. In chapter four, results and findings of the study will be analyzed, and finally in chapter five, discussion, conclusion and implications based on the findings of the study will be presented.

# Chapter 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1.Overview

This chapter provides an overview of research areas related to vocabulary acquisition, blended learning, CALL, multimedia, and multimedia software. It is divided into 12 sections. First, an overview of vocabulary acquisition is provided, then the role of multimedia in the field of CALL is discussed. Section 4 reviews some studies in the area of blended learning, it is followed by section 5 which discusses how multimedia can optimize learning. 'Learning styles and multimedia learning' are stressed in the next section. Section 7 stresses the significance of integrating multimedia in education. Studies related to teachers and students' attitudes toward technology are examined in section 8. Some challenges to the use of technology are presented in the ninth section. In the next section, teachers' concerns related to technology application are focused. Finally, the significant role of multimedia software in the field of CALL is pointed out in section 11. At last a brief description of the chapter and how the present study adds to the existing literature is provided.