# L2 Vocabulary Acquisition: The Impact of Negotiated Interaction

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## Abstract

Interaction between teachers and students during teaching/learning sessions and the language during these interactions form the main source of language input besides instructional materials from textbooks and workbooks. Research has shown that appropriate input and suitable contexts for interaction among students can lead to successful second language acquisition (SLA). This study examines the relationship between negotiated interaction and the ability to retain vocabulary items among a group of primary school English as a Second Language (ESL) learners with similar first language (L1) backgrounds. 48 participants took part in a one-way input task which involved traditional teaching/learning methods where the teacher used translations and pictures to teach vocabulary. 24 of the 48 participants took part in an additional two-way interactive task in the form of an information gap task. Learners worked in pairs to describe target vocabulary items in pictures. The interactive sessions were audio/video taped and transcribed. All the 48 participants sat for a pretest and three posttests (both immediate and delayed). The results showed that learners who negotiated for meaning in the two-way task achieved higher vocabulary test scores. The 24 students involved in the interactive task demonstrated their ability to negotiate for meaning despite their lack of proficiency in the language. As negotiated interaction has proved successful in enabling students to acquire and retain vocabulary items, such interactive tasks should be encouraged in the classroom.

**Keywords:** interactional input, negotiation of meaning, second language acquisition, vocabulary retention, vocabulary acquisition.

## Introduction

English plays an important role in several key areas in Malaysia. At the International Conference IPBA 2006, Faisal (2006) highlighted the impact of the English language in the advancement and growth in Malaysia in areas such as the business, employment, education, politics, tourism, law, media and translation domains. Although English plays an important role in many key areas, there has been a decline in English language proficiency over the years. This has been lamented by the public and politicians alike in

the media over the years. A government survey in 2005 revealed that nearly 60,000 Malaysian graduates were unemployed with one of the reasons being "their poor command of the English Language with inadequate communication skills" (New Straits Times, November 10, 2005). The inability of school leavers to communicate in English after spending almost eleven years in schools may be due to the fact that most Malaysian classrooms are exam oriented where teachers tend to place too much focus on the teaching of grammar and writing skills with little or no emphasis on listening, speaking or on learning vocabulary items. Nunan (1991) notes that an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful language use and that without vocabulary a language cannot be understood. Therefore, it is important that students are equipped with a sufficient amount of vocabulary to help in communication. Structures and functions of the language alone cannot be used for comprehension and communication. In an earlier research conducted by Wilhelm and Pei (2008), questionnaire data revealed that students had little opportunity to practice English in the classroom and classroom time was dominated by teacher talk with little group work. Research has shown that negotiated interaction helps learners with comprehension and production of the language (Pica et. al, 1987) and when learners take part in two-way information gap tasks, they strive for a common communicative goal (Doughty & Pica, 1986). The act of negotiation is supposed to have a lasting effect on memory and research has shown that negotiated interaction is especially beneficial for the acquisition of vocabulary items, in particular concrete nouns. However, previous studies on negotiated interaction involved mainly adults and children of varied L1 backgrounds. In view of this, the present study will therefore examine whether students with similar ethnic backgrounds (sharing the same L1) would be able to negotiate for meaning for the acquisition and retention of vocabulary items. However, this paper will not highlight the strategies used but rather provide quantitative data as evidence that the strategies used by this group of students enabled them to get meaning across.

## Literature Review

### Input and language acquisition

Input in language acquisition has been widely recognized for its role in SLA. "Input is used to refer to the language that is addressed to the L2 learner either by a native speaker or by another L2 learner", (Ellis 1990, p.127). This input according to Corder (1967) is not what the learner hears or what is presented to the learner to take in but rather what actually goes in, making what is heard or read as 'input' and what is taken in as 'intake'. The Input hypothesis developed by Krashen (1985), states that learners acquire language in only one way and that is by understanding messages or receiving input that is slightly above their current level of understanding. Although the theory asserts that comprehensible input is important for acquisition to take place, it does not go on to explain what comprehensible input is or what it looks like (Wesche, 1984). In reaction to the Input Hypothesis, much research was done to look at how input could be made comprehensible to the learner. Pica (1994) claimed that exposure to input alone is insufficient for acquisition of second language (L2) form meanings. Input needs to be made comprehensible before learners can internalize the rules, forms and features. This

led to investigations into areas such as interaction and negotiation of meaning, the role of output and noticing in making input comprehensible to the learner.

## Interactional input

Long (1996) claimed that both interaction and input are two major players in the process of acquisition. Long acknowledged the role of input in language acquisition but went one step further to say that modified interaction between participants in an interlocution was necessary in providing comprehensible input to the language learner. Modified interaction occurs when native speakers or non-native speakers make modifications during their conversations. This is known as the Interaction Hypothesis. According to Long (1996), the modifications that native speakers or non-native speakers make during a conversation serve as comprehensible input to the learners.

According to the Interaction Hypothesis, acquisition is facilitated when learners obtain comprehensible input, feedback (both positive and negative evidence) on their problematic utterances using the feedback provided during interactions. Thus, negotiation sequences have the potential to provide learners with opportunities to access linguistic data about what is acceptable and not acceptable in the target language (Bitchener, 2003).

The premise that interaction promotes comprehension of input has been exemplified in several studies. In a study conducted by Bitchener (2003) on long-term retention of vocabulary items, it was found that task repetition through a two-way information gap task and a decision making task played a role in the incidental acquisition of concrete nouns and to a lesser extent, abstract nouns and adjectives. Based on the results of the study, Bitchener suggested that task-based learning opportunities should be adopted by teachers in their vocabulary development programmes.

Gass and Torres (2005) investigated the effects of input and interaction as separate entities and in combination. The four conditions of investigation were: (1) material focused solely on input, (2) material focused solely on interaction, (3) input-focused material followed by interaction and (4) interaction-focused material followed by input. Using pretest and posttest designs, Gass and Torres tested the groups for the acquisition of (a) Spanish gender agreement (noun + adjective), (b) estar + location and (c) seven vocabulary items. For all the experimental conditions, the greatest gains were noted for vocabulary with the interaction-input condition showing the greatest improvement. The authors go on to state that since vocabulary is noncomplex and non abstract, using one's own internal resources is probably more efficient in these areas of learning. Input only materials are more efficient with other areas of language such as syntax which requires focused attention.

## Negotiation of meaning

Negotiation is an important factor in language learning and there is considerable evidence for the role negotiation plays in comprehension of input. Negotiations seem to work

better with lexical items (Gass & Torres, 2005) than grammatical areas that are more abstract and complex. Pica (1994) summarizes that negotiation helps in making input comprehensible to learners, help them modify their own output and thus provides more opportunities for the learner to access L2 form and meaning. Much of the work conducted on negotiation involved adult L2 or foreign language (FL) learners. Very few studies examined the role of negotiation for child SLA.

Oliver (1998) conducted a study to examine whether children were able to negotiate for meaning just like adults and if so to investigate whether the strategies for negotiation were similar. A one-way task involving the description of a picture for their partners to draw was completed by half of the pairs while a two-way jigsaw task of a kitchen was completed by the other half. Results showed that children did negotiate for meaning in similar ways as adults using strategies like clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and repetitions. However, there was a difference in the degree to which each strategy was used by adults and children. The strategy which was used the most by children was repetition followed by clarification requests and confirmation checks. The least used was comprehension checks. Based on the results, Oliver concluded that even children are able to work towards mutual understanding in a conversation and thus negotiation for meaning has its value in SLA among children in classroom situations.

Oliver (2002) conducted a study on conversational interaction between children aged 8 to 12 years old. Her study involved 96 pairs of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) matched in age and gender. The dyads formed were 32 NNS-NS, 48 NNS-NNS and 16 NS-NS. All the pairs were involved in two communicative tasks, a one-way input task and a two-way task. The results showed that of the three types of dyads, the NNS-NNS used the most negotiation for meaning strategies, followed by the NNS-NS dyads and the NS-NS dyads.

de la Fuente (2006) investigated the effects of three vocabulary lessons (one traditional and two task-based) on the acquisition of basic meanings, forms and morphological aspects of Spanish words. Results showed that the type of pedagogical approach had no impact on immediate retrieval of target word forms but it had an impact on long-term retrieval of target forms. Both the task based lessons were more effective than the traditional method of learning vocabulary.

In a study carried out by Zhao and Bitchener (2007), 16 adult migrants from varied ethnic backgrounds took part in ten information exchange communicative tasks between learners-learners and teacher-learners. The results showed that negotiation occurred in both types of interactions when dealing with linguistic difficulties. However, in the learners-learners interactions, there was more questioning which enabled learners to "initiate opportunities for accessing target language data for the immediate resolution of language difficulties" (Zhao & Bitchener, 2007, p. 446) which augured well for their L2 learning and acquisition.

The combination of both input and interaction in the classroom are important tools for the acquisition of language both in adult and young learners. Negotiated interaction allows for practice in the target language especially when there is little opportunity for the learner to do this outside classroom situations. Moreover, studies (Varonis & Gass, 1985; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987) have shown that negotiation of meaning helps students notice gaps in their language which enables them to work towards mutual understanding. The act of negotiation is supposed to have a lasting effect on memory and research has shown that negotiated interaction is especially beneficial for the acquisition of vocabulary items, in particular concrete nouns.

Students in the primary school in Malaysia are required to know a number of words in the word lists provided in the English Language syllabus especially since these words are tested in the public examination UPSR (a Year Six public examination). Students have very little opportunity or none at all to encounter these words outside the classroom especially if they involve low-frequency words. This is because students tend to use their mother tongue outside classroom situations. Therefore, it is necessary to provide as much practice as possible for students to listen to and reproduce these words in different contexts so that they may be stored in their long-term memory for easy retrieval at a later time. Given this situation, the research questions for this study are as follows:-

1. Is there a significant difference between the immediate vocabulary posttest scores of the group with input and interaction and the group with input only materials?
2. Is there a significant difference between the delayed posttest scores of the group with input and interaction and the group with input only materials?

## Methodology

This study used a mixed-method approach where quantitative data was gathered using pretest and posttests while qualitative data was collected using audio-video recordings of the interactive tasks. However, in this paper, only the quantitative data will be discussed.

## Participants

The participants for the study were forty-eight students from a national type primary school in Kuala Lumpur. These students were from two primary Year Five ESL classrooms. The students in this study were between ten and eleven years of age and belonged to the average proficiency class where their average scores for two monthly tests and one term test ranged from 55-65 marks out of 100. They comprise 28 males and 20 females and are of similar ethnic backgrounds (sharing a similar L1); all are Malays and their mother tongue is Malay. The forty-eight students were divided into two equal groups; the control group and the experimental group.

**Procedures**

On Day 1, all 48 participants sat for a pretest involving 14 vocabulary items on 'Things in the Kitchen'. These words were taken from the Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran, the English Language syllabus for primary schools. Since the language of communication at home is Malay, this particular topic may be daunting for the students as they have little or no opportunity to use these terms in English. On the second day, all 48 participants were taught these vocabulary items through an input only task where the words were embedded in a comprehension passage. The teacher used translations and pictures to get meaning across. On the 3rd day, students in the experimental group were involved in a two-way interactive task. This involved the use of a 'Spot the difference' task where each pair had a picture of a kitchen with different items in them. After receiving instructions from the researchers on how to carry out the task, the students proceeded to ask about one another's picture without being allowed to view their partner's picture. The interactions between the students were audio-video taped and later transcribed by the researchers. All 48 participants sat for a posttest identical to the pretest on the 4th day to check for immediate retention of vocabulary items for both groups. A week later, all 48 participants sat for a second posttest similar to the previous tests. This was to check for delayed retention of vocabulary items for both groups. After 3 months, a third posttest similar to the previous pretest and two posttests were administered to all the 48 students. This was to check for the long term ability of students in both groups to retain the target vocabulary items.

**Results and Discussion**

A total of four sets of scores were gathered. They comprised a pretest and three posttests which were administered immediately after the treatment, a week after the treatment and three months after treatment. Data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17. Descriptive statistics were obtained by conducting a baseline analysis on the pretest scores of both the control and experimental group to determine equality of variances. The results of the test are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below.

**Baseline analysis**

Table 1: Descriptive summary for baseline

| Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 24 | 2.58 | 1.139 | .232 |
| Control | 24 | 2.46 | 1.215 | .248 |

Table 2: Independent samples test

| **Levene's Test for Equality of Variances** | | **t-test for Equality of Means** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
| .178 | 0.675 | 0.368 | 46 | 0.715 | 0.125 |

Based on Tables 1 and 2, the p-value from the Levene's test for equality of variances is 0.715. This means that equality of variances can be assumed where baseline scores can be said to be similar. It can be concluded from the results above that the subjects shared the same level of vocabulary. Thus, the two groups were deemed comparable prior to treatment.

**Comparison of immediate post test results**

To find out if there was a difference between the immediate vocabulary posttest scores of the group with input and interaction and the group with input only materials, an analysis of t-test for paired samples was used to analyze the mean scores of the pre-test and the posttest obtained by the control group and the experimental group. The criterion value was set to $p < 0.05$. The mean scores of the pretest and immediate posttest results for both groups are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Paired samples t-test for experimental group

| | **Mean** | **n** | **Std. Deviation** | **p-value** | **Partial Eta Squared** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baseline | 2.58 | 24 | 1.139 | < 0.001 | 0.925 |
| Immediate post test | 9.71 | 24 | 2.177 | | |

Table 4: Paired samples t-test for control group

| | **Mean** | **n** | **Std. Deviation** | **p-value** | **Partial Eta Squared** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baseline | 2.46 | 24 | 1.215 | < 0.001 | 0.667 |
| Immediate post test | 4.83 | 24 | 2.160 | | |

Tables 3 and 4 show a significant increase in the mean value of the immediate posttest for both groups in comparison to the baseline value. The p-value for both the experimental and control group are reported at < 0.001.

For the control group, the mean gain score was 4.83 indicating that 5 out of 14 target words (35.7%) were learnt after receiving input material. The mean score gain for the experimental group was 9.71, indicating that 10 out of 14 words were acquired after receiving input and interaction materials. This shows that learners in this group managed to learn 71.4% of the target vocabulary. Thus, there was a significant increase for both groups with p values at less than 0.001; the gain for the experimental group was significantly higher. This gain is seen in the Partial Eta Squared value of the experimental group which is at 0.925 compared to the Control group which is at 0.667. It can be concluded that students who received input and interaction materials performed much better than students who received input only materials. The results of this study are similar to previous studies (Gass & Torres, 2005; Ellis et al., 1994) conducted on negotiated interaction for the acquisition of vocabulary.

Gass and Torres (2005) claim that subjecting learners to interaction with materials only may not enable the learners to confirm or disconfirm hypothesis if there is a lack of knowledge. This is true in the case of weak and average proficiency learners. Thus, the study confirms that input together with interaction is more effective in enabling students to retain more vocabulary items than receiving input only materials.

A study on traditional and task based lessons on the acquisition of vocabulary by de la Fuente (2002), revealed that task based activities had no impact on immediate retrieval (after treatment) but had an impact on long-term-retrieval (after a week). In this study however, quantitative analysis performed on the data showed that negotiated interaction was effective for both short-term and long-term retrieval. The results of this study support Gass and Torres' (2005) claims that input and interaction materials when presented together result in greater gains for vocabulary acquisition. In this study, while negotiating the meanings of words through the interactive task, students were able to make themselves understood. In other words, they have made input comprehensible to one another by modifying their output of language which according to Swain (1985) is necessary for L2 mastery.

To find out if there was a difference between the delayed posttest scores of the group with input and interaction and the group with input only materials, data was submitted to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with overall changes for both groups and multiple comparison of time (immediate and delayed) to examine the effect of negotiated interaction on the immediate and delayed vocabulary test scores. The repeated measures analysis was performed to test the difference in mean scores between Baseline, Immediate, One week later and Three months later. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 5. In the analysis, the p-value was set at less than 0.05. Thus, at least one pair of means differed significantly. In testing the pair wise differences, the Bonferroni multiple comparisons method was used to identify specific differences between the means. The results are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

**Changes over time**

Table 5: Overall changes for both groups

| Time | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower | Upper |
| Baseline | 2.521 | .170 | 2.179 | 2.863 |
| Immediate | 7.271 | .313 | 6.641 | 7.901 |
| One week later | 8.042 | .298 | 7.441 | 8.642 |
| Three months later | 7.417 | .307 | 6.799 | 8.034 |

Table 6: Multiple comparison

| Time 1 | Time 2 | Mean difference | SE | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baseline | Immediate | 4.750* | .274 | <.0.001 |
| | One week later | 5.521* | .291 | <.0.001 |
| | Three months later | 4.896* | .312 | <.0.001 |
| Immediate | One week later | 0.771* | .219 | 0.006 |
| | Three months later | 0.146 | .302 | 1.000 |
| One week later | Three months later | 0.625 | .239 | 0.073 |

Tables 5 and 6 show that the posttest mean values for both groups at Immediate, One week later and Three months later are significantly higher than the Baseline values. The mean values for the One week later pretest is significantly higher that the Immediate posttest value. However, the Three months later posttest mean value is no different from the Immediate posttest value. This means that there is no significant difference between the One week later and Three months later posttest mean values. An illustration of the results can be seen in Figure 1. There is a sharp increase in the mean scores from the Baseline to the Immediate posttest mean values. Thereafter, the means are more or less leveling, meaning that there is not much change after that.

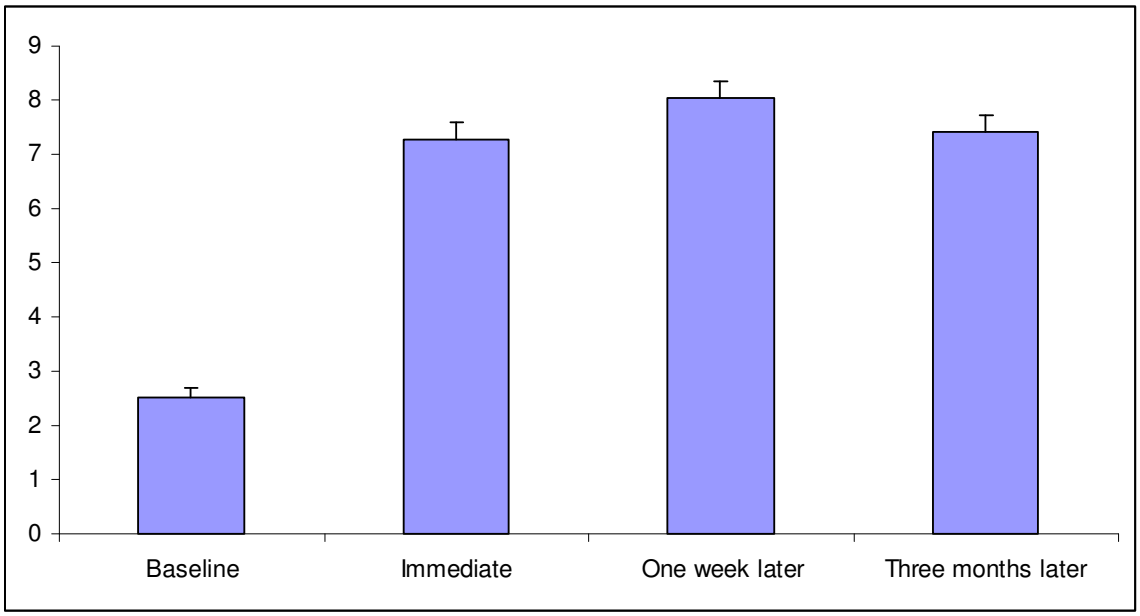


Figure 1: Overall changes for both groups

Data was also subjected to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with overall changes by groups and multiple comparisons by groups to determine which of the two groups (control and experimental) had performed better in terms of retention of vocabulary items. The repeated measures ANOVA was performed to test if there was a difference in the Baseline, Immediate, One week later and Three months later scores between the two groups. The descriptive statistics for the two groups are shown in Tables 7 and 8. There was a difference in the means between the two groups, at least at one time point. Difference between the group means at various time points were tested based on the 95% confidence intervals (CI). If the two intervals overlap, there is no difference in the scores.

For Baseline, in the experimental group the 95% CI for mean is [2.102, 3.064] and in the control group the 95% CI is [1.945, 2.971]. Since these two intervals overlap (that is 2.971 is between 2.102 and 3.064), this shows that there is no significant difference in the Baseline scores between the two groups. This means that the students share a similar level in terms of their understanding of the vocabulary items. Immediately after the intervention, the 95% CI for the experimental group is [8.789, 10.627] while for the control group it is [3.921, 5.746]. Clearly, these two intervals do not overlap. Thus, there is a difference in the mean scores between the two groups at this time point.

One week later, the 95% CI for the experimental group is [9.436, 11.314], while for the control group it is [4.906, 6.510]. Since these two intervals do not overlap, again there is a difference in the mean scores between the two groups at this time point. Three months later, the 95% CI for the experimental group is [8.646, 10.604], while for the control

group it is [4.402, 6.015]. Since these two intervals again do not overlap, there is a difference in the mean scores between the two groups at this time point. This means that the acquisition and retention of target vocabulary items are not similar for both groups. Table 8 shows that for both groups, the posttest mean values at Immediate, One week later and Three months later are significantly higher than the Baseline values. However, there is no significant difference from the Immediate posttest onwards.

Table 7: Overall changes by groups

| Group | Time | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Experimental | Baseline | 2.583 | .232 | 2.102 | 3.064 |
| | Immediate | 9.708 | .444 | 8.789 | 10.627 |
| | One week later | 10.375 | .454 | 9.436 | 11.314 |
| | Three months later | 9.625 | .473 | 8.646 | 10.604 |
| Control | Baseline | 2.458 | .248 | 1.945 | 2.971 |
| | Immediate | 4.833 | .441 | 3.921 | 5.746 |
| | One week later | 5.708 | .388 | 4.906 | 6.510 |
| | Three months later | 5.208 | .390 | 4.402 | 6.015 |

Table 8: Multiple comparison by groups

| Group | Time 1 | Time 2 | Mean difference | SE | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | Baseline | Immediate | 7.125* | .423 | .000 |
| | | One week later | 7.792* | .446 | .000 |
| | | Three months later | 7.042* | .452 | .000 |
| | Immediate | One week later | 0.667 | .299 | .215 |
| | | Three months later | 0.083 | .403 | 1.000 |
| | One week later | Three months later | 0.750 | .264 | .056 |
| Control | Baseline | Immediate | 2.375* | .350 | .000 |
| | | One week later | 3.250* | .372 | .000 |
| | | Three months later | 2.750* | .431 | .000 |
| | Immediate | One week later | 0.875 | .320 | .071 |
| | | Three months later | 0.375 | .450 | 1.000 |
| | One week later | Three months later | 0.500 | .399 | 1.000 |

An illustration of the results can be observed in Figure 2. It can be seen that there is a sharp increase in the mean scores from the Baseline to the Immediate posttest in the

experimental group compared to the control group. Again, thereafter, the means are more or less leveling.

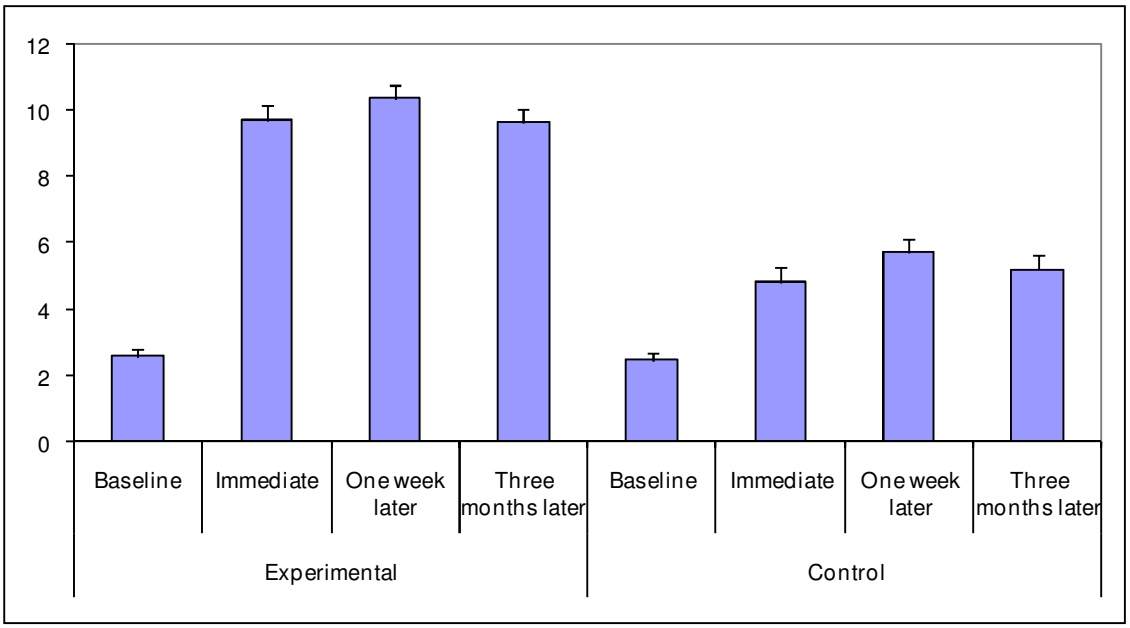


Figure 2: Overall changes by groups

For the One week later posttest scores, for both groups, the mean values seem to have increased slightly, meaning that students in both groups had acquired more vocabulary in the space of one week. Although students were not told that they would have to sit for a similar posttest, a week after the immediate posttest, some learning seemed to have taken place. For the Three months later posttest scores, again the results in Tables 7 and 8 showed that both groups were able to retain the vocabulary learnt. After a slight increase for the One week later posttest, mean values dipped slightly back to almost the same level as the immediate posttest scores.

Figure 2 shows a clear outline of this trend. It can be concluded from the results that there is a significant difference between the two groups in their ability to retain the vocabulary items learnt with the experimental group showing greater gains by retaining more vocabulary items than the control group. The results also showed that both groups were able to retain the vocabulary items learned. However, one interesting observation noted was the fact that, for long-term retention, the number of vocabulary items acquired had increased over time for both groups. The results of this study are partially supported by the findings of Ellis et al. (1994) who conducted a similar study on negotiated interaction and vocabulary acquisition.

Ellis et al. (1994) carried out two separate classroom studies called the Saitama Study and the Tokyo Study based on the same design. In this study, both the premodified group (PM) and interactionally modified (IM) group listened to a set of instructions read by a

native speaker of English. The PM group was not allowed to interact with the teacher whilst the IM group was allowed to do so. The Saitama study revealed that learners who received interactionally modified input were able to retain more vocabulary items compared to the PM group, confirming that negotiated interaction helped in the long-term retention of vocabulary items. However, in the Tokyo study, long-term effect for negotiated interaction was not evident. In fact the PM group outperformed the IM group. The authors claim that this is due to the fact that students in the Tokyo study had a higher level of motivation to learn English and do well compared to the students from the Saitama study that came from a less prestigious and less academically successful public high school. However, where the present study is concerned, the researchers speculate on the following for such an occurrence.

a) After the immediate posttest, the students were observed to be discussing the questions in the test. They sought clarification for the objects that they were not able to identify or were not too sure of in the test. This had reinforced learning of some vocabulary items.

b) The nature of the posttest itself could have been responsible for learners acquiring more vocabulary. Since all the pretest and posttests were similar, this may have helped some students to answer questions that were previously not known as a result of discussion after the tests.

c) During an interview with the students, researchers learnt that some of them had done some revising and memorizing of the target vocabulary items on their own. This was confirmed during the interview when students claimed that they had revised at home to remember the vocabulary items.

The results of this study have shown that input together with interaction have helped learners to acquire more vocabulary than those in the input only group. Where retention of vocabulary is concerned, both groups managed to retain the vocabulary learnt. However, the gain in the experimental group is more significant than in the control group. This means that the students in the experimental group were able to acquire and retain more vocabulary items compared to the control group. It can be concluded that both the control and experimental groups had shown a significant increase in the acquisition of vocabulary items. In addition, the experimental group showed greater gains in the test scores. Where delayed posttest scores were concerned there was a very slight increase in the One week later scores for both groups. As for the Three month delayed posttest scores, it was more or less the same as the Immediate posttest scores for both groups.

## Conclusion

This study was motivated by concerns regarding the lack of opportunities for students to use the target language in the classroom. The results of this study confirm that negotiated interaction has its value in enhancing the acquisition and retention of vocabulary items among average proficiency primary school students where concrete nouns are concerned.

Interaction enables learners to work together for meaning, whereas in traditional classroom teaching/learning sessions, where the teacher provides information through one-way input students have little opportunity to produce the target language. The one-way input task which involved the teacher introducing vocabulary through a comprehension lesson did not benefit lexical acquisition as much as the interactive tasks. By listening to the teacher alone, there was insufficient reinforcement of the newly learnt vocabulary. The opportunity to practice the target language in the classroom has enabled the students in the experimental group to acquire and retain more vocabulary items than those in the control group. Thus, carefully planned activities involving negotiated interaction is too valuable to be overlooked in the ESL classroom. Instead, it should be one regular feature in the classroom which should be incorporated in the syllabus and textbooks for the value it offers. Preparation for important public exams need not be a boring and mundane exercise. English language classrooms need to be fun and exciting to encourage students to be involved in a variety of language exercises for the development of the English language and one such method is through negotiated interaction.

In the process of carrying out this study, there were several limitations that needed to be addressed. The number of participants posed a limitation and as such the findings cannot be generalized to other educational settings. For better accountability of the findings, it would have been desirable to have had a larger number of participants. The present study involved students who belonged to the same level of proficiency. Similar to studies on NS/NNS negotiation of meaning, future research should also include negotiation of meaning between pairs comprising average and intermediate proficiency learners. It is also not known if results would be similar for the acquisition of grammar or other aspects of the language besides vocabulary. The use of similar pretest and posttests could have had an effect on the students' memory. Future research should involve manipulation of test items to discourage the influence of item familiarity which could have affected students' performance. Multiple measures of different types of vocabulary tests would enhance credibility and perhaps offer more specific insights.

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