

A Comparative Study of Using Receptive and Productive Tasks on the Vocabulary Development of Upper-Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate differential effect of using receptive and productive tasks on the vocabulary development of upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners and which of the tasks (receptive tasks or productive tasks) is more effective in vocabulary development. This study first examined the immediate effect of receptive and productive task and then the delayed effect of two kinds of tasks on the vocabulary development. For this end, 50 upper intermediate English learners received TOEFL vocabulary part test and 30 learners who had got higher mark selected for the treatment and divided into two experimental groups. Learners received an approximately 10 minute for 20 session productive task treatment and 10 minute receptive task. In the receptive group, the learners completed True-False, Matching and Multiple choice tasks and in the productive tasks completed Short-Response, Fill-in Blank and Sentence Writing tasks. All the learners after the treatment received immediate vocabulary post test and delayed post test to examine learners' vocabulary learning development. The findings of the first research question indicated that both of the receptive and productive groups had development on the vocabulary learning. To answer the second question which examined two tasks (receptive or productive tasks) on the vocabulary learning, the learners who completed productive tasks outperformed those who did the receptive tasks that is in contrast to the predictions of the involvement load hypothesis, which does not predict that any output task will lead to better results than any input task.

Keywords

receptive tasks, productive tasks, vocabulary development, upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners

1. Introduction

One of the most difficult questions to answer in vocabulary studies is “What is a vocabulary?”. Vocabulary of each language consists of single words such as nouns, adjectives and word combinations such as idioms and collocations. A large vocabulary is necessary to function in English: 8000-9000

words families for reading, and perhaps as many as 5000-7000 families for an oral discourse (Schmitt, 2008). Little can be conveyed if one does not know grammar, but nothing can be conveyed if one does not know any vocabulary (Wilkins, 1972). The importance of vocabulary learning can be seen in the listening, speaking, reading and writing. Vocabulary items can help learners learn new words. Vocabulary knowledge is an essential element of language learning. Research has shown that you need to meet a word at least seven times before you know it properly (McCarthy & O' Dell, 2001). Thus, in the last decades, vocabulary learning has received increasing focus in the field of second language acquisition. Vocabulary plays an important role both in learning to read and in comprehending text: readers can not understand text without knowing what most of the words mean (Shari Bulter, Kelsi Urutia, Anneta Buenger, Nina Gonzalez, Marla Hunt, & Corinne Eisenhart, 2010). The general aim of the vocabulary learning is to improve learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In order to do this, it is important to choose vocabulary activities to better learning. Comprehensive EFL learning programs require the systematic treatment of a large number of interrelated elements. In order to make vocabulary learning useful, many ways and approaches have been searched. One of which is the receptive and productive vocabulary learning tasks based on the involvement load hypothesis. The involvement load hypothesis is an incidental vocabulary learning theory that formulated the criteria which explain why certain tasks are more effective than others in promoting L2 vocabulary acquisition. There have been a lot of studies conducted to investigate the use of receptive and productive tasks on the English vocabulary learning. Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) investigated the effect of task-induced involvement on short and long-term retention of 10 unfamiliar words by advanced EFL learners in Netherland and Israel. By stating the limitations of Hulstijn and Laufer's study, Keating (2008) conducted an experiment to investigate whether the predictions of the Involvement Load Hypothesis affects similarly on the learners passive and active word knowledge.

Vocabulary learning is one of the major challenges foreign language learners face during the process of learning a language (Ghazal, 2007). Knowing a word is defined as knowing its spelling, pronunciation, collocation co-occurs with, and appropriateness (Nation, 1990).

Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary, students can not understand others or express their own ideas. Students often instinctively recognize the importance of vocabulary to their language learning when they can not express what they have in mind. In fact, vocabulary learning helps students understand and communicate with others in English. English vocabulary learning is complex with three main aspects: form, meaning, and use, as well as meaning connected to the roots of individual words. English language learners who have lack of vocabulary development are less able at text comprehension, speaking and listening. Using vocabulary has always been problematic for English language learners and this has been revealed in their reading comprehension and speaking. How Iranian English learners learn English is complicate and time consuming. Iranian spend more time in English classroom and also read the text books designed to English learning. However, they have lack of development at the vocabulary learning. Based on the

above explanation vocabulary learning is an important issue in English learning. A bundle of research has explored effective strategies to improve vocabulary learning but there is no direct research on the effect of receptive and productive tasks on the vocabulary development of upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners. This research identifies vocabulary learning methods which learners use to improve their vocabulary and to succeed in comprehension and communication.

2. Review of the Literature

Many studies have investigated the effects of output and input tasks on the L2 learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), “task-based language teaching refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching”. Nunan (2004) believes that “task is an important element in syllabus design, classroom teaching and learner assessment”. Ellis (2003) maintains that “tasks hold a central place in current second language acquisition (SLA) research and language pedagogy”. According to Willis (1996), tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communication purpose in order to achieve an outcome. Richards and Rodgers (2001) offer some assumptions which are believed to underlie TBLT. Skehan (1998) believes that when we deal with task complexity, we have to consider the structural model too. “Lexical units are central in language use and language learning”, and “conversation” is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition. Rightly after developing the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) investigated the effect of task-induced involvement on short- and long-term retention of 10 unfamiliar words by advanced EFL learners in Netherlands and Israel. Three learning tasks with varying involvement loads were compared: reading comprehension with marginal glosses (moderate need, no search, and no evaluation), reading comprehension plus fill-in (moderate need, no search, and moderate evaluation), and writing a composition and incorporating the target words (moderate need, no search, and strong evaluation). To measure short-term retention of the target words, the learners were asked to provide the L1 translations or English explanations for the 10 target words immediately after treatment. Additionally, to measure student’s long-term retention, the same posttest was again administered 1 week later in the Netherlands and 2 weeks later in Israel. In this study, the results of two experiments were somewhat different. The findings of the Hebrew-English Experiment completely fulfilled the predictions of the Involvement Load Hypothesis: the composition group scored significantly higher than the fill-in group on both posttests, and the fill-in group scored significantly higher than the reading group. However, the results of the Dutch-English Experiment partially supported the Involvement Load Hypothesis: the composition group performed significantly higher than the fill-in and the reading groups; yet, the fill-in group did not performed significantly higher than the reading group on both posttests. Rahimi Esfahani (2012) investigated the effects of receptive and productive learning from word pairs on comprehension, and the use of thought words in writing in advanced EFL learners of Persian. The results indicated that those who had learned their target words productively outperformed the receptive participants on the

writing test significantly. Similarly, the receptive group did significantly better on the reading comprehension test than the productive group. The findings of this study revealed that receptive vocabulary learning may be more beneficial to understanding a text and productive learning is more effective in improving the use of students' taught words in writing.

Sadeghi and Safari (2013) had studied the effects of two types of production modes on the productive English vocabulary knowledge. Output task involves a group of learners engaging in activities such as discussing and writing where they can receive immediate feedback in order to solve a problem or build knowledge. The research aim was to determine which of the output tasks is effective. There was no significant difference in the degree of effectiveness of two types of production task, both of them improved vocabulary knowledge of learners. Falahi and Moinzade (2012) investigated the effect of receptive (reading three glossed sentences) and productive (completing a cloze task) tasks on learning English verb-noun collocations in an Iranian English learners as a foreign language (EFL) learning context. Its aim was to examine the effect of receptive and productive tasks on collocation learning in Iranian EFL learning context. The finding of the study indicated that the students who did the productive treatment had better performance on productive posttest than receptive posttest, but the converse situation was attested with those participants who did the receptive treatment. The findings of this study revealed no significant difference between the effects of the tasks on learning collocations. The amount of time spent on receptive or productive tasks seems to be a determining factor in whether a receptive task is more effective or a productive task. Webb (2002) investigated the effects of receptive and productive vocabulary tasks on vocabulary knowledge. Two experiments designed to determine the relative efficacy of learning from three glossed sentences and sentence production on receptive and productive knowledge of orthography, syntax, grammatical functions, association, meaning and form. As a result, the MANOVA revealed an overall significant difference between the two tasks. The learners who completed the receptive task had higher scores than the productive group on all of the dependent measures. Overall, the results indicated that both treatments were very effective. Large gains in knowledge of orthography, association, meaning and form, syntax, and grammatical functions were made by both groups. However the results show that the receptive task is superior to the productive task and both productive and receptive measures that was in contrast with the research has made on word pairs by Griffin and Harley (1996); Stoddard; Waring (1997b).

3. Methodology

Participants in this study included 30 upper-intermediate students aged 16-19. The institution had a total enrollment of 159 learners. 52 were elementary English learners. 57 were intermediate learners and 50 were upper intermediate English learners. All were English learners whose primary language was Azari. Most of the students had been attending the English language learning classes since childhood. All 50 upper intermediate English learners received TOEFL vocabulary part test and thirty learners who had got higher markers were choosed for the study. This study investigated how receptive

and productive tasks affected the vocabulary development of English learners who were exposed to do tasks in the classroom. During the classroom, learners had the opportunity to read book and find definitions from dictionary and then complete the tasks. The question that guided the study asked which of the receptive and productive tasks is effective in the vocabulary development of Iranian EFL learners.

Quantitative information were gathered to examine development in vocabulary. The assessment was used to determine learners developments in regard to the effect of receptive and productive tasks on vocabulary learning. The 15 students were given receptive tasks and 15 students were exposed to productive tasks. The teachers collected samples of students' receptive and productive tasks throughout the 20 sessions of treatment. The task papers were examined to identify the correctness of tasks during each session. Although in each session immediate post tests to each lesson after treatment were given to the learners which was chosen from Test Your English Vocabulary in Use, upper intermediate (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2001). This book provided a series of tests on different aspects of English vocabulary at the upper intermediate level. It is based on the vocabularies presented in the units of English Vocabulary in Use: upper-intermediate. Each test is scored out of 40. The first exercise in each test offered a maximum score of 10 and it is recommended that learners do this exercise first. The second part of the test score is 5, and the third, fourth parts of the test scores were 5, 20 respectively. The devoted time to each test was 20 to 30 minutes. The immediate post tests during treatments in two groups compared based on the received marks to determine the immediate effects of receptive and productive tasks on vocabulary learning. Although the samples were not exposed to the receptive and productive tasks during their English language learning course, since showed nervousness when the teachers asked them to do tasks and complete the tests at the end of each session.

The collected samples and tests of learners were dated and registered to comparison after the treatments. Although the correctness of both receptive and productive tasks in each session was examined by the each class teacher. Despite the immediate post tests in each session during treatments, the learners received TOEFL vocabulary part delayed post test at the end of course. Because lack of the time, 20 lesson had chosen from English Vocabulary in Use, upper intermediate (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). The tasks were designed according to the related previous studies described in Sarani and et al. (2013). Learners at their task after teaching, received task papers and had done tasks during the devoted time (productive tasks 10 minute and receptive tasks 10 minutes). The selected lessons were about Concession and Contrast, Global problems, Work, Sport, The arts, Music, Health and medicine, Travel, Crime, Pleasant and unpleasant Feelings, The six sense, What your body does, Distances and dimensions, Sound and light, Possession, Giving and lending, Success, Failure and difficulty, Expressions with do and make, Expressions with bring and take, Expressions with get, Expressions with set and put. In the receptive task, three receptive tasks designed: True-False, Matching and Multiple choice task. The participants assigned to receptive task in which 10 words were chosen from every lesson. They were asked after teaching vocabulary book, complete the tasks during 10 minute.

Productive vocabulary task although had three different task: Short-response, Fill in the blank and Sentence writing. Quantitative information were gathered to examine development in vocabulary. The assessment was used to determine learners developments in regard to the effect of receptive and productive tasks on vocabulary learning. The 15 students were given receptive tasks and 15 students' productive tasks. The teacher collected samples of students' receptive and productive tasks throughout the 20 sessions of treatment. The task papers were examined to identify the correctness of the tasks during each session. Although in each session immediate posttests to each lesson after treatment were given to the learners which was chosen from *Test Your English Vocabulary in Use, upper intermediate* (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2001). This book provided a series of tests on different aspects of English vocabulary at the upper intermediate level. It is based on the vocabulary presented in the units of *English Vocabulary in Use: upper- intermediate*. The tests of this book were used based on the worked lessons in the treatment. The immediate post tests during treatments in two groups compared based on the received marks to determine the immediate effects of receptive and productive tasks on vocabulary learning.

The collected samples and tests of learners were dated and registered to comparison after the treatment. Although the correctness of the receptive and productive tasks in each session were examined by the each class teacher. Despite the immediate post tests in each session during treatment, the learners received TOEFL vocabulary part delayed post test at the end of course after exposing to the two kinds of treatments.

4. Data Analysis

The pre test data was ready for analysis immediately after collection, because the tests were chosen from the TOEFL tests. The other data was collected throughout the duration of this study including immediate posttest and delayed posttest. The delayed post test was used to determine the immediate impact of the receptive and productive tasks on the vocabulary development. In order to analyze this quantitative data, teachers examined the correctness of receptive and productive tasks and also used immediate post test results after the implementation of treatment tasks to inform analysis of whether receptive and productive tasks helped to determine the relationship between kinds of tasks and vocabulary development. Although the immediate post test compared in each session to show the immediate effect of receptive and productive tasks on the vocabulary learning and which one was superior to other during treatment times and at last the given post test for two group were examined to determine the recognizable effects of tasks (receptive or productive one) on the vocabulary. All scores of immediate post tests and the delayed post test were recorded on a table to look at differences between receptive and productive tasks. The table had two columns to record scores from the immediate posttest during each session. The data from the table was entered into the SPSS program to receive descriptive information about differences in the vocabulary learning at two different tasks. The SPSS program was also used to evaluate differences in the overall and single immediate post test scores

on the vocabulary development of upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners. In order to examine the delayed impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, the scores of post tests on the two experimental group were submitted to SPSS. The SPSS investigated the effects of receptive and productive tasks on the Iranians EFL learners' vocabulary development. Additionally t-tests were performed to further investigate if there is a difference between experimental groups. The means of immediate post test and delayed posttest of receptive and productive groups are shown on the below Figures.

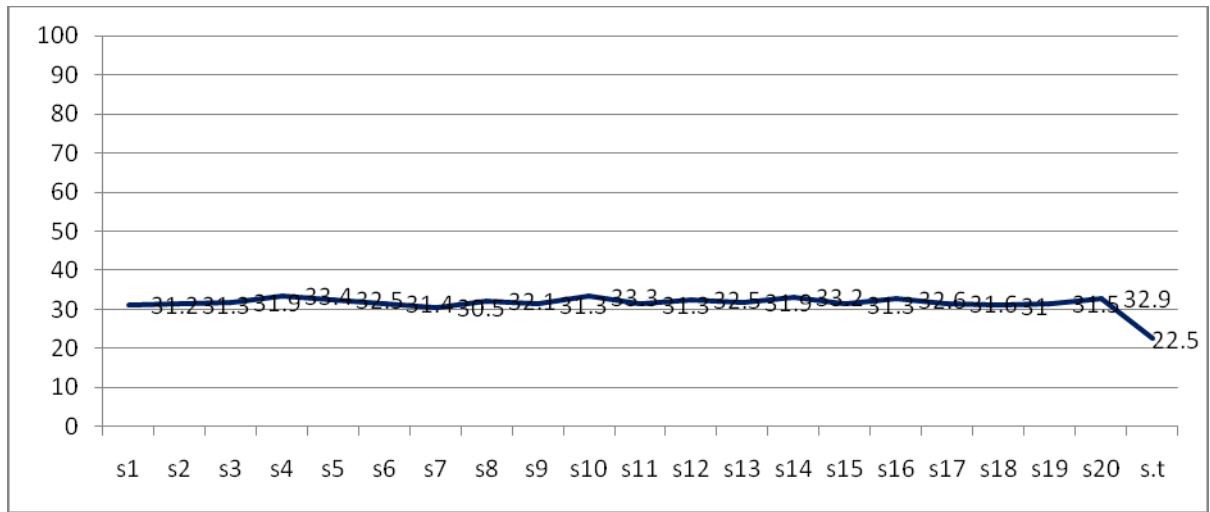


Figure 1. The Means of Receptive Group' Immediate and Delayed Post Tests on the Twenty Session

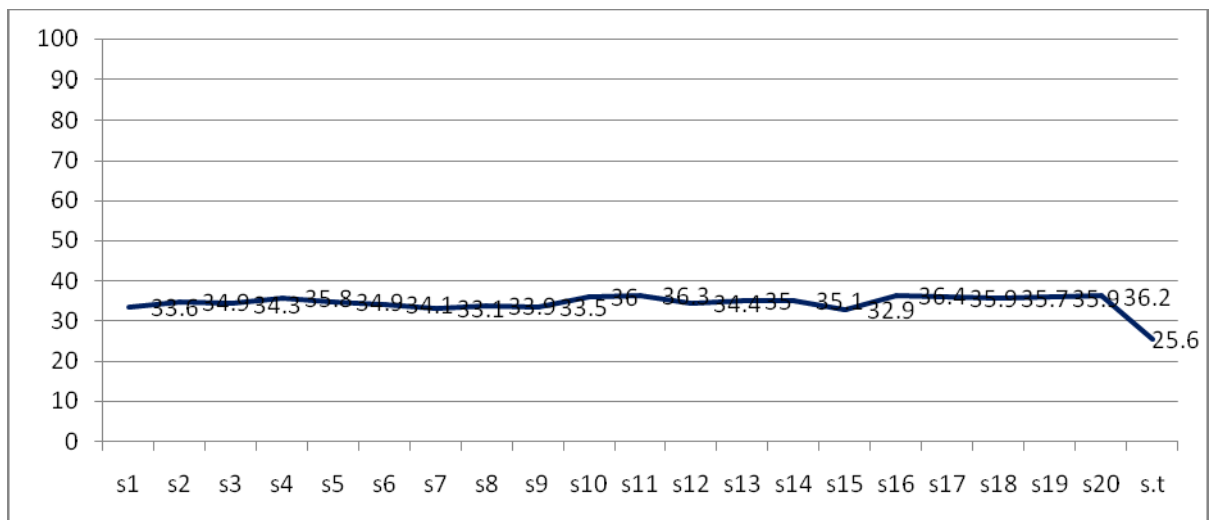


Figure 2. The Means of Productive Group' Immediate and Delayed Post Tests on the Twenty Session

As the Figure suggests the mean scores of productive group was higher than receptive group expect

some sessions such as 6, 7, 8 session. But there is a significant difference at the delayed posttest because productive group mean is larger than receptive group. In spite of the Figures comparisons to investigate the vocabulary development differences final descriptive statistics of two experimental groups are shown on the Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. The Final Descriptive Statistic for the Two Experimental Groups

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
final	Re	15	22.5333	1.76743	.45635
	Pr	15	25.6000	2.06328	.53274

From these descriptive data, it can be seen that the productive group performed better. However, to make sure these observations are also statistically significant, T-Test was run, with probability level set at $p =$ or < 0.05 . The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 2. Results of the T-Test Comparison of Means for Learners' Productive and Receptive Vocabulary Development

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper		
s.total	Equal variances assumed	.328	.571	-4.372	28	.000	-3.06667	.70147	-4.50357	-1.62977
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.372	27.355	.000	-3.06667	.70147	-4.50510	-1.62824

As with the results obtained in the test of Levene for Equality of Variances, the variances in both groups are not equal. Sig .value (p) is lower than .05. It can be also seen in the table of t-test for equality of means that the group means are statistically significant. The value in the Sig (2-tailed) is lower than .05, therefore, there is significant difference between the two groups.

5. Discussion

The main findings of the analysis shown in Tables 3-4 indicated a positive answer to the major question of the study. It was found that the using productive tasks had a significant effect on the learners' vocabulary development. This was proved through the higher mean scores that the productive group obtained in the immediate and delayed post tests. Specially the productive group's performance was differentiated that of the receptive group in the posttests. Furthermore, the pretest results didn't reveal any statistical difference. This means that before application of the experiments, they both had nearly same vocabulary knowledge. Since they selected after exposing to TOEFL vocabulary test. That is to say, they had the same vocabulary knowledge.

The findings of the present study showed that the participants of the productive group except at some sessions had higher scores on the post test than the learners in the receptive group did. Thus there was a statistically significant difference between the receptive group and productive group. The big difference between the receptive group and productive group could be attributed to many reasons. Firstly during the twenty sessions of experiment, the productive group had opportunity to use words in the tasks. The output hypothesis posits that learner output (i.e. the language a learner produces) must be considered not just a sign of acquired knowledge (Krashen, 1994), but also a sign of learning at work (Swain, 2000). Based on the output hypothesis, learners used vocabulary in output form at the tasks. Swain (2000), in particular, argues that the output "forces" learners to move from semantic analysis of the target language to a more syntactic analysis of it. In so doing, learners notice a gap between what they can say and what they want to say, which prompts them to stretch their current inter language capacity in order to fill the gap, enabling them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge (Swain, 2000), on the other hand receptive group didn't have that opportunity. Such productive tasks can be said to have enhanced the productive group's vocabulary learning in a effective way. Secondly, the sentence writing tasks used for productive group that provided opportunity to use background knowledge to complete the tasks. As a result, they become more confident to use their knowledge.

Such findings confirms the findings of Rahimi Esfahani (2012) where a review of research and literature led her to conclude that those who had learned their target words productively outperformed better than the receptive participants on the writing test significantly. The findings of her study revealed that receptive vocabulary learning may be more beneficial to understanding a text that is in contrast with this study. This although agrees with the findings of Falahi and Moinzadeh (2012), where they found that the students who did the productive treatment had better performance on the productive test than receptive posttests, but the converse situation was attested with those participants who did the receptive treatment. Although, the results of the two experiments presented above generally corroborated Hulstijn and Laufer's (2001) findings that he concluded that the output-oriented tasks with high involvement loads produced more effective and more durable effects.

Web's (2005) study results indicated that the receptive task is more superior to the productive task on

the both productive and receptive measures that is in contrast with the present study. Similarly Sarani et al. (2013) who examined the effect of involvement load and task type on vocabulary acquisition, that the receptive tasks were also compared with productive ones. Contrary to the Involvement Load Hypothesis, their study suggested productive tasks were more effective than receptive ones which is in line with the present study. However, both the two experimental group involved in the present investigation appeared at first to be willing to participate in the experiment but they showed unwillingness during post test exams. In spite of the doing tests, learners were unwillingness to doing tasks, since they not used to doing tasks during their learning courses. Rahimi Esfahani et al. (2012) investigated the effect of incidental receptive and productive learning tasks on reading comprehension and the use of taught words in writing in Persian EFL learners who concluded that learners in low intermediate and high intermediate groups who had learned their target words productively outperformed the receptive participants on the writing test significantly, but findings revealed that receptive vocabulary learning may be more beneficial to understanding a text and productive learning was more effective in improving the use of students' taught words in writing that is in contrast to the present research.

Hashemi Shahraki and Kassaian (2011) based on the their investigations on the learner interaction, receptive and productive learning tasks on vocabulary acquisition concluded that productive learning is superior to receptive learning not only in developing productive knowledge but also in producing larger gains in receptive knowledge that confirms the present study findings.

Web (2005) studied the effects of receptive and productive vocabulary tasks on vocabulary knowledge and revealed when the same amount of time was spent on both tasks, the receptive task was superior which contrast with Griffin and Harely (1996), Mondria, Wiersma (2004) and Waring (1997). But the above research (Griffin & Harely, 1996; Mondria & Wiersma, 2004; Waring, 1997) findings confirms this study findings, which indicate that productive tasks are more effective than receptive tasks on the vocabulary development. This study do not confirm Web (2005) study which revealed when the allotted time on tasks depended on the amount of time needed for completion with the productive task requiring more time, the productive time was more effective. Based on the results of the present study, there was a significant difference between the receptive and productive learning. One can argue that this was expected, since on the many studies productive task had better effect than receptive tasks.

6. Results

Based on the results from the data analysis and with regard to the research questions and hypothesis, there was a differential effect on the using receptive and productive tasks on the vocabulary development of upper-intermediate EFL learners. The productive task was more effective than receptive task in the vocabulary retention except in some cases. Vocabulary learning in the past received little attention, but now has become a focus of much research. According to Laufer (1997a, p. 147): "vocabulary is no longer a victim of discrimination in second language learning research, nor in

language teaching?”. As it was observed those learners who have been taught vocabulary through productive tasks outperformed those learners who have been taught vocabulary through receptive tasks. The current study has provided further empirical evidence for the value of a task-based approach to second language learning. The findings show that productive tasks while learners performing tasks provided opportunities for the learners to think about the vocabularies and monitor the vocabularies they used. As observed, productive tasks provide an authentic, purposeful, and intentional background for comprehending and using language.

7. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this research can have several implications in English language teaching materials with regard to the teaching methodology, the findings of the study emphasize the role of receptive and productive tasks in learning vocabulary. The time on the tasks should be considered before applying the technique in teaching methodology. The recommendations that can be drawn from the conclusion are: 1). Teachers should consider the applicability of the tasks in learning contexts. 2). A change should be made from traditional method to task-based teaching. 3). Recent methodological developments should be taken into consideration by EFL learners. 4). English language teaching supervisors should facilitate the process of task-based teaching. 5). Learners should work in the tasks to promote their learning. 6). Learners should be encouraged to do tasks in the class.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

The focus of this study was investigating the comparative effects of using productive and receptive tasks on the vocabulary development. It is recommended first to examine the effect of receptive and productive tasks on other kinds of teaching materials such as reading comprehension. Second, applying tasks in the learning is very important factor and should allot enough time to the completing tasks, taking background about the tasks is another factor. In spite of the tasks in this study, teachers can allow learners to use dictionary in the tasks and also consult with the learners and teacher.

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