

# LEARNING AND COMPARING A LANGUAGE ONLINE AND IN THE CLASSROOM

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10806966>

**Abstract.** *While the convenience and flexibility of online platforms are advantages, providing meaningful interaction is key to effective language acquisition. Interaction provides students with the opportunity to practice using language in authentic contexts. Through interactions with peers and teachers, students can apply their knowledge and skills to improve their understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and language functions. Interaction allows for immediate feedback and correction of errors, which is important for language development. Students receive guidance on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary to help them improve their accuracy and fluency. Engaging in meaningful interactions helps students develop communicative competence, which includes not only linguistic skills, but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills. Students gain confidence to express themselves appropriately in a variety of social and cultural contexts. Interactive activities promote student motivation and engagement by fostering a sense of community and collaboration. Students are more likely to remain motivated and committed to their language learning goals when they feel connected to their peers and teachers.*

**Keywords:** *computer-assisted language learning, language related episodes.*

## Introduction

The use of technology has become an increasingly popular for second language teaching and learning. Particularly, when global disasters, pandemics, or even local emergencies such as natural disasters occur, it is helpful to temporarily switch to an online learning environment [1]. From films and audiotapes in the 1980s, to smartphones and tablets, technology for second language acquisition (SLA) is ever- changing and improving.,Technology offers convenient access to language-learning materials both inside and outside the classroom. Devices that access the internet allow learners the possibility of viewing all types of video and audio materials to help facilitate learning by providing input necessary for language learning .Furthermore, online language learning has the potential to offer learners a communicative and creative platform that can increase engagement with the lessons in and out of the classroom [2-5].

However, in order for acquisition to occur, students need the opportunity for interaction, not just input. Therefore, this study sought to measure the instances of interaction as defined by negotiation of meaning and exchange of information, in both the classroom and online settings.

## Computer Assisted Language Learning

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) encompasses a wide range of computerized technology, and research has presented mixed support. Some benefits of CALL include increased interactions, student production and, in general, more student-based lessons. However, the quality of the language appears to be the same regardless of the context; in-person or in a virtual setting. CALL programs could be as effective as classroom learning if they contain the necessary elements for acquisition. In other words, the effectiveness of the lesson is dependent on the quality of instruction, based on SLA principles, rather than the setting.

Studies have measured the types of instruction that are most effective and found that meaning-based activities with interaction that ask learners to comprehend and produce meaningful language outperform mechanical drills devoid of meaning that are traditionally used in the classroom and in online instruction. This data are reflected in the evolution of CALL platforms as many newer programs focus more on interacting and using language in real time rather than focusing on memorization of vocabulary and simple mechanical grammar drills, though many such still exist [6-8].

Conducted experiments by scientists with language learners manifested that, interaction during a lesson, whether in person or online, has been demonstrated to be effective in the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, the current study sought to review online courses to discover if they contain the necessary elements for interaction. This study also compared in-person classrooms with an online classes to measure the amount of interaction based on number and type of LREs. The results will add to a growing body of evidence that supports effective teaching through interaction regardless of whether the course is in person or online.

### **Interaction Approach**

Interaction as learners' exposure to language input, learner production and feedback on that production. In these interactions, learners attempt to comprehend a message and respond with a message for the language partner.

Learners also have the opportunity to interact by asking questions about the input in order to seek clarification. Furthermore, learners are given responses to this clarification seeking in the form of feedback, both explicit and implied. This interaction leads to further understanding and promotes acquisition. Interaction is of particular interest to the current study because the classes that were recorded and analyzed were communication-based and focused on instructor-learner and learner- learner interaction, and therefore is the main measure of comparison in measuring the effectiveness of a classroom.

This interaction, as measured by language related episodes (LREs) are events that occur during interaction when the learner or the teacher, or advanced speaker, refer to their language use. "Instances in which learners may (a) question the meaning of a linguistic term; (b) question the correctness of the spelling/pronunciation of a word; (c) question the correctness of a grammatical form; or (d) implicitly or explicitly correct their own or another's usage of a word, form, or structure". The presence of these LREs is evidence of the elements necessary for acquisition to occur [9,10].

The four types of LREs that we measured for our study were clarification requests, comprehension checks, and 2 types of feedback: recasts and prompts. Examples are provided below. A clarification request, example 1, is a type of LRE in which the learner questions the language of the instructor.

Learner to instructor: Could you repeat? how many?

A comprehension check, example 2, is another type of LRE. During this interaction, the instructor or more advanced speaker seeks to confirm that the learner has understood the utterance.

Instructor to learner: Do you want me to repeat?

Feedback is a type of LRE in which the more advanced speaker comments on the learners' language in order to clarify or correct. A recast, example 3, is the second type of feedback. A recast is when the advanced speaker notices an incorrect utterance and provides the learner with the target-like form.

Learner: I have *five* dogs.

Teacher: Wow! FIVE dogs! That's a lot.

Learner: Yes, FIVE dogs.

A prompt, example 4, is a type of feedback where the advanced speaker makes some reference to the learners' non-target-like utterance as a question. It prompts learners to notice the incorrectness and clarify.

Advanced speaker to learner: Excuse me? The person does what?

These four types of LREs were the focus of measurement of the classroom and online for the present study.

#### Research Questions

The research questions that guided the current study were the following:

Do online language teaching platforms contain interaction, necessary for acquisition?

Hypothesis 1: We believe that an online language teaching platform contains interaction.

If an online language teaching platform does interaction, how does it compare to an in-person classroom as measured by number of LREs?

Hypothesis 2: We believe that the online classroom will have as many LREs as a communication-based classroom when considering the number of students per interaction.

The first research question, Do online language teaching platforms contain the elements necessary for communication (i.e. interaction based on LREs)? is supported by the results; online language teaching platforms can contain the elements necessary for communication. The second hypothesis that the online classroom will have as many LREs as a communication-based classroom when considering the number of students per interaction was supported by the results of the analysis.

#### Conclusion

Four types of language-related episodes were the focus of this study; comprehension checks, clarification requests, recasts, and prompts. Results from studies demonstrate that for second language acquisition to occur, learners must have opportunities to comprehend and produce language, particularly with conversation partners of a higher proficiency. Learners also need the opportunity to receive and incorporate feedback, which allows the opportunity to notice and improve accuracy.

It is apparent that learners in both the in-person classrooms and the online classrooms were given this opportunity and demonstrated comprehension and communication.

This goal of this study was to examine in person and online language classes to determine if they contained the necessary elements for language acquisition to occur, according to the interaction approach, specifically input, interaction, and output. Both the online and the in-person classes demonstrated evidence of these elements, designated as language related episodes containing comprehension and communication. Therefore, it is concluded that interaction is not limited to in-person lessons, and online classes can contain the interaction necessary for acquisition to occur.

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