USING SMALL TALK CARDS TO HELP LOWER THE AFFECTIVE FILTER AND INCREASE LANGUAGE ACQUSITION IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN CURRICULUM AND LEARNING

BILINGUAL/ESL

by

Luisa La Spisa

William Paterson University of New Jersey

Wayne, NJ

January 2015

This is a research paper submitted for ELCL 6290-6300, Research in Education I & II, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in Education in Curriculum and Learning at William Paterson University of New Jersey.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

USING SMALL TALK CARDS TO HELP LOWER THE AFFECTIVE FILTER AND INCREASE LANGUAGE ACQUSITION IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS

by

Luisa La Spisa

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

William Paterson University of New Jersey

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

January 2015

College/School: Education

Department: Curriculum and Learning

Thesis Supervisor:

_____

Dr. Holly Seplocha

Chairperson:

_____

Dr. Bruce Williams
Department Chair

Abstract

USING SMALL TALK CARDS TO HELP LOWER THE AFFECTIVE FILTER AND INCREASE LANGUAGE ACQUSITION IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS

by

Luisa La Spisa

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Holly Seplocha

The purpose of this study was to determine if adult English learners who used the small talk flash cards communicative activities would lower their affective filter thereby increase their motivation to speak English, and if by practicing authentic conversation with the small talk cards, it would help to increase the students' oral and written output in English. Forty adult English learners were chosen to participate in this comparison study. The study was conducted over a 4-week period. The learners' attitude towards speaking English and their English oral proficiency were scored both at the beginning of the study and at the end. Furthermore, the two groups' writing skills were evaluated and compared at the end of the study. The hypothesis, that the small talk card would help reduce the affective filter and help develop oral and written output, were minimally supported by the data collected. However, a longer study with more participants would better substantiate the results. The data showed that adult English learners enjoyed and wanted the chance to practice authentic language in class. Additionally, they benefited greatly from the practice. Therefore, teachers should make every effort to include as many of these activities as possible in their curriculum.

AKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and understanding during these long months. I am also very grateful to my niece Alyson La Spisa for inspiring me to complete this endeavor and to my nephew Ronnie Branch for teaching me how to do tables and charts. I am extremely grateful to my advisor Dr. Holly Seplocha whose patience, wisdom, and encouragement helped me to stay on task. A special thanks to my students who participated in the study. Finally, to my three great-nieces Josie, Genevieve and Mia who missed out on fun time with Aunt Lou, I'm back!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendices

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Overview

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2010 the foreign born population in the United States was estimated at nearly 40 million, or 13 % of the total population. Although, California, New York, Texas, and Florida are the top four states where immigrants have settled, California, New York, and New Jersey had the highest foreign-born proportions in their total populations. Over one in four residents of New Jersey were foreign-born. Over 80 % of the foreign-born population was between the ages of 18 to 64, including 50 % between the ages of 18 to 44. About 85 % of the foreign-born population spoke a language other than English at home, and one in ten foreign-born did not speak English at all (US Census Bureau, 2010). According to these estimates, English language proficiency varies widely among foreign-born, and for some is non-existent, resulting in a need for English as a second language education. Adult English learners play a significant role in state-administered adult education classes making up approximately 46% of total participants (CAL, 2010).

There are a number of motivating factors that compel immigrants to learn English, money being at the top of the list. According to the US Census Bureau (2010) the participation rate of immigrants in the labor force is higher than that of native born; however, their median household income is lower than native born and the poverty rate is higher. In addition, immigrants are more likely to work in service, construction and production jobs than native born. Due to the competitive nature of the labor market learning English is a necessity for immigrants rather than a convenience. From my experience, other factors motivating immigrants to learn English include the following:

continuing their education, communicating with emergency personnel, understanding medical information, applying for and becoming a US citizen, overseeing children's education, navigating thru social services, meeting new people, and enjoying American entertainment such as films, music, art and literature. In sum, in order to get along in their daily activities, further their career and education, and provide a better future for their family immigrants living in the United States need and want to learn English.

Statement of the Problem

Social factors affect learning. I have noticed that many adult learners have limited exposure to the target language. For the most part, they are immersed in their native language. Even though they want to learn English, they have very little opportunity to use it outside the class. They shop in stores that speak their language. They listen to music, watch television, read, and engage in activities in their native language. As a result, they may not feel a connection to the new language thus reducing motivation to learn.

Although, adult learners bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the learning process, they must learn both a new language and a new culture. Many may be using English for the first time and experience anxiety as a result. Others may have low self-esteem due to negative past experiences with language learning. "Learners are not abstract entities but human beings with feelings and insecurities, anxieties and inhibition" (Maftoon & Sabah, 2012, p. 37). When students are faced with anxieties, low self-esteem and low motivation, a barrier goes up, known as the Affective Filter, and impedes the knowledge from reaching the Language Acquisition Device preventing the learners from successful acquisition (Krashen,1985).

In addition to a low affective filter Krashen (1985) stated that for acquisition to occur, one also needs comprehensible input slightly above learners level (*i*+1) presented in an interesting non threatening manner, so as not to produce anxiety. However, he cautioned teachers to be careful because more exposure did not necessarily mean better learning. More comprehensible English was what counted. He further noted that what was crucial was not that students were exposed to a lot of English, but that comprehensible input was provided.

In order to learn a new language one must have exposure to it in the form of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). In addition, oral interaction is essential for language acquisition to occur. For many students the classroom is the only place where they get to communicate in English. Although, Krashen (1985) claimed that speaking/output does not promote acquisition, but that the ability to speak emerges on its own, as a result of acquisition. "The comprehensible input from the teacher, not the students' production, causes acquisition" (p. 48). I believe that output is necessary in order to learn. Many feel that to abandon output altogether would be a bad idea. Output of some kind is seen as a necessary phase in language acquisition. Boulouffe (as cited in Mason, 2002) suggested that teachers need output from students to be able to judge the learners' progress, and adapt material to needs. When students are called upon to produce language they will feel a real need to reorganize and elaborate their knowledge of target language. It is only thru students' production that we can check whether they have fully understood the input or not. Without verification, there are a number of errors that may never be cleared up. Personal production allows students to reorganize knowledge of the language in an authentic attempt to communicate.

In order to overcome learners' obstacles to using English, teachers may need to create frequent opportunities for learners to share ideas and information as best as they can with the English they have learned. Giving all the factors that can affect adults from successful language acquisition, there may be a need for activities that lower anxiety and raise self-esteem. By having such an activity the Affective Filter (Krashen, 1985) could be lowered resulting in increased production. This leaves teachers of adult English learners with the quandary of what to do in order to help learners develop the oral proficiency necessary for them to truly learn and improve all the skills necessary for production of the new language. Cary (2007) suggested a number of strategies to encourage English learners to increase their English output. Increasing the amount of time and opportunities for meaningful talk, reducing teacher talk, and providing emotional safe-ground for language risk-taking were among some of his suggestions. In order to maximize oral communication in adult language learners, teachers must implement activities that would lower the Affective Filter, allow learners frequent opportunities to practice in class, and incorporate ideas that would enable the students to use what they have learned.

Purpose of the Study

My goal as a teacher is to see my students put to practical use what they have learned in the classroom. However, finding the right activity which will maximize their skills is a challenge. As a result, I have made up an activity that uses flash cards with small talk questions written on them with the hope that they will take away something they can use in their daily lives. Because these questions are used randomly students need to listen and answer. The questions are designed to give them something to talk

about during idle time and continuously practice what they have learned. They are very low pressure activities which activate prior knowledge. As the term progresses, cards get added onto the deck which allows for constant review and recycling of material already learned. There are several different activities that can be done using these small talk cards which may reduce the risk of the flash cards activity to become boring and monotonous. In my experience, students seem to enjoy them, and they create an opportunity for the students to use what they have already learned. After years of using these small talk cards, I am curious to see if they, in fact, help in second language acquisition.

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the small talk cards as a communicative activity in the development of language and reduction of the Affective Filter of adult English learners. Krashen (1985) suggested that when a teacher supplies enough high-quality comprehensible input, while using a natural approach activity, students make excellent progress in the acquisition of target language. Providing activities that supply comprehensible input on topics of real interest, not forcing early speech production and not insisting on high levels of accuracy in early stages, may help reduce anxiety in the classroom, anxiety built up by negative experiences in incorrectly taught language classes.

By providing the students with a prepared series of small talk questions would the students feel more comfortable using the newly acquired language? By offering students the tools to get better acquainted with each other in the form of a communicative activity, would it help lower their anxiety and make them less self conscious? How much of an effect would this activity have on the rest of their skills? Do these cards help the learners

develop a repertoire of questions which they could later use? Is this method better than other methods?

The Research Question

1. What sort of impact does using the small talk cards have on the affective filter?
2. What is the relationship between using the small talk cards and learners' language output?
3. What is the relationship between using the small talk cards and the learners' written output?

Definition of Variables

Small talk cards

Small talk cards are a set of 3" x 3" index cards with small talk questions written on them used by learners in order to promote conversation.

Adult English learner

For the purpose of this study an Adult English learner is a student between the age of 18 and 60 who works either full time or part time and is a beginner English learner.

Activity

For the purpose of this study an activity is an interaction between two or more students to help promote language acquisition.

Output

For the purpose of this study output is oral or written production from learner.

Fossilization

Fossilization is a common phenomenon that affects most foreign language learners and it refers to the erroneous features that continue despite the fact that the

person seems to be reasonably fluent in the language. These erroneous features become a permanent part of the way a person speaks or writes a language. Aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammar may become fixed or fossilized in second language learning.

Error

In this study, an error is a noticeable deviation of the correct grammar of the target language, and it generally demonstrates the student's competence in the language.

Mistakes

A mistake in this study refers to an error that is either a random guess or a slip because the student knows the rule but fails to produce the correct form at this particular moment.

Target language

The language the students are learning. For the purpose of this study target language refers to English.

Proficiency

Refers to the degree of skill in which a person can use the language.

Native speaker

Native speaker in this study refers to a student who was born in the country whose language he speaks.

Implicit learning

For the purpose of this study implicit learning refers to language rules and vocabulary that are understood through context.

Explicit learning

For the purpose of this study explicit learning refers to language rules and vocabulary that are learned through detailed and clear instructions.

Authentic language

For the purpose of this study authentic language refers to language production which has the qualities of natural speech.

Hypotheses

Adult learners are faced with many challenges when learning a new language. One of the reasons is the affective filter. However, if they are exposed to comprehensible input in an interesting way, the filter goes down allowing acquisition to take place (Krashen, 1985). Providing students with an engaging activity which allows them to feel relaxed and at the same time exposes them to comprehensible input may effectively lower the affective filter and allow the input to reach the Language Acquisition Device.

It was expected that students who engage in activities using the small talk cards would experience less stress and anxiety resulting in more output and more successful second language acquisition.

Hypotheses 1

It was hypothesized that using small talk cards activities to achieve acquisition would help students feel less anxious and more open to learning thereby lowering the affective filter.

Hypotheses II

It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards activities students would produce more oral output.

Hypotheses III

It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards activities students would produce more written output.

Additional research questions

In addition to the hypotheses mentioned above, I was also interested in some questions and observations that derived from the research.

1. Which of the small talk cards activity impacted the affective filter the most?
2. Which activity did the students like the most?
3. Is there any relationship between the two results?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Humans have been learning language for millennia. As soon as cultures recognized the need to trade with other cultures, they also understood the necessity to learn how to communicate with each other. Up until the nineteenth century, the accepted method of learning a second language was thru memorization and translation (Brown, 1993). However, the twentieth century ushered in a new era where the relationship between the psyche and learning were closely examined. As a result, many theories, philosophies and methodologies of teaching a second language emerged (Brown, 1993). This literature review explores research in second language acquisition with the focus on the adult learner, Krashen's theory of how one acquires a second language and the impact that the affective filter has on learning, strategies for developing communicative competence and ways of incorporating writing within the language classroom setting.

Adult English Language Learners

It is a widely accepted belief that adults do not learn a second language as easily as children do. Studies, conducted to assess differences in the acquisition of learners proficiency, based on age of arrival, found evidence indicating that young children are more likely to attain native-like proficiency in second language than teenagers or adults. The steady decrease in performance according to age of arrival suggests that there is a critical period for second language acquisition and that learners' capabilities decline with age; therefore, the older the learner the more difficult the acquisition. Some factors are responsible for the inability of adults to learn as successfully as children. One factor is children's reliance on a Language Acquisition Device. In addition there are neurological

changes such as loss of plasticity, that prevent adults from using their brains the same way children do on language learning tasks (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

However, not all researchers accept this belief. Some research suggests that adults have an advantage over children as demonstrated on most tests measuring language learning speed. For example, adults learn certain parts of a new language more quickly. This advantage, however, is short lived. During the early stages of acquisition, adults achieve more rapidly than children, but the general consensus is that older individuals cannot reasonably achieve a native accent in a second language (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

By comparing adults learning a second language to children learning a first and a second language, Brown (1993) provides some theories as to why adults have more difficulties in acquiring a second language. Children's first and second language acquisition and adults' second language acquisition have common and important aspects that can be compared providing a number of key theoretical issues to consider such as the critical period hypothesis, psychomotor coordination, emotions, cognitive and linguistic considerations.

Brown (1993) wrote that the critical period hypothesis was considered as a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire, and that it occurred around puberty. Plasticity of the brain suggests that prior to puberty, children acquire not only their first language but also just as easily a second language. Although there is much controversy about the exact age of the development of lateralization, they all agree that it is pre-puberty and not post. As the human brain matures certain functions are assigned to the left hemisphere and others to the right. Language functions appear to be controlled

mainly in the left hemisphere. However, there is support of right-hemisphere activities during the early stages of second language acquisition, and some studies seem to suggest that adult learners might benefit from right-brain activity in the classroom context. However research provides a great deal of conflicting evidence.

Brown (1993) added that psychomotor coordination of the "speech muscle" or accent is another factor that plays a role in second language acquisition. In order to become accomplished in a set of skills requiring muscular dexterity, one almost always has to have begun developing that skill as a child. Brown noted that evidence suggests that persons beyond the age of puberty do not generally acquire authentic pronunciation. This might have little to do with lateralization of the brain but more with neuromuscular plasticity. Although, some adults do acquire native like pronunciation, such cases are rare. However, muscular coordination may be of minimal significance for overall successful acquisition of a second language. The acquisition of the communicative and functional purposes of languages is far more important.

Although it may not seem like it, human emotions such as empathy, self esteem, extroversion, inhibitions, anxiety and attitudes all affect second language acquisition in the form of defense mechanisms. As indicated by Brown (1993), after puberty all of these factors are heightened and may account for the difficulties that adults have in learning a language. Adults are more grounded in their own identity than children, and changes are more likely to enhance inhibitions which result in the language learner clinging to the security of the native language. Learning a new language is no simple matter, but when one's ego is secure enough to overcome inhibitions, it can be successful (Brown, 1993).

Human cognition develops rapidly throughout the first 16 years of life and less rapidly after adulthood. Adults possessing superior cognitive capacity often do not successfully learn a second language. Young children are not aware that they are acquiring a language, nor are they aware of society's values and attitudes toward one language or another. Language learners who are too consciously aware of what they are doing might have difficulty (Brown, 1993).

Brown (1993) further stated that adults approach a second language systematically and attempt to formulate linguistic rules based on the linguistic information available to them from both the native language and the second language. When they could not bridge the gap between the two languages by generalizations, they relied on rules from the first language. However, children do not appear as distracted by the first language as adults do (Brown, 1993).

Ipek (2009) suggested that both first and second language learners follow a certain pattern of development. He observed three developmental stages: the silent period, formulaic speech, and structural and semantic simplification.

Children acquiring their first language go through a silent period by listening to the language to which they are exposed. In the case of second language acquisition, learners opt for a silent period; however, many second language learners, especially classroom learners, are urged to speak. This fact is widely accepted; however, there is disagreement on what contribution the silent period has in second language acquisition. Krashen (as cited in Ipek, 2009) argued that it built competence in the learner via listening. Gibbons (as cited in Ipek, 2009) argued that it was a stage of incomprehension.

Ipek (2009) denoted that the second developmental stage is formulaic speech which is defined as expressions which cannot be broken down and are learned as wholes and employed on particular occasions. These expressions have the forms of routines, like greetings, memorized chunks and patterns, and can consist of entire scripts.

Lastly, Ipek stated that in the third stage, learners apply structural and semantic simplifications to their language by leaving out some function words or content words. There are two general reasons for such simplifications. First, learners may not have yet acquired the necessary linguistic form, and they are unable to access linguistic forms while speaking. These three stages show that first language and second language learners go thru similar stages of development with the exception that second language learners are urged to skip the silent period (Ipek, 2009).

Both Brown (1993) and Ipek's (2009) arguments have serious suggestions for language teachers which can help them to design their syllabi, teaching processes and classroom activities in order to enable them to understand their students' learning processes. These arguments show that there seems to be an order of acquisition in both first and second language acquisition, but there appears to be inter-learner variation in the order of acquisition. Variables such as sex, intelligence, social background, rate of learning, and experience of linguistic interaction affect the order of acquisition among learners. Hence, one should be careful not to claim for a constant order of acquisition but for a more flexible order of acquisition and be aware of the variation affecting the order (Ipek, 2009).

In an attempt to demonstrate how formulaic language fits into the learning process of adult English learners, Durrant and Smitt (2010) conducted a study to find out whether

adult non-native learners of English retain information about target word pairs that they meet in their input through lab-based training and testing. Formulas are said to be important in attaining fluency, and it has been suggested that the processes involved in formula learning may be central to language learning in general (Durrant & Smitt, 2010).

Collocations, words that appear together more frequently than their individual frequencies, hold a central place in the scheme of formulaic language, as suggested by Jones and Sinclair (as cited in Duran & Smitt, 2010). Collocating words predict each other. High frequency collocations can be seen as a type of formulaic sequence. Ellis (as cited in Duran & Smitt, 2010), described collocation as the product of a psychological mechanism known as chunking. He argued that short-term memory is not tied to the amount of information in a message but to the number of chunks in information. This enables language learners to encode greater amount of information in short term memory and thus increase the efficiency and fluency of communication. Wray (as cited in Duran & Smitt, 2010), argued that adult second language learners primarily notice and remember not meaningful chunks but individual words, and when they encounter chunks break them down into word meaning and store words separately without any information regarding the facts that they went together. Therefore they have no memory of collocation. This study was conducted in order to examine whether adult English learners remembered collocation better than single words (Duran & Smitt, 2010).

The participants of the study were 84 non-native speakers of English (56 females, 28 males). All were taking postgraduate courses at the University of Nottingham. The mean age of participants was 25. The students were assumed to be reasonably proficient in English. The study carefully controlled the input language learners received of target

word pairs, and then tested their retention of those pairs. Participants underwent a short training session where they were exposed to a number of target combination words embedded in sentences. Then, they underwent a recall test to see if target nouns were recalled when paired with target adjectives (Duran & Smitt, 2010).

The study looked at learning under three different conditions. In all three training conditions, nouns that had been seen together with their paired adjectives during the training phase were remembered significantly more frequently than those that had not. It was concluded that adult second language learners do, in contrast to Wray's claims, retain some memory of which words go together in the language they meet. Since this retention appears to occur implicitly (without conscious intention of the learner) this suggests that adult language learners are likely to gather information about the collocation in their input, regardless of any intentional study technique or strategy (Duran & Smitt, 2010).

Results suggest that adult learners of English do retain information about what word appear together in the language to which they are exposed. This suggests that adult learners do not, as Wray suggested, focus their learning entirely on individual words (as cited in Duran & Smitt, 2010). Rather as Ellis's model predicted, learners retain a memory of chunks from the language to which they are exposed. Therefore teachers should give special emphasis to activities in which learners have the opportunity to encounter the same language several times. Thus enabling them to focus on building up fluency with particular strings of language without the distraction of dealing with text, context, and meaning (Duran & Smitt, 2010).

Since testing took place immediately after training, it is not known if the same results would have been obtained had the testing taken place after a longer period of time. The study did not establish the length of time before the initial knowledge disappeared and how many exposures are required for stable long-term association. Also, the research only dealt with implicit learning, and no assessment was made of how well the meaning and use of the collocations were learned. Future research should include consideration for above mentioned aspects (Duran & Smitt, 2010).

Teaching Strategies for Adult English Learners

According to Schwarzer (2009), teaching English as a second language to adult learners requires more than knowing how to teach the basic four skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. It means understanding that learning a language requires language usage and communication as a negotiation process. It is also important to look at the adult language learner as a whole person rather than just a learner. They are spouses, parents, workers, and neighbors. In general, they are members of a community with accomplishments and responsibilities. Furthermore, we must also look at language as a whole rather than segments that must be taught individually.

Schwarzer proposed that achieving effective communication did not mean that the four basic skills are forgotten or not important, but they are integrated in communicative language tasks inside and outside the classroom. When looking at language as a whole rather than approaching it in pieces, learners can study the language in context so that they can experience learning in a realistic way and not as isolated parts. By incorporating learning experiences from learners' daily lives, learning activities represent both the

cultural context of the learner and the cultural context outside the classroom (Schwarzer, (2009).

Schwarzer (2009), submitted that it is important to remember that vocabulary development, learner's motivation and meaningful interaction are critical aspects of adult English learning, and the ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to communicate and interact with people that speak it. Based on Scmidt and Frota, (as cited in Schwarzer, 2009), interaction in the language makes learners aware of the gaps between what they want to say and what their listeners understand.

Gass (as cited in Schwarzer, 2009) stated that by building a community of learners in the classroom, teachers provide a safe environment where learners can interact and receive comprehensible input and feedback from each other. It is important that adult learners feel welcome and accepted for who they are. Developing a sense of belonging to the class is crucial. Gass recommended that instructors should provide the students with the opportunity to make the classroom feel like their own. For example, let them bring food or beverages since many of them are coming straight from work, and have them share stories about family and culture. These would help learners take ownership of their learning environment. Schwarzer (2009) added that although, it is important to remember that the mandated curriculum must not be ignored, one must remember to address learners' needs and wants and integrate them into the curriculum by involving the learners in the decision making process related to lessons and activities.

By trying methodologies that focused on the adult learner as a whole, teachers could enhance students' motivation to learn. When turning a language classroom into a site of students' interaction, and viewing language teaching as a holistic process, and by

inviting learners' to bring their lives into the classroom teachers create an environment that is conducive to learning (Schwarzer, 2009).

Learning vocabulary is a major component of language learning. As a matter of fact, it is at the heart of language learning and language use. Lexical problems frequently interfere with communication, and communication breaks down when people do not use the right words (Komachali, 2012). To have a rudimentary grasp of a language at the conversational level a vocabulary of 5,000 words is necessary. Vocabulary acquisition accounts for years of language learners' time. Although, beginning of language learning focuses on language at the lexical level, little attention is paid to the problem of vocabulary acquisition in the language classroom and is often left up to the student. Impact of vocabulary teaching seems unimportant relative to the sheer number of words needed to be learned (McGraw, Yoshimote, & Seneff, 2009).

As a learning strategy, students resort to explicit memorization. Proponents of communicative language teaching criticize vocabulary learning through memorization of word lists or flash cards by referring to the lack of linguistic content. However, the efficiency of these methods cannot be denied. It is possible to learn thousands of words thru memorization, but many students find this method tedious. The problem of providing an environment for incidental vocabulary acquisition to the beginning language student remains largely unsolved. Unfortunately this is where such systems are sorely needed, since lexical acquisition is often the most difficult task for an adult learner learning a language from scratch (McGraw et al., 2009).

Implicit acquisition in which new words are learned through reading and conversation, although more acceptable, can be quite slow for beginners with little

foundation from which to infer the meaning from context (McGraw et al., 2009). Although second language acquisition theory might suggest that incidental vocabulary acquisition offers pedagogical advantages, it is not clear whether, when time is taken into account, methods that do not focus explicitly on the memorization task will be as efficient as intentional vocabulary learning. Studies show that more communicative approaches are not always the most efficient. Nevertheless, a methodology that requires more time for vocabulary acquisition is not necessarily less valuable. Perhaps it is indeed the case, for instance, that the most efficient manner in which a student can internalize new word meaning is through memorization. However, if the student does not enjoy the task, memorization may be of little value, since the student is unlikely to want to spend much time on the task. One should be able to quantify the efficiency with which a given method leads to long term retention of lexical items and, as best we can, assess whether a trade-off exists between this efficiency and the level of interest of the student (McGraw et al., 2009).

Learning vocabulary through the use of flash cards has shown to be very effective. One main advantage of flash cards is that they can be taken almost anywhere and studied when one has a free moment. Another is that they can be arranged to create logical grouping of the target words. Working with flash cards helps learners in acquiring vocabulary more effectively than word lists. Flash cards have been used in teaching ESL not only for vocabulary but also for teaching prepositions, articles, sentence structures, tenses, and phrasal verbs. In addition, flash cards have been used to improve both comprehension and reading speed (Komachali, 2012).

Flash cards can be used by learners with a range of proficiencies, but are often used by beginners trying to learn their first few thousand words in a foreign language. Flash cards are freely available, and can be tailored to a learner's individual need. However, they rarely require the student to speak. Although some second language acquisition researchers would not regard this as a negative characteristic, many agree that spoken output is not simply the result of learning a foreign language, but an important component of its acquisition (McGraw et al., 2009). Providing a well-motivated system for vocabulary acquisition is a delicate balance. While flash cards are highly customizable, they typically take the lexical item out of any meaningful context.

In a recent study concerning the use of flash cards**,** conducted by Maryann Estlahcar Komachali vocabulary flash cards (VFC) were used to determine their effectiveness in boosting vocabulary acquisition in Iranian pre-university English learners (Komachali, 2012). Based on literature review, Komachali hypothesized that although flash cards are highly customizable; they typically take the lexical item out of any meaningful context. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of students in an experimental group who applied VFC and the mean scores of those students in the control group who did not apply VFC when learning vocabulary.

The participants of the study were 50 female Iranian pre-university students at a public school in Astaneh, Iran. All participants were EFL learners, aged 18, who had studied English as a compulsory subject in the previous six years. They had four hours of English per week with a non-native instructor. The selected groups were randomly assigned into two groups of 25 to form the experimental and the control group of the study to be tested on the effect of VFC as a vocabulary learning tool (Komachali, 2012).

Two groups were selected for this experimental quantitative research. One group served as the experimental group and received the treatment (VFC) while the other group served as the control group and received only the routine instructions. Pre and post tests were administered to both groups. The tests were made up of 60 vocabulary items selected from the students' textbook. The 60 item multiple-choice test was split into two equal halves based on odd and even numbers as the pretest and posttest. In addition a general language proficiency test was administered in order to divide the students into two almost homogeneous groups (Komachali, 2012).

The result of pretest showed that the two groups were almost at the same level of vocabulary knowledge and the mean of the two groups were not of great difference. The posttest results also showed that there was a significant difference between the control and the experimental group regarding their vocabulary knowledge. In order to see if this difference was meaningful the researcher made a t-test. The results implied that the experimental group performed significantly better in the posttest. The posttest results nullified the hypothesis, and it was concluded that there was a significant difference between the experimental and the control group in terms of their vocabulary knowledge at the end of the study (Komachali, 2012).

Kimachali (2012) suggested that due to the limited number of participants and their gender, this could impose a limitation on the study. Furthermore focusing the study on only vocabulary words might be another limitation since psychological factors such as anxiety and motivation were not considered. Suggestions for further studies were to involve students from other levels, use male students, and other nationalities and to investigate the relationship between flash card and motivation (Komachali, 2012).

There is a widely held belief that certain communication strategies relate to successful language performance because they can solve communicative disruptions and enhance interaction in the target language. According to Nakatani (2010), these strategies are the conscious thoughts and behaviors used by language learners to help them better understand, learn, and remember the target language information. Communication strategies can be regarded as any attempt by learners to overcome their difficulties and generate target language to achieve communicative goals in actual interaction. This gives learners sufficient opportunities to learn how to solve communication problems while maintaining the conversation flow.

Nakatani (2010) proposed that learners tend to use verbal and nonverbal strategies such as paraphrasing, using gestures, and asking questions for clarification to avoid communication breakdowns that might be caused by the learners' lack of knowledge of the target language. By utilizing these strategies, they could recognize their own deficiencies and employ specific strategies to negotiate meaning and produce the target language. In using communication strategies learners did not only cooperate with their interlocutor but also found a solution without cooperative assistance (Nakatani, 2010).

Two types of communication strategies were identified in a study by Faerch and Kasper (as cited in Nakatani, 2010), achievement strategies which enable learners to work on an alternative plan for reaching the original goal by means of whatever resources are available, and reduction strategies which let learners avoid solving a communication problem and allow them to give up on conveying the original message. These strategies allow learners to remain in the conversation, which provides them with opportunities to hear more target language input and produce new utterances. Thus the use of

communication strategies can have a significant learning effect for English language learners.

Nakatani (2010) conducted a study examining whether the use of specific communication strategies in the classroom context could improve learners' English proficiency in communicative tasks. Several assessment methods were combined such as pre and post conversation tasks that investigated how participants changed communication, and videotaped interactions which were transcribed and analyzed, with specific focus on segmentation of the utterances and the content of each utterance. Student's errors were analyzed in the transcription data, and the communication strategies were divided into achievement strategies, reduction strategies, and signals for negotiation. The study addressed whether the use of communicative strategies that included negotiation of meaning and communication enhancers could develop learners' oral proficiency in the classroom setting.

The participants of the study were 62 female students enrolled in mixed-level English as a foreign language classes at a private college in Japan. Their age ranged from 18 to 19 years and they had low English proficiency. Study participants had one 90 minute English lesson per week with a Japanese instructor for a total of 24 classes a year. Pre-test and post-test conversation tasks were used to investigate how participants changed communication task performance. Tasks were similar to daily classroom activities where students were prompted by a hypothetical situation in which they were to pretend that they were traveling alone in a foreign country. The conversations were recorded on videotape and analyzed (Nakatani, 2010).

Nakatani (2010) concluded that the frequent use of specific communication strategies, such as making efforts to maintain conversation flow and negotiation of meaning, could contribute to the oral proficiency development of English learners. The use of communication strategies to keep the conversation smooth was related to their oral communication ability. The use of these strategies reduced communication breakdowns and made their speech more fluent. In addition, the study demonstrated that there is a clear relationship between the incidence of negotiated interactions and increase in oral communication ability. Nakatani noted however that it was not clear how the strategies for negotiation lead to target language development, and further studies should be carried out across different types of groups. Overall, Nakatani concluded that negotiation strategies provided learners with opportunities to improve target language output.

A learning strategy that has been viewed negatively for several decades is rote learning. Rote learning is defined as repetition, memorization, and practicing (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012). It is mostly used as a memorization strategy in second language acquisition. Most people see rote learning as memorization by repetition, often without an understanding of the reasoning, or the relationship involved in the material that is being learned. The authors further noted that some researchers regard rote learning as a passive way of learning, and a misguided memorization strategy with no focus on problem solving skills. It also has been viewed negatively, particularly in the context of education, because few understand that rote learning is memorization by reading and writing repeatedly, reviewing often, using a dictionary, taking notes and group work. In addition, rote learning is the only way to quickly learn certain foreign languages' alphabets, vocabulary lists, and irregular verb lists (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012).

Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) pointed out that most Asian countries still use rote learning especially in vocabulary learning. Within the Eastern philosophies of learning, memorization has been regarded as an essential tool in supporting learning and understanding. In addition, the authors indicated that it was effective not only in the initial stages of language learning, but also in higher stages because a sizeable vocabulary is necessary for mastery of a foreign language. They believed that the acquisition of vocabulary and spelling ability help language acquisition in general; therefore language learners whose traditional cultures mainly rely on rote learning would continue to apply it as long as they benefited from it.

Sinhaneti and Kyaw advocated that rote learning did not have to be meaningless repetition. It may help to consolidate knowledge and deepen understanding. In addition, they wrote that it was beneficial for the accuracy of knowledge. However, rote learning should not just be practiced in the classroom. As recommended by Sinhaneti and Kyaw, repeatedly hearing certain words and phrases outside the class for example on television, at a sporting event, in public, on the radio, or while shopping commits these words to memory. They advised that excessive repetition in a short amount of time was actually counter-productive to learning, and that it was this later concept that had given rote learning the negative reputation. Although, there are other memorization strategies such as creating mental linkage, applying images and sound, and reviewing well, rote learning is still highly used among English language learners and language learners whose traditional cultures mainly rely on rote learning (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012).

In an effort to investigate the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning strategies of Burmese English learners, Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) conducted a study to

show a relationship between rote learning and other memorization strategies in vocabulary learning for Burmese English learners. They hypothesized that rote learning strategies play the main role in English vocabulary learning and that rote learning is more supportive than any other strategies in vocabulary acquisition.

A total of 100 participants from the Yangon Institute of Education in Myanmar took part in this study. Seventy-five were undergraduate English major and 25 were EFL (English as foreign language) junior teachers. All the participants had learned EFL from kindergarten to grade 11. Therefore, they had a strong foundation in EFL and a similar experience in vocabulary learning (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012).

By using a questionnaire and interviews they were able to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The study used a vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire to collect data from the students, and then interviewed the junior teachers by asking them about their opinions comparing rote learning to other memorization strategies (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012).

Based on this study, results supported the main hypothesis that Burmese students hold a positive view of rote learning, and it is preferable to other memorization strategies for learning vocabulary. Most indicated that rote learning was more essential in the early stages of vocabulary learning and the majority of students had no other strategies for learning vocabulary. These results were also confirmed by the content analysis of the oral interviews. Overall, the results showed that Burmese students use rote learning strategies as a combination of memorization and understanding. Therefore, rote learning strategies were collaboratively applied with repetition memorization and practice rather than mere repetition. Teachers should take into consideration that traditional culture is a

factor on learning strategies and should take into account students' learning styles when planning and implementing a curriculum (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012).

The Monitor Theory and Affective Filter

Krashen (1985) posited that the monitor theory can influence language acquisition and learning. His theory of second language acquisition consisted of five main hypotheses, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis claimed that there was a distinction between acquisition and learning. Acquisition was a subconscious process similar to the process used in first language acquisition, and the learner was not always aware that acquisition is taking place. Krashen stated that acquisition is a process similar to the way children learn their first language. But on the other hand, Krashen noted that learning is the conscious acceptance of knowledge about a language. For example, when learning about grammar or rules we are talking about learning. This is the product of formal language instruction (Krashen, 1985). "Language acquirers are not consciously aware of the grammatical rules of the language. On the contrary, language learning refers to knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them." (Bahrani, 2011 p. 281).

In the natural order hypothesis, Krashen, (1985) claimed that we acquire rules of language in a predictable order, noting that certain grammatical structures are acquired early while others are acquired later. It occurs independently of the order that rules are taught in language classes. This order occurs regardless of the first language or the age of the learner.

The monitor hypothesis explained how acquisition and learning are used in production and defined the relationship between one on the other. The ability to produce an utterance in another language comes from acquisition. Learning or conscious knowledge serves as a monitor to make correction, or change the output before we speak. In order to use this monitor, the learner must be consciously concerned about accuracy and must know the rules. According to theory (Krashen, 1985), error correction affects learning not acquisition. He shared that it was at this point that we rethink and adjust conscious rules. Acquisition plays a more important role in second language performance. The conscious rules act as a monitor while we are speaking or writing because we can stop and make correction. However monitor rule reduces the amount of information we transmit. Research evidence suggests that monitor use is limited and fluency and accuracy is a result of what learner has acquired and not learned (Krashen, 1985).

The input hypothesis suggested that we acquire rules by understanding messages or by obtaining comprehensible input. Language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand also known as comprehensible input. However, in order to make progress along the natural order, this input should be one step above the learner's current language ability ($i+1$). "We acquire a new rule by understanding messages that contain their new rule" (Krashen, 1985, p.8). Speaking does not cause language acquisition. The ability to speak emerges on its own, as a result of acquisition and of obtaining comprehensible input. This hypothesis helps to explain why some learners go thru a silent period. During this period learners are building

competence. Comprehensible input, when delivered in sufficient quality and quantity automatically contains all the appropriate structures for the acquirer (Krashen, 1985).

The affective filter hypothesis suggested that comprehensible input is not sufficient for second language acquisition. Even if input was understood, it might not reach the language acquisition part of the brain, also known as the Language Acquisition Device or LAD. Krashen (1985) claimed that this filter was a mental block that prevented learners from using comprehensible input due to low motivation, high anxiety and low self-esteem. Therefore successful acquisition requires that at least two conditions be met comprehensible input and low affective filter. Krashen maintained that acquirers must assume that they will be successful and must consider themselves to be potential members of the "club" of users of that language. In language class when students feel on the defensive, they are afraid their weakness will be revealed and this causes the affective filter to go up. When we obtain comprehensible input, presented in an interesting way, in a low anxiety environment, we acquire language (Krashen, 1985).

Although schools and educators have embraced Krashen's theories and applied them to their curricula, he is not without critics. Gass and Selinker (1994) asserted that one of the reasons that his ideas were so influential was his confident attitude about his assumptions. Whereas many studies point out that either their research is inconclusive or needs further studies, Krashen is not only confident in his findings, but makes suggestions for teaching activities based on his hypotheses. In addition, he proposes for teachers to work with linguists in order to do research. Adding to his popularity is the fact that he expresses his ideas clearly and accessibly (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Krashen's critics argue that both the way is theory is constructed and the results are vague (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Also since every hypotheses must be testable "a theory remains falsifiable as long as parts of it are testable, and all untestable parts are related to testable ones" (p.149). They further noted that this poses problems for Krashen's theories because his claim of *i+1* and the affective filter cannot be tested. Furthermore, he has failed to provide evidence that learning and acquisition are two different systems, nor has he provided a means for determining if they are separate (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Another debatable point is his claim that both children and adults acquire language in the same way. However, Bley-Vvoman and Schachter (as cited in Collin Fry, n.d.) proposed "the fundamental difference hypotheses" claiming that children and adults have different ways of acquiring language. Whereas children use Universal Grammar and specific learning procedures, adults rely on native language knowledge and general problem solving skills to acquire language. Furthermore, Schachter (as cited in Collin Fry, n.d.) stated that a child is equally capable of learning any first language. In contrast, the ease with which adults can learn a second language is influenced by the relationship of their first language to the target language. This is an indication that adults do not access the same mechanism as children do. Also, why is it that children do not appear to fossilize, but adults do (Collin Fry, n.d.)?

His comprehensible input hypothesis also comes under scrutiny maintained Collin Fry. First, he maintained that it lacked precision. Understanding new structures through context was not the only way changes occur. He mused that a "trigger" for change may be the result of learners using current linguistic knowledge to make sense of utterances.

Furthermore, it is incomprehensible input that acts as a stimulus to change rather than comprehensible input (Collin Fry, n.d.).

In a study focusing on the connection between students' interest, self-esteem, attitude, motivation and the affective filter hypothesis, Lin (2008) set out to determine if the use of various student centered activities would reduce the affective filter. The study was based on the theory that emotions influence students' English learning to a great extent. The author stated that "language learners might be distracted by emotional factors, and thus not be able to absorb what they should learn due to teacher's uncongenial manners or classmates' aggressive and competitive attitudes." (p.115).

In accordance with Krashen's theories, Lin (2008) noted that teachers across universities in Taiwan were urged to apply games, songs and films in their classroom activities. These activities were communicative in nature and were designed to enhance confidence in language acquisition. In this study Lin attempted to reinforce the use of these pedagogies by reporting on a teaching project undertaken at the MingDao University in Taiwan.

The participants in the study were 97 freshmen intermediate level English learners. All the participants had started learning English in grade 5 or 6 of elementary school or the first year of junior high. The course being taken was required in order to fulfill graduation requirements. Two classes out of 26 were selected to participate in the study. Classroom equipment for the purpose of the study included use of notebook computers, CD audio playback equipment, and a projector capable of displaying computer images on a large screen. Teachers included games, English songs, and movies in the lessons (Lin, 2008).

The procedure involved four steps. First, the participants were not told about the affective filter hypothesis, but they were informed that they would be led toward a more calming and self-assured state of mind as part of the learning process. Second, they were tested in order to compare before and after results. Third, they were taught English thru the use of games, songs, films and music for the duration of the semester. Finally, at the end of the semester they were retested and their perceptions of the new teaching methods were collected and analyzed (Lin, 2008).

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used so that research questions would be measured more accurately. In addition five subjects were interviewed and recorded and their answers were conceptualized. Researchers were interested in finding out if these activities were effective in association with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. Also, if the students thought these methods were valuable. In addition, they wanted to see if students improved more when trained this way, and if students might have more willingness to attend class when these methods were being used (Lin, 2008).

Lin (2008), reported that the results affirmed the importance of Krashen's hypothesis and gave insight into students' feelings. In addition it showed educators the need to update teaching pedagogies. More than 80% believed that their relaxed and positive attitudes and teachers' interesting way of teaching plus encouragement enabled them to achieve greater knowledge in English. Activities were welcomed by the students, and they agreed that the affective filter was blocked. Results indicated that teachers should adopt more of these methods.

Lin's (2008) recommendation for future research included doing more of these studies across Taiwan, using additional activities, more time, and at different levels.

However, students might not have been totally honest in their answers because they anticipated teachers' positive attitudes towards this method of teaching, and worried that negative answers would affect their grades (Lin, 2008).

Another study focusing on Krashen's hypothesis was conducted by Wang (2013) to determine which factors of the affective filter hypothesis played a role in motivating Ethnic Chinese students to learn Chinese as a second language. Wang reported that "Putonghua" or better known as Mandarin, based on the Beijing dialect, is the standardized form of spoken Chinese, and is spoken by almost one billion inhabitants of China. However, not all Chinese people speak Chinese. As a result it is taught all over China. Wang maintained there are some unsolved issues in the field of teaching Chinese as a second language.

In the study, 2000 ethnic Chinese secondary school students in Fiji participated in a survey trying to find out which affective factors influenced their acquisition of Chinese. Of the 2000 participants 90% have had 8 to 10 years of Chinese reading and writing instructions. The remaining 10% have studied or learned Chinese from 11 to 13 years, and most can speak Cantonese (Wang, 2013).

Methods used in Wang's study were the Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery, Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale, and other research findings on motivation to design a questionnaire, which included 20 questions relating to the influence of affective factors of Chinese language acquisition. Questionnaire included questions about the learning attitudes, learning motivation, Chinese culture identity and other factors of Chinese learning acquisition in order to find the rate of influence that the affective factors had on them (Wang, 2013).

In order to make Chinese teaching more successful some measures were proposed to enhance the initiative of Chinese students. Researchers looked at attitudes of ethnic Chinese students towards their mother tongue, Chinese learning motivation of ethnic Chinese students and Chinese cultural identity. The results showed that 65% have a positive attitude toward their language. Learning attitude was broken down into five aspects, emotional experience, curiosity, initiative, examination and planning. Among the five aspects emotional experience was the most important factor. "Learning attitude decides whether a person learns the language consciously or not and influences the effect of learning a foreign language" (Wang, 2013, p. 58). Chinese learning motivation includes, integration motivation, instrumental motivation, achievement motivation, teaching motivation, and Chinese culture identity. Chinese culture identity was the most important learning motivation. The study found that 80% of the students believed that learning Chinese was useful for many reasons, but one common reason was that by learning Chinese they had access to their language and culture where otherwise they would not. Wang sated that Chinese cultural identity greatly affects ethnic students' motivation for learning Chinese, and greatly affects students' motivation to learn. Learning Chinese and understanding the mother tongue shows respect to one's culture and identity.

The author concluded by stating that motivation and attitude are only average affective factors among Fiji students learning Chinese, but Chinese cultural identity is high, and for them the process of learning Chinese is equivalent to their cultural identity. Therefore, the affective filter plays a significant role in their emotional attitude toward learning Chinese (Wang, 2013).

In an attempt to test the affective filter hypothesis which describes the relationship between effective variable and the process of second language acquisition and how affective factors influence language learning, Mingzheng (2012) conducted a study to explore the role of humor as a teaching tool in language acquisition. More and more scholars and researchers have pointed out that when students are learning in a relaxed atmosphere, they will regard it more as an enjoyment rather than a task. One of the purpose of Mingzheng's paper was to examine the role humor plays in language teaching and learning. The study looked at using humor as a pedagogical tool in an English language class to see if it can lower the students' affective filter in the learning process. By using humor-incorporated pedagogy in their teaching, it was expected that the students will get rid of the negative affective filter in their foreign language learning.

Participants included 80 foreign language teachers and 300 students from the University of Foreign Languages (UFL) in Luoyang, China. The teachers were faculty members from the Department of English of UFL and the students were non-English major sophomores. All students and teachers were involved during the first stage. However, only 80 students were involved in the second and third stage of the study (Mingzheng, 2012).

In the first stage of the study, all participants were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire on their perception of humor application and its effect within the foreign language classroom. Questionnaire included eight questions with three possible answers. In addition, teachers were asked an open ended question stating "Do you have any good suggestions for and comments on the use of humor in language

teaching?" Furthermore, during the completion of the questionnaire students were asked to indicate if they wanted to participate in the study (Mingzheng, 2012, p. 399).

The second stage involved the 80 students who chose to participate. They attended two lectures. The first lecture was conducted in the traditional way, by using inquiry based questioning, explaining new words and phrases, and conducting oral practice. In the second lecture the teacher incorporated humor into the lesson by using humorous cartoons, comics or videos clips. The teacher would also provide some interesting context and tell some humorous stories to help the students comprehend the topic (Mingzheng, 2012).

In the third stage of the study the 80 students were surveyed by means of questionnaire and asked about their attitudes regarding the two lectures. Questions were designed to find out what they thought about the use of humor and if it could improve their language learning by having such type of lecture (Mingzheng, 2012).

Results indicated that both teachers and students thought that present teaching methods were not satisfactory and needed improvement, and they felt that humor was important to language learning. After the two lectures, students considered the teaching with humor to be beneficial and would like the teachers to use more humor in class. Students demonstrated that the teaching with humor approaches were positive. This study provided evidence that the use of humor in foreign language teaching helped lower the affective filter of students studying a foreign language (Mingzheng, 2012).

Adult English Learner Writing

Krashen (1985), stated that writing does not cause language acquisition; it is not comprehensible input. Writing is an intellectual tool for cognitive development. It can

make you smarter. It has two purposes; it's a medium of communication and a means of personal growth, personal growth being more important. It helps to better manipulate our vague ideas and allows us to keep our thought in memory. However, there is a connection between thoughts and writing. When one writes ones sees how spoken language looks when it becomes written language. Furthermore, writing is a particularly important tool for English learners who need a great deal of practice with academic language. They need to write in order to learn both content area and writing conventions. Students learn content material through the mental processes they experience as they write (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

Wright (2010) asserted that writing is a challenge for English learners because they have to learn to write before they are proficient in English. They may or may not be familiar with the Roman alphabet, may still be learning English orthographic conventions, and sometimes produce sentence level errors influenced by their primary language. An additional challenge for newcomers was that they are learning to adjust socially and culturally to a new country (Wright, 2010).

Wrights (2010) stated that the writing development process is similar for English learners as it is for native speakers because they must learn the English alphabet, spelling, proper syntax for forming sentences and paragraphs, and the conventions for writing specific genres. They both engage in literacy tasks in a variety of social contexts, and use writing to interact and develop interpersonal relationships. However, unlike native English speakers, English learners are simultaneously acquiring language and composing skills. English learners writing development is not linear and varies from student to student, even when they speak the same language, and have had similar amounts of

exposure to English instructions. Quality and quantity may vary from piece to piece and draft to draft for the same writer (Wright, 2010).

Furthermore, Gass and Selinker (1994) indicated that English learners' output is often equated with their grammar. For example, it is frequently inferred that changes in the output represent changes in a learner's grammar. However, the two should not be equated. A number of factors suggested that the output is not identical to one's grammar. First was the recognition that there are individual differences in what learners are willing to say. Personality factors such as confidence in one's ability to produce correct target language sentences may influence whether or not a learner produces target language material. Additionally, English learners produce different linguistic forms that have varying amounts of accuracy depending on the task performed. For example, what learners can produce in writing is not what they can produce in speaking; what they can understand from a printed page is not equivalent to what they can understand from a conversation. Third, different grammatical information may be used in different kinds of writing (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Newman (1983) stated that having students write in journals could make them more comfortable with writing. Journal writing helps students develop fluency (as cited in Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010). Students are interested in and willing to try writing their own experiences and thoughts if they are assured that their work will be kept confidential. Encouraging them to write, even a sentence or two each day, in a journal helps them to formulate ideas and practice at expressing themselves in English. They are learning how to string together ideas into sentences and paragraphs to make their thoughts comprehensible. They can review their writing later if they want to, or use it as a

nonthreatening way to practice putting their thought down on paper. Journals are typically notebooks where students can write whatever they want. They are often used as places for students to write down what they think, see, feel, or have experienced. Writing in journals is not only a way to express thoughts; it can also be a process of discovery. When writing in journals, students can learn what they truly think and who they really are (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

However, there are a number of issues to consider when giving students journal-writing assignments. Just asking students to write in journals may not result in much writing. Lenski and Verbruggen (2010) recommended that a teacher must provided students with one or more journal prompts. Journals should not be graded. The audience for journals should be the students, so it is not necessary for teachers to grade students' journal entries. Teachers should let students know that journal entries are part of schoolwork and are not strictly private. Teachers in many states are mandatory reporters, which means that if they suspect any type of abuse, they must report it to social services. Sometimes students write things in journals that they should keep private, and at times students exaggerate during journal writing (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

Another issue was whether to allow students to write in their native language or whether to encourage students to write only in English. Since the goal of the writing assignment is to encourage fluency in writing English, students should attempt to write in English, but they can use their native language if they can't think of the English word for something, and they don't want to interrupt their writing to ask someone. Switching languages in this way is called "code-switching" and is commonly accepted in certain types of student writing (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

Informal writing is similar to speech in that it doesn't focus on the conventions of language as much as producing written output. When students write using informal writing activities, they use words and language without paying too much attention to editing. It is necessary to scaffold students' ability to distinguish between conversation and writing so they will not be confused when they are assigned formal writing activities. When students write informally, they often write what they hear in conversation. For example, many English learners write *kinda* rather than *kind of* and *wanna* rather than *want to*. By using the information from students' informal writing, a teacher can use these and other examples to show students how to write these common English phrases and to scaffold students' English learning. As students developed writing fluency; they will continue to develop their competence in their knowledge about the English language (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

Learning journals are places for students to record what they have learned. They provide the double benefit of helping students practice writing in English using academic language and in solidifying their knowledge of academic subjects. Asking students to record what they have learned helps them understand what they know (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

In an article Kim (2005) shared her view on journal writing by adult English learners. She wrote that journal writing is good for enhancing interaction communication and involvement of students. Dialogue journals promoted social interaction in a conscious and constructive way, and maximize language literacy development. Orsen (2001) wrote that for English learners, journal writing provided an opportunity to develop

second language literacy by engaging the learners in the use of the language in a meaningful and authentic context (as cited in Kim, 2005).

Auerbach (1999), (as cited in Kim, 2005) asserted that journal writing implies that learners' lives and voices have value and can become a vehicle for language acquisition as well as self-discovery. It helps learners develop critical literacy by engaging in language learning actively rather than mastering functional literacy skills. Dialogue journal provided both the learner and the teacher a meaningful way to create a learning environment and developed a sense of community.

Kim's article took into account the practice of a learner centered curriculum, and provided a good example of how adult learners come to appreciate diversity and differences that each individual brings to the classroom. The participants in the dialogue journals were advanced adult English learners at a community based adult basic education program in the Southwest. Most of the 25 learners in the class were Spanish speakers, 4 adults were from Asian countries, 2 speakers of Chinese one Japanese, and one Korean. Kim indicated that such a multicultural class environment provided students with the opportunity to engage in the learning process that promoted development of knowledge across culture and created an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the different cultural experiences and values that each brought into the classroom (Kim, 2005).

In Kim's study, activities were designed around the issues that were of interest to the adult learners, such as, experiences and concern about learning English, adjusting to a new life in the US, families, children's education, and obtaining a job. Adult learners can benefit from writing journals in many different ways. Through a daily practice of writing

journals, learners engage in exploring new ideas, using language in a real meaningful context, and expressing themselves freely. Journals played an important role as a vehicle for better communication (Kim, 2005).

Kim found that the journal activities promoted a better communication with the adult learners and created a learning environment that enhanced their learning. A meaningful aspect of journal writing was that the learners obtained a sense of ownership of their journals. The stories represented who they were and they identified themselves through their journals.

Kim (2005) showed how adult English learners engaged in practicing authentic and meaningful learning by utilizing dialogue journal writing as a leaning approach. Through authentic dialogue they engaged in the process of negotiating and making meaning, which is essential in language learning. In relation to the development of literacy in the second language, he found that dialogue journal writing provided a natural, functional setting in which the learners acquired literacy and practiced in an environment they found meaningful and comfortable.

Wright (2010) asserted that English learners' ability to express themselves in written English was highly dependent on their level of English proficiency. He believed that there was a close relationship between English learners' oral proficiency in English and their ability to express themselves in written English. This relationship was consistent with research findings on the importance of oral language. Wright further denoted that most English learners are unlikely to use words in writing that they do not know orally, and the language forms they use in writing will typically be limited, at least initially, to the forms they are able to use in conversation. English learners writing may

be only as good as their English speaking ability. Wright suggested that English learners benefit from writing instructions that focus on topics they can talk about. Such instructions support their English language development. In addition, he declared that there was a strong relationship between students' writing ability in their native language and their writing ability in English.

However, English oral language skills have little impact on word-level writing skills, word level skills such as spelling are not strongly related to oral language skills in English. Thus English learners can memorize the spelling of words without knowing their meaning or how to use them in a sentence. But, they have a strong impact on text-level writing skills. When large chunks of text are involved, such as sentences, paragraphs, and stories, English oral skills have a strong impact between English learners' reading ability and their ability to write English. The more students read at appropriate levels, the more vocabulary and language structure they will acquire. This knowledge can be applied in their writing. Findings from research reveal that the more they read the more they write, the better they write, and the less apprehensive they are about writing. Reading is important to students writing development in three ways. First, reading can be used as a springboard for a topic to write about. Short newspaper or magazine articles on controversial topics can be good motivators for students to write their own opinion. Second reading can provide background information and material for students to write about a specific topic. Finally, reading can be used as a model of a particular writing feature for students to imitate (Wright, 2010).

It has been assumed that in a second language learning situation, learners rely extensively on their native language. Students' native writing skills are a major asset

because much of their knowledge will transfer to English. They already know the conventions of different genres of writing and will simply need to develop enough proficiency in English to use these skills in the new language. Not all transfer from the first language is positive transfer, however. Negative cross-language influences might show up when English learners erroneously apply native language phonological and orthographic rules to English spelling. Nevertheless, negative transfer is actually a good sign because it shows that students are using an effective strategy, applying native language writing skills to writing in English. Most students quickly figure out what does and what does not transfer. Also, teachers can plan instructions to help students recognize instances of negative transfer to avoid (Wright, 2010).

In a study conducted by Pappamihie, Nishimata, and Mihai (2008), they question how the composition process can be made more efficient and effective for English learners by making use of native languages when composing in English. They questioned if under timed writing conditions, adult English learners write better essays if they use their native language for brainstorming, or do they write more effectively if they maintain the use of English throughout the writing process.

The theoretical framework in the study relied on two concepts. The first related to Commins's (2000) Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis stating that students who acquire literacy skills in their first language are able to transfer those skills to their second language provided that they have received adequate education or exposure to literacy in their first language (as cited in Pappamihiel et al., 2008). Thus, students could take advantage of native language skills when writing in English.

Participants included 27 adult English learners enrolled in an intensive English program at a large university in Florida. All participants had received at least the equivalent of a high school education in their first language. The English writing proficiency of the participants ranged from novice to advanced with seven participants at the novice level, nine at the beginning level, eight at the intermediate level, and three at the advanced level. All of the writing classes in this intensive English program emphasized the writing process approach and the use of brainstorming strategies.

Two writing samples were collected from each participant at the end of an intensive six-week English program session. On the first data collection day, students were asked to brainstorm in their native language to generate ideas about a topic and then were given 30 minutes to write a five-paragraph essay in English. Two days later, the same students were asked to write a similar essay but had to use English for the brainstorming activity. The topic for the first essay was "Some people prefer to eat at food stands or restaurants. Others prefer to prepare and eat food at home. Which do you prefer?" The topic for the second essay was "Some people prefer to live in a small town. Others prefer t live in a big city. Which place would you prefer to live in?" (Pappamihiel et al., 2008, p. 388).

Both essays were scored using an analytic method and final score was reached by combining a student's score in the area of essay content, organization, vocabulary language use, and mechanics. Two different writing instructors scored all essays anonymously. No significant differences were found when essays were looked as a large group. However, when participants were grouped into low- and high proficiency groups, the novice and beginners benefited from using only English in their timed writing.

Participants who had lower level of English scored significantly better when brainstorming in English than when they used their native language to brainstorm. However, the participants at the higher level showed a slight (non significant) trend toward the benefit of native language use (Pappamihiel et al., 2008).

Pappamihiel et al. (2008), concluded that it is possible that switching from native language to second language in the brainstorming stage hinders processing speed and short-term memory. Another possibility is that when English learners use their native language for invention task, the ideas and concepts they brainstorm are just too far above their ability to express them in English. It was recommended that instructors at the intermediate and advanced level neither encourage nor discourage learners from using their native language. However, students at the lower level should be encouraged to use only English under timed writing conditions. The researchers identified that the limitation in this study was the relatively small number of participants and the use of a convenience sampling method, noting that ideally such studies should be done with a larger number of participants.

Summary of the Literature Review

Most literature about adult second language learners suggests that adults have a much harder time learning a second language than children do. However, there are many conflicting opinions as to the accuracy of this belief (Gass & Selinker, 1994). By comparing how children learn their first language to how adults learn their second language, linguists and psychologists have developed some theories to explain why this is so. Brown (1993) concluded that the critical period hypothesis, lateralization of the brain, psychomotor coordination, emotions and cognition all play an integral part in second

language acquisition. Furthermore, he explained how these factors may hinder the adult learners' acquisition of a second language. Ipek (2009) suggested that there is a pattern to language acquisition and is similar in first and second language with a variation of what is expected from the learner. The silent period, formulaic expressions and application of structural and semantic simplifications are the three stages of language development as explained by Ipek (2009). Durrant and Smitt (2010) explored how formulaic language fits into the learning process, and concluded that collocations help adult language learners store information and commit these terms to memory.

In order to facilitate language acquisition and develop fluency strategies that focus on student-centered activities have been proposed and implemented. Scharwzer (2009) wrote that developing a community of learners by letting students be a part of the classroom's decision making process enhanced language acquisition. Nakatani (2010) looked at how learners use verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies to maintain the conversation flow when there is a communication breakdown. Because acquiring vocabulary is central to language learning, the use of flash cards was investigated to determine if they helped or hindered language development (Komachali, 2012). A study by Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) discussed the value of rote learning for language learners from Asian countries, and pointed out its benefits for certain learning styles.

In order to help teachers develop lessons that take the learners' acquisition process into consideration, Krashen (1985) explained the monitor theory as that in order for acquisition to take place there must be comprehensible input and a low affective filter. However his critics claimed that his hypotheses cannot be tested and leave many unanswered questions (Gass & Selinker 1994).

Lin (2008), Wang (2013) and Mingzheng (2012) all conducted studies to see what factors contributed to lowering the affective filter. Lin (2008) concluded that student centered activities where regarded as positive and played a role in helping student feel more motivate to attend class. Wang (2013) pointed out that cultural identity was important in motivating students to learning a second language. Finally Mingzheng (2012) demonstrated how using humor in a foreign language class helped students learn the language. These three studies supported Krashen's hypotheses that a low effective filter was helpful when learning a second language.

Writing is an important component of learning a second language. However it poses many problems for learners because the ability to write in the new language depends on the knowledge of the language and skills in native language. Krashen (1985) warned that writing does not cause language acquisition and is merely a tool for cognitive development. Wright (2010) provided a detailed account of the problems faced by English learners when writing in English, and explained how native language affects the learners' written output. Kim (2005) reported on how journal writing helped her adult English learners develop confidence in their writing ability and helped in the overall acquisition of English. Pappamihie et al. (2008) investigated if brainstorming in learners' native language benefited or hindered the learners during essay writing under timed conditions. The results showed that native language was not always helpful when brainstorming.

The following study was conducted in an effort to bring together theory and practice regarding adult language learners. Although theorists and linguists, write and hypothesize about the problems of language learners, it is the teachers who develop

activities to promote learning. This study looks at an activity that incorporates fun and some often criticized teaching strategies, rote learning and memorization, and determine its usefulness in reducing anxiety in order to help adult English learners produce both oral and written output.

CHAPTER III

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were adult English as a second language learners enrolled in a pre-academic English as a Second Language class at a community college in northern NJ. Participants were chosen according to their scores on the BEST Plus Oral Proficiency Test. Participants whose score ranged between SPL (student performance levels) 0 to 5 (beginning ESL literacy to High beginning ESL) were selected. All participants had limited English vocabulary, very little control of grammar and could function in very limited ways in situations related to immediate needs (CAL, 2004).

A total of 40 students participated in this study, 12 males and 28 females. All students that participated in this study were born outside the United States. A total of 25 students were from the Dominican Republic, 4 from Peru, 3 from Colombia, 2 from Morocco, 1 from Bangladesh, 1 from Ecuador, 1 from Mexico, 1 from Palestine, 1 from Puerto Rico, and 1 from Venezuela. Of the 40 participants, 36 students were native Spanish speakers, 2 students spoke Arabic and French as their native language, 1 student spoke Arabic, and 1student spoke Bengali. The students were between 18 to 60 years of age. All but one student had less than one year of ESL instructions.

The teacher/researcher was the ESL teacher for the two groups. She is bilingual in French and Italian, and started studying English at the age of 13, later studied Spanish in college for two years. She had received NJ certification in both French and ESL and was a trained Best Plus test administrator. At the time of the study, she had been teaching ESL for the prior 18 years and was enrolled in a teacher education master's program.

Materials

A personal data form (Appendix A) was used in order to obtain participants' demographic data. The Best Plus Oral Proficiency Test (CAL, 2010) was administered pre and post intervention. To gather data about participants' attitudes towards speaking English the teacher/researcher created a questionnaire (Appendix B) that was administered before the study and at the end of the study. In addition, the teacher/researcher used students' journals (Appendix C) to periodically evaluate participants' progress. A grammar test (Appendix D), and a writing test (Appendix E) were administered to both groups at the end of the study and scored using an answer key and a rubric (Appendix F). In order to instruct the students, the following materials were used: English in Action 1, student text and workbook, and English in Action 1 CD by Heinle Cengage Learning (2010). The experimental group used the small talk cards (Appendix G). The teacher/researcher maintained field notes in a notebook.

Best Plus Oral Proficiency Test

The basic English skills test (Best Plus test) assessed the speaking and listening proficiency of adult second language learners of English through an oral interview. The interviewer then rated the learner's responses using a scoring rubric that addressed three language domains: listening comprehension, language complexity, and response comprehensibility (CAL, 2004). Test administrators were trained by The Center for Applied Linguistics to administer and score the Best Plus test. To get a reliable comparison of participants' oral development the teacher/researcher administered the Best Plus test pre and post intervention (CAL, 2004).

Personal Data Form

The Personal Data Form (Appendix A) was replicated from English in Action Placement Test Package (Heinle, 2005). The demographic data collected from this form was used to assign subgroups based on first language spoken, nationality and age. Because so much as been speculated about second language learning and age of acquisition (Krashen, 1985), information from this form may be helpful in drawing certain conclusions.

Affective Filter Questionnaire

To gather data about participants' attitude towards speaking English, the teacher/researcher created a questionnaire (Appendix B) that was administered pre and post intervention. This was done in order to quantitatively measure participants' attitudes and anxiety level about learning and speaking English. The questionnaire consisted of five multiple choice questions with participants marking the degree to which they agreed with the statement. The multiple choice questions asked about their anxiety level in different circumstances when they had to speak English. Surveys were translated into participants' native language to ensure validity of answers.

Journals

Participants periodically wrote in a journal (Appendix C) to express their feelings and reflect on what had been learned that day. The teacher/researcher quantitatively analyzed content of journal by looking for answers to questions such as: What activity did you not like? or What activity would like to do again? and why? What did you like most? In addition, the teacher/researcher qualitatively analyzed content of journal by keeping track of sentence structure and syntax.

Grammar Test

In order to quantitatively measure students' sentence structure skills, a 20 multiple question grammar test was created by the teacher/researcher (Appendix D). The test results were applied toward measuring participants' comprehension and use of simple present/present progressive, plural/singular forms, and subject/verb agreement. Test scores were recorded and used for comparison between the two groups.

Writing Test

In order to qualitatively analyze participants' progress with sentence structure and word order, the teacher/researcher created a writing test (Appendix E). Participants were asked to write answers to open ended questions (Appendix D) which were evaluated using an ESL essay placement guidelines rubric (Appendix F).

Field Notes and Observations

The teacher/researcher kept a notebook throughout the study where she made notes about students' attitudes and feelings about language learning and events that occurred that day. The notes included a summary of students' recorded communicative activities which she later analyzed for speech production. She kept track of verbal communication strategies, use of authentic speech, hesitations, and fillers in order to assess oral output. The teacher/researcher also included any information that she considered relevant to the study, such as spontaneous events that would give more insight into the study.

Procedures

Forty adult English learners participated in the study. The teacher/researcher randomly chose a control group and an experimental group to undergo the study.

Students were assigned to group according to their schedule and availability of seats in class. The experimental group participants attended semi-weekly lessons and used small talk cards (Appendix G) to encourage communication in English. The control group participants attended semi-weekly lessons and used communicative activities, such as information gap and dialogues, to encourage communication in English. Participants attended ESL conversation classes for a period of four weeks. Each lesson was 2.5 hours long and classes met twice a week. The teacher/researcher used different tools and strategies to introduce vocabulary and grammar. In addition the teacher/researcher used a number of communicative activities to encourage participants to produce oral output. In order to minimize threats to the external validity of the study where participants perform better than usual because they know that they are being favored, also known as the Hawthorne Effect or John Henry Effect (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996) neither group was informed about of the study.

Pre-Intervention Assessment

The 40 participants for this study were chosen based on their scores on Best Plus (CAL, 2004) which was administered during private interviews prior to beginning of the study. In addition, participants completed a pre intervention questionnaire asking them to rate their feelings and anxiety when speaking English under different circumstances. Their scores were recorded.

Intervention Procedures

The teacher/researcher conducted class by following lesson plans. Lessons began with a warm up communicative activity. Lessons for both groups followed similar plans with the exception of the small talk cards (Appendix G) for the experimental group. The

experimental group engaged in communicative activities (Appendix H) using small talk cards, and the control group engaged in communicative activities suggested in the book English in Action 1 (Heinle Cengage Learning, 2010).

While students were engaged in communicative activities, the teacher/researcher addressed individual student's concern, attended to administrative matters, walked around, offered help when needed and observed students' interactions. In order to avoid repetition and boredom in the experimental group, the teacher/researcher devised four different activities (Appendix H) using the small talk cards. In addition to these four different activities, participants used small talk cards during any idle class time.

Table 1 displays and organizes the small talk cards activities carried out during the study for the experimental group and the different communicative activities for the control group. In addition it displays and organizes the different qualitative and quantitative data collection methods used in the study throughout the study.

Table 1

Data Collection Time Table

	Experimental Group		**Control Group**	
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 1	Day 2
Week 1	Affective filter survey Small talk cards(1-15) Activity 1	Small talk cards (1-25) Activity 2 Journal entry	Affective filter survey Ask & answer questions with a partner	Ask & answer questions in large group Journal entry
Week 2	Small talk cards (1-25) Activity 1	Small talk cards (1-35) Activity 3 Journal entry	Practice the dialogue with your partner	Ask and answer questions to five classmates Journal entry
Week 3	Small talk cards (20-40) Activity 2	Small talk cards (1-40) Activity 3 Journal entry	Information gap about the classroom	Work with a partner Ask and answer questions about your hometown Journal entry
Week 4	Best Plus post test Grammar test Small talk cards (30-50) Activity 2	Small Talk Cards(1-50) Activity 2 Best Plus Post test Writing test Affective filter survey	Best Plus post test Grammar test Practice the dialogue with your group	Ask and answer questions with your partner Best Plus post test Writing test Affective filter survey

Post-Intervention Assessment

At the end of the study participants in both groups completed the affective filter questionnaire (Appendix B). In addition they were administered a grammar test (Appendix G) and a writing test (Appendix E) to evaluate their writing competency. The teacher/researcher administered the Best Plus test (CAL, 2005). Results were scored and recorded. The mean scores of the two groups were compared.

Data Collection

Several qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used to gather information in this quasi-experimental study. Participants were pre and post tested with the Best Plus test (CAL, 2005) in order to compare their oral proficiency. Although, this method gathered qualitative data which was based on the interviewer valued judgment, the scores were computed quantitatively (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). In order to minimize the possibility that the posttest scores would be affected because the participants had been subjected to the pretest, the subjects were given a different format of the test (Thomas, 2005). The teacher/researcher made daily observation to detail participants' language development. During observation periods the teacher/researcher's role ranged from interactive to non-interactive depending on whether she wanted to maintain objectivity, or if she wanted more detailed information about students' interactions (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). The Writing Exit Test (Appendix E) qualitatively measured participants' ability to express themselves in writing. In order to quantitatively analyze the results a scoring rubric was used (Appendix F). To gather data about participants' attitude towards speaking English, the teacher/researcher used a questionnaire (Appendix B) that was administered before the study and at the end of the

study. This was done in order to quantitatively measure participants' attitudes and anxiety level about learning and speaking English. The Grammar Exit Test (Appendix D) quantitatively measured participants' knowledge of grammar and syntax structures of the English language. After all the data were collected and graded, the teacher/researcher analyzed the results using a quantitative approach. She recorded the results of each student by identifying the students only by a numeric code. Data collected in this study were used to determine if the use of the small talk cards had any impact on the affective filter and their language acquisition. Table 2 displays and organizes the data collection methods and links the methods to the research questions.

Table 2

Data Collection Methods

	Hypothesis I Effect on Affective Filter	Hypothesis II Effect on Speaking	Hypothesis III Effect on Writing
Best Plus (Form A)		**X**	
Affective Filter Pre Intervention Survey	**X**		
Grammar t Test			**X**
Writing t Test			**X**
Affective Filter Post Intervention Survey	**X**		
Best Plus (Form B)		**X**	
Students' Journals	**X**		**X**
Teacher Field Notes	**X**	**X**	**X**

CHAPTER IV

Results

Overview

The data collected in this study were used to explore adult English learners' language acquisition through the use of small talk cards. The teacher/researcher was specifically interested in examining to what degree the small talk cards helped adult English learners lower their anxiety about learning a new language, and acquire communication skills. In order to accomplish this, the teacher/researcher conducted a four-week comparison study of two beginning level English as a Second Language classes.

At the beginning of the study, in order to gather information regarding the participants' feelings about English, the teacher/researcher administered an anxiety about speaking English questionnaire (Appendix B). The teacher/researcher administered the same questionnaire at the end of the study in order to determine if there had been any changes in their anxiety about speaking English. In addition the teacher/researcher administered an oral proficiency test at the beginning and at the end of the study to quantitatively measure the participants' oral proficiency. The Teacher/researcher used these data to compare the change in participants speaking skills. Other data were gathered during the study in order to compare the progress of the two groups.

During the four weeks of the study, participants were instructed in the curriculum by means of current teaching methodologies. Activities included: music, TPR, audio, videos, role playing and lecture. Subject matter included; greetings, family members, classroom objects, home and furnishing, adjectives, and everyday actions. Some minor

grammar points were covered such as sentence structure, simple present/present progressive, singular and plural, and word order. Lessons were presented to both groups in the same manner by the teacher/researcher. However the control group practiced different communicative activities while the experimental group practiced communicative activities mainly by using the small talk cards.

At the end of the study the teacher/researcher administered several tests and reviewed students' journals and her own field notes in order to qualitatively and quantitatively measure the results of the study. The results of the study suggested that small talk cards were helpful in helping adult English learners develop language proficiency. However the data did not support the hypothesis that the small talk cards help in lowering the affective filter more than other communicative activities.

Analysis of Data

Hypotheses 1- Using small talk cards activities to achieve acquisition would help students feel less anxious and more open to learning thereby lowering the affective filter.

It was hypothesized that adult students would feel more comfortable learning English if they were given a fun activity to help them develop their speaking skills. In order to quantitatively measure the level of anxiety about speaking English, the teacher/researcher administered an affective filter questionnaire (Appendix B) at the beginning of the study to determine students' attitude towards using English. A Likert scale was used to measure their responses. The choices listed were Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The most favorable responses towards using English were given 4 points, and the least favorable answers were given 1 point. The value awarded for each response varied depending on the question (Glanz, 2006).

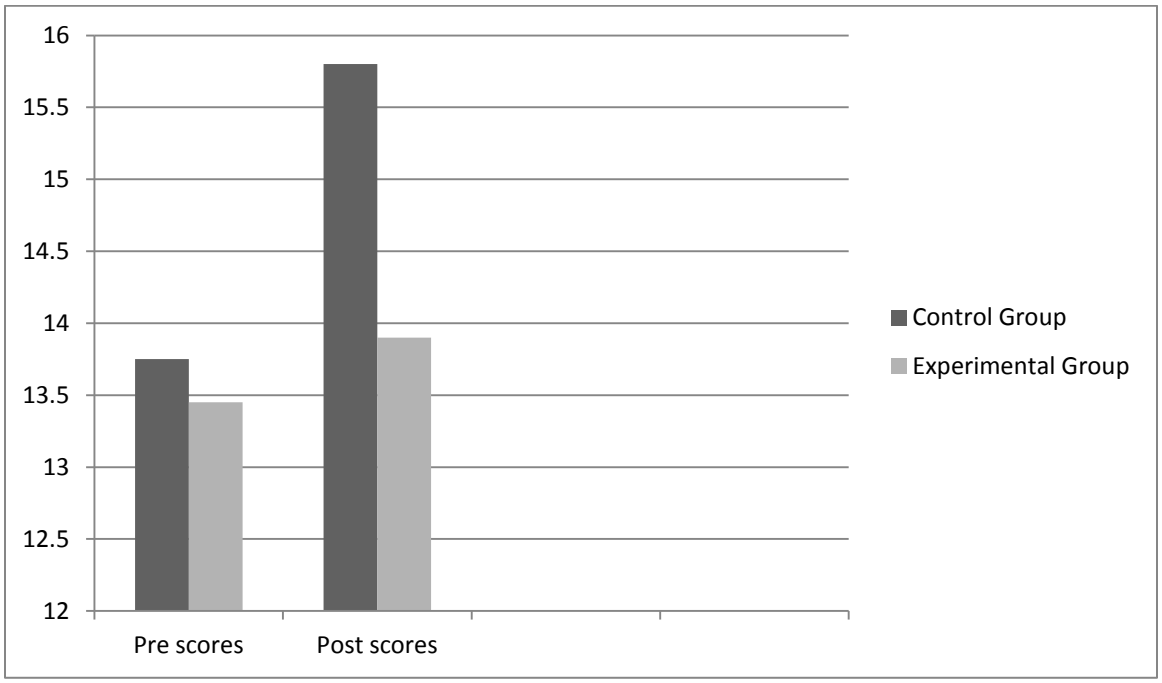
Twenty respondents for each class completed the pre and post intervention questionnaire regarding their attitude towards speaking English. The total of each question was added and each participant was given a score. Then the total scores for each group was added and divided by the number of participants in order to get the mean for each group.

Although the results showed that the attitude towards speaking English improved in both groups, the control group's mean attitude score increased more than the experimental group. Therefore, the hypothesis that the small talk cards would help lower the affective filter more than other conversational activities was not founded. Figure 1 demonstrates the pre and post intervention scores of the two groups.

Figure 1

Students Attitude Towards Using English

n=20



The first question of the questionnaire asked if the participant tried to speak English all the time. According to the responses, the control group scored higher at the end of the intervention than the experimental group. There was no change in the experimental groups score. The second question asked about their anxiety when they had to speak English. Once again the control group anxiety level went down after the intervention while the experimental group's anxiety level stayed the same. The third question asked about how they felt when they spoke English. Although both group showed an increase in feeling good when they spoke English, the experimental group had a more positive score. The fourth question asked if they felt nervous when they spoke English. Both groups indicated more nervousness at the end of the intervention, but the control group indicated less nervousness than the experimental group. The last question asked if they liked English; the control group had a more positive reaction to English after the intervention while the experimental group's reaction stayed the same. A breakdown of participants' answers to each question is given in Table 3.

Table 3

Breakdown of Affective Filter Survey Answers

	Pre Intervention								**Post Intervention**							
	Control Group *n=20*				Experimental Group *n=20*				Control Group *n=20*				Experimental Group *n=20*			
Prompts	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD
I try to speak English all the time.	10	7	3	0	10	9	0	1	15	4	1	0	11	6	3	0
I feel anxious when I have to speak English	4	13	2	1	9	8	0	3	4	8	7	1	11	2	6	1
I feel good when I speak English	7	5	5	3	7	8	3	2	15	3	0	2	14	5	1	0
I feel nervous when I speak English	5	5	5	5	7	10	1	2	2	5	8	5	12	3	1	4
I don't like to speak English	2	3	4	11	2	3	3	12	1	1	5	13	2	1	7	10

In order to get a sense of how the students felt about the activities in class, the teacher/researcher had the students write in journals (Appendix C). At the end of the study, the teacher/researcher analyzed this qualitative data. All classroom activities were considered, but conversation, pronunciation, music, and homework review were the ones commented on by the participants. The teacher/researcher reviewed the journals four times and kept a tally of answers given. When the teacher/researcher was done totaling the activities, she divided each different answer by the number of total activities in order to get a percentage of how many times each answer was mentioned.

When asked about their favorite class activities, 45% respondents in the control group said they preferred conversation activities but did not specify which conversation activity, 35% responded that they liked everything, and 15% did not answer. In the experimental group, 62% of respondents preferred conversation activity. From that 62%, 32% specifically mentioned small talk cards activities. Of the other 38%, 19% preferred pronunciation activities, 15% preferred activities which included music, and 4% did not answer.

When asked which activities they wanted to do more of, 50% of the control group responded that they wanted more conversation activities, 40% did not respond, 5% responded more pronunciation and 5% wanted more homework review. In the experimental group, 37% wanted more conversation activities, 25% wanted more pronunciation, 25% did not respond and 12.5 % wanted more homework review. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate those results.

Figure 2

Students' Favorite Activities

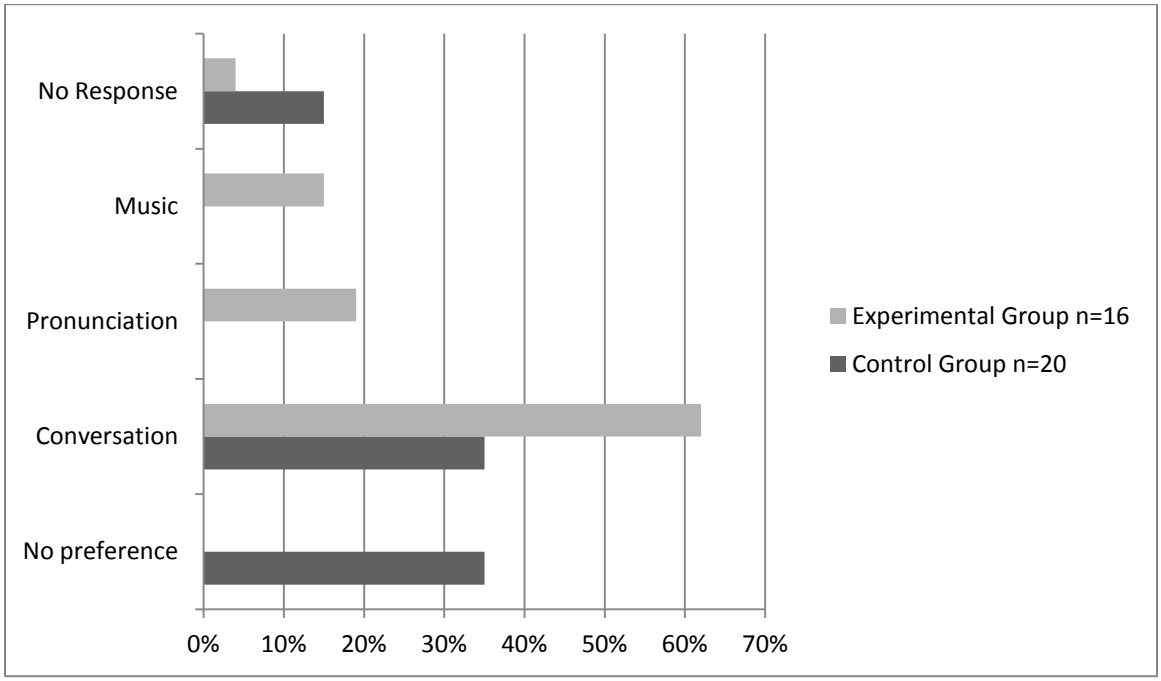
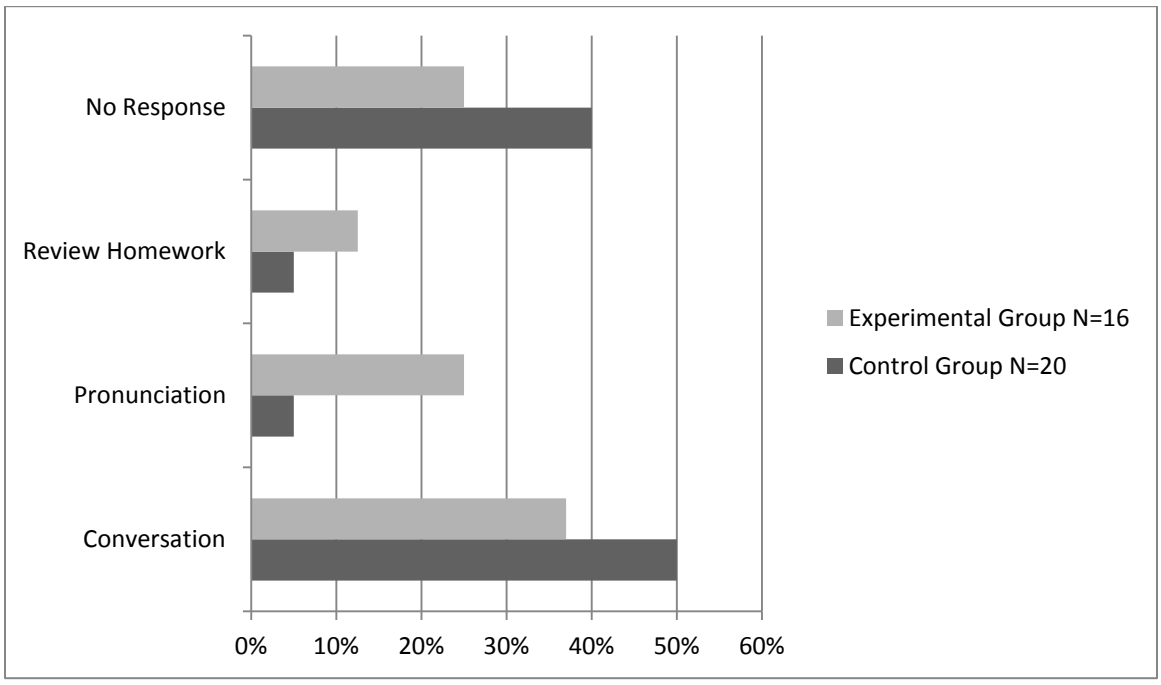


Figure 3

Activities Participants Would Like to do More Often



The teacher/researcher kept field notes while students practiced activities. On several occasion the teacher/researcher recorded the activities of the students through the use of an audio recorder so that the account could be accurate (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Thomas, 2005). Later on the teacher/researcher transcribed these notes and made the following observations.

The teacher/researcher noticed that more time was spent explaining directions to the control group. During communicative activities the control group participants stayed focused on the script and did not ask follow up questions. Furthermore there was less eye contact as students were focusing on reading the script or questions rather than focusing on listening to the dialogue or questions. Students involved in conversation looked at the paper with questions and made occasional notes. There was less focus on listening and more focus on reading questions. Answers were more scripted and more mechanical.

In the experimental group, although more time was required to explain the direction at the beginning of the study, with further practice explanations became unnecessary. Conversations seemed more natural and there was more focus on listening and speaking. There were more occurrences of follow-up questions by group members and less scripted answers. The teacher/researcher also noted more laughter and camaraderie amongst participants.

Hypotheses II - Using small talk cards activities students would produce more oral output.

It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards students would be able to produce more conversation. In order to measure the learners oral output, the teacher/ researcher used the Best Plus test (CAL 2010) with both groups at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. After administering the test to students, the teacher/researcher calculated the scores and determined the students' oral proficiency levels according to the Best Plus test (Cal 2010) scoring rubric. The pre intervention scores and post intervention scores were compared and the teacher/researcher determined according to the scoring rubric which students went up and by how many levels. Pre and post intervention scores are illustrated in figure 4 and 5.

Figure 4

Pre Intervention Best Plus Oral Proficiency Test Results n=20

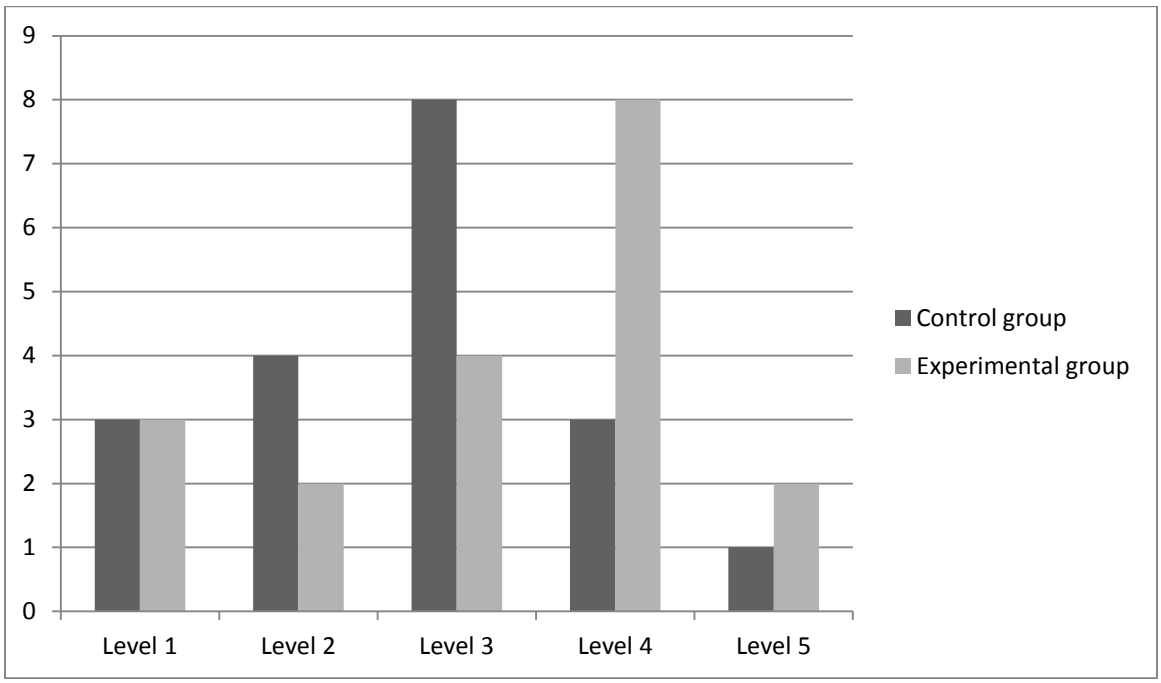
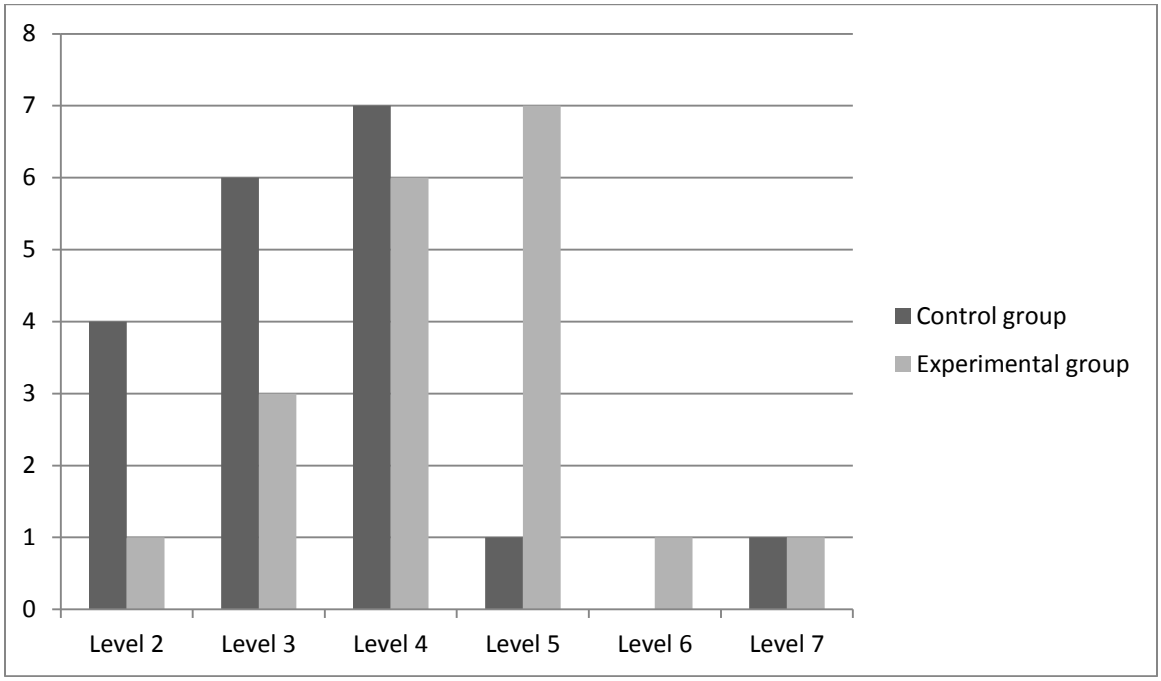


Figure 5

Post Intervention Best Plus Oral Proficiency Test Results n=19

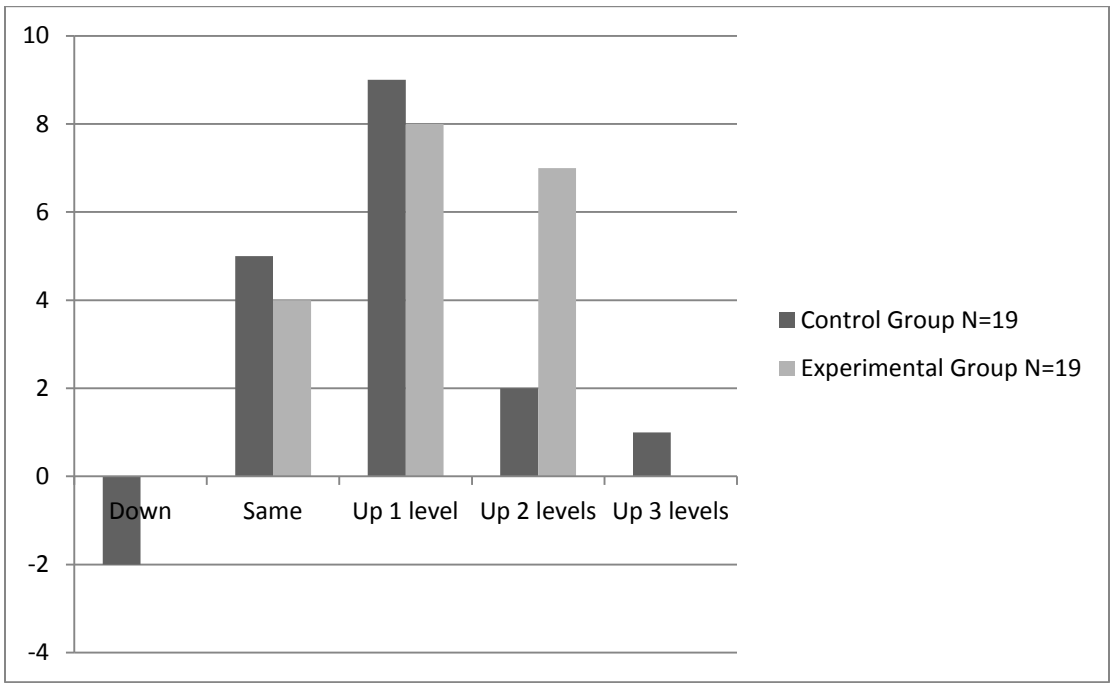


The post test scores show that in the control group, three students placed at level 1, four students placed at level 2, eight students placed at level 3, three students placed at level 4 and one student placed at level 5, for a total of 19 students. In the experimental group the scores were as follow: three students placed at level 1, two students placed at level 2, four students placed at level 3, eight students placed at level 4, and two students placed at level 5 for a total of 19 students.

After comparing the pre and post data, the teacher/researcher concluded that using the small talk cards had a positive effect on the students' oral development. The results showed that in the control group, out of 19 students who took the test, two students went down one level, five students stayed at the same level, nine students went up one level, two students went up two levels and one student went up three levels. In the Experimental group, the results were as follows: four students stayed at the same level, eight students went up one level, and seven students went up two levels. Figure 6 presents the results.

Figure 6

Students' Proficiency Advancement Post Intervention



In addition to using the Best Plus test (CAL, 2010) scores to determine students' oral proficiency, the teacher/researcher maintained field notes and made notations after each student's interview commenting on the students listening skills, language complexity and communication skills.

The teacher/researcher observed that students in the experimental group had better listening skills. They responded more quickly to questions during the Best Plus test (CAL, 2010). In the control group the average length for each test was 9.21 minutes whereas in the experimental group the average length was 8.31 minutes per test. The teacher/researcher timed each interview, added the minutes for each class then divided by the number of students, and came up with a mean score for each interview. The control group took a total of 175 minutes while the experimental group took a total of 158 minutes.

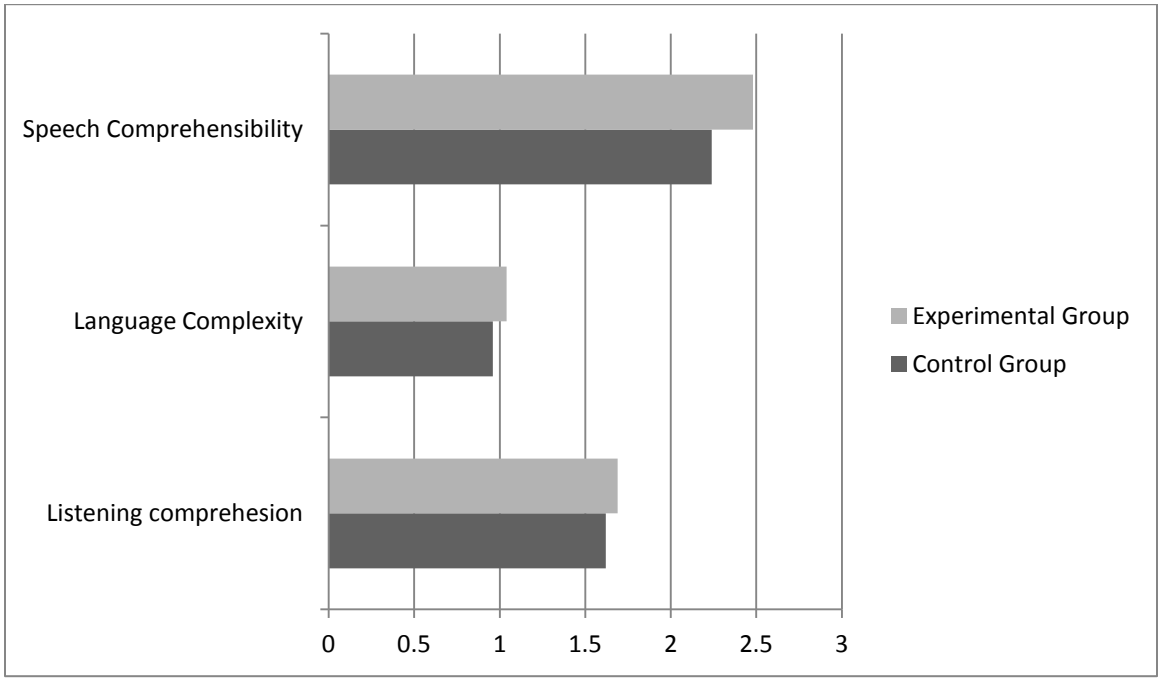
Further reviewing of field notes revealed that there were fewer hesitations, false starts and requests to repeat a question in the experimental group. These numbers indicated that the students who used the small talk cards had a small advantage in control of the language.

Furthermore, it was noted that the experimental group had better control of the language and used more complex answers when engaging in communicative activities. Students' answers went beyond one word answers or simple sentences. The teacher/researcher noted more frequent use of words such as because, but, and if when answering a question. In addition students asked follow-up questions. It was also noted that pronunciation and intonation were slightly better with the experimental group.

The results from the Best Plus test (CAL, 2010) concurred with the teacher/researcher field notes on the subject of language complexity and comprehensibility of participants. Figure 7 presents the mean score for listening, complexity and communication from the Best Plus test (CAL, 2010) results.

Figure 7

Comparison of Language Skills Post Intervention

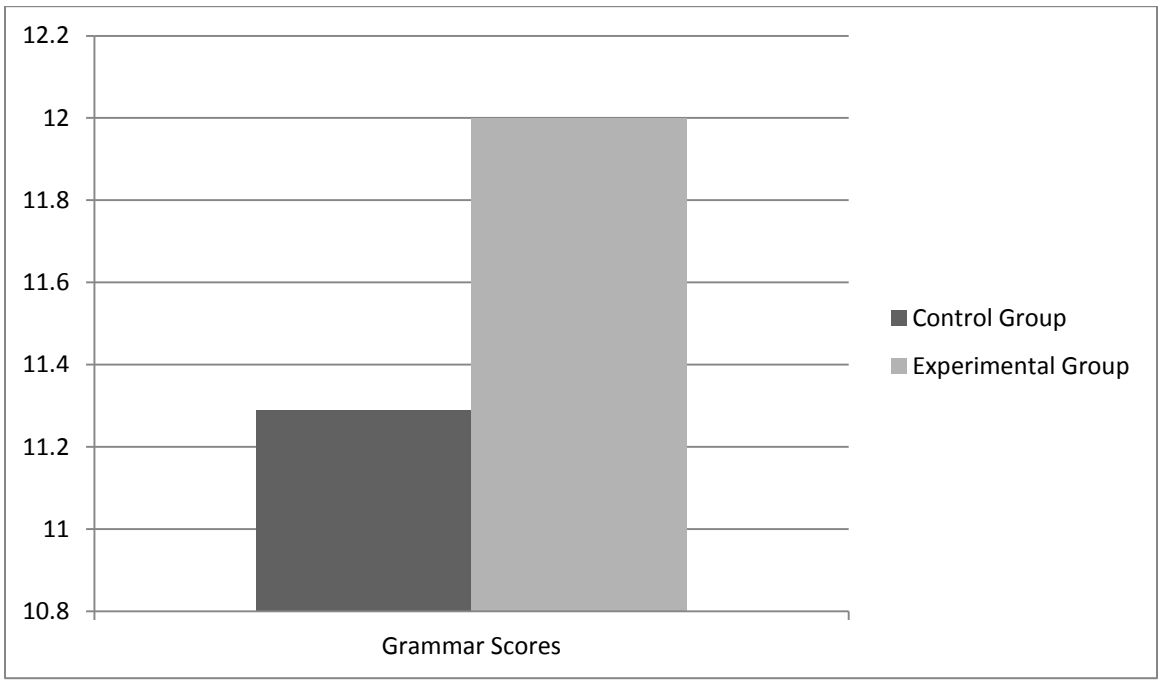


Hypotheses III- It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards activities students would produce more/better written output.

At the end of the study the teacher/researcher administered a writing test (Appendix E) and a grammar test (Appendix D) in order to assess the students writing skills to see if the small talk cards had made a difference in the students writing output. The results of the grammar test neither supported nor negated the hypotheses that the small talk cards would improve the students' writing. The teacher/researcher administered a grammar test with 20 multiple choice questions; each question was worth 1 point for a total of 20 points. Because the mean scores differed by only 1 point, this test neither supported nor nullified the hypotheses. The experimental group scored higher by one point therefore only slightly supporting the theory that students would accomplish better grammar scores. Figure 8 presents the scores of the grammar test.

Figure 8

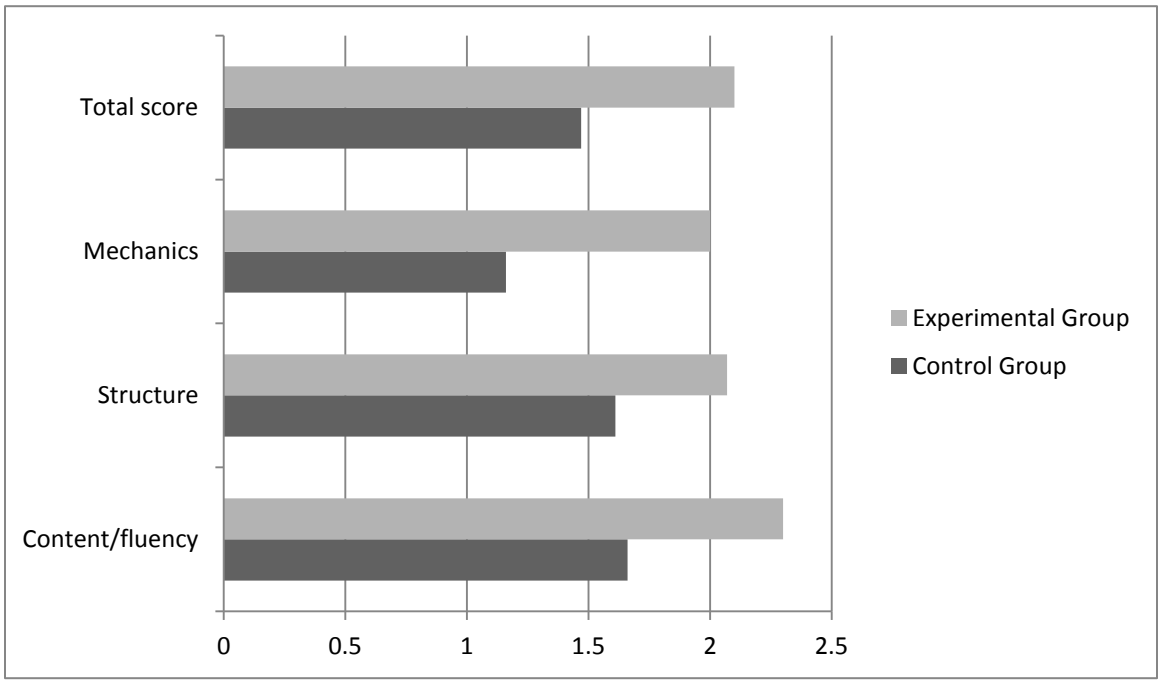
Post Intervention Grammar Test Score



In addition to the grammar test, the teacher/researcher administered a writing test (Appendix E) which she assessed using a rubric (Appendix F). The findings supported the hypothesis that students who used the small talk cards would produce better written output. On a scale from one to five the mean score for the control group was 1.47 while for the experimental group it was 2.10. On content and fluency the control group scored 1.66, on structure they scored 1.61 and for mechanics they scored 1.16. The experimental group scored 2.30 for fluency, 2.07 for structure and 2.00 for mechanics. Figure 9 presents the results.

Figure 9

Post Intervention Writing Test Results



The teacher/researcher reviewed students' learning journals (Appendix C) in order to compare their writing output. Since these were beginning students with very low English writing skills, the journal writings were guided, and writing prompts were suggested by the teacher/researcher. Students were also encouraged to express their likes and dislikes about classroom activities and to make suggestions. Furthermore, they were told that if they did not know a word in English, they could use their native language.

After reviewing the journals' data on four different occasions, the teacher/researcher observed that the students in the experimental group did not demonstrate better writing skills. The experimental group had better control of sentence boundaries. Periods were used in appropriate places more frequently whereas in the control group sentences ran into one another. The experimental group used the subject or subject pronouns more consistently than the control group. Except for these two categories, writing conventions were to a large extent similar in both groups. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4

Breakdown of Journal errors

	Control Group	**Experimental Group**
Missing periods	40%	17%
Missing subjects	43%	23%
Incorrect word order	20%	18%
Incorrect verb form	15%	12%
Stayed on topic	43%	41%
Did not complete	25%	12%
Used some native language	30%	37%

Additional research questions

In addition to the hypotheses mentioned, the teacher/researcher was interested in some questions and observations that derived from the research. Throughout the study the teacher/researcher collected data rating the students' attitude toward the activity in which they had just taken part. Students were asked to express how they felt about speaking English by completing the sentence "When I speak English I feel (good/so-so/nervous)." The data collected revealed that the more English they used during the activity (Appendix H) the more positive feelings they had about speaking English. This suggested that the actual act of speaking English lowered the affective filter.

The teacher/researcher was interested in finding out which of the small talk cards activity impacted the affective filter the most. The data collected revealed that the students had more positive feelings about speaking English after Activity 3 in which they were divided into two circles, and each student had occasion to engage in conversation with each member of the class. Activity 2 pair and group work ranked second with pair work resulting in more positive feelings than group work. Activity 1 which was teacher guided discussion came in last.

When asked to rank which activity they liked the most, the results were split evenly between activity 1 and activity 3. The students commented that they enjoyed having a chance to speak to everyone in the class and practicing a lot with the whole class. They also commented that they liked having the teacher help them with pronunciation of certain words and being able to ask clarification on some grammar points.

S*ummary of Results*

The results of this study provided mixed results supporting the hypothesis that when adult English learners were exposed to comprehensible input in an interesting way, their anxiety about learning would be lowered and acquisition increased. Contrary to the expectations that using small talk cards would lower the affective filter more than using other communicative activities, the results demonstrated that the affective filter was in effect lowered but not more than any other fun communicative activities.

The data collected supported the hypothesis that using small talk cards would increase language production in adult English learners. At the end of the study, the students who had used small talk cards activities performed better in all aspect of language production. This included listening comprehension, language complexity and understandability. The teacher/researcher also noted that language production seemed more spontaneous and natural among students who used the small talk cards.

The hypothesis regarding using small talk cards and improving written output was minimally supported. Students' writing samples revealed that those who used small talk cards achieved better scores than students who did not. However journal writing and grammar test only minimally supported the hypothesis.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The result of this study showed interesting and unexpected information. First of all, the hypothesis that using small talk cards would lower the affective filter in adult English learners was not largely supported. The data showed that although learners' anxiety about speaking English was lower at the end of the study, the two groups showed similar results. Secondly, the data analyzed supported the hypothesis that using the small talk cards would improve learners' verbal communication skills. Finally, the data collected to analyze if learners produced better written output when using small talk cards, only slightly supported the hypothesis. The following discussion attempts to explore the implications of the findings that both support and challenge the hypotheses of this study.

Hypothesis 1- It was hypothesized that using small talk cards activities to achieve acquisition would help students feel less anxious and more open to learning thereby lowering the affective filter.

Schaetzel and Low (2009) stated that meaningful communicative tasks that relate to daily use of English can improve learners' intelligibility, help lower inhibitions and increase motivation. The teacher/researcher was interested to know if when provided with small talk cards to perform a communicative activity, adult English learners would enjoy it enough to lower their anxiety thereby allowing acquisition to take place. She compared two classes of students to see if there was any difference in the anxiety level of the class that used the small talk cards and the class that did not use them. She did this by administering a questionnaire (Appendix B) at the beginning of the study to both classes

in an attempt to measure the students' anxiety level regarding learning and speaking English. At the end of the study she administered the same questionnaire to both classes and calculated the results.

Although the data gathered did not support the teacher/researcher hypothesis that the small talk cards would help lower the affective filter more than other communicative activities, the results did show that anxiety about English were lowered in both groups. However, the control group anxiety was lowered much more than the experimental group. There are many factors that may have contributed to these findings. First of all, the two groups met at different time of day. The control group met during the day and the experimental group met in the evening. After a long day at work, it might be expected that learner's attitude towards a class might not be as positive as during the day

Furthermore, research has shown that a learner's attitude towards learning has much to do with the learner's age. Krashen (1985) hypothesized that the affective filter has much to do with the difference between children and adult acquiring a second language successfully. He argued that when learners are given fun hands-on activities the affective filter is lowered thereby allowing acquisition to take place. However, the older the learner the more difficult it is to lower the affective filter.

The age range of the two groups used in the study differed. The average age of the control group was 24, while the average age of the experimental group was 32. This age difference would support the theories that the older a learner the higher the affective filter and anxiety towards learning (Krashen, 1985). Brown (1993) claimed that human emotions such as empathy, self esteem, extroversion, inhibitions, anxiety and attitudes all affect second language acquisition in the form of defense mechanism. Adults are more

grounded in their own identity than children, and changes are more likely to enhance inhibitions. The teacher/researcher believes that these two factors contributed in the scores reported by the survey.

The analysis of students' journal and field notes further revealed that students' anxiety about speaking English was lowered through the use of the small talk cards. It was observed that students enjoyed using the small talk cards. This was supported by the fact that students mentioned wanting to do more small talk cards activity during class. Also, during activities there was laughter and genuine interest in the conversation rather than scripted mechanical conversation which the teacher/researcher observed in the control group. When people are smiling and laughing and genuinely interested in the other person's answers this would suggest a relaxed atmosphere.

Hypothesis 2- It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards activities students would produce more oral output.

As expected students who used the small talk cards produced more oral output than students who did not. The experimental group performed better in all areas or oral assessment. They performed better in speech comprehensibility, language complexity and listening comprehension. This supported the teacher/researcher's hypothesis that using small talk cards would help to develop students' acquisition of spoken language.

The small talk cards gave the students more opportunity to use formulaic speech, collocations and chunking, which have been suggested to be important to attaining fluency and are central to language learning in general (Durrant & Smitt, 2010). Because of the high frequency of these phrases and the general random nature of the small talk cards, students were able to encode greater amount of information in short term memory

and thus increased the efficiency and fluency of their communication. This was supported in a study conducted by Durrant and Smitt, (2010) which examined if adult English learners remembered collocation better than single words. Results suggested that adult learners of English do retain more information when words appear together. When learners have the opportunity to encounter the same language several times, they focus on building up fluency with particular strings of language without the distraction of dealing with text context and meaning (Durrant & Smitt, 2010).

Furthermore, the small talk cards incorporated learning experiences from learners' daily lives. Learning activities which represent both the cultural context of the learner and the cultural context outside the classroom may have aided in implicit acquisition. Learners can study the language in context so that they can experience learning in a realistic way and not as isolated parts (Schwarzer, 2009). The small talk cards gave students a chance to practice more authentic language, and when learners drew inferences from their daily lives the learning was more implicit because the questions focused on them, their families, their work, their likes, and their dislikes.

The unpredictability of the cards created an atmosphere of real conversation. Students who used small talk cards focused on listening to the questions as opposed to the control group who relied more on reading the questions or dialogues from the book to create conversations. The latter focused on what was written rather than what was being spoken. Although in the control group the communicative activities also focused on personal experiences, the questions were not random and students did not have to think on the spot which resulted in less authentic conversations. Their conversations seemed more mechanical and scripted.

When using the small talk cards the vocabulary was recycled from one unit to the next. This helped the students retain the vocabulary. Furthermore, they were able to implicitly acquire some grammar structures because of continuous exposure to them. The teacher/researcher observed that the communicative activities in the book did not recycle vocabulary from unit to unit, and conversation drills mainly focused on the grammar structure presented in the unit. This lack of repetition may have hindered their retention.

In addition to reprocessing the information, the small talk cards included vocabulary from future units, thereby creating expectation in the learners. This expectation may have helped learners retain the vocabulary once it was introduced in the book. One example was the question "How many siblings do you have?" The students had come across this question several times before the unit that introduced vocabulary words for the family. One of the rules of using the small talk cards was that if they didn't understand a question they could just move on to the next question. After they were introduced to the word in the unit, they knew what it meant, and the next time they got the card with the question they were able to answer it. During a writing practice, several weeks later, they were asked to describe their siblings. One student didn't remember the word and asked "What does sibling mean?" Most of the class answered his question in unison. Whereas in the control group when asked to write about the same topic most of the students asked what the word sibling meant. This incident demonstrated that creating curiosity about a word might enhance vocabulary retention.

Using the small talk cards gave learners a chance to intrinsically acquire some grammar rules on their own because of repeated use. For example several questions used the present perfect such as, "How long have you lived in the U.S.?", "How long have you

been married?", "How long have you worked at your job?" Eventually they formed their own rules about using present perfect, which would to support Krashen's (1985) Natural Order hypothesis which states that certain grammatical rules are acquired independently regardless of the order that rules are taught in classes. The experimental group never made that connection because they were not exposed to these questions as often. The book focused on grammar structures that had been covered in the units, while the small talk cards applied grammatical structures that come up in everyday conversation. This required learners to formulate their own rules.

The teacher/researcher noted that the students using the small talk cards used communicative strategies more often than the control group. While the experimental group relied on communicative strategies such as gestures, paraphrasing, and asking follow-up questions, the control group relied on pre writing their answers in their books or on paper not allowing for unstructured flow of ideas in order to negotiate language production.

According to Nakatani (2010), learners tend to use verbal and nonverbal strategies such as paraphrasing, using gestures, and asking questions for clarification to avoid communication breakdowns. Nakatani suggested that these communication strategies are the conscious thoughts and behaviors used by language learners to help them better understand, learn, and remember the target language information and can be regarded as an attempt by learners to achieve communication goals in actual interactions. In using communication strategies, learners do not only cooperate with their interlocutor but also find a solution without cooperative assistance. This gives learners sufficient opportunities to learn how to solve communication problems while maintaining the conversation flow

(Nakatani, 2010). The results of this study supported Nakatani's concept that using communication strategies could contribute to the oral proficiency of English learners.

Hypothesis 3- It was hypothesized that by using small talk cards activities students would produce more written output.

Analysis of students' writings supported the hypothesis that students who used the small talk cards would produce more written output. The experimental group outperformed the control group in all aspects of writing. They were better in the area of fluency, development, mechanics and structure. Although the difference was not very large, it is important to note that the duration of the study was not very long, and perhaps a longer study would have yielded more conclusive scores.

Adult English learners' oral language proficiency is shown to be a resource that can have a positive impact on literacy development. Since using the small talk cards helped them to develop their speaking skills, as a result they were better able to express themselves in writing. As Wright (2010) pointed out, English learners' ability to express themselves in written English is highly dependent on learners' level of English proficiency. However one point to consider is the strong relationship between students' writing ability in their native language and their writing ability in English.

Wright (2010) noted that English learners' writing may be only as good as their English speaking ability. There is a close relationship between English learners oral proficiency in English and their ability to express themselves in written English. He remarked that most English learners are unlikely to use words in writing they do not know orally, and the language forms they use in writing will typically be limited to the forms they are able to use in conversation. English learners benefit from writing

instructions that focus on topics they can talk about. Such instructions support their English language development (Wright, 2010).

The students' journals minimally supported the hypothesis that they would produce more written output. Although the writing test (Appendix E) at the conclusion of the study clearly supported the hypothesis, the journals' results were more ambiguous. However, one must consider that journal writing is informal, and informal writing is similar to speech in that it doesn't focus on the conventions of language as much as producing written output. When students write using informal writing activities, they use words and language without paying too much attention to editing (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

Moreover, Wright (2010) stated that English learners' writing development is not linear and varies from student to student. Quality and quantity may vary from piece to piece and draft to draft for the same writer. English learners produce different linguistic forms that have varying amounts of accuracy depending on the task performed and different grammatical information may be used in different kinds of writing (Wright, 2010). Personality factors such as confidence in one's ability to produce correct target language sentences may also influence whether or not a learner produces target language material (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

It was noted by the teacher/researcher that the experimental group applied punctuation rules more consistently than the control group. Sentences boundaries were clearly marked by periods. The control group had not developed that skill as well. Furthermore, there was more consistent use of subjects in the experimental group.

However, those were the only two areas were the experimental group showed better performance in their journal writing.

The teacher/researcher had originally thought that the experimental group would have achieved better word order, but this was not evident in their writing. Surprisingly, there was very little difference in the word order between the two groups. Also, both groups went off topic and used incorrect verb form equally as often.

In order to encourage students to write in their journals the teacher/researcher told the students that if they did not know a word in English, they could write it in their native language. Students took this advice to heart and applied it broadly throughout their journal writing. This resulted in considerable use of native language for both groups.

The mean score for the grammar test (Appendix D) minimally supported the hypothesis. It is frequently inferred that changes in the output represent changes in a learner's grammar. However, the two should not be equated. Grammar test such as true/false and multiple choices do not represent changes in a learner's oral output. A number of factors suggest that the output is not identical to one's grammar. (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

One observation made by the teacher/researcher was the occurrences of fossilized errors. Those errors were more common in the grammar test than in communicative activities. For example, when asked "How old are you?" during oral activities they would answer correctly by using the verb to be. However in the grammar test most students picked the expression using the verb to have as in "I have 21 years." There were other inconsistencies noted by the teacher/researcher where students would use correct form in speech but picked incorrect answer when given multiple choices. Perhaps this was due to

both fossilized form and correct form being offered as a choice, and learners naturally navigated towards the fossilized forms. Further research is necessary in order to make a more accurate inference. Due to these inconsistencies teacher/researcher concluded that a grammar test is not a useful tool in assessing learners' language development.

Additional Research Questions

In addition to the three formal hypotheses of this study, the teacher/researcher was interested in finding out which of the small talk cards activity impacted the affective filter the most, and which of the small cards activities the students liked the most. According to the data collected after each small talk cards activity (Appendix H), students' affective filter was impacted the most after Activity 3. This activity received more positive feedback than other activities. The activity lasted about 20 minutes and the students were engaged in conversation the entire time. The pace was fast moving and students got a chance to engage in conversation with everyone in the class at least twice. The teacher/researcher observed that the students were in high spirits at the end of the activity and seemed upbeat during the rest of the class. At the end of the class, several students mentioned to the teacher/researcher that they had enjoyed that evening's class very much.

When reviewing students' attitude toward each activity, it might be concluded that the length of time the students engaged in conversation had a direct relation to how they felt about speaking English. Although the other activities were also enjoyed by the students they did not produce the same effect. Furthermore, the least enjoyed activity was the teacher-led conversation, Activity1, because it involved the teacher leading the conversation and students only got to engage in conversation one at a time. This activity

gave them less talk time since teacher did some correcting of pronunciation and clarified some questions that students had about grammar structures.

Surprisingly, Activity 1 and 3 were the favorite activities. When asked to rate the small talk cards activities, students chose these two as their favorite. Students indicated that they liked Activity 1 because it gave them a chance to get instant feedback on their pronunciation and it gave them a chance to ask for clarification. These mini lessons answered their questions on the spot, and validated their need to know. Their reason for liking Activity 3 was that they got to practice a lot which they felt would help them learn English. These data supported the teacher/researcher assertion that small talk cards activities need to be varied in order to avoid boredom.

Conclusions

This study indicated that when adult English learners used small talk cards to participate in communicative activities their anxiety about speaking a new language was lowered and their ability to contribute to a conversation in English went up. Although the three hypotheses were not completely supported by the data, it must be noted that adult English learners were able to integrate knowledge they already possessed by incorporating their own experiences through social interactions to the knowledge they were acquiring by using the small talk cards. Furthermore the motivation of the learner and their eagerness to participate in their own acquisition increased because they were able to draw from their personal experiences. Attitude, motivation and self esteem, known as the affective filter (Krashen, 1985) greatly influence second language acquisition in adult learners. Because adult English learners are more influenced by this

affective filter, it is important that teachers design activities which will help reduce their anxiety about learning.

Using the small talk cards gave the students a chance to use certain formulaic language, chunking and collocations which helped in their retention of English vocabulary and expressions. Durrant and Schmitt (2010) suggested that learners commit to memory words that appear together better than single words. Also, when incorporating experiences from learners lives in a realistic way, as opposed to isolated parts, implicit acquisition occurs **(**Schwarzer, 2008)

Using the small talk cards also was a way to capitalize on learners' oral skills in order to increase writing skills. In order for English learners to write in English they must acquire oral English skills first. Oral language and writing skills are interdependent. Students' whose oral English proficiency was higher at the beginning of the study showed better writing skills than students with lower proficiency.

These results support the findings of Nakatani (2010) who found that flash cards and rote learning were very effective tools in the initial stages of learning a second language. Some of the benefits that Nakatani stated that the results of this study concur with included that they are convenient and add randomness to the learning. They helped students use communication strategies such as paraphrasing and using gestures and asking for clarification in order to avoid communication breakdown. These strategies allowed learners to maintain the flow of the conversation and enhanced oral proficiency of learners (Nakatani, 2010).

The results also reinforced Wright's observations that there is a strong association between speaking skills and writing skills. Oral proficiency and writing go hand in hand.

Analysis of these students' writing supported hypothesis that small talk cards can help improve written output. Learners' ability to express in written English is highly dependent on their level of English proficiency (Wright 2010). The small talk cards gave learners the ability to increase their retention of vocabulary and the chance to use this vocabulary in a natural way. As a result they were able to use this knowledge when writing.

Analysis of the student journals also supported the hypothesis that small talk cards would improve written output because it gave them a change to have an informal way of communicating through writing. Wright (2010) maintained that since this was an informal way of writing, there wasn't much emphasis placed on writing conventions such as spelling, staying on topic or not using native language. Students used whatever means they had at their disposal to make themselves be understood through the written word. Furthermore the task at hand determines accuracy. What they produce in writing is not what they can produce in speaking (Wright, 2010)

Results of the grammar tests minimally supported the hypothesis; however one must remember that output and grammar knowledge should not be equated. Output is not identical to one's grammar. Grammar tests are not useful tools in assessing language development because formulaic language plays an important role in early language acquisition. It is a good practice to delay grammar teaching and testing. Furthermore using small talk cards was an inductive approach and making learners aware of explicit grammatical rules is a deductive approach.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that adult English learners want to practice conversation. They felt that the classroom was a safe place where they could

practice without being ashamed of making mistakes. In the classroom they felt it was acceptable to make mistakes because this was part of the learning process. When using the small talk cards they felt comfortable to experiment and create their own mini conversation using the original questions as a springboard for further questions and develop more complex conversation. As their confidence in their speaking ability increased so did their confidence in their writing ability.

This study indicated that when given a safe environment in which to practice newly acquired structures and a fun way to practice these, adult English learners would improve their conversational skills. Although using the small talk cards might not reduce inhibitions and anxiety more so than another communicative activity, they may help in lowering the anxiety of learning a new language. It was noted that the students found the small talk cards to be fun and instructional. Furthermore they helped the students to develop conversational skills which are very important at the beginning stages of learning a language. As the students improved their conversational skills, those skills transferred to literacy skills such as writing and reading. However they did no help in improving grammar a great deal. Perhaps a longer study would have given further insight into this.

Educational Implications

This study confirmed the value of communicative pair and group activities in oral language development, and that this development can be carried on to writing activities. The teacher/researcher observed that when adult English learners were given a chance to participate in communicative activities, they optimized their chances to learn intrinsically. These activities should focus on helping learners use the language more effectively. Teachers should increase efforts in giving students a chance to communicate

and practice the structures that have been learned by providing a variety of communicative activities the students will enjoy. Teachers need to find ways to capitalize on learners' oral skills to create a successful learning experience.

Using small talk cards was a low pressure activity. Students were not pressured in producing any language if they were not comfortable. When a question was not understood, they could just say that they did not understand the question and pass. The next time the question came up in the activity, the students had a chance to hear the answer from someone else. The next time they got the question, they were able to formulate their own answer. The groups were mixed so the lower skill students may have also learned from the higher skill students, but not in a way where anyone had to explain anything, but rather from participation in the group. Everyone had an equal chance to participate in activity so the burden of the work was not left only on the higher skilled students.

Because more difficult questions were mixed in with easier questions the difficulty level was left up to chance, so no one was targeted. When students did not understand a question or a word they did not have to figure it out, but were told to just pass. The advantage of this was that when that word was introduced in vocabulary drills since they had already heard it, they committed it to memory. By creating this anticipation students learned vocabulary more effectively.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations in this study. The length of the study and the sampling size presented only a glimpse into students' language acquisition. A number of students were absent when data were gathered which might have affected the results.

Also the participants were limited in their responses because of their lack of English proficiency which could account for lack of responses on some prompts. Moreover because of their lack of English proficiency, we cannot assume that respondents fully understood the questions. A longer study with a larger sampling should be conducted in order to further investigate the hypotheses put forth by the teacher/researcher.

Implications for Future Research

This study supported the hypothesis that small talk cards are a useful tool when applied in the classroom in order to develop Adult English learners' ability to communicate in the new language. However, a lengthier research with a larger sampling is needed in order to establish these findings. Furthermore, in order to establish the validity of small talk cards' benefits in the classroom, future research should focus on a single aspect of the research. Perhaps concentrating on different aspect of oral output such as pronunciation, fossilization and use of language, or perhaps only concentrating on the value of learners' motivation and anxiety. The focus of this study was very broad and took on several hypotheses that could have each been investigated as several studies.

Doing a comparison study had some limitations because of all the variables that affect Adult English learner. Variables such as age of participants, length of time in the country, native language proximity to English, learners' literacy skills in native language, learners' employment status, family responsibilities, time that the class met, and the location are all variables that need to be taken into consideration. All these variables had the likelihood of affecting the results. In future research comparing two groups might not be as beneficial as comparing different communicative activities in order to determine the benefits that small talk cards can bring to second language acquisition.

APPENDIX A

Personal Data Form

Today's Date: _____

Name: _____
Last First Middle Initial

Address: _____
Number Street Apartment Number

_____
City State Zip Code

Telephone: _____ _____
Home Cell

Birth Date: _____ Age _____
Month/ Day/ Year

Marital Status: Single ____ Married ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____

Do you have any children? Yes ____ No ____

How many children live with you now? _____

Native Country: _____

Native Language _____

Other languages you speak _____

How long have you lived in the United States? _____

Have you studied English before? _____ Where? _____

Do you work now? _____ What type of work? _____

Signature of student _____

APPENDIX B

Affective Filter Survey

Date _____

Use the scale to indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement bellow. Circle the appropriate response.

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree D= Disagree SD= Strongly Disagree

1. I try to speak English all the time.

   SA A D SD

2. I feel anxious when I have to speak English.

   SA A D SD

3. I feel good when I speak English.

   SA A D SD

4. I feel nervous when I speak English.

   SA A D SD

5. I don't like to speak English.

   SA A D SD

APPENDIX C

Journal Prompts

Name _____ Date _____ ____

In English class, I learned _____ _____

_____.

My favorite Activity class was _____,

but I don't like_____.

I would like the teacher to do more _____

_____activities

because _____.

In order to improve my English, I will _____

_____

_____

Additional comments

_____

_____

_____

Journal prompts:

1. What did you learn in class?
2. What did you like the most about the lessons? Why?
3. Was there anything you did not like? Why?
4. What activities would you like to do more often? Why?
5. What will you do in your free time in order to learn English?

APPENDIX D

Grammar Test

Name _____ Date _____

Choose the correct answer.

1. _____ your book?
   A. Is there
   B. This is
   C. Is this
   D. Is these

2. _____ your friends at home?
   A. Be
   B. Are
   C. Is
   D. Do

3. _____ my brother.
   A. He's
   B. She's
   C. What's
   D. Where is

4. Q: Is Bill's hair long?
   A: Yes, it _____
   A. is
   B. long
   C. isn't
   D. this

5. _____ young?
   A. He is
   B. Has she
   C. Is she
   D. Does he

6. Maria has a sister. _____ sister is 32 years old.
   A. Her
   B. His
   C. Its
   D. Their

7. When _____ to this country?
   A. you came
   B. you did come
   C. did you come
   D. did you came

8. Where _____ ?
   A. the post office is
   B. be the post office
   C. do the post office
   D. is the post office

9. Our family _____ very big.
   A. not
   B. no is
   C. doesn't
   D. isn't

10. _____ you from Mexico?
   A. Is
   B. Are
   C. No
   D. Do

11. Q: Are you tired?
   A: No, I _____.
   A. am not
   B. not
   C. don't
   D. aren't

12. They _____ Korean.
   A. speak
   B. are speak
   C. speaking
   D. speaks

13. _____
   A. You doesn't sit here.
   B. You isn't sit here.
   C. You don't sit here.
   D. You don't sits here.

14. _____
    A. does Dan speak Spanish?
    B. Does Dan speak Spanish?
    C. Do Dan speak Spanish?
    D. Is Dan speak Spanish?

15. _____
    A. There is twenty students in the class.
    B. There are twenty students in the class.
    C. There have twenty students in the class.
    D. There no are twenty students in the class.

16. _____
    A. What floor do you live in?
    B. What floor does you live on?
    C. What floor you live on?
    D. What floor do you live on?

17. _____
    A. Bill is twenty years old.
    B. Bill has twenty years old.
    C. Bill has twenty years.
    D. Bill are twenty years old.

18. _____
    A. I am eat fish every day.
    B. I eating fish every day.
    C. I eat fish every day.
    D. I eats fish every day.

19. Do you have any siblings? _____
    A. Yes, I does.
    B. Yes, I am.
    C. No, I don't.
    D. Yes, I don't.

20. Where you late this morning? _____
    A. Yes, I was.
    B. Yes, I were.
    C. Yes, I wasn't.
    D. Yes, I am.

ANSWER KEY: **1) C 2) B 3) A 4) A 5) C 6) A 7) C**
8) D 9) D 10) B 11) A 12) A 13) C 14) B
15) B 16) D 17) A 18) C 19) C 20) A

APPENDIX E

Writing Test

Name _____ Date _____
Class _____

Answer the questions in complete sentences.

Where are you from?

_____

Where do you live?

_____

Write a few sentences about an important person in your live.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Where do you usually shop for food? Why?

_____

_____

_____

What do you usually do everyday?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Write about your favorite food.

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

ESL Writing Rubric

Student name _____ **Date** _____

Class _____

Score	**0**	**1**		**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Content/fluency	Little comprehensible information Use of first language Meaning unclear	Limited word choice vocabulary Great deal of first language interference Some meaning unclear		Simple personal vocabulary	Some vocabulary range Ideas are organized	Broad vocabulary range. Varied vocabulary choice Meaning is clear	Extensive amount of information Varied and effective use of vocabulary
Structure	Mostly fragments No apparent control of present tenses.	Some complete sentences Minimal control of present tenses Many fragments		Some control of present tenses Mostly complete sentences Some problems with word order and/or usage	Basic control of present tenses although some errors in 3rd person Errors occasionally distract from meaning Some fragments	General control of a variety of verb tenses Attempt at some compound sentences using and, but, so Little or no fragments	Minimal grammar errors Control of verb tenses Varied sentences (compound, simple, complex)
Mechanics	Lack of punctuation and capitalization	Inconsistent punctuation Frequent spelling errors		Some punctuation and capitalization errors Some spelling errors	Use of periods and capitals with some errors. Few spelling errors	Minor errors in use of punctuation and capitals. Minor spelling errors.	Use of periods, commas and capitals mostly correct. Almost no spelling errors.

Content/Fluency _____

Structure _____

Mechanics _____

Total score _____

APPENDIX G

Small Talk Cards

What is your name? 1	Where are you from? 2	What country are you from? 3
What language do you speak? 4	What is your nationality? 5	How long have you lived in the United States? 6
Where do you live? 7	Are you married or single? 8	Do you have any children? 9
Do you work? 10	Where do you work? 11	What is your occupation? 12
What do you do for a living? 13	How old are you? 14	When is your birthday? 15
Do you have any hobbies? 16	What do you like to do in your free time? 17	Do you drive? 18
What town do you live in? 19	Do you live in a house or an apartment? 20	What floor do you live on? 21
How many rooms are there in your house? 22	Do you have a pet? 23	How many children do you have? 24
How old are your children? 25	What are your children's names? 27	How big is your family? 28
Do you have any brothers or sisters? 29	How many siblings do you have? 30	Where do your siblings live? 31
What language do your siblings speak?	Do your parents live in the United States or your	What are your parents' names?

32	country? 33	34
Do you like to read? 35	What do you read? 37	What kind of music do you listen to? 38
Do you like sports? 39	Do you play any sports? 40	What is your favorite sport? 41
Do you like to watch TV? 42	How often do you watch TV? 43	What do you like to watch on TV? 44
What do you like to do on the weekend? 45	What is your favorite fruit? 46	What is your favorite vegetable? 47
Are you a vegetarian? 48	What is your favorite weather? 49	Where do you like to shop for food? 50

APPENDIX H

Small Talk Cards Activities

- Activity 1: Both students and teacher/researcher participated in this activity. Student sit in a circle including teacher/researcher and take turn drawing a card from pile and asking person sitting next to them the question. Teacher takes advantage of teachable moments to elaborate on grammar, work on pronunciation, or introduce new vocabulary.
- Activity 2: Group/Pair work: Students randomly pick a card from deck and ask a member of group question on card.
- Activity 3: Students are split into circle 1 and circle 2. Each member of circle 1 picks five random cards from pile. Circle 1 is the inner circle. Circle B forms outer circle. Students face each other, and students holding cards ask students facing them a question. Continue in this matter until all five questions are answered. Circle 1 moves one place to the right, circle 2 does not move. Repeat same process until students are with original partner. Repeat one more time, but this time circle 2 asks the questions to circle 1.
- Activity 4: Students pick 10 random cards copy the question and write out the answers to the questions.

References

Bahrani, T. (2011). The Implications of the monitor theory for foreign language teaching. *Asian Social Science, 7*(10), 281-284. Retrieved March 5, 2014, from dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n10p281

Brown, H. (1993). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (3rd Ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Cary, S., & Cary, S. (2007). How do I get my reluctant speaker to speak English. In *Working with English language learners: Answers to teachers' top ten questions* (2nd ed., pp. 52-65). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Center for Applied Linguistics, (2005). *Test administrator guide: Best Plus CAL's new oral English proficiency test for adults.* Washington, DC: Author

Center for Applied Linguistics. (2010). *Education for adult English language learners in the United States: Trends, research, and promising practices.* Washington, DC: Author.

Colin, F. (n.d.). Second language acquisition - Krashen and his Critics. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from *http://faculty.kfupm.edu*

Durrant, P., & Schmitt, N. (2010). Adult learners' retention of collocations from exposure. *Second Language Research, 26*(2), 163-188. Retrieved March 5, 2014.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (1994). *Second Language Acquisition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Glanz, J. (2006). *Fundamentals of educational research: A guide to completing a master's thesis*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Goodwin, W., & Goodwin, L. (1996). *Understanding quantitative and qualitative*

research in early childhood education. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ipek, H. (2009). Comparing and contrasting first and second language acquisition: implications for language teachers. *English Language Teaching, 2*(2), 155-163. Retrieved February 1, 2014, from ccsenet.org/journal.thml

Kim, J. (2005). A Community within the classroom of adult ESL Learners. *Adult Basic Education, 15*(1), 21-32. Retrieved January 1, 2014.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London: Longman.

Lenski, S., & Verbruggen, F. (2010). *Writing instruction and assessment for English language learners K-8*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Lin, G. (2008). Pedagogies proving Krashen's theory of affective filter. *Hwa Kang Journal of English Language and Literature, 14*, 113-131. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Maftoon, P., & Sabah, S. (2012). A critical look at the status of affect in second language acquisition research: Lessons from Vygotsky's legacy. *BRAIN: Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience, 3*(2), 36-43. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Mason, T. (n.d.). Critique of Krashen V: The input hypothesis. Retrieved March 20, 2014, from http://www.timothyjpmson.com/webPages/langteach/license

Mingzheng, L. (2012). An empirical research on the application of humor in college English teaching. *Revista Aademiei Fortelor Terestre, 17*(4), 396-407. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Nakatani, Y. (2010). Identifying strategies that facilitate EFL learners' oral communication: A classroom study using multiple data collection procedures.

The Modern Language Journal, 94(N1), 116-136. Retrieved March 5, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Pappamihiel, E., Nishimata, T., & Mihai, F. (2008). Timed writing and adult English-language learners: An investigation of first language use in invention strategies. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 51*(5), 386-394. doi: 10.1598/JAAl.51.52 . Retrieved March 5, 2014.

Schaeltzed, K., & Low, E. (2009, July 1). Teaching Language Pronunciation to Adult English Language Learners. Retrieved March 2, 2014, from *http://www.cal.org/*

Schwarzer, D. (2009). Best practices for teaching the "whole" adult ESL learner. *New Directions for Adults and Continuing Education, Spring 2007*(121), 25-33. Retrieved February 12, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Sinhaneti, K., & Kyaw, E. (2012). A study of the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning strategies of Burmese students. *US-China Education Review, A 12*, 987-1005. Retrieved March 15, 2014.

Thomas, R. (2005). *Teachers doing research: An introductory guidebook*. Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). *The foreign-born population in the United States: 2010* Retrieved January 30, 2014, from *http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acs*

Wang, W. (2013). Research on the influence of affective filter factors to ethnic Chinese students ' Chinese acquisition. *Canadian Social Science, 9*(3), 57-60. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from EBSCO Host.

Wright, W. (2010). *Foundations for teaching English language learners: Research, theory, policy, and practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Pub.