

An Investigation Into High School Students' Vocabulary Uptake as a Result of the Interventionist Versus the Non-Interventionist Approach

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Abstract—This research study investigated the effectiveness of two vocabulary instructional methods at a Perth high school to prepare 29 year nine English as an additional language (EAL) students for a high-stakes national literacy assessment called NAPLAN. With the aim of finding the most useful pedagogical practice to spur students' vocabulary growth, the author investigated the participants' vocabulary uptake as a result of the interventionist approach versus the non-interventionist approach, both of which were applied in conjunction with Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Students' narratives were coded to determine the frequency of use of the target words, their grammatical accuracy and contextual appropriacy. Follow-up interviews were conducted to investigate the lack of uptake in some students. Both methods of instruction were found to lead to a high frequency of uptake and contextually appropriate application of the target words. The non-interventionist approach was observed to result in more grammatically accurate usage of the taught lexical items. In the context that language teachers tend to use the implicit, incidental approach more than explicit vocabulary instruction (Wong & Lee, 2024), the findings of the study will help educators make informed choices to select the most suitable instructional approach in the classroom to boost their students' vocabulary development.

Index Terms—vocabulary acquisition, interventionist approach, non-interventionist approach, authentic input, modified input

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the most fundamental building block in language learning, playing a crucial role in determining students' ability to express themselves flexibly and precisely (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Schmitt et al., 2017). It is often reported to be far more important than grammar since without vocabulary the successful transmission of the message is impeded (Barcroft, 2004). To date, vocabulary acquisition has attracted a significant number of studies to investigate the best pedagogic interventions to increase students' retention of new vocabulary, such as employing audio-visual resources (Nguyen & Boers, 2019; Sinyashina, 2020; van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013; Vidal, 2011), exposing students to incidental and instructed reading (Chang & Renandya, 2021; Collins, 2010; Lowell et al., 2020; Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015; Min, 2008; Pellicer-Sánchez, 2016; Vidal, 2011), using multimodal glosses (Boers et al., 2017; Kherzlou et al., 2017), employing educational games (Calvo-Ferrer, 2017), using technology-assisted methods (Alemi et al., 2015; Kohnke et al., 2019; Wong & Looi, 2010) and consulting the dictionary (Alahmadi, 2020; Laufer, 2003). Findings have been far from homogeneous, with some methods found to be more effective than others. For example, direct instruction combined with computer-assisted glosses is reported to result in greater vocabulary gains than incidental learning (Kherzlou et al., 2017) while pictures are noted to usurp adult EFL learners' attention and distract them from retaining new words effectively (Boers et al., 2017).

At the time this study was conducted, the researcher was a teacher at a high school in Perth, Australia. Through the examination of the existing literature into vocabulary instruction, the researcher-practitioner endeavoured to find the answer as to what teaching approach would help to maximise student vocabulary retention and application to improve her students' results in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN, NAP, 2022a). Despite a plethora of studies about vocabulary acquisition, there is a dearth of research conducted with English as an additional language (EAL) students in an English-speaking context such as Australia. The majority of the current body of research appears to be carried out in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (e.g. Boers et al., 2017; Ghanbari et al., 2015; Min, 2008; Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015; Nguyen & Boers, 2019; Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Zheng et al., 2022) with adult university students or adult students (Mohamed, 2018; Nguyen & Boers, 2019; Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Zeng et al., 2022). Mohamed (2018) indicated their participants were English as a second language (ESL) students; however, they were graduate students majoring in engineering and science, not school students such as those in the current study.

Regarding the instruments used to measure vocabulary retention, few studies required students to produce extended

writing tasks to evaluate their vocabulary memory and accuracy of usage. Methods employed in past studies to test students' vocabulary retention or uptake tend to involve closed tasks such as gap filling (Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015), multiple choice questions (Ghanbari et al., 2015; Mohamed, 2018; Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015; Pellicer-Sánchez, 2016) and matching exercises (Boers et al., 2017; Nguyen & Boers, 2019) to test form recognition and meaning recall. Common instruments such as the Vocabulary Size Test (Mohamed, 2018; Zeng et al., 2022) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) do not require the participants to produce the target language orally or in the written form to test the extent to which they can employ the new lexical items in their speaking or writing to respond to a prompt or topic.

The lack of studies that measure vocabulary retention through written production prompted the author to conduct this research project to evaluate her own practice. This study focused on year nine school students learning EAL in an English-speaking country, who were taught advanced narrative vocabulary in four weeks to prepare for the annual NAPLAN assessment (NAP, 2022a). The study compared the effectiveness of two teaching methods: contextualised authentic input (also referred to in this study as the non-interventionist approach) and discrete sentence input (henceforth the interventionist approach) with regard to students' vocabulary uptake rate, grammatical accuracy of the application of the target words and contextual appropriacy of usage. Both methods were delivered in conjunction with Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). The instrument to measure students' vocabulary retention, accuracy and appropriacy of usage was an extended NAPLAN-style narrative writing task performed under testing conditions in 45 minutes ten days after instruction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Naturalistic Vocabulary Acquisition Versus Instructed Vocabulary Acquisition*

Naturalistic vocabulary acquisition is also referred to as uninstructed, unguided or spontaneous acquisition (Housen & Pierrard, 2005). Naturalistic vocabulary acquisition happens due to incidental learning, a by-product of learners' exposure to naturally occurring, authentic resources such as listening and reading activities (Hulstijn, 2003; Nguyen & Boer, 2019). Learners pick up new words by themselves and are not explicitly instructed what to focus on. Those acquiring vocabulary via this method are often said to pay attention to the meanings of the lexical items rather than their form (Hulstijn, 2003).

While naturalistic, incidental vocabulary acquisition is common among L1 children (Coady, 1997), it is often found to have a disappointingly slow impact on L2 learners (e.g., Dahl & Vulchanova, 2014; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Waring & Takaki, 2003) and may only be suitable for advanced learners (Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). This is partly because of the difficulty to encourage L2 learners to engage in leisure reading on their own (Min, 2008). Within the classroom context, Waring and Takaki (2003) reported the Japanese university students in their study showed a sharp decline in their vocabulary retention after one week and a three-month delay and did not demonstrate much vocabulary acquisition from a graded reader. Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) found incidental acquisition to be useful only when students were repeatedly exposed to the words, i.e. more than ten times each. In a study that involved 60 first-grade Dutch students, Dahl and Vulchanova (2014) showed naturalistic acquisition was beneficial to the children's receptive vocabulary comprehension; however, it took the participants eight months to develop their ability to recognise the items after repeatedly listening to increased English input from their teacher.

Contrary to incidental vocabulary acquisition is explicit vocabulary instruction (Schmitt, 2000), also called tutored or guided acquisition (Housen & Pierrard, 2005). This approach places a conscious emphasis on both forms and meanings to commit new vocabulary items to memory (Hulstijn, 2003). It is reported to be the dominant mode of vocabulary acquisition as more people are learning language in a formal context (Housen & Pierrard, 2005). However, whether it plays a role in enabling second language acquisition (SLA) or facilitating SLA is a subject of contention among SLA researchers (Housen & Pierrard, 2005). For example, while Schmitt (2000) argues high-frequency vocabulary must be taught explicitly to ensure a firm foundation for language learners, Wong and Lee (2024) express the concern that explicit instruction may not meet every student's needs as some lexical aspects cannot be covered sufficiently in the classroom and would be better acquired through incidental learning.

B. *Teaching Vocabulary: Interventionist Versus Non-Interventionist Approaches*

An interventionist approach refers to a pre-selection of discrete language items to teach a target language objective (Long & Crookes, 1992). This synthetic approach helps teachers to manipulate and streamline the input, enabling students to focus on specific linguistic aspects that need developing (Long & Crookes, 1992). While this approach appears to be useful in making language accessible for students, Nematollahi and Maghsoudi (2015) argue that language and culture are intertwined and need to be taught side by side. Teaching new words as decontextualised items may be demotivating and thus reduce retention (Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015).

In contrast to the interventionist strategy is the non-interventionist, whole-text approach, which aims at presenting new language in an authentic and contextually meaningful way (Long & Crookes, 1992). This approach is contended to provide students with multiple benefits including learning real language in context, learning a range of genres and styles and increasing students' intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure, which leads to long-term improvements (Shaughnessy, 2004). Despite these potential merits, there are some concerns the non-interventionist, whole-text approach may not

provide students with what they need or that the vocabulary is too complex and not adapted to students' proficiency level (Shaughnessy, 2004).

The literature that compares the use of authentic and non-authentic texts to aid vocabulary acquisition appears non-conclusive. For example, in a study involving 74 adult Iranian EFL learners, Nematollahi and Maghsoudi (2015) found an insignificant difference between the words learned from a vocabulary practice book and those acquired from authentic texts selected from a website. On the contrary, Ghanbari et al. (2015), who also studied young adult Iranian students' vocabulary uptake, reported that the group who learned vocabulary from an authentic online newspaper demonstrated a marked growth in their lexical knowledge compared with the control group who only received vocabulary instruction from a textbook. Due to these inconclusive findings and the fact that both the interventionist and non-interventionist approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses, this study set out to investigate which pedagogical strategy was more effective to expedite students' vocabulary retention and accuracy of use.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Teaching Context and Participants

The participants of this study were 29 year nine students who spent four weeks preparing for NAPLAN narrative writing as a part of the annual national assessment program for years three, five, seven and nine (NAP, 2022a). While NAP (2022a) indicates Australian students are expected to master a variety of written genres, the text types usually tested are narrative writing and persuasive writing (NAP, 2022a). In 2023, NAPLAN happened at the end of the seventh week of the first school term (NAP, 2022b), meaning the students in the study had about seven weeks to review and revise the two genres for the written component of this national literacy assessment.

The students in the study came from non-English speaking backgrounds who had been in Australia from one to four years and did not have English as their medium of instruction in their home countries. Therefore, they met Western Australia's eligibility approval to be enrolled in the EAL course (SCSA, 2023). As can be seen in the table below, two students (Student 28 and Student 29) were new to Australia and thus were not required to sit NAPLAN; however, they were encouraged by the school to participate in the assessment to familiarise themselves with the new educational requirements. Therefore, they were also involved in the study and participated in the data collection.

While the students were grouped into two EAL classes taught by the author, their English proficiency levels were not homogeneous. As shown in Table 1, the students' levels were evaluated based on the EAL progress map used in Western Australia, which is divided into eight levels. Level one describes students who have a limited command of written and oral communication skills while level eight delineates those who are highly fluent in the target language (Department of Education WA, 2015).

TABLE 1
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL

Student number (deidentified)	Ethnic background	Length of stay in Australia	Level of English proficiency (according to the EAL progress map ¹)
S1	Malaysian - Chinese	3 years	7
S2	Chinese - Hong Kong	3 years	7
S3	Iranian	2 years	6
S4	Chinese	4 years	8
S5	Chinese	4 years	6
S6	Chinese	4 years	5
S7	Chinese	4 years	6
S8	Chinese	4 years	6
S9	Chinese	4 years	4
S10	Chinese	3 years	4
S11	Taiwanese	2 years	7
S12	Burmese	2 years	7
S13	Singaporean	1 year	4
S14	Malaysian - Chinese	3 years	8
S15	Malaysian - Chinese	4 years	7
S16	Malaysian - Chinese	2 years	7
S17	Thai	1 year	4
S18	Chinese	4 years	4
S19	Chinese - Hong Kong	3 years	2 (neurodivergent)
S20	Indian	1.5 years	6
S21	Malaysian	4 years	7
S22	Iranian	4 years	5
S23	Indian	3 years	7
S24	Malaysian	4 years	4 (special needs)
S25	Chinese - Hong Kong	3 years	5
S26	Indonesian	3 years	5
S27	Chinese	4 years	6
S28	Indian	3 months	3
S29	Indian	1 month	3

¹ Level 1 means the student is new to learning English while level 8 indicates that the student is a competent English user in a wide range of social and learning contexts (Department of Education, WA, 2015).

B. Implementation of Two Teaching Approaches

The participants in the two classes were taught narrative vocabulary and narrative conventions by the same teacher (the author) four times a week (4 x 60 minutes) in four weeks to prepare for NAPLAN. Two instructional approaches were applied in the first two weeks: the interventionist approach in the first week and the non-interventionist approach in the second week, with a buffer period in the third week before a test was implemented in the fourth week. The goal was to see which strategy was more effective to promote vocabulary uptake, accuracy and appropriacy of usage.

(a). Stage 1: Interventionist Approach

The students were reminded of the conventions of narrative writing via a YouTube video. They were then given the handout in Appendix 1, which consists of pre-selected, modified sentences to illustrate how to report characters' direct speech in narrative writing while simultaneously describing characters' attitudes, emotions and actions and the atmosphere of the scene. The chosen sentences have similar structures to help develop a 'formula' for these aspects of narrative writing. Employing Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009), the teacher presented the new lexical items one by one with regard to forms, meanings and usage. 16 words were taught by this approach.

A quick diagnostic test had been conducted to ensure the students were not familiar with the words highlighted in Appendix 1 and had not used them before in their speaking or writing. As the students listened to the teacher's explanations, they were asked to annotate meanings directly onto their handouts. This method of typographic enhancement has also been used in other studies about vocabulary instruction (e.g. see Boers et al., 2017; Nguyen & Boers, 2019) to promote students' 'noticing' of salient language features according to the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 2001). The instruction was then followed by form-focused practice tasks (Ellis, 2015) such as pair dictation, technologically enhanced quizzes and paper-based quizzes to promote short-term retention of the spelling and their meanings. This procedure took four lessons (4 x 60 minutes).

(b). Stage 2: Non-Interventionist

Students were introduced to the classic novel *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte, 2016), its plot and characters via a diagram and a YouTube trailer. After that, they were provided with an excerpt in Appendix 2 to teach reported speech and vocabulary to describe characters' attitudes, actions and emotions as well as the atmosphere of the scene. Similar to the first approach, Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009) was adopted together with typographic enhancement (e.g. see Boers et al., 2017; Nguyen & Boers, 2019). The form-focused practice (Ellis, 2015) also involved pair dictation, technologically enhanced quizzes and paper-based quizzes. This procedure took another four lessons (4 x 60 minutes). 16 words were taught by this approach.

(c). Stage 3: Buffer Period

The students were taught a series of pre-selected sentences to equip them with other thematic narrative lexical items such as describing the setting, actions, and inner feelings. This happened in six lessons (6 x 60 minutes) and served as a buffer between the interventions above and the subsequent test for data collection to circumvent the issue of students using their short-term memory to recall the vocabulary (Nematollahi & Maghsoudi, 2015). At the end of Stage 3, students were given one lesson (60 minutes) to revise all that had been taught in 14 lessons to prepare for their practice test, which was conducted some time before the actual NAPLAN writing session. The data collection process, however, only focused on the words presented in Stage 1 and Stage 2.

(d). Data Collection Instrument

As an instrument to evaluate students' retention, accuracy and appropriacy of usage of the vocabulary taught in Stage 1 and Stage 2, the participants were asked to write a narrative in 45 minutes in response to two NAPLAN-style narrative prompts called "Discovery" (first EAL class) and "What a mess" (second EAL class). Two different prompts were selected to ensure fairness across the two EAL classes as the written assessments could not be conducted at the same time due to the classes' differing timetables. The participants were instructed to construct a 500-word story of any genre so long as it followed the conventions of a narrative (see Humphry, 2020, for more explanations of the marking guide for NAPLAN, also used for this written assessment). The tests were considered high stakes since their results were recorded for the students' semester reports. In other words, the data collection was a part of an authentic teaching and assessment process.

C. Data Analysis

After the students' written responses to the narrative prompts were collected, the taught lexical items from Stage 1 (interventionist approach) and Stage 2 (non-interventionist approach) were colour-coded as suggested by Macnaughton and Hughes (2009). As the writing was submitted online to a forum in a learning management system called SEQTA (Education Horizons, 2023), the frequency of the words could be located quickly with the search function (Control + F). This could have been done with SPSS (IBM, 2024) if the scale of the data had been larger. The words that were not contextually appropriate were picked out and examined separately. The frequency and accuracy of the words used were then calculated to determine which instructional method was more impactful on students' vocabulary acquisition. Four

participants who did not employ any of the instructed vocabulary were engaged in an informal, open-ended, low-key interview to further investigate why there was zero uptake from them.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Quantitative Analysis of Students' Uptake of Newly Taught Vocabulary in Their Narratives

Among 29 students participating in the study, 25 students incorporated some new words taught by the two intervention approaches in their narrative (86.2%). Four students did not use any of the new vocabulary in their narrative: S13, S22, S28 and S29 (13.8%), two of whom were newcomers (S28 and S29). Out of the 16 target words taught by the interventionist approach, 14 were used (Figure 1). This ratio was higher in the non-interventionist approach, which saw 15 out of 16 target words being picked up by the students (Figure 2).

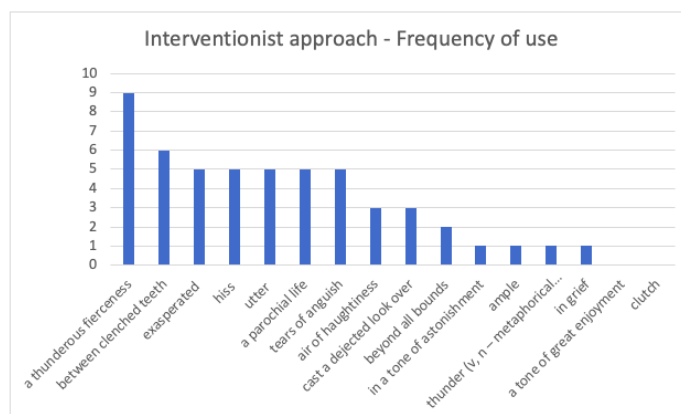


Figure 1. Frequency of Usage – Words Taught by the Interventionist Approach²

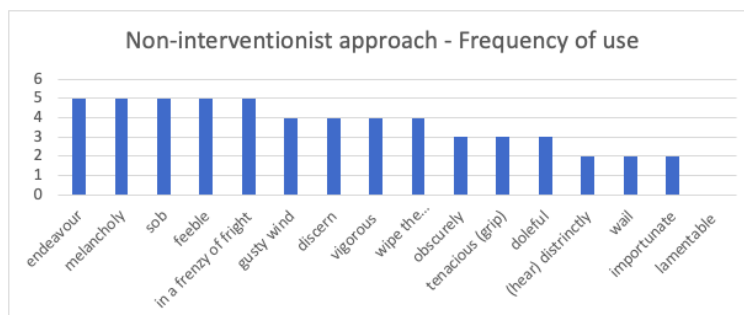


Figure 2. Frequency of Usage – Words Taught by the Non-Interventionist Approach

On average, each of the 16 words taught from the interventionist approach was used 3.25 times (total: 52 times; mean = 3.25, Figure 3) while each of the 16 words taught through the non-interventionist approach was used 3.5 times (total: 56 times; mean = 3.5, Figure 3).

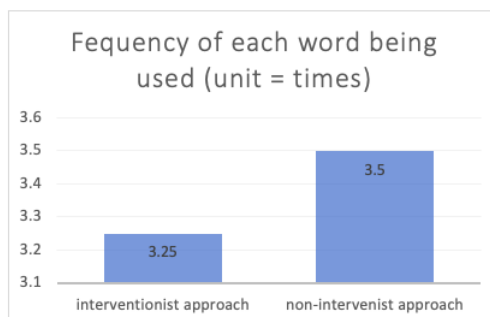


Figure 3. Comparison of the Frequency of the New Words Used by Students

As can be seen in Table 2, the words learned from the interventionist approach were used with a lower grammatical accuracy rate (86.5%) than words learned from the non-interventionist approach (91.07%). However, words picked up

² The numbers in the vertical axis indicate the number of times the words were used by the participants.

from the interventionist approach appeared to be used more contextually appropriately (98.1%) than words taught by the non-interventionist approach (91.07%).

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY AND CONTEXTUAL APPROPRIACY

	Number of times words were used grammatically correctly	Percentage	Number of times words were used contextually appropriately	Percentage
Interventionist approach	45/52 times ³	86.5%	50/52 times	98.1%
Non-interventionist approach	51/56 times ⁴	91.07%	51/56 times	91.07%

B. Examples of Students' Vocabulary Usage in Their Narratives

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide examples of the students' application of the words taught by the two approaches to illustrate the quantitative results which have been discussed.

Table 3 presents students' usage of "anguish(ed)" taught by the interventionist approach. As can be seen below, all five students used "anguish" accurately as a noun, employing appropriate prepositions and verbs to create correct phrases such as "burning with anguish" (S4) and "a cry filled with anguish" (S24). All these participants demonstrated correct understanding of the meaning of the new word and used it suitably in their stories to describe severe mental pain or suffering. S10, having a pre-intermediate level of English, also used "anguish" contextually correctly despite a minor grammatical error with the article "the".

TABLE 3
EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS' USAGE OF "ANGUISH" PRESENTED BY THE INTERVENTIONIST APPROACH

Georg woke up when the sun retreated. He was filled with melancholy and <i>anguish</i> ⁵ . (S2)
"So who are you? Are you just a figment of my imagination?" Basil questioned, still burning with <i>anguish</i> . (S4)
George sobbed with the <i>anguish</i> and more felt that the weird have make fun of them. George's dad still dies, with the nameless and pity. George felt he could seed the wisp of gold. (S10)
I can't describe what I saw next, but I heard a shattering noise, and a cry filled with <i>anguish</i> . (S24)
I talked in <i>anguish</i> , "I know, but I cannot let go of my past. I didn't even say goodbye to my classmates and friends!". He knew that I am not feeling well, so he continued to chat with me. (S25)

Table 4 presents examples of the students' application of "clenched" taught by interventionist approach. "Clench" was flexibly applied as both a verb by students S1, S2 and S19 and as an adjective by S23 and S27. Only one of six attempts was grammatically incorrect (S18). However, this still illustrates a high accuracy rate of this lexical item learned through the interventionist approach (about 83%).

TABLE 4
EXAMPLES OF HOW STUDENTS MANIPULATED THE PARTS OF SPEECH OF "CLENCH" TAUGHT BY THE INTERVENTIONIST APPROACH

"That wicked woman!" I muttered. I clenched my teeth and stood in grief. (S1)
Jack's eyebrows furrowed and he clenched his fist. (S2)
"This was your box; a treasure belongs to your childhood." The mother hissed between the clench teeth. (S18)
"Okay gggg got it dddd dad and mmmmm mum" I clenched my teeth. (S19)
"One of your little loving creatures." The giant stated, hissing between his clenched teeth. (S23)
Showing his clenched teeth to his friend while rage coursed through his veins at rapid speed. (S27)

Words taught by non-interventionist approach were also applied flexibly by students. Table 5 demonstrates how the students were able to change the parts of speech of the adjective "vigorous" taught by the non-interventionist approach to suit the context of their narratives. S11 and S27 employed the lexis as an adverb while S14 accurately used the root noun of the word. All these students used *vigour/vigorously* to express the meaning of excess energy or effort.

TABLE 5
EXAMPLES OF HOW STUDENTS MANIPULATED THE PARTS OF SPEECH OF "VIGOUR" TAUGHT BY THE NON-INTERVENTIONIST APPROACH

She turned around <i>vigorously</i> with a knife in her hand. (S11)
I gripped the door handle of my front door with much <i>vigour</i> , holding on to it as if it was my last lifeline. (S14)
"I need to find all the materials and substances to make it happen" he commanded himself <i>vigorously</i> as he was searching on the internet like a mad child obsessed will toys. (S27)
He had a vigorous hand to hold the huge rock. (S19)

Another example of a word successfully and flexibly adopted from the non-interventionist approach was "feeble". As can be seen in Table 6, "feeble" was accurately employed as an adjective by S9, S18, S19 and S27 and as an adverb by S11. These students demonstrated correct understanding of the word as weak or lack of strength (although "feeble mind" appears dated and offensive, which was not intended by S27).

³ Each taught item was used multiple times. For this category, 16 words presented by the interventionist approach (Figure 1) were used 52 times in total. They were used 45 times grammatically correctly.

⁴ Each taught item was used multiple times. For this category, 16 words presented by the non-interventionist approach (Figure 2) and were used 56 times. They were used 51 times grammatically correctly.

⁵ Emphasis added by the author.

TABLE 6

EXAMPLES OF HOW STUDENTS MANIPULATED THE PARTS OF SPEECH OF “FEEBLE” TAUGHT BY THE NON-INTERVENTIONIST APPROACH

<p>He cried dolefully with a feeble voice. (S9)</p> <p>‘Time to go to school, Isla’ she uttered feebly. (S11)</p> <p>Accompany by a feeble sound of noise made in the ample house, Qin slowly place her hand on the item she yet found. (S18)</p> <p>He heard a feeble scratching of the under place making form the depth of death. (S19)</p> <p>He started off with a feeble mind and slowly making his way to high technology that even society would be shocked of. (S27)</p>
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C. Findings From Informal, Open-Ended Interviews: Why Some Students Did Not Use the Taught Lexical Items

A follow-up interview was conducted to explore why four out of 29 students (13.8%) did not use any of the words presented. These students (S13, S22, S28 and S29) were asked a simple question in an informal, low-key interview: I notice you didn’t use any of the vocabulary we learned in class. Can you tell me why?

Some reasons were identified from the interviews: The words were too difficult, especially for S28 and S29, who only arrived in Australia a short time before and were still trying to understand the new curriculum and academic expectations. One participant (S13), who had been in Australia for one year at the time of the study, reported she was unsure how to fit the new words into the storyline while another (S22) felt more confident sticking to what he had already known and didn’t want to jeopardise his marks by experimenting new language he was unfamiliar with. Below is the story written by S13, which she said couldn’t be connected to the thematic lexes presented in class.

TABLE 7

A NARRATIVE WRITTEN BY A STUDENT WITH ZERO UPTAKE OF THE NEWLY TAUGHT VOCABULARY

<p>What a mess!</p> <p>“Wake up Lily”! Your late to school shouted my tired mom, I was exhausted I wish I can glue me and the bed together, my room is mess my clothes and the home is a mess looking at the mirror even the city bins are cleaner it has all ways me blue, I changed in to my school clothes and when to eat my breakfast as always it scrambled eggs just like your homes.</p> <p>“It’s 7:52a.m. Lily”! Okay mom, got my school bag, it was 8:05 a.m. when we reached to my school neatest high schools the school was the opposite of me so it really clear that I have bully, they call me messy Lily which I like it because mess is me, as I walked to the gate all eye where on me I don’t know why? But that when I realised that my boots have muds on them and not only but the mud was hard as rock my classmates were screaming as if I have murder a queen! I was so embarrassed I ran to the nearest park, me myself felt so stupid of running away but it’s not like they want me there I’m totally the only one. I’m not lazy or what I just talking in my brain, we don’t have the money we have been living in a rented house since I was a child. (S13)</p>

This example shows that the student attempted to use some complex vocabulary items and collocations such as *exhausted*, *embarrassed*, and *scrambled eggs* and metaphorical language such as *screaming as if I have murder[sic] a queen*. However, being new to Australia (with the length of stay being one year) and having the proficiency level of 4 (pre-intermediate, see Table 1), S13 was still struggling with basic language conventions such as punctuation and tenses as seen in this extract. She only used one simple reporting verb (*shouted*) and could not incorporate advanced expressive vocabulary to describe the characters’ tones, attitudes or actions as instructed by the interventionist and non-interventionist approaches.

V. DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the effective application of newly taught words rather than accuracy of spelling, recognition of form or meaning recall investigated in previous studies (e.g., Mohamed, 2018; Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Reynolds & Ding, 2022). It has found that both interventionist and non-interventionist approaches have yielded positive results, with a high uptake rate of measurable learning as well as accurate and contextually appropriate application of the target words. The results show that Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009) employed together with both instructional approaches was useful for the two classes for most low-achieving and high-achieving students. This study confirms Nation’s (2001) observation that “learning vocabulary from context and direct intentional learning are complementary activities, each one enhancing learning that comes from the other” (p. 232).

A. Non-Interventionist Approach and Intrinsic Motivation

The strong uptake of the non-interventionist approach of 3.5 times per word shows that contextualised instruction and authentic learning materials were appreciated by a significant proportion of the students in the two EAL classes. This confirms the benefits of a constructivist approach that places an emphasis on authentic, meaningful and contextualised learning (Duchesne et al., 2022). It is worth noting that the non-interventionist approach was empowering for the researcher-practitioner’s EAL students. During the study of *Wuthering Heights*, it was observed that motivation was high, and students took notes of their vocabulary diligently. One student (S18) posted her research about the characters in the novel on the class’s forum, exhibiting an intrinsic enjoyment in learning that moved beyond what was taught in class (Figure 4). This aligns with Shaughnessy’s (2004) and Nematollahi and Maghsoudi’s (2015) observations about the merits of learning real language in context. As remarked by Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010), the choice of authentic texts plays a salient role in accelerating student vocabulary acquisition. In this study, the choice of the Gothic novel *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte, 2016) with its intriguing storyline succeeded in capturing the students’ interest. With the non-

interventionist approach, it appeared the students found joy in reading the chosen extract from the novel rather than learning it for the sake of the external standardised writing assessment (NAPLAN).



Figure 4. Student Voluntarily Posted Their Research About the Characters and Storyline of Wuthering Heights (Bronte, 2016) on the Class's Forum

As a side note, it is worth pointing out that exposure to an authentic classic text such as Wuthering Heights (Bronte, 2016) had a positive psychological influence on the two EAL classes, enabling them to overcome their inferiority complex of doing 'baby' English – a stereotype often held by mainstream peers about EAL students at this Perth school. As noted by research into second language (L2) motivation, the way EAL students perceive themselves has a crucial impact on the effort they put into learning to reduce the gap between the actual and the ideal self (Martinović, 2018; Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013). Being exposed to authentic texts boosts students' motivation as they become impressed by how much they know and comprehend (King, 2002). The intrinsic motivation usually attributed to the non-interventionist approach (King, 2002) could be the reason why the students noticed the grammatical features of the target words more, resulting in higher accuracy when applying the lexis taught by this approach (91.07% compared to 86.5% in the interventionist approach; see Table 2). According to Marszalek et al. (2022), intrinsic motivation facilitates a state called 'flow', a motivational state that heightens awareness and concentration, leading to improved language learning results. This might be the explanation for the grammatically accurate application of most vocabulary gained from the non-interventionist approach. This pedagogical approach appears useful to engage EAL students in deep learning and boost their intrinsic motivation, necessary for long-term improvement.

B. Cognitive Merits of the Interventionist Approach

The lexical items presented by the interventionist approach appeared to be used slightly less often than those taught by the non-interventionist approach: each target word taught by the interventionist approach was used 3.25 times on average as opposed to 3.5 times for the words taught by the non-interventionist approach. This is still a positive rate of uptake, which can be accredited to the reduction of cognitive load when language items are presented as discrete sentences (Long & Crookes, 1992). As can be seen in the data (Figure 1), the item '(thunderous) fierceness' and its inflections were used nine times and 'between clenched teeth' was applied six times, more frequently than any word taught by the non-interventionist approach. Out of 29 students, '(thunderous) fierceness' and its inflections were picked up by eight students⁶, an uptake rate of 27.6% while that of 'between clenched teeth' had an uptake rate of 20.7% (six out of 29 students), higher than any individual lexis presented by the non-interventionist approach. The interventionist approach appears useful to target certain language features that the teacher wants students to add to their linguistic repertoire. As Wong and Lee (2024) assert, clear, explicit teaching methods are particularly useful to assist students who grapple with low-frequency words. The findings confirm the benefits of the careful pre-selection of similar linguistic items to help students see repeated patterns in a systematic fashion, making it easier for them to put the new vocabulary into use. It can be seen that the interventionist approach is suitable to prepare students for high-stakes external literacy assessments such as NAPLAN.

C. Contextual Appropriacy

Both methods appeared to help students use their new lexis rather contextually accurately although the interventionist approach seemed to gain an advantage (98.1% compared to 91.07%). A possible explanation for this variation is the discrete sentences made it easy for the students to see how words were contextually employed compared to language in its natural, authentic occurrences and not simplified for educational purposes. Both approaches, however, may consist of words beyond the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1997) for some students who were either new to Australia or had a low literacy level as seen in the interviews with the four students who did not or could not employ any new words in their narratives. Adjustments and differentiation would be necessary in the future to cater for these students' lexical needs.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The research study inevitably has some limitations. The teaching materials reported in this study were designed and selected for a rather advanced group of language learners despite its heterogeneity since the aim was to assist the EAL students to meet the expected literacy level of year nine students in Australia. As the students were prepared for a high-stakes system-level assessment (NAPLAN), they were willing to cooperate and apply themselves to learning the new

⁶ There was one student who used the word twice.

words. In a different context, it is possible that students with a lower literacy level and lower motivation will see a lower vocabulary uptake.

A factor that may affect the representation of the data was the spread of the students' abilities. S18 and S19 were notably passionate about learning new vocabulary and attempted to employ almost all the words presented by the two approaches; however, their linguistic competence was still developing, resulting in quite a few grammatical inaccuracies observed in the data. As a result, the findings of the study regarding grammatical accuracy and context appropriacy might be slightly skewed due to the sentences produced by these two students. One possible way of improving the data would be removing their sentences from the calculations; however, that would not paint a true picture of the two EAL classes that possessed a wide range of linguistic competencies.

In the final analysis, both interventionist and non-interventionist approaches have been found to be useful to accelerate students' vocabulary learning, especially when employed in combination with Explicit Direct Instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). However, given the intricate nature of vocabulary acquisition (Wong & Lee, 2024), it is vital that teachers conduct careful analyses of their students' needs to select the most appropriate vocabulary instructional method.

APPENDIX A. VOCABULARY PRESENTED USING THE INTERVENTIONIST APPROACH

Examples	Direct speech	Reporting verbs	Description of tone, attitudes or actions
1.	"Please, mum, just another," begged Todd. "Go along with you,"	exclaimed Susan,	giving him a gentle push on the back.
2.	"Dear me!"	exclaimed the matron	in a tone of astonishment , "Is that Mr Suzuki?".
3.	"Why, lord bless my soul!"	exclaimed Mr Omer	in a tone of great enjoyment .
4.	"Change it!"	ordered the SS officer,	exasperated // beyond all bounds by the young Jewish prisoner's spillage of the soup.
5.	"You disgraceful boy! Upon my word!"	shouted Mr Bodin,	who by this time had resumed his air of haughtiness .
6.	"Don't talk so much,"	hissed Mary,	who clutched her brother by both arms.
7.	"Tilda,"	uttered the old gentleman	with dignity.
8.	"Right again!"	hissed the officer	between clenched teeth .
9.	"But why did you tell her?"	continued old Betty	after a short pause. after a short silence.
10.	"So what?"	retorted Richard	with a thunderous fierceness she had never seen before.
11.	"What's the matter with you?"	cried Mrs Clubbins,	hugging the little girl close to her ample bosom while staring questioningly at her husband.
12.	"A parochial life?"	thundered Mr Bumble,	striking the table with his cane.
13.	"Heaven forbid! How did he get here?"	whispered Marlene,	casting her dejected look over the gloomy pasture.
14.	"Give it back to me, you traitor!"	screamed Georg,	his eyes filled with tears of anguish .

Adapted from Mahlberg, M. (2013). Phrases in literary contexts: Patterns and distributions of suspensions in Dickens's novels. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 18(1), 35–56.

APPENDIX B. EXTRACT FROM WUTHERING HEIGHTS (BRONTE, 2016)

This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard **distinctly** the **gusty wind**, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and **endeavoured** to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. 'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the **importunate** branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most **melancholy** voice **sobbed**, 'Let me in - let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of LINTON? I had read EARNSHAW twenty times for Linton). 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I **discerned**, **obscurely**, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it **wailed**, 'Let me in!' and maintained its **tenacious grip**, almost maddening me with fear. 'How can I!' I said at length. 'Let ME go, if you want me to let you in!' The fingers relaxed, I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it, and stopped my ears to exclude the **lamentable** prayer. I seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour; yet, the instant I listened again, there was the **doleful** cry moaning on! 'Begone!' I shouted. 'I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years.' 'It is twenty years,' mourned the voice: 'twenty years. I've been a waif for twenty years!' Thereat began a **feeble** scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up; but could not stir a limb; and so yelled aloud, in a **frenzy of fright**. To my confusion, I discovered the yell was not ideal: hasty footsteps approached my chamber door; somebody pushed it open, with a **vigorous** hand, and a light glimmered through the squares at the top of the bed. I sat shuddering yet and **wiping the perspiration** from my forehead: the intruder appeared to hesitate, and

muttered to himself. At last, he said, in a half-whisper, plainly not expecting an answer, 'Is any one here?' I considered it best to confess my presence; for I knew Heathcliff's accents, and feared he might search further, if I kept quiet. With this intention, I turned and opened the panels. I shall not soon forget the effect my action produced.

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