

## THE IMPACT OF CLASSICAL MUSIC ON VOCABULARY RETENTION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine how background classical music affects vocabulary retention in a classroom. It whether background classical music can help students remember new vocabulary. It was carried out with 20 learners aged 12 to 16, who were divided into two groups. Both groups learned the same words, but only one group had music during the lessons. The group with music usually scored a little higher, especially in the later sessions and in the final test. The difference was not large, but it appeared more than once. This may mean that classical music can support vocabulary learning in a small way, possibly by making the classroom feel calmer. At the same time, the results show that music is not the main factor in learning and works better as an additional support.

**Keywords:** *vocabulary retention; classical music; language learning; background music; classroom experiment; memory; learning conditions*

**Introduction.** Vocabulary is one of the most important parts of language learning because it helps learners understand messages, express ideas, and develop other language skills. Without enough vocabulary, students may have difficulty reading, writing, listening, and speaking effectively. As a result, vocabulary learning has remained an important concern in language classrooms. This is especially important when students need to learn new words and remember them for later use.

Teachers continue to look for ways to make vocabulary learning more effective. One method that has gained attention is the use of background music during lessons. Classical music, in particular, is often connected with relaxation and better concentration, so it may create more favourable learning conditions. At the same time, previous research has not shown consistent results. Some studies suggest that music can support and improve memory and learning, while others report little or no significant effect. This means that the role of music in vocabulary learning is still not completely clear.

Therefore, this study examines the impact of classical music on vocabulary retention in language learning by comparing students who learn with music and those who learn without it.

**Review.** Rashidi and Faham (2011) looked at the role of classical music in a reading task with Iranian students. They found that the group working with music performed better than the one without it. An important point here is that is the condition under which it appears. Reading requires sustained attention, and even a small change in the classroom atmosphere can influence how long students stay focused. In this sense, music seems to function less as a direct learning tool and more as something that stabilizes attention during the task, which may explain why the difference becomes visible in performance. This suggests that music may

support attention during tasks, which is relevant to the present study where music was used during vocabulary practice.

Meiliana et al. (2024) show direct connection to vocabulary where classical music was used together with a memory strategy. The results show a clearer improvement in vocabulary. However the research illustrates that music on its own may not be enough. It seems to work better when it is combined with activities that already focus on memorizing words. In other words, music becomes more useful when the task is clearly about retention. This makes the result more relevant for vocabulary learning, since remembering words depends not only on exposure but also on how that exposure is structured. This may explain why the effect in the present study is smaller, since music was not combined with a specific memory strategy.

Bad'urová (2019) presents a less clear result. The results are difficult to interpret because students performed slightly better when music was present, but the difference was quite small and not noticeable. Because of this it is hard to say that music itself improved learning in a reliable way. As a result, the effect of classical music might be limited and not consistent across situations. It may play some role, but this likely depends on other factors, such as the type of task, the way the material is learned, or even how students respond to the learning conditions. This is similar to the present study, where the difference between groups was also limited.

Ishak et al. (2023) show a similar pattern. The experimental group did improve after being taught with classical music in the background, and their post test score was higher than the control group's. However, as in the previous study, the difference was not significant, so the result does not strongly prove that classical music itself caused the improvement. Because of this, the study suggests that classical music may have some positive influence on learning, but the effect is not always strong enough to stand on its own. This aligns with the present findings, where improvement was observed but remained modest.

**Methodology.** This study used a small-scale quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of background classical music on vocabulary retention. It was carried out over two weeks at Dong Eun Academy, a private language learning centre. The participants were 20 learners, aged 12 to 16, with English proficiency levels ranging from A1 to B1. They were divided into two equal groups of 10 students each, an experimental group and a control group. The groups were kept as balanced as possible in terms of age and proficiency level.

Each session included a new set of approximately 20 vocabulary items based on three familiar topics: daily routine, environment, and animals. The same topics were used in all sessions, but different sets of words were introduced each time. The full list of vocabulary items is provided in Appendix A. The words were chosen to match the learners' level. Over the two weeks, the three topics (daily routine, environment, and animals) were repeated across six sessions so that students had more than one opportunity to work with the target vocabulary. Both groups were taught by the same instructor under identical classroom conditions, with the same lesson time, materials, and teaching procedures. The only difference was the listening condition. In the experimental group, instrumental classical music by Mozart (e.g., piano sonatas) and similar instrumental classical pieces was played at a low volume during the vocabulary learning stage. The control group completed the same tasks in silence.

Each lesson followed the same structure. First, the teacher introduced the target words. Then the students completed guided practice activities, including repetition, matching, and short sentence formation. At the end of each session, the learners took a short vocabulary test

with 10 items to check immediate recall. After the two week period, a final test with 20 items was given to measure overall vocabulary retention. A short questionnaire was also used to collect students’ views about focus, comfort, and engagement during the lesson.

The results were compared using average scores and percentages. This made it possible to identify whether the group that learned with classical music performed better than the group that learned without music.

**Results.** Across the two-week period, the experimental group tended to score slightly higher than the control group. In the first sessions, the difference was minimal, and at times both groups showed almost identical results.

Session	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)
1	74	72
2	76	71
3	77	72
4	77	73
5	79	71
6	80	73
<b>Final</b>	80	73

**Table 1.** *Average Vocabulary Test Scores (%)*

As shown in Table 1, this gap becomes more visible in later sessions. The experimental group recorded higher scores in most cases, while the control group also improved, but with less stable results from session to session. In particular, the experimental group showed a gradual increase across sessions, whereas the control group’s scores remained more uneven.

In general, the experimental group reached about 76–80%, whereas the control group remained closer to 70–73%. A similar pattern can be seen in the final delayed test, where the experimental group again achieved higher scores. This suggests that the difference between the groups was maintained over time, even after the learning period.

**Discussion.** The results in this study do not show a large difference between the two groups, but they are not random either. The experimental group, which worked with background classical music, tended to score a little higher than the control group in most sessions, and this could also be seen in the delayed test. The gap is small, but it appears more than once, so it is difficult to ignore. In this case, it looks like music did not change the learning outcome in a strong way, but it may have given a slight advantage during vocabulary practice.

One possible reason is that the music made the classroom feel calmer. That fits the idea that a more relaxed learning condition can support concentration, especially when students are working with familiar vocabulary. In this study, the music was only in the background, so it may have worked more as a support than as a direct teaching tool. It is also possible that students became used to the music after a few sessions, which may explain why the difference became a little more visible later on. That is only an interpretation from the results, not a separate measured factor.

The present findings are close to Rashidi and Faham (2011), who reported better reading performance in the music condition. They also connect with Meiliana et al. (2024), where classical music combined with a memory strategy led to clearer vocabulary improvement. At the same time, this study is also similar to Bađurová (2019) and Ishak et al. (2023), because

both of those studies found only limited or non-significant differences between music and no-music conditions. So the result here sits somewhere in the middle. Music seems to help a little, but not enough to count as the main reason for learning success.

For this reason, classical music in this study should be seen as a supportive factor rather than a central one. Repetition, task design, and students’ attention during practice probably mattered more.

**Conclusion.** This study shows that background classical music can have a small influence on vocabulary learning, but the effect is not strong. The group that learned with music often performed slightly better, although the difference remained limited. This suggests that music may help create more stable learning conditions, rather than directly improving memory. In this sense, it works more as a support during learning than as a teaching tool. At the same time, the results should be treated with caution. The study involved a small number of learners and was conducted over a short period. Because of this, the findings cannot be generalized. Further research with larger groups and longer duration is needed to better understand how music affects language learning.

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